

**DukeEngage and the Politics of “Help”: Millennials, Civic  
Engagement, & the Problem of “Saving the World”**

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## PREFACE

“Why do you do what you do”? It was such a simple question, yet I struggled to formulate an answer. It was March 2008, and I had stumbled upon the blog wdydwyd.com quite by accident, through a link I found through a friend from UNC. It had been but a few weeks after the murder of Eve Carson, the UNC-Chapel Hill student body president, and the blog was featuring a poignant tribute to her through her own explanation of why she did what she did:



**Figure 1: Photo of Eve Carson’s answer to wdydwyd blog**  
(Source: <http://www.wdydwyd.com/2008/03/eve-carson-them-do-what-they-want-to-do.html>)

*“I want any excuse to work with my classmates (and help them do what they want to do...because that’s what I wanted to do.” [arrow back to front]*

Deep seated Duke-Carolina rivalries notwithstanding, I was truly touched by the simple yet powerful message that grounded Eve Carson's motivations. Through these ruminations I couldn't help but ask myself the same powerful, yet complicated question: *Why do I do what I do?*

My interest in this project culminates from the resulting confusion, clarity, and complexity that emanated from this seemingly simple question. "Why do I do what I do?" quickly emerged as a larger question about my identity, my values, my experiences, my background, and the greater forces that have shaped my journey here to Durham, North Carolina.

I am a child of the nineties, a Millennial in the purest sense in that I grew up during the era of Backstreet Boys, America Online, and MTV. While the nineties were certainly a decade of optimism and prosperity, it was still one marred by the tragedy of the Oklahoma City bombings, Columbine, Rwanda and the Los Angeles Race Riots, an event that I encountered personally growing up as a first-generation Korean American in Los Angeles, California. These events shaped my first understandings of community, social change, political participation, and the elusive American Dream.

For as long as I can remember, I have been engaged in efforts to create change, to mobilize people, ideas, participate in service, all in an attempt to "help make the world a better place." Whether it was involvement in student organizations, urging my friends to register to vote, volunteering at the local food bank, or instigating impassionate debates on education inequality, I was always striving for ways to make a difference. Duke was a natural breeding ground for these ambitions, and it was here in

the Gothic Wonderland that I nurtured these values and discovered a community of likeminded peers who seemed to be obsessed with the same goal – we all wanted to “Save the World.” But why?

It was in spring 2008 that Duke University proudly announced the full launch of DukeEngage, the highly anticipated civic engagement program. Duke students now had the opportunity – and the privilege – of being able to take their humanitarian ambitions beyond the ivory tower into virtually every corner of the globe.

Despite the buzz surrounding the program, I couldn’t help but recognize a growing yet inexplicable unease growing inside me about DukeEngage. Despite my own bleeding-heart impulses to “Save the World”, I felt conflicted about my peers who were signing up in droves to participate in the program. What did 20-year olds know about AIDS prevention in South Africa? Why were my friends not voting in the primary race but spending hours on their Global Health independent study projects? How could they wear a “Save Darfur” t-shirt without knowing the capital of Sudan?

Hence, while this project is a culmination of my academic interests in issues of inequality, social justice, and privilege, it is fundamentally grounded in a personal quest to answer the question of “Why do we do what we do”? DukeEngage emerged as the perfect microcosm of the greater trends at hand – Millennial characteristics, civic engagement transformations, and the seemingly never-ending yet ever interesting project of “Saving the World.” This work is not meant to be critical of the DukeEngage program per say, as I am not an alumnus of the program and cannot speak of the program from firsthand knowledge. Rather, it is a means to explore more deeply the

ways in which the program reflects a greater truth about what we do, who we are – and continue to aspire to be.

Perhaps most importantly I speak as a Duke student, Millennial, daughter, sister, woman, American *and* global citizen, one that has and will continue to be wholly complicit in the complicated work of “Saving the World.” Writing this piece has been a long and complicated journey, but the process has taken me one step closer to being able to answer the question of why I do what I do. It is my fondest hope that it can do the same for you.

- Kathy S. Choi

March 25, 2009

## INTRODUCTION

*“America is great because she is good. If America ceases to be good, America will cease to be great.” – Alexis de Tocqueville*

The summer of 2008 signaled the inauguration of DukeEngage, the highly anticipated civic engagement program for undergraduates at Duke University. DukeEngage provides funding for undergraduates who wish to pursue an intensive civic engagement project for 8-weeks in the summer, and the program’s kickoff transplanted 365 enthusiastic Duke students into virtually every corner of the globe for an immersive service experience. The program seeks to enact into action the mission of:

“Empower[ing] students to **address critical human needs** through **immersive service**, in the process **transforming students**, advancing the University’s educational mission, and providing **meaningful assistance** to communities in the U.S. and abroad.”<sup>1</sup>

The variety of available projects were quite extensive – ranging from working at a women’s boarding school in Kenya to serving a microfinance organization in Chile – and for eight weeks, students were expected to apply in-class knowledge to address the most pressing social issues, tackle real-world problems, and develop valuable skills and self-knowledge through immersive service.<sup>2</sup>

The proliferation of programs such as DukeEngage is just one example of a wider, more recent trend that expands not only to peer academic institutions but throughout greater society. Philanthropies, public policy institutions, humanitarian groups, non-profit organizations, politicians, teachers, even businessmen and idealists

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<sup>1</sup> “About DukeEngage,” [DukeEngage](http://dukeengage.duke.edu/about). 1 Oct 2008. <<http://dukeengage.duke.edu/about>>

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

alike have adopted the mantra of “doing good”<sup>3</sup>, and have reorganized their mission and vision statements accordingly – perhaps without much consideration of the idea’s complex theology and ultimate consequences. The idea of “Saving the World” is a loaded concept that cannot be separated from the complicated and profound ways in which it has been co-opted, transformed, and redefined for each new generation.

Perhaps out of all the great American generations, the ways in which the Millennial generation imagines its role in the world most closely mirrors the trends reflected and sustained by programs like DukeEngage. Millennials envision and articulate a vision of the world that has been shaped by a culmination of forces: a perfect concoction of the belief in the power of American intervention as a force of good, a multi-faceted boost in resources and opportunities for civic engagement, a vision of social change free of ideology, humanitarian and development projects, a turn away from the cynicism and apathy that defined Generation X, and a certain degree of historical amnesia that forgoes concerns regarding past failed efforts. In a sense, Duke University can be seen as a microcosm of this generational trend, and a quick tour around campus is proof of the idea’s ubiquitous proliferation. At every corner, bulletin boards are smothered in flyers advertising the Global Health program’s guest lecture, calls for submission for the newfangled civic engagement journal, sign ups for

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<sup>3</sup> I use the phrase “doing good” loosely to describe the multiplicity of civic engagement, service, and fundraising and other efforts with a social mission. This can range from donating to charity to volunteering at a service organization and everything else in between. I also utilize the term “help” to signify the specific act of utilizing resources, time, and money to offer assistance to communities in need in a formalized act. The use of “help” in my project does not include the multiplicities of “help” – assisting a sibling with homework, taking care of an alcoholic father, and so on. It is used only in the specific context of formalized civic engagement.

alternative spring break mission trips, and numerous other civic engagement-related opportunities.

Indeed, a close examination of the University's mission statement reveals the deeply rooted ways in which these ideas are engrained into the culture, vision, and daily life of the school:

“The mission of Duke University is to provide a superior liberal education to undergraduate students . . . but also to their **development as adults** committed to high ethical standards and **full participation as leaders in their communities** . . . **to help those who suffer**, cure disease, and promote health . . . to promote a deep appreciation for the range of human difference and potential, a sense of the obligations and rewards of citizenship, and a commitment to learning, freedom and truth.

“By pursuing these objectives with vision and integrity, Duke University seeks to engage the mind, elevate the spirit, and stimulate the best effort of all who are associated with the University; **to contribute in diverse ways to the local community, the state, the nation and the world**; and to attain and maintain a place of real leadership in all that we do.”

Much of the desire to be engaged in a world beyond the borders of the Gothic Wonderland can be traced back to this founding document. But when examining this idea, one must view this call to action and its development through its rich historical context. Duke University, as an institution, seeks to model a certain type of “virtuous citizen” through its mission. Furthermore, it is important to understand that this specific vision articulated in the Duke University Mission Statement has changed over time, as each revision corresponded to a specific moment in the institution's history. The ideal of the “virtuous Duke student” has changed and will continue to change with time.

In this project I hope to explore the complex ways in which Duke students - as Millennial participants in DukeEngage - imagine and live out their beliefs in the value

civic engagement and buy into the compelling notion of “Saving the World”. Why is civic engagement viewed as an agent of change? From where do the assumptions of intervention as “good” emerge? What motivates these Millennial do-gooders? Ultimately, I hope to better understand how participation in DukeEngage, as well as the program itself, is a generationally specific moment that presents its fair share of problems and contradictions – as well as new possibilities. It is my hope that a better understanding of this moment will translate into the “bigger picture” – how will Millennials envision their role in greater society, and what is their relation to ideas of democracy? What will this mean for the future of the United States? Will the world with DukeEngage be a better world than one without?

## **METHODS**

A good piece of cultural anthropological work is defined by its rich ethnography – my project will be no different. I hope to answer these questions through conversations with various Duke students who participated in the inaugural DukeEngage program. Each of these students have been specifically selected to provide a diverse offering of perspectives, personal backgrounds and experiences, and it is my intention and hope they serve as a realistic cross-section of the type of Duke student that participates in civic engagement-related programs. It is through their stories, observations, and experiences that I hope to illuminate upon the far-reaching trends that are influencing the Millennial generation’s call to action and a vision for the future generations to come. These observations will be obtained through individual interviews with DukeEngage

participants as well as small focus groups of 3 to 6 students. Most of these participants were either personal acquaintances of mine or introduced to me through friends. Though not a truly “random” sample, I feel that their varied experiences still encompass a wide cross section of DukeEngage participants.

This work will also include my own observations from the wealth of knowledge I have accumulated through my four years as a Duke student, and my own relationships and engagement with various student organizations and activities that are civic engagement related. I hope that these observations will provide a context for my worldview, and impart upon the reader knowledge of “How I Know What I Know”, and offer an insiders point of view about life inside the so-called “Duke Bubble.”

I will also utilize various other aspects of material culture related to Duke and DukeEngage in my work as well. These materials include literature, pamphlets, and website content produced by the DukeEngage program, descriptions of student produced flyers, banners, and other civic engagement related materials on Duke’s campus, and other rich sources of information. The presentation and language used on these materials will serve as a vibrant source, and a way of “knowing.”

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Knowledge of a wide body of literature is critical when fleshing out the issues involved with Millennials, civic engagement, and the idea of “Saving the World.” For starters, I will focus on a rich characterization of the Millennial generation. I explored the trends involving Millennial attitudes towards civic engagement through the use of

several texts, the most prominent of which was a 2008 CIRCLE<sup>4</sup> report entitled “Millennials Talk Politics: A Study of College Student Political Engagement”. This report shed light on many of the ways in which Millennials have and continue to imagine their involvement and role in American society via the exercise of civic engagement. The CIRCLE report defines the main characteristics of the Millennial generation as such:

- Today’s college students are more engaged than Generation X was.
- Millennials are involved locally with others but are ambivalent about formal politics.
- Millennials dislike spin and polarized debates and seek authentic opportunities for discussing public issues.
- Differences among the Millennials are important to note as well – colleges and universities are providing very unequal levels of opportunity for civic participation and learning.<sup>5</sup>

These trends are valuable in the process of “placing” the project. The selection and deliberate focus on DukeEngage and its Duke student participants already narrows down the scope of the study to an extremely select group of Millennials, and this report places the students’ experiences into a broader context. The last major point made in the CIRCLE report is of particular importance, as the differentiated opportunities for civic participation and learning provide unequal opportunities for learning, and in turn

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<sup>4</sup> The Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning & Engagement, a non-partisan research center that studies youth civic engagement based out of Tufts University’s Tisch College of Citizenship and Public Service.

<sup>5</sup> Abby Kiesa, Alexander P. Orłowski, Peter Levine, Deborah Both, et al. “Millennials Talk Politics: A Study of College Student Political Engagement,” CIRCLE (Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement), Nov 2007.

allow the language of civic engagement and participation to be one that is solely relegated to those in the “elite” ranks. This notion of “help” as one that is dominated and usurped by the privileged few is critical in understanding other dimensions of this work, and must be examined further. The CIRCLE report provides a thorough baseline for the examination of trends that dominate the Millennial college student’s relationship with civic engagement and will serve as a critical starting point in this work.

Much of the body of work completed on the relationships between Millennials and civic engagement is also predicated upon the assumption that all potential interventions – both humanitarian and development-minded – will “do good”. Programs such as DukeEngage are constructed upon the validity of this assumption. But while it is commonly thought that intervention in the name of “help” is always a positive thing, the benefits must also be taken into consideration alongside a substantive critique of aid and the lofty goal of “Saving the World.” Closer examinations of many intervention efforts reveal that there is in fact much evidence to the contrary. Good intentions are often simply not enough.

I will be relying on the works of several critics of humanitarian and development work as a way to frame the problematic elements present in the multiplicity of projects led by Duke students participating in DukeEngage. I will focus particularly on the work of the former Director of Research at Doctors Without Borders Fiona Terry’s *Condemned to Repeat?: The Paradox of Humanitarian Action* and former World Bank economist William Easterly’s *White Man’s Burden*. Both Terry and Easterly point to the little publicized ways in which the assumption of aid as a force of good can often complicate

the realities of humanitarian or development crises on the ground level. In both cases, there are both logistical and theoretical challenges that underpin the continuation of practices that are antithetical to the supposed mission at hand. The remarkable growth of the Western “aid industry” has been unaffected by the very real dangers that it poses to those “helped” by the “helpers.” Terry challenges the assumptions inherent in aid by articulating two new dilemmas: (1) the emergence of the “complex emergency” – characteristic of the post-Cold War environment where humanitarian emergencies are far more complicated than in the past and (2) the various ways in which humanitarian aid can sometimes prolong conflict.

Easterly also points to the flaws present in development aid, particularly the ways in which Western aid is distributed and implemented in areas of need, and the assumptions laden in the unequal power relations between philanthropist/NGO/development agency and the world’s poor. He also traces the long and seemingly unending history of Western intervention abroad, all the way from the legacy of slavery, colonialism, imperialism, all the way to the 1960s push to spread “Americanism” via the Peace Corps, and finally to its modern reincarnations. Can aid be merely the newest form of an age long process of colonialism and imperialism? Perhaps most importantly, what are the implications of an increasingly complicated aid landscape on Millennial civic engagement? As programs like DukeEngage and thousands of others like it continue to boost the number of American students it places in various humanitarian and development aid projects abroad, will it be able to assuage emerging crises or merely exacerbate existing problems further?

In order to better understand these implications, one must have a fuller comprehension of who is able to help, who is helping, and what it means to be able to help. The ability to help is a privilege given from those who have to those who don't. As mentioned previously, inequalities are present within the Millennial generation, as a select group are provided with the resources to be able to engage in this type of civic engagement, while a larger group is often deprived of the same opportunity to perform aid work. Furthermore, the global aid industry is one dominated by wealthy Western actors imparting their help (who know it as a verb) onto poor non-Western countries (who know it as a noun). In *The Road to Hell*, Michael Maren points to the ways in which this type of relation perpetuates a distortion of good intentions and actualizes itself as an "us" versus "them" type of relation. In essence, aid in many ways becomes a method of "othering" the powerless in order to assert one's own power. These powerful inequalities thus become reified as natural and uncontroversial, converting a variety of aid projects into ethically unproblematic interventions even when there is evidence to the contrary. Efforts at help become such that the thought of an untrained 20-year old college student entering a remote community in Kenya to promote AIDS prevention is one that is lauded, promoted, and becomes an almost trite part of the college experience in elite campuses like Duke University.

This unquestioned participation in efforts to "do good" is omnipresent in the Millennial generation's culture as well. Our generation's obsession with "Rock Star Philanthropy" is fairly easy to spot – turn on the television, flip through a fashion magazine, sport a wristband for a cause – as the message to "help" is ubiquitous. Movie

stars, pop singers, athletes, and public figures from all walks of life seem to have cultivated a social conscience as of late, and millions have been raised by various anti-poverty, AIDS, anti-genocide, and numerous other campaigns. Alex de Waal presents a vivid critique of this trend in “The Humanitarian Carnival”, and points to the dangers side effects that these new interventions have had on modern humanitarian crises.

The emergence of programs like DukeEngage is indicative of the rise of the “Rock Star Philanthropist’s” new best friend – the “philanthrocapitalist.” The world of the “philanthrocapitalist” can be best epitomized as the domain of ultra-wealthy individuals like Bill Gates, Microsoft funder turned Gate Foundation chief who has dedicated his post-corporate life to causes such as eradicating diseases such as malaria throughout the globe. Matthew Bishop, the American Business Editor and New York Bureau Chief for *The Economist* has aptly titled this trend as “philanthrocapitalism,” as he chronicles the growth of “social investors,” wealthy philanthropists with backgrounds in the corporate world who use big-business strategies and expect results and accountability to match in their gift-giving.<sup>6</sup> The likes of Bill Gates and other “philanthrocapitalists” seem to be building upon the legacy of American philanthropy laid forth by late capitalists such as John D. Rockefeller and Andrew Carnegie, but are redefining the expectations, implementation, and outcomes of their philanthropy. This shift is particularly relevant as the DukeEngage program was started with a \$15 million gift from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Do the aid efforts of DukeEngage gain or

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<sup>6</sup> “Synopsis,” [Philanthrocapitalism](http://www.philanthrocapitalism.net/?Synopsis). 1 Oct 2008. <<http://www.philanthrocapitalism.net/?Synopsis>>

lose meaning when it is so heavily reliant on the generosity of big business and the capitalist system?

Perhaps more importantly, is the proliferation of “Rock Star Philanthropy” and “philanthrocapitalism” inadvertently reifying the dilemmas and diverting attention away from the greater sociopolitical, economic, and structural problems that underpin the issues in the first place? Can the Millennial intervention of idealistic Duke students be unintentionally recreating the same dilemmas they are so valiantly attempting to solve in the first place?

Instead of offering a cautious warning into the dangers of these Millennial interventions for “good”, perhaps a better approach would be to understand these motivations and trends as a new articulation of the same ideas. The important question is not whether or not a world without DukeEngage is a better one than a world without, but rather how DukeEngage is changing the world and posing important questions about the trends and shifts going on beyond its borders.

## CHAPTER ONE – THE INAUGURATION OF DUKEENGAGE

*“College is a time for exploration. Just as we need students to emerge with practical skills that will serve them in their chosen career field, so do they need to graduate with an understanding of themselves and the world in which they live.”*

*– President Richard H. Brodhead, Duke University*

*“For twelve years our faces have been buried in textbooks. We read the words, add the numbers, take the tests. At Duke, we look up from the pages. And invariably meaning emerges from the data. We see faces in the facts. We hear voices in the texts. For the first time, perhaps, we begin to see the world as it is. And the exhilaration and the wonder of a stargazer who suddenly sees a new planet is ours. We stand on the threshold of the world. Some may look forward to where Duke will take them after graduation. But the real adventure of Duke begins as we move beyond the books and beyond the classroom walls.”*

*– Duke Brochure, “Duke Students Taking Their Knowledge To The World”*

The glossy color brochure features a striking – and perhaps very familiar – portrait of a young Duke student named Hilary Robbins embracing a group of nine young Tanzanian children. She is smiling, laughing and joking alongside the children, her pale white face standing in stark contrast against the dark, chocolate brown skin of the students. The caption of the photo reads:

*“Children at the Arusha Primary School in Tanzania gather around Hilary Robbins, DukeEngage ’08. Through their Literacy Through Photography project, DukeEngage students used photography as a vehicle for introducing visual learning into primary and secondary schools in and around Arusha.”*

The brochure depicts a compelling portrait of the opportunities for civic engagement – and possibilities for change – offered by DukeEngage. The message is clear – Duke students, by participating in a DukeEngage program, can not only challenge themselves, but also save the world:

*“During my eight weeks in Tanzania, I threw every ounce of myself into changing the lives of children who are starved for simple opportunities to learn . . . The*

lessons I gained through my DukeEngage experience will continue to shape who I am and where I go in life.” – Hilary Robbins, DukeEngage '08

This student’s experience aptly captures the stated motto of DukeEngage: “Challenge yourself. Change your world.” What is this program and how does it merit such a powerful message?

On February 12, 2007, Duke University announced the unveiling of a highly anticipated \$30 million civic engagement program aptly titled DukeEngage. While Duke certainly did not invent the novel idea of civic engagement, the program is novel in its conception as it provides full funding for Duke undergraduates who wish to pursue an intensive eight week civic engagement experience anywhere in the world. DukeEngage is designed to be an immersive service experience and Duke students can serve through three ways: (1) by participating in a Duke-sponsored or organized program, (2) by participating in a program that Duke coordinates with an outside provider, or (3) by submitting a funding proposal for a unique individual internship of the student’s creation.<sup>7</sup> The variety of projects were astounding, ranging from working on a community water project in Cuzco, Peru, to recording apartheid-era oral histories in Johannesburg, South Africa.

Over 360 Duke students participated in the inaugural summer of DukeEngage in 2008 due to the generous financial support offered by the DukeEngage program. Duke covers the travel and living expenses associated with the project and even waives the “summer earnings” component for those students receiving financial aid. DukeEngage’s \$30 million endowment was made possible by a generous gift of \$15 million each from

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<sup>7</sup> “About DukeEngage,” DukeEngage. 1 Oct 2008. <<http://dukeengage.duke.edu/about>>

The Duke Endowment and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. It is no coincidence that Melinda French Gates is a 1986 Duke alumnus, and a quick glance at the National Advisory Board reads like a “Who’s who” of America’s accomplished elite.

A friend of mine who is a Duke Undergraduate Admissions Officer commented to me about the sheer excitement and “buzz” that DukeEngage has created among prospective Duke students. He described to me his experiences traveling across the state of Texas, his assigned region, and meeting high school seniors at the Duke University information sessions that are eager and truly excited to be able to participate in a program like DukeEngage. Perhaps then it is no surprise that the program has had a direct impact on not only the type but sheer number of students that apply to Duke University. The Duke Office of Undergraduate Admissions received a record high 23,750 applications for the 2009-2010 year, a 17% jump from last year. Christopher Guttentag, Dean of Undergraduate Admissions cited the program as one of the reasons for the record-breaking application increase:

"I've really noticed the degree to which DukeEngage is visible among prospective Duke students," he said. "We always talk about DukeEngage when we are presenting Duke to prospective students and their families."

According to a *Chronicle* article written about the application surge, six percent of the applications in the Class of 2012 admissions pool mentioned the DukeEngage program, as compared to the 10 percent that mention “basketball” in their application.

The application boost did not go unnoticed by the DukeEngage staff. DukeEngage Director Eric Mlyn commented:

“It contributes to Duke’s reputation as a community that is committed to service. That notion of engagement is nationally recognized as a word that describes university partnerships with communities.”<sup>8</sup>

DukeEngage serves multiple roles within the institution, and this fact is not lost among the students. One of the participants in a focus group I conducted with students who participated in inaugural DukeEngage programs commented:

“I really do think . . . that DukeEngage was a huge publicity tool, and I know that even if you talk to Eric Mlyn he will tell you that it was rushed. It came out in February 2007, right after the whole lacrosse scandal, and even though I am on the [Student] Advisory Board, I can tell you that I don’t think they still know what they are doing.”

In many ways, this identity problem is at the core of many of the issues connected to DukeEngage. On one hand, Duke has successfully rebranded itself as the elite school that emphasizes civic engagement, with DukeEngage showcased center stage as evidence of the university’s civic spirit. There is no debating that the announcement of the program was in some part a savvy and very strategic public relations maneuver designed to allay the concerns brought forth by the 2006 lacrosse scandal. The accusation of rape against three young, white Duke men’s lacrosse players by an African American dancer in April 2006 shocked the Duke community and the nation. The eruption of the scandal brought forth national scrutiny onto the doorsteps of the Gothic Wonderland, and the image of the institution was damaged in incalculable ways. The Duke “brand” badly needed to be salvaged and reinvented, and the portrayal of Duke as a “civically engaged” institution, not only through DukeEngage but also

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<sup>8</sup> Will Robinson. "Admissions Talks Up DukeEngage." Chronicle 16 Jan. 2009. 16 Jan. 2009 <<http://media.www.dukechronicle.com/media/storage/paper884/news/2009/01/16/News/Admissions.Talks.Up.Dukeengage-3588016.shtml>>.

through initiatives like the Duke-Durham Neighborhood Partnership provided a perfect forum to do just so. Perhaps an excerpt from the literature distributed by the Office of Undergraduate Admissions entitled “Duke Students Taking Their Knowledge To The World” says it best:

“At Duke, civic engagement and public service grow directly from our scholarly activities. They are not simply an extension of it; they are the very essence of our Duke education . . . People here are doing such amazing things . . . Everyone is willing to help. There’s funding everywhere. In my four years I have seen Duke evolve dramatically in supporting students who want to engage the community.”

The efforts of Duke University to brand itself as a bastion of civic engagement have not been lost on the students. Rachel Revelle, a sophomore Duke student who participated in the Dublin, Ireland DukeEngage program, reflected upon her first impressions of Duke when visiting as a prospective student:

“I remember visiting Duke in high school and thinking that everyone was involved in something. Whether it was service work through a fraternity or sorority, tutoring, and so on. I was very impressed in general by the student body’s involvement.”

These sentiments were echoed by another Duke student, Chrissy Booth, a junior who also participated in the focus group:

“I remember wanting to come to Duke because I always thought at Duke, people go on to do big things. I didn’t see it much from the humanitarian or civic engagement angle back then, but I do more so now.”

The growing influence of DukeEngage and other efforts to reshape Duke as a “civically engaged” institution have, and will continue to affect the “brand” that Duke is selling to prospective students. Perhaps these inflections in the marketing and message of the institutions will also be reflected in the Duke student population’s demographics, as it will attract more students who are passionate about attending a university centered

around the ethos of service. Regardless, there is no denying that Duke is changing, and in many ways DukeEngage remains at the epicenter of these seismic forces.

### **IDENTITY CRISIS?**

While there was much fanfare surrounding the launch of DukeEngage, the program is still very much in a state of flux. Perhaps more so than other new civic engagement programs, DukeEngage is attempting to establish an identity in the midst of much uncertainty about its purported mission. I believe that the program is endeavoring to respond to a variety of messages that are oftentimes mixed.

One of the main dilemmas that come to mind is the debate about the mission of DukeEngage – should the program focus on providing an experiential learning opportunity for Duke students or focus on creating sustainable change for the community? Is it possible to achieve both these goals or are they mutually exclusive?

This debate is not one limited to outside critics of the program, but is also one that occurs internally within the program itself. I was pleasantly surprised to discover during my research that the staff and advisory board members of DukeEngage are undergoing a constant process of reevaluation and self-examination of the program. Nonetheless, there is also internal debate regarding the mission of the program. An Assistant Director of DukeEngage commented:

“[There should be] emphasis on the program as a venue to participate in service learning! Duke is an academic institution, after all. It’s a constant juggling act between student development and issues of community change and sustainability.”

My conversation with DukeEngage staff also revealed the vital ways in which faculty and site coordinators shape the success of the program as they often have different and opposing beliefs as to which mission should be privileged. This aspect of the identity of DukeEngage has, and will continue to be informed by a tug of war between these forces.

There is also another controversial issue related to the marketing and programmatic options available through DukeEngage – location. While the DukeEngage staff members attempt to make a point of marketing the domestic programs for students, the abroad programs draw far more student attention than the domestic projects held in Durham, Seattle, and other U.S. locations. This poses a challenge of sorts as there is an internal conflict between the purported mission of civic engagement and service that in some ways can be accomplished more aptly at home and the “sexier,” more exotic international projects.

Eric Mlyn, the director of DukeEngage recently announced the program’s efforts to boost the size of the local programming in Durham:

“We have always been committed to having more students in Durham than any of our other sites. Because we had a fairly rigorous process of approving [individual] projects this year, we have slots available, and we wanted them in Durham because that’s where our priority should be.”<sup>9</sup>

A *Chronicle* article reporting the change stated that while there was a 9 percent increase in the number of applications this year, only 26 of the 30 spots for the Durham program have been filled. The current goal is to accept approximately 10 more students to the local program.

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<sup>9</sup> Emmeline Zhao. “DukeEngage to boost local program size,” *Chronicle* 4 Mar. 2009. 4 Mar. 2009. <<http://media.www.dukechronicle.com/media/storage/paper884/news/2009/03/04/News/Dukeengage.To.Boost.Local.Program.Size-3658739.shtml>>.

The Durham program differs from its more exotic international cousin as it involves a full-time summer internship with a local nonprofit agency. This placement seeks to provide hands-on experience related to social, cultural, economic, and environmental issues in Durham. There are also local excursions, orientation and training sessions, and on-campus housing.<sup>10</sup>

While Mlyn remains optimistic about student interest in the Durham programming, some of the responses from Duke student suggest otherwise. According to the article, sophomore Laura Hart, a Chronicle wire staff member, applied to DukeEngage for an individual project in Morocco and was not accepted – she does not see Durham as an alternative:

"The reason I did an individual project was because I wanted to go abroad and because I physically couldn't do the group projects since the dates didn't work for me," Hart said. "I also don't want to be in Durham. I'll be living here for four years, I don't want to be here again for the summer."

The disconnect between the rhetoric of DukeEngage staff members and the wishes of Duke students is revealing. There exists a fundamental ambivalence between the role and prominence of the international projects as compared to the domestic projects. Hence, a precarious balancing act is created between mediating the purported outcomes and aims of the program in theory (as one that develops student knowledge and promotes community change and civic engagement through immersive service), versus that of the program in practice. International programs have an undeniable “cache” – the attractive opportunity to travel and experience an exotic “other” world -

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<sup>10</sup> Emmeline Zhao. “DukeEngage to boost local program size,” Chronicle 4 Mar. 2009. 4 Mar. 2009.<<http://media.www.dukechronicle.com/media/storage/paper884/news/2009/03/04/News/Dukeengage.To.Boost.Local.Program.Size-3658739.shtml>>.

that domestic programs simply cannot compete with. Shikha Kapil, a junior, echoed these sentiments:

“I think international projects are viewed as much more important. Because there are DukeEngage projects in like Seattle and Durham. I think because they are exotic, they sound exotic.”

Other students felt that international programs simply fit in better with their personal academic interests. Scott Peppel, a junior who participated in another DukeEngage program in Bangladesh commented:

“As an International Comparative Studies major, I really prefer the international sector...because I think [while] there is so much that can be learned domestically, you go to a different part of the country, you work with a different population and gain huge insight, but for me, I have always had a stronger interest on international development, and I enjoy taking my lens, take my U.S. perspective and go abroad, and come back with a very new perspective on the world. I think not enough people spend time abroad. I mean, you go to Europe, you go to Canada, you find a lot of well-traveled people. I think the U.S. can encourage that...still, [one flaw is] overdrawing [from people] the temptation of travel [rather than the service component.] But I think that international exposure is crucial.”

Mark Kurzrok, another junior who participated in the DukeEngage program in Guatemala responded in kind:

“I agree, I also would’ve considered a U.S. program but definitely more attracted to international programs, from a culture aspect, I’m just really interest in learning about different cultures, see how people live and bring it back home. And also, my interest in Spanish is such that it’s much easier, and more helpful for me. Gaining experience speaking Spanish in a country with people who speak Spanish.”

This reality is not lost on other members of the DukeEngage staff:

# Where in the World is DukeEngage?

During the Summer of 2009, DukeEngage will send 300 students to 31 group sites around the globe, above and beyond 100 independent project placements worldwide. The 2009 DukeEngage group project sites are listed below:

**NORTH AMERICA**

- Durham, NC: Partnering with local non-profits and schools focused on community and economic development, social services, the environment, youth and education
- Durham, NC (ELI): Developing business plans in partnership with community organizations to launch and scale high-impact social enterprises
- Crownpoint, NM: Serving as facilitators, instructors and educational counselors to help prepare high school students on the Navajo Nation for college
- New Orleans, LA: Working with agencies serving community needs in the New Orleans area, still in recovery from Hurricane Katrina
- Portland, OR: Serving with organizations focused on environmental management
- St. Louis, MO: Tutoring students lagging in academic achievement
- Seattle, WA: Partnering with non-profits and NGOs in various service placements to help address community needs in collaboration with Duke alumni
- Tucson, AZ/Mexico: Providing first aid to Mexican immigrants and serving as instructors of English to speakers of other languages

**CENTRAL AMERICA & THE CARIBBEAN**

- Belize: Developing and running summer youth enrichment camps
- Guatemala: Serving as social entrepreneurial consultants for businesses and non-profits in Southern Guatemala
- Haiti: Helping with health education initiatives and plans for a new health center
- Honduras: Assisting in the construction of a sustainable health clinic in Las Mercedes
- Nicaragua/Costa Rica: Addressing healthcare technology shortcomings through medical equipment repair and technical training
- Republic of Trinidad & Tobago: Volunteering with programs designed to promote entrepreneurship, helping to motivate and educate disadvantaged youth, and assisting village women to organize for community improvement

**SOUTH AMERICA**

- Brazil: Volunteering with NGOs focusing on issues of cultural activities and social entrepreneurship (Joint DukeEngage/Study Abroad program)
- Chile: Working on micro-enterprise projects in Santiago
- Colombia: Collaborating with the Perceps Bibliotecas to help give community workshops that teach residents valuable skills
- Peru: Installing clean-burning stoves, providing conservation and environmental education, and assisting with health education and outreach

**ASIA**

- China: Working in a school for migrant children who have moved from rural areas throughout China to Beijing
- Vietnam: Volunteering in a green summer campaign in the rural community outside Ho Chi Minh City alongside Vietnamese youth

**AFRICA**

- Kenya (Kakamega): Working with partner organizations that focus on topics such as women's empowerment, microfinance/microenterprise, environment, health and human rights
- Kenya (Makuru Bay): Enhancing health and education programs with a focus on youth
- South Africa: Interviewing residents who were victims of, and activists against, the rigid system of racial apartheid
- Tanzania (Arusha): Co-leading classroom-based photography and writing projects
- Tanzania (Northern): Addressing healthcare technology shortcomings through medical equipment repair and technical training
- Uganda: Providing training, education and dissemination of medical services that address widespread malaria as well as obstetrical care

**EUROPE**

- Ireland: Working with communities of refugees and migrants in Dublin
- Northern Ireland: Partnering with NGOs that focus on human rights within the context of the conflict between the Protestant and Catholic populations
- Russia: Volunteering with community partners to provide tutoring and other assistance to various communities in need (Joint DukeEngage/Study Abroad program)

**MIDDLE EAST**

- Egypt: Pursuing human rights work through literacy with refugees from Somalia, Sudan and Iraq
- Israel: Promoting social justice in primarily disadvantaged communities (Joint DukeEngage/Study Abroad program)

**DukeEngage**  
Challenge yourself. Change your world.

dukeengage.duke.edu

Figure 2: DukeEngage literature

“Look at this...[pointing to the image]. How am I supposed to encourage students to pursue domestic projects and stress a more domestic focus when this is the kind of material that our communications people produce and sell to students?”

This comment about the blatant international-focused marketing materials created by the communications team demonstrates the internal struggles the program faces concerning the desired identity of DukeEngage present – and for future years to come. The debates about the character, vision, and mission of the program will undoubtedly continue on for many more years. The process of figuring out the correct answer will

also be one that necessitates a sense of self-reflexivity and perhaps a willingness to make mistakes along the way.

## CHAPTER TWO – MILLENNIALS RISING: THE EMERGENCE OF THE “SAVE THE WORLD” GENERATION

*“And so, my fellow Americans: ask not what your country can do for you - ask what you can do for your country.” – John F. Kennedy*

*“[In America], there is every sign that the new generation will be different from the present generation.” – Alexis de Tocqueville*

*But I have to tell you, I came up with the perfect title for my Hodges: “The Intellectual Foundations of Globalization” “Global” is a key concept. It’s a big plus if you show an altruistic interest in the Third World. Tanzania is very hot right now. East Timor is not bad. Haiti will do, but you haven’t like...you haven’t like gone deep enough into the Third World. You know what I mean? It’s too easy to get to Haiti. I mean, you can take a plane from Philadelphia and be there in an hour and a half, that sort of thing.”*

*“What do you mean, ‘get there’?” said Charlotte.*

*“You actually go there. You go to Tanzania or some other country that’s hot for your junior year abroad. You never pick Florence or Paris or London, least of all London. It has to be the Third World, and you have to show what they call ‘service opportunity leadership.’ I went to Kenya, but it turns out everybody has this idea Kenya’s too civilized. I taught English in a village out in the re-mote, out in the bush about four hours west of Nairobi by pickup truck, and I mean there wasn’t a ballpoint pen within a fifty-mile radius, much less a word processor, and I got malaria like everybody else in my village. They gave me the best house they had, this little brick hut with two windows, since I was the teacher come all the way from America, but it didn’t have any screens – so I got malaria like everybody else – and I come back and other Mutants are telling me I made a bad choice. Kenya is too civilized. If I had to do it over, I’d do a project like a documentary photo study of Tanzania, with text, something like that.”*

*Adam detected a touch of reproof in the look Charlotte was giving him. Sure enough, she then said, “You went – people go all the way to Africa just to look good?”*

*-Tom Wolfe, I am Charlotte Simmons*

### **THE MILLENNIAL CHARACTER**

The Millennials are rising. Also known as the “Google Generation”, the “Net Generation”, or “Generation Y”, this wave of young Americans who were in the post-

1982 era (and grew up during the 1990s and 2000s) are of increasing concern and interest in their multiplicity of roles as consumers, students, knowledge seekers, volunteers, voters, and ultimately as the future leaders of the nation.

According to Neal Howe and William Strauss, experts on the development of American generations, a generation can be defined as:

“A society-wide peer group, born over a period roughly the same length as the passage from youth to adulthood (in today’s America, around twenty or twenty-one years), who collectively possess a common persona. The length need not always be the same. A generation can be a bit longer or shorter, depending on the coming-of-age experience and the vagaries of history.”<sup>11</sup>

Each American generation’s character has and continues to be uniquely defined by various forces that forge common attitudes about family life, gender roles, institutions, politics, religion, culture, lifestyle, and the future. The Millennial generation has been defined by its own distinct trends – rising prosperity, expanding technology, celebrity politics, spreading gaps between the rich and the poor, resplendent individualism, humanitarian globalism, cultural decadence, and the crusading of culture-wars among others. The maturation and development of these forces will continue to organize and define the character of the remaining Millennial life cycle.<sup>12</sup>

A firm understanding of the character of Millennials within the larger context of the development of American generations is necessary to better comprehend the unique ways in which Millennials’ generational positioning affects their views on civic engagement, political participation and democracy. A firm understanding of the

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<sup>11</sup> Neil Howe. Millennials rising the next great generation /by Neil Howe and Bill Strauss ; cartoons by R.J. Matson. New York: Vintage Books, 2000, 40.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 57.

Millennials is a critical and unnecessary component when attempting to navigate the tricky issues involved with programs like DukeEngage.

#### **INTERVIEW – Theresa Cho, senior, DukeEngage New Orleans**

**KC: So I guess this is more of a personal question but where does your desire to help come from? Have you ever thought about where your desire to do this type of helping engagement comes from?**

TC: I guess part of it is this sense of responsibility. Hmm, I don't know. This is a really tough question.

**KC: I have found through [this] whole [interview experience], it's such a simple question but nobody really knows what to say.**

TC: I think, and I don't want to, you know, stilt the blame towards the University's mission or whatever, but I definitely do think that there is this big push from the University itself for students to become more aware, um, to become "global citizens" if you will. And I mean, as condescending as it is, I do think that I have adopted this idea that I am in a position of privilege, granted I don't have all the answers, but it's like my civic duty almost to give back to the community? And to find ways in which we can live in a more equitable society if we will.

**KC: Do you think that you had this desire before Duke? In terms of being involved in your community or high school, or was it kind of like you had to do it for college?**

TC: As far as my community service, I would definitely say it was geared towards getting those hours towards college, I didn't give a shit about what it was, I worked with, what was that organization called, the American Red Cross, and you know, that wasn't something that struck me, or had a personal connection to or was meaningful to me in some way. And while it doesn't always correlate directly with engagement, I've always been sort of an activist, always been interested in diversity issues and what have you. But no, I don't think I had this sense of urgency in terms of engagement until I came to Duke.

**KC: Do you think that this is something to Duke? Or our generation? What do you think are some of the factors that contribute to the popularity of this kind of thing? For example, the sheer number of students who are going abroad to participate in these type of projects have skyrocketed in the last five, ten years? Do you have thoughts on what you think about that?**

TC: I don't think it's specific to Duke. I do think it is a product of our generation. I'm not sure what has shifted, but in terms of us being very cynical about politics, um, and having, especially in the past eight years, having this sense of mistrust of

the government, and being very disappointed in some of the foreign policy that we have seen. I think maybe it's that people are taking more ownership of themselves to you know, "go make change." I mean maybe you're right, maybe it is this fad that we've become exposed to or taken on as something that is necessary to do while you're in college. I think that's what DukeEngage really aims to do, you know, have this be an integral part of the undergraduate experience, and I know Duke is pushing to have this experience be part of every undergraduates experience at least once before they graduate.

The above interview excerpt with Theresa Cho illustrates many of the ways in which Millennials are uniquely defining – and redefining – their beliefs regarding their role in society and the greater world. As a whole, the Millennial generation takes a departure from many of the characteristics of Generation X, the generation that preceded them. It is a known fact that each generation attempts to (1) solve a problem facing the prior youth generation, whose style has become dysfunctional in the new era, (2) corrects for the behavioral excess it perceives in the current midlife generation, and (3) fills the social role being vacated by the departing elder generation.<sup>13</sup> In this sense, the generational character of the Millennials is deeply tied to Generation X (whose members are now middle-aged Baby Boomers). Millennials are attempting to shift away from what they perceived as the excesses of the Boomers – narcissicism, impatience, iconoclasm, and a constant focus on talk over action.<sup>14</sup> Thus, the Millennial character is in many ways the result of a historical, rather than ahistorical process, and must be recognized as so.

To be sure, there are a variety of other social factors – race, socioeconomic status, gender, and so on – that can shape the life experiences of an individual within a

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<sup>13</sup> Neil Howe. *Millennials rising the next great generation* /by Neil Howe and Bill Strauss; cartoons by R.J. Matson. New York: Vintage Books, 2000, 62.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

generation. Nonetheless, there are larger forces that shape and influence the character of each generation, and these forces must be reckoned with. Millennials can be considered in other ways as a genuinely “special” generation. Not only are the Millennials the largest, and most racially diverse generation in history, they also are engaging with their community and society in markedly different ways. The Millennial attitude towards civic engagement is of particular interest in this project. When using the term “civic engagement,” I am referring to a wide range of individual and group activities designed to identify and address issues of public concern, ranging from volunteerism to electoral participation, and everything in between. Millennials have increased interest and participation in certain types of civic engagement, particularly community service/volunteering and service learning, while their involvement with electoral participation and other forms of direct political participation has a more complicated relationship. These relationships will be explored further.

The definition of “community service” has morphed from generation to generation throughout modern American history, dating back to service efforts during World War II. Since then, the Millennial civic spirit has been bolstered by trends such as compulsory volunteering in high schools<sup>15</sup> and the growth of “serving learning” programs. Howe and Strauss describe the new Millennial service ethic as one built around notions of collegial (rather than individual) action, support for (rather than

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<sup>15</sup> “Service learning is now often required for middle or high school graduation, and was further boosted by the Acts of Congress in 1990 and 1993, which created the Learn and Serve America program. From 1984 to 1999, the share of high schools offering community service programs rose from 27 to 83 percent, and the share with “serving learning” grew from 9 to 46 percent. (Howe, 216).

resistance against) civic institutions, and the tangible doing of good deeds.<sup>16</sup> The experiences and sentiments expressed in the interview excerpts with Theresa Cho echo the desire of many Millennials to “give back” through acts of civic engagements via non-governmental institutions such as non-profits and private schools like Duke University. There is a very real desire to work outside “the system.”

Michael Blake, a junior History major from Buffalo, New York and alumnus of the DukeEngage South Africa program, offered his perspective:

**KC: So, thinking and speaking as a representative of our generation, what do you think are the attitudes towards civic engagement and political participation as a whole?**

**MB:** That’s a loaded question.

**KC: Ha, it is a loaded question.**

**MB:** I guess if you look at the numbers than people are less politically involved, but I guess it’s hard for me from my own experiences to comment on that, because for me, I’ve always been interested in politics, had an internship after my freshmen year, so on. I think that at Duke, I think people are more politically aware and educated than coming from my friends at home who don’t attend as elite schools, state schools for the most part. So I think it’s hard coming from this background and surrounded by these people to make an observation. It definitely exists though, there is an apathy. I think your point earlier that people are channeling that to other means is valid. If I wanted to do something, I’m not going to write a letter to a politician, I’m going to do it myself. I don’t know if it’s a different mindset, or something that if created by the environment which we live where government is ineffective and politicized, but I don’t know.

Michael’s views are similar to the sentiments that Millennials hold regarding the nature of government, as government and politics are viewed cynically as bureaucratic, politicized, and ineffective organizations.

**KC: So if government is ineffective, and you want an effective government, and you want to make a real change. But twenty or thirty years down the line, you**

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<sup>16</sup> Neil Howe. Millennials rising the next great generation /by Neil Howe and Bill Strauss ; cartoons by R.J. Matson. New York: Vintage Books, 2000, 216.

**and after effective people don't trust the government; so who's running the government then?**

**MB:** Uh, the people that are really into politics? Young Republicans? Young Democrats? That type?

**KC: What is that type though? I think you're talking more about politicians per say, but government speaking generally, runs far and wide, bureaucrats, etc. But there's a lot of cynicism about it, but I think a lot of people complain about government and how it's ineffective, but what's the alternative? And I think people are more likely to abandon it as an option altogether rather than seeking ways to make it better? But you mentioned earlier you wouldn't write a letter to a politician, but doesn't not being in government limit what you can do yourself?**

**MB:** No, I definitely think there are [limits]. Um, I guess I don't know. I don't have an answer for you. I think though, as you get older, you become a little bit more realistic, and you realize that you can't you gotta go through the system.

**KC: What does that mean, go through the system?**

**MB:** So say, I'm in Durham, and I'm volunteering at a public school in Durham and say, "God, this is awful." I'm tutoring some kid in math and he is way behind. What do I do? I grow older, I don't know, do I start a charter school, a separate school, or do I work with Durham public schools, NC department of Ed, U.S. department of education? What do you do? I mean, I would love to know the number of non-profits in the U.S. in the past 50 years, I would love to see a chart, I would guess that it's grown exponentially. I don't know if you can necessarily pin point it to our generation, and I don't know how you grew up, but I grew up in a household that thought government is bad, government doesn't do things inefficiently...

**KC: Conservative household? Ha.**

**MB:** Well not that government is bad, but the idea that if you give government a million dollars to do a program, and the non-profit a million dollars too, the non-profit is going to do it better.

### **A CLOSER LOOK AT MILLENNIAL CIVIC ENGAGEMENT**

While there are various characteristics shared by all Millennials, those shared by Millennial college students are of particular interest in this work. Recent research on Millennial college student civic engagement indicates that while Millennials are involved locally with others (volunteering in particular), they remain ambivalent about formal

politics. According to the CIRCLE report, most college students think it their responsibility to get involved to make things better for society, to “help others.” They view volunteering as a means of change, both for their immediate community needs and as a means of systemic change.<sup>17</sup>

Furthermore, the site of this type of engagement is expanding from local communities to countries around the globe. The international service industry is growing, and an increasing number of American college students are partaking in service and learning opportunities abroad. According to the International Volunteers Program Association, between 50,000 and 60,000 Americans volunteer overseas every year, with 18- to 24-year-olds making up the largest age group. The organization estimates that the number of volunteers will top 100,000 by 2010, and these numbers do not include the thousands that go to study abroad as well.<sup>18</sup>

In order to better understand DukeEngage, a more expansive understanding of the history of international service is necessary. The current popular brand of international service traces its roots largely to the creation of the Peace Corps in 1961. Then President John F. Kennedy developed the program as a means to combat Soviet communist ideology during the height of the Cold War. In some sense, the thousands of American volunteers sent to various nations abroad were considered the ultimate salesmen of the “American Way” of life.

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<sup>17</sup> Abby Kiesa, Alexander P. Orłowski, Peter Levine, Deborah Both, et al. “Millennials Talk Politics: A Study of College Student Political Engagement,” CIRCLE (Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement), Nov 2007, 13.

<sup>18</sup> Thomas Coen, “Globe Trotting”, *Campus Progress*, 31 Jul. 2008. 31 Jul. 2008.  
<<http://www.campusprogress.org/fieldreport/3095/globe-trotting>>

International service has come a long way. The modern reincarnations of the Peace Corps (as well as its existing form) are sophisticated, and include a diverse array of opportunities, whether it is volunteering at a NGO in Ethiopia or providing microfinance opportunities for a rural community in Bangladesh. When exploring the DukeEngage program, I will demonstrate how the program mirrors many of these developing trends, but also the ways in which the program needs to be accounted for on its own unique merits as well.

While there may be an undeniable increase in the number of American college students who are participating in volunteering efforts at both home and abroad, their engagement in non-service oriented aspects of civic engagement, particularly formal involvement with politics, is mixed.

Voting is a particularly thorny topic in Millennial civic engagement. The exercise of the vote is arguably one of the most important facets of civic engagement in a free and democratic society, but each generation holds distinct views on its potential as a tool of change. The Millennial generation emerged in one of the most dynamic periods of modern history. The advent of technological innovations (the Internet in particular) has dramatically altered the ways in which individuals communicate, learn, and consume information. Robert Wattenberg argues that changes in media habits from generation to generation have led to our current situation in which young people are far less likely to be exposed to news about public affairs than their elders. Millennials consume their news through media outlets and platforms such as blogs and other forms of social media that do not have the same emphasis on public affairs content as traditional media

forms such as the newspaper and television. Thus, without even consciously deciding to avoid political news, they have been socialized in a markedly different media environment that results in their being the least politically knowledgeable generation in the history of survey research.<sup>19</sup> Wattenberg argues that this has profound implications in the ways in which Millennials view their role in American democracy.

In addition to the impact of different media consumption habits, the CIRCLE report also points to the ways in which few Millennial college students view voting as an effective vehicle to address public issues. Much like the dissatisfaction that Michael Blake expressed towards government action in his interview, many Millennial college students view politics and formal government as one marred by bad ideals and as an ineffective vehicle for change. Students are often disillusioned with politicians for exacerbating the inaccessibility of the political system, as they see politicians participating in spin and polarized debates, both of which are antithetical to their desire for authentic opportunities for dialogue and engagement.<sup>20</sup> For a generation enraptured with efficiency and immediacy, volunteering and service is an alternative to the complex, competitive, and often gridlock-ridden system of American democracy.

Michael's views on effectively creating social change without ideology – or government – were echoed by another DukeEngage participant, junior Shikha Kapil, who participated in the DukeEngage in New Delhi program:

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<sup>19</sup> Martin P. Wattenberg. Is voting for young people? New York: Pearson Longman, 2007, 5.

<sup>20</sup> Abby Kiesa, Alexander P. Orłowski, Peter Levine, Deborah Both, et al. "Millennials Talk Politics: A Study of College Student Political Engagement," CIRCLE (Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement), Nov 2007, 24.

“I volunteer at the Ronald McDonald house<sup>21</sup>, um, I don’t know, I vote. I’m not big about politics, I honestly don’t care that much about politics. I think a lot of it is irrelevant... I think it is very difficult to make an impact on this level on a broad level. That’s why I wanted to go into health because I think that health care, global health also, is a better way to positively impact people. I understand that politics and policy is important but I also think it is too difficult to get things done. I think there is just too much bureaucracy to sift through.”

Shikha, like many Duke students, picked her specific DukeEngage in New Delhi project as she not only was interested in the global health focused aspect of the program, but it was also seen as her way to “make a difference” without going through formal avenues of civic engagement.

Other Millennials, like Scott Peppel, view traditional forms of civic engagement as supplemental to its newest forms:

“I think civic engagement is one of the most important forces in existence. You know, like you said, voting, such a strong supporter of voting. I think volunteering and engagement is extremely important, domestic or abroad, active citizenry important in strong world. I’ve been interested in social service for a really long time, I did a lot of volunteering in high school, it was an important part of my high school and my family. As a whole, I really like Duke saying that being part of a community, being part of an engaged citizenry is part of the new mission statement, and I think it’s a great turn into the university. I think my perspective has changed. I think every experience has shed new light on what social service is. But I learned a lot from the DukeEngage experience about the frustrations that exist even in the best of the best. I liked BRAC because it’s the best of the best, they have a model replicated in other countries, one of the first NGOs spreading from a non-Western country into others and having great impact, but at same time, I saw a lot of the flaws and the inability to serve all needs, so for me, I became a little bit jaded but at the same time got a realistic perspective on what it will take to make a real impact on social service. So, yeah, I guess how it’s changed, I’ve been more frustrated about what exists, but more excited about potential that could exist.”

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<sup>21</sup> The Ronald McDonald House is a national charity supported by the McDonalds Corporation that helps support families around the world by offering ways for them to stay together during times of urgent care for seriously ill children, in proximity to the treatment hospital, and be comfortable and cared for during their stay. (<http://www.rmhc.com/what-we-do/ronald-mcdonald-house/>)

Others, like Rachel Revelle, a sophomore from Murpheesboro, North Carolina who participated in the DukeEngage in Dublin program, expressed her frustration with politics:

“I don’t even know how to jump into being a politically active person, there is just too much info out there. How do you decipher through all the messages?”

These sentiments were further echoed by senior Katie Noto:

“Yeah, technology and the media are crazy...there are all these news stories all the time about all the bad things going on in the world. How are you ever supposed to figure out how to tackle the issue?”

These trends seem even more troubling when considering that is contrary to the notion of a life cycle effect, as it has not always been the case that young people possess the weakest sense of citizen duty with specific regard to voting. In fact, this is a new phenomenon that has deep repercussions as a generation who is relatively unlikely to see voting as an important civic responsibility is one who will lose many of its members as voters for the rest of its duration – these trends translate to the future of American democracy.<sup>22</sup> Millennials are increasingly viewing social change as one devoid of ideology or formal forms of political participation – and they are finding abundant ways in which to fulfill their desire to seek civic opportunities outside “the system.”

Furthermore, even the most positive trends of Millennial civic engagement – such as the growth in volunteer hours – can be met with some skepticism. As evident in the interview excerpt with Theresa Cho, many youth (particularly those in high school) are volunteering at records rates for motives other than to fulfill a desire to be civically engaged. Increased pressure and expectations for an increasingly competitive college

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<sup>22</sup> Martin P. Wattenberg. Is voting for young people? New York: Pearson Longman, 2007, 137.

admissions process have directly (and indirectly) led to an increase in volunteer hours for those eager to build up college resumes. And perhaps this rationale can be extended to Duke students participating in DukeEngage. Is participating in DukeEngage projects merely a way to differentiate resumes for jobs and graduate school applications instead of a true engagement with service? Shikha commented on the frustration she felt with a student who participated in her DukeEngage program:

“You know what really frustrates me is that a lot of people who went on that trip are going to put this on their resume and no one’s going to know that they didn’t do jack shit, sorry, and they didn’t learn, they didn’t take away from it, to them, it didn’t have like a profound impact on their lives, their worldview, their perspective. And it’s just frustrating that people use this on their resume to get ahead when they should be using it to learn about the world and how lucky they are.

[Then there was this one girl]...she literally sat around all day and just wrote in her journal the whole time. Like she was white so maybe she felt a little out of place but Jenna was white and she tried hard to fit in and learn. But then she like came back to Duke and kept telling people how amazing it was, but it’s like, don’t talk about it like you got anything from it.”

The issues of motivation and intention behind the students who undergo these projects are complicated and will be explored further. Wattenberg’s research is particularly troubling as well, as he argues that there is currently no sign of a great new spirit of voluntarism among the Millennial generation that translates after this age.<sup>23</sup>

While a cynical interpretation would be to view these trends in Millennial civic engagement as a merely superficial and self-serving trends, the role of programs like DukeEngage (and other programs like it) in youth civic engagement requires a deeper and more nuanced exploration. Millennials must be judged for the totality of their civic

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<sup>23</sup> Martin P. Wattenberg. Is voting for young people? New York: Pearson Longman, 2007, 182.

engagement and political participation. The stories, personal transformations and experiences offered by DukeEngage programs and other civic engagement programs cannot be aptly captured by statistics alone. I will explore the notion of motivation behind Millennial civic engagement further later in this work, but it seems to be that there is a potential for civic engagement work to be meaningful and transformative, regardless of the purity or impurity of the participants' motivations. I hope that the stories and experiences of the DukeEngage alumni will shed further light on this issue.

### **AND WHAT ABOUT THE FUTURE?**

There are several critical events that define the memory and galvanize the personality of each American generation. For the Boomers, it was the assassination of John F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King Jr., for Generation X it was the fall of the Berlin Wall and the destruction of the Columbia shuttle. *Millennials Rising* was written in 2000 and thus only describes the character of the Millennials up to this point. Howe and Straus claim that the Columbine school shootings are the defining moment of the Millennial generation. I would argue that our generation's defining moment was 9/11, a tragedy that not only transformed the collective identity of a generation of Americans but that of an entire nation – and perhaps even the rest of the globe.

Perhaps this paradigm shift into an era of the permanent “War Against Terror” has complemented the already salient characteristics of Millennials. The popularity and near obsession with the idea of “Saving the World,” and its accompanying ethos of help and change may be connected to the ways in which 9/11 redirected attention to the fragility and vulnerability of the 21<sup>st</sup> American society. The post-9/11 world is one

characterized by various new forces, and I would argue that one major change is manifesting itself as the shortcomings of a shrinking welfare state. In turn, perhaps this disparity provides a growing niche for non-governmental (i.e. philanthropic and humanitarian) interventions. In an increasingly globalized economic, social, and political society, these interventions do not merely extend across national boundaries, but rather reach beyond into the global citizenry. Thus, while 9/11 in some measures instilled a sense of permanent fear and insecurity into the constantly shifting “global” world of the Millennial, I would argue that it has simultaneously extended a sense of responsibility and goodwill across international borders as well. The permanent repercussions of these forces and larger trends remain to be seen.

Furthermore, the conclusive trends listed in the CIRCLE report may require some revision in light of the recent election. The 2008 Presidential election seems to point to promising trends in youth civic engagement. According to newly released data, youth turnout rates increased to at least 52% with 23 million voters under the age of 30, which was over 3.4 million more than in 2004. This new boost in voters accounted for at least 60% of the overall increase in new voters, and signaled a dramatic shift from past elections.<sup>24</sup>

How, if at all, does President-elect Barack Obama’s historic election signal a clarion call about the desires of Millennial voters? In various ways, Obama’s campaign and his message of “Hope” and “Change” resonated naturally with the Millennial tendency to disavow spin and polarization in exchange for authentic opportunities for

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<sup>24</sup> “Youth Voting,” CIRCLE. 1 Feb. 2009. <<http://www.civicyouth.org/>>

dialogue. Obama very much embodies the Millennial characteristics of favoring social change without ideology (or rather a partisan ideology), as his message of bipartisanship and “working together” was central to his campaign platform. There is much speculation as to the ways in which this election will permanently change the ways in which Millennials engage in politics for future years to come. The heightened Millennial interest in public service careers as demonstrated by the record number of applications received by the Obama campaign’s transition office are promising signs, as are the plans for the Obama administration to unleash a campaign to expand national public service programs.<sup>25</sup> Only time will tell if the historic election of Barack Obama has truly dissolved the Millennial sense of cynicism towards government and has genuinely signaled a shift in the ways in which our generation engages in politics. In many ways DukeEngage serves as a microcosm of the intersection of these various forces, and perhaps the program’s evolution will provide better insights into the potential of this paradigm shift – or its short life as a passing trend. Perhaps this comment by Scott Peppel sums it up best:

“I think people have lost faith in traditional systems, in terms of actually having an impact. I think there’s a lot of frustration with politicians, but that’s existed for years, but people want to have more of a direct impact on the world and communities, and as it’s more possible to personally take that action, because of technology and globalization, people are actually able to have a greater impact abroad, have impact on a great issue like global warming. I think that this self-starter, entrepreneurial look is exciting and possible. At the same time, I think a lot gets forgotten in terms of voting, that can have an impact, that that can be important. In the last election, there was a pretty big shift, and there is this newness to voting, political participation. I think that new interest for getting involved in politics has been inspired. I think it’s just moving past beyond what our parents’ generation and how they used to do things. I think that we look at

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<sup>25</sup> “Service,” [BarackObama.com](http://www.barackobama.com). 1 Oct 2008. <<http://www.barackobama.com/issues/service/>>

protest as a wasted effort. Mark and I were abroad and people told us that in the U.S. we didn't actually have protests, you sit there behind the yellow tape with white signs, but you can't stop traffic, so what are you protesting? You just sit there for awareness. I think the U.S. has taken such a structure towards a common mold of what is acceptable, to start a program, to go abroad, and be innovative, and I think in a lot of ways that is great, and I think that is incredible. But of course I am hopeful that we don't forget about voting."

### **THE MILLENNIAL OPPORTUNITY GAP**

As mentioned previously, the Millennial generation is a diverse one that cannot be easily generalized in many ways. For the purposes of this project, I will be focusing not only the behavior and trends of Millennial college students (between ages 18 and 25), while also recognizing that these college students represent a minority viewpoint and life experience. Despite increased access to higher education, more than half of young people between the ages of 18 and 25 are not enrolled in four-year colleges and universities.

These gaps become even more profound when recognizing that a project that focuses on DukeEngage and the Duke community reflects a very particular sect of students within the larger college-educated whole. A critical issue facing Millennial civic engagement is the engagement inequality gap. Simply put, colleges and universities are providing very unequal levels of opportunity for civic participation and learning. The CIRCLE report surveyed students across a spectrum of American academic institutions, ranging from the Ivy-ranks of Princeton University to the limestone-lined walls of Kansas State University. Even within this small sample of schools, there was a significant difference in the types of civic engagement resources and opportunities available for students. Wealthier, elite institutions have far more opportunities for engaging public

issues through discussion, internships, an academic project, student organizations, and approved programs.<sup>26</sup> In essence, the rhetoric and practice of civic engagement is one that is relegated only to a privileged few, and any generalizable assumptions about Millennial trends in civic engagement must include this critical caveat. In a sense, this reality is also mirrored by the trends evident in many greater aid-oriented “help” communities. The ability to “help,” the use of the word as a verb and not as a noun, can never be separated from the deeper power relations in which these actions and ideas are rooted. These differences may continue to cause an increasing opportunity gap for civic engagement, further polarizing Americans into civic participants or bystanders - those who have had opportunities to learn “how the system works” and those who have not. Scott Peppel attempted to explain the necessity of providing these learning opportunities for students at elite institutions such as Duke:

“I think a common phrase is that people try to justify it by saying that we are the leaders of tomorrow. So impacting a Duke student could have more downstream effects because they, whatever, people at the Ivy league and Duke and Stanford are going to go on and become the CEOs, and run companies or whatever. One thing good about DukeEngage is that a lot of the students here are the ones that could gain a lot from exposure like that, whereas a student who hasn’t been giving this much opportunity has already realized what work can be done through community work? Like someone who has grown up in an impoverished community and hasn’t had a lot of opportunity might already understand the value of community organization, whereas a Duke student, I mean I’m generalizing extremely, who hasn’t grown up in that, who had missed out on some of the realities of the world...this exposure to realities whether it is realistic, can be important, something we lack more than other students would?”

At the same time, people say college is one of the greatest equalizers, but at the same time it is the greatest dividers. Because they say equalizer because people

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<sup>26</sup> Abby Kiesa, Alexander P. Orłowski, Peter Levine, Deborah Both, et al. “Millennials Talk Politics: A Study of College Student Political Engagement,” CIRCLE (Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement), Nov 2007, 32.

get huge amounts of financial aid, but at the same time, if you can't get into Duke, if you haven't had the support or opportunity to get into Duke, there is a huge division in terms of long term opportunity. I agree it is not fair, I don't think we should say that we should take this opportunity and redistribute it. I don't really know what the right answer should be? I think Obama has been making a move to make universal service as a way to pay for college, and I think that is great. But it's also hard to tell the private institutions not to give the opportunities for their students. If you get down to it, Duke, they do this reason for a lot of reasons, they do this for recruiting, on applications the reason to come to Duke, #1 is DukeEngage, #2 is basketball. They pull in strong students and they have a better institution supposedly. So I don't think you can stop the institution from doing, I think it can be improved but I think it's something that despite the inequality I don't think you can say that Duke is in the wrong."

The implications of this trend are serious when the goal of American democracy is a more equitable society. These inequalities manifest itself in ways large and small, making itself present even in Duke University's undergraduate admissions process. One Duke student aptly commented:

"Just look at the type of students that are in the Robertson Scholars program<sup>27</sup>. These students all come from backgrounds that allow them to do "good" . . . they have wealthy parents that can pay for them to spend a summer volunteering in Africa . . . a poor kid isn't going to be able to do all this volunteering when they have to work to pay the bills . . . does [the program] really accomplish its mission if this is the type of student they attract?"

DukeEngage navigates a similarity complicated relationship with notions of privilege, and it becomes more so when family members become involved in the decision-making process. Katie Noto, a senior who participated in the DukeEngage program in Dublin, Ireland, commented on the issue:

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<sup>27</sup> The Robertson Scholars program is a Undergraduate Scholars program that seeks to "build a community of students at Duke and UNC-Chapel Hill who will share important educational experiences and who as alumni will become community leaders . . . further develop the educational opportunities at Duke and UNC-Chapel Hill that link classroom learning with community service ... prepares students to understand, contribute to, and benefit from our culturally, racially, and ethnically diverse and interdependent world." (<http://www.robertsonscholars.org/index.php?type=static&source=10>)

“I know that there was a girl who interviewed for my program and didn’t do it because her parents didn’t think it was a “real” program and wanted her to get a legit job.”

DukeEngage’s failure to be seen as a legitimate program in the student’s parent’s eyes sheds light on the ways in which international service programs still remain a privilege in the truest sense for many – it not only places financial limitations on many students but also reflects the novelty of international service as a type of “social kudos”, one that properly translates only in elite, educated circles.

The intersections of privilege and the Millennial “personality” become further complicated when considering the characterizations of those like David Brooks. In his acclaimed 2001 *Atlantic Monthly* entitled “The Organization Kid”, Brooks spent several days observing students at the elite Princeton University in order to see “what the young who are going to be running our country in a few decades are like.” After many coffee conversations, observations in small groups, and email exchanges, Brooks concluded that:

“The young men and women of America’s future elite work their laptops to the bone, rarely question authority, and happily accept their positions at the top of the heap as part of the natural order of life . . . They are professional students . . . they are goal-oriented. An activity – whether it is studying, hitting the treadmill, drama group, community service . . . is rarely an end in itself. It is a means for self-improvement, resume-building, and enrichment.”<sup>28</sup>

There are certainly compelling elements in Brooks’ characterization of the elite Millennial college student, many of which aptly define the Duke student as well. Mark Kurzrok finds the parallels to the Duke students of today compelling:

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<sup>28</sup> David Brooks, “The Organization Kid,” *The Atlantic Online*, April 2001. 1 Oct 2008. <<http://www.theatlantic.com/doc/200104/brooks>>

“I mean I think Duke in and of itself is a pretty pre-professional institution, where everybody is going to med school or law school or consulting or banking. I think DE potentially gives people a way to think outside that box, which I think would be really important to be honest. I think Duke lacks, or creativity within the student body in terms of deciding what they want to do with their lives, I think there are some very defined tracks. I think Duke students are typically conformists, and so being able to say there are going on one of those established tracks gives them comfort and legitimacy. So where does DukeEngage play in that? I think absolutely they will give them that job down the road - you can twist international experience any way you like. And I am personally conflicted about that a lot, but then you get the philosophical questions about when humans do something that is actually not self motivated. So you can get to the base of all service as you feeling better about yourself, that is a very cynical view of viewing human sin the world, so in a lot of ways the people that aren’t using it in an interview to make themselves look better, still may not have been as vocal about it but still enjoy the experience for personal gain. I think that, at the end of the day, I think what matters is the experience you get out of it no matter what goals you had going into it. So getting out of the suburban experience, gets people to open their eyes a little bit and think of these issues, and I think this experience has potential to create change even if it was done for selfish reasons.”

While I thoroughly enjoyed Brooks’ portrait, it is an incomplete one, as it misses the ways in which this Millennial character is a product of a very specific group within a broader generational moment, and is also predicated upon certain positions of power and privilege that define the “elite”. In essence, a heavy reliance on Brooks’ Millennial representation can induce a theoretical myopia – one in which the experiences of a select become the rule, rather than the exception. One must be careful to not lose sight of all that beyond what is “near”, as a full view of Millennial civic engagement is necessary for a complete and nuanced understanding of DukeEngage.

## CHAPTER THREE – THE PARADOX OF AID

*“The evil that is in the world always comes out of ignorance, and good intentions may do as much harm as malevolence, if they lack understanding.”*

– Albert Camus

*“Take up the White Man’s burden—  
Send forth the best ye breed—  
Go bind your songs to exile  
To serve your captives’ need;  
To wait in heavy harness,  
On fluttered folk and wild—  
Your new-caught, sullen peoples,  
Half-devil and half-child.*

*Take up the White Man’s burden—  
The savage wars of peace—  
Fill full the mouth of Famine  
And bid the sickness cease;  
And when your goal is nearest  
The end for others sought,  
Watch sloth and heathen Folly  
Bring all your hopes to naught.*

–Rudyard Kipling, “White Man’s Burden”

*“Has no one told you, ‘In the Country of the Blind the One-Eyed Man is King?’  
‘What is blind?’ asked the blind man, carelessly, over his shoulder.”*

–H.G. Wells, “The Country of the Blind”

**Danny:** So don’t tell me you’re here to make a difference eh?

**Maddy:** And you’re here to make a buck?

**Danny:** I’m here for lack of a better idea.

**Maddy:** That’s a shame.

**Danny:** Not really. Peace Corp types stay around long enough to realize they’re not helping anyone, the government only wants to stay in power long enough to steal enough to go to exile somewhere else, and the rebels, they’re not sure they want to take over otherwise they’d have to govern this mess, so TIA mate.

**Maddy:** What’s TIA?

**Danny:** This is Africa, eh?

–“Blood Diamond”, 2006.

The challenges that DukeEngage will face in the future do not end with the current debate over its mission. The growth of the DukeEngage program and its Millennial participants must be understood in conjunction with the greater forces – and ever so interconnected ties – that the program has with the world beyond Duke University’s walls.

Critical attention must be focused on the civic engagement efforts – the “aid” – that the students are offering to the communities they are purporting to help. The notion of “Saving the World” is a loaded one that is riddled with assumptions and paradoxes of power and privilege. There is little doubt that some Duke students actually enact worthwhile “help” to the communities they are aiding, but there is much potential – and historical evidence to demonstrate – that efforts to “Save the World” can do more harm than good.

### **POVERTY “CHIC”**

Images of aid are ubiquitous. A simple click of the television screen brings forth a flood of heart wrenching visuals – news and photographs capturing famine and conflict in the jungles of the Congo, poor children scavenging through garbage dumps in India – interspersed in between “Save the Children” commercials featuring an endless stream of African babies with bellies bloated from starvation. There is little wonder why Millennials and Duke students in particular are obsessed with the notion of “Saving the World” - the message is provocative, compelling, and omnipresent.

To be sure, the media messages of recent years are more complicated than this oversimplified characterization. Coverage on genocide in far-off nations is often overshadowed by media coverage on celebrity gossip, whether it is the sudden weight gain of pop singer Jessica Simpson or the recent antics of Paris Hilton. Fashion magazines print marketing spreads that urge savvy young fashionistas to purchase t-shirts from Gap's (RED) Campaign to support the Global Fund to Fight HIV/AIDS. Even celebrities have jumped onto the bandwagon, spearheading efforts to raise money and awareness for their own pet humanitarian causes, resulting in what Alex de Waal terms a "humanitarian carnival."<sup>29</sup>

While the forms and avenues vary, the message is clear: we must help others. We must intervene and use our wealth and knowledge to help those mired in poverty, stop genocide and civil war, and cure disease. It is our duty. Thus, the notion of "Saving the World" remains an unquestioned, unproblematic, and unmitigated obsession. Its dangers are overlooked.

### **AID & THE "OTHER"**

*"The hand that gives is always above the hand that receives." – Akan saying, Ivory Coast*

The innumerable manifestations of aid – both large and small – have become so naturalized in our daily lives that it is almost difficult to envision a world without it. While charity comes in many forms, the most striking and increasingly popular form is

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<sup>29</sup> Alex de Waal, "The Humanitarian Carnival: A Celebrity Vogue," *World Affairs*, Fall 2008.

through that of international aid efforts, whether it is through institutionalized efforts of the World Bank, United Nations and International Monetary Fund, the private philanthropy and magnanimous efforts of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, or the grassroots-based individual efforts of young college students seeking to make a change. While these seemingly generous efforts to “help” may seem innocuous, they often rest upon dangerous underlying assumptions that need critical reexamination.

For one, Western efforts in foreign humanitarian and development aid rest upon the assumption that there exists a weak “other” (whether it be a nation, person, government, etc.) that requires a helping hand. By providing aid, “help” not only reifies the “other” as weaker, needy, and less powerful, but it also positions the Western world in opposition to the often non-Western “other” and solidifies an already unequal power differential. Perhaps Michael Maren, the author of *The Road to Hell*, journalist, and a former Peace Corps volunteer and development worker in Africa says it best:

“For us, Africa was more than a place on the map, it was a location in our collective psyche. Our idea of Africa had been shaped by years of advertisements and news coverage that portrayed the continent as poor and helpless. Growing up in an affluent Western society we were invested with a stake in the image of helpless Africa, starving Africa. The image of the starving African is said to edify us, sensitize us, mobilize our good will and awaken us from our apathy. This [image] exists as a point in space from which we measure our own wealth, success, and prosperity, a darkness against which we can view our own cultural triumphs. The belief that we can help is an affirmation of our own worth in the grand scheme of things. The starvation clearly delineates *us* from *them*. It is only in their weakness, when their death is inevitable, that we are touched. And it is in their helplessness that they become a marketable commodity.”<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Michael Maren. *Road to Hell: The Ravaging Effects of Foreign Aid and International Charity*. New York: Free P, 1997, 3.

Yet these very conceptions of the “other” are itself complicated by other contradictions. The contemporary notion of a “global community”, an identity of a global citizenry unbound by distinctions of race, class, gender, or geographic borders and centered on the “human” identity seems to challenge the notion of the “other” as one without agency. There is an inherent tension between the idea that other “humans” have innate capacities and gifts that merely have lacked the opportunity to be realized with the increasing emphasis on difference and the exoticness of the “other” that begs to be nurtured and “saved”. It begs to be reconciled.

Perhaps the growth of the latter trend can be attributed to the immense shifts in technological innovation and globalization. The growth of media technologies spurred by the invention of the Internet has also shifted what I term the “feel good” phenomenon of “help”. Fiona Terry coined the term “disaster pornography” to aptly describe the ubiquitous presentation of images of suffering and pain throughout the Third World that shock Western audiences. These images now infiltrate multiple arenas of media consumption beyond traditional sources like the television and newspaper – websites, fashion magazines, retail advertising – and exacerbate the phenomenon of the “CNN effect”. The “CNN effect” one hand raises awareness of problems across the globe but on the other hand desensitizes audiences by allowing graphic pictures rather than in-depth reporting convey the story.<sup>31</sup> The lack of nuanced understanding of international crises further exacerbates the complexities of foreign interventions.

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<sup>31</sup> Fiona Terry. Condemned to Repeat? The Paradox of Humanitarian Action. New York: Cornell UP, 2002, 230.

While the 8-week service experiences of Duke students may be undoubtedly different than those of Peace Corps volunteers or professional development workers, the underlying assumptions remain the same. The proliferation of images of Duke students surrounding by smiling Third World children on DukeEngage brochures, websites, and other promotional materials confirms this – those that use the term “help” as a verb are forever more powerful than those who know the term only as a noun.

### **THE COMPLEX HISTORY OF “HELP” & THE PARADOX OF AID**

*“The conquest of the earth, which mostly means the taking it away from those who have a different complexion or slightly flatter noses than ourselves, is not a pretty thing when you look into it too much. What redeems it is the idea only. An idea at the back of it is not a sentimental pretense but an idea; and an unselfish belief in the idea – something you can set up, and bow down before, and offer a sacrifice to...”*

– Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*

*“America has a spiritual energy to her which no other nation can contribute to the liberation of mankind.”*

-Woodrow Wilson

*“The colonized, underdeveloped man is a political creature in the most global sense of the term.”*

-Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*

In order to understand the modern formulation of “help,” one must first trace its long and troubling legacy. The idea of “Saving the World” (in the form of international

aid) can perhaps be most aptly analogous to various colonial moments in the 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup>, and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. The colonial project was itself led by young men who thought themselves to be adventurers, men who braved the dangers of the unknown in order to establish a new order – and civilization – on a new land.

Those like William Easterly, a former economist at the World Bank, argue that remnants of colonialism underpin the logic of the modern West's efforts to "help":

"The West has essentially exchanged the old racist coinage of colonialism for a new currency. 'Uncivilized' became 'underdeveloped.' There was a genuine change of heart away from racism and towards respect for equality, but a paternalistic and coercive strain survived. Meanwhile, the enterprise of the West transforming the Rest got a new name: foreign aid."<sup>32</sup>

Western interventions have evolved since the days of colonialism and imperialism, but Easterly argues that it very much remains the same monster. In fact, academics such as James Fearon and David Laitain argue:

"The U.S. is now moving towards a neotrusteeship – postmodern colonialism. The previous imperial era did not facilitate economic development, but instead created some of the conditions that bred occasions for today's unsuccessful interventions: failed states and bad government."<sup>33</sup>

Our modern humanitarian instincts are in essence attempting the work of nation building and the creation of "civil society" – arguably the central goals of the colonial enterprise. It is no surprise then that the explosive political crises of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Israel-Palestine, Kashmir, etc.) have roots in the same past Western treatment of peoples as "pawns in a game."<sup>34</sup> The roots of this connection and its resulting history

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<sup>32</sup> William Easterly. The White Man's Burden Why the West's Efforts to Aid the Rest Have Done So Much Ill and So Little Good. New York: Penguin (Non-Classics), 2007, 24.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 272.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 291.

are extraordinarily powerful and cannot be denied. But while these histories merit attention of one of the strong indictments of modern efforts to “help,” there seems to be a potent historical amnesia that greets every contemporary, “novel” effort at intervention. The logic behind DukeEngage is no exception.

Easterly’s critique also focuses on a wide range of Western interventions (humanitarian aid, development aid, peacekeeping efforts), but at its core it remains a striking condemnation of the modern “White Man’s Burden.” The notion of the “White Man’s Burden” (WMB) rests upon the assumption that (1) the WMB is acting in the interests of the poor in the Rest (of the world), (2) the WMB is effective at resolving poor people’s problem, and (3) lots of bad things, whose prevention was affordable, are happening to poor people.<sup>35</sup> How successful have these assumptions been? Easterly makes a powerful condemnation of the West: the West has spent \$2.3 trillion on foreign aid over the last five decades and has little more than its own goodwill to show for it.

Despite the best intentions, these assumptions, coupled with what Easterly terms the “something is being done” (SIBD) syndrome, often result in disastrous consequences for those “helped” by the West.<sup>36</sup> A classic example is the ways in which the West has addressed the problem of AIDS in Africa. Politicians from wealthy nations convince wealth voters that “something is (and must) be done” about AIDS in Africa, yet these efforts are undermined by the Western world’s politics, as religious groups’ opposed condom distribution in the very African nations they purport to help. It is a

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<sup>35</sup> William Easterly. The White Man's Burden Why the West's Efforts to Aid the Rest Have Done So Much Ill and So Little Good. New York: Penguin (Non-Classics), 2007, 241.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 254.

classic example of rich Western peoples' preferences trumping what is best for the poor in the Rest.<sup>37</sup>

Though it must be recognized that Easterly's critique of aid focuses on the pitfalls of large, institutionalized forms of foreign development and humanitarian aid given to non-Western nations, the logic of "help" parallels that which underpins programs like DukeEngage. Time and time again, the efforts of the West to aid in humanitarian and development efforts have resulted in failure – yet there is a consistent form of historical amnesia that seems to plague even the most modern, cutting edge aid efforts. Whether it is foreign aid awarded by the World Bank, humanitarian refugee camps set up by the United Nations, American Peace Corps volunteers in Indonesia, or college students interning at an AIDS clinic in Kenya, one thing is clear – help is *never* viewed as ethically problematic, and intervention is always assumed to be "good."

### **THE NEW HUMANITARIAN DILEMMA**

**"WISER [Women's Institute for Secondary Education] Week 2008 took place September 29 – October 3.**

**MONDAY:** The co-founders of WISER, Drs. Sherryl Broverman of Duke and Rose Odhiambo of Egerton University, spoke to students about the history and founding of WISER.

**TUESDAY:** The secondary annual liveWISER concert took place in Page Auditorium. Beginning with a welcome by WISER co-founder Dr. Rose Odhiambo and girls from Muhuru Bay, the show featured Duke student performance groups Something Borrowed, Something Blue; Speak of the Devil; the Duke Chinese Dance Troupe; Panda Force; Rhythm and Blue; Dance Slam; the

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<sup>37</sup> William Easterly. The White Man's Burden Why the West's Efforts to Aid the Rest Have Done So Much Ill and So Little Good. New York: Penguin (Non-Classics), 2007, 254.

Pitchforks; and DefMo. At the end of the show, WISER Duke members performed the WISER song.

**WEDNESDAY:** WISER Duke accepted donations for a Kenyan lunch on the Plaza catered by Palace International.

**THURSDAY:** Stephen Lewis, founder of AIDS Free World gave an inspirational talk titled, “The Burden of HIV/AIDS on Girls and Women in Africa.” Lewis spoke about how gender inequality around the world and particularly in Africa makes women and girls more vulnerable to poverty, HIV, and sexual violence.

Lewis’s message of striving to create equality for girls and women is deeply important to the heart of WISER. As Lewis said, “If you look at the entire number of kids in secondary school in Africa, only sixteen percent are girls. That’s why what WISER is doing is so remarkably admirable...They are attempting to create a girls boarding school which will protect young girls from all of the predatory sexual overtures and the susceptibility to HIV and the sense of isolation and...marginalization of the lives they lead.”

**FRIDAY:** With the help of Edens and Kilgo dormitories, WISER held a bake sale featuring WISER themed desserts. Later, Dr. Rose Odhiambo treated members of the Duke community to an intimate conversation about her life and the beginnings of WISER.”<sup>38</sup>



**Figure 3: New York Times graphic**  
 Source: <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/02/06/business/06red.html>

<sup>38</sup> “WISER Week – Fall 2008”, WISER Girls, 1 Feb 2009. <[http://wisergirls.org/duke/wiser\\_week/](http://wisergirls.org/duke/wiser_week/)>

On January 26, 2006, the (RED) campaign was launched at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland. The campaign purported to battle HIV/AIDS by connecting the Global Fund's efforts with the Western world's consumerism. Proceeds from Product (RED) items – Gap t-shirts, American Express purchases, iPods, Converse shoes – would save Africans dying of aids. Shopping, in a sense, would save the world.

The message was a provocative one that was usurped not only by everyday shoppers, but by the nation's elite as well. Celebrities like Bono and Oprah Winfrey eagerly bought up (RED) items, while others like Gwyneth Paltrow were featured prominently in full-page magazine spreads wearing an African-inspired necklace and face paint. The photo's message was printed in big block writing: "I AM AFRICAN. Help up stop the dying. Pay for lifesaving AIDS drugs that can keep a child, a mother, a father, a family alive. Visit [keepachildalive.org](http://keepachildalive.org) to help."<sup>39</sup>

The (RED) campaign utilized an intensive marketing strategy. The March 2007 issue of Advertising Age magazine reported that RED companies had collectively spent as much as \$100 million in advertising and raised \$18 million for the Global Fund. The campaign had taken the merger of marketing and philanthropy to new levels, emerging as one of the largest consumer-based income-generating initiatives by the private sector for an international humanitarian cause, but it simultaneously received marked criticism from activists and bloggers for its consumer oriented practices. The (RED) Campaign's co-founder Bobby Shriver, nephew of John F. Kennedy, claimed that the campaign was an extension of his own efforts to address problems in Africa. Bono and Mr. Shriver also

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<sup>39</sup> Alex de Waal, "The Humanitarian Carnival," *World Affairs*, Fall 2008, 47.

founded Debt AIDS Trade Africa (DATA), an organization that lobbies for debt relief as well as AIDS funds. Shriver wanted to take a different approach to raising funds for AIDS drugs: “I hate begging for money. In most cases when you go and ask for a corporate donation, they’ll cut you a check and that’s it. We wanted something that was more sustainable.”<sup>40</sup>

Whatever the successes or failures of the (RED) campaign, there is little doubt that a new breed of humanitarianism is emerging. Efforts like the (RED) campaign are reflective of a new cohort of “do gooders” whose desire to help emerges from a mix of forces: the age-old Western desire to “help”, the rise of philanthrocapitalism, the Millennial character, increasing global awareness, professionalism of the aid industry, and celebrity humanitarianism. When these forces coincide with the emergence of what Fiona Terry terms the “complex emergency,”<sup>41</sup> the results have the potential to be problematic – and potentially even life threatening. DukeEngage must be understood within this same framework, as it is indeed a program that is far more complex than the purported aim and mission advertised on its glossy brochures. A further examination of the nuances of the program will reveal these complicated details.

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<sup>40</sup> Ron Nixon, “Bottom Line for (RED),” The New York Times, 6 Feb. 2008. 1 Feb 2009.  
<[http://www.nytimes.com/2008/02/06/business/06red.html?\\_r=1&pagewanted=2](http://www.nytimes.com/2008/02/06/business/06red.html?_r=1&pagewanted=2)>

<sup>41</sup> Terry defines the “complex emergency” as the post-Cold War environment crises that are more complicated than that of the past, those filled with new dilemmas. As a result, the international response is more “complex,” and the proliferation in the number and type of actors in the field has exacerbated dilemmas inherent in the provision of humanitarian assistance. (*Condemned to Repeat*, 13)

## **THE RISE OF GLOBAL GIVING**

Holly Yeager, a former U.S. politics correspondent for the *Financial Times* explores the explosive growth and evolution of humanitarian organizations and global giving in “The New Face of Global Giving.” In it, she traces the growth of humanitarian and relief organizations from the post-World War II era to the radically simple online giving organizations of today. Yeager argues that the contemporary world of global giving is being dominated by private dollars, just as a host of fledgling organizations are defining their roles while a new Millennial generation is becoming convinced, rightly or wrongly, of its ability to affect the lives of others. In a sense, there is a critical mass of “humanitarians” developing throughout the globe. International philanthropy from 22 wealthy nations in the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development reached \$42 billion in 2006, and total private flows to the developing world reached \$332 billion, far exceeding the amount of official aid given by recipient nations (\$104 billion).<sup>42</sup>

The sheer dollar amounts do not adequately reveal the extent to which the humanitarian sector has been changing. Samuel Worthington, president and CEO of InterAction, a coalition of 165 U.S.-based relief and development NGOs working overseas, claims that the sector now has a “collective impact” that brings together the private humanitarian community new sway among governments, businesses, and

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<sup>42</sup> Holly Yeager, “The New Face of Global Giving,” *The Wilson Quarterly*, Summer 2008, 58.

multilateral organizations. “Fifteen years ago, that wouldn’t have happened,” Worthington said. “Now we’re at the table for that conversation.”<sup>43</sup>

In many ways, the aid industry is seen as increasingly “professionalized”: mere enthusiasm is not a sufficient enough qualification for would-be humanitarians. In particular, development work was once seen as being the domain of “good-hearted, globe-trotting, draft-dodging hippie types who enjoyed living and working in places where life was cheap”. Today, the aid sector is increasingly professionalized, filled with individuals with technical expertise and young professionals with graduate degrees from the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard.<sup>44</sup> This trend has particular implications when considering aid as an *industry*, one in which development concept generating universities, policy organizations in Washington, and on-site aid organizations have a particular interest in self-preservation. This relation becomes even more problematic when considering the paradox of giving – if an aid organization does well, it will receive more money. However, if an aid organization is performing poorly, it will also receive more money. Issues of accountability and effectiveness further complicate this paradox, as even the most ambitious of aid efforts often do not fundamentally address the root of the problem, nor are they often criticized for inefficiently addressing (or at times exacerbating) the crisis at home. There is simply no mistaking the fundamental contradictions and problematic elements of “aid” organizations.

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<sup>43</sup> Holly Yeager, “The New Face of Global Giving,” *The Wilson Quarterly*, Summer 2008, 58.

<sup>44</sup> Michael Maren. Road to Hell: The Ravaging Effects of Foreign Aid and International Charity. New York: Free P, 1997, 33.

## THE PHILANTHROCAPITALISTS SAVE THE WORLD

There is a quixotic new form of “aid” that has recently been attracting much attention. Matthew Bishop, the American Business Editor, and New York Bureau Chief for *The Economist* and co-author Michael Green have coined the term “philanthrocapitalism” to describe the new generation of billionaires who are reshaping the way they give. To them, giving is a business. Largely trained in the corporate world, these “social investors” are using big-business-style strategies and expecting results and accountability to match.<sup>45</sup> Bishop and Green cite Bill Gates as a premiere example of a modern “philanthrocapitalist,” as the Gates Foundation has already made remarkable strides in addressing the issue of global health in Africa.<sup>46</sup>

The Gates Foundation’s “philanthrocapitalist” model resonates deeply with Duke University, as the foundation pledged \$30 million to DukeEngage. The foundation’s generosity and investment into Duke University did not end with the civic engagement program, as in the past the foundation has also donated \$300 million for the development of the French Science Center, a life sciences building aptly named after the maiden name of Bill Gates’ wife, Melinda French Gates. Perhaps it is also fitting that Duke University itself was established by the generous endowment of the North Carolina tobacco tycoon James B. Duke. Even in its earliest days, Duke University emerged as an institution founded on the dollars and goodwill of America’s elite

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<sup>45</sup> <http://www.philanthrocapitalism.net/?Synopsis>

<sup>46</sup> In a recent talk for the annual TED conference, Bill Gates released a handful of mosquitoes into the audience when presenting his work on malaria prevention in Africa. He shocked the audience with his demonstration, which he performed nonchalantly while claiming, “Why should only poor people have to deal with malaria?” I recount this incident as a great example of the ways in which philanthrocapitalists like Gates are attempting to “bring it back home.”

businessmen. This reality, and DukeEngage's strong ties to philanthrocapitalist roots are not lost on Duke students like Scott Poppel:

"Historically, some of the greatest impact has come from foundations, like the CEO of Nike has very strong economic influence, [he] has capitalist power, and turns it into social impact later. I mean I have huge frustrations with that as the way they go about making their money is not always socially sound, but it's hard for me to say that it's a flawed perspective, as those [capitalists] are the people who end up having so much social impact in the world. Like the Gates Foundation is how we got to go on the program in the first place but how did he make his money? So I struggle to be upset about that, and I hope that by blending the experiences there can be some future where people think about social impact while they go about making their millions? Or somehow can combine the components? And maybe that's the role Duke can play, in figuring out how to unite the experience and step outside how to look at it just as a resume builder. I don't know, if it's a student who is a student who would've just worked at Goldman Sachs than Goldman Sachs, then DukeEngage, then the situation is better...The problem is that NGOs is that they are managed by people who have never worked within the private sector, all managed by people who only worked in public sector, so as soon as they try to create change, they get completely stymied by the forces that run the world today, so having a realistic perspective about how to interact with the capitalist world can be extremely important later on in having an impact."

These choices are further complicated by financial restraints, not only in the individual financial burdens that Duke students bear, but also in their potential for greater social impact. For those like Mark Kurzrok, money can become a means to a great end:

"My organization was started by a guy who did [investment] banking for 10 years, until he was 31, then did the Peace Corps then launched into starting the organization. I think that is ideal to be honest, because, at the base of it, you need money to have change, you need money in order to fund any sort of project, so being able to have a financial cushion before going into the service field is I think a positive. I mean, you can't, it's unfair to have, well not unfair, but a lot of people will be turned off from going directly into service because they see going into service right away as being sort of a martyr? A lot of jobs in the NGO sector not well paying at all, but what can happen is that people can spend their lives doing that and not being to do much because they don't have the funds to enact the organizations goals. Whereas if you have the financing beforehand, it can be a means to an end. I think."

The influence of the dollar is not limited to the pocketbooks of the aid providers. Even the rhetoric used by the DukeEngage program borrows upon the tenets and philosophies of the business world. A conversation I had with one of the Assistant Directors of DukeEngage revealed the ways in the business model remains deeply embedded in the program:

“We need to focus on the issue of sustainability for the communities . . . so we are going to get together a ‘Best Practices Panel’ of the faculty and site coordinators that we thought were the most successful from the inaugural summer . . . so that the new faculty members can learn from their mistakes.”

Other key “buzz” words like sustainability and accountability are omnipresent throughout the internal and external discussions about the DukeEngage program. The program’s “philanthrocapitalist” roots reveal themselves to be vibrant and thriving.

The quixotic relationship that the corporate world has with DukeEngage and Duke University is also not lost on Duke students. DukeEngage cannot be seen as simply a civic engagement program or as a resume building, career-boosting program – the motives beyond the students who participate in it are far more complex. Several issues are a hand. For one, there are very real financial hardships that prevent students from pursuing DukeEngage (despite the relief it offers to the summer earnings component of financial aid packages) and other related civic engagement or non-profit opportunities. Additionally, there is the very real belief at Duke that certain “business world skills” are necessary in order for “do gooders” to truly make a difference in the world. Hence, many students comment that there is a sentiment that “selling out” in the corporate world for a few years is essential in developing a more successful career in the non-

profit world further down the line. Furthermore, there is also the remaining difficulty of marketing the newly minted DukeEngage program for future internships and jobs, as there is a sense that a certain level of “legitimacy” is still lacking from this summer of civic engagement. Michael Blake, a junior DukeEngage alumnus currently in the process of searching for summer internships responded:

“I feel like a lot of Duke students want to do something, but don’t know how to do it. Like with jobs, a lot of people just apply to companies that come to recruit here and then decide that even if it’s not what they want to do, they’ll do it for two years and then do what they really want to do . . . and then there’s this issue of loans, even if you want to do this non-profit type work, you are handcuffed by them, and have to spend your time figuring out how to pay for this amazing education you just had.”

Other students echoed the experiences they had with potential employers themselves.

Chrissy Booth, also a junior DukeEngage alumnus responded in turn:

“I remember going to the Bain [a management consulting firm] info session and them showing this graph about what Bainies do after two years, and like a lot of them went to Harvard and Stanford Business Schools yea, but the next category was people going into the non-profit world. I think people [at Duke] really feel like you need those business skills to better understand the non-profit world after [going corporate].”

These realities are not lost to Duke University. The Duke Career Center recently offered a workshop entitled, “How to Talk About Your DukeEngage Experience to Employers”.

Other students also mentioned the difficulty of explaining and justifying their DukeEngage experiences to their parents. When examining the multitudes of ways DukeEngage becomes articulated and rearticulated through various lenses, as a new trend in “philanthrocapitalism” and global giving or as a new trend in Millennial civic engagement, there is one thing for certain – at its core, these issues are all centered

around the idea of privilege. The privilege of money, time, connections, and the power to participate in a project like DukeEngage is revealing, and sheds much needed light not only on the institutional history of the program, but into the actual day to day experiences of the students as well.

## CHAPTER FOUR: THE PROBLEM OF “SAVING THE WORLD”

*“The road to hell is paved with good intentions.”*

– Samuel Johnson

**Danny Archer:** So you think because your intentions are good, they'll spare you, huh?

**Benjamin Kapanay:** My heart always told me that people are inherently good. My experience suggests otherwise. But what about you, Mr. Archer? In your long career as a journalist, would you say that people are mostly good?

**Danny Archer:** No. I'd say they're just people.

**Benjamin Kapanay:** Exactly. It is what they do that makes them good or bad. A moment of love, even in a bad man, can give meaning to a life. None of us knows whose path will lead us to God.

*“To hell with good intentions. This is a theological statement. You will not help anybody by your good intentions.”*

–Ivan Illich

*“Is it just possible,” he sighed, “that the most vigorous and boldest idealists have been the worst enemies of human progress instead of its greatest creators? Possible that plain men with the humble trait of minding their own business will rank higher in the heavenly hierarchy than all the plumed souls who have shoved their way in among the masses and insisted on saving them?”*

– Sinclair Lewis, *It Can't Happen Here*

The individual experiences of the 360 students that participated in the inaugural DukeEngage program cannot be generalized. Their experiences were defined by a multitude of factors – their own preparedness for the program, the type of program, the location, the program director, the site coordinator, and the partner organization. But while there is no one right answer to this question, there is one thing for certain – the Duke students who participated in the DukeEngage program had the best of intentions.

They sought the program with the hope of “making a difference” in a community and learning about a new culture along the way.

But while DukeEngage participants may have embarked upon their journeys with the best of intentions, were the realities of their interactions with community organizations and project sites able to actualize their goodwill into action? DukeEngage in many ways does not fit the mold of the traditional “aid” organization – it is neither a philanthropy, student abroad program, humanitarian group or development organization – it is a hybrid of all four. Thus, by its very nature, this new brand of international student civic engagement projects does not subscribe to many of the established critiques of humanitarian and development aid, and simultaneously presents many unanswered questions of its unforeseen dangers. What are the dangers in having good intentions? And more importantly, what were the actual experiences of these students in their respective DukeEngage projects?

### **LOCATION, LOCATION**

As previously mentioned, the location of the individual DukeEngage projects have not only been a point of controversy for the program, but also plays a huge role in dictating individual student experiences for a variety of reasons.

For one, it is important to examine the issue of location (particularly in an international context) to not only to better understand how Duke students chose their programs, but to also better understand the connection between the communities and their own backgrounds, the issues of safety, and the day-to-day experiences of students

during their trips. I have previously mentioned the “exotic” cache that international programs hold with students, but for some others, the choice of programs abroad are a matter of need. Shikha Kapil, a junior working towards her Global Health certificate explained why international projects appealed more to her:

**KC:** Why international instead of domestic? Do you think that things are worse abroad?

**SK:** Absolutely. I understand that there are people in the United States who have it bad here, but anyone who is poor in the U.S. is totally different than people in developing countries like Haiti, and Africa, and India. People live in subhuman conditions. If you’re poor in the U.S., you have government programs that will help you, you have welfare, you have shelters, you have places to go. In developing countries there is no infrastructure for that.

Shikha valued the possibility of making the largest impact possible when choosing her international project – she viewed international communities as simply in more need than domestic communities.

The issue of location not only has deep implications for the kind of work that students will partake in, but also plays a huge role in determining student safety. The issue of safety is a critical one that quickly emerges to the forefront for many students.

Michael Blake commented on his parents’ reactions to his choice of location:

“When I first told my parents they were a bit weary, they suggested other places...they were like, ‘Why don’t you go to Europe instead?’ implying that South Africa was a dangerous place... and yes, the danger was very real. When I was working at my site there was a death threat. But the experience in general seemed like a real investment for the future.”

Other students seem to be unfazed by the possibility of violence and instability in their respective sites. Sue Mather<sup>47</sup>, another senior who participated in a DukeEngage program in Capetown commented:

“There was a lot of violence, especially with the policemen and the ‘coloreds’ - very racist. A man was shot in the street right front of our hostel, the security guards ran up our stairs after the shots rang out to check on us, we were fine. There really was no response on the part of Duke on the shooting and on safety issues. That kind of stuff happens everywhere.”

The issue of safety manifests itself in more insidious and subtle ways as well. The problem of safety was magnified for the female Duke students on the program, as they faced the additional threat of sexual harassment. Shikha commented on her experiences identifying as an Indian women in New Delhi:

“It was the most dangerous environment that I had ever been in, really. But I was very safe because the directors of the NGO were very careful. But there was a lot of potential for me to be sexually harassed. There were actually times were I was but I didn’t realize it because of the cultural differences. Again, gender was an issue. Especially because I spoke the language, the men, when I was translating for them, would connect with me, joke around with me inappropriately, and I didn’t understand because there was a cultural difference, like when a guy stands by you there you don’t think about anything or it as anything inappropriate.”

It remains to be seen if Duke as an institution will take additional measures to address the potential for harm to its students, particularly as the DukeEngage program continues to grow.

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<sup>47</sup> Pseudonym used to protect the individual’s request for privacy.

## **GET READY, GET SET**

*“American students who travel abroad cannot be expected to transcend historical, political, social, and global systems of power in order to become cross-culturally immersed ‘global citizens.’ We can, however, be asked to become internally conscious and self-aware American citizens who are responsible for thinking about those critical issues.”*

*-Talya Zemach-Bersin*

Almost every Duke student I interviewed mentioned pre-trip training as a critical issue for the DukeEngage program. The official DukeEngage training for participating students included a set of workshops on issues ranging from ethics to cross-culture sensitivity, and each program site had its own requirements (such as readings or meetings) in addition to the mandatory workshops. But how does one prepare for a trip of this caliber? Is it even possible to train oneself for the emotional and physical challenges presented by such a program?

Scholars such as Ivan Illich have been deeply critical of the potential of the American volunteer’s goodwill:

*“I do have deep faith in the enormous goodwill of the U.S. volunteer. However, his good faith can usually be explained only by an abysmal lack of intuitive delicacy. By definition, you cannot help being ultimately vacationing salesman for the middle-class ‘American Way of Life,’ since that is really the only life you know. The idea that every American has something to give, and at all times may, can and should give it, explains why it occurred to students that they could help Mexican peasants ‘develop’ by spending a few months in their villages.”*

In the eyes of those like Illich, there is simply no potential for “good” that can come from idealistic college students participating in projects abroad. In fact, these efforts often have the potential to cause more harm than good:

*“Next to money and guns, the third largest North American export is the U.S. idealist, who turns up in every theater of the world: the teacher, the volunteer,*

the missionary, the community organizer, the economic developer, and the vacationing do-gooders. Ideally, these people define their role as service. Actually, they frequently wind up alleviating the damage done by money and weapons, or 'seducing' the 'underdeveloped' to the benefits of the world of affluence and achievement...There is no way for you to really meet with the underprivileged, since there is no common ground whatsoever for you to meet on. The damage which volunteers do willy-nilly is too high a price for the belated insight that they shouldn't have been volunteers in the first place...I am here to challenge you to recognize your inability, your powerlessness and your incapacity to do the 'good' which you intend to do."<sup>48</sup>

Illich's harsh admonishment was addressed to a group of young American students who were about to embark on a trip to aid with development efforts in a rural Mexican village. It has emerged as the classic critique of "good intentions," and I even found copies of his famous speech in the reading packets of several DukeEngage programs.

While Illich's harsh rebuke can be seen as a most radical declaration against the efforts of programs like DukeEngage, there are nuggets of truth and wisdom embedded in his words that are further illuminated by the frustrations of Duke students with the training and preparation they received for their experience. Chrissy Booth, a junior who participated in the DukeEngage in Turkey program commented:

"I didn't even know Turkish when I went to Turkey, so I took it upon myself to go out and get books and tapes to try and learn. It was definitely tough, and I guess they wanted that struggle to be part of the 'cultural immersion' process but there definitely needs to be more preparation."

This lack of training was not limited to the Turkey program. Gillet Rosenblith and Michael Blake, both in the South Africa program, responded in kind:

**MB:** Ha, training?! We were told that there were no good books on South African history, which is simply not true...

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<sup>48</sup> Ivan Illich, "To Hell with Good Intentions," 20 Apr. 1968. 6.1 Oct 2008.  
<[http://www.swaraj.org/illich\\_hell.htm](http://www.swaraj.org/illich_hell.htm)>

**GR:** It was terrible, we had no preparation. And it wasn't even knowing about South African history but just about understanding the contemporary situation there as well, which I don't even think our faculty advisors really knew."

These concerns about the lack of adequate training have resulted in a change for the next summer of programs. DukeEngage has crafted the new DukeEngage Academy, an immersive retreat to be held during the coveted Beach Week to better address the concerns and needs of students for better training. It will be comprised of a series of full workshops on various issues – ethics, safety, cultural exchange – and also utilize the wisdom and manpower of DukeEngage alumni. Only time will tell if these efforts to ramp up training will prove adequate, but the sheer change in the training curriculum indicates that the program staff are responsive and highly aware of DukeEngage's deficiencies.

In addition to the frustrations related to the lack of training, Duke students also endured moments of miscommunication and embarrassment due to their perception in the eyes of the community members as "wealthy American college students." Rachel Revelle and Katie Noto reflected on the misunderstandings they encountered during their project in Dublin:

**RR:** "Oh, and when we were in Dublin, the people we worked with were simply amazed that a group of college kids would want to come to Dublin and do this kind of work. They just didn't understand why we would want to be there."

**KN:** "I also think that those trends in study abroad [its exponential increase] point to a different issue about how there is a value in being put into a position of learning rather than helping. I remember when I was in Dublin people thought we were presumptuous when we said that we were there to help. They were like, "What, don't you have enough problems of your own in the U.S.?" That to be was very embarrassing, and after a while I would just say that I was a student."

Other students added to the collection of stories. Amanda Tong, a senior who participated in the DukeEngage in Peru program recalled:

“I remember having an interaction with the Mayor’s wife who didn’t understand why we were picking up trash because in Peru they just burn trash and she was like, “What the hell are you doing, you need to burn trash.” They think it’s cleaner, more efficient, whatever. Then there was the fact that we were doing manual labor besides men who did this [type of work] for a living, and while I’m sure that they really appreciate the help, I remembered thinking, ‘What the fuck am I doing here?!’ We were a bunch of American students, white college girls for that matter, and the people must’ve found the whole situation very humorous.

Chrissy Booth added,

“Yeah, I remember explaining it to people at my orphanage in Turkey, and they just didn’t understand really why we were there. At one point one woman was like, “I’d love to get a grant to go to America for the summer.”

Particularly when considering areas that have had a significant presence of Western intervention - in the form of missionaries, teachers, developers and students - the new role of “do gooder” in the form of the idealist college student on a civic engagement project must seem quizzical to the local community members. Who are these young idealists and what are they all about?

But perhaps the best way to better understand the day-to-day experiences of Duke students who participated in the program is to hear it from the students themselves. I will share with you my interviews with four Duke students – Michael Blake, Scott Peppel, Mark Kurzrok, and Shikha Kapil – as a means to better illuminate the successes, failures, frustrations and insight accrued from their experiences in the summer of 2008.

## **MICHAEL BLAKE, DUKE ENGAGE DEMOSC IN SOUTH AFRICA**

Michael Blake is a junior, History major from Buffalo, New York. He grew up in a staunch Catholic family where Sunday church services were the rule, not the exception:

“The first time I didn’t go to church was in South Africa, that was an interesting experience. But so yea, I definitely that like, yea, Duke is the first non-Catholic school that I have gone to. So I definitely think [the value of “help”] has been instilled in me through my religion, like that’s what you do, you help others. Um, but I also think that there is a moral side from just, uh, hard to separate my morality from religion, but I do think that there is a feeling that if you have gifts and talents you should share them, it’s not fair social justice wise that some people don’t even have basic human needs, and then you live in luxury, what can you do. You should be doing everything in your power to help them.”

Thus, Michael Blake’s personal background seemed to jive coherently with the mission of the DukeEngage program.

“So I guess I heard about it my freshmen year, so February freshmen year, and I knew immediately it was something I wanted to do. I guess on the shell aspect, it sounded like a cool experience and it was free so obviously it was a wonderful opportunity that you were already paying for so you might as well take advantaged of it. Although on another level I have always been pretty active and service work so I thought the experiences I would have traveling to another country during service work for a long time I could have an impact, learn a lot about the culture, and my own talents and more about myself.”

Within DukeEngage, South Africa naturally emerged as his site of choice.

### **KC: Why South Africa?**

**MB:** That’s a good question. To be honest, I knew as much as the average person knew about S. Africa, I don’t know why but I have a memory of a sixth grade social science book reading about South Africa and reading about apartheid and seeing like a picture of an escalator, and seeing a whites only escalator and a blacks escalator, and that’s all. I knew very very little but I guess I saw my opportunity because it was sponsored by the History program about social change, and I guess at the time, those were my two majors and there was an intersection there. I guess I also thought I have always been interested in social movements, I took a class my freshmen year on it and we did a really interesting project on it, my project focused on the temperance movement in the U.S., and I thought it would be interesting to see it within another culture.

**KC: [Tell me about the program.]**

**MB:** We were in two cities, first four weeks in Pietermaritzburg and then the next four in Capetown. In Pietermaritzburg I was working for an organization called PACSA, and it was an anti-apartheid organization that was founded by a white South African that wanted to spread awareness among the white churchgoing population, particularly about AIDS awareness because at the time, people just didn't know what was going on. Also deals with issues of economic justice and gender issues. So I was placed on the AIDS and gender desk, so I went to various workshops for training church leaders in various areas around Pietermaritzburg. I also helped work on the website.

**KC: So besides that website project, did you feel that you were well qualified and competent in terms of some of the skills necessary to complete the projects that they were asking for?**

**MB:** That's an interesting question. I mean, the HIV training, I prepared, like I had all the knowledge, the ABC method, the history of AIDS in S. Africa, I took AIDS in Emerging diseases, I had that knowledge, AIDS as a virus, spread by STDs, etc. I think I could not prepare for the emotional aspect of being there, meeting people whose aunts, uncles, friends, who were suffering from the virus. The other thing that we dealt with, was at the time, our very first day in the townships, where most of the black South African population lives, erupted violence, with black South Africans attacking African immigrants to S. Africa, there was huge 30% unemployment, so they were attacking them because they felt like they were stealing their jobs. So [we ended up going] to different functions that PACSA held, training groups, kind of observing the meeting with the director, and a meeting with all the church leaders in the province, and it was essentially trying to ask, how can we reach out to African immigrants in that area who feared they might be attack so they wouldn't leave home to get food, etc. So we just kind of sat there, listened to everyone speaking, a macroplanning meeting and then a few days later there was a smaller group who met to figure out who was going to do what, and then afterwards, the director was like, come up with a brochure and if anyone has supplies, you will coordinate how they will be dropped off. And I was kind of like, uh, how am I going to do this? But Alyssa [another student] was like, why are you so down? And I was like, I wouldn't know how to do this at Duke, let alone what are we going to do? I think there was a lot of, it speaks to the fact that, there was some miscommunication between, well there wasn't a general framework of "this is our four week internship," and sometimes it was more shadowing, in the beginning than actual engagement. I guess that's not true, it was engagement but we weren't actually doing anything, I guess our presence being there at those training sessions, there is no tangible aspect but I think a reaffirmation that someone in the US cares.

**KC: [After talking further, M. Blake mentions that many people leave, and that outsiders should return.] When you say outsiders, do you mean foreigners or do you think it should be S. Africans who return?**

**MB:** I think foreigners. Like when I was in Pietermaritzburg. We met a woman who was an attorney from the US and came and fell in love, she met her husband here. It's a very diverse country, and the fact that they are used to living with us [white people], I don't see that as a huge barrier. I think another thing that is really hard about it, hampering democracy, is that they are not used to democracy. For like 90% of the population they don't really know what to do, and I think it's new to Southern Africa as a whole, as lots of democracies there are rather unstable, look at like what's happening in Zimbabwe, so there is definitely a learning curve for them. "What is a political culture?" "What is the role in a democratic society?" and also kind of creating an African democracy, because I think that there is a tendency to want to import, but how do you develop ideals that conform with African culture but still allow for a democratic process in government, etc.

**KC: Well, this idea of uh, you know, I'm sure you know your Africa history, but due to the processes of colonialism and imperialism, a lot of these places weren't even able to develop, and a lot of the instability can be traced back to Western influences...**

**MB:** It's amazing to see what your ancestors have done.

Michael's experience touched upon a lot of the same issues that Duke students faced on their respective programs: the lack of a defined role, undefined outcomes for their projects, and some frustration with the partner organization itself. Michael's experiences in particular were interesting because his site was one deeply rooted to his academic and personal interests. Overall, Michael was pleased with his DukeEngage experience. He is planning on working in South Africa again this summer, this time under a research grant.

### **MARK KURZROK, DUKEENGAGE IN GUATEMALA**

Mark Kurzrok is a junior, History major (on a Pre-Medicine track) from Bethesda, Maryland. He attended the Sidwell Friends School, an elite, PK-12 Quaker private school

attended by many Washington elite (including the current President's two daughters).

Mark elaborated on the ways in which his high school experience sparked his interest in civic engagement and service:

"I went to a Quaker school that incorporated service into academics, and there was a weekly, monthly requirement. I got used to it and came to see value in making service part of my life."

Thus, in a sense, DukeEngage was a natural extension of his high school experiences as well as his personal interests in Latin America:

"I did DukeEngage because it's a sweet deal. I mean, I love to travel, I love Spanish, and it was really a big draw to be able to do service at the same time. It made it something I couldn't resist doing. I had a little bit of experience in Latin America from vacations and a little bit from service as well. I knew that I really liked what I had seen from Central America so it was really interesting going back there, and I didn't know anything about microfinance and learned a bit about it since coming to college and thought it was a really interesting concept that I didn't know that much about. I wanted to see the economic side of things, of 'aid', whereas I'd assumed I'd be going into the 'health' side of things. DukeEngage in Guatemala integrated everything."

Mark's experience in Guatemala touched upon a variety of issues and proved to be an incredible learning opportunity:

**KC: Do you feel like you actually made a difference when you were there? What kind of work were you doing in your site?**

**MK:** I think it's hard. I don't think it's possible to have a huge amount of impact in such a short amount of time. I think it has to do a lot with building relationships and building a community. Especially when you're abroad, living in a place that doesn't speak English, it takes so long to integrate into a community, get your bearings, get comfortable. You already leave by the time you start to get comfortable. I think it's about planting a personal vested interest in service work and people and making it a focus in their lives. I think it varies from project to project whether students actually make an impact. I know for myself, the Soluciones Colantarias organization, most of the year it is a very small organization, 5 or 6 employees total, in the summer they bring in manpower, the students that come in and enact what they plan all year. In terms of change we can see, I did believe in what the organization had planned in their model for growth and so basically we were kind of the grassroots for them in building

networks and strengthening community connections, to better be able to enact change in future years.

**KC: Did your experience change your views on civic engagement?**

**MK:** My perspective changed a lot, because of way my organization approached service and how they serve their community. I haven't given a lot of thought to aid, I assumed that all aid is good aid. But from going down and hearing people that really knew the community talk about how they approached it, I don't think that's the case. The ideal behind my organization is to help people help themselves, and drive themselves to a position to be able to enact change. And a big part of that is trying not to be the imperialist American force that tells people how to do things. It's more training people and giving people the skills to do things for themselves, and I think that's important. A lot of efficiencies come about from traditional aid and I feel like it's very American to go into a community and assume they know everything about the community and the best way to do things, which very may be true where they are from, but the cultural barriers are huge, and can present a lot of difficulties, 'lost in translation', or just lost in the way people do things. So I think that service is give and take, it has to be a conversation between both sides, it can't be the aid organization coming in and imposing a point of view and imposing a way of doing things. I'm not sure that that can work.

**KC: What were your experiences with the project? How about the other Duke students who went on the project with you? Did you have time to think about these issues?**

**MK:** I think we did not have as rigid a program, and so the goal was impact in the community, a big goal, but at the same time, people who started the project were ex-Peace Corps members so they saw the value in self-reflection and cultural learning process. So they integrated, they kept things loose so that we could go at the pace we wanted, not to say we were slacking off but we didn't think about the project to go rafting for three days for example, just to see the cultural aspects of the country and come back and be refreshed to do the work. I mean, some people just didn't believe in the project or the goals of the organization and their way of doing things so there was some conflict there. And as I said, a lot of time we didn't know exactly what we were doing, if we weren't implementing the model, a lot of what we were doing was expanding networks of this organization and strengthening ties from NGO to NGO in order to increase the possibility of working together and pooling resources as a way to make larger forces of change basically. But in doing so, we didn't feel like we were impacting the community so we really had to take a leap of faith into the organization itself and a lot of people had trouble trusting it, because it really took a 110% faith in the organization with the work we had done this summer in order to feel like we were doing totally worthwhile.

**KC: Did you ever think of the potential of intervention to do harm?**

**MK:** Well one thing I think creating dependency, in terms of like donations is a problem. My program trains rural women to become entrepreneurs and sell various products in their home communities, products that address health needs like water filters, reading glasses, and so on. Something they have to battle is donations. Reading glasses donations for an outsider sounds perfect, and it is, there's two sides of it. Yes, it provides access but you drive organizations like this out of business. Scratch that, it doesn't make sense at all. No, I do think that there is more harm than good. Here's where donations go wrong. This organization also sells wood burning stoves and provides servicing for it. So they'll come build you a stove, and then it breaks, and the people that donate them have left, and they were not there to keep it up and so they have a piece of junk in their homes, for rest of life. So that provided a year of service but for the house they have something they don't want. I'm not sure about their extent of that evil, but there definitely is a deficiency in the aid model.

Mark talked frankly about the challenges he encountered during his time in Guatemala.

His answers paint a revealing portrait about both the possibilities – and limits – of DukeEngage.

**SCOTT PEPPER, DUKEENGAGE IN BANGLADESH**

Scott Pepper is a junior, International Comparative Studies major from Minnetonka, Minnesota. He has always been interested in international service or social programming, and previously spent a summer in the Duke Study Abroad Program in Ghana. His academic and personal interests in international affairs made the DukeEngage program a natural fit in many ways:

“I wanted to work in international service...but I've gotten really frustrated with the current models that are used in terms of development, so I am looking and still am looking for ways to cornerstone the social sector and the for-profit sector, to find some ways to innovatively unite those and create actual progress. I think they all have their flaws. I went to the program in Bangladesh [for this reason]. It was a microfinance program working with BRAC, the largest NGO in the world. I was really excited about who we were working with, as they have

been having such big impact through the south to south model...it's going into other countries now. Also, it was also the home of microfinance so for me, I was excited by the potential that working with BRAC would help me to better understand what I wanted to do long term. I think DukeEngage offered me the opportunity to at least appear to have an impact on their organization and program as well, I felt like we could do some real service abroad, because so many opportunities are like go teach English, go dig a hole, and I felt like I could actually be part of that organization and have some real impact. I've never been to Asia before, and Bangladesh seemed to me like an incredible place to go and understand and learn about microfinance and social development."

For Scott, and many others like him, teaching English and digging a hole – arguably more “traditional” volunteer roles – simply were not enough. He wanted to do more, to stretch the possibilities of his personal impact on the organization. DukeEngage seemed to provide that opportunity.

**KC: Did you feel like you had an impact when you were there?**

**SP:** I felt like we had an impact. How ours worked was that we were going around and collecting interviews and collecting videos and also doing research on specific program areas, so that as BRAC was expanding into other areas like Uganda and Afghanistan, they were able to finance those programs, because it's a huge NGO and its all within Bangladesh, and to fund that they needed an U.S. arm, and for that they needed advertising, and website with information about the different programs. So we left with a product and I know they really tried to put it in a sense of like this is how much money we had, how much programs we had, and so on, and make us feel like we had a long term impact. But in the end, I felt like there was poor communication between our organization, well parts of our organization, and also to Duke. So Duke team leaders. So between those three I feel like a lot of communication lost, so as result it was hard to have as much impact as we ideally would have had. At same time, we left and the people there at the program were extremely appreciative of us having come and having done what we did, but we also paid the people to be there, to meet the people and spend time, so I don't know if it was an interest in us bringing in revenue too. I struggle some, I think DukeEngage, at least in my experience, is centered more around personal interest than overall service and impact. I think it's one of those things where it sparks more interest in people for service in future. Like Teach For America, not everyone becomes a teacher but a lot of people become involved in education policy. In DukeEngage, not everyone stays involved in service but they get that interest sparked.

**KC: What are your thoughts on DukeEngage?**

**SP:** I wish as a program, that there...I think one of the biggest flaws of DE and at the same time its greatest benefits is that its so available to so many people, and I know it's changing a bit this year. I think in terms of preparation, our preparation was not adequate in my opinion. We didn't have to do extensive research on Bangladesh or our program, and it gives access to so many people. Like grants, a lot more people have to do work for grants and independent research on what their program is about. So it's a flaw that so many people get to go that don't know what they were doing, and I had tried to do some independent reading and things like that and I still felt very unjustified in getting this kind of a grant and getting to go on this program. And at the same time, I think it's great because you get exposure to so many more different kinds of people, and by broadening that exposure, I mean that's incredible, to send many people from this university abroad and have these experiences, and so to have some people not get everything out of it doesn't justify other people not going. Um, so my experience with myself and other students while I was there was that I definitely didn't think that we had enough time to reflect. Our program was rigid, we had full days in the office early in the morning to late at night, so people had hard times journaling, hard time reflecting and spending time talking to other students about it. We get to the end of the day and sometimes we really just want to relax, because we really did work like interns. On one hand it was good, because we did have a final project with impact, so if our only goal was to focus on our impact, it was good, but if our greater goal was to have more reflection and personal impact we missed it, because we missed out on what we could've heard and taken back from the experience through more personal reflection, and I think that was felt across the board. We had a member in our group who was ready to go home pretty quickly but completely turned his or her focus to the project and not what he or she could learn, and I think that the lack of personal preparation reflecting during the process changes the focus of the program to social impact, and if we're not having that social impact, I think there needs to be selection to what is the main goal and how we can achieve it.

**KC: What about the potential of intervention to cause harm?**

**SP:** I think a threat can be unrealistic expectations. You go into a community and people see, and I think people come into a community and forget the impact they have. So in Bangladesh, there was this tall guy and people were just following him, at one point there were 100 people following him, and when he would raise his hands all these people would copy him. Hundreds of people were taking photos of our using iPods or whatever and projecting as an ideal. The thought that the impact we could have is unbelievable for better or for worse. Unrealistic expectations are scary...just going in and a program shows up and says we're going to give you everything that you need, and then of course, projecting the needs that they have and not following through with it. I think what it does is it jades the community and changes what their values are in terms of what they think they need, and also deconstruct their happiness. I think

of the movie *The Gods Must Be Crazy* and I don't know if you have seen it or not, but a coke bottle is thrown out of a plane and as soon as it gets to an African community it creates huge conflict, as there is conflict over its use for good. That same conflict can go about when we go into a community and we help treat 6 people with TB and the other people are like why aren't we being treated. Um, justifiably so. How do you choose the random people who get help? I think there can be a lot of negative impact that occurs and especially in the case where you don't think about that before, or don't know exactly what you are doing, and I think that is one of the biggest threats of DukeEngage, we don't have training, and I went into Bangladesh like others not knowing the language."

### **SHIKHA KAPIL, DUKEENGAGE IN NEW DELHI**

Shikha Kapil is an Indian American junior from Alpharetta, Georgia. Her strong personal ties to India have always informed not only her coursework, but her personal motivations to "help" as well:

"I'm Indian so I have strong ties to India. I just didn't understand why as a kid there were kids my age banging on my window begging for money, it was just a different world. I just didn't get why they didn't have food, clothes, and so on. My dad works internationally a lot, he's a physician for the CDC, so he travels a lot. He has since shifted to a more policy focus, so seeing that it was basically what I wanted to do since I was little. It was always very hard for me to see this on my trips to India. This time was hard when I would see these women who needed medical help and I knew that I could get help for them but for legal, ethical, and sustainability reasons, I can't continue that standard of care. But it's just so frustrating. You gotta do what you can. What's that quote? Those born to privilege are born to specific obligations? Have you ever heard that?"

Much of Shikha's motivations were deeply informed by her personal identification as an Indian American woman and by these childhood memories. Her experience with DukeEngage was also different in that it was rooted in her academic coursework for a semester prior to actually stepping foot in New Delhi:

**SK:** I was doing an independent study the semester before and I worked with NGO called Sahara House in New Delhi in India. This NGO works with injecting drug users, because that creates a host of other problems, they deal with a lot of things – infectious disease, AIDS, tuberculosis, abandoned children, mothers,

abuse from husbands, needle exchange programs, just a myriad of problems. So our goal was to go in; there is a pretty large transgender population called the *hidras* and they are mostly involved with sex work, also worked a lot with issues related to injecting drug use allowing with sex work, so our goal was to go in with a microfinance program so they wouldn't have to rely on their sex work as a way of income, livelihood, etc. So we did a semester of planning for this, had a really good plan going in...

Despite the planning, Shikha soon learned that even the best-laid plans go awry.

**KC: Who was we?**

**SK:** So there were about 10 of us doing independent study in public policy, then another 10 that were accepted just through DukeEngage, so they were not at all prepared for this, they were just thrown in, and that was a problem, they were just not prepared, and huge divide from people who had done independent study and those who didn't, a lot of them were not Indian, they had never been to India before, they were just totally overwhelmed. So the independent study went in, and the transgender group not at all conducive to microfinance program...

**KC: What do you mean not conducive to?**

**SK:** First of all, they are not all that unhappy with sex work, because they are men, they are gay men, so they do participate in riskier behavior as lots of gay men do, so as it is their risk is already higher; it just wasn't; our program wasn't fit for the population. We just didn't know enough about our population. That is partly our fault, partly fault of our TA's, who kept pushing us to work with the transgenders, it was not a good idea. So we found that out within a week; so had to shift our focus, you know on the ground you gotta think on your feet.

**KC: So how long did it take for you guys to figure that out?**

**SK:** So I took a team of like three people and we started working in the women's center. We worked there because most of those women were injecting drug users, not so much involved in the sexual aspect of things, so the program worked a lot better there. And they wanted more to get out of their situation whereas the *hidras* weren't necessarily unhappy with their situation. They had sort of accepted their lives. The microfinance program with the women was very successful, they worked really well.

**KC: What do you mean successful?**

**SK:** Well, they have a very structured day, they have prayer, they have activity time. So what we did was used their activity time to produce things that we thought they could sell; we kind of guided their production so it was marketable. So we took their products, I had some grant funding, we donated their supplies,

they made all their stuff, and then we bought it from there, and then we took it back to Duke and we sold it for them, and the proceeds are going back to them. So obviously it's not sustainable right now, but will be in future, it will be a pretty working way for them to create some kind of income for themselves. It's unique because it deals with drug users instead of just impoverished communities.

**KC: Why did you choose to be in this program?**

**SK:** I heard about this program through some upperclassmen; they said it was a really unique experience, I wanted to do work in India and do something with global health, thought it was good opportunity, wanted to do some real fieldwork.

**KC: So did you feel like your program as a whole was successful?**

**SK:** For me, personally it was. I put a lot into it, so I got a lot out of it. A lot of those other kids who just did it through the DukeEngage program did not get a lot out of it as they could have, they just weren't prepared. Not necessarily their fault, the program should've done a better job preparing them. I also think that our TA kept pushing us, pushing, to keep working with the transgenders, even though we saw otherwise during the semester. We could have been more effective if we could have planned with the women's center beforehand. But as I know with global health, you never know what you're going to have.

Best learning experience I have ever had. It was very real life. It wasn't in the class. I've taken all my global health classes, so in that sense I was prepared, quote unquote, but you don't learn until you get there and you're actually doing it. For one, it was a window to reality; a billion people in the world, literally, live like that, you don't realize this when you are in the Duke bubble or whatever. The other aspect was learning how difficult it is to get things done, you have to learn to be efficient with the resources you are given. Especially in India, there's a certain level of corruption, certain level of inefficiency with the staff, and drug users in particular are a unique group to work with, because they are very good at getting you to believe what you want to believe. And that was hard for me, in the beginning I felt so bad hearing their stories feeling so bad, but a couple of times I got played, you know, cause they see you as this rich kid from America, I can get anything out of them. I was naïve in that sense, it was just a world experience, that I really, really got a lot out of.

**KC: Did the other kids on your program think that way?**

**SK:** Some did, some didn't get the same thing out of it. A lot of times after work I would go out and interact with the staff and just learn about them. A lot of kids who weren't Indian, or not even weren't even not Indian, but just a lot of people weren't ready. It was just a really intense eight weeks. Some were just not prepared. A lot of kids would just stay in their room, watch movies, wouldn't interact outside of it. I just learned a lot about people in general.

We also did, my responsibility was, in addition to microfinance, I did HIV/AIDS and STI information sessions for the women, and was involved in a lot of the healthcare aspects of it. It was tough for me to see this women who needed help and see that their diseases that were treatable and they were not getting the care they needed. Tuberculosis you can treat in months if you get the meds you need every day. But you know, they don't adhere to the program, they get back on drugs, you know, it's just, you see it over and over again. There's this one girl, you know, we got really close to the women, and they had a lot of trust in us, they confided in us, sometimes they would say this and this happens to me, I get sick, and I'm not a doctor but I can refer them to where they need to do, encourage them to get tested. And this one girl just had all these pregnancy complications that would never have happened if they had a human standard of care, they were living in these conditions that were like subhuman.

**KC: Do you really think that you got more out of the program than the community or do you think it was balanced?**

**SK:** I think I got more out of it than the community did, absolutely, at the end of the day, there is still an NGO that was running 30 years before I got there, and will still be running after I leave. They are managing by themselves. I think I made an experience in the lives of 25 women, but the NGO helps a lot more people than when I was there, I took a lot of valuable information from them. I learned a lot.

**KC: Do you think that is a problem?**

**SK:** Um, I think it would have been a problem if we had hurt them in any way or if we were causing any inconvenience, but I think financially Duke paid a lot, because we lived in their headquarters, so financially we helped them out a lot. I do think it is a problem that Duke uses them as a tool to teach us. They are their own entity, but teaching us was not part of their responsibility, but they were compensated, and I think they appreciated the money.

**KC: What do you think about the DukeEngage program in general?**

**SK:** I think that the selection process should be more stringent. I think that people who go on it need to have better preparation before they go. I think that in theory it's a good idea, in practice, I think they should reevaluate some sites that they send people to, I think they need to reassess the impact that students have on the community.

Overall, I think the kids that are going need to be selected more carefully. Because the India trip was not appropriate for some kids who went.

**KC: How can they do that?**

**SK:** Well I think that if they want to go on a global health program they need to have a global health background, at least. I think they need to be upperclassmen, I don't think it's appropriate to send a freshman on a trip like this. I think they need to have some experience working with marginalized populations, if not international experience. I think there should be a lot more preparation after the student is accepted. I mean we had like three workshops or something that were totally useless, beyond useless. Irrelevant, nothing that prepared anyone for what they were going to see. I think the faculty sponsors need to be much more involved.

**KC: Anything else? How did it impact your experience that you were an Indian woman?**

**SK:** I did have a closer bond with the women because I spoke the language, then some other girls did. As far as being Indian, I think the clients did connect with me better. There was still like a huge divide, some of the women in the center would be like 50 to 60 years old and they would call me "bedi", a respectful term for older sister and they wouldn't call my name, because it was a class thing, they knew I was wealthy and from America even though I was 19 or something. This one woman, every time she would see me she would touch my feet, it was like a sign of respect, I was helping them with their issues and stuff. That was really awkward for me.

Shikha is remarkably frank and revealing about her experiences in New Delhi, and her narrative reveals the complex ways in which the relationship between Duke students and the "helped" communities are articulated and realized in practice.

These four narratives of Duke students reveal several complicated realities. For one, many of these students realized that the action of "help" in which Duke students aid others is not as simple as it seems. In Shikha's case, the idea of the static "global citizen in need" was turned on its head as she discovered that the transgendered hidra population indeed, did not really need aid. The romantic notion of the benevolent Westerner entering into unchartered lands and "saving" the community often is - and will continue to be - an unrealized ideal. The projection of a nameless, faceless, and striking homogenous "global community in need" has the potential to perpetuate a

multitude of stereotypes and falsities that are often shocking in practice. The actual work of engaging in community-based change is difficult, painstaking, and frustrating – and often fails to meet its stated goals.

Programs like DukeEngage further complicate the mission of “Saving the World” through its additional programmatic goal of educating the student. While the goal of providing an academic experience for Duke students is noble one, it becomes complicated when contemplating the use of DukeEngage dollars as payment to community organizations in exchange for providing student opportunities. The use of money as a facilitation tool raises questions of authenticity – are the *genuine* experiences of Duke students in their respective DukeEngage sites delegitimized or discounted by this fact? The very notion of being able to *buy* a “life-changing experience” is a loaded concept that begs for further examination. How does this privileged position undertaken by Duke reflect deeper issues of “help”, and what it means to be able to help?

### **BRINGING IT BACK HOME**

For some students, the complicated issues they encountered during the DukeEngage program did not end at the conclusion of their eight-week project. Many vocalized the difficulty of linking their DukeEngage experiences back to Duke, and articulated their frustrations with various aspects of the program – and Duke University’s student body as a whole.

Gillet Rosenblith drives home this point:

“One of the problems is that when you come back [from DukeEngage], it’s so easy to get sucked back into the way things were...a lot of people at Duke just dabble in a bunch of little things, aren’t really committed to anything. I personally find it really frustrating.”

Despite the incredible experiences many students had with the program, the return back to the Gothic Wonderland brings forth a wave of responsibilities and other concerns that complicate the ability of some students to continue to engage in DukeEngage-esque civic engagement programs. Michael Blake expressed his frustrations:

“One that note, I’ve never met so many unreliable people in my life...people [from DukeEngage] don’t come to reunion events, they don’t even answer emails about the program, etc.”

Perhaps these realities have less to do with DukeEngage and more to do with the culture of student engagement at Duke more generally. At an institution full of overachieving, type A personalities, it should be no surprise that commitment to a particular cause can come as a cost. Amanda Tong commented on her perception of Duke student engagement:

“I feel like everyone at Duke has their own cause, and it’s fragmented... people always want to start something but are never committed [to their involvements].”

Chrissy Booth echoed similar feelings:

“Yeah, I remember reading an Editorial in *The Chronicle* about social entrepreneurship and how everyone wants to start something of their own, and there are never enough people to ‘follow’, and how things would be better if there were just people who would [do so].”

Other students suggested ways in which the DukeEngage experience can be better integrated into life back in Durham. Rachel Revelle suggested integrating the programs more with curriculum:

“I also think it would be better if we could better link the programs to an on campus experience. I know in Dublin, we worked with immigration issues, and there are definitely ways to get involved more with immigration stuff in Durham.”

For others, the question of “bring it back home” goes beyond that. Chrissy responds in kind:

“I feel like it is expected that every student should be able to answer the question of ‘How do you give back to the community.’ It is built into our value system here.”

But perhaps it is this very experimentation that leads to clarity. Rachel Revelle aptly sums it up as such:

“There is a disconnect though, as by trying and ‘dabbling’ in these experiences, we are trying to figure out who you are in the process.”

What kind of Duke student are they aspiring to be?

## CHAPTER FIVE: THE EMERGENCE OF THE PRIVILEGED, “VIRTUOUS CITIZEN”

*“This is why I call for DukeEngagers to ground themselves in a new approach to civic engagement – a psychology of engagement. It is a belief that human beings, whether in India, Kenya, Ireland, Brazil, Peru or New Orleans, are good, decent, and infinitely worthy. The challenge them becomes how to materialize this belief in a world contaminated by prejudice against other cultural heritages: against Americans for their ‘arrogance’, against Europeans for their colonial legacy, against the Global South for its ‘naivete,’ and against the rest of the non-Western world for its ‘Otherness.’ This is a world of constructed realities, but DukeEngagers cannot and should not ignore it.*

*To be a true DukeEngager implies one’s acceptance to challenge oneself to navigate through unfamiliar lands and cultures not as a passing tourist, but as a concerned citizen of the world. If a DukeEngage comes back from Cairo without expiring the Egyptian bureaucracy or the sweltering mid-day sun of Cairo, or if a DukeEngager returns from Peru or South Africa without experiencing what ‘ordinary’ Peruvians and South Africans face in their daily lives, then I believe there has been something missing in that journey of engagement.”*

*-Mbaye Lo, “The psychology of Engagement,” The Chronicle, October 27, 2008*

*“If our colleges and universities do not breed men who riot, who rebel, who attack life with all the youthful vision and vigor, then there is something wrong with our colleges. The more riots that come on college campuses, the better world for tomorrow.”*  
*– William Allen White*

Every morning I stroll by the worn gray limestone walkways of Duke University’s West Campus aptly termed “Gothic Wonderland”, and step briskly to keep up with the pace of the students walking past. Even mid-strides they are always multitasking – speeding away to their 11:20 am class, dialing numbers on their Blackberry phones, or running into friends on the Plaza walkway and chit chatting for a few precious minutes.

Duke students are always doing *something*, an act deeply characteristic of the Millennial college student: the overachiever who spares no time while juggling schoolwork, extracurricular activities, while squeezing in a social life somewhere in

between. Productivity defines the hour-to-hour activities; 24 hours in a day are simply not enough.

Perhaps another interesting way to view Duke students is through the lens of cultural anthropology's half-sister; archaeology. What are the precious relics that the students leave behind? Empty bottles of Gatorade, crushed cans of Busch Light beer stuck in corners besides mashed red plastic Solo cups, and of course, the litany of flyers that seem to cover every square inch of free bulletin board space on campus. Every day, hundreds of flyers printed in every shade of the rainbow are stapled and taped onto various boards, walls, even bathroom doors, each flying clamoring to target a specific need, want, and desire of a Duke student.

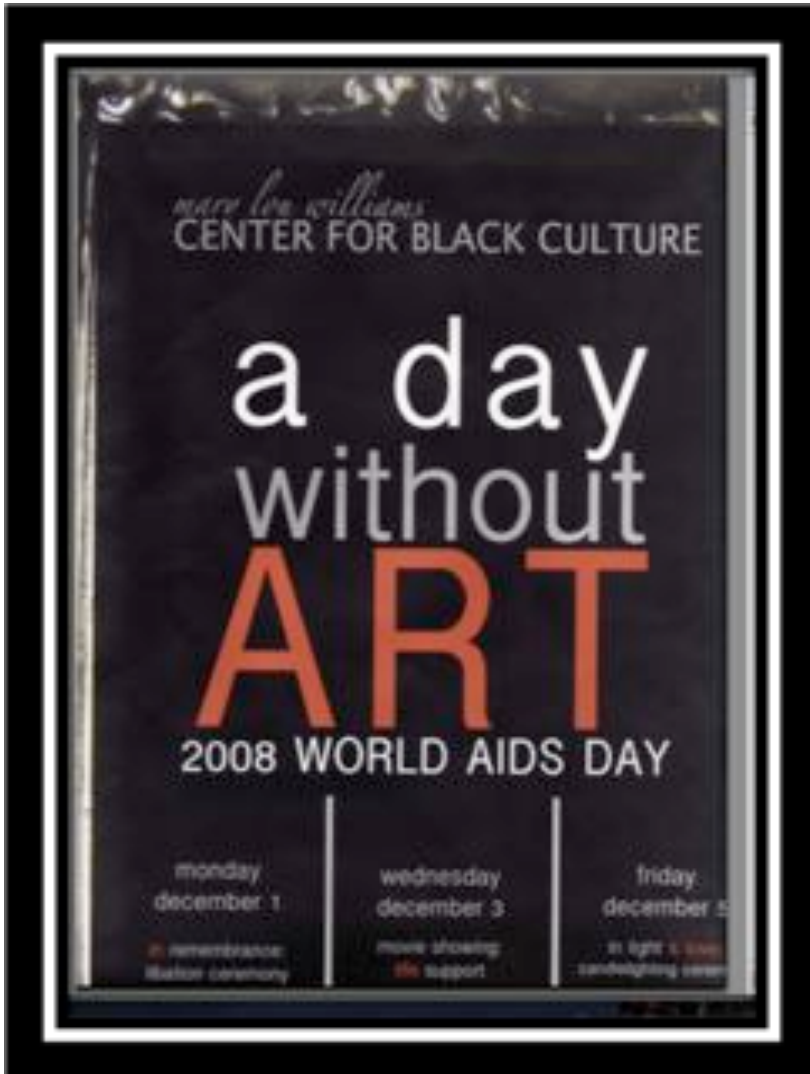


**Figure 4: Photo by author**

A closer examination of the material posted on these boards reveals some strange, yet familiar contradictions. I have selected three particular flyers to scrutinize in detail, and

each was chosen for the strangely revealing ways in which their oddly incoherent, yet sound messages paired with one another.

**FLYER ONE**



**Figure 5: Flyer collected on Duke University campus**

## FLYER TWO & THREE



The first flyer is the work of the Mary Lou Williams Center, Duke University's Center for Black Culture. The full-color poster is advertising a weeklong event entitled "A Day Without Art," held in honor of the 2008 World Aids Day. The flyer is advertising the exhibit's three separate events, kicking off with an in remembrance libation followed up with a movie screening of "Life Support" and a candle-lighting ceremony in remembrance of those who are touched by the dreaded disease. The flyer is appealing to the inner humanitarian in each Duke student, calling out for support towards a noble cause and attempting to promote awareness by capturing their hearts and minds (and perhaps playing upon a small element of pity as well). The sponsorship by the Mary Lou Williams Center also serves as a silent acknowledgement of the ways in which AIDS has ravaged the global black community - and perhaps also a recognition of the ways in

which AIDS and Africa are forever and inextricably linked together. The poster embodies the will of the Duke “do-gooder,” the philanthropist, the scholar, the global citizen, and the activist.

Perhaps then it is only fitting that this flyer was flanked on both sides by the second and third posters. The second flyer is an advertisement for a local laundry delivery service called “Laundrymen,” complete with the slogan “Keep it Clean”. This company’s marketing presence on a Duke undergraduate bulletin board is not merely an example of successful market research but rather a bold (yet subtle) statement about the outsider’s perception of the identity of the average Duke student – wealthy, lazy, and privileged. The flyer enthusiastically states, “Tired of doing your own laundry? Let us do it for you! We pick up and deliver right to your door”: short, simple, and to the point. The placement of this ad among the numerous other flyers for fraternity parties and on-campus events blurs away the oddity of paying for personal laundry service and melds its disconcerting elements into normalcy. Privilege in this sense is marketed as routine, as the norm. The ordinary Duke student senses no cognitive dissonance at maintaining the dual roles of activist/humanitarian and wealthy student utilizing private laundry service.

But the third poster may be most revealing of them all. The third serves as the antithesis of the Duke student modeled by the first – the sharp-suited Wall Street capitalist, the money hungry and self-serving corporate mouthpiece. The flyer is promoting “The Great Debate: Banking vs. Consulting,” and event hosted by two student organizations, the Duke Consulting Club and NFE, the Network for Future

Executives. Both these groups are composed of students who have a strong interest in the business world, and attempt to sponsor various events and activities that would be of aid to the future-investment bankers and consultants in the university.

Nonetheless, the message is not so simple. Oftentimes these two “molds” are not diametrically opposed, but in some ways complimentary. Students take summers in between their coursework in Global Health to serve as a summer intern in Goldman Sachs’s investment banking division. What is most interesting is that most students do so without even receiving a quizzical second look from other Duke students.

There are several issues at play here. For one, there is the question of how programs like DukeEngage and the popularity of similar programs like Teach for America are changing the established “social clout” and markers of success once dominated by careers in banking and consulting. I would argue that the “virtuous” Duke student does not view these seemingly oppositional career fields as mutually exclusive forces. Much like the trends that fueled the rise of the “philanthrocapitalist,” the Duke student of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century seems to want it all – earn a six figure salary while juggling summers in AIDS clinics in Africa. The new ideal of success (and accompanying “social kudos”) is accorded to those that came juggle the two interests effortlessly and naturally. These two ideas are not incongruous, nor it is strange. How and what is it about the Duke environment that creates – and reinforces – this *ideal* model of a Duke student?

## **PRIVILEGED?**

*"I am of the opinion that my life belongs to the whole community and as long as I live, it is my privilege to do for it whatever I can. I want to be thoroughly used up when I die, for the harder I work the more I live."*

*-George Bernard Shaw*

The ideal of the "virtuous" Duke student and its accompanying commitments to the community and notions of service must not go unexamined. The centrality of civic engagement to the purported character of the ideal Duke student is complicated when considering issues of privilege.

In many ways, civic engagement and service is an inherently privilege-ridden and unequal relationship between those who help and those who are helped. This troubled relation is perfectly demonstrated by the history of troubled town-gown relations between Duke University and the city of Durham. The juxtaposition of Duke University, a wealthy, world-class private university within Durham, a predominantly black community recovering from the economic fallout of the textile and tobacco industries bust in the 1990s lends itself to some inherent tensions. This local tensions were attempted to be assuaged by the launch of the Duke-Durham Neighborhood Partnership Initiative, a move that was part public relations campaign, and another part a genuine move on the part of the university and the city to share opportunities for engagement and service.

The progress in town-gown relations was suddenly stymied in April 2006 with the eruption of the Duke Lacrosse scandal. The stunning accusation of rape against three young, white Duke Lacrosse players by an African American dancer quickly

erupted into a media frenzy.<sup>49</sup> As news of the scandal emerged onto the national then international stage, the already tenuous and seemingly oppositional relationship between university and community emerged into a polarized, oversimplified story. The media portrayal pitted a narrative of the powerful white, wealthy, private school attended by elite, privileged students against the poor, angry, black community. Media from all over the globe were attracted to the story. Students, faculty, school officials and community members were stunned by the extent to which the scandal rocked the community – the Duke Lacrosse Scandal in essence became a microcosm of the underlying tensions related to race, gender, class, and privilege in America.

The historical development and institutional specificity of the DukeEngage program cannot be separated from this ugly part of the university’s history. The operation of privilege – whether seen as a force for good, or as a force of division – is central to both events.

### **TO HAIL THE “VIRTUOUS CITIZEN”**

We, as Duke students, are incessantly being “hailed” into a specific ideal – the student who “works hard, plays hard” while juggling their humanitarian efforts with their Wall Street ambitions. This ideal characterization of the “virtuous citizen” is a specific subjection position that is daily reinforced by the coherent – yet mixed –

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<sup>49</sup> The accusation and the accompanying criminal were further complicated by the actions of the Durham District Attorney at the time and the political turmoil brewing on Duke University’s own campus. For the sake of time, I am only focusing on the issue of the centrality of privilege in the case as it relates to the theoretical underpinnings of service and the development of DukeEngage.

messages sent by our peers, colleagues, professors, family members, even popular media.

The idea of the “virtuous citizen” can perhaps be best understood through the concept of interpellation. This concept was first coined by Louis Althusser, a renowned Marxist philosopher, to explain the mechanism by which ideological state apparatuses interpellate subjects into specific ideological subject positions. In essence, interpellation attempts to explain the ways in which ideology and power are internalized in individuals to form a particular type of person, a subject that did not exist prior to the acceptance of the ideology.

The classic example of interpellation is that of the policeman who yells “Hey you.” We stop upon recognizing this call and turn around. We are responding in kind to the policeman’s interpellation and identifying as a specific subject position; hence, creating an identity. The policeman identifies us, and we become that which has been identified.

The strangeness lies in our conscious – and unconscious – response to being hailed. We respond to the policeman’s hail because we accept the subject position that is being presented, it is as if we had always known it. Yet, the apparent freedom we have to accept this specific position only serves to concretize us further into it – the subject position is bonded ever more tightly to the underlying ideology that underpins it.

The notion of the “virtuous” Duke student at its surface level appears to be a noble one that can be likened to a moral code like Aristotle’s ethics of a “good life.” In a

sense, the Duke ideal mirrors many of the same tenets of Aristotle's "good life" - an individual who is morally and intellectually virtuous, self-examining, and constantly reflecting on his or her individual self. This "virtuous citizen" is the Duke student plastered all over the glossy DukeEngage program brochures, it is the smiling student featured prominently on the website.

Yet this idealized notion of the "virtuous Duke citizen" has its limits. The concept of interpellation deconstructs the myth of the virtuous Duke student, as it debunks the notion that the ideal – and the desire to "help" – is a product of the self-reflection of the individual. Rather, it is a product of being "hailed" by a specific environment, a social construction that reflects the specific ideologies of the particular context, in our case, Duke University. To what extent is the Duke student's desire to help shaped by the institution and the ideologies of others? Fellow students, administrators, program directors, faculty, even the university's mission statement daily articulate the powerful tenets of the "Virtuous Duke Student's Manifesto" – it is both ubiquitous and inescapable. The paper flyers that plaster every free inch of wall space, the articles in the *Chronicle*, the reading lists for global health courses, the Facebook campaigns for Darfur all articulate the same values: one must value service and civic engagement, one must give back to the community, one more treat others with kindness and respect, and most importantly, one must always be willing to "do good." To reject these tenets would be an affront of the highest kind.

This projection of the virtuous Duke student becomes problematic when considering the impossibility of divorcing the concept from its greater, overarching

ideologies, ideologies that are often linked to very real inequalities. Service remains an act of great privilege, even when exercised with the most noble of intentions. But if service remains an essential part of being the “virtuous” Duke student, what are its implications? Can service be considered anything more than an exercise of privilege if it is undergirded by an active politics? And perhaps most importantly, do the potential dangers change our understandings of what it means to be a “virtuous citizen”, a virtuous Duke student?

## CONCLUSION

*“Were called upon to exercise their skill,  
Not in Utopia, subterranean fields,  
Or some secreted island, Heaven knows where!  
But in the very world, which is the world  
Of all of us, -the place where in the end  
We find our happiness, or not at all.”*

*-Wordsworth*

### DUKEENGAGE ADVISORY COMMITTEE FOLDER REPORT – Initial Observations

The comments of all respondents indicate that DukeEngage has provided a unique experience for those involved. The program is also on track to its achievements. 98% of the students reported some clear impact from the project experience, with 81% indicating the impact was great. A deeper analysis of the student responses indicates that a “some impact” response could actually be categorized as great. We are learning how to codify this into a systematic attribution.

While the surveys provide valuable information, the number of responses from each group was low. With only 53 of the 360 DE students responding to the before and after reflections, achievement of the first student outcome will require changes. Higher participation will also be crucial to full implementation of the projects by both the students and local partners.

Comments indicate that improvements could be made to the initial processes of the program. To better match the student to the placement, job descriptions and the skills and expectations of the students should be better communicated. This will reduce student disappointment around job responsibilities (or lack thereof) and community partner interview time (one partner indicated that during “many” of the interviews, the students admitted to having no interest in the position). We believe that students will be more likely to experience impact from the project when expectations are clarified and skills are more effectively matched to the placement.

Involvement of previous Engagers will help students get a more realistic picture of the experience they face. A number of students suggested having the project groups meet earlier in the process. Matching these group meetings with an Engager who had a similar internship may be worthwhile.

The areas of planning and preparation were also noted for improvement. Many student comments (24%) pointed to a need for more project/experience specific workshops. It is probable that this number would be higher if the pre-experience reflection had included the questions about preparation. Language training and cultural immersion preparation were two areas for improvement.

We suggest a change in the manner in which travel arrangements are made. Students complained about long layovers and agents unfamiliar with travel to the area they were traveling. One faculty member suggested that the faculty make the arrangements. Students also commented that more help could be provided for locating suitable housing/housing students together. While there were other comments indicating a need for better planning and preparation (nearly 10%), specifics were not provided.

The general responses in the student reflections were “soft”. If the tangible result achievement is to be met, there will need to be more clarity around what the students gave to the communities served. Students indicated that they gave awareness, knowledge, kindness, support and similar answers. While these are positive, worthwhile things to give, they say nothing about the tangible student impact on the community or project. It would be more helpful to know what behaviors changed because of these. Have any of the recipients done anything differently in light of their new knowledge? Of those students presenting tangible results in their responses, few indicated the breadth of impact. For example, a few students were involved with a project installing clean burning stoves. One student responded, “My project had very tangible results, stove.” Another provided more clarity, “I built 21 clean burning stoves in two communities.” This sort of clarity can be gleaned from the softer answers as well. A push towards measurable responses would not only help track toward the outcome achievements, but would also provide students with a more clear idea of their impact.

### **THE LEGACY AND PROMISE OF DUKEENGAGE**

The DukeEngage website prominently states the expected outcomes of the program:

- DukeEngage is educating Duke students to be responsible citizens and scholars.
- DukeEngage is strengthening the civic ethic and mission of Duke University.
- DukeEngage is applying academic knowledge to community problem-solving.
- DukeEngage is serving unmet social needs.
- DukeEngage is building the capacity of non-profit organizations to fulfill their social missions.

DukeEngage is promoting broad-based understanding, crossing social, racial, class, and international spheres.<sup>50</sup>

These are no simple goals. They are complex, multi-faceted, far-reaching, and in some respects, unattainable goals for a newly hatched program. Has the program been successful in reaching these intended goals? Better yet, is the world with DukeEngage a better one than a world without?

To be sure, there are two distinct and clear-cut answers to this question. For starters, there is certainly merit to the rosy view of DukeEngage, one that encompasses the qualities of the DukeEngage program that is articulated daily through the glossy brochures and marketing materials. It is the DukeEngage program depicted in the photos of smiling Duke students who are fulfilling smiling broadly while surrounded by gushing African children. These students are living out the goals of the DukeEngage mission statement in full. In this view, all the community partners are receiving ample and much needed “help” from the Duke students, and each student is not only being utilized to their fullest potential, but also enduring personal growth through the experience. DukeEngage receives pleasant evaluations, plenty of substantive publicity materials, and establishes itself as the premiere model of university-level civic engagement. It is DukeEngage in its most coveted, ideal form.

There is also an apt logic in the opposing, and far more cynical view of DukeEngage, one that views the program and its purported aims as an abject failure. This view sees the program as an entirely misleading and utterly inconsequential civic

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<sup>50</sup> “About DukeEngage,” DukeEngage. 1 Oct 2008. <<http://dukeengage.duke.edu/about>>

engagement program that helps people in name only. This perspective sees DukeEngage as a program that begs to be destroyed, one that echoes the sentiments of an increasing number of humanitarian and development aid critics – stop aid. Don't try to help; period. Intervention only prolongs and exacerbates problems. DukeEngage in this sense is but a mere propaganda machine that aims to remedy Duke's public relations while benefitting wealthy college students' propensity to become humanitarian dilettantes at a human cost. In this case, DukeEngage must be destroyed.

But perhaps there remains a provocative "third way" of approaching this question. It is far more realistic and tempting to split the difference between the two views – "yes DukeEngage is great, but it still has problems that must be addressed". It is not this, but not quite the other either. However, one must be cautious when examining this self-reflexive positioning, as this position is one that is revealing in itself.

When extending this view to DukeEngage, it should come as no surprise that individuals complicit in the program's goal of "Saving the World" do so with a degree of reflexivity and awareness. All of the students I had the opportunity to talk to were incredibly reflective, self-critical, and almost hyper sensitive of the potential of the program to cause harm to both the communities and to the students themselves. Gillet Rosenblith commented:

"I really thought your point on colonialism [and the colonial era's pioneers' similarities to motivation of students] was really interesting, it's like, how is the civilizing mission of 2009 any more different than that of the colonial era. The idea that we as smart Duke kids can just come in and 'Save Africa' I think is something we really need to be more wary of, just because we're smart doesn't mean anything. I think it is also a very American idea that we have to know everything about everyone else and always help everything and intervene."

Gillet, and other students like her, fully knowledges the ways in DukeEngage touches upon the potentially dangerous issues of paternalism embedded in the notion of “help”, and urges other students to be wary of them in their own experiences. Shikha Kapil also echoes these sentiments about the program:

“A lot of this program is very selfish. I think that’s the irony – [Duke is] marketing it as civic engagement for the community but it is for the students. I guess it is their #1 priority. To some extent, I think there is value in grassroots programs like look at what Paul Farmer did in Haiti, but there are successful programs that can elicit change that way, we modeled ours after the Muhammed Yunas program, because there are ways from the ground up to help. The West in general is very arrogant, we think that we are the right way and everyone else is the wrong way and we are so benevolent, noble, and we’re going to fix everything. It is not realistic or effective.”

Many Duke students remain truly deliberate and thoughtful about their potential to cause harm, but is their cautious self-reflexivity indicative of a larger force at work?

Perhaps even more interesting is the fact that despite the litany of programmatic flaws mentioned by the participants, the program continues to have tremendous buy-in with Duke students. Mark Kurzrok comments:

“It would be so easy for Bill Gates to pocket that money so I think that for every, even if for every 30 failures, in terms of people going, that do it to get a job and put it on a resume and never think about it again, the one success story who makes service a central part of their life is absolutely valuable and if Bill Gates is willing to put money towards that goal, power to him and I think the world will be a better place for it.”

Scott Peppel adds further:

“I think the direction that the DukeEngage program is moving to makes it a better force in the world. In the first year, there were probably more failure stories than success stories, to be honest. But when it gets down to it, when people are getting more exposure to the world, I think so much of it is about the pre trip training, and I think we can gain value for it, they can just ask us about our lives and learn about the rest of the world, learn about the opportunities in the world. We can learn so much, and I think in the end, that has huge potential.

Just because people have better global perspective and there's some reality to the concept of you know, knowing how much water you use for your shower here, you can think about other people in the world who are having a drought. Even if you remain completely disconnected, you can think about these little things that flash the memory, and I think that can have a good perspective to have."

In essence, the pros of the program far outweigh the cons – and the students' belief in its potential for greatness seemingly excuses its potential for harm.

Furthermore, as mentioned previously, DukeEngage is the newest reincarnation of an old breed of "help," and its unique elements set it apart and allow it to articulate the established critiques of humanitarian and development aid in a different manner. It is a different monster. To further complicate matters, there is differentiation between the types of programs (group vs. individual, domestic vs. abroad, non-profit vs. aid agency) even within the DukeEngage program. DukeEngage simply cannot be easily generalized or set into established paradigms of critique.

Thus, DukeEngage and other programs like it can be seen as articulating the language of the "new" humanitarianism. The notion that an open-minded attitude and a degree of fine tuning the technicalities of the program can absolve DukeEngage of its problematic elements is one that is not only daily articulated at Duke, but in the world beyond. Yes, we know that we are complicit, and that the work is embedded with deep-seeded issues, but we still want to keep improving it and working in order to accomplish the greater goal. This perspective is a culturally specific one that is already clearly communicated in the program's ethos, as demonstrated by the comments and efforts of DukeEngage staff and participants. There is a constant desire to "fine tune" the program and improve it through a seemingly endless stream of efforts to ramp up training,

provide better academic support, placement, and much more. Yet there is a conspicuous absence of talk related to a fundamental overhaul of the program; is it even an option? At best, it is an option on paper. It is truly difficult to imagine how one would get rid of a program as deeply embedded into Duke's reputation, resources, and institutional apparatus as DukeEngage. There is simply too much is at stake.

Thus, the desire to evaluate the program as one that "remains to be seen" and in need of constant improvement is one that is revealing of its nature as a socially constructed statement. In this sense, the program simply cannot fail. Failure is not an option. This reality is reminiscent of the same paradoxical nature of Western humanitarian and development organizations – regardless of its strengths or weaknesses these aid organizations will continue to thrive. A good aid organization gets more money to further its goals and programming. A bad aid organization gets more money so that it can address its flaws. A clarion call to eliminate these "help" organizations on the basis of its failure to accomplish its stated goals remains simply nonexistent. Aid must – and will - go on.

### **THE POTENTIAL FOR A POLITICS OF SERVICE**

When contemplating the trends and characteristics of Millennial involvement in service-oriented civic engagement, some unanswered questions remain.

First, what are the long-term consequences of service outside the boundaries of formal politics? The voting records of Millennials are mixed, and are generally less consistent than of generations of the past. The narratives of the Duke students

demonstrate the cynicism that many Duke students hold for formal avenues of political participation, and these sentiments cross partisan lines. Students who identify as Democrats, Republicans, or even as Independents all agree that formal politics involves a degree of frustration and bureaucracy that is seemingly nonexistent in the service-oriented civic engagement world. It is an avenue for engagement that is devoid of partisan gridlock and slow-moving paperwork – it has the potential to get things done, and get things done quickly.

But what are the long-term consequences of service outside the boundaries of formal politics? While it is true that much of the nation's best and brightest are devoting their brainpower and resources to civic engagement service efforts, can a non-formal form of political participation accomplish the same type of change that a formal politics can achieve? What are the potentials for social change beyond the state apparatus? More provocatively, does this move risk the slow death of a powerful, capable government for the people, by the people? If so, what will the ideal Millennial democracy look like?

Nonetheless, the opinions of Duke students who deeply value the merits of service while recognizing the importance of a formalized political system seem to indicate that the links between service and formal politics are not mutually exclusive for many Millennials. There are several indications that the old form of "help" may be slowly changing. The voting records of youth in the last 2008 Presidential election were strong, and seemed to indicate a departure from the past. The downfall of the economy in the current recession seems to have made public service and government jobs a hot

commodity in a fragile job market. “Public service,” through both formal and informal means, is becoming a hot “buzz” word. Will participation in service undergirded by a strong politics be the answer?

### **AND THE WORLD BEYOND?**

*“Everyone thinks of changing the world, but no one thinks of changing himself.”  
-Leo Tolstoy*

An understanding of the ways in which DukeEngage is deeply connected to global trends and shifts must also be recognized. Regardless of the success or failure of the DukeEngage program, the trend of Millennial civic engagement in the form of international service will continue to experience dynamic growth. Duke has been able to lead on the “cutting edge” of this type of program because of its generous coffers but all the trends indicate that it is not something exclusive to the university. In 2010, over 100,000 American college students are estimated to pour into every corner of the globe with humanitarian intentions in mind. Millennials will continue to engage themselves in various civic engagement projects, their voting track records will continue to be mixed, and the involvement of the Western world in the affairs of the non-West will continue to be unceasing and unrelenting in its eagerness to “help.”

Service, by its very nature, is inherently a practice of great privilege. As long as there are power differentials that favor the West, the benevolent efforts of the West (or “helpers” more generally) will always face a flawed reality. Even the most noble of public servants are daily exercising the multiplicity of privileges that have allowed them to occupy the position of “helper”. Service actualizes power in the luxurious form of

time, money, resources, access, and even skin tone. There is no denying this, and perhaps the first step is accepting this fact. How then do we exercise this privilege of service in a meaningful and generous way? Is a service underpinned by an active politics the answer? Can we recognize the individual human agency within the “global citizens” that we seek to help? Or will they forever remain silent props in the background of photos that Western humanitarian hopefuls bring back home as souvenirs? Their sustained silence, both in this work and in countless other works on the politics of “help”, reveals the very real limits and pitfalls of the contemporary dialogue on “Saving the World.” How does one continue to maintain a sense of self-awareness within this unequal relationship while mitigating the dangerous and damaging consequences of good intentions? What does the ideal form of service and civic engagement look like?

I think I may have a suggestion for the first step. At the end of the day we must not forget to ask, “Why do we help?”

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