

American Citizenship

Community Involvement
Political Participation
Voting and Elections
State and Local Government
Volunteerism
Charitable Giving



“The most
important
political office
is that of
private citizen.”



LOUIS D. BRANDEIS

ASSOCIATE JUSTICE OF THE
U.S. SUPREME COURT

1916–1939



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Above: Volunteers help to rebuild the Gulf Coast of Mississippi after the devastation of Hurricane Katrina in 2005. Opposite: President John F. Kennedy gives his inaugural address in 1961, calling on Americans to “Ask not what your country can do for you—ask what you can do for your country.”



In the United States, government serves the citizens. It protects constitutional rights, including freedom of speech and religion, and the right to equal protection under the law. American citizens exercise many rights and privileges that empower them to participate fully in the nation’s political, economic, and cultural life.

Other countries define their national identity—what it means to be a citizen of that country—primarily through common characteristics: ethnicity, origin, ancestry, religion, or history. But in these areas, there is little common ground among citizens of the United States. They—or their ancestors—come from every continent and every country around the world. What binds this diverse group of individuals together is the shared belief that individual liberty is the essential characteristic of free government.

U.S. citizens also recognize that they have a responsibility to their society if they are to enjoy the protection of their rights. Americans willingly, for the most part, live within the law, serve on juries when called upon, pay their fair share of taxes, and exercise their right to vote responsibly. Civic participation in the United States also means

Opposite, top: Martin Luther King Jr., center, leads a 1965 march in Montgomery, Alabama, to protest lack of voting rights for African Americans. Bottom: Volunteers build a playground for children in a low-income neighborhood in Highland Park, Michigan.

that citizens respect the rights of others, accept the authority of the elected government, and make an effort to be informed, involved, and invested in their communities and their nation.

President John F. Kennedy (1961–1963) offered another definition of citizenship when he said in his inaugural address,

“Ask not what
your country can
do for you—ask
what you can do
for your country.”

During his brief administration, Kennedy inspired young Americans to join government programs that worked to fight poverty at home and abroad. Though an assassin cut short the Kennedy presidency after only one thousand days, the challenge of his inaugural speech continues to inspire Americans not only to ask—but to act—to help their country, their communities, and their world.

This book describes some of the activities and responsibilities that Americans take on voluntarily to be good citizens and to better their neighborhoods, communities, and states. Hundreds of thousands serve in positions in local and state government or engage in campaigns to promote particular candidates or issues. Tens of millions give their free time to volunteer in nonprofit organizations that work for a greater good or devote part of their income to a worthy cause. In thousands of ways, Americans contribute to their society and their country, understanding that citizenship is a privilege to be paid for over and over again.



Citizens of the United States —or their ancestors—come from every continent and every country around the world. What binds this diverse group of individuals together is the shared belief that individual liberty is the essential characteristic of free government.

The responsibility of citizenship calls Americans to participate in the political process and to volunteer in their communities. Above, clockwise from lower left: College students in Austin, Texas, give their time to spruce up a neighborhood by planting trees; citizens wait in line in San Francisco, California, to vote in the 2008 presidential election; AmeriCorps volunteers paint a house in Shreveport, Louisiana, in 2003.

Voting

A right and a responsibility

Abraham Lincoln, the 16th president of the United States (1861–1865), perhaps best described democracy when he said democracy is a “government of the people, by the people, and for the people.” There is no government “by the people,” however, unless citizens choose their leaders through free and fair elections.



Voting is a fundamental right and responsibility of U.S. citizens—the right to have a say in how they are governed and the responsibility to be informed about candidates and issues when they go to the polls.

The United States was founded, in large part, on the desire of its people to participate in the decisions of their government. Surprisingly, perhaps, the U.S. Constitution itself did not address the right to vote or who was eligible to participate. The prevailing view when the Constitution was written in 1787 was that only white men who owned property were qualified to vote, because they had an interest in preserving society to protect their wealth and because they had the independence and education to decide important political matters.

Fortunately, times change. By the mid-19th century, property requirements were dismantled and virtually all adult white males

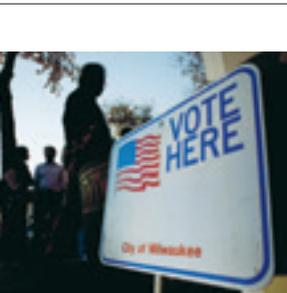
were able to vote. Soon after, the United States engaged in the Civil War (1861–1865) over the right of states to allow slavery within their borders. The Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution abolished slavery in 1865; the Fourteenth Amendment in 1868 guaranteed “equal protection of the laws” to all citizens and established the voting age as 21 years; and the Fifteenth Amendment in 1870 stated that no citizen should be denied the right to vote “on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude.”

This was progress, but half of the U.S. population still could not vote: women. Agitation for universal suffrage began in the mid-19th century, but the turning point came when the United States entered World War I in 1917. How could the United States fight for democracy overseas while denying it to half the population at home? Obviously, it could not, and the Nineteenth Amendment granted women the right to vote in 1920.

In the mid-20th century, another foreign conflict led to expansion of the franchise. Thousands of young Americans fought in the Vietnam War, many of them teenagers. They were old enough to fight for their country, yet not old enough to vote. Public outcry and political will led to passage of the Twenty-sixth Amendment, granting the vote to 18, 19, and 20 year olds in 1971.

In spite of the many struggles to guarantee all citizens the right to vote, the percentage of Americans who exercise that right declined during the second half of the 20th century. No single reason explains this trend. Some citizens may feel that their single vote does not make a difference; some may lose interest in campaigns run primarily through the media. Others may simply be too busy to go to the polls every time there is an election. Americans vote for every political office from school board member to state legislator to congressional representative to president of the United States, as well as on a host of state and local matters. Often, citizens are asked to vote on *something* several times in one year. The challenge of citizenship is to get to know the candidates and to understand the issues in order to vote responsibly.

An apparent shift in the low-turnout trend occurred between the 2000 and 2004 presidential elections. The historically close election of 2000 perhaps convinced voters that every vote *does* matter, and voter turnout increased from 60 percent of eligible voters in 2000 to 64 percent in 2004 and 2008. The increase in voters between the ages of 18 and 29 was even more dramatic. Project Vote, a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization that works to empower under-represented voters, estimates that turnout in this age group in 2008 increased by 9 percent from 2004.



Top: A college student registers to vote at New Mexico State University in September 2004, during a campus voter registration drive. Above: Voting line in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

Young Voters Turn Out

by Sam Barrett

The presidential election of 2008 demonstrated the enormous influence young people can bring to the democratic process when a cause or a candidate energizes them. All across the United States, young people of diverse backgrounds volunteered tirelessly for Democrat Barack Obama and Republican John McCain.

Political activity was one of the hottest campus trends at the University of Pennsylvania (Penn) in 2008, and a variety of groups, some with competing agendas, worked day and night to win support from fellow students. Their combined efforts resulted in an on-campus voter turnout rate of almost 90 percent, according to an estimate by Penn Leads the Vote, exceeding the nation's average turnout by nearly 30 percent.

"In recent history, there's been a tendency to ignore youth," said Annassa Corley, president of Penn Leads the Vote. "We have really turned that around and shown it is possible to engage youth."

Even groups with an avowed agenda wanted young people to recognize their eligibility and make the trip to the polls, no matter who they supported. "Whether you voted for McCain or Obama," said Mike Stratton, co-president of Penn for Obama,

"the key is that you voted—that you participated, that you showed your civic duty, and that you used your vote to help change America."

Penn Leads the Vote, founded before the 2004 presidential election and run entirely by Penn students, used a massive data-driven campaign to register students at the Philadelphia campus. Campaign volunteers identified unregistered voters or voters registered out of state, guided them through the registration process, and then helped them locate their polling location—usually just a few blocks away from where they lived at school—so that they had no excuse to miss out on Election Day.

"You're really empowering people to take that first step and vote. We don't really care who they vote for, but we do care that they are able to represent themselves," Corley said.

Beyond the Penn campus, other national nonpartisan groups have used television, public service announcements, and celebrity star power to encourage young voters to get involved. Most also use the growing influence of Web sites like Facebook and Twitter to connect with potential voters.

Opposite, counter-clockwise from upper right: Annassa Corley, president of Penn Leads the Vote; members of the organization; Mike Stratton, co-president of Penn for Obama; student volunteers register a new voter; the University of Pennsylvania campus.

Sam Barrett is a third-year student of international politics at the University of Pennsylvania. An expanded version of this article is available online: <http://www.america.gov/st/usg-english/2010/February/201002031557001MgninnaMo.3311731.html>



"You're really empowering people to take that first step and vote. We don't really care who they vote for, but we do care that they are able to represent themselves," said Annassa Corley, president of Penn Leads the Vote.





The Other Side of the Ballot

Elections in the United States are not only about the candidates running for office. Frequently voters are asked to decide public policy issues for their states and communities.

Statewide questions make their way to the voting booth through one of two routes: a ballot initiative or a legislative referendum. A ballot initiative is a mechanism for citizens to propose policy changes, while a legislative referendum is proposed by the state legislature, an elected official, or a government agency or commission.

Ballot initiatives are permitted in only 24 of the 50 states, so legislative referenda generally outnumber ballot initiatives in any election year. In the year 2008, for example, 153 statewide measures were voted on by citizens: 92 legislative referenda and 61 ballot initiatives.

What are all these ballot measures about? Often they concern hot-button issues that citizens think are not being addressed by elected officials or that private-interest groups are promoting. In the case of referenda, legislators may not find agreement among themselves to enact a new policy or law, and they may think that voters should decide the matter.

Ballot questions reflect issues that are on the minds of Americans. In 2008 some of the most controversial ballot issues involved abortion, immigration policy, and same-sex marriage. Other issues that voters considered in several different states were renewable energy, criminal justice, drug policy, election rules, and legislative pay and term limits.

Closer to home, local governments often place bond issues on election ballots. Voters are asked to decide whether their jurisdiction should sell bonds to raise money for construction or improvement projects involving community assets, such as schools and libraries, parks and recreation centers, and roads and bridges.

Opposite: A voter casts her ballot in the November 2004 presidential election at an elementary school in Battle Creek, Michigan. Right: Voters line up outside a polling place in Charlotte, North Carolina, in 2008.



State and Local Government

Americans are citizens not only of their country but of their states and local communities as well. In addition to the federal government, seated in Washington, D.C., governments are established in each of the 50 state capitals and in thousands of cities, towns, and counties across the country.



Each level of government holds responsibility for certain needs of its citizens. The federal government, of course, is responsible for national security and for ensuring the fair treatment of all Americans. At the state level, officials handle the unique concerns of their own population: matters involving industries located in the state, transportation networks, natural resources, and social service needs. Local officials primarily perform such day-to-day functions as maintaining public schools and libraries, providing fire and police protection, and ensuring reliable provision of water and utilities.

Tens of thousands of Americans serve on local government bodies, including school boards, city and town councils, public works commissions, planning boards, and election commissions. Outside of government structures, millions more are involved in volunteer activities in their neighborhoods.

In Fifty States

As the U.S. Congress meets in Washington, D.C., state legislatures convene in each of the 50 state capitals to discuss state issues and make laws that apply to citizens within their own borders. Like the Congress, 49 of the states have two-house legislatures, composed predominantly of members of the two major political parties, Republican and Democratic. Only the state of Nebraska maintains a one-house legislature and all its members are officially labeled as Independents.

A total of 7,382 Americans serve in state legislatures, elected by their fellow citizens for term lengths prescribed in state constitutions. According to the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL), the average age of state lawmakers is 56, with 61 percent between the ages of 30 and 60; nationally, 22.6 percent of them are women.

Until the 1960s, state legislatures generally met every other year for a limited number of days. Individual legislators were poorly paid and had little or no staff support. Today, however, 45 states hold annual legislative sessions, and many have increased legislative pay and added professional staff support. Still, the amount of time a legislator needs to fulfill his or her job varies greatly from state to state.

In large, industrialized states such as California, Michigan, New York, and Pennsylvania, for example, being a state legislator is a full-time job. In small or less populated states such as Montana, New Hampshire, North Dakota, South Dakota, Utah, and Wyoming, the work of a state legislator occupies about 50 percent of his or her time. The other 40 states fall somewhere in between.

Legislators' salaries reflect the demands of their jobs. Where the work is greatest, legislators are paid enough to live without needing outside income. At the other end of the spectrum, legislators receive low salaries and they continue to devote time to their private-sector careers to make a comfortable living. The NCSL reports that there is "a higher concentration of legislators serving during their income-earning years in states that maintain a full-time legislature with a higher salary. Legislatures that operate on a part-time basis and have lower salaries tend to have a higher number of younger and retired legislators."

Whatever the size of a state legislature or the salary of its members, the importance of their work cannot be underestimated. Addressing a group of state legislators meeting in Washington in 2009, Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives Nancy Pelosi said, "States are the laboratories for so many ideas. Some of the things that we [in Congress] have confidence to run with are things that have worked at the state level."



Top: In Massachusetts, the speaker of the state house of representatives delivers his annual address to citizens. Above: Two state senators take the oath of office as a new session begins.

Government Close to the People

Each of the 50 U.S. states is divided into any number of local jurisdictions, which include counties, cities, and towns. A county may encompass a number of communities that have different names, while a city or town encompasses an area that has one distinct name. The administration of government varies from county to county and city to city, but the mission of all local governments is the same: to provide essential, everyday services that ensure the well-being of their citizens.

To get an idea of the diversity of local government, consider these facts about county government: There are 3,066 counties in the United States, ranging in area from Arlington County, Virginia, with 67 square kilometers (25.9 square miles), to North Slope Borough, Alaska, with 228,439 square kilometers (87,861 square miles). Population varies from Loving County, Texas, with 140 residents, to Los Angeles County, California, with 9.2 million.

In general, local governments perform functions that are delegated by their state governments. County governments are responsible for managing the mechanics of elections. They register new voters, mail election information to voters, select voting devices, establish polling sites, recruit poll workers, and count and certify ballots on Election Day. Local governments also perform traditional functions, such as assessing property values for tax purposes, keeping records of property transactions, and maintaining vital statistics such as births, marriages, and deaths.

Perhaps most importantly, local governments provide services that affect citizens' daily routines. Local authorities ensure that the water piped into their homes is safe, that trash is picked up from their neighborhoods, that public schools are accessible to all children, and that the roads are paved.

When unusual, and possibly dangerous, circumstances arise, local government is there too, with police officers, firefighters, and emergency medical personnel protecting and aiding citizens. Clearly, the work of local government is closest to people's everyday lives.



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The responsibilities of local government include administering public schools, providing emergency services, and managing election procedures. Above, clockwise from lower left: Students in Texas walk to school buses to take them home after class; a Fairview Township firefighter battles a brush fire in Pennsylvania; a large sign marks a polling place in Little Rock, Arkansas.



An Informed Citizenry

The First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution guarantees freedom of the press. Mass media outlets are owned and run by private citizens, organizations, private companies, and public corporations—not by governments.



The American people rely on this free and independent media sector to provide information about all sides of an event or issue, and they may select their information from a variety of sources, allowing exposure to a range of viewpoints. In the major midwestern city of Chicago, Illinois, for example, area residents have access to no less than 15 daily or weekly newspapers, 12 television stations, four news radio stations, and a news magazine, all produced locally. According to *Mondo Times*, a worldwide media guide, Chicago-based publishers produce an additional 16 newspapers and 19 magazines that cater to special local interests, from entertainment and sports to business and science. Through nationally circulated magazines, cable television, satellite radio, and the Internet, of course, Chicago residents—like all Americans—have access to countless sources from around the country and around the world.

Above: A cameraman sets up for a CNN/YouTube presidential primary debate in St. Petersburg, Florida, in 2008. Opposite: A voter from Texas appears on a television monitor as she poses a question to a candidate onstage during a debate.

The majority of Americans get at least some of the news from television. Prior to 1980, three major networks (American Broadcasting Company (ABC), National Broadcasting Company (NBC), and Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS)) were the greatest sources of television news in the United States. The networks offer primarily entertainment programming with daily news broadcasts.

In 1980, the Cable News Network (CNN) revolutionized the industry by offering news 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and by establishing an international presence.

The success of CNN led to the formation of many other cable news channels that follow the 24/7 news delivery model.

Daily metropolitan newspapers and evening network news broadcasts once dominated news delivery, but cable news has now seized a significant share of the news-consuming audience. Perhaps one reason is that some cable channels now provide news and commentary with a decided point of view that appeals to certain segments of the audience. A survey conducted by the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press revealed that 74 percent of viewers find the three major network news programs to be “pretty much the same,” while 48 percent found “real differences” in coverage among three cable news outlets.



Above: A café in San Francisco, California, offers free wireless Internet access.

E-Government

U.S. citizens have access to their government 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Through government Web sites, Americans in most localities can go online to find out what their community officials are doing about garbage pickup, pothole repair, or other services. They also can transact with government agencies to renew a driver's license or auto registration. Many government agencies also allow citizens to submit comments about proposed policy changes online.

In addition, more and more government officials are producing blogs aimed at their constituents, and some are even on Twitter. Utah State Rep-

resentative Stephen Urquhart told *State Legislatures* magazine, “Blogging is simply another way to communicate with constituents. It's tough to draw much of a crowd to reason with me on most issues,” he said. “People are too busy to do things on my timetable. But on my blog, I can reason with many people every day on a variety of issues.” Furthermore, research shows that people who are engaged online are likely to be more civically involved offline. “People often approach me to discuss issues they read about on my blog,” Urquhart said. “Blogging does build bridges.”

Campaigning Online

As the Internet expands, online media claim a larger role in the world of political campaigns. First used as a new tool to sign up volunteers and solicit campaign contributions, the Internet became an integral communications tool between candidates for office and American voters in the 2000s.

According to the Pew Internet and American Life Project, 55 percent of the adult U.S. population went online to participate in or to get news and information about the 2008 presidential election campaign. The study, *The Internet's Role in Campaign 2008*, released in April 2009, also found that voters were using the Internet's social-networking and interactive capabilities to follow political events in new ways. The survey showed that one in three Internet users forwarded political content to friends or family; one in five used a blog or social-networking site to express their own thoughts on the campaign.

On social-networking sites such as MySpace and Facebook, many U.S. presidential candidates took up residence for the 2008 race. Tom Anderson, a founder of MySpace, says that the site reaches people who might not follow political news through traditional media.

“A MySpace profile could excite their interest in ways they are used to,” he says. “In the same way they learn about their friends, they could learn about a candidate.”

The Pew study also found that 45 percent of Internet users went online to watch a video relating to the political campaigns in 2008. YouTube, the video-sharing Web site, made history in presidential political campaigns, introducing a whole new mechanism for voters to become involved in the race. YouTube joined with CNN to conduct televised debates among candidates for their respective party's nomination in 2008. The traditional format allows a panel of journalists to question the candidates, and occasionally, an audience in a television studio might have the opportunity to pose questions to candidates. In 2008, anyone with an Internet connection and a video cam had a chance at the politicians. Individual voters lobbed questions at the candidates in videos uploaded to YouTube. The candidates assembled for a televised event in one location to respond to the video questions. The events, held separately for Democratic and Republican candidates, were broadcast on CNN.



Top: Bloggers report from the 2008 Democratic National Convention in Denver, Colorado. Above: A live satellite radio broadcast from the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in Cleveland, Ohio.



The Gift of Service

Service to the community is an integral part of what it means to be an American. More than 60 million people—one-quarter of the U.S. population over the age of 16—regularly give freely of their time through a service or charitable organization.



The teenager who helps clean up a riverbank, the father who coaches his daughter's basketball team, the senior citizen who reads to patients in a hospital—all these people are doing their part to make their communities better places.

On average, volunteers give 52 hours of time each year, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reports. Women volunteer at a higher rate than men: nearly 30 percent of women and 23 percent of men. They also differ in the types of activities they volunteer for. Women are more likely to do fundraising; to tutor or teach; or to collect, prepare, distribute, or serve food. Men are more interested in doing manual labor; in coaching, refereeing, or supervising sports teams; or in providing professional or management assistance.

Above: First Lady Michelle Obama works with volunteers to build a playground at an elementary school in San Francisco in 2009. Opposite: Members of AmeriCorps and corporate volunteers secure a newly raised wall for a building on the Gulf Coast of Mississippi in 2006.

In addition to those who devote time to volunteer activities in between their regular commitments to work and family, millions more give one or more years of their life to national service through the military, the Peace Corps, or AmeriCorps, a domestic service program. The U.S. government strongly encourages volunteer activities and works closely with state and local organizations to support programs that benefit all Americans.

On April 21, 2009, President Barack Obama signed into law a bill that dramatically expands national and community service opportunities for Americans, whether with a formal organization like AmeriCorps or in their local neighborhoods. The Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act, named for the late senator from Massachusetts, will usher in a “new era of service,” the president said.

The Serve America Act reauthorizes and expands the national service programs administered by the Corporation for National and Community Service, a federal agency created in 1993. The corporation enables 4 million Americans to serve in a wide variety of capacities each year, including AmeriCorps members, Senior Corps volunteers, Learn and Serve America students, and additional community volunteers mobilized through the agency’s programs. The Kennedy Act authorizes increases in the number of AmeriCorps volunteers from 75,000 to 250,000, for example.

Upon signing the law, President Obama addressed Americans of all ages:

“We need your service right now, at this moment in history. I’m not going to tell you what your role should be; that’s for you to discover. But I’m asking you to play your part....

“And if you do, I promise you your life will be richer, our country will be stronger, and someday, years from now, you may remember it as the moment when your own story and the American story converged, when they came together, and we met the challenges of our new century.”



Volunteers from AmeriCorps and community partners plant one of a thousand donated trees to green the city of Miami, Florida.

New Citizens in the Volunteer Military

Perhaps the ultimate volunteers are the people who enlist in military service, willingly giving up years of their lives to defend their country and their fellow citizens. The demands of duty are great, the pay is relatively low, but the volunteer military remains strong. Since the military draft ended in 1973, the United States has relied on volunteers to fill its military forces, numbering more than 1.4 million.

Thousands of noncitizen immigrants are in the ranks of the U.S. military. As of September 2009, more than 50,000 immigrant soldiers had become citizens since September 2001, and the number keeps growing.

At a naturalization ceremony at Pope Air Force Base in North Carolina in October 2008, Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates welcomed 42 men and women into citizenship. These soldiers, sailors, airmen, and Marines hailed from 26 countries, and many had served in Iraq and Afghanistan. "This nation that welcomes you with warmth and with pride is very much in your debt, because you have shown your love for this country in the most honorable way possible," Gates said.

Army 2nd Lt. Memorina Edwin Barnes, a native of Micronesia, became a U.S. citizen along with 250 other service members on March 4, 2009, in Iraq. On receiving a U.S. flag and her certificate of citizenship, Barnes said, "I was overwhelmed and felt a surge of pride." With 15 years of military service to her credit, Barnes added,

"Every soldier who received their citizenship today took steps long before this to get their citizenship, and we all served our nation even before we could call it home."

Both citizens and permanent alien residents are eligible to serve in the U.S. military. In peacetime, noncitizens who serve in the military may obtain citizenship in three years, as opposed to the five-year wait required of civilian applicants. During times of military hostilities, however, the president of the United States may allow noncitizens immediate naturalization. In July 2002, President George W. Bush issued an executive order granting expedited citizenship to immigrant men and women who served in the U.S. military since September 11, 2001. Previous administrations took similar actions, granting citizenship to 143,000 military participants in World Wars I and II, 31,000 who fought in the Korean War, and more than 100,000 veterans of the Vietnam and Persian Gulf Wars.



Foreign-born sailors salute during a naturalization ceremony aboard the *USS Ronald Reagan*, docked at Coronado, California, in 2006.

Charitable Giving

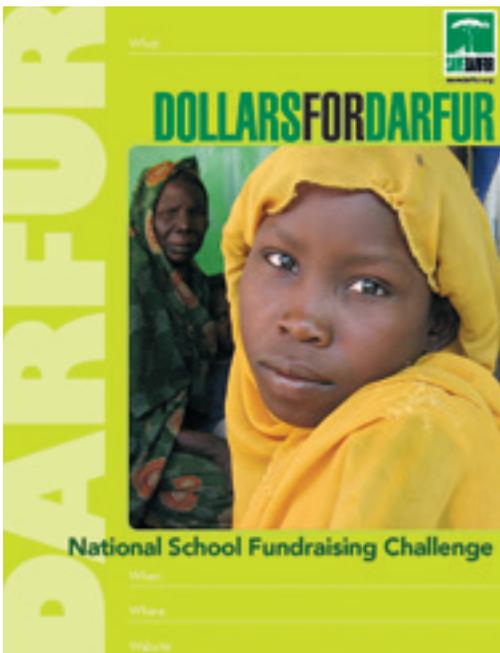
Another way that Americans contribute to their society and to the world is by donating a portion of their income to charitable causes. According to the most recent statistics assembled by the National Philanthropic Trust (NPT), 89 percent of American households give to charity, and the average annual contribution per giver is \$1,620. NPT reports that Americans contribute more than \$250 billion to charity each year.

American philanthropy reached an all-time high of \$295 billion in 2006, following Hurricane Katrina in the U.S. South and the Asian tsunami, but declined in 2008 as a recession began. Still, many Americans are, by nature, quite generous, beginning from a very early age.

Take Nick Anderson and Ana Slavin, for example. While they were secondary school students in Massachusetts, Anderson and Slavin became aware of the genocide in Darfur. "Our generation knows it will inherit a world with staggering problems," Slavin said. "We simply can't wait for others to change the world. We must start now."

Both teens used social-networking Web sites to stay in touch with friends, and they realized that those same sites could bring them together with students around the country for a good cause. They founded Dollars for Darfur and set a goal to raise \$200,000 during the 2006–2007 school year; instead, they raised \$306,000 from students at some 2,500 schools nationwide. Now administered by the Save Darfur Coalition, Dollars for Darfur has raised more than a half million dollars. Half of the money donated is used to fund humanitarian relief in Darfur and Chad; the other half goes to efforts to maintain political pressure to bring peace to Darfur.

With nearly 1.2 million charitable organizations and foundations in the United States alone, Americans are free to contribute to whichever charity—or charities—inspires them to give. Many choose to keep their money close to home, working through their neighborhood religious institutions, food banks, or homeless shelters. In addition, Americans dig into their own pockets to support nationwide organizations that serve causes such as medical research, veterans affairs, or children. Americans, too, are strong supporters of international relief organizations, demonstrating that U.S. citizens consider themselves citizens of the world as well as their own country.



"Our generation knows it will inherit a world with staggering problems. We simply can't wait for others to change the world. We must start now," said Ana Slavin, co-founder, along with Nick Anderson, of Dollars for Darfur.

Whether volunteering in the community or contributing to charitable causes, Americans are a generous people. Above, clockwise from lower left: A poster for the Dollars for Darfur fundraising campaign; volunteer street sweepers walk through New Orleans, Louisiana, during a community clean-up, just weeks after Hurricane Katrina in 2005; a group of volunteers uses a long rope to pull discarded tires from the Kansas River near Linwood, Kansas.

Where Volunteers Help

What Volunteers Do

<i>Civic, Political, Professional, or International Organization</i>	5.5 percent
<i>Educational or Youth Service</i>	26.0 percent
<i>Environmental or Animal Care</i>	2.0 percent
<i>Hospital or Other Health Care</i>	8.2 percent
<i>Public Safety</i>	1.3 percent
<i>Religious Institution</i>	35.1 percent
<i>Social or Community Service</i>	13.5 percent
<i>Sport, Hobby, Cultural, or Arts Organization</i>	3.3 percent
<i>Other/Not Determined</i>	5.1 percent

Who Volunteers

<i>Age of Population</i>	<i>Number of Volunteers</i>	<i>Percent</i>
16 to 24 years	8,239,000	21.9
25 to 34 years	9,154,000	22.8
35 to 44 years	13,016,000	31.3
45 to 54 years	13,189,000	29.9
55 to 64 years	9,456,000	28.1
65 years+	8,749,000	23.5
Total	61,803,000	26.4

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2008.

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