

Review

Who Are the Change Makers?

By Paul C. Light

Review Vanessa Kirsch

Stanford Social Innovation Review
Spring 2011

Copyright © 2011 by Leland Stanford Jr. University
All Rights Reserved

Think Hard

Review by **Melissa A. Berman**

GIVE SMART: Philanthropy That Gets Results

Tom Tierney & Joel L.
Fleishman

208 pages, PublicAffairs,
2011

The purpose of literature, according to the Romantics, is to teach us how to live. Tom Tierney and Joel L. Fleishman's book, *Give Smart*, aims to teach us how to give. Their contribution adds to a growing guidance curriculum for philanthropy, including books by Bill Clinton, Paul Brest, Hal Harvey, Charles Bronfman, and Jeff Solomon—with more in the pipeline. But do we need to be taught how to “give smart”? Can we be taught to “give smart”?

After all, we are living in a new golden era of giving, with more and more wealth holders committed to using their resources to change the world. And world-changing social innovations are supposedly abundant. Some believe that all we need is a system to connect the supply to the solutions. Since biology now suggests that we're hardwired for generosity, success is inevitable. The reality, of course, is not so simple.

Ironically, mounting expectations of the wealthy inhibit philanthropy. The seriously rich and famous face remarkable social pressure these days to be bold, decisive experts on complex issues—not just to fund solutions, but also to find solutions. At Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors, we see would-be donors who feel compelled to plunge into an issue—any issue—just to respond to demands. At the other extreme, we meet donors who are paralyzed as they seek the perfect program with the perfect solution. Similarly, the conviction that philanthropy is the natural act of a good person can also create barriers. If philanthropy is innate, then someone who seeks help must not be naturally good. Finally, for many wealth holders, philanthropy can become another form of consumption—or entertainment. The ultra-wealthy are, to

state the obvious, ultra-empowered. Few are in a position to challenge them; rather, it's their job to encourage and enable. All in all, there's too little real thinking going on.

So credible books that encourage potential donors to step out of their external and internal pressure cookers, and into serious thinking, are indeed important and useful. Tierney and Fleishman have written such a book. Combining Tierney's expertise in consulting with Joel's expertise as a foundation head, professor, and trusted counselor, *Give Smart* offers potential donors a way to think about—and then act on—philanthropy. One important way that *Give Smart* promotes this kind of thinking is through its structure: The book is organized around half a dozen serious questions, not answers. The authors repeatedly stress that donors will answer key questions differently and will need to spend time reaching conclusions.

The six questions—all remarkably simple on the surface and complex upon contemplation—are: What are my values and beliefs? What is “success” and how can it be achieved? What am I accountable for? What will it take to get the job done? How do I work with grantees? Am I getting better? There is also a helpful checklist at the back of the book that provides progress indicators for each question.

Give Smart is especially powerful in three areas. First is its comfort with the paradox that philanthropy at its best is both visceral and analytical. Tierney and Fleishman are clear that philanthropy begins with values and beliefs, and that research, evidence, and strategy must be built onto that framework.

Second, the authors are direct about what's realistic. Through a series of examples as well as sound advice, they make it clear that there is no magic grant, there is work involved in making progress, and “success” does not mean “problem solved.”

Third, and perhaps most important, the authors devote considerable space to the

relationship between the donor and the nonprofit. Here they are highly prescriptive. They speak frankly and bluntly about the donor-grantee power imbalance and the dangers of the super-empowered imposing their own conclusions, criteria, and calculations. They address the false idol of low overhead costs persuasively.

Tierney and Fleishman speak directly and clearly to an implied audience of very wealthy donors, with both respect and can-

dor. Could they have pushed harder to provoke thought and reflection? Certainly. For one thing, the authors mention all too briefly as “terrible truths” the matter of scale, the relative size of philanthropy, and the role of the public sector. Many of their examples conclude with a change in policy, or the development of public sector funding

streams—but the authors don't hammer home the lesson that the big bucks aren't always in philanthropy.

Give Smart admirably asks a donor to think about accountability, but the chapter on this subject focuses on what the donor wishes to commit, with self-accountability the dominant theme. As the authors note, external accountability is virtually nonexistent. But that doesn't mean donors shouldn't think more about what it means to be a steward for the public good.

Finally, Tierney and Fleishman could have done more to address directly the forces that tug at the ultra-wealthy. In addition to the pressures mentioned above to act quickly, boldly, and confidently in giving, wealth holders embarking on serious philanthropy must often confront conflicting family expectations as well as pressure from peers and colleagues. Tierney and Fleishman focus, by choice, on philanthropy through the lens of a major initiative, but most donors are balancing a portfolio of causes, interests, and constituents. That's often the third rail of philanthropy, and it absorbs an enormous amount of donors' time and energy. But perhaps that's a topic for another book. ■



MELISSA A. BERMAN is president of Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors. She also serves as a director of the Foundation Center and as an adjunct professor at Columbia Business School.

One Nation Under Gods

Review by Rhys H. Williams

AMERICAN GRACE: How Religion Divides and Unites Us

Robert D. Putnam & David
E. Campbell
673 pages, Simon &
Schuster, 2010

For those who follow American public intellectual life, Robert Putnam is best known for his 2000 book *Bowling Alone*, in which he argued that a key problem with contemporary American civic life was the decline in memberships in voluntary associations. Using mountains of data, Putnam demonstrated declining levels of memberships in groups such as the Elks and Rotarians, civic improvement groups, and even bowling leagues. According to Putnam's formulation, participation in groups brings people into contact with others, creates relationships of trust that foster "social capital," and produces a sustained concern with public life. The organizational demise of voluntary associations ramifies throughout the culture to isolate individuals and block avenues for pursuing the common good.

One voluntary association that has remained vibrant, however, is the religious congregation. More Americans belong to religious congregations than any other type of organization. Therefore, Putnam and his colleague David Campbell focus on the religious lives of Americans, particularly as expressed in congregations. They are interested in how religion divides and unites Americans, and in the tolerance that is fostered through inter-religious engagement, providing a "grace" that contains great hope for society.

Putnam and Campbell use a nationally representative survey and site visits with a dozen congregations to try to get at both the statistical breadth of American religiosity and the varied ways it happens "on the ground." They present the now-standard narrative of postwar American religion—that the social and cultural changes of the 1960s, and reactions to them, led to a split in American religious and political life. Religious conservatives and liberals have polarized, even within denominational groups. And those who are highly involved

with their religious community—by attending worship services often, for example—have become more conservative. So a division between highly involved conservatives, on the one hand, and liberals and the nonreligious, on the other, has left a shrinking "moderate middle."

But Putnam and Campbell also show that interpersonal religious tolerance and religious diversity have grown. How does polarization coexist with such diversity? The polarized clusters are apparently not accompanied by religious segregation. Rather, the fluidity of American religion that helped foster these divisions also encourages switching and connecting across them. Most people know someone of a different faith through extended family. The authors call this the "Aunt Susan Principle," and claim it is "the most important reason that Americans can combine religious devotion and diversity." A corollary, the "My Friend Al Principle," reflects interfaith ties in non-family social networks, or through shared interests. The authors find that such bridging produces a slight, but general, religious tolerance and softens the potentially destructive aspects of religious divisions.

The role that organizations, specifically congregations, play in this story is not simple. The fluidity of religious involvement, and its intrinsic voluntarism, means that congregations have increasingly become places for the like-minded. Such homophily pushes clerical leadership to pander to the views of congregants, as the latter can "vote with their feet" if the place makes them uncomfortable. It is one reason that the authors find little overt politicking in churches—there may be subtle attitudinal shaping, but directive teaching or actual political mobilization risks alienating some members.

And yet Putnam and Campbell show that things are changing. Many churches have adapted to the advent of women's equality, and although still overwhelmingly racially segregated, they are becoming less so. Clergy aware of the need to keep members have found that direct politics doesn't help, so they encourage a type of practical tolerance and develop ways to interpret and present their faith. And when different types of peo-

ple find themselves in the same congregation, the contact there fosters the good neighborliness and respect for diversity that the authors admire in American religion.

That said, there are fewer organizational lessons in the book than I expected. For a study predicated on the importance of associational belonging and network connections among groups, it gives overwhelming attention to individual-level data. The congregation vignettes are interesting and illustrative; they make the book a more engaging read. But this isn't an organizational analysis of American religion, or one full of insights from organizational insiders. It is pretty standard—though very well done—survey-based social science about attitudes and behaviors.

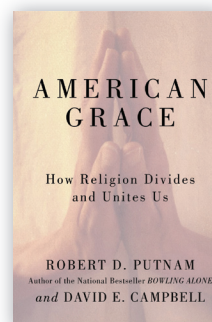
American Grace is an optimistic book, and there is good reason for that. Compared with many places, Americans manage religious diversity pretty well and seem to be getting better at it. But it is important not to underestimate how religion divides Americans and is still intertwined with inequality and social conflict. Religion has adapted to, rather than led, most social justice-oriented change. And the book's thesis is that social contact and

familiarity help produce religious tolerance, not any particular theological doctrine. (Indeed, the most highly religious 10 percent are less tolerant.)

A common wisecrack about American religion is that it is "a mile wide but an inch deep." That may also apply to American religious tolerance. Tolerance for diversity is not "plural-

ism"; as the controversy over an Islamic community center in lower Manhattan demonstrated, it often doesn't take much to rile up animosities. Historically, acceptance of religiously marginal groups has depended on their adaptation to American Protestant middle-class culture. That largely remains the case.

Religion is not going away in our national culture, so it is reassuring to read a highly researched, clearly thought-out argument about why religious adherence and diversity continue to serve American society positively. This will be important to keep in mind on those days when news events reflect humankind's darker side. ■



RHYS H. WILLIAMS is professor and chair of the department of sociology at Loyola University Chicago, where he also directs the McNamara Center for the Social Study of Religion.

Who Are the Change Makers?

Review by Vanessa Kirsch

DRIVING SOCIAL CHANGE: How to Solve the World's Toughest Problems
Paul C. Light
208 pages, John Wiley & Sons, 2011

Paul Light's new book *Driving Social Change: How to Solve the World's Toughest Problems* is the latest contribution to a rich, ongoing dialogue

about how to usher in social breakthroughs.

Light presents a methodology for creating lasting social change, and he begins his book with three research questions: Has the field placed too much emphasis on the individual social entrepreneur, thereby defining social entrepreneurship as the primary source of social innovation? Are there other, equally powerful drivers of social progress? And finally, how are social breakthroughs achieved? Light devotes a chapter to each question, all of which feed into his "breakthrough cycle," a nine-stage process that outlines the "moves from inputs, activities, and outputs to a new social equilibrium."

Light's line of inquiry stems from previous works—"Reshaping Social Entrepreneurship" (2006) and *The Search for Social Entrepreneurship* (2008)—although his contention is no longer that social entrepreneurship is a little-understood term but that its role has been overestimated as a driver of social change. He argues that the tendency to promote an exclusive definition of social entrepreneurship has prevented the field from forging necessary partnerships. In contrast, he defines social entrepreneurship loosely as "an essential but not exclusive driver" that "can be found almost anywhere."

To broaden the field's approach to social problem solving, Light highlights three additional drivers he believes have been neglected—social exploring, social advocacy, and social safekeeping. Each has a specific function: Social explorers assess the present social climate and identify opportunities for change; social advocates use political channels and grassroots movements to maximize pressure points; and social safekeepers (Light's name

for social service providers) transform social breakthroughs into common practice, while also preserving past progress.

When assessing which driver is best suited to address a particular problem, he argues that the choice of driver must align with the desired outcome. Light also believes that social breakthroughs are more attainable when all four drivers exert pressure in tandem "to create the irritation needed for disruption." His breakthrough cycle relies on eight other elements, such as a commitment to change and an assessment of assets and obstacles.

Light says his book is based on the idea that social entrepreneurship is "neither the only driver in agitating the prevailing wisdom, nor always the best choice in addressing urgent threats." In the breakthrough cycle, he limits the contribution of social entrepreneurship to the introduction of a new combination of ideas. He also notes that in some cases, this contribution is "irrelevant" for the type of breakthrough needed.

My experience is that the role of the social entrepreneur is both more distinctive and more comprehensive than the phenomenon Light describes. Other drivers are indisputably essential. At the same time, I have witnessed that powerful innovators and organizations undertake many of the activities assigned to social explorers, advocates, and safekeepers. Nonprofits such as Citizen Schools, College Summit, Stand for Children, Year Up, YouthBuild, and Youth Villages (some of which are supported by my organization, New Profit) are social entrepreneurial organizations that have achieved large-scale impact through policy change, major public-private partnerships, grassroots advocacy, and new service delivery techniques.

Light challenges social entrepreneurs to "join the fight already under way throughout society," but we are already seeing traction on this front. Cross-sector partnerships like the 100,000 Homes Campaign, the Strive Partnership, and the Education Equality Project all take collaboration seriously while embracing a robust understanding of what various change agents bring to the table.

Driving Social Change will appeal to many

who are pioneering new ways to solve old problems, whether through young or established organizations, advocacy efforts, or research. In particular, Light's presentation of the social breakthrough cycle surfaces many of the components needed for transformative social change, while also leaving room for exploration into how the components work together and the additional elements needed to make change possible.

Light is right that the problems facing us globally are too big for any one person or method to solve. Partnerships are necessary, as are multifaceted approaches that use diverse tactics for social change. We need to learn from the partnerships that are already testing the type of collaboration Light calls for in *Driving Social Change*. I look forward to the day when we stop debating the pros and cons of social entrepreneurship and move on to better aligning our resources. Then we can actually solve some of the world's toughest problems together. ■



Passing the Mic

Review by Marc Vogl

20UNDER40: Re-Inventing the Arts and Arts Education for the 21st Century
Edited by Edward P. Clapp
361 pages, AuthorHouse, 2010

20Under40 is a collection of essays about the future of the non-profit arts sector and its next generation of leaders. Editor

Edward P. Clapp assembled the collection to understand "why a career in the arts seems to be particularly challenging for younger professionals."

The 20 essays are all by writers under age 40. Some are practicing artists, others are arts administrators; there are essays by academics, management consultants, bloggers, screenwriters, educators, and, in one case, an MIT-trained physicist who hosts the Discovery Channel show *Time Warp*. Clapp wants to disseminate these viewpoints because he believes that the arts sector is in crisis—that

MARC VOGL is a program officer at the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation managing grants to San Francisco Bay Area arts organizations and developing strategies to promote next generation arts leadership. Vogl served on the Obama Campaign's Arts Policy Committee, and was the 2010 recipient of the Americans for the Arts Emerging Leader Award.

VANESSA KIRSCH is the president and founder of New Profit Inc., a venture philanthropy fund based in Cambridge, Mass. She has more than 20 years of experience in developing innovative solutions to social problems and is widely recognized as a leading social entrepreneur.

it “suffers from an insecurity complex and operates from a position of fear.”

The most compelling essays are those that call for reform in how arts organizations are run, are supported, and engage artists and audiences. Some authors criticize arts programmers for their insularity, funders for their cautiousness, marketers for their conventionality, and arts educators for their dogmatism. Others write about the mismatch between abundant arts programming and a shrinking audience.

In the first essay, Brian Newman, former CEO of the Tribeca Film Institute, declares that the nonprofit arts sector is grossly overbuilt and woefully undercapitalized. As a result, it is incapable of coping with the way technology has altered how individuals create, share, and participate in arts experiences. His bitter medicine for the sector is to admit that more arts groups need to merge and “many more organizations need to be shut down entirely.”

In her essay “Please Don’t Start a Theater

Company!” Rebecca Novick encourages artists to “operate as bands do—coming together to play a few gigs, then dissolving as people’s interests diverge.” Novick implores established arts organizations to invite younger artists to bring innovations to their institutions, and she warns funders to “stop advising young artists to replicate the standard nonprofit model.” David McGraw, a professor of arts entrepreneurship at the University of Iowa, also criticizes foundations that reward arts organizations for longevity rather than creativity. Like Novick, he suggests that more support go to artists who create multiyear projects.

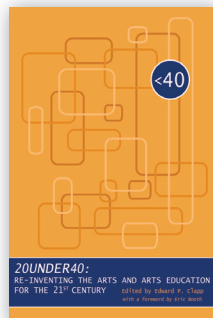
The potential for philanthropists to be heroes or villains is a clear theme here. In an essay co-authored by Ian Moss and Daniel Reed, an arts blogger and a management consultant, technology is hailed as a 21st-century arts funder’s best friend. They argue that a “guided crowdsourcing” approach to arts funding would vastly expand the number of artists and the amount of ar-

tistic product that could be evaluated. If grantmakers harness the wisdom of crowds, they argue, philanthropists may be able to make funding decisions that are not only more informed, but more equitable as well.

Although some of the *20Under40* authors believe that dysfunction in the traditional nonprofit arts sector can be remedied, others are ready to abandon the nonprofit paradigm altogether. Elizabeth Lamb, a curator in Portland, Ore., presents a case study of successful online art stores and a gallery and apparel shop that have taken a customer-centric approach to their programming.

Reinventing the arts and arts education is not just about new business models. In the collection, there are punchy essays about the way art school students are graded, why contemporary dance is losing its expressive power, and why 21st-century arts educators should teach computer programming.

Of the 20 selections, several cover old ground in predictable ways: testing in schools means less time for arts classes; preschoolers need art too. Although much of the book is dedicated to expressing frustration with the





PRESENTED BY THE STUDENTS OF
THE HARVARD BUSINESS SCHOOL &
THE HARVARD KENNEDY SCHOOL

MARCH 5-6, 2011

2011 SOCIAL ENTERPRISE CONFERENCE

“[One of] the year’s most exclusive and influential conferences.” - Forbes.com, January 2009

- 1,200+ conference participants including students, alumni and professionals
- More than 75 panelists and speakers
- 30 panels on the latest topics in social enterprise
- Networking reception with practitioners in the public, private and non-profit fields
- Practical skills-based workshops to expand your toolkit

plus SOCIAL ENTERPRISE CAREER FAIR ★ **PITCH₄CHANGE**
SOCIAL IMPACT IDEA COMPETITION

sustaining impact, living change

get your ticket now: www.socialenterpriseconference.org

status quo, there is a high level of optimism about the future. That optimism is grounded in a faith that technology can be used much more creatively; that nonprofit and for-profit business models can be successful; and that Gen Xers and Millennials are going to get their art fix with or without established arts organizations.

Although the anthology showcases a rising generation of arts leaders, two established leaders make cameos. Diane Ragsdale, a former arts program officer at the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation, laments that “what’s killing this field is that people are beginning to leave it. People make it into large institutions and get stuck in middle management jobs with no access to power and no opportunity to try new things.” This critique is echoed by arts consultant Eric Booth: “We talk a good game about collaboration and openness to new ideas in the arts, but the input from our younger professionals is neither sought nor honored as regular practice.”

20Under40 puts new ideas from younger professionals on the table. Now the question is: Who will pick them up? ■

People Power

Review by Peter Walker

**JOIN THE CLUB:
How Peer Pressure
Can Transform the
World**

Tina Rosenberg
288 pages, W.W. Norton &
Company, April 2011

Most books about history are about power. As you read them, you can feel the author being drawn in by the adrenaline rush, by

the unconscious association with the larger-than-life heroes and villains of yesterday. But most history is not made by these figures. It is made by humanity, by people living out the mundanity of family life, earning an income, seeking better circumstances for their children. Just by trying to get on with their lives, most people have to contend with a world that the few—those with power—make for them.

PETER WALKER is the Irwin H. Rosenberg Professor of Nutrition and Human Security at Tufts University and is director of the university’s Feinstein International Center, which develops operational and policy responses to protect the lives of people living in crisis-affected and marginalized communities. He was the founder of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies’ World Disasters Report, and he helped develop the Code of Conduct for disaster workers and the Sphere humanitarian standards.

A whole series of injustices arise from this power imbalance: a world where alcoholism and cigarette addiction are driven by the few to drive their corporate profits and fuel their greed; a world where fear and xenophobic nationalism are dressed up as patriotism, to keep people acquiescent and the powerful in power. Sometimes this power imbalance arises from the amoral logic of systems—markets that take no heed of the collateral damage of unemployment; food supply systems that are blind to malnutrition and obesity; cultural traditions that evolve into cruel hierarchies of class and caste and the diminishment of one race, gender, or caste to the point where it becomes second nature to the oppressed and abandoned to believe that their oppression and abandonment are the natural order of things.

And against this abuse, the common woman and man have one superweapon: the power of self-organized, self-supporting groups who throughout history have had the courage to stand up against the abuse of power.

Join the Club by journalist Tina Rosenberg could have been written at just about any point in history. It could have been written after the Chartists in the 1830s or the Peasants’ Revolt in the 14th century, after the ousting of Willem Kieft as director general of the early Dutch settlement of New Amsterdam or the 1912 Bread and Roses strikes of women in the mills of Massachusetts, or after the 1960s civil rights movement in Northern Ireland. Writing now, in the 21st century, Rosenberg reaffirms that the power of people to organize and to seek self-help remains a phenomenal force, regardless of technological advances.

In *Join the Club*, Rosenberg shows how peer support can change the lives of the individuals involved, can change a whole economy, can bring down dictators, and can strike back against a thousand years of caste oppression.

Her thesis is a simple one. People are fundamentally social animals. In isolation a person can never “be all that you can.” When we are able to harness the power of being part of a group, supporting and being supported by those around us, we can achieve extraordinary things. The message

is one of hope. This is refreshing, given that most books on peer pressure focus on the negative: on gang warfare and adolescent drug use or the political blindness of gated communities.

Join the Club is largely descriptive. Part of chapter 2 delves into the science of why people are societal animals, summarizing new research in neurology and genetics. Such science is fertile new ground for enabling readers to better understand the evolutionary advantages of peer support or for making the case that what distinguishes *Homo sapiens* from apes is not brain size or calculating power but their cognizance of and place in social groups.

Yet Rosenberg does not build on this argument, scientifically or philosophically, nor does she make any new sociological conclusions. Rather, she makes the case for peer pressure through a series of case studies, most of which have appeared in other guises and often more analytically presented. She looks at how peer pressure enables successful antismoking campaigns, the empowerment of outcast women in India through microfi-



nance, the revival of megachurches, the success of calculus clubs in universities, and, my favorite, the power of the campaign slogan “He’s Finished!” in the Otpor student movement of Serbia. In her concluding chapter, she muses on whether peer pressure can be harnessed to counter the allure of violent terrorism.

Each chapter is enjoyable to read as a stand-alone description, but one is left wondering why Rosenberg picked the subjects she did. Ultimately, *Join the Club* fails to build a compelling case. It is description without critique or analysis. It will sit on the same shelf as James Surowiecki’s *The Wisdom of Crowds*, Malcolm Gladwell’s *The Tipping Point*, or, going back three decades, Howard Zinn’s *A People’s History of the United States* in the way it reasserts that true power comes from within and from the support of our peers—not from wealth, technological supremacy, or fear. But I suspect it will be far less thumbed through than those texts.

Yet the basic message of the book is still true: Governments should always be a little afraid of their people. ■