

A close-up photograph of a young girl with dark, curly hair, smiling warmly at the camera. She is resting her chin on her crossed arms, which are resting on her knees. She is wearing a purple top with a black and white polka-dot pattern and small, star-shaped earrings. The background is a soft, out-of-focus outdoor setting with green foliage.

capita

Tomorrow is Now: New Directions for Children's Philanthropy

What funders should learn to help children and families flourish in 2019 and beyond.

APRIL 2019

We believe the time is right for philanthropic organizations and individuals focused on the well-being of children and families to renew their best thinking with five big ideas focused relentlessly on the future. These ideas are well suited to help funders adapt to current social and political circumstances, renew their most creative thinking and operate more productively in the future, all in turn magnifying their own impact. This white paper is intended to share learnings and perspective from our first year of work. In sharing these, we aim to shape current thinking about philanthropic investment in the well-being of children while also surfacing deep cultural and governance issues that deserve more consideration from those organizations committed to the flourishing of all children and families in the future.

Philanthropy focused on the well-being of children should:

1. Prepare for a post-liberal political future,
2. Attend to criticisms about the complicity of philanthropy in practices which undermine the well-being of vulnerable populations,
3. Prioritize in-depth learning and broaden the focus of their organizations and programs,
4. Collaborate with funders in different disciplines and sectors, and
5. Invest in ideas while recognizing that conversations are costly.



ERROR 155:

Democracy
not found

Prepare for a post-liberal
political future.

Since the financial crisis of 2008, Brexit, the election of Donald Trump to the Presidency of the United States in 2016, and the rise of nationalist and populist leaders in Hungary, Brazil, and elsewhere, credible thinkers on both the left and the right are pointing out the foundational weaknesses of the democratic liberalism which has pervaded the political order since the end of the Second World War. Characterized by separation of powers, a market economy, and equal rights, democratic liberalism has served as the foundation for American politics and life. Our human services, health, and education sectors are built within this tradition, as are the assumptions about the delivery of social welfare within that

context. Failure to examine the foundations of this work, to prepare for a new set of fundamental assumptions, and to work in the spirit of building what John Milbank and Adrian Pabst have called a “humane post-liberalism” represents significant short sightedness by children’s philanthropy.¹

The founders of the United States, who ushered in a western and global revolution towards rights-based liberalism alongside a market-based economy, conceived of citizens as “rights-bearing individuals who could fashion and pursue for themselves their own version of the good life”.² Yet nearly two and a half centuries since those dramatic years of revolution, many of the promises of liberalism have failed to materialize for many people in America, across Europe, and beyond. Instead, liberalism’s managerial elite continues to secure rights through the unfair replication of advantages, contest basic democratic rights such as access to voting, increase economic inequality, and lastly, fail to inspire confidence in its ability to govern. Unsurprisingly, many have lost confidence in liberal democracy, and a search for alternatives is underway.

If “liberalism finds its quintessential form in a market state that enforces individualism,” then its demise presents us with a challenge.³ The market state’s enforcement of individualism inherently leaves out the vulnerable child, a definite loser in

the liberal world order, unable to assert herself as an individual and devalued by the market. How then can children’s philanthropy and many of the organizations supported by children’s philanthropy begin to contribute to the building of a post-liberalism that properly positions the child, and our obligations to the child, in ways that are truly humane?

First, we must reclaim the languages of justice, responsibility, and solidarity when speaking about the rights of the child and our obligations to invest in their healthy development. For too long, we have relied on making our case using the language

“We must reclaim the languages of justice, responsibility, and solidarity when speaking about the rights of the child and our obligations to invest in their healthy development.”

of the market. However, the public, private, and philanthropic sectors largely tasked with serving children and families exist only because of market failures in this domain.

Alongside recovering the language of solidarity, funders should invest more in the governance structures that promote such solidarity. Fundamental reforms are needed that make our systems more democratic, just, and cooperative—not simply better policies within the system as



it is presently configured. Many funders are in a position to invest in building the public will for such structures. Restoring governance of health systems to cooperative governance by the people, introducing more worker cooperation in management, and ensuring a free and fair vote for all, are just a few opportunities for reform that would benefit all families and contribute to a brighter future for children.

Secondly, we should recover the human scale of things—the scale at which most people spend most of their time, derive the greatest satisfaction, and have the greatest supports when a child is sick, a parent struggles with aging, or a job is lost. The finance-dominated market and the state that ministers to it are massive affairs with social programs that struggle to compete with the day-to-day needs and realities of children and

families. Recovering the human scale of things—family, neighborhood, community, and school—by investing in the web of human relationships that support the well-being of the child is something many funders already do. But this recovery of scale must be deepened in order to respond to the challenges of a post-liberal order. Investing more in front porches and third spaces will go a long way toward impacting factors that will not only improve outcomes for children today, but for all families tomorrow.⁴ We should utilize opportunities to invest in places such as libraries, cafes, urban trails, and public parks, where communities and families safely gather, build social solidarity, and strengthen the complex web of relationships that exist in civil society—along with new forms of association adapted to the 21st century—where meaningful and strong ties are forged.

“How then can children’s philanthropy and many of the organizations supported by children’s philanthropy begin to contribute to the building of a post-liberalism that properly positions the child, and our obligations to the child, in ways that are truly humane?”





Attend to the *Winners*
Take All criticism.

All philanthropy must reckon with its own complicity in the structures and practices of injustice that exacerbate the social challenges we are trying to solve. Anand Giridharadas, Rob Reich, Edgar Villanueva, and others have raised the valid criticism of how the wealthy drive inequality through extractive, systemic practices that siphon the gains of our innovation-driven economy upward, while positively managing their reputations through philanthropic giving.⁵ Too often, one's arm of business may be exacerbating what the philanthropic arm is trying to solve. With this in mind, child-focused philanthropic organizations should examine whether their long-term investments

“Let us not just be advocates for effective programs and policies, but for all children and families, and against whomever or whatever compromises their welfare.”

and benefactors' investments may be undermining their philanthropic endeavors.

It is right and fitting for those of us who are passionate about children's well-being and education to insert our voices into this space. Let us not just be advocates for effective programs and policies, but for all

children and families, and against whomever or whatever compromises their welfare. As Ford Foundation president Darren Walker recently wrote:

Rather than taking a “this too shall pass” attitude, philanthropists need to engage in repairing the very mechanisms that produce, preserve, and promote our privilege. I believe we must practice a better vision of philanthropy, one that improves itself and the societies of which we are members.⁶

We believe children's philanthropy can be a leader in articulating this “better vision.”

For example, many colleges and universities in the American South (and beyond) are presently wrestling with their complicity in slavery. Their example may help us discern a better way forward for philanthropic organizations and foundations that are also complicit in the legacies of slavery, economic exploitation, environmental degradation, housing discrimination, and more.

Furman University, to take one example, was founded by wealthy Southern Baptists who were prominent theological apologists





An engraving of a Charleston, S.C. slave sale, 1856.

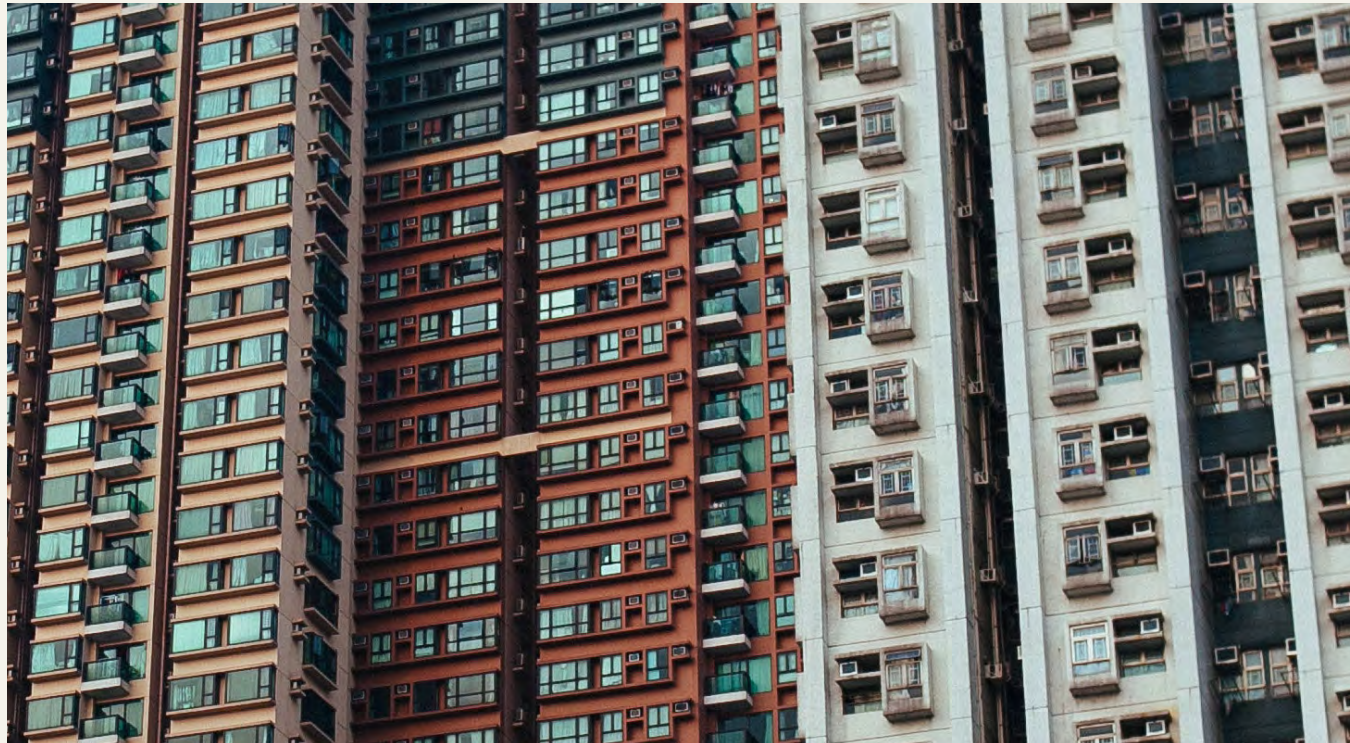
for slavery. Furman's first president was a slave-owner and a signatory to South Carolina's ordinance of secession, which broke the ties of union in an ill-fated attempt to preserve the "peculiar institution" of slavery. Today, Furman is taking both symbolic and concrete steps to rectify the complicity of Furman's founders, early supporters, and the university itself in slavery. After undertaking a long and thorough historical investigation into its past, the Furman Board of Trustees approved a series of recommendations that will make a concrete effort to repair the wrongs committed. These recommendations, now being acted upon, include renaming buildings presently named for slaveholders, renaming campus streets, erecting new statues honoring prominent African-American alumni, and providing new resources for the public interpretation of the university's history. These recommendations also include investing in new scholarships for students "beset

by systematic, intergenerational social disadvantage and discrimination" resulting from slavery and Jim Crow.⁷

We have found precious little evidence of foundations and other philanthropic organizations taking steps to evaluate the ways in which their wealth and power were generated and repairing wrongs where that wealth and power creation resulted from extractive and destructive means. Moreover, this isn't just about past practices of founders, but current philanthropic practice that "divides and destabilizes".⁸ In addition to examining sources of philanthropic wealth, we must also examine many of the core assumptions at the heart of philanthropy and the ways in which those

assumptions do not serve the common good, especially for children and families: why is philanthropic wealth "held back from public coffers," why is it that overwhelmingly white people get to decide how that wealth is invested, and why are monumental decisions impacting the common good entrusted to so few?⁹

Foundations and other philanthropic organizations need to practice constant reevaluation—in meaningful dialogue with truly representative external stakeholders—in order to use their wealth in ways that build the common good and ensure justice rather than continue to exacerbate the social disorders they purport to solve.





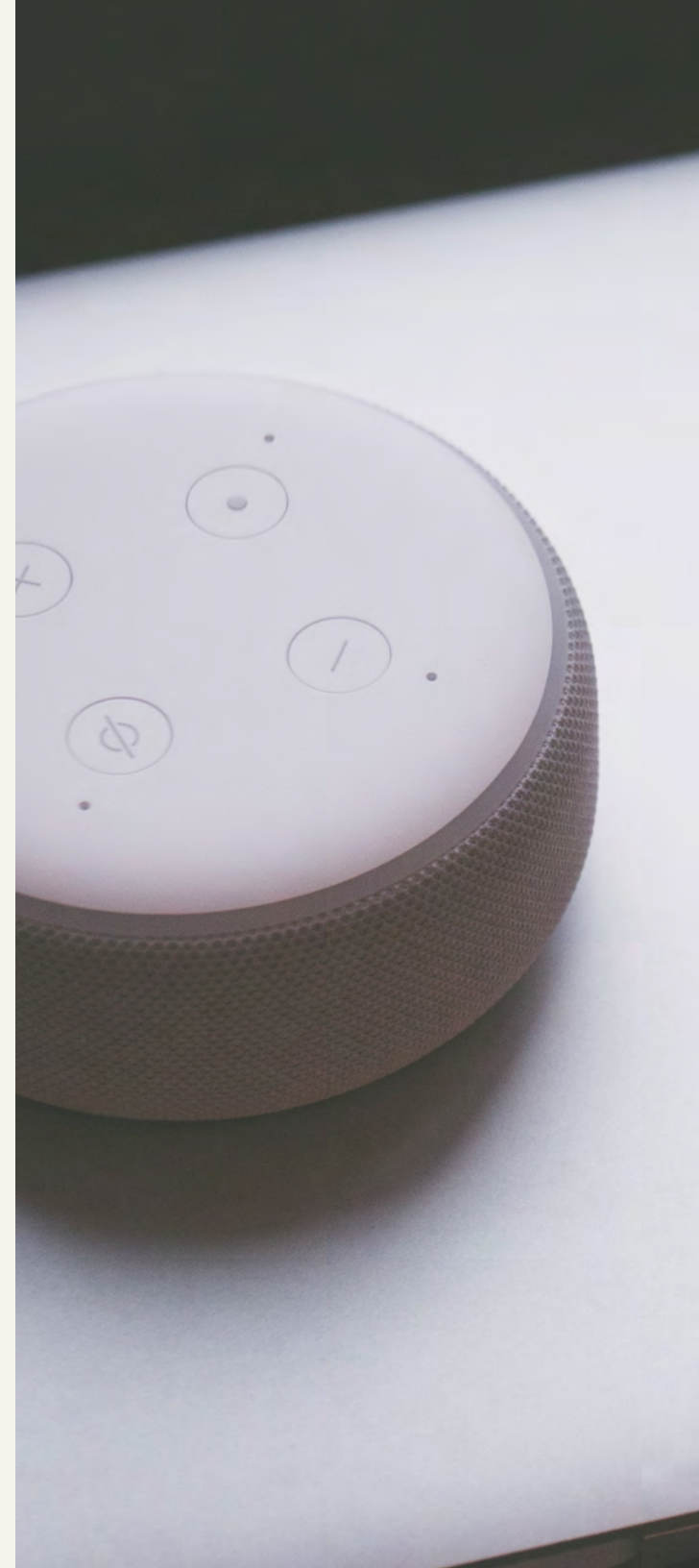
Prioritize in-depth learning
and broaden the focus.

While the important work of children's philanthropy has funded a range of compelling and promising practices for children and their families, we must ask ourselves if these investments have yielded a deep understanding of how all children, regardless of their background, can flourish in today's society? Have we understood deeply and challenged the cultural narratives, assumptions, and mindsets that can undermine the well-being of families? Are we more attuned to the experiences and needs of children and their families in the 21st century? And, for those children who are not yet flourishing, what are the most necessary investments over the short and long term? While mission-critical, we do not believe these questions are currently being answered at the scale needed to truly make a significant difference for the most underprivileged children and families.

Always mindful of solutions, we urge the field to consider new funding strategies that invest more

in the cross-cutting, multi-disciplinary research and learning communities that explore the most profound, and accordingly, potentially life-changing questions facing children and families in the 21st century. [KnowledgeWorks'](#) efforts to bring strategic foresight to K-12 education is but one example of this kind of rigorous, in-depth learning and exploration that should be more broadly supported by children's philanthropy. We need to explore deep questions about caregiving, the provision of social-welfare, the ethical formation of children raised in augmented and virtual realities, and more. Answering these questions—even provisionally—will require funding for more research in the humanities, for exploring ethical frontiers, and postulating about the future based on current trends. This approach to funding will require dedication, patience and steadiness over many years. Yet, it is critically important for building a better future for the children and families of today and of tomorrow.

“Have we understood deeply and challenged the cultural narratives, assumptions, and mindsets that can undermine the well-being of families? Are we more attuned to the experiences and needs of children and their families in the 21st century?”





Foster intersectional funder
collaboration.

Intentional intersectional collaboration across disciplines and policy areas must become an essential feature of philanthropic work on behalf of children and families. The North Carolina Early Childhood Funders' Collaborative and the [Constellation Philanthropy](#) in Colorado are two regional examples of this approach to collaborative advocacy and funding. Both groups are making strategic, collaborative investments and leveraging their collective voice in public policy advocacy. This trend is, on the whole, positive because it breaks down knowledge and programmatic barriers that exist within philanthropy.

We can imagine even greater possibilities from such collaboratives if funders are willing to consider meaningfully working with others whose work impacts child outcomes, but whose

programming is not always explicitly or solely child focused.

For example, a funders collaborative addressing the prevalence of childcare deserts in a particular region might collaborate fruitfully with affordable housing funders. Most funders would seek to solve the problem of childcare deserts by bringing the tools and frameworks of the early childhood sector to bear on the problem. This directional approach might result in new measures to promote in-home childcare quality or subsidies at the state level. It might also involve investing in entrepreneurial ventures like [Wonderschool](#) or [MyVillage](#) that are franchising in-home childcare centers. But the approach is not likely to include a collaboration with

a housing funder addressing the lack of high-quality, affordable housing for those people who could start in-home childcare businesses in these childcare deserts. An intersectional approach that includes collaboration across disciplines and policy areas has the potential of multiplying the impact of the approaches and investments of the children's funding community.

“We can imagine even greater possibilities from such collaboratives if funders are willing to consider meaningfully working with others whose work impacts child outcomes, but whose programming is not always explicitly or solely child focused.”





Ideas matter, but
conversations are costly.

Organizations and institutions dedicated to advancing bold ideas are necessary to drive better outcomes for children over many years, but too few investments are made purely with the intention of fostering good ideas and too few innovations become reality. Furthermore, philanthropic and other organizations have come to expect a level of access to potential and promising ideas that is not commensurate with their investments in bringing those ideas to fruition. A range of organizations have emerged in recent years to catalyze bold ideas-driven work to improve outcomes for children. They are increasingly aware of the costs of conversations with philanthropic organizations that wish to benefit from the power of good ideas, but do not make significant investments in the operation required for the generation, dissemination, and application of new ideas shaping the future for our children and families.

Philanthropic organizations should develop pools of resources for those individual and organizational pioneers actively fostering the next generation of ideas, connecting such ideas with broader trends in politics, culture, technology, and the economy, then socializing those ideas in philanthropic, policy, and practice circles. Moreover, philanthropic partners must appropriately value the time and energy of the pioneers building and workshopping these ideas and making the moral, intellectual, and practical case that these ideas matter and have the



potential to solve some of our society's greatest challenges.

Individual and organizational “idea pioneers” need the intellectual freedom, time, and space to do their work and it must be meaningfully supported by children’s philanthropy. This critical work cannot be taken for granted and must be funded accordingly.

In recent decades, more funders have been supporting the generation and dissemination of new policy ideas in think tanks in capitals around the world. These ideas are then taken up by advocates who promote them with governments. This funding is often driven by the ideological commitments of the funders. Of course, funders

“Investing in big ideas that shape culture and public perception and that build the public will, upon which policymakers act, will require more investments in time for artists and scholars to develop new work, for generative convenings without clear near-term next steps and more resources to publish and disseminate ideas both within particular fields, but also among broader publics.”

have the prerogative to focus their giving based on their values, but we are eager to see more gifts that support ideas for ideas’ sake. Moreover, we also are excited by the prospect of funders supporting idea-generation that happens outside the traditional public policy-think tank/university bubble. Investing in big ideas that shape culture and public perception and that build the public

will, upon which policymakers act, will require more investments in time for artists and scholars to develop new work, for generative convenings without clear near-term next steps and more resources to publish and disseminate ideas both within particular fields, but also among broader publics.

The Gary Community Investments' Early Childhood Innovation Prize and Omidyar Network's investment in Promise Venture Studio represents a positive step in the direction of investing in new ideas and pioneering entrepreneurs. Capita, AIR Serenbe, and Reach Out and Read Carolinas have worked together to provide dedicated residency time for artists creating new work for young children. We urge the children's philanthropy world to move in this direction, particularly for organizations that are looking ahead to the ideas on issues that will set the agenda for improving outcomes for families in the coming decades.





Conclusion

Nearly 51 years ago, on the night of April 4, 1968, Robert F. Kennedy touched down at the airport in Indianapolis, Indiana, and soon learned that Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. had been shot earlier in the evening on a hotel balcony in Memphis, Tennessee. Upon reaching his campaign stop in an African-American neighborhood in which the police refused to protect him, Senator Kennedy realized

“We believe this tradition of leadership is poised for renewal to meet the challenge and opportunity of the age in which we find ourselves. However, the north star of philanthropic leadership must clearly and enduringly be our effort to, in the words of RFK, “make gentle the life of this world” for all people, especially those on the periphery of society, and most especially children.”

those gathered around him were unaware that Dr. King had been killed. He broke the news to them and the words he chose in that moment are a charter for our way forward as a country and for our world:

What we need in the United States is not division; what we need in the United States is not hatred; what

we need in the United States is not violence and lawlessness; but is love and wisdom, and compassion toward one another, and a feeling of justice toward those who still suffer within our country, whether they be white or whether they be black.

We can do well in this country. We will have difficult times; we've had difficult times in the past; but we will have difficult times in the future. It is not the end of violence; it is not the end of lawlessness; it is not the end of disorder. But the vast majority of white people and the vast majority of black people in this country want to live together, want to improve the quality of our life, and want justice for all human beings that abide in our land. Let us dedicate ourselves to what the Greeks wrote so many years ago: to tame the savageness of man and make gentle the life of this world.¹⁰

For over a century, philanthropic organizations have been on the leading edge of social progress for children and families. We believe this tradition of leadership is poised for renewal to meet the challenge

and opportunity of our age in which we find ourselves. However, the north star of philanthropic leadership must clearly and enduringly be our effort to, in the words of RFK, “make gentle the life of this world” for all people, especially those on the periphery of society, and most especially children.

We hope that children’s philanthropy in the United States and around the world will build on these ideas and become poised for learning and renewal, meaningful leadership in a time of uncertainty and inequality, and for public advocacy that clearly establishes investment in the first years of life and in families as the foundation for a life of flourishing and dignity.



ENDNOTES

¹ John Milbank and Adrian Pabst. *The Politics of Virtue: Post-liberalism and the Human Future*. London: Rowman & Littlefield International, 2016.

² Patrick J. Deneen. *Why Liberalism Failed*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018.

³ Phillip Blond. "Politics After Liberalism." *First Things*. Available at: <https://www.firstthings.com/article/2017/12/politics-after-liberalism>.

⁴ Patrick J. Deneen. "A Republic of Front Porches." *Front Porch Republic*. Available at: <https://www.frontporchrepublic.com/2009/03/front-porch-republic>; Eric Klinenberg. *Palaces for the People: How Social Infrastructure Can Help Fight Inequality, Polarization, and the Decline of Civic Life*. Crown/Archetype, 2018.

⁵ Anand Giridharadas. *Winners Take All: The Elite Charade of Changing the World*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2018; Rob Reich. *Just Giving: Why Philanthropy Is Failing Democracy and How It Can Do Better*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018; Edgar Villenueva. *Decolonizing Wealth: Medicine to Heal Divides and Restore Balance*. Oakland, CA, Berrett-Koehler, 2018.

⁶ Darren Walker. "The Coming of Hope: A Vision for Philanthropy in the New Year." Ford Foundation. Available at: <https://www.fordfoundation.org/ideas/equals-change-blog/posts/the-coming-of-hope-a-vision-for-philanthropy-in-the-new-year>.

⁷ Furman University Report on Slavery. Available at: https://www.furman.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Seeking_Abraham_Furman_Task_Force_on_Slavery_and_Justice_Report.pdf.

⁸ Edgar Villenueva. *Decolonizing Wealth: Medicine to Heal Divides and Restore Balance*, 25.

⁹ Edgar Villenueva. *Decolonizing Wealth: Medicine to Heal Divides and Restore Balance*, 24.

¹⁰ Robert F. Kennedy. "Statement on Assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr." Speech, Indiana, Indianapolis, April 4, 1968.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This white paper was produced by Capita, an ideas lab exploring how the great cultural and social transformations of our day affect children and families. Capita fosters new ideas and broadens the public dialogue to ensure a future in which all families flourish.

Thanks are due to Capita Board members Sara Peters, Lucy Davidson, and Jessica Schumer, MD for their contributions to this brief. Joe Waters was the principal author. Sam Jones provided invaluable editorial help and managed the revision process. Alan Richard always improves our writing and our thinking. Brannon McAllister served as the designer on this project.

Ashley Beckner of Omidyar Network, Vinny Badolato of Voqal, Nicole Biondi of Innovation Edge, and Carolyn Lyons of the Campaign for Grade-Level Reading read a draft of this brief and provided trenchant feedback from their unique organizational vantage points. We are enormously grateful for their input and perspective, but all errors or shortcomings in this work are Capita's alone.

capita