

# 21/64

## LETTER FROM THE EDITOR //

*“As I’m sure my peers will agree, the way the next generation engages looks different, but much of what they are trying to achieve resonates with us too.”*

One of the many positive signs in the field of generational change is the increased amount of research emerging. From *USA Today’s* October 2006 coverage entitled “Gen Y Gets Involved,” to *PBS’s* website examining “Generation Next,” collectively, we are beginning to understand the power of the next generation market, who they are, and how their choices are informing every sector of society.

The generational research we are highlighting in this edition of the 21/64 newsletter comes from a report soon to be released by Steven M. Cohen and Ari Y. Kelman entitled *Continuity of Discontinuity: How Young Jews are Connecting Creating and Organizing their own Jewish Lives*. We helped support this study to evolve further our understanding of the audiences we’re aiming to engage in Jewish life and we hope the lessons we are learning will add to your work across the North American landscape.

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and Kelman’s data looks different in terms of how young Jews are participating, but many of the themes that emerged in the research echo historical moments that I lived through or learned about in school. In fact, Cohen and Kelman begin their report recounting a group of young, single Jews in New York who organized a cultural festival to increase Jewish pride. While my mind immediately conjured imagines of JDub Records’ concerts ([www.jdubrecords.org](http://www.jdubrecords.org)), the authors were describing the American Hebrews, a group of young men who reclaimed the festival of Hanukkah in 1870.

If possible, I encourage you to read the findings in this newsletter with one eye toward the future and one eye to the past. Remembering that these new modes of Jewish life are important for the next generation to invent, or reinvent, as it were. And that in the not too distant past, we too were reclaiming our Jewish identity and practice in similar, yet different ways.

Best,



Jeff Solomon



# WHAT MAKES THE NEXT GENERATIONS DIFFERENT?

In talking with multi-generational families, parents will often say, ‘what’s new about this?’ ‘I rebelled against my family’s interests until I was married, had children and settled down.’ ‘I came back, so will they.’ What makes this next generation so different?

The question rightly assumes that people go through predictable life stages which raise different issues at different times. However, this analysis ignores generational differences. For one, what makes Generations X and Y different from their Baby Boomer parents is their unlimited access to everything that American society has to offer. What’s on offer might not lead them “back” to the same choices their parents and grandparents once made.

This is why Steven M. Cohen and Ari Kelman’s report, *Continuity of Discontinuity: How Young Jews are Connecting Creating and Organizing their own Jewish Lives*, is so illuminating.

One of their main findings describes the distinctiveness of the next Jewish generations. “They are constantly interacting with the larger society and cultures outside their borders, inevitably adopting new ideas that they incorporate and come to see as authentically their own.”

While “being Jewish” or “being Catholic” used to define everything for a person—where they lived, who they married, how they voted—today, next generations have *choices* that are expanding identity paradigms.

## THE VANGUARD //

*“If the next generations of Jews are incorporating so much of the universal into their identities, they may want both age-old Judaism and contemporary American culture to express the multiple facets of who they are today.”*

Cohen and Kelman examined four innovative organizations and their non-profit leaders considered to be the vanguard of a phenomenon in which informal communities, creative culture, and episodic engagement are primary characteristics in next generation Jewish life. While Robert Putnam in his book *Bowling Alone* decried the decline of our communal participation, Cohen and Kelman identified abundant “voluntary associations,” but noted the new forms that have begun to take shape.

The bowling leagues and bridge games of our elders do not attract younger generations, and these four organizations and their leaders are utilizing contemporary resources such as social networking technology, music, literature and social justice to revitalize old connections.

In fact, one of the most remarkable new conclusions from Cohen and Kelman is drawn from their attempt to shift away from a dichotomous framing of the generational issue as—old vs. new—to a more nuanced view of today’s next generations.

The authors claim “...the increasing diversity of the American Jewish community is thirsting for a greater diversity of opportunities to engage seriously.” We might not have to choose between synagogues or salons, between education or music. If the next generations of Jews are incorporating so much of the universal into their identities, they may want both age-old Judaism and contemporary American culture to express the multiple facets of who they are today.

## TAKING CONTROL //

*In order to blend new ideas with traditional themes, next generation organizational leaders are teaching us new ways of organizing.*

Next generation Jews are taking control of their Jewish lives and creating what they cannot currently find elsewhere. In order to blend new ideas with traditional themes, these next generation organizational leaders—whose stories Cohen and Kelman convey—are teaching us new ways of organizing. Key attributes that run through all four of the organizations Cohen and Kelman studied include:

- ***Making the old, new.*** Not throwing out the old but re-enlivening it.
- ***Holding values at the center.*** Maintaining traditional Jewish values at the core of new communities.
- ***Utilizing contemporary vehicles that are high in quality.*** Offering Jewishly what is equal in caliber to what’s on offer broadly in society.
- ***Drawing on Jewish education.*** Incorporating Jewish knowledge into their communities to ensure new forms are not light on content.



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## WHAT CAN WE DO? //

*We must experiment  
to stay vibrant.*

Whether we manage family foundations, family businesses, or non-profit organizations, we are all experiencing generational transitions. While it is hard to change the way things have always been done, we also know that maintaining the status quo is not engaging the next generation.

We are learning that we must experiment to stay vibrant. Or in Cohen and Kelman's terms, this is the *continuity of discontinuity*. In order to maintain continuity, we have to be willing to permit some discontinuity as well.

### COHEN & KELMAN REPORT

To receive a copy of Cohen and Kelman's full report, *Continuity of Discontinuity: How Young Jews are Connecting Creating and Organizing their own Jewish Lives*, email us at [info@2164.net](mailto:info@2164.net).