PHILANTHROPY AND
DIGITAL CIVIL SOCIETY:

BLUEPRINT

THE ANNUAL
INDUSTRY FORECAST

by Lucy Bernholz

2021

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Stanford SOCIAL INNOVATION Review

Stanford PACS
Center on Philanthropy
and Civil Society

Digital Civil Society Lab

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WHAT IS THIS MONOGRAPH?

Philanthropy and Digital Civil Society: Blueprint 2021 is the twelfth annual industry forecast about the ways we use private resources for public benefit in the digital age. Each year, I use the *Blueprint* to provide an overview of the current landscape, point to big ideas that will matter in the coming year, and direct your attention to sources of future promise.

Sadly, because of the restrictions in place to prevent the spread of Covid-19, I have not been able to travel outside of the U.S. since 2019, so this year's *Blueprint* is more U.S.-focused than I prefer. However, while working from my home and spending time mobilizing, protesting, and mourning in community with neighbors, I still learned enormously and gratefully from the African American Policy Forum; the Rights x Tech community; the Guild of Future Architects; Justice Funders; Megan Ming Francis; digital sociologists Jessie Daniels, Karen Gregory, and Tressie McMillan Cottom; NYU's Institute for Public Knowledge; Civic Signals; colleagues across California working to "digitally upgrade" nonprofit capacity building; people working on community-led digital infrastructure; data justice leaders; the Radical AI and Computer Science and Civil Society communities; civic scientists and those who study them; and a global network of scholars, activists, lawyers, policymakers, and technologists working to enable assembly in the digital age. That's where I've been.

WHY IS IT CALLED A BLUEPRINT?

I use the metaphor of a blueprint to describe the forecast because blueprints are guides for things yet to come and storage devices for decisions already made. My father is an architect. I grew up surrounded by scale models of buildings, playing in unfinished foundations, trying to not get hurt by exposed rebar. I eavesdropped on discussions with contractors, planning agencies, homeowners, and draftsmen[1]—all of whom bring different skills and interpretations to creating, reading, and using blueprints. Creating a useful blueprint requires drawing ideas from many people, using a common grammar so that work can get done, and expecting multiple interpretations of any final product. I intend my *Blueprints* to speak to everyone involved in using private resources for public benefit and help people see their individual and institutional roles within the dynamics of the larger collective project of creating civil society. I hope you will use it as a starting point for debate and as input for your own planning. Please join the discussion on Twitter at #blueprint21.

WHO WROTE THIS DOCUMENT?

I'm Lucy Bernholz and I'm a philanthropy wonk. I am Senior Research Scholar and Director of the Digital Civil Society Lab, which is part of Stanford University's Center on Philanthropy and Civil Society (PACS). *The Huffington Post* calls me a "philanthropy game changer," *Fast Company* magazine named my blog Philanthropy2173 "Best in Class," and I've twice been named to *The Nonprofit Times'* annual list of 50 most influential people. I studied history and earned a BA from Yale University and an MA and PhD from Stanford University. On Twitter I'm known as @p2173 and my website is www.lucybernholz.com. The Digital Civil Society Lab curates, creates, and shares free resources related to data governance at www.digitalimpact.io.

WHERE CAN I GET MORE INFORMATION?

In addition to my blog and website, information about Stanford's Digital Civil Society Lab is at www.pacscenter.stanford.edu. Previous *Blueprints* can be downloaded at https://pacscenter. stanford.edu/resources/blueprints. If you are just joining the *Blueprint* series with this edition, welcome. If you've been reading since 2010, thank you. Feel free to go back in time by reviewing previous editions (several of which include organizational worksheets). The worksheets are free online at https://digitalimpact.io/toolkit.

INTRODUCTION - MY *CRI DE COEUR*

The year 2020 may well be remembered as the year most universally referred to as a "dumpster fire." I hope it comes to be seen not only for a widespread (but not yet wide enough) puncturing of White, wealthy disregard for structural injustices generally, but also, for philanthropy and the nonprofit sector, as a turning point toward more engaged, just, and equitable institutions and economics. The realization of this hope will require a sustained commitment, by individual organizations and the sector as a whole, to facing and addressing the following hard truths that 2020 laid bare.

First, despite episodic progress in the areas of basic human and civil rights throughout its history, the U.S. remains a deeply inequitable and structurally unjust country.

Second, foundations and nonprofits— many of which see themselves as part of the solution—are produced and privileged by the very same political and economic systems that perpetuate those inequities, and therefore must engage in a deep analysis of their own complicity before they can hope to truly bring forward justice and equity for all.

Third, civil society is essential and not to be taken for granted. Personally, I have always distrusted American exceptionalism, since it has long been plain to me that the nation has failed to live up to its own rhetoric about equality and justice and the right of all to participate in an ongoing experiment in
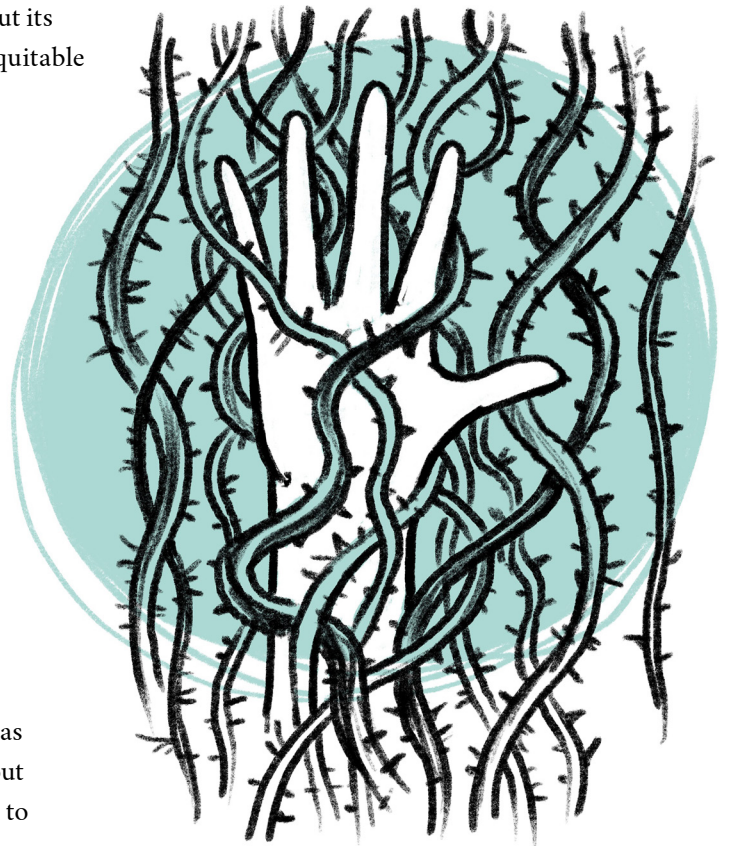
self-governance. Yet, I continue to believe in the promise of the rhetoric, and believe that the realization of our nation's goals is deeply dependent on the space that lies adjacent to the formal levers of governing that we call civil society. In civil society, all those who are excluded from the "rooms where things happen" gather and organize and demand to be let in while also creating thriving alternatives. Thus did Blacks gain the franchise and fight still to keep it. Thus do people with disabilities fight for their lives and queer and transgender people demand basic dignity. Thus have Indigenous people strived for their lives, languages, and due respect of legal treaties, amid and against systems purposefully designed to take land and obliterate civilizations. What 2020 has simultaneously showed us, is that civil society is responsible for laying bare these truths we all must face if we are going to build a truly equitable and just nation, and that, because of efforts to suppress people's rights to protest and assemble, our civil society is precarious.

Fourth, digital civil society is real and vital and vulnerable, and, like it or not, all foundations and nonprofits must accept that they are part of it. After almost a year on Zoom, I am hopeful that this particular truth is obvious to many, as well as its implications. Civil society organizations are dependent on digital systems and tools to do their work: said digital systems shape their work in ways that require real tradeoffs, and the political economy of "the tech industry" influences their daily operations, their governance responsibilities, their programmatic obligations, and, indeed, the policy domains that matter to their success.

In moving forward from 2020, my *cri de coeur* to the philanthropy sector on behalf of civil society is that those of us who give time and money, who work for foundations or nonprofits, and who seek a more equitable and just world will abandon existing practices that are preventing many of the changes that philanthropic organizations and individuals purport to pursue. To quote Dr. Carmen Rojas, CEO of the Marguerite Casey Foundation speaking on a video conference on **Philanthropy and Inequality: The Fierce Urgency of Now**, "There is no scenario in which we don't have to think hard, take risks, and change the way we work." To move forward, philanthropists, nonprofits, and other civil society actors will have to move through deep grief, admit the failure of well-intentioned efforts, and seek different paths from those taken in the past. And across the board, people in positions of power will need to follow leaders who have been previously sidelined, while giving sustained support and control to people with the generational expertise of subjugated power.

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To be specific, the philanthropic sector as a whole cannot achieve equity or justice as long as it:

- Supports toxic tax structures that prioritize the growth of the tax-exempt sector while perpetuating wealth inequality and the defunding of public services.

- Ignores the costs of dependencies that leave the sector digitally vulnerable and beholden to commercial priorities that run afoul of civil society values.

- Continues to act as a stand-in for public services, knowing it cannot actually provide the far-reaching and long-term solutions that are government responsibilities.

My hope for the years ahead is that the entire sector will abandon those practices and positioning, and instead will:

- Examine the role it plays in preserving the status quo rather than advancing change.

- Support tax reform that serves equity and social justice goals.

- Protect people's ability to assemble, take action, and protest. This requires legal actions to protect the digital and physical means of assembly; to resource advocates and nonprofits in ways that center safety and recognizes the long-term trauma of this work; and to support deeper, experience-informed research and policy about assembly in the digital age.

- Help nonprofits not just get technology, but imagine, create, purchase, and maintain a digital infrastructure and tools aligned with democratic and pluralistic logics. These are necessary to allow the sector to safely exist and remain independent of corporate and government capture.

- Develop policies, protections, platforms and new rules so that civil society and democracy can thrive in our digital reality.

- Support, amplify, and move into leadership positions those people and communities that have been fighting for equity and justice for generations, for therein lies success.

SECTION 1: THE SYNDEMIC WE FACE AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR CIVIL SOCIETY AND PHILANTHROPY

While 2020 was a terrible year, much of what made it so has been in place for decades. Medical anthropology gives us a term—syndemic—to name what happens when an independent threat (such as a pandemic coronavirus) finds a host in a system defined by long-term, endemic afflictions and has an amplifying effect. In a syndemic, the dangers of individual afflictions don't just stack on top of each other, they entwine, mutate, and grow in lethality. Such has been the case this year in the United States, where the Covid-19 pandemic arrived and amplified the existing afflictions of structural racism, income inequality, climate collapse and a decades-long assault on civil society and democratic institutions.
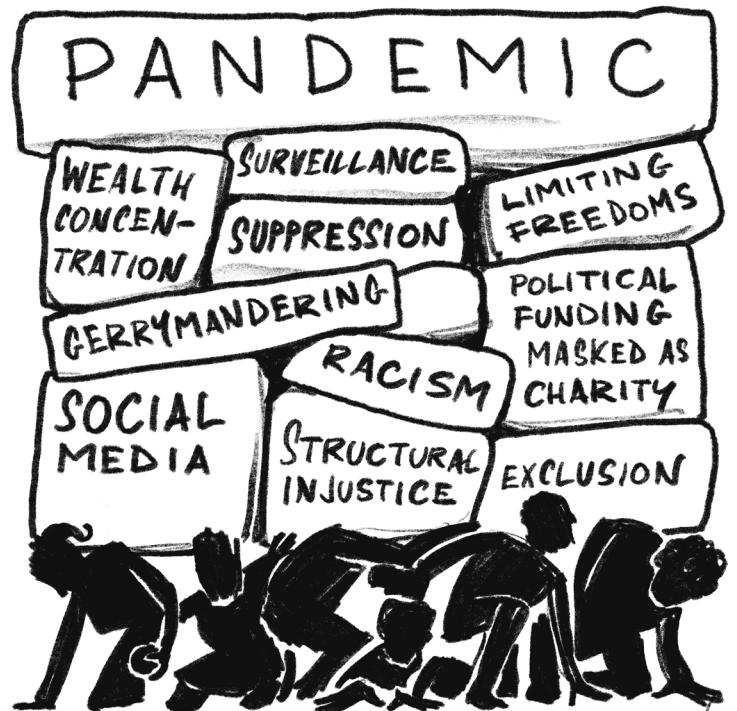
The affliction that is the assault on civil society and democracy, and the way it intersects with the philanthropy sector, is of particular relevance to this *Blueprint*, because it is from within civil society that many fights for equity and the protection of our democratic principles first take place, and it is the mission of many in the philanthropic sector to support these fights. This is to say that civil society is as critical to the functioning of democracy as are verified and trustworthy voting machines. And a healthy philanthropy sector has an important role to play in the preservation and promotion of civil society.

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And the affliction is real: In the decade since I began writing the *Blueprint* series, there have been numerous efforts to change the rules for U.S. civil society, which have in turn impacted philanthropy. In 2010, for example, the U.S. Supreme Court handed down a decision in the case of *Citizens United v. FEC.* The case (along with others, such as *McCutcheon v. FEC*), changed campaign finance law in the United States and legitimized the idea of corporate personhood. These decisions created the opportunity for political donors to use charitable nonprofits as a means of laundering their names off of political contributions and as such have had a huge impact on the philanthropy sector.

Ten years on, the effects of this are seen not only during election cycles but in the everyday workings of U.S. civil society. There seems to have been growth in the number and size of organizations deliberately using charitable (c3) and political (c4) structures

to pursue missions through legal struggles that seem almost anachronistic given the extensive and deliberate efforts to blur lines between the charitable, political, and corporate sectors. (The data on this are bad, which is a fixable problem.) By contrast, individual donors at all levels mix and match political behavior—that is, both action and giving—with charitable behavior, and they are focused much more on issues and causes than on legal categories.[2] In parallel, the importance of tax benefits for certain activities and not others appears relevant to fewer and fewer donors, although much more research on this is necessary.[3]

At the same time, the oversight body for the charitable sector (the IRS) has been steadily gutted of funding over decades. And the last year brought on an adjacent effort to defang the oversight body for political organizations (the FEC) by encouraging the resignation of commissioners (and not replacing them) until there was no longer a quorum.

Meanwhile, attacks on the U.S. electoral system have been continual and unrelenting since the 2000 *Bush v. Gore* Supreme Court ruling to end vote tallying in Florida and declare George W. Bush president of the United States based on the standings in the electoral college. More recently, in 2011, the Republican Party undertook a successful effort to redistrict Congressional districts that was so nefarious that the book about it is titled *Ratf*cked*. Similarly, fundamental protections of the Voting Rights Act were stripped away (again by the Supreme Court) in 2013; between 2013 and 2020, the State of Georgia threw 198,351 voters (most of whom are Black people) off the rolls under false pretenses, while also installing election machines known to be faulty, and to ice the
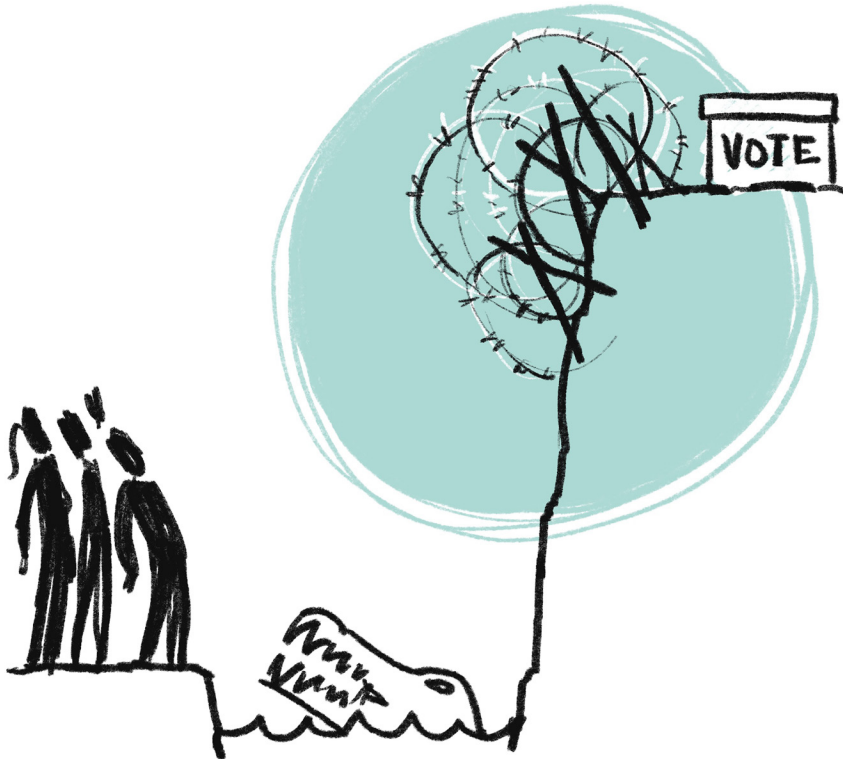
cake, installing far too few of those;[4] and in Florida, after voters passed a referendum re-enfranchising formerly incarcerated state residents, the state legislature simply overruled the will of the voters and put new roadblocks in place, again stripping more than one million people (most of whom are Black or Latinx) of the most basic right of citizenship in democracies, the ability to vote. Indeed, though it takes different forms, voter suppression, largely of people of color, remains a hallmark of the U.S. electoral process. As Professor Eddie Glaude has written about the U.S., "Our democratic principles do not exist in a space apart from our national commitment to white supremacy."[5]

Those championing rules that expand money in politics use free speech as their constitutional buttress.

If all that isn't sufficient, civil society has been threatened by efforts to limit protest and suppress assembly, two of its bedrock elements. Ironically, those who so often use the First Amendment right to free speech to champion rules that expand money in politics seem to hold little regard for the right to free assembly or petitioning the government. Since 2016 alone, forty states have considered more than **135 proposals for legislation or regulations to limit protest**, including one in Florida that would grant immunity to drivers who hit people assembled on the streets.[6] In October, 2020, *The Wall Street Journal* reported more than 100 such incidents since the start of the year, leading to charges against 39 drivers.[7] For the last four years the president of the United States has made numerous overt call-outs to armed vigilantes, organized within civil society, to take to the streets in what he, without irony, refers to as "law and order."

Digital tools also provide a slew of new opportunities to close the space for assembly and association. Unlike many parts of the world, where shutting off the internet is an oft-used blunt-force tool, authorities in the U.S. have seemed to prefer more invidious tactics. One example are decisions to maintain the porous ties between corporate data gathering and government surveillance that Edward Snowden revealed seven years ago. Another is the regulatory inaction that consistently allows a handful of corporations to set the rules that control speech—with politicians pursuing regulation only when their own speech is deemed in violation of corporate codes.

Further, digital surveillance is easily advanced by providing funding to police forces to invest in privacy-invading surveillance equipment. This funding comes from both the federal government and the private sector, both of which often help

police departments conceal these purchases from public oversight by funneling them through nonprofit police foundations. Communities have also digitized their public spaces with ever-present cameras, license plate-readers, and "smart" sensors on everything from parking garages to streetlamps. These installations, marketed in the name of security or efficiency, extend corporate data collection practices and business models beyond our computers and into the public spaces where we assemble.

All-seeing digital data collection mechanisms have left the "screen" and been placed throughout our "public squares."

While advocates and scholars have been focusing on the dangers posed by online misinformation and corporate speech moderation, all-seeing digital data collection mechanisms have left the "screen" and been placed throughout our "public squares."

As for the philanthropic sector, what 2020 has done, to paraphrase Warren Buffet, has shown us the real ground we're standing on when the tide pulls out. On that ground, what has been revealed is that truths long visceral to those exploited by the system have been made unignorably visible to those who benefit from it. For example, most philanthropic organizations are led by White people, resulting in stark disparities in funding provided to nonprofits run by Black, Indigenous, or people of color. Indeed, Black-led nonprofits face a philanthropic world that is as biased as that confronting Black-owned businesses seeking credit or Black families seeking mortgages. And let us be clear about politics: while philanthropy

is comprised of many organizations committed to redressing syndemic harms, it is also home to donors and activists who embrace market fundamentalism, White supremacy, climate change denial, and the inequitable treatment of women, LGBTQ people, and immigrants. While many nonprofit and philanthropic organizations care about equity, many do not.

Many philanthropists insist that they provide support in an apolitical way. But since the institutional philanthropic world exists as an artifact of political choices—the tax and corporate code, first among them—this is simply not possible.[8] The more compelling evidence against this pretense of apolitical existence exists in the decades of successful efforts by right wing foundations and nonprofits to change the rules of the game. There's good scholarship on the Republican Party's efforts to change the rules of governing over the last twenty years. Most of this literature centers on strategies that focus directly on elections and governing—voter suppression, gerrymandering, social media manipulation, and court packing. Much has also been written about the economic policies that accompany this political behavior, including deregulation, the elevation of techno-libertarianism, and the privatization of public services. Not enough has been written or considered about how the same aspirations to change the rules manifest in civil society. But they do.

The fact is, while giving and caring for others are human values that pre-date any form of government and extend across cultures, languages, time, and place, foundations and nonprofits—along with donor-advised funds, LLCs, political action committees, political parties, social enterprises, family offices, and trust companies—are institutions sanctioned,

and chartered and regulated by governments and sold by lawyers, bankers, and wealth advisors. Unlike the basic human instinct to give and care for others, they are regulated products, bound by government rules and market incentives.

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The fact is foundations and nonprofits are products of toxic tax policies that use the promise of philanthropy to justify inequality. In the United States today, our current tax laws starve our schools, hospitals, transit, and elder care systems. They allow individuals to become trillionaires and corporations to pay nothing. They encourage companies to hide marketing expenses as charitable donations, enabling corporate price gouging in the name of benevolence.[9] And they enable the amassing of philanthropic fortunes so large that people turn to them when government efforts fail, which is exactly what we have seen during the Covid-19 pandemic. Philanthropic institutions stepped in to provide basic protective equipment for frontline workers when the federal government abdicated this responsibility. They shipped masks and gloves to places that needed them, upped donations to food banks, and provided money to and negotiated with hotels to enable homeless people to quarantine. They donated hardware and software to help students attend remote classes. And they provided hundreds of millions of dollars in grants to state governments

to protect the November election, a public responsibility that cannot possibly be seen as an appropriate role for private actors.[10]

Yet philanthropic fortunes, created at the expense of shared investment in government programs, will not and cannot remedy the afflictions that are at work in the current syndemic, such as structural racism; inequitable health care, education and housing; or insufficient efforts to halt climate change. Those failures are ours collectively, as citizens. Only together can we solve them. It isn't simply that the funding doesn't add up, it's that relying on philanthropy and nonprofits to do the public's work is a form of lower-cost outsourcing with less accountability. It's not democratic. And it's not working.

To put it another way: any reader will be familiar with the claim—made during previous economic crises—that some companies or industries are too big to fail. What the syndemic we face now shows us is that our current philanthropic sector is too big to succeed. Philanthropy has become so big partly because of government priorities that put a higher value on capital accumulation and private wealth than on public well-being, but it's not big enough to replace government. In an ouroboric irony that must be called out: we've starved our public systems to encourage private action, knowing full well that private actors are neither able to nor appropriate for meeting public needs. Indeed, as generous as they have been during this crisis, foundations will slow their giving as soon as their endowments begin to shrink, or they get

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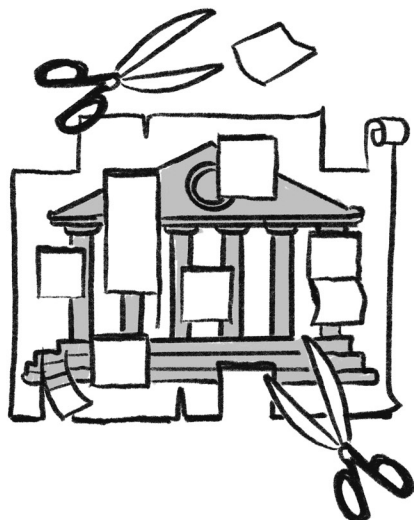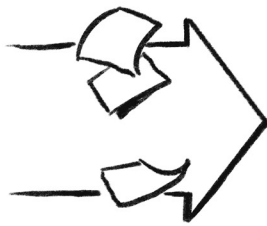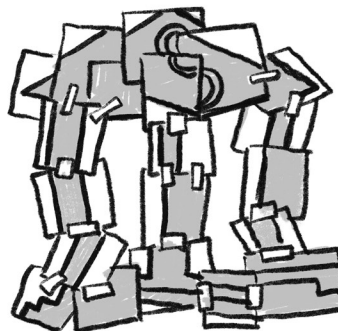
bored of paying for basic services. And they could never even hope to begin covering the cuts resulting from state budgets decimated by Covid-19. The broader process at work here is one of privatization—of public responsibilities, of government functions, of accountability— and it is a trajectory toward failure.[11]

What most distresses me is the degree to which many in the sector are acting as if everything is OK, we just need more philanthropy and we need it now. Decades of tax and corporate regulations to minimize tax bills for the wealthy and induce more philanthropy have brought us to this moment. Moreover, the sector's own infatuation with size (as measured by assets, percentage of GDP, and jobs) is an accelerant to political frames that minimize public investment and decrease public services. In using its size and scale as political leverage, and in refusing to take on policy issues that might limit the growth of philanthropy, the sector contributes to the privatization of public obligations. We don't need more philanthropy covering our basic public responsibilities. We need public resources, public governance, and public accountability.

More philanthropy will not get us to a just or equitable society. Philanthropy done better

will help, but more fundamentally, what is needed is an honest evaluation of what we've let philanthropy become and where it should fit in relationship to public responsibilities. In order to overcome the syndemic that is upon us, we need to reclaim public control over the corporations and technologies that shape our right to speech, assembly, association, and privacy, and to overturn public policies that protect those rights for some people (White, wealthy) and not others. We need to repair the long-term damage of racism—in society writ large of course, but also in the sector—before we can even arrive at a starting line for pursuing equity.

> *We need to re-evaluate what we've let philanthropy become and where it should fit in relationship to public responsibilities.*

We need an economic overhaul that prioritizes human dignity over wealth hoarding. And we need to listen to the wisdom and follow the lead of people whom our systems have always oppressed, for they are the ones most experienced in imagining and working toward liberation.

SECTION 2:
THE SYNDEMIC SHOWS US WHERE TO ACT

In the decades ahead, we will need to rebuild all of our public systems, including education, employment, food systems, health care, housing, and transportation.

All of this rebuilding will need to account for the ever-increasing pace of climate degradation, escalating migration within and across borders, global interconnectedness, and technological change. These forces are shifting where people live and how they work, as well as how and when people participate civically and politically.

Each of our public systems is broken in its own unique way. Rebuilding them is an opportunity to reimagine them from the roots up. For philanthropy and civil society, starting at the roots is a chance to redesign long-held preferences for distinct programmatic strategies. This redesign could begin by rethinking the preference foundations have shown over more than a century to structure their programs around domain areas such as those noted above (education, environment, etc.). Those domains have never been—and certainly aren't now—as singular as an organization chart would make them out to be. For one thing, they are all built on—and integrally tied to—a singular set of digital systems and commercial logic. For example, improving education now requires addressing the extractive and surveillant nature of digital technology. So too does protecting environmental advocates, building more housing, preparing people for new types of work, or creating affordable and safe health care or transportation systems.

> *The insidious nature of racism itself, now fully baked into algorithmic decision-making tools and "tools for increasing organizational efficiency," runs through everything.*

Second, centuries of racist and colonial institutional practices and assumptions need to be replaced and the harms they've created repaired. The insidious nature of racism itself, now fully baked into algorithmic decision-making tools and "tools for increasing organizational efficiency," runs through everything from redistricting to vote counting, resource allocation to credit scoring, home design to school assignments. With this in mind, programmatically-siloed funding that lacks specific attention to countering systemic racism is designed for incrementalism (at best).

Third, civil society and philanthropic strategies need to account for—and provide alternatives to—the misinformation and manipulation that now pollute our systems for news gathering and communicating, at the expense of trust. These may seem like externalities to well-considered program design, but strategies that ignore the interconnected nature of digital dependencies, racism, and distrust, are designed for a world we simply don't inhabit.

Foundations prefer to silo program domains and approach them independently. There is neither time nor capital for that. Real progress is going to require massive public investment. Philanthropy and civil society's rightful role will be to support and sustain the infrastructure for broad, inclusive civic and political participation and leadership in setting public priorities, to protect and support the space for assembly and associational life, and to commit itself to a thriving, independent digital civil society.

We have before us the opportunity to reimagine it all. As a start, action is needed in at least five arenas:

1. Reconceptualize philanthropic practices and boundaries

2. Dismantle toxic tax policies and promote policy levers that reduce inequality

3. Increase the digital independence of civil society

4. Promote new rules and better systems for digital civil society

5. Protect our ability to assemble and take collective action in digital and physical spaces

1. RECONCEPTUALIZE PHILANTHROPIC PRACTICES AND BOUNDARIES

The U.S. economy "collapsed" in March, cratered in July, and stalled again in October, but it was broken well before. I'm not an economist, yet I predicted the 2020 recession in the fall of 2019, as I wrote last year's *Blueprint*. It was clear that our lived economy was fragile, discriminatory, and unreliable—although the adjectives more commonly used were automated, innovative, and entrepreneurial.

During the pandemic, greater cognitive dissonance has taken hold in the philanthropic world. Quantifiable measures of charitable giving and nonprofit vitality are declining even as people are taking to the streets, delivering aid to neighbors, creating online communities of care, and crowdfunding to keep beloved main street shops alive. While we search for ways to reconstruct our shattered economy into something better, we also need to reflect on how best to rebuild civil society and not simply recreate the "old normal." To do that, we need to take an honest look at where we're starting.

While we search for ways to reconstruct our shattered economy into something better, we also need to reflect on how best to rebuild civil society and not simply recreate the "old normal."

PHILANTHROPY AND NONPROFITS

First, the hopeful news. This past summer, the nonprofit world was buoyed (emotionally, at least) when five of the nation's big foundations announced a commitment to an additional $1.7 billion in grantmaking. This joint action, which involves a variety of measures including debt issuance and higher payout rates, demonstrates that even the largest foundations can act quickly and creatively when they want to. Another example is the #HalfMyDAF campaign, which encourages people to give at least half the money in their donor-advised funds to nonprofits hit hard by the pandemic. These acts reflect awareness by a handful of organizations and donors that our democracy is, as Crystal Hayling of The Libra Foundation put it, "on the precipice" of collapse.

While commendable, these philanthropic actions are short-term fixes largely aimed at saving nonprofit organizations. Neither effort reflects a reconsideration of philanthropic structures, the privileges granted to them by law, or their role in perpetuating the societal systems that birthed them in the first place. Instead, they are positive steps within the confines of the old normal. Perhaps the most important thing about them is that they demonstrate the ability of donors to act differently—to make decisions more quickly, to make general operating grants, to lower the time-cost of their grantmaking. Having done this, foundations should not revert to their old ways. But these operational changes hardly qualify as reform. The efforts to voluntarily move more money quickly also involve a degree of self-protection for both foundations and DAF holders fearful of expanded regulatory demands. Ultimately, these approaches are about giving more but not differently or necessarily better.

Nonprofits certainly need help, but before philanthropy rushes to save them, let's consider what we're saving. We should remind ourselves that many nonprofit jobs are poorly paid and lack benefits and that the nonprofit world fares little better than corporate America on measures of inclusion or equity. I say this not to kick nonprofits when they're

down, but to ask us to think about what we're collectively invested in repairing.

The charismatic megafauna of nonprofits—colleges, museums, libraries, performance centers, and hospitals—pose an additional set of challenges. Many are struggling during a pandemic that has made physical gathering dangerous, forcing them to move quickly to incorporate digital opportunities without making their brick and mortar institutions obsolete. How, for example, will higher education justify the expenses associated with residential life when most teaching is occurring online? The universities that figure out how to do it right and survive the pandemic will be models for a new normal in higher education. Navigating this transition will require wholesale reconsideration of both individual organizations and their collective approach to digital rules and practices regarding issues of privacy and intellectual property.

A BROADER CONCEPTUAL UNDERSTANDING OF PHILANTHROPY

While the biggest of the big nonprofit organizations are struggling, smaller, community-based networks of care that rarely attracted outside funding raised unprecedented amounts of attention and money in the early months of the pandemic. Bail funds and mutual aid groups used the internet and social media, and months of media attention, to attract money from new donors in faraway locales who previously knew little or nothing about these groups. The lifeblood of these groups is community control and participation. At the same time, as people remain without work, health insurance, or childcare, their ability to help others dwindles.

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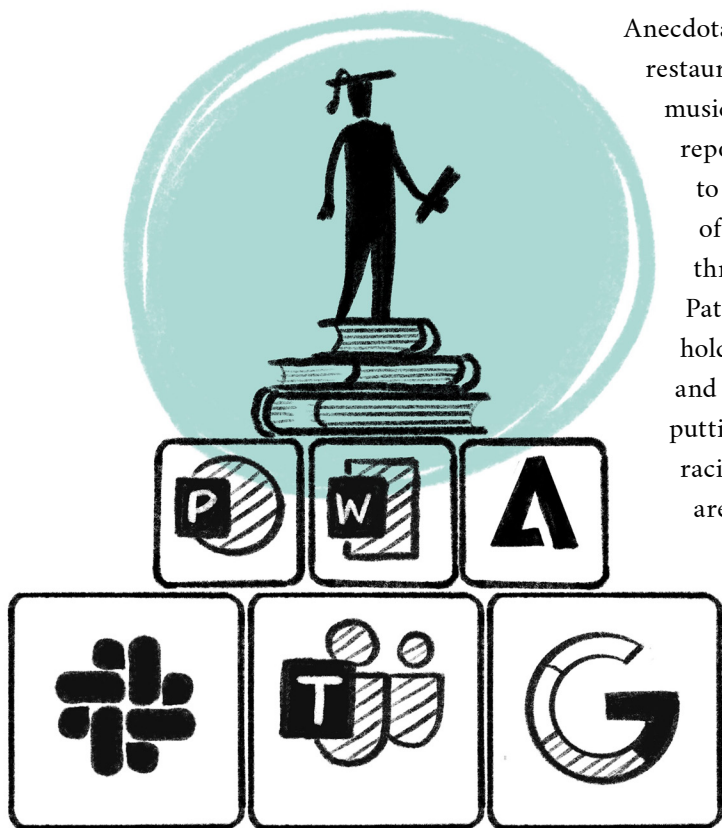
Anecdotally, we are also giving to local restaurants, newspapers, artists, musicians, and unions. But unless data reporting rules change, we have no way to quantify this generosity since much of it takes place on private platforms through services such as GoFundMe, Patreon, Venmo, and PayPal. The same holds for the time, energy, money, and physical safety that people spend putting their bodies on the streets for racial justice. These collective actions are uncounted, even as they lead to policy change in cities and corporations. As I've discussed in the *Blueprint* series, this giving of time, skills, and money also demonstrates how donors care little about tax incentives when it comes to everything

from working for social justice to keeping small businesses alive.

We need to broaden our conceptual understanding of philanthropy even further. It is more than giving money and time. We need to create systems that allow us to safely and equitably give digital data if we so choose. We need regulations and laws that prevent and prosecute the extraction of such data by third parties until and unless we find ways that people and communities control the process. We also need to see beyond the big institutions, nonprofits, and foundations, and expand the menu of practices we count, encourage, and recognize as philanthropic.

We need to upgrade the laws that define which organizations and forms of giving are recognized as community assets. Which organizations and which forms of donating are given tax breaks and required to report on their activities? The laws also need to account for the variety of forms these efforts take, from deeply rooted cultural traditions of care such as mutual aid networks to decentralized global grassroots movements such as those currently pushing for government action on climate change. To understand our public life, we need rules that guarantee greater visibility into the data that flows through proprietary payment and crowdfunding platforms that power all this civic action.
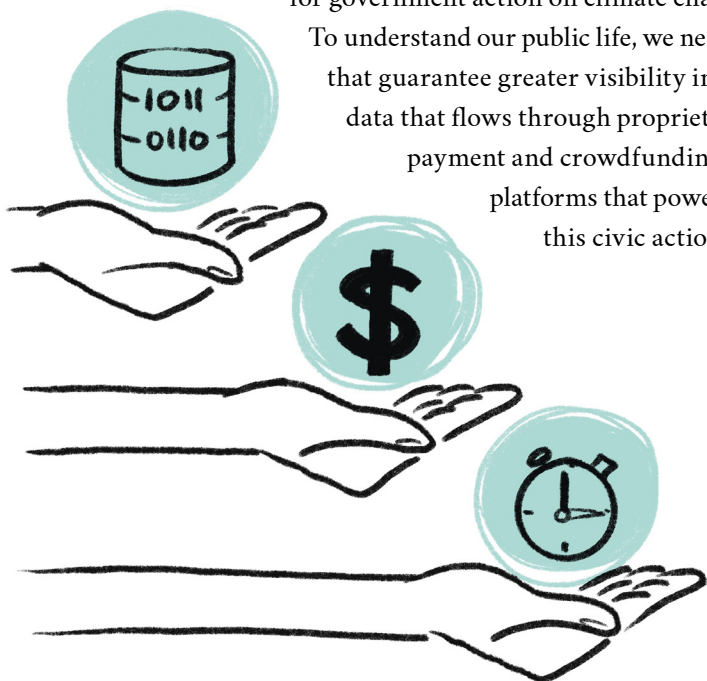
PHILANTHROPY AND DEMOCRACY

In 2020 democracy became a core concern of some big foundations and many individual donors. Small scale giving to groups dedicated to getting out the vote, fighting voter suppression, and protecting the right to protest increased as foundations also made new investments in program areas focused on democratic practices. This is hopeful, if it continues. Foundations and donors alike depend on rights-based democracies to exist. Democracy doesn't need philanthropy (except when a society abandons its own commitment to providing basic public services). But philanthropy and civil society depend on democracy.

Democracy doesn't need philanthropy, but philanthropy needs democracy.

The reason is simple: Authoritarian alternatives to democracy generally have little to no interest in allowing sources of power, influence, or assembly to exist beyond those fully controlled by the political leadership. Again, and simply put, democracy doesn't need philanthropy, but philanthropy needs democracy.

Protecting democracy—not just the governing protocols and practices but the adjacent space of civil society—is in philanthropy's own self-interest. Threats to assembly (such as those described in action 5 below) matter to philanthropists and nonprofits, even if they don't see themselves as street protestors. Digital surveillance of activists matters even to foundations or nonprofits engaged in what they see as nonpolitical acts. How those activists are treated are warning signs of how political power sees all independent action, regardless of issue.

Undergirding all of civil society are digital transmission systems to which we need affordable, reliable access and assurances that our information will be treated fairly. The policy concerns of all philanthropic enterprises should be those that protect the public's access to information, the people's ability to participate, the freedom of expression and assembly, and the existence of digital, physical, and liminal spaces that encourage pluralistic participation. Protecting the space for civil society is fundamental to institutional philanthropy, for the latter can't exist without the former.

No one knows when the Covid-19 pandemic will end, nor what that end will look like. But we can already see the need to rebuild public systems. We've spent the last year demonstrating the possibilities of faster acting, more community-focused philanthropy, and civic action that centers racial justice and equity. There is tremendous opportunity to use this moment, as Arundhati Roy declares, "as a portal," through which we choose what to take and what to leave behind. Here are some opportunities for rethinking philanthropy that we can take through that portal to shape the future.

To get started, scholars and community advocates can help philanthropists:

- Re-write the regulations about what kind of giving counts and develop meaningful measures of those activities.

- Support and privilege giving practices that prioritize participation and community decision-making by those closest to the challenges themselves. One hundred years ago we did this with community foundations. Mutual aid, giving circles, and cooperatives are age-old examples with White European roots. Now is the time to legally recognize and privilege diasporic, indigenous, and culturally-aligned models of giving.

- Remain committed to the BIPOC-led organizing and mobilization efforts that they supported before the November 2020 election.

- Commit to protecting the personal safety of civil society actors, people's digital data and digital "selves," and the ability to participate in collective action.

- Encourage philanthropic investment in community-led efforts to help nonprofits incorporate safe and effective digital practices. Inspirational models include Detroit's Equitable Internet Initiative and Indigenous-led efforts to bring high speed broadband to tribal nations.

- Upgrade nonprofits and foundations from their analog roots. Invest in new ways of managing data that build off the emergence of entities such as open collectives, data collaboratives, or data cooperatives that enable communities to safely and effectively use digital data to make change.

- Act now to preserve the digital data, software code, and other digital assets collected on marginalized and vulnerable populations by nonprofit organizations that are now closing or merging.

Each of these ideas provides an opening for foundations to help community groups and mutual aid networks flourish without falling back on the inequitable rules and transactions that currently shape financial donations. Community foundations such as the Chicago Community Trust are already taking steps in that direction. Local nonprofits should also look for ways they can support and learn from the care and aid networks in their communities, including strengthening rather than diminishing grassroots leadership. This is not just a chance to save nonprofits; it is an opportunity to adapt them into more effective participants in civil society.

2. DISMANTLE TOXIC TAX POLICIES AND PROMOTE POLICY LEVERS THAT REDUCE INEQUALITY

Philanthropy and digital civil society must stop pretending to be above or outside of politics or to be independent of public political and economic choices. This argument fails on three fronts: first, as organizations they exist fully within the confines of public laws and regulations. Second, philanthropic and nonprofits missions are shaped by public policies—they either fill perceived gaps, demonstrate alternatives, or align with and expand public priorities. Third, people and communities are shaped by public policy choices; by extension, the people working at or being served by foundations and nonprofits are influenced by public choices.

Today's tax policies are toxic and use the promise of philanthropy to justify inequality. In the United States today, this toxic tax code permeates our soil and prevents us from growing into an equitable society. Our current tax laws starve our schools, hospitals, transit, and elder care systems. They allow individuals to become trillionaires and corporations to pay nothing. They encourage companies to hide marketing expenses as charitable donations, enabling corporate price gouging in the name of benevolence.[12] They enable the amassing of philanthropic fortunes so large that people turn to them when government efforts fail.

Today's tax policies are toxic and use the promise of philanthropy to justify inequality.

Tax systems and budgets are signs of a society's priorities. As long as the tax system in the U.S. prioritizes wealth accumulation over fair economic participation, the social issues that nonprofits and foundations address will get worse, not better. A tax agenda that seeks to limit wealth inequalities would provide greater public funding for social, educational, and environmental services. While it might limit the growth of new philanthropic contributions, the sum of resources available and the public control over those resources would likely lead to more equitable systems of care than any amount of private philanthropic largesse.
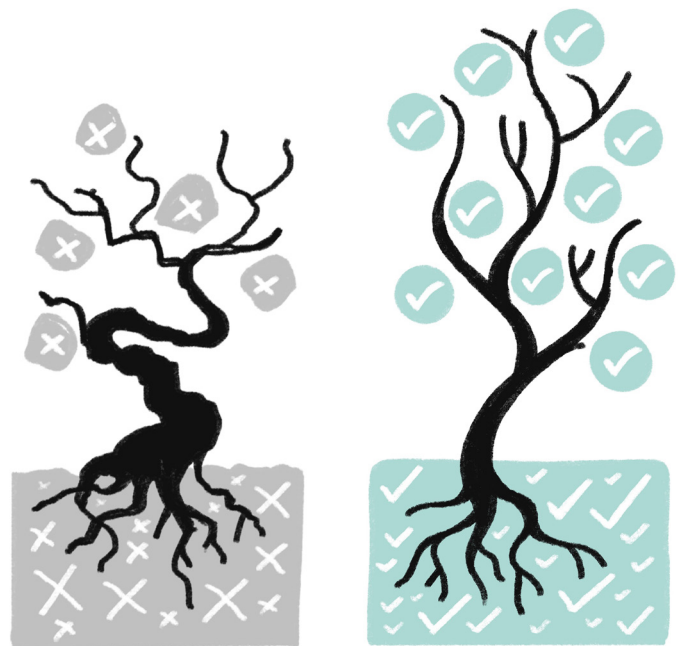
Sustaining a system that enables such massive concentration of wealth at the expense of an equitable society and functioning public services is a recipe for societal (and philanthropic) failure. Are the massive philanthropic legacies produced as a byproduct of this system worth the costs? This is not a question that can or should be answered just by counting dollars. Far more important is the question of public governance and decision-making. Here, by design, philanthropy fails.

Most foundations and their advocacy associations will never admit this, of course. Instead, they simply focus their limited advocacy elsewhere. But failing to fix our tax policies destroys the soil in which public policies, such as our social safety net, grow. By stepping in and allowing philanthropy to take on the task of providing an alternative source of funding, we are abrogating our responsibility to govern ourselves. We are privatizing the public sector.

By failing to organize and support advocacy for equitable tax policies, philanthropy reveals that its devotion to fueling its own growth is greater than its allegiance to its stated missions. Policy advocates for philanthropy and nonprofits who focus only on institutional self-preservation without attending to the broader effect of wealth inequality are like young farmers polishing apples for the county fair while ignoring the health of the soil in which her orchard grows.

To move in a new direction in the arena of current tax policy and to address the impact of their own role in the extreme inequality in our country, philanthropy and nonprofits must actively support public policies that dig deep into soil level issues of our current public policies. We can begin with these actions:

- **Understand the damage our current tax policies inflict on our public infrastructure**. Philanthropic leaders themselves are quick to remind us that they don't have the money to fix massive public systems like education or health care. Yet they continue to advocate for tax policies that favor philanthropic institutions over government programs. We need to stop ignoring the reality of tax and wealth inequality and acknowledge that the status quo, no matter how much it benefits philanthropy, isn't working.

- **Advocate for a just and fair tax code.** The political agendas of nonprofit and philanthropic advocacy organizations focus on the wrong end of tax policy. The emphasis has been on deduction rates for charitable giving, payout rates for endowments, exemption rates for nonprofits, prevention of municipalities from taxing endowed or nonprofit property, and postage rates for preferred organizations. Proposals of this type are fine, but they circumvent the most important issue: the various ways our existing tax structure enables unjust accumulation by the already wealthy.

Advocating for a just and fair tax code (and enforcing it) means adopting an agenda that has been all but ignored by trade associations for the philanthropic world.[13] This new agenda would include the larger issues of estate taxes, corporate tax shelters, and personal exemptions that have contributed to the highest rates of wealth inequality in the world's history. To take one example, this advocacy would mean challenging laws that minimize taxes on carried interest rates. Such laws benefit hedge funds, private equity firms, and their owners. And these investment companies, in turn, contribute to the devastation of main streets, the decimation of local journalism, and the decline in the quality of elder care.

While tax changes that encourage more equitable participation in civil society are worth considering, we should keep in mind that tax breaks aren't our only motivator for participation. Other policy changes can also reduce inequality and expand civic participation. Here are a few specific actions we can take:

- **Fight against other discriminatory public policies**. We should fight against recent presidential actions to prevent

diversity and inclusion efforts within the federal government (or by its contractors), to limit free inquiry by scholars (denouncing Critical Race Theory), and to remove civil service protections in the public workforce. These actions run counter to the work and interests of much of civil society and philanthropy. Fighting these through coalitions, litigation, and advocacy is in the interest of the entire sector.

■ **Demonstrate practices that other institutions might follow.** We've seen philanthropy and nonprofits do this with mission-related investing and grantmaking approaches that shift funding decisions to groups and individuals in the communities that foundations serve. In recent months, foundations and nonprofits have made statements of solidarity with the cause of racial justice and some have made real changes in their practices. Justice Funders, for instance, is a community of philanthropic leaders committed to redistributing wealth and shifting power and economic control to communities most in need. Liberated Capital applies the lessons of decolonization by trusting and supporting those harmed most by historical and systemic racism.

Much more is needed. Might we, for example, see a foundation not only pledge to engage community members in selecting grantees but go further and dedicate its assets to the communities from whom the wealth was originally extracted? Will foundations pay reparations to descendants of the enslaved people whose labor capitalized them or the indigenous stewards of the lands on which they sit? Doing so would require not only transferring funds but transferring decision-making and leadership to those communities. Some White-led nonprofits are beginning to embrace the "spread the abundance" model practiced by bail funds, which give any money raised beyond what they need to other funds rather than stashing it away for themselves. The rise of giving circles and basic needs funds, participatory grantmaking, and more deliberate consideration of the politics and practices of mutual aid are all important steps. They are alternatives to and erasures of the "usual" model that says donors should dictate where their money goes. They instead put resources and decisions in the hands of those closest to the need. These are edge practices now, but what would "better" look like if such approaches became the norm?

Perhaps greater civic participation rests not on tax cuts but on broadband access? Or perhaps universal childcare or kindergarten might unleash more civic and political involvement than any tax benefit. Economic policies that center equity and environmental care might do more to save the planet than tax changes. We have plenty of room here to get creative. We have countless ways to participate, to organize, and to make change in our communities. It's time we expanded our imaginations about the policy levers we could use to support them.

> *We have countless ways to participate, to organize, and to make change in our communities. It's time we expanded our imaginations about the policy levers we use to support them.*

3. INCREASE THE DIGITAL INDEPENDENCE OF CIVIL SOCIETY

Nonprofits, foundations, political organizers, street protestors, and each of us as individuals are dependent on the digital world. We rely on hardware, software, and digital networks to work, shop, entertain, connect, pay bills, and organize. And that was before the pandemic forced many people to figure out how to manage nearly every aspect of their lives remotely.

Our dependence on digital systems—almost all of which are commercially-owned and government surveilled—reduces the notion of an independent space for civic action to a farce.

Our dependence on digital systems—almost all of which are commercially-owned and government surveilled—reduces the notion of an independent space for civic action to a farce. But it doesn't need to be this way. Right now we have the best opportunity we may ever get to reimagine civil society having a new kind of independence. The opportunity we have right now allows us to develop and protect ways that we can live private lives and organize our own communities; express our values, creativity, and concerns; and assemble and associate in the liminal space between digital and physical where life now happens.[14]

The current digital relationships, like the tax system discussed above, are a toxic element of the soil that feeds today's nonprofit and philanthropic organizations. Digital copies of your organization's documents, financial information, community and donor information, coalition plans, and video-conferenced board meetings live on big tech's servers and are controlled by their rules.[14]

This data collection is no longer limited to the time you spend on keyboards staring at screens. The hype about 5G, the Internet of Things, and Smart Cities is a techno-optimistic way of describing a reality in which the internet follows you when you move through city streets, across a plaza, or in a park, whether to picnic or protest. Companies such as Palantir, Clearview AI, and Axon power the security in buildings, the spot counters in parking garages, and the tag readers on office buildings. We leave digital trails when we actively go online and when we go outside.

It's a useful visual to imagine the work done by all the nonprofits, foundations, political groups, and protestors in the country as a few folders on the hard drives—otherwise known as the "cloud"—owned by Amazon, Google, Microsoft, Facebook, Clearview AI, and Axon. There is no independent sector in this scenario. Civil society, nonprofits, and foundations are subsumed in a digital world dominated by governments and companies. The logic of commercial digital systems—its extractive nature, its focus on consolidated power, and both its vertical and horizontal integration—is fundamentally at odds with community control, pluralistic expression, privacy, and independence.
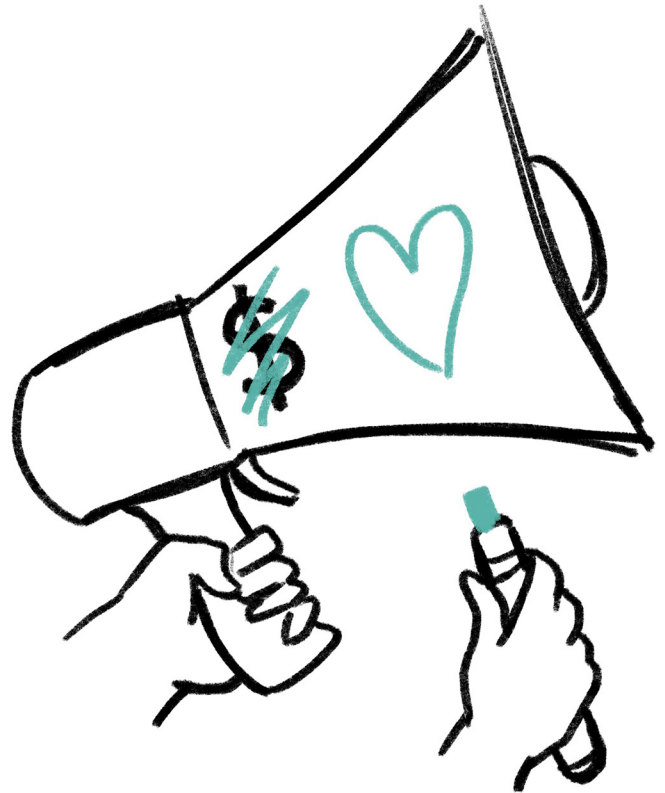
Civil society, nonprofits, and foundations are subsumed in a digital world dominated by governments and companies.

ever-expanding dependencies. Corporate philanthropic gifts of free or low cost software, cloud storage, or hardware (think "Tech for Good" programs) are visible signs of this seduction. Financial **contributions from these companies** further entangle nonprofit organizations, who become loathe, for example, to advocate for public broadband when cable companies donate to their annual fund.

Here too, there is opportunity. Imagining, investing in, and maintaining digital infrastructure (software, hardware, institutions, and regulations) that protects personal safety, enables collective action, and allows people to opt into and out of the dominant existing systems is fully within the purview of civil society. While government regulations and some corporations may be useful allies in this, the vision, investment, and possibility will only come from within civil society as the other two sectors are bound by very different incentives. In its proper role in democracies, civil society creates alternatives to dominant commercial and government systems. These alternatives can be powerful enough to shift the dominant systems, proven by examples as diverse as the Voting Rights Act, environmental protections, and universal design. And sometimes the alternatives are simply important as alternatives, as respite from or an option to, majoritarian norms. Operating with and adjacent to profit or national rule without being captured by them is the purview of civil society. Now is the time to extend its values to digital infrastructure.

A small number of nonprofits, such as the American Civil Liberties Union, **The Leadership Conference on Civil & Human Rights**, and **Fight for the Future** have fought to protect civil liberties in digital spaces for decades. Most nonprofits, however, have allowed themselves to be seduced into

Equally important is the opportunity to recognize the expertise held by social and racial justice organizations, BIPOC and women-led nonprofits, and others who don't see themselves in the "digital rights world." Their expertise is desperately needed by those who understand digital systems and technology policy but whose lived experience doesn't include Black excellence, mutual and community advocacy, and generational struggle for social, economic, civil and political rights. It is not simply a matter of bringing digital expertise to communities; the digital expertise itself—legal, technological,

and operational—needs to change. In the European Union, the Digital Freedom Fund is pursuing its work with an eye toward decolonizing digital rights. At a minimum, integrating the expertise of communities and digital technology experts is critical for pursuing community goals and digital rights.

If nonprofits and foundations want to continue to pursue their individual missions—and remain free of market or government control—they will need to embrace alternative technologies and new digital organizational forms and commit to creating public policies that enable the safe use of digital platforms by those taking collective action. Promising efforts are already underway in each of the following areas. Philanthropy and nonprofits can join or at least learn from each one.

- **Embrace alternative privacy-protected technologies.** Two of the most pervasive pieces of software in use today—Mozilla's Firefox browser and Open Whisper System's Signal messaging system—are built and maintained by nonprofit organizations. These tools, and the organizations and communities that support them, exist to provide accessible, privacy-protected, non-commercial alternatives for browsing the web or communicating with family, friends, and communities. Similarly, efforts such as the Open Voice Assistant Lab and the Common Voice project aim to protect privacy and encourage competition in the fast-growing area of virtual assistant technology.

- **Learn from new "digital-positive" organizational forms.** Entities such as civic data trusts, data collaboratives, and open collectives allow digital data to be used safely and effectively to advocate for change. Think of these as land trusts for data. A group of people— say those volunteering as Covid-19 vaccine testers— could create a trust, appoint trustees who represent them by age, geography, race, gender, and other characteristics, and determine how their data is used. The trust holds the rights to the data and the trustees would negotiate access to those data rights according to trust law and the original agreements. This would provide legal protection to use the private data for public benefit—for medical research, for example—but not for the needs of law enforcement or immigration authorities.

Such organizations remain rare today. But just as the B Corporation movement accelerated socially-positive commercial activity in recent years, this is an ideal moment to accelerate the growth of digitally-positive organizations. After all, as historians Jonathan Levy and Naomi Lamoreaux have explained, the nonprofit corporation itself emerged from 19th century negotiations between profit-maximizing investors and state governments. The modern foundation was born of a 20th Century legislative compromise between the U.S. Congress and the State of New York regarding the creation of The Rockefeller Foundation. Likewise, this is the time to imagine and collectively create 21st century organizations that help people contribute their private data for public benefit.

> *This is the time to imagine and collectively create 21st century organizations that help people contribute their private data for public benefit.*

- **Engage in integrated policy advocacy that reinforces digital civil society.** Digital policy matters whether your area of focus is housing, energy, immigration, or cultural preservation. It might come in the form of data collection, net neutrality, intellectual property, labor rights or some other form, but there is a digital component to the policies that shape your focus areas. At the same time, there are experts in digital rights, telecommunications law, data regulations, broadband access, and so on who need peer expertise on education, the arts, housing policy, anti-discrimination laws, gender issues, and immigration laws. Integrating these areas of expertise is critical to advancing domain-level policies and digital policy.

Luckily, nonprofit organizations ranging from the ACLU to Wikimedia have critical expertise and are experienced advocates on these issues. Associations of libraries and public broadcasters, media justice and civil rights groups, environmental advocates, and human rights lawyers are finding common ground on digital public policies ranging from net neutrality to encryption. Integrating these different forms of expertise will unleash the real power of civil society.

Digital systems are here to stay. Civil society is the only realm in which tools that center community control by taking advantage of digital connectivity are likely to be created.

Our digital systems are here to stay. Civil society is the only realm in which tools that center community control by taking advantage of digital connectivity are likely to be created. We need tools, organizations, and laws that protect our rights to assemble, associate, and express ourselves as we choose.

Democracies fall when there is no space outside the market or governments for people to gather, to speak, to take action, to create, and to care for each other. Civil society's purpose is to provide this space.

Democracies fall when there is no space outside the market or governments for people to gather, to speak, to take action, to create, and to care for each other. Civil society's purpose is to provide this space. It is time to ensure that we have these opportunities in a world awash in digital data. Simply put, digital public policies are now the policy agenda for the nonprofit and philanthropic world.

4. PROMOTE NEW RULES AND BETTER SYSTEMS FOR DIGITAL CIVIL SOCIETY

Nonprofits and foundations are defined by laws. They exist to provide an alternative or complement to governments and markets. Philanthropy, especially legally privileged, institutional forms such as foundations, is a subset of civic space; it exists within the broader frames of assembly and association. Big foundations exist only because laws allow them to—laws that are barely more than a century old. These laws are negotiated through the mechanics of our democracy. They are grounded in a societal commitment to allowing people to come together and use their private resources for public benefit.

Digital systems can fuel collective change as long as people have agency over them. Digital systems are on/off switches for far more of our lives than we pay attention to. They connect our energy networks and our schools; we use them for health care and managing public utilities; we rely on them for news and personal communication, transportation, public safety, political participation, civic action, employment, and almost every interaction we have with an organization.

> *If the digital systems we rely on and the data they generate are to serve us, we must govern them to ensure that equity, safety, and privacy—not profit—are priorities.*

If the systems we rely on and the data they generate are to serve us, we must govern them to ensure that equity, safety, and privacy—not profit—are priorities. We need laws, public policy, and regulations that put society in control, rather than allowing companies to define the digital bounds of our daily lives. Proposals for Public Digital Infrastructure, community tech stacks, and a corporation for Public Software show the imagination and possibilities here. This type of big thinking is particularly important for nonprofits, foundations, and civil society because they cannot function as a counterweight to governments and corporations given their current dependence on digital systems made and monitored by companies and states.

Philanthropy and digital civil society organizations can:

■ **URGENT: Provide resources to protect nonprofit data.** Predictions abound of large numbers of nonprofits closing up

shop or merging with others. Many of these organizations hold lots of data (collected at public or philanthropic expense). We urgently need a coordinated effort to provide nonprofits with guidance, resources, advice, and repositories for these data sets that will protect the people represented in the data sets and further the public purpose for which the data were collected. Doing so can protect already vulnerable people from digital exploitation, ensure the data continue to serve public purposes, prevent a massive privatization of public goods, and demonstrate the potential for public digital infrastructure.

■ **Define the bounds of digital data donations.** Should we be able to donate digital data? If so, who should make this decision—you or Facebook? Should Google and Twitter determine the rules over your photos, your postings, your network of friends, allies, and organizational affiliates?

People are already donating their data for public purposes. This is precisely what happens when you upload a photo to eBird or iNaturalist. Your photo becomes part of global databases used by researchers to track biodiversity. Data donation is what happens when you contribute to a bone marrow registry, participate in a medical study, or allow Ancestry.com or 23 & Me to use your DNA for any purpose beyond telling you (something) about your genetic connections. As of now, the companies (and occasionally the research organizations) lay out rules that work for them. Civil society and philanthropy have

important roles to play in deciding if and how digital data can be donated safely and equitably. Sage Bionetworks is an example of what leadership can look like.

- **Elevate leaders from the most-affected communities when writing digital regulations.** In Minneapolis, the Community Advisory Board to the Racial Equity Commission includes digital technology as part of its remit in setting guidelines for public departments. In Detroit, local residents show up to police commission hearings to fight the use of facial recognition technologies. Communities know what harms that digital technologies can cause, and they know how to fight them. Philanthropy and nonprofits would be well-served by finding these leaders, supporting them in their work, and learning from them to expand the impact of their own philanthropic work. The Algorithmic Justice League and AI for the People are two examples.

- **Big philanthropy needs to expand its investments in digital infrastructure and literacy.** Investments need to move beyond the instrumental nature of the technologies. Simply helping nonprofits expand their use of digital technology without questioning the effects of commercial digital dependencies does more harm than good. The move to public interest technology is a positive step, but it must widen its focus to take into account how the internet now shapes physical spaces and underpins most spheres of life. We've had decades of exciting experiments in community-governed broadband, mesh networking, nonprofit-built encryption software,

public-purpose and open source social media, document sharing, and cloud storage. We have frameworks that model how different pieces of digital hardware, software, institutional designs, and regulations can constitute alternative, public-purpose infrastructures. Such infrastructures are—not surprisingly—being theorized, modeled, and built from within civil society. There is an unprecedented opportunity to lead in expanding and creating these alternatives as integral parts of any philanthropic strategy.

We have an unprecedented opportunity to lead in expanding and creating alternative, public-purpose digital infrastructures.

5. PROTECT OUR ABILITY TO ASSEMBLE AND TAKE COLLECTIVE ACTION IN DIGITAL AND PHYSICAL SPACES

The pandemic of 2020, shelter-in-place orders, and street protests have brought new attention to our desire and right to assemble. We gather to build societies. The right to come together—for friendship, worship, play, learning, commerce, protest, governing, mourning, or celebration —is fundamental. Today this right is threatened by our digital dependency. The strength of this threat is similar to that of the threat to expression, but the location is different. Past *Blueprints* have discussed the many threats to our rights to free expression and privacy, but threats to our right of assembly have not been considered to the same extent. This section attempts to fill that gap.

Our ability to come together—for friendship, worship, play, learning, commerce, protest, governing, mourning, or celebration—is threatened by our digital dependency.

Today's policy battles about online discourse, political advertising, and hate speech are informed by decades of scholarship that position the internet as communications infrastructure. Now that our digital infrastructure supports physical interactions, we need to consider the implications for assembly. As the lines between physical and digital spaces blur, these challenges are being re-potted into the soil of public life.

As we consider our associational rights, we should broaden the aperture through which we designate forms of collective action worthy of public recognition and privilege. Philanthropy and nonprofits are not the only worthy options for collective action in civic space. We worship together; we create aid networks or cooperatives; we pool our resources to build everything from libraries to independent neighborhood wifi networks; we provide care to others as acts of kinship, love, and reciprocity; we share our voices and our resources; we build digital communities and physical communities, and we take action by connecting the two.

All these forms of our associational lives exist in both physical and digital spaces. From the 1990s' enthusiasm for online communities to the subsequent proliferation of social media "groups" and "circles," the internet has long promised bigger, easier, and more diverse associational options

and spaces for assembly. But the reality is more complicated as marginalized communities have long experienced. The sorting and clustering we experience online is designed to serve digital ads but puts boundaries that we cannot see on our online experiences. What variables do the digital platforms use to define you or the people with whom they think you might share common interests? How do the machines see each of us, and how does that categorizing shape with whom we associate?

YOUR DATA TRAIL

Consider your own behavior over the last year. If you are fortunate enough to have reliable access to computers and broadband, your work, schooling, family gatherings, worship services, civic engagement, and political participation have all been happening via video calls or within gaming platforms. You have been assembling in online spaces designed, owned, and monitored by corporate-owned video conferencing or streaming software. When you couldn't stand it any longer you switched over to sharing pictures, music, videos, and news on some other corporate-owned software. Whether you've had food and goods delivered to your home or ventured out to shop for yourself, you used your phone to do it, and so your digital trail followed you. If you took to the street in protest, went to a polling place to vote, or had to seek medical care (not via tele-health) you did so while generating digital data that was collected by invisible third party telecommunications companies, software makers, and cell phone manufacturers. Everywhere you assembled with others—in outdoor physical space and while you were online at home—your data trail was (and is) visible to, collected and stored by, and used for profit by third parties.

We are "online" at all times now, whether we're at home or in public spaces. Data on who we are with, where we are going, how long we're there, and who else joins us is being generated and captured, not only by companies you think of (Facebook, Google) but also by companies like Clearview AI, Axon (maker of tasers and cameras), and innumerable data brokers.

DIGITAL PLATFORMS SHAPE OUR ASSOCIATIONS

We need ways to determine how digital platforms shape our associations with others. While the platforms don't determine this, they do play a role. For all the work we do using them for outreach and community building, the designs of the tools we use also exert influence. Here's one superficial example of what I mean: I assume you're familiar with video conferencing by now. You know what it means to be in a "Zoom room." And, once you're on Zoom you know only one person can talk at a time. That's not like any "physical room" I've ever been in— it's a design constraint of the Zoom software. It could be different (and, trust me, software developers are busy creating alternatives). While not a particularly meaningful example, I hope it draws your attention to how the software you use shapes what you can do with it (and vice versa). There is a recursive relationship between digital tools and how we use them.

This is important for membership organizations whose ranks are increasingly filled by those who "find" them on Facebook and other social media platforms. In this case, the Facebook software is playing a role in determining who an organization reaches. It's a role the company controls and the organization guesses about and tries to work with or around. Given everything we've learned about how corporate software and moderation practices contribute to disinformation online, we should investigate how digital profiling shapes what groups we

Without new rules to guide us, we are in danger of allowing company-owned sorting algorithms to determine our engagement in civic life.

learn about, what events we attend, and which organizations we ultimately join. Without new rules to guide us, we are in danger of allowing company-owned sorting algorithms to play ever-expanding (yet proprietary) roles in our engagement in civic life.[15]
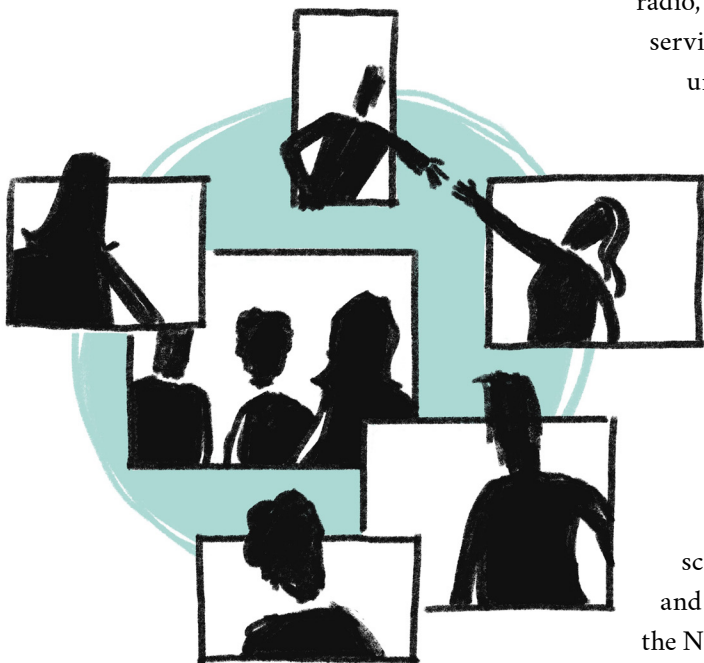
Moderators online do more than shape speech; they shape relationships. We don't know whether those relationships align with how we see ourselves or what we're looking for. How can we exert our own agency and define our own communities in an environment of inscrutable, profit-intermediated choices? We don't know what rules, variables, or personal judgments are behind digital decisions to promote or obscure protest information, community announcements, or even meet-ups. We are repeating the mistake we made with online speech, assuming, for decades, that giving access to more and more voices meant that everyone would be heard and all would be well. We learned the fallacy of this assumption the hard way; we must avoid repeating the mistake with assembly and association.

AN EXAMPLE OF THE WAY WE GATHER TODAY

On June 20, 2020, more than one million people participated in the Poor People's Campaign Call for Moral Revival, a gathering supported by videoconferencing, radio, social media, and telephone dial-in services. Religious organizations, labor unions, Black fraternities, veterans, environmental advocates, and digital rights activists organized their members and built the digital scaffolding for the event. The aspiration had been for a physical gathering reminiscent of the 1963 March on Washington. In some ways, the digital version was more inclusive, but the arrangements for participants and organizers changed as the event shifted from streets to screens. Instead of the masks, water, and medics they would have brought to the National Mall, the organizers brought passwords to video lines, protected the chat rooms, and used redundant servers to prevent being taken offline by opponents. Bringing people together now requires constantly learning and updating a mix of physical and digital safety measures for individuals, their online presences, and entire communities. Supporting diverse alliances of community groups and digital advocates is fundamental to civic and political engagement today.[16]

Hierarchical and mostly White nonprofits and foundations, on the other hand, scrambled to find this kind of expertise when shelter-in-place orders required them to disperse overnight. Smart managers, of course, will work to move forward under these new conditions, engaging their staff and board members in the kinds of ongoing digital safety practices that their critical missions deserve. Doing so will mean encouraging the distribution of expertise

throughout the organizations they work with, a small step toward helping nonprofits adapt to their dependence on digital systems.

OUR GATHERING SPACES ARE THREATENED BY CORPORATE ENCLOSURE

Digital systems now control everything from our energy grid to transportation systems, educational venues to hospitals, manufacturing practices to elections. They govern the places we have for gathering, learning, bonding, buying and selling goods, and for protest. We have privatized control of our public spaces by allowing property owners to aim closed-circuit cameras on our streets, allowing the use of beacon-based advertising, encouraging political parties to use geofencing, and funding police departments to buy stingray phone trackers, drones, and facial recognition software. This path brought us to the current challenges of corporate-controlled online speech; we should not travel it again to experience corporate control of assembly in public spaces. I wrote a chapter about this for a publication from the Knight and Kettering Foundations called *Democracy and Civic Life: What's the Long Game for Philanthropy?*

People now need adaptive expertise about product design and platform priorities in order to organize, communicate, and mobilize with others in both online and in physical spaces. This involves expertise in reverse-engineering social media and search priorities, in the evolving concerns around security, and in increased situational awareness of the ways state and corporate entities set boundaries on associational spaces via regulation, subpoena, or product design. All this requires ongoing attention to

the unacceptable consequences of machine suppression of the right to assemble, such as repurposing health data for economic gain or geofencing certain groups for political messaging.[17] The social effects of massive data collection, concentration, and analysis are seen in the outsize power of a small number of corporations, in microtargeted campaign efforts, and in the feeling that we've lost control of online speech. Unless we intervene now, we are on a trajectory of digital corporate enclosure of our physical and virtual gathering spaces.

> *Unless we intervene now, we are on a trajectory of digital corporate enclosure of our physical and virtual gathering spaces.*

Taking action now is critical. Unfortunately we do not have decades to study these forces before they irreparably harm our ability to voluntarily gather to plan, mobilize, and take action. The actions we can take include:

- **Understand what's going on.** We have studied trolls, bots, misinformation, and platform governance, and now we need to explicate how they shape the human relationships that contribute to and result from them. Most analysis of these phenomena focuses on them through the lens of either violence or speech. While this is fine, we also need an analysis of machine categorizing as it manipulates assembly and as it leads to practices that drive women and queer people off online spaces, target Black and Latino people with fake information about elections or coronavirus, and livestream armed

attacks within houses of worship. All of these need to be understood as forms of associational suppression and threats to the right of assembly.

This suggests critical areas for increased understanding and research. Among others we need to more completely understand how digital systems shape where, with whom, and how we assemble. We need to understand how digital decisions shape relationships and promote some information over others. And we need expertise to help us learn how we can retain or regain control of our physical and virtual gathering spaces.

- **Recognize and support the expertise that already exists.** Leaders at the Detroit Community Technology Project and Media Justice in Oakland repeatedly demonstrate the digital expertise of community organizers. Native American communities organize horizontally and eco-systemically, flowing like water away from hierarchical watched spaces. In their 2020 book, *Design Justice*, Sasha Costanza-Chock reminds us that communities know what they need. Philanthropists need to respect and support communities in imagining, teaching, and building alternative technological futures.[18]

- **Big philanthropy's new digital investments need to include protecting digital assembly.** Its vision must expand to address the effects on assembly of digitized meeting spaces—to weld community-based expertise about safety and vibrancy to decisions about public digital infrastructure and to create the networks of expertise that can identify, critique, prevent, and provide alternatives to a digital takeover of public physical spaces. Starting points include Catherine Sandoval's framing of net neutrality

as a public safety issue and efforts to articulate critical digital infrastructure for democratic participation.[19]

- **Civil society and philanthropy advocates need to shift their policy focus to protect the right and ability to assemble.** For 50+ years, the policy agenda of the nonprofit sector has been tax and corporate law.[20] As I've mentioned earlier, this agenda is misguided from an equity standpoint. It prioritizes institutional self-interest over public policies that would mitigate against extreme wealth inequities. If foundations aspire to any legitimacy in struggles for justice, equity, or sustainability, they also need to support public policies that expand people's ability to take collective action, to choose with whom they associate, and to give time, money, and data safely and with agency. All these actions are now digitally dependent, and so philanthropy's policy agenda must follow.

The policy domains that matter to the existence and functioning of all nonprofits and philanthropic organizations are those that directly implicate the core values upon which civil society exists in democracies: access to information, participation, pluralism, and freedom of assembly and speech. Our lived experience of these values now sits at the intersection of public policy and corporate product choices. Civil society and philanthropy have roles to play here.

SECTION 3:
FUTURE PROMISE

In October of 2020, the California Association of Nonprofits hosted two video conferences on philanthropy reform that attracted more than 1800 people. The "pages" of *The Chronicle of Philanthropy*, *Alliance Magazine*, *The Nonprofit Times*, *Nonprofit Quarterly*, *IDR* (India), *Pro Bono News* (Australia), and all the other nonprofit, philanthropy, and civil society newsletters/magazines I read have been filled with stories about proposed regulatory changes for charitable tax deductions, new forms of philanthropic institutions, new rules for donor-advised funds (DAFs), and the racial equity imperative for civil society.

TOWARD PHILANTHROPIC REFORM

There's a lot of talk about philanthropic reform, and, beyond talk, in the U.S. there are actual proposals herky-jerking through legislative bodies on DAFs, foundation payout rates, and charitable deductions. There's little or no coordination across these efforts. They are very "inside baseball," and they reveal old tensions within the sector (between community foundations and national donor-advised funds, for example). More ambitious reform is needed.

There's also action on the voluntary side of the ledger. MacKenzie Scott, Sue Sandler, and some established foundations showed us that it was possible to make two billion dollars in grants very quickly with virtually no application process or reporting requirements. Can big donors and foundations build on this model and commit to being more flexible, longer-term partners who fund groups as though they want them to succeed, rather than supplicate?

There appears to be an uptick in donors committing to spend out their foundations, some of this driven by a legitimate sense of

> *Can big donors and foundations commit to being more flexible, longer-term partners who fund groups as though they want them to succeed?*

urgency about the planet and people. What would it take for time-limited, endowed foundations to replace perpetuity as the default norm (let alone change the laws about perpetuity)? Public conversations about universal basic income or direct cash payments have had a lot of positive

energy during the pandemic and economic collapse—perhaps moving both ideas closer to mainstream consideration by governments or philanthropists. The work of Edgar Villanueva and others on decolonizing wealth that seeks different ways of being is gaining attention alongside calls for a new economy, cries about late capitalism, and generational leadership of old fortunes.

I don't have final answers on what better laws about philanthropic giving or nonprofit action might be. I do have a sense of where the big opportunities sit:

- Incentivize collective giving and participatory governance over individualistic structures.

- Limit the size or length of the term of singly-governed endowments.

- Place meaningful, enforceable disclosure rules on political funding (including for the judiciary).

- Ensure and protect the physical, virtual, and legal space for assembly and association of those without economic power.

- Incentivize capital circulation over wealth aggregation.

- Privilege a culturally-diverse range of giving traditions and practices.

- Develop digital data donation regulations and practices that prioritize human dignity, personal agency, and collective safety.

What's a pressing reason to consider these issues? Philanthropy researchers often point to the estimated $30 trillion transfer of wealth expected to occur as the baby boom generation passes on. Given the urgency of our times, this presents a powerful opportunity to imagine the incentives, norms, and practices that could direct that wealth toward repairing the damage of racism, preventing the collapse of present public systems, and building the infrastructure so that future generations can thrive.

Norms and laws don't change quickly. All of the above may be possible green shoots of a new understanding of philanthropy—big and small, institutional and informal. If they are, the next question is who will generate the policy positions and proposals? Who will build the coalitions and political strategy that moves forward real policy change? In just four years technology companies in the U.S. went from being nearly untouchable to practically toxic in the eyes of the public. Behind the scenes are well-funded, politically-savvy scholars and activists pushing litigation, legislation, and regulatory reform on everything from antitrust to telecommunications law. They are buoyed by grassroots activism against the companies that comes from a diversity of groups focused on issues as wide-ranging

as educational equity, legal asylum, a living wage, and affordable housing. The breadth of advocacy reflects the extent to which technology companies and their products now shape so much of daily life.

No industry, philanthropy and nonprofits included, is without reform-minded leaders and outsiders with a vision of better. Right now, it's hard to see where those leaders and ideas might be organizing. One of the last big sources of change in nonprofits and donors came from a Supreme Court case that seemed to be about free speech and campaign finance (*Citizens United*); but just a decade later there are hints of second and third order effects of that decision on (c3) and (c4) nonprofits, donor choices about anonymity, and possibly even the rise of DAFs. Trade associations for nonprofits and foundations abound at the state and national level, but they are beholden to self-preservation-minded members and donors. They mostly play defense. Change in philanthropy and nonprofits likely will not come from these mainstream groups, but rather will be rooted in adjacent spaces, perhaps advocates focused on campaign finance, digital infrastructure, or labor classifications. Alternative practices—be they immigrant communities' mutual aid networks or feminist-minded communities of care—apply pressure on mainstream philanthropy, simply by existing as alternatives. Communities working toward visions of equitable broadband, housing, transportation, and environmental justice or social movements focused on saving the planet are other potential sources of reform.

Change in philanthropy and nonprofits likely will not come from mainstream groups, but rather will be rooted in adjacent spaces.

I've noted above that we need to reconsider the legal privileges we provide to different forms of giving and collective action. The existing set of rules we use to distinguish political action from charitable giving are out of sync with what people actually do. Also out of sync are the rules that privilege hierarchical financial transactions over mutual or community aid, are out of sync with what people actually do. Crowdfunding platforms and LLCs require new scrutiny and oversight. Staying firmly within the bounds of giving time and money, we can find numerous opportunities to rewrite rules to be more equitable, reflective of our cultural diversity, and aligned with the digital systems that undergird so much of our behavior.

REDEFINING WHERE "GOOD" HAPPENS

The enormous growth of nonprofits and philanthropy since the end of World War II has limited our imaginations about where society's good works happen. But these entities have never made up the whole of civil society. In addition to the informal activities like mutual aid networks that have always been there, numerous new options have come knocking at the door since the turn of the 21st century. From impact investing to new forms of journalism, from giving circles to B corporations, from open data collectives to Native American repatriation funds—a whole horizon's worth of "nonprofit-adjacent" institutions are being seen and considered by White institutions for the first time.

It's a critical time to look at this spectrum of structures and strategies and reconsider what gets privileged, certified, and supported in this country. If we are to plan for a better future, we need to remind ourselves that we are starting from a much more dynamic, diverse, and inclusive space than we officially credit.

At the beginning of this *Blueprint*, I referred to a term used in medical anthropology, "syndemic," to describe the challenges when multiple crises intertwine. In 2020 those crises—structural racism, a novel coronavirus, economic inequality, climate catastrophe, and threats to civil society—threaten to overwhelm us. But as we've seen, this time of profound need is also teaching us positive lessons about collective care and action. Let's build on these lessons as we consider where we go from here.

To plan for a better future, we need to remind ourselves that we are starting from a much more dynamic, diverse, and inclusive space than we officially credit.

MOVING TOWARD SHARED RESPONSIBILITY

Our polarized nation appears a long way right now from the goal of shared responsibility and of strengthening and expanding places and ways of caring, coming together, and building trust. Instead of a national coordinated response to contain and treat the coronavirus in the U.S., we have a patchwork of regional approaches, stewing in partisan divisiveness and adding up to nothing a virus won't exploit. But there is also another story to tell. People and communities across the country are coming together to respond to our syndemic crises with care and commitment—working in hazardous conditions, helping neighbors, expanding on and building new community-led solutions when our government systems are failing.

These are two sides of the American historical coin. We underinvest in our shared public systems while we celebrate individual generosity. This places a burden on nonprofits and philanthropy that is both

too big and inappropriate to their purpose in democracies. By design the nonprofit sector is supposed to provide either an alternative to or a bolster for public programs and investments. Now it seems that we are placing the weight of collective care, justice, education, environmental action, and healthcare on this alternative space.

This is not a challenge philanthropy and nonprofits can meet. It's possible we should not even be trying, given the potential impact on our democracy. We can't let independent action—individual programs or philanthropic gifts—become a substitute for shared responsibility. The massive size of today's philanthropic funds is evidence of this phenomenon: such ridiculous private wealth accrual is made possible only by a tax system that ignores the needs of the many to benefit the few. The combined demands of big philanthropy and government contracting have fed the corporatization of community action. The challenges of raising funds tends to create organizations that often lack legitimacy in the communities they serve and can crowd out efforts led by local leaders and people of color.

Nonprofit and philanthropic organizations that want to address our syndemic crises need to be prepared to take on the societal systems that created them—and that have allowed their own organizations to flourish. As I mentioned earlier, novelist Arundhati Roy has described the **pandemic as a portal**, which allows us to decide what we bring with us as we pass through it. Do we take our inequities, divisiveness, and individualism through to the other side, or do we find ways to leave them behind and build systems that benefit the many instead of the few? This is our chance to build something better.

BUZZWORDS 2021

Picking the most-oft used phrase for digital civil society over the past year is easy—it has to be some version of "You're on mute." Here is the jargon you'll be hearing in the news, at conferences, and around meeting tables in 2021 (in other words, on Zoom calls). Some are ephemeral rhetoric, others hint at something bigger. This year I've separated out three that really matter—these are bigger than buzzwords.

Caremongering. A Canadian term for an abundance of acts of kindness. Captures the best of human nature when faced with crises and has been on display around the world during the pandemic.

Coordinated Inauthentic Behavior (CIB). A term of art, credited to Facebook, with no clear definition, but which the company and others claim to be carefully attending to. The issue is tracking distributed efforts to organize actions intended to cause mischief or real harm, such as when TikTok users "coordinated" making reservations for a presidential rally in Tulsa, Oklahoma with the deliberate intention of claiming seats, inflating campaign expectations, and then not showing up. The very existence of the term as a thing companies are spending money to monitor, even though they can't quite define it, is a red flag. The fact that this has to do with how people organize others to do something (good or bad) means that civil society should be paying attention to that flag.

Cloud. This is not a new term, but it is one that every nonprofit and foundation (and their associational representatives) should be thinking about. Chris Worman of TechSoup Global notes that major software providers are moving to host their services in the cloud only, meaning no more desktop versions of word processing or spreadsheet tools. The cloud is marketing speak for "the companies' servers." The more of your software that is managed this way, the more apt will be the visual metaphor that your entire organization is enclosed in a file folder on distant corporate servers.

Digital Assembly. We gather online. We gather offline. Our digital data trails follow us across these "spaces." Digital assembly includes how we exercise our ability to assemble in all three places—strictly online (and how these gatherings are manipulated by corporate algorithms), strictly offline (and how we are tracked by surveillant sensors in our built environment), and the liminal spaces between the two, which we navigate via our digital data trails.

Digital Infrastructure. The hardware, software, corporations, networks, regulations, and institutions that constitute our digital systems. Includes everything from the cables over which digital information is transmitted to the apps on your phone. These systems are built by people (companies, nonprofits, open source maintainers); some are dependent on physical materials (routers, data centers), and all are shaped by laws, regulations, and group practices (internet governance bodies, standards organizations). An expansive definition of digital infrastructure recognizes all of these features and the ways they interact with physical, digital, and social systems.

Disparate Impact. The term comes from labor law and applies to public policies in a number of domains (housing or employment, for example) that adversely affect one group of people over another. The legal bounds involve protected classes of people (race, gender, religion, etc.) and the logic is to be able to demonstrate discrimination by effect, not intent. The term comes to the attention of civil society because of federal efforts to limit its application, the degree to which algorithmic decision making technologies exacerbate it, and growing attention (at long last) to systemic inequities in all our public systems.

Keyword Squatting. The Harvard Media Manipulation Project defines this as a "tactic of creating online content—including social media accounts—around a specific search-engine-optimized term so as to determine the search results of that term." I think of it as a version of identity theft, but on an organizational scale. In practice it might include swarming a hashtag to make it mean something other than what its originators intended. An example from 2020: queer activists jumping in and using the hashtag #ProudBoys on social media, thus diminishing and ridiculing the tag's intended signal among followers of a White Supremacist group. Anyone can squat or be squatted, so everyone on social media needs to be alert to the likelihood of being manipulated in this way.

OrgSec. Shorthand for organizational security. Increasingly important issues for nonprofits and foundations and includes everything from securing digital systems, training staff and volunteers about phishing and data breaches, and integrating risk models and protections for the physical safety of nonprofit or foundation staff. Aligns with the prediction (below) on budget line items for both risk management and physical/digital security for nonprofit advocacy organizations.

Reset. Buzzword for start again, accounting for changed circumstances. Throughout 2021, we'll hear promises of resetting just about everything. In case it's not clear, extending nonprofit dependency on Facebook for everything from communications to financing is not a healthy trajectory for an independent civil society or democracy.

(MUCH) BIGGER THAN BUZZWORDS

The problem with buzzwords is they mix together funny lingo with significant ideas. Here, I'm separating out a few ideas (and phrases) that really matter. They are frames or ideas that philanthropists and actors in digital civil society are actively engaging with in their work. For me, understanding and working with these ideas requires constant attention because they question both easily spotted, visible practices and deeply embedded, almost instinctive, assumptions.

Decolonizing Technology. Decolonizing technology is the call to create cultural and social structures that use technologies for human flourishing. It builds on the work of communities, scholars, and advocates who have been decolonizing "modern" society for generations. The current political economy of digital technology is built on a set of assumptions that largely serve those who build and sell it. While some attention is paid to civil rights, the full spectrum of **human agency, dignity, and economic or social rights** are barely discussed, even in the most progressive pursuits of digital alternatives.

Global Majority. The majority of humans on the planet are racially, ethnically, culturally, linguistically, geographically, religiously, and socially diverse. White, European-descended Christians are a minority. This phrase, which I learned from the **Miami Institute of Social Sciences**, works better than "people of color" and "global south" and "nonwhite" and many other phrases that continue to position White, European-descended people as the norm and everyone else as others.

Knowledge Frameworks. Epistemology is the fancy word for a theory of knowledge. Different theories emphasize different values, for example, some center financial relations while others prioritize social relationships. In the U.S. we value Whiteness, patriarchy, convenience, and capitalism to the extent that these values seem "normal" and unquestionable. Given global demographics and the entwined challenges of inequity, climate change, and coronavirus, it behooves us to consider the limitations of our frameworks. Failing to do so makes it harder to work together across differences and is a barrier to meaningful change (as well as being misleading, harmful, and discriminatory). Efforts such as the **Equitable Evaluation Initiative** are bringing these possibilities to light while doing real work with funders and nonprofits.

PREDICTIONS FOR 2021

When it came time for me to write this section I cried aloud, "You've got to be kidding me." So I turned to the crowd for help. A few call outs on Twitter, a shared document seeking input, and a couple of wonderful conversations led to this list of predictions. Special thanks to Paul Clolery, Jayne Cravens, Asha Curran, Rhodri Davies, Jara Dean Coffey, Liz Fisher, Clementine Lucas, Sean McDonald, Adin Miller, Tim Ogden, Alana Petraska, Jack Poulson, Tawana Petty, Ann Rosenfeld, Cassie Robinson, Woodrow Rosenbaum, Michelle Shevin, Divya Siddarth, Krystian Siebert, Rebecca Van Sickle, and others who chose not to be listed. I curated, modified, and edited the selections (largely so I can hold myself accountable a year from now). You can find the complete spreadsheet of predictions here.

GIVING MONEY

2020 will have the highest ever levels of grants from DAFs as percentage of assets. (Woodrow Rosenbaum)

More countries around the world will introduce restrictions on foreign funding (as with India's new FCRA 2020 laws). (Rhodri Davies)

The "Trump Bump" that was experienced by progressive or civil liberties-focused nonprofits in 2017 will be replaced by the "SCOTUS bump," as organizations focused on civil rights, civil liberties, immigration, workers safety, health care, and environmental protections see funding spikes.

The big six U.S. technology companies—Amazon, Apple, Facebook, Google, Microsoft, and Twitter—will at least double their corporate spending on lobbying and charitable giving/community partnerships—as regulators increase their scrutiny of the industry.

GIVING TIME

Virtual volunteering will reach new heights, and stay there. (Jayne Cravens)

Corporate volunteering will nosedive, and take a long time to recover.

DATA AND DIGITAL SYSTEMS

Experimentation with and use of forms such as trusts or data collaboratives will grow as governments engage communities in the use of administrative data and pushback against data extraction continues. (Michelle Shevin, Sean McDonald)

We still won't get reliable, auditable, longitudinal data about giving from commercial funding platforms (Venmo, GoFundMe, etc.), but awareness of the need will rise.

PEOPLE, OPERATIONS

Nonprofit organizations, especially but not only advocacy organizations, will increase their focus on the physical and digital security of their staff, volunteers, and board members. This will be reflected in the development of risk management plans and budget allocations.

More high net worth donors will declare their intention to, or actually will announce a time frame for "spending out" their foundations or philanthropic institutions.

We'll start wondering in 2021, but may not see data on this until 2022, what happened to all the women and the (already few) Black, Indigenous, and people of color in nonprofit leadership roles, as the economic fallout and closure of nonprofits hits these professionals first.

Climate migration will become a common issue for wealthy people around the globe, not only the poor, and as a result media narratives, public policy, and insurance strategies will change.

GOVERNANCE, REGULATIONS

There will be state-level regulatory changes in the way donor-advised funds work and spend their resources. (Adin Miller)

Nonprofit boards and leaders will finally demand guidance/support from capacity building programs and consultants on digital governance, as ransomware continues to plague the sector and the shadow of the Blackbaud data breach (and subsequent lawsuits) lengthens.

We will see more new forms of collective governance—for money and data—emerge as well as increased use of trusts, collaboratives, commons-based models, and cooperatives. "Exiting to community" will trend. (Divya Siddarth, Woodrow Rosenbaum)

Someone will find a way to measure nonprofit closures in real-ish time, rather than waiting years for the IRS to declare non-filing organizations closed. And the numbers will be big.

NOT REALLY PREDICTIONS, BUT...

The tide will pull back on foundation giving or pledges focused on racial equity, leaders of colors, and community expertise.

The tensions between toolkits and rhetoric that emphasize strategy, KPIs, and impact and long-term investments in trusted leadership and community well-being will be exposed.

SCORECARD:
RENOVATIONS TO 2020 PREDICTIONS

I remember thinking, in the fall of 2019, how pretentious was the very notion of making predictions in a time of such upheaval. Seems quaint now, in the fall of 2020 (pre-presidential election). But what's striking is how "accurate" those predictions were. It says a lot about what information we heed, what forms our denial takes, and what sense or nonsense we choose to make of all that surrounds us.

PREDICTION	RIGHT	WRONG	NOTES
Electoral politics will suck up more money than ever before. Among other effects, this will contribute to a precipitous drop in philanthropic support for U.S. charitable nonprofits.	✔	✔	More money than ever before in electoral politics is a 100% accurate prediction any time there is a U.S. presidential election. The drop in philanthropic support, however, isn't visible at the macro level (and may not exist). But we do need to look beyond top line charitable giving numbers to really understand what's going on. I gave this a No on the second half, because it's not clear.
Technology will not provide solutions to decreases in charitable giving.		✔	First of all, there weren't decreases in charitable giving in 2020. Second, it's a badly worded prediction with nothing to benchmark against. My fail.
People will use social media less because deepfakes, lies, and bots will have taken over the platforms. User numbers will drop.		✔	Wishful thinking. Even a year of the #StopHateForProfit campaign, numerous Congressional commissions, executive meddling in TikTok/WeChat, a general "techlash," and self-aggrandizing Netflix movies in which social media makers purport now to defend us from their creations, we can't put down the damn phones.

SCORECARD:
RENOVATIONS TO 2020 PREDICTIONS
(CONTINUED)

PREDICTION	RIGHT	WRONG	NOTES
Politicians' stances on digital rights will become an increasingly important issue for voters.	✔		All sorts of politicians, all sorts of campaigns, and many sorts of voters have recognized that the tech industry needs overhauling.
There will be a global economic recession in 2021, following on chaos from the U.S. presidential election and Brexit.	✔		Yes, I saw it coming in the fall of 2019. The economy was broken before the pandemic.
Young women of color will continue to lead on global climate activism and will be resisted at every step by corporations and governments led by White men. The climate struggle will be racialized (more so than it already is).	✔		This is past, present, and future. On all issues, not just climate.
The U.S. presidential election will be inconclusive and the results will be contested. Beyond that, I can't bear to put my thoughts in writing.	✔		The election was conclusive. The results—indeed the entire electoral process—are being subjected to a deliberate campaign of lies, led by the outgoing president. The damage will be lasting.
Human migration rates will reach new heights.	✔		U.N Institute on Migration reports 272 million people migrating internationally in 2020, compared with 150 million in 2000.[21]
Climate adaptation technology—from smoke masks to generators—will become "normal" supplies at both home and work.	✔		The year started with Australia burning. Throughout 2020 the U.S. Midwest experienced "regular" flooding; meteorologists ran out of names for hurricanes in the U.S. South; and the West burned for weeks.
Protest movements about climate and inequality, from striking auto workers to full scale pro-democracy efforts, will grow in intensity and frequency.	✔		Black Lives Matter protests spread around the globe. Protestors in Hong Kong stayed in the streets for months until Beijing took over.

WHERE TO GO FOR MORE

This work draws from (and, I hope, builds on) the work of many activists, writers, filmmakers, and scholars. I've created this list to help you find some of the people whose work goes before me. Check my Twitter feed (@p2173) to see whom I follow. I use the like button as a bookmark for people/things to learn about (though not always—no guarantees).

BLOGS/WEBSITES/REPORTS/NEWSLETTERS

Adrienne Maree Brown, Emergent Strategy,
http://adriennemareebrown.net/tag/emergent-strategy/

Alliance Magazine, issue on Social Movement Philanthropy,
https://www.alliancemagazine.org/magazine/issue/june-2020/

The Equitable Evaluation Framework from the **Equitable Evaluation Initiative**,
@jdeancoffey as well as Coffey's blog, **Musings and Machinations**

Mekaelia Davis, "Risks for the Future We Want," Stanford Social Innovation Review,
https://ssir.org/articles/entry/risks_for_the_future_we_want

Cheryl Dorsey, Jeff Bradach, Peter Kim, **Racial Equity and Philanthropy: Disparities in Funding for Leaders of Color Leave Impact on the Table**

Civic Hall's **First Post**, newsletter (now Micah Sifry's *The Connector*), @mlsif

Civic Signals Newsletter

Crystal Hayling, **On the Precipice. Get In and Stay In**. @CHayling

"Grantmaking with a Racial Justice Lens", guide, from **Philanthropic Initiative for Racial Equity**

HistPhil, blog, @HistPhil

Vu Le, **NonprofitAF**, @nonprofitaf

Public Books' newsletter, @PublicBooks

Siegel Family Endowment, "Rebuilding America: The Road Ahead,"
https://infrastructure.siegelendowment.org/

Ethan Zuckerman, **The Case For Digital Public Infrastructure**, @ethanz

MOVIES/VIDEOS/PODCASTS, ETC.

African American Policy Forum, **Under the Blacklight** series

Coded Bias, movie by Shalini Kantayya

Crip Camp, movie and resources, @CripCamp

Intersectionality Matters with Kimberlé Crenshaw (podcast, includes video interviews from AAPF Under the Blacklight Series), @sandylocks

Hear to Slay, Roxane Gay and Tressie McMillan Cottom, podcast, @rgay and @tressiemcphd

Philanthropy and Social Movements, podcast, class taught by Megan Ming Francis

Through The Night Film, by Loira Limbal, @DJLaylo

SCHOLARSHIP

Ruha Benjamin, **Race after Technology: Abolitionist Tools for the New Jim Code**, @ruha9

André Brock, Jr: **Distributed Blackness: African American Cybercultures**, @DocDre

Sasha Costanza-Chock, **Design Justice: Community-Led Practices to Build the Worlds We Need**, @schock

Chiara Cordelli, *The Privatized State*, 2020

Nick Estes, **Our History is the Future: Standing Rock Versus the Dakota Access Pipeline, and the Long Tradition of Indigenous Resistance**, @nickwestes

Lina Khan, **Amazon's Antitrust Paradox**, (not new, but critical), @linamkhan

Tressie McMillan Cottom, **LowerEd: The Troubling Rise of For-Profit Colleges in the New Economy** (not new, but critical), @tressiemcphd

Miami Institute for the Social Sciences, coming in 2021

Alondra Nelson, **Body and Soul: The Black Panther Party and the Fight Against Medical Discrimination**, (not new, but critical), @alondra

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Philanthropy and Social Movements **Syllabus** (Megan Ming Francis)

Digital Public Infrastructure, Resources, **https://pacscenter.stanford.edu/event/digital-public-infrastructural-possibilities/**

Digital Infrastructure for the Public Interest **Reading List**

ENDNOTES

1. Draftsmen don't really exist anymore in the age of computer-aided design (CAD). This was just coming into practice at the time I'm referring to, and there were still people (the ones I knew were all men) who hand drew every draft of every blueprint. They've gone the way of typing pools.

2. Laurie E Paarlberg, Rebecca Nesbit, Richard M. Clerkin, (2019) "The Politics of Donations: Are Red Counties More Donative than Blue Counties," Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly, (48:2) and Maria Petrova, Ricardo Perez-Truglia, Andrei Simonv, and Pinar Yildirim, "Are Political and Charitable Giving Substitutes? Evidence from the United States," Petrova, Maria and Perez-Truglia, Ricardo and Simonov, Andrei and Yildirim, Pinar, "Are Political and Charitable Giving Substitutes? Evidence from the United States." (December 22, 2019). Available at SSRN: https://ssrn.com/abstract=3508534 or http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3508534

3. According to tax experts, about 8% of U.S. tax filings took advantage of charitable tax exemptions following changes in the law that went into effect in 2018. Prior to these changes, between 25-30% of tax filers claimed charitable tax deductions. In addition, conversations with more than 300 people over the course of 2019 and observations of behavior on crowdfunding platforms and the creation of LLCs instead of foundations imply that tax benefits are of decreasing importance to both every day and high net worth donors. My book, *How We Give Now*, exploring this in more detail, published by The MIT Press will be available in the Fall of 2021.

4. Greg Palast and the Palast Investigative Fund, Georgia Voter Roll Purge Errors, September 1, 2020, Report for the ACLU, accessed online: https://www.acluga.org/sites/default/files/georgia_voter_roll_purge_errors_report.pdf

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8. Rob Reich introduced me to this idea.

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11. Chiara Cordelli, *The Privatized State*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2020.

12. Nicholas Florko, "'You just got better at making money': Democrats blast Celgene, Teva for price hikes detailed in internal documents," *Stat*, September 30, 2020, accessed online https://www.statnews.com/2020/09/30/democrats-drug-pricing-celgene-teva/.

13. Emmanuel Saez and Gabriel Zucman, *The Triumph of Injustice: How the Rich Dodge Taxes and How to Make them Pay*, New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Co., 2019.

14. For inspiration see the Our Data Bodies Project, https://www.odbproject.org/; Ruha Benjamin, *Race After Technology*, New York: Polity Books, 2019; the fiction of N. K. Jemisen; James Bowles, "From the data-driven nonprofit to nonprofit-driven data," *Third Sector Geography*, October 2, 2020. https://thirdsectorgeography.com/2020/10/02/from-the-data-driven-nonprofit-to-nonprofit-driven-data/; Rachel Coldicutt, Glimmers and the Community Tech Stack, https://glimmersreport.net/report/communitytech; Sasha Costanza-Chock, *Design Justice: Community-Led Practices to Build the Worlds We Need*, (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2020); and 2020, Ethan Zuckerman, The Case for Digital Public Infrastructure, https://knightcolumbia.org/content/the-case-for-digital-public-infrastructure

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