

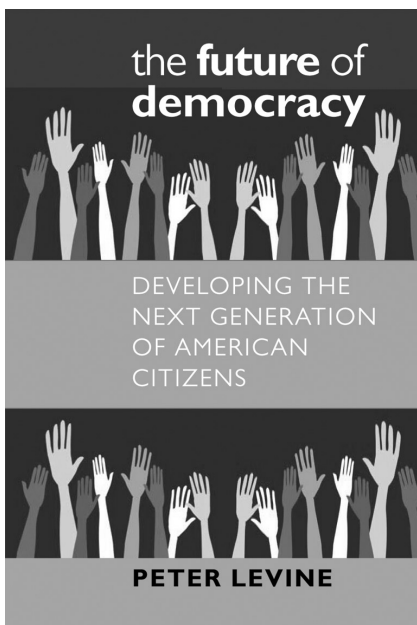
NEW BOOK: THE FUTURE OF DEMOCRACY: DEVELOPING THE NEXT GENERATION OF AMERICAN CITIZENS

The *Future of Democracy: Developing the Next Generation of American Citizens* is a manifesto for youth civic engagement, based on a critical review of recent research. CIRCLE's director, Peter Levine, is the author of this book, but it is based on work by our staff, grantees, and advisory board, among others. All proceeds will benefit CIRCLE. The book was commissioned by Tufts University Press/University Press of New England for its Civil Society Series and was published in June 2007.

"Levine's book is a little gem that I will keep on my bookshelf, close at hand." —**John M. Bridgeland, Former Director, White House Domestic Policy Council & USA Freedom Corps**

The Future of Democracy begins by defining "civic engagement." Moving beyond a list of actions and attitudes, Levine proposes some essential principles. He then argues for broad civic engagement as a path to social justice, efficient and responsive institutions, diverse cultures, and meaningful human lives. Next he asks why we should be especially concerned about young Americans' civic engagement. Not only does engaging young people create lasting skills and habits, thereby strengthening American democracy; it also helps young people to develop in healthy and successful ways.

At this point, *The Future of Democracy* examines recent trends in civic engagement among American youth, finding a mix of bad news and promising signs. Young Americans are increasingly likely to volunteer and are highly tolerant. Some are



In "The Future of Democracy: Developing the Next Generation of Citizens," Peter Levine makes a number of valuable contributions to academic and 'real world' debates over the state of U.S. democracy. —**Michael X. Delli Carpini, Dean, The Annenberg School for Communication of the University of Pennsylvania**

inventing exciting new forms of civic engagement, including online methods. On the other hand, they score poorly on assessments of civic knowledge, they are relatively mistrustful of other citizens, they are less likely than in the past to join or lead traditional membership organizations, and they usually vote at low rates. Most are skeptical about their own power to make a difference in their communities.

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The rest of the book explores two basic models for understanding these challenges. The first is a “psychological deficits” model. It assumes that there are problems with young people’s civic skills, knowledge, confidence, and values. These problems are not the fault of youth. Hardly anyone would hold a sixteen-year-old personally accountable for lacking interest in the news or failing to join associations. If we should blame anyone, it would be parents, educators, politicians, reporters, and other adults. Nevertheless, the problems are located (so to speak) inside the heads of young people. We should therefore look for interventions that directly improve young people’s civic abilities and attitudes. Such interventions include formal civic education, opportunities for community service, and broader educational reforms that are designed to improve the overall character of schools. *The Future of Democracy* devotes a chapter each to schools, universities, and community-based organizations that serve youth.

An alternative to the idea of psychological deficits is an “institutional reform” model. This paradigm assumes that there are flaws in our institutions that make it unreasonable to expect positive civic attitudes and active engagement. For example, citizens (young and old alike) may rightly shun voting when most elections have already been determined by the way district lines were drawn. They may rightly ignore the news when the quality of journalism, especially on television, is poor. And they may rightly disengage from high schools that are large, anonymous, and alienating.

If this model holds, then we do not need interventions that change young people’s minds. Civic education that teaches people to admire a flawed system is mere propaganda.

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PETER LEVINE is Director of CIRCLE, the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Education, which he helped launch in 2001. He holds a doctorate in philosophy from Oxford University and is also Research Scholar at the Institute for Philosophy and Public Policy in the University of Maryland’s School of Public Policy. He has served as Executive Committee chair of the Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools and in other advocacy roles. He has published five books and numerous articles on politics, civil society, the Internet, and moral philosophy, and literature.



Peter Levine, CIRCLE Director

CIRCLE (The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement) promotes research on the civic and political engagement of young Americans. Although CIRCLE conducts and funds research, not practice, the projects that we support have practical implications for those who work to increase young people’s engagement in politics and civic life. CIRCLE is also a clearinghouse for relevant information and scholarship. CIRCLE was founded in 2001 and is funded predominantly by Carnegie Corporation of New York and The Pew Charitable Trusts. It is based in the University of Maryland’s School of Public Policy.

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Instead, we should reform major institutions. *The Future of Democracy* argues for specific institutional reforms in schools, the news media, and elections. This book is not a polemic in favor of one basic model over the other. In the final chapters, Levine argues that we need a broad movement to improve civic education while also reforming the institutions in which citizens engage. We must prepare citizens for politics, but also improve politics for citizens. Neither effort can succeed in isolation from the other. Educational curricula, textbooks, and programs, if disconnected from the goal of strengthening and improving democracy, can easily become means of accommodating young people to a flawed system. But political reform is impossible until we better prepare the next generation of citizens with appropriate knowledge, skills, habits, and values. Students should feel that they are being educated for citizenship, but also that they can help to renew American democracy. ■

ORDER "THE FUTURE OF DEMOCRACY"

The Future of Democracy is available for purchase through the Tufts University Press, University Press of New England. Visit <http://www.upne.com/1-58465-648-4.html> to purchase the book online. *The Future of Democracy* is 184 pages and costs \$27.95. ISBN 1-58465-648-4

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