PhilanthropyRoundtable
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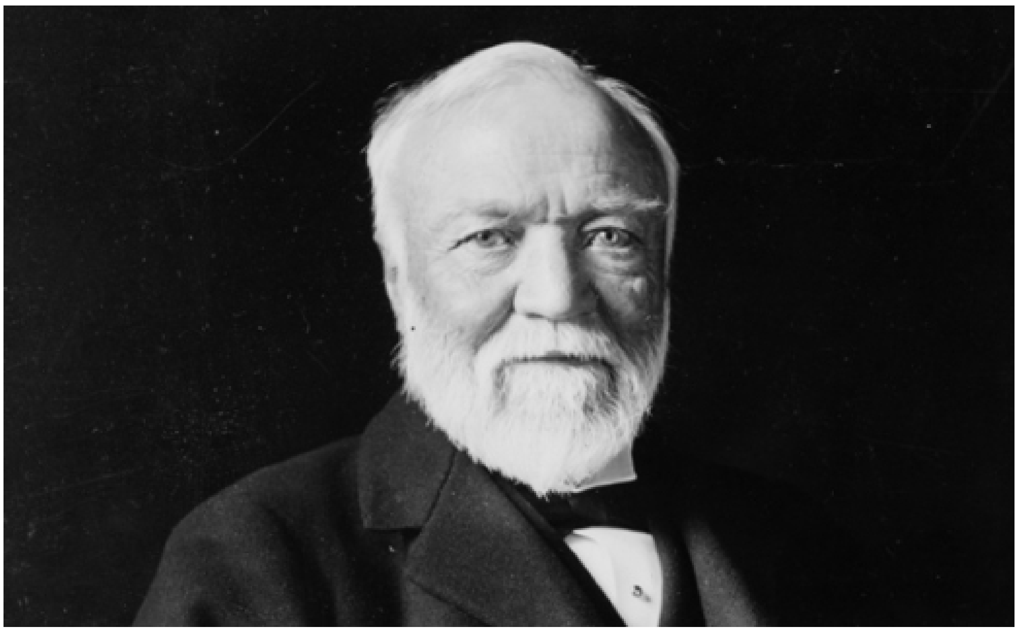
The Carnegie Corporation Turns 100

A century has passed since Carnegie founded the Carnegie Corporation of New York. What would its founder think of it today?



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By Leslie Lenkowsky

In 1889, in the first of two essays that have come to be known as "The Gospel of Wealth," Andrew Carnegie warned of the perils the wealthy faced if they were insufficiently philanthropic during their lifetimes:

. . . the day is not far distant when the man who dies leaving behind him millions of available wealth, which was free to him to administer during life, will pass away "unwept, unhonored, and unsung," no matter to what uses he leaves the dross which he cannot take with him.

About such people, he judged, "the public verdict will then be: 'The man who dies thus rich dies disgraced.

In 1911, during his 76th year, Carnegie realized that he was at risk of this fate himself. Despite having already given $150 million away, he had seen his fortune grow more rapidly and remained an extremely wealthy man. As a result, with initial gifts totaling $125 million (close to $3 billion today), he established the Carnegie Corporation, a philanthropic trust with a broad mission to "promote the advancement and diffusion of knowledge and understanding."

Along with the creation of the Russell Sage Foundation in 1907 and the Rockefeller Foundation in 1913, this marked the beginning of the modern era of foundation philanthropy. Smaller funds with more limited purposes had existed before, but according to the Foundation Center, the combined assets of foundations with endowments of at least $1 million in 1909 amounted to about $1.5 billion (in present-day dollars). Carnegie's gift alone surpassed that, and others soon followed suit. In the second decade of the 20th century, 78 large foundations were set up, with endowments that would amount to over $16 billion today; during the next, another $16 billion was added in 173 grantmaking organizations. Most are still operating.

But more than size and scope made the Carnegie Corporation stand out. It also embraced a philosophy of giving known as "scientific philanthropy," which sought to apply the knowledge of experts, particularly those in the medical and social sciences, to the problems donors wanted to address. "Scientific philanthropy" promised more innovative approaches and more cost-efficient returns, making it especially congenial to an industrialist like Carnegie. After all, both innovation and efficiency were key factors in his business success. Carnegie was among the very first to adopt the Bessemer process and the Siemens-Martin "open-hearth" method for steel-making. In addition, he loathed waste—his motto to managers was, "Well, boys, what can we throw away this year?"—and was eager to see every philanthropic dollar as effectively invested as possible.

With a staff heavy in experts and close ties to leading universities and research institutions, the Carnegie Corporation, along with Rockefeller, quickly became known as a principal exponent of this philosophy—and a leader in the world of institutional philanthropy. Even today, though its giving barely places it among the top 50, it remains one of the most prestigious of grantmaking organizations.

Is that reputation deserved? And what would Andrew Carnegie think of his creation?

Duquesne Steel Plant

As the Carnegie Corporation enters its centennial year, these are questions worth pondering, not just to examine the work of this particular organization, but also to assess the approach to grantmaking it has exemplified, which has served as a model for many other foundations. The answer is not simple. The reason lies in the difference between what Carnegie and his generation regarded as effective philanthropy and what those who direct many of today's foundations do, including Carnegie's own.

The Living Donor

Andrew Carnegie's views on philanthropy now enjoy widespread popularity, largely because of their insistence on the responsibility of the wealthy to give their fortunes away during their lifetimes, rather than leave them to their heirs. The latest evidence can be found in the generally favorable public reaction to the efforts of Bill and Melinda Gates and Warren Buffett to persuade contemporary billionaires to devote the majority of their wealth to giving. Few have suggested they should stick to making money instead, let alone spend it on themselves or their families.

During his own lifetime, Carnegie tried to practice what he preached. He established a number of scholarly and research institutes which bear his name: the Carnegie Institution for Science, the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, and the Carnegie Institute of Technology (today known as Carnegie Mellon University). Convinced of the power of music for worship, he helped churches purchase over 7,500 organs. He created organizations designed to encourage the peaceful resolution of international conflicts, including the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and the Carnegie Council for Ethics in International Affairs.

But, as a summary of his "benefactions" published on his death put it, "the work which has made Andrew Carnegie's name a household word all over the world" was his gifts for libraries, to be open at no charge to the public. So prolific were his efforts that the exact number of libraries is still in dispute, but the count when he died stood at 2,811, two-thirds in the United States and the rest in Canada, Great Britain, and other parts of the English-speaking world.

But there was much more to Carnegie's thinking than the idea that the rich had an obligation to be philanthropic. Indeed, at the time he set out his views, they were—and were meant to be—challenging and controversial.

When Carnegie started to publish "The Gospel of Wealth" in 1889, he had already decided to give away most of his fortune. (Two years earlier, his soon-to-be wife signed a prenuptial agreement in which she acknowledged that he planned to give most of his wealth to "charitable and educational purposes.") But since he was not a particularly spiritual man, his motives were not religious, as John D. Rockefeller's were. Rather, they sprang from his political philosophy, which owed much to Herbert Spencer, the English philosopher, sociologist, and classical liberal theorist of the late Victorian era.

Photo by Jim Kuhn

Carnegie understood his enormous success in business as due to his own talents, which, literally to his good fortune, were allowed to flourish within an economic system that valued enterprise, competition, and private property. It had made him (and others like him) extremely wealthy and brought improvements in living standards for everyone else as well. However, its inevitable costs included greater inequality and social "frictions" between employers and workers. Left unaddressed, these could lead to efforts to overturn the system and replace it with another that was likely to result in greater misery for all.

For Carnegie, philanthropy was critical to preventing that from happening. By using their wealth "to produce the most beneficial results for the community," those who enjoyed the fruits of the economic system could ensure that the rest of society gained, too. This was not only a matter of prudence; it was one of justice as well. As much as he appreciated his own talents and the rightness of the rewards they brought him, Carnegie recognized that his good fortune was also the "joint product" (as he would later write) with many others, including his employees, customers, suppliers, and not least of all, the political community, who consented to the laws governing economic activity. To all of them, he believed, the "man of wealth" had an obligation, which could best be discharged through returning his money to public uses.

But not merely through any kind of giving. Carnegie's essays were as much a critique of philanthropy as it was then practiced as they were an argument for its importance and urgency. "Of every thousand dollars spent in so-called charity to-day," he wrote, "it is probable that nine hundred and fifty dollars is unwisely spent—so spent, indeed, as to produce the very evils which it hopes to mitigate or cure." The problem, as he saw it, was "indiscriminate charity": providing help to people who were unwilling to help themselves. That sort of philanthropy—"almsgiving," in his opinion—rewarded bad habits instead of encouraging good ones. To underscore the point, Carnegie devoted the second of the two essays he wrote to the "best fields for philanthropy," which included supporting universities, libraries, hospitals, meeting halls, and recreational facilities. Simply giving money to the needy was not on the list.

Both parts of Carnegie's "gospel" drew criticism. In an otherwise laudatory review, the British Whig political leader William E. Gladstone (whom Carnegie admired) defended the right of the wealthy to hold on to their money, even if they had inherited it. It was theirs, after all, and they should not feel obliged to give it to charity unless they wanted to do so. He also believed Carnegie had given short shrift to religion in his enumeration of the "best fields for philanthropy."

From a different perspective, a Methodist bishop, the Rev. Hugh Price Hughes, went so far as to denounce Carnegie as "anti-Christian." The reason: the real problem of modern society, as he saw it, was the underhanded ways people like Carnegie used to acquire their fortunes, especially their use of protective tariffs, price-fixing, and other measures to disadvantage competitors. Until that came to an end, philanthropy could do little good. Carnegie's "gospel" was, in essence, no more than an attempt to legitimize the fortunes of the wealthy by claiming that they not only were deserved, but also would ultimately benefit the public.

Although these objections continued for many years, Carnegie was not deterred. Throughout the rest of his life, he defended his views in print and tried by example to show how to give responsibly to charity, directing much of his money toward the kinds of institutions—particularly in education—that would help people cultivate their talents and take advantage of the opportunities he believed the economic system offered. Yet, by his own standard, Carnegie realized as he approached the end of his life that he was not going to succeed in completely distributing his own wealth.

Creating the Corporation

At the conclusion of the second essay, Carnegie wrote:

To leave at death what he cannot take away, and place upon others the burden of the work which it was his own duty to perform, is to do nothing worthy. This requires no sacrifice, nor any sense of duty to his fellows.

Nonetheless, that is exactly what he did in creating the Carnegie Corporation.

Carnegie's biographers are divided about why he changed his mind. One hints he wanted to relieve his wife of the burden of spending his remaining wealth. Another suggests he wished to avoid the legal complications that could arise with bequests at that time. The appeal of obtaining a kind of immortality may have been a factor, too. But whatever the reason, he changed his mind, and in 1911 began transferring what was left of his fortune to the newest—and by far, the largest—of the many institutions he had created.

Carnegie nevertheless remained firmly in charge. The initial trustees were all close associates and included no family members. In addition to the broad, general purpose, the Corporation's mission statement enumerated the kinds of organizations the Corporation was to support, which corresponded to the ones Carnegie had been funding directly. Its early grants went predominantly to the groups he had helped establish and maintain, such as the Carnegie Institute in Pittsburgh, and his fund for building libraries. As a member of the first group of trustees, Henry S. Pritchett, would later note, "When Mr. Carnegie formed the Carnegie Corporation, he simply incorporated himself."

But as he had done with other organizations he had endowed, Carnegie gave his trustees control over the Corporation. In the letter accompanying his first gift, he wrote that they were to have "full authority to change policy or causes hitherto aided from time to time, when this in their opinion becomes necessary or desirable." He added: "They shall best conform to my wishes by using their own judgment." The Carnegie Corporation was intended to exist indefinitely—"for generations untold," as he put it. Because its goals were ambitious and not limited to a particular area of activity, those in charge would have considerable freedom to decide what to support.

They lost no time. Carnegie had already begun withdrawing from the day-to-day operations of his Corporation. He was increasingly infirm, and deeply depressed by the outbreak of the First World War, which made a mockery of more than a decade spent promoting peaceful resolutions to international conflicts. Carnegie's signature library-building program was among the first up for reconsideration. Aware of the problems facing the facilities—including sparse use in some communities—trustee Henry S. Pritchett commissioned a Cornell University professor of economics to write a report. The report concluded that the grantmaker should focus on "efficient library service," and not necessarily the construction of more libraries. (It was a conclusion perhaps suspiciously amenable to Pritchett, who also served as president of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, a separate entity created to promote improvements in education.)

According to *The Politics of Knowledge*, Ellen Condliffe Lagemann's definitive history of the Carnegie Corporation, the report infuriated James Bertram. Bertram—also a trustee—was Carnegie's right-hand man. He was incensed because the report seemed clearly to go against Carnegie's wishes. Nonetheless, in 1917, while its founder was still alive, the Corporation stopped providing support for library construction and, not long after, developed an initiative with the American Library Association to train librarians.

This pattern repeated itself during the early years of the Carnegie Corporation. The trustees started with Carnegie's own interests, but then enlarged them in light of the recommendations of the experts they consulted. In 1902, for example, Carnegie had endowed an institute in Washington to stimulate scientific research. Following the First World War, the Corporation provided the seed money to establish the National Research Council, an arm of the National Academy of Sciences that aimed to enhance the federal government's capacity to utilize such knowledge.

Carnegie also had an abiding concern about labor relations in a modern industrial economy. At the end of 1920, the Corporation gave early support to the National Bureau of Economic Research, which began, under the direction of Columbia University professor Wesley C. Mitchell, a program of empirical studies of unemployment and other business-cycle issues. Though valuable for the development of economics as a social science, the real utility of this work, at least to Carnegie trustee Pritchett, was to combat "the propaganda of misinformation now existing in this country," which he saw steering the United States toward socialism.

Perhaps the most successful example of this sort of approach was an unintended one. Like other philanthropists of his day, Carnegie had taken an interest in improving educational opportunities for African Americans throughout the South. The Corporation had continued that effort. But in 1935, its trustees decided to step back and examine what was being accomplished and what further steps could be taken to address "negro education and negro problems," including in the northern states. To get a fresh perspective on the subject, they recruited Gunnar Myrdal, a Swedish social scientist, who put together a team of researchers and began extensive field work.

As Lagemann has observed, Myrdal's report had little "direct relation to the Corporation's original intentions in commissioning the work." Instead of an analysis of the problems facing black Americans that would lend itself to a new round of Corporation grantmaking, the two-volume study offered a wide-ranging account of race relations in the United States, aimed at forging public consensus about the need for political and social change to close the gap between the country's egalitarian ideals and its racially discriminatory practices. Moreover, when finally published in 1944 as *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy*, the Second World War was underway and the Corporation's interests had shifted.

Consequently, Myrdal's analysis was largely ignored within the organization. But his book had a significant effect in catalyzing the civil rights movement, as well as shaping scholarship on racial issues in the United States.

The Corporation Evolves

The Carnegie Corporation kept its focus in the years after the Second World War chiefly on social problems, particularly education. (From 1955 to 1979, the Corporation's president served as president of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, and the two came close to merging.) It helped create the Educational Testing Service and promoted greater use of standardized examinations. In the 1950s, it supported former Harvard president James Bryant Conant's bestselling studies of secondary education and teacher training. The following decade, under the direction of Clark Kerr, former president of the University of California, it launched an extensive series of reports on key issues facing colleges and universities.

Much of this work challenged the educational status quo in the name of expanding opportunities for those who wanted to take advantage of them. Conant's studies, for example, called for creating more "comprehensive" high schools (as opposed to those with specialized curricula) so that more students could take college-preparatory classes. He also criticized the value of education courses for future teachers, recommending instead more emphasis on mastering the subjects they were supposed to teach. Kerr's reports urged increased funding for student aid, rather than institutional support for colleges and universities, in order to expand access to higher education.

As Washington began to address poverty and other social issues, however, the Carnegie Corporation's attention turned increasingly toward trying to affect public policy. John Gardner, the Corporation's president for a decade, played a key role in developing the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, which provided the first major federal funding for public schools; he was then chosen by President Lyndon B. Johnson to serve as his Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare. According to Lagemann, to his successor, Alan Pifer, "developing blueprints for federal action became a central Corporation strategy." A series of Carnegie grants on the development of intelligence in early childhood laid the foundation for the creation of the Head Start program. A Carnegie-sponsored commission produced a major report that provided the basis for the Public Broadcasting Act of 1967.

In a way, these efforts could be seen as merely an extension of the Corporation's long-standing interests. (Its support for public broadcasting was a descendant of Andrew Carnegie's library-building program, which in the intervening years had broadened into one concerned with adult education.) But they also marked a significant departure from its founder's understanding of the role of philanthropy—and, more broadly, the nature of American society.

Andrew Carnegie had seen his philanthropy as an alternative to government, preventing the potentially harmful growth of the public sector in response to the perceived injustices produced by the economic system. If, however, he thought government activity would help the economic system, he supported it. This was true not just for his business interests, but also for his philanthropy. Each donation he made for a new library, for example, included a requirement that the community in which it was to be built agree to appropriate the funds necessary for its upkeep.

On several occasions in the past, the Corporation had also deployed its resources to try to help public officials carry out their responsibilities. Some of its first major projects, such as the creation of the National Research Council and the National Bureau of Economic Research, were appealing precisely because they enabled grantmakers to contribute to improving the workings of public agencies, while avoiding an expansion of government. By the 1960s, however, this approach had changed and the Corporation threw its weight (and funds) behind helping government overcome the limitations of philanthropy.

This new direction eventually led to a Corporation-financed study, released in 1972, that made the case for (in the words of its principal author, Christopher Jencks) "what other countries usually call socialism." Titled simply *Inequality: A Reassessment of the Effect of Family and Schooling in America*, it grew out of a debate that had begun six years earlier with the publication of a report by sociologist James S. Coleman which had examined the factors affecting educational achievement among children from poor and minority families. The unexpected conclusion was that school facilities, class sizes, the quality of teachers, and similar factors were much less influential than children's families and the peers with whom they socialized.

The Carnegie Corporation made a series of grants to re-analyze the Coleman report's findings, which ended up concluding they were largely valid. Inequality was among them. In the eyes of its authors, the results pointed inexorably toward a startling conclusion: If helping those who were not reaping the benefits of the economic system was the goal, programs (such as the ones foundations and the federal government were backing) to create opportunities for those who wanted to get ahead were not going to make a substantial difference. Instead, given the difficulties of affecting family life or social relationships, more direct means of redistributing economic rewards were both necessary and just—"what other countries usually call socialism."

To be sure, that was not the final word on the subject, or the only implication that could have been drawn. Identifying school programs that were having significant effects and trying to expand access to them was another plausible course of action, and it has led to many of the educational innovations currently under way. Increased investment in child or family development was also consistent with Coleman's conclusions; at about the same time it was digesting them, the Carnegie Corporation underwrote the development of Sesame Street, relying on the insights of child psychologists for its style and content. More extensive racial and socioeconomic integration might help too, though efforts to produce that goal could generate a backlash, as school busing initiatives showed.

Still, the realization that much of what it had been trying did not—and could not—work, coupled with a steady stream of negative findings about the effectiveness of government social programs (including Head Start), was a blow to the liberal optimism that had long infused the Carnegie Corporation's work. Progress in helping those left behind by the economic system—the same economic system that conferred such great benefits on Andrew Carnegie and others—had been slow to achieve. Some at the Corporation started to wonder if it could be accomplished at all, which, in turn, raised the question of whether the real problem lay in the system itself. That was a view with which the Carnegie Corporation would associate itself.

The Corporation Today

In 1977, following a well-funded, seven-year study, a Carnegie-sponsored Council on Children published its final report, *All Our Children: The American Family under Pressure*. Written chiefly by Kenneth Keniston, a Yale University professor of psychiatry, it amounted to an indictment of the destructive impact of the American social and economic system on family life, and especially of the "stacked deck" (as the report put it) facing poor and minority families. Along with increased investment in health and social services, the group called for more generous income supports and a full-employment jobs policy. Two years later, a second report appeared, also criticizing American society for failing to live up to its egalitarian promises.

Both publications attracted considerable criticism, as well their share of defenders. But within the Corporation, according to Lagemann, they were considered "worthwhile," even though they went far beyond the more moderate views held by the organization a generation earlier. Indeed, the Corporation was now in the position not only of disagreeing with its own previous ideas but, even more strikingly, with its founding "gospel." Yet so too was a large segment of intellectual and political leaders, for whom "liberalism" had come to mean empowering the disadvantaged to seek economic and political change, rather than merely providing opportunities to get ahead in what they considered an inherently unfair system.

Nonetheless, the Corporation has not produced anything quite so radical since. It has remained interested in the welfare of children and families. But particularly under the direction of physician David A. Hamburg, its president from 1982 to 1997, it has taken more of a medical and developmental, rather than a social scientific, approach. Since Vartan Gregorian, a former president of Brown University, took the helm, the Corporation has concentrated on its traditional interests of improving teacher education and school curricula. It has also continued a long tradition of challenging the educational establishment by giving support to charter schools, working to link teacher pay to student performance, and undertaking other reform efforts.

The most notable departure for the Corporation in recent years has been a growing focus on international affairs. In 1983, at a turning point in the history of the Cold War, Hamburg wrote in his first presidential report:

Given the immense risks and costs of the nuclear arms race, is it at least conceivable that the basic relations between [the United States and the Soviet Union] might change for the better in the decades ahead? If so, should somebody be thinking about ways to get from here to there, and on what basis?

That led to a series of grants to, as Hamburg put it, "explore and delineate long-term possibilities for improving the basic U.S.-Soviet relationship, taking into account their view of us as well as our view of them." After the Soviet Union collapsed, the Corporation's attempts at "preventing deadly conflict" have expanded and been joined by programs to promote development in Africa and Eurasia, focused on libraries and higher education. On Gregorian's watch, it added, in 2004, initiatives to improve public understanding of Islam and Muslim societies, mostly through education and scholarly research, but also by assisting interfaith-dialogue groups like the American Society for Muslim Advancement, whose founder, Imam Feisal Abdul Rauf, has been a leader in planning an Islamic cultural center in lower Manhattan.

Although it had not been a prominent part of its grantmaking for most of its history, the recent growth of the Corporation's international interests would probably not have disappointed Andrew Carnegie. He spent much of the latter part of his life trying to foster world peace, including through actions and words that, in retrospect, look quixotic and naïve. (In an article for the New York Times in June 1913, he praised the German Kaiser, Wilhelm II, for his contributions as a peacemaker.) But Carnegie was also an ardent patriot, the "Star-spangled Scotchman" (as a magazine once called him). Although he did not hesitate to question the United States' actions—especially if he thought they resembled those of the imperial powers of Europe—he was a champion of democracy and would have bristled at the suggestion that American ideals were no worthier than those of its adversaries.

But perhaps the most valuable lesson from Carnegie's experience for the Corporation's international ambitions would be a tragic reminder regarding the limits of good intentions married to great wealth. Not even one of the richest men in the world could influence the course of human affairs so much as the tubercular son of a Serbian postman, who fired two .32-caliber rounds into a passing limousine on a warm June day in Sarajevo.

What Would Carnegie Do?

According to a perhaps apocryphal story, Henry Kissinger, briefing President Richard M. Nixon before his historic 1972 visit to China, informed him that the Chinese premier, Zhou Enlai, was an avid student of French history. Consequently, during a lull in the official proceedings, Nixon asked him what he thought the impact of the French Revolution had been. "It's too soon to tell," China's second-in-command supposedly responded.

The Carnegie Corporation—the recipient of the final and largest of Andrew Carnegie's gifts during his long philanthropic career—now has a legacy creeping toward half the duration of the French Revolution's. Yet reaching a conclusion about its impact is just as problematic.

On the one hand, Carnegie could have little objection to the Corporation's continuing interest in the issues that concerned him during his lifetime. This is partly because having decided that it would (like his other institutions) have a permanent endowment, he gave its trustees considerable authority to shape its course as changing times required. Perhaps motivated by his belief that evolutionary progress was inevitable, he clearly intended that the organizations he had created would not lag behind, controlled by "the dead hand of the past," a common worry about charitable trusts in Carnegie's day. The possibility that giving such leeway to trustees might also create problems did not seem to bother Carnegie, unlike his near-contemporary Julius Rosenwald, who wrote, a decade after Carnegie's death, his own widely read essays on philanthropy, urging donors to limit the lifetimes of their foundations.

As Lagemann's history shows, the Corporation's directors and staffs have not been shy about exercising the power Carnegie gave them. Even so, the "fields" in which it has chiefly been operating—education, science, and international affairs, particularly—are those Carnegie himself thought deserved attention. The essays its presidents regularly write invariably invoke his views and philanthropic concerns as the starting point for laying out their own programs, including one of its most recent, aimed at encouraging immigrants to become citizens. And many of the Corporation's accomplishments—creating research institutions, promoting measures to improve educational quality, and fostering international negotiations—not only resemble initiatives Carnegie undertook himself, but some have also had lasting value in their own right.

Yet in important ways, the Corporation's work has departed from its founder's vision. Although it remains riveted on curing social and political inequalities, it has come to regard them less as the unfortunate by-product of an otherwise successful and worthy economic system, and more as symptoms of fundamental flaws that require substantial changes to the system itself. While it continues to see its responsibility as creating, in Carnegie's words (which continue to be cited in the Corporation's description of its mission), "ladders on which the aspiring can rise," it has been more concerned about ensuring that such assistance is broadly available, not just furnished to those who are trying to help themselves. Even though the Corporation's giving has not become an example of "indiscriminate charity," the idea that philanthropy—or, for that matter, public policy—should make distinctions between those who deserve help and those who do not has all but vanished.

These departures are an outgrowth of the Corporation's aligning its grantmaking with the views of experts. By looking to the social sciences and other scholarly disciplines to guide its programs, it inevitably acquired the perspectives and biases such expertise possessed. Throughout the 20th century, the older liberalism of Herbert Spencer and others that so influenced Andrew Carnegie grew less and less fashionable. A new kind of liberalism, one more critical of established institutions and more inclined to see those left behind as victims of them, became dominant. The Carnegie Corporation's history is a reflection of that transformation, even as Andrew Carnegie's own life is, ironically, a refutation.

The lesson for today's philanthropists is not that expertise should be ignored, but that it must be handled with care. Moreover, ambitious plans for social and economic reform of the sort the Carnegie Corporation has been pursuing throughout most of its history—for identifying the "root causes" of problems and developing "systemic" solutions to them—present special risks. Not only is the knowledge to do so successfully likely to be inadequate, but it will also come with the predispositions of those providing it. Building more libraries is sometimes the safer, and more useful, option.

The centennial of the Carnegie Corporation is also a reminder that what Andrew Carnegie is most often remembered for today—his call for the wealthy to give their fortunes away during their lifetimes—is one of the few goals he failed to achieve. That is why he created the Corporation. But what he really ought to be remembered for has frequently been forgotten, not least of all by those administering his philanthropy for much of its history. The responsibility of the wealthy is not only to use their fortunes to help others, but to do so in ways that affirm the value, and enable others to take advantage of, the opportunities the United States afforded an immigrant like him. To Carnegie, philanthropy was made possible by the American political and economic system—and philanthropy was best used when it enabled others to likewise benefit from the nation's opportunities.

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