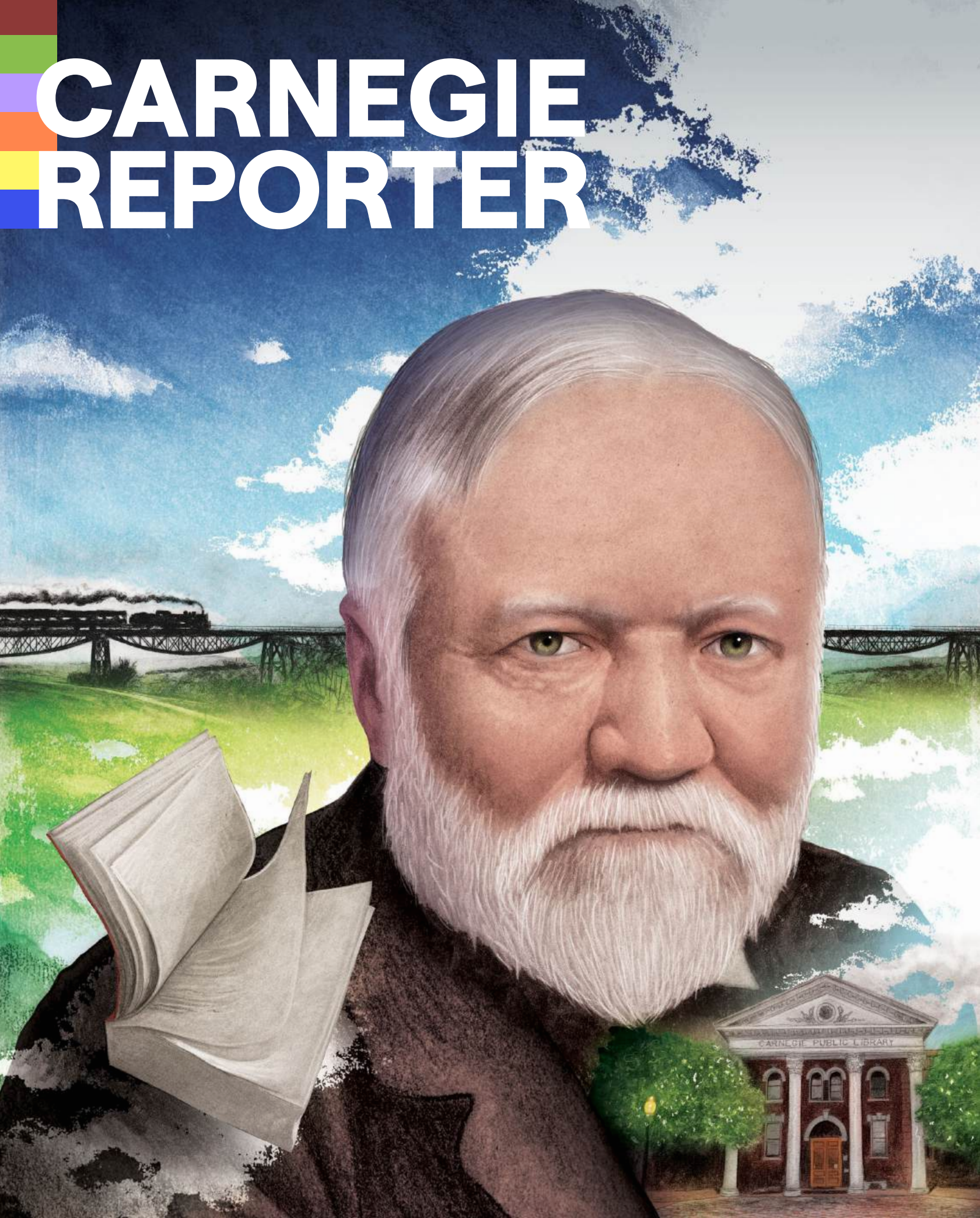




# CARNEGIE REPORTER



In South Dakota, a community fund helps Native Americans start small businesses.

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## Carnegie Reporter

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The Andrew Carnegie Foundation, originally established as Carnegie Corporation of New York in 1911, works to reduce political polarization through grants that support ladders of opportunity and a more peaceful world. Its funding provides individuals with the knowledge and tools needed to improve their

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A Foundation for  
Opportunity and Peace

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# Welcome to the Issue

By Celeste Ford

## KEY NOTES



## What Would Andrew Carnegie Think?

Introducing the Andrew Carnegie Foundation, formerly Carnegie Corporation of New York, to clarify who we are and what we do

### Andrew Carnegie

possessed remarkable foresight and anticipated that circumstances would change. In his 1911 instructions, he granted his trustees full authority to change policies or causes as they saw fit, noting: "They shall best conform to my wishes by using their own judgment."

While commissioning a portrait for the cover of our redesigned *Carnegie Reporter*, we debated the appeal of a younger, snappier Andrew Carnegie. At his foundation, where we marked our 115th anniversary this year, we are proud of our legacy and the enduring influence of our founder. We decided on a more traditional image for the illustration by Brian Lutz, but we updated Carnegie's look as part of our new visual identity. We also changed the foundation's name.

Established as Carnegie Corporation of New York on June 9, 1911, in New York City, we are now doing business as the Andrew Carnegie Foundation — pronounced car-NAY-ghee, the way our founder said his name. We want to honor him, provide clarity about who we are and what we do, and help ensure the public's trust in our philanthropic mission. We are a grantmaking foundation, not a corporation, and we support organizations working in education, democracy, and peace across the country and the world, not just New York.

The confusion stems from a defining story in American philanthropy. When Andrew Carnegie sold his steel company for nearly \$500 million in 1901, he vowed to give away his fortune. He created more than 20 nonprofit organizations in the United States and Europe, including Carnegie UK, the Carnegie Hero Funds, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, and Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. By age 76, Carnegie still

# Andrew Carnegie

## FOUNDATION

had \$150 million to give away, so he founded what was then the largest grantmaking body ever recorded. Having exhausted the more conventional names with his other organizations, Carnegie settled on Carnegie Corporation of New York.

The foundation was the culmination of his philanthropic vision, detailed in Carnegie's "The Gospel of Wealth," an 1889 essay that remains an inspiring and influential guide to giving. Carnegie showed pragmatism, optimism, and remarkable foresight, granting his trustees full authority to change policies or causes as they saw fit, writing, "They shall best conform to my wishes by using their own judgment."

His institution has continuously evolved, and today, under the leadership of Carnegie president Dame Louise Richardson, our overarching theme is reducing political polarization. At Carnegie, we fund a range of potential solutions, including two interrelated topics: understanding how our democracy works through civic education, and bringing people together with opportunities for civic engagement. While these are not new concepts, nonprofits are developing ingenious approaches that we feature in this edition of the *Reporter*.

Among the examples, we attended the National Civics Bee to see whether a \$100,000 prize helps young people learn civics. Our photojournalist traveled to five states to show us how the Trust for Civic Life helps strengthen rural communities. Locations include Alabama, home to organizations such as the Freedom Quilting Bee, a cooperative for Black artists, and South Dakota, where the Four Bands Community Fund is generating jobs by supporting small businesses on the Cheyenne River

Sioux Reservation. Follow the links to the DIY Civics video series, featuring writer and comedian Baratunde Thurston. He tells the stories of young people leading community projects, such as a fitness center and a platform for civil discourse, as part of the Carnegie Young Leaders for Civic Preparedness program.

Equipping the next generation for civic life requires opportunities for upward mobility, whether it is access to information, including libraries, or

weapons across the world, and how stability in space is vital to stability on Earth, a growing issue due to chaos caused by satellites.

This year's celebration of the country's 250th anniversary was the perfect backdrop for our annual Great Immigrants, Great Americans tribute to the contributions of naturalized U.S. citizens. Philosopher Kwame Anthony Appiah, a past honoree, writes about the eight foreign-born signers of the Declaration

## When Andrew Carnegie sold his steel company for nearly \$500 million in 1901, he vowed to give away his fortune. He created more than 20 nonprofit organizations in the United States and Europe.

support for low-income students to attend college — we report on both. These investments underscore the need for a culture shift that prioritizes shared goals, job and life skills, and strong communities, according to Richardson. In her essay, she explains why the time has come for a national service program. In partnership with the National Governors Association, Carnegie has established a fund to support state programs that provide paid work opportunities for young people and expand services in their communities.

Such "ladders of opportunity," as Andrew Carnegie would view them, will not get too far without a more peaceful world. As part of our International Program, we examine why the nuclear risk is higher today than it has been in decades, the ways publicly available satellite images are changing the tracking of nuclear

of Independence. Carnegie celebrated with a commitment of \$25 million in grants related to the 250th, including gifts to more than 1,350 of the original Carnegie Libraries in the United States. Find out what they did with the money in our library profiles, and if you are part of our devoted community of library lovers, please test your knowledge with a Carnegie crossword puzzle designed by artist Tommy Mishima. As a bonus for reading to the end of this essay, let us recall how Andrew Carnegie referred to free public libraries with the answer to 27 across: "Palaces for the people." ♦

**Celeste Ford** is the chief communications officer of the Andrew Carnegie Foundation, a former broadcast journalist, and the winner of a duPont and two national Edward R. Murrow awards for reporting.

# President's Letter

By Dame Louise Richardson

KEY  
NOTES



## Now Is the Time for National Service

Four out of five Americans across party lines support national service. Could it also help reduce political polarization?



CREDIT:  
Brooklyn  
Public Library

## Writing in the 1830s, Alexis de Tocqueville described Americans' proclivity to create voluntary groups and civic organizations to solve local problems. In 1961, John F. Kennedy memorably encouraged Americans to "ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country." In 1993, President Bill Clinton signed the National and Community Service Trust Act creating AmeriCorps.

Applications to the country's largest service organizations, AmeriCorps, the Peace Corps, and Teach for America, soared after the 9/11 attacks. In his first State of the Union Address after the attacks, President Bush launched the USA Freedom Corps and called on Americans to contribute two years of national service. Over the years since, cosponsored bills and the White House Citizen Service Act demonstrated bipartisan support for national and community service.

The Andrew Carnegie Foundation, too, has long played a prominent role in supporting national service. In his 1902 book, *The Empire of Business*, for example, Andrew Carnegie told wealthy

young men that they had a "duty to contribute to the general good of the community." During the Johnson administration, we helped to create the White House Fellows program, and in 2008 we cohosted a bipartisan summit with 600 participants that was addressed by presidential candidates, Senators John McCain and Barack Obama, both keen advocates of service. More recently we have supported state-level service initiatives in Maryland and Utah as well as the Service Year Alliance, which is working with several states. We have developed a framework and business models that can be used by cities and states as they contemplate service programs, and we have created a Service United

Fund to support the National Governors Association as it leads a new strategy to promote state service.

We have been drawn to extend our commitment to community service primarily because we view it through the lens of polarization. The literature on the extent of political polarization in the U.S. is extensive, and every American witnesses its impact every day. We see it in the dysfunction in Washington and the failure of our political leaders to forge compromises on issues of concern to all of us, from immigration reform to education and health care. We at Carnegie see the political paralysis in Washington as impeding our ability to deliver the advances we seek in education, strengthening democracy, and promoting peace.

Far from improving, political polarization appears to be getting worse. For the past several years, Carnegie has commissioned a CivicPulse survey of local government officials across the country. The findings have been consistent: local political leaders perceive polarization at the national level as a significant problem, but not at the local level, where shared problems require cooperation to implement solutions. Recently this has changed. The number of local political leaders who see polarization as a problem locally jumped from 30 to 41 percent in the most recent survey. The national number has consistently been around 90 percent.<sup>1</sup>

We believe that we cannot simply sit back and watch polarization deepen and shred the fabric of our democracy, especially as the evidence suggests that Americans are not, in fact, as divided as the rhetoric of our political leaders

## President's Letter

### KEY NOTES

would suggest. Study after study has shown that there is an enormous convergence among the majority of Americans on democratic values,<sup>2</sup> and on what American history should be taught.<sup>3</sup> Yet our political structures, with a winner-take-all system and closed primaries that favor the extremes, ensure that our political leaders are more polarized than the people they are elected to represent. Moreover, the business model of social media and cable TV augments these extremes and contrives to keep us divided.

We at Carnegie believe that national and community service is one way to put a brake on the trajectory of political polarization. It is one of the few issues that has

**“Carnegie's commitment to national and community service is the apex of our grant-making in the area of civics education.”**

bipartisan support: 82 percent of Americans, including 88 percent of Democrats and 78 percent of Republicans, support service programs.<sup>4</sup> There is not as much hard evidence as we would like of the impact of national service on polarization, but all the evidence points in one direction: When diverse cohorts serve together for a sustained period, work toward

common goals, and build a common identity, they reduce polarization. This pattern holds across military service studies in Europe,<sup>5</sup> Israel, and Singapore, and across U.S. civilian programs such as Teach for America and City Year.<sup>6</sup>

Any service to one's community is, of course, a plus, both to the individual and the community, but the particular type of service program that we are advocating is one that learns from the experience of the military. It requires sustained commitment. It is worth noting that over 70 percent of those who apply to serve in the military are, for one reason or another, deemed ineligible. These young people could readily be referred instead to a service program. The service programs likely to have the most impact are those that last for a sustained period; the ideal would be one year between high school and college. Participants are paid, so that nobody is excluded on grounds of cost. People from different races, regions, religions, and class are brought together to work on shared projects

of benefit to the community. They are trained together and develop a strong collective identity.

While many argue that a service year should be mandatory, we believe that offering incentives for participation is more likely to be successful. Businesses could help by offering preference to applicants who have completed a service year. Universities could help by offering preference in admission, scholarships, credit, or automatic deferral for those undertaking a year of service. Philanthropists could help by offering to fund completion bonuses to participants, or by joining Carnegie in helping states develop the necessary infrastructure.

There are many advantages to national and community service, quite aside from the impact on polarization. A year's service would also provide young people with critical workforce skills as they make the transition from education to career. It provides an opportunity to acquire the discipline necessary to succeed in the workforce, skills required for particular jobs, as well as exposure to a range of possible careers. Someone who has successfully completed a service year is likely to be an attractive prospective employee.

In addition to these tangible benefits, we believe that participation in a year's service is also likely to help address the epidemic of loneliness and alienation being experienced by young people today. The opportunity to get off their screens and participate in something bigger than themselves, to get to know people unlike themselves, and to feel that they are contributing to helping others, can only be beneficial to their mental health in the near term. In the longer term, one hopes, it will help develop

**“We may just put the brakes on political polarization and reclaim the democratic spirit, the energy, and the idealism that built this great republic.”**

an appreciation of the importance of community and civic participation.

Carnegie’s commitment to national and community service is the apex of our grantmaking in the area of civics education. The work of some of our grantees is covered in this issue of the *Carnegie Reporter*. Civics education is badly needed. The 2026 ACTA survey<sup>7</sup> found that 61 percent of college students cannot identify term lengths for senators and members of Congress. Thirty-seven percent know that Congress holds the power to declare war while an equal number answered incorrectly that the president has the authority. In the 2022 NAEP civics assessment,<sup>8</sup> only 22 percent of eighth graders scored proficient, the first decline in the test’s 25-year history. Nearly one in three students could not describe the basic structure of the U.S. government. The 2025 Harvard Youth Poll found that only 15 percent of young Americans trust the federal government to do the right thing most or all of the time.

It is, of course, easy to distrust something you don’t understand, but you cannot build or sustain a healthy democracy when its citizens

do not understand, or care, how it works. Only 47 percent of young people aged 18–29 voted in the 2024 presidential election, yet Gen Z now represents one-fifth of the electorate. Our portfolio of grants under our Education for Civic Participation program is designed to ensure that by the time they graduate from high school, young people understand how their government works, have a keen appreciation of their rights and responsibilities as citizens, and have attained some experience of participating in civic life. If they do, and they then follow their graduation from high school with a year of robust community service, we may just put the brakes on political polarization and reclaim the democratic spirit, the energy, and the idealism that built this great republic. ♦

**Dame Louise Richardson** is president of the Andrew Carnegie Foundation. A widely recognized expert on terrorism and international relations, she previously served as vice-chancellor of the University of Oxford and of the University of St. Andrews, and as executive dean of the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study.

## The State of Polarization in America

In 2024 and 2025, the Andrew Carnegie Foundation worked with the nonprofit CivicPulse to research local officials’ perceptions of polarization and possible solutions to its negative effects. Over three surveys, a trend emerged: while perceptions of the negative impact of polarization at the national level were high, they remained comparatively low in local contexts.

A new survey released this year, however, paints a starker picture: perceptions of polarization are increasing at both the national and local level. Ninety-one percent of local officeholders now say polarization is hurting the country, a slight increase over previous surveys. Closer to home, 41 percent of local leaders report substantial negative effects of polarization within their own communities — a significant jump from the previous mark of about 30 percent.

The survey found that immigration is the most polarizing topic nationally, followed by cost of living and election administration. However, respondents said that at the local level, the three most polarizing topics are the cost of living, taxes, and housing, and identified immigration as an increasingly divisive factor locally.

### NOTES

1. CivicPulse, *Polarization in America* (December 2025).

2. More in Common, *Hidden Tribes: A Study of America’s Polarized Landscape* (October 2018).

3. More in Common, *Defusing the History Wars: Finding Common Ground in Teaching America’s National Story* (December 2022).

4. Voices for National Service, “Poll Finds Broad Bipartisan Support for National Service” (January 2020).

5. Chagai M. Weiss, *Compulsory Military Service Reduces Affective Po-*

*larization: Evidence from Conscription Reforms in Europe* (December 2022).

6. Esther Burson, *City Year Alumni Bridging Study*, under the supervision of Richard Kiely (Cornell University, prepared for City Year, June 2024).

7. ACTA, *The Story of Our Nation: How Well Do College Students Know America?* (June 2026).

8. NAEP, *Nation’s Report Card, National Assessment of Educational Progress* (May 2023).

## Q&amp;A

By Celeste Ford

KEY  
NOTES

# Janet L. Robinson on the 'Carnegie Way'

The chair of Carnegie's board of trustees explains how her role at the helm of the New York Times Company prepared her for institutional change



A former school-teacher who rose to serve as chief executive of the New York Times Company, Janet L. Robinson (right) now serves as the chair of Carnegie's board of trustees, her second term since joining the board in 2004. Robinson spoke with Celeste Ford (left), chief communications officer, at Carnegie's New York City headquarters in June 2026.

**CREDIT:**  
Alejandro Rovira



In 2002, Robinson was featured as part of a public awareness campaign produced by the Foundation for a Better Life. She was presented as an example of determination to help encourage good values.



From schoolteacher  
to president.

**DETERMINATION**

*Pass It On.*

THE FOUNDATION FOR A BETTER LIFE

**E**arlier in her career, Janet L. Robinson was routinely ranked on annual lists of the most powerful women in business. A former schoolteacher, she joined the New York Times Company as an account executive and rose to be the first woman to serve as chief executive. At the Andrew Carnegie Foundation, Robinson is on another exclusive list. She is among the more than 160 distinguished individuals who have served as a trustee since the institution was established in 1911. Joining the board in 2004, Robinson is also one of the longest-serving trustees and is now on her second term as chair.

Andrew Carnegie wanted his trustees to be forward-thinking stewards who could adapt to changing times. He left instructions, writing that trustees would “best conform to my wishes by using their own judgment.” Robinson knows a lot about managing through change. During her tenure at the *Times*, she oversaw the early stages of the critically important transition from print to digital publishing. This included the launch of a paywall that proved readers were willing to pay for quality journalism, a model that was eventually adopted by the industry. Robinson’s boss, *New York Times* publisher Arthur Sulzberger Jr., was quoted as saying, “Janet sees where the media business is going. She knows how to translate all we do in print for a digital audience.”

Today Robinson is overseeing the foundation through a period of evaluation and change, including its focus on reducing political polarization, investing in national service, and embracing a new name.

**The Andrew Carnegie Foundation is among the oldest philanthropies in the country, yet our founder feels very present. Describe his influence.**

I believe that Andrew Carnegie was very pragmatic. He changed the model of philanthropy from one that was based purely on generosity, charity, and moral obligation to one of strategic support of systems, infrastructure, and institutions. This was a critical shift that has benefited philanthropy through the years. Carnegie was a capitalist, but his desire was to help people to help themselves. He did not embrace pure charitable donations but rather identified root causes that plagued society and the important factors that could improve people’s lives. He believed that the diffusion of knowledge was essential, and as a pragmatist, he invested in libraries.

**After 115 years as Carnegie Corporation of New York, we changed our name to the Andrew Carnegie Foundation.**

# Q&A Janet L. Robinson

**1.** After graduating with a degree in education from Salve Regina College in Newport, Rhode Island, Robinson, seen here in 1981, taught grade school in Rhode Island and Massachusetts for 11 years.

## KEY NOTES

1.



2.



3.



4.



### Why did you think it was necessary?

Clarity is extremely important. The word *corporation* caused confusion or misunderstanding, and “New York” is limiting, especially when the foundation awards grants across the nation and the world. The new name embraces Andrew Carnegie as a man and as a philanthropist. When you attach someone’s name to an institution, it is a clear signal that we support the ideals that he stood for.

### At Carnegie, the trustees have shown strong support for reducing political polarization. It is the overarching theme of our grantmaking. Why prioritize this?

Polarization is tearing our country apart. As we work to address this problem, we must examine the root cause. Polarization is not just fostered by media coverage or by politicians. It is fostered by the difficult conversations we are having with each other at the dinner table or at the town hall or in the boardroom. We must learn how to debate respectfully, to listen carefully to other points of view, and to reach consensus through compromise.

### How might our new focus on service programs at the state and community levels make our society less polarized?

I am so pleased to see Carnegie support and invest in national service. This could be a game changer for many young people as they transition from high school to college to their careers. These programs will help formulate their views on the benefits of service.

Supporting programs that encourage students to gain a service background can only be good for students and for the organizations they choose to serve. In the long run, I have no doubt that the programs will reap many benefits.

Other foundations are also supporting national service. I believe that there is strength in having multiple foundations and voices support this initiative, and other collaborations as well. Louise Richardson and the staff have developed many partnerships that engender widespread support.

### You often reference the “Carnegie way.” What does that mean to you?

The Carnegie way focuses on the long term with a well-researched, clearly disciplined approach to philanthropy. It examines the root causes of issues plaguing our society and listens to all points of view before developing the positions the foundation will take

**2.** Robinson presents at the awards ceremony for the American Advertising Federation, where she was chair of the board of directors from 1999 to 2000.

**3.** Robinson, then president and CEO of the New York Times Company, with the former chair, Arthur Sulzberger Jr., at a Matrix Award ceremony in 1998. Robinson was recognized with the award by New York Women in Communications.

**4.** Robinson visits a *New York Times* newspaper in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, in 2007. During her tenure, she oversaw a multibillion-dollar publicly traded company with regional, national, and international newspapers; radio and TV stations; and related properties.

**“I loved being part of an organization that measured and rewarded excellence. I also loved being part of an organization that was committed to quality journalism and educating the citizenry.”**

on any one issue. After examining these causes, the foundation is very proficient at developing initiatives that address the issues and identifying nonprofit organizations that will support solutions. The Carnegie way is a constancy of purpose that has served us well over the decades.

**Your legendary career at the *Times* started in the 1980s and spanned almost 30 years. You started in advertising sales for *Tennis* magazine, a former *Times* property, after leaving your job as a public school teacher in Massachusetts. What led to this decision?**

I loved being a teacher. My decision to leave teaching after 11 years had a great deal to do with the frustration I felt over the lack of a meritocracy within school systems at that time. I firmly believe that meritocracies are good for school systems, good for corporations, and good for philanthropy. When there are measurable results, progress is made.

When I began my career in sales at the *Times*, results were clearly

measured. It was very apparent that a meritocracy was in place within the newsrooms and within the business departments. I loved being part of an organization that measured and rewarded excellence. I also loved being part of an organization that was committed to quality journalism and educating the citizenry. Even though my role was on the business side of the organization, I looked upon my role as one of service.

**How did your professional life prepare you for your board roles, especially your years as president and CEO of the New York Times Company?**

The New York Times Company is a publicly held company controlled by the Ochs-Sulzberger family. My leadership responsibilities included safeguarding the financial wellbeing of the company in addition to supporting its mission.

The transformation from a print organization to a digital organization was a critical turning point. We could no longer define ourselves

by the print distribution. We had to position the company and all our publications as news and information sources of the highest quality across all platforms.

My perspective on the importance of international peace and security, which is a cornerstone program here at Carnegie, was made clear during my career at the *Times*. I was very involved in the kidnapping and ransom negotiations for two colleagues, David Rohde (2008, Afghanistan) and Anthony Shadid (2011, Libya). When conflicts impact your colleagues and your company, the experience gives you a unique appreciation for what international peace and security truly means. That perspective is priceless.

**Surveys show that the general public does not know much about philanthropy and grantmaking in their communities. This can lead to distrust. What can we do about this?**

It's our job to educate the public about the role of philanthropy. The foundations themselves and the nonprofits that benefit from them should make a concerted effort to make sure the public understands where the money is coming from, how it is being used, and, importantly, what the results are. ♦

*This interview has been edited for length and clarity.*

**Celeste Ford** is the chief communications officer of the Andrew Carnegie Foundation, a former broadcast journalist, and the winner of a duPont award and two national Edward R. Murrow awards for reporting.

**Our funding** helps individuals achieve upward mobility and greater civic participation, and aims to increase trust in public institutions, elections, and government.

# Ladders of Opportunity

Inside: Civics // service // and the American dream

**When Imre Huss, a high school student in Cleveland Heights, Ohio, discovered that it was impossible**

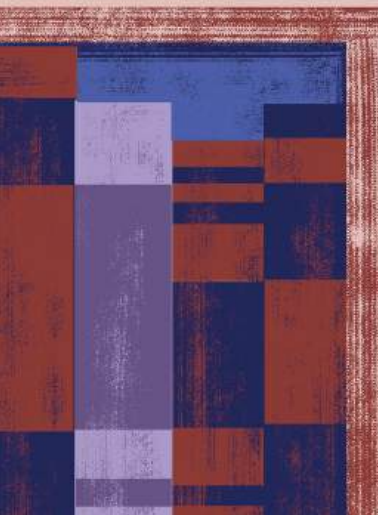
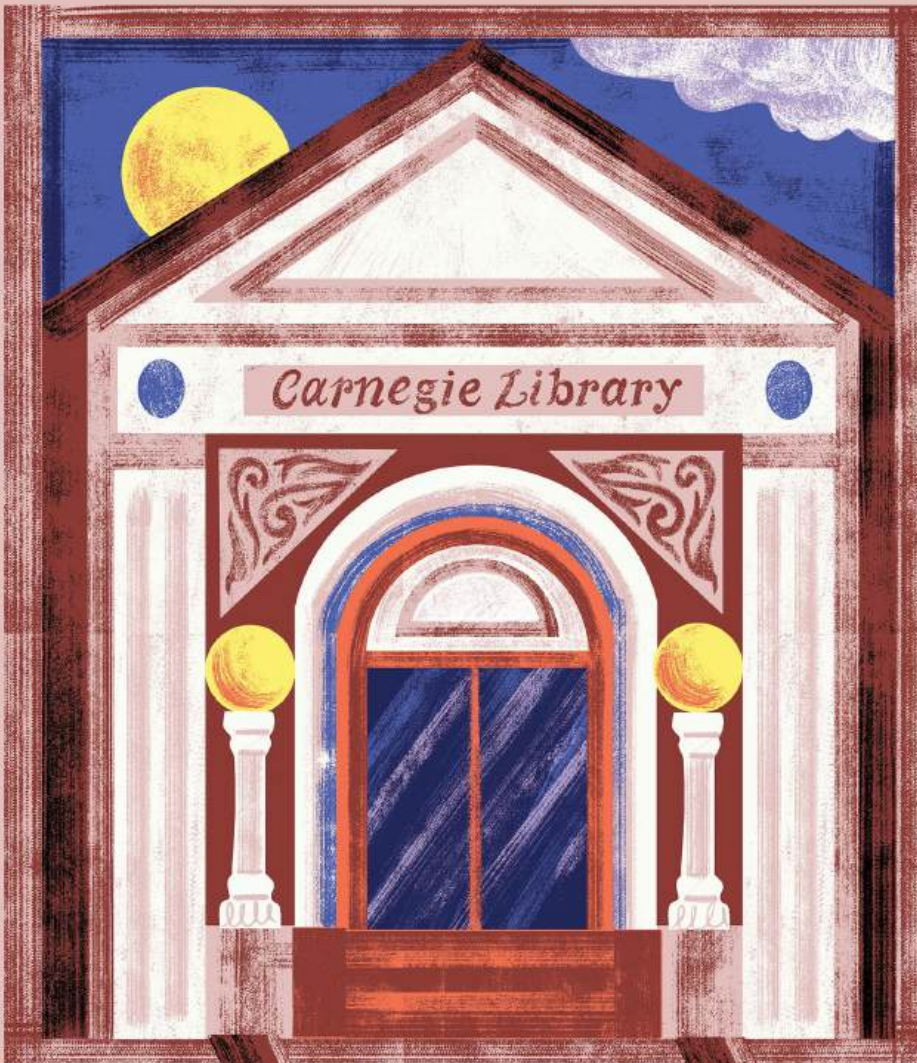
to find local election information in one place, he built Govvy, an online platform that turned scattered candidate and policy information into a simple, four-minute quiz. For Imre, such civic engagement wasn't new. At the age of eight, he read his city's municipal code to figure out how to open a lemonade stand.

According to a 2024 survey by America's Promise Alliance, most young people say they discussed civics in school just a few times or not at all during the past year. Carnegie and other organizations are trying

to change this. In the following pages, we meet Imre and four other young leaders who have improved civic life in their communities, from starting gardens to helping teenagers unplug from social media. We also hear from prominent leaders who tell us why national service has the potential to renew social cohesion in America, and learn about young Americans competing for a \$100,000 prize at the National Civics Bee. And we take a closer look at who should have to pass the U.S. citizenship test and efforts to bring it into American classrooms.

**"The best means of benefiting the community is to place within its reach the ladders upon which the aspiring can rise."**

**Andrew Carnegie**



## OPPORTUNITY


**Carnegie Young Leaders for Civic Preparedness**

is a program where young people aged 14 to 24 are paid to pursue civic solutions in their communities. Participants receive up to \$7,500 and a full year of support to take on a local challenge and gain experience in exercising important civic skills, like holding productive conversations, using credible information, and collaborating to address problems.


**Two-thirds of adults aged 18 to 27 have volunteered.**

and 90 percent of young people note that they care about and feel responsible for their community, according to a 2023 Ipsos poll.



# DIY Civics with Baratunde Thurston

How five teenagers are contributing to their communities

By Angely Montilla

When federal SNAP food benefits were cut in Birmingham, Alabama, affecting nearly 25,000 people, a teenager helped start a community garden, growing fresh and free produce for her neighbors. In the small town of Saint George, South Carolina, a 20-year-old convinced her town council to let her use a public building for free to bring healthy practices to her community. In Boulder, Colorado, a teenager helped his peers unplug from social media by getting them to take a break together. In Cleveland Heights, Ohio, a young leader made it easier for residents of his city to match their interests to candidates. And in Tallahassee, Florida, a student brought 200 people who disagreed into the same room — on purpose.

Writer and comedian Baratunde Thurston sat down with Sofia, Nyra, Ben, Imre, and Ryan to hear how they are addressing local problems and what the rest of us can learn from them. All five students are part of Carnegie Young Leaders for Civic Preparedness — a C&S program funded by the Andrew Carnegie Foundation.



## Feeding your neighbors

Sofia Nunez, Birmingham, AL

In 2025, Congress substantially cut federal funding to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), commonly known as food stamps, shifting many of the costs to states. The Center on Budget and Policy Priorities estimates that at least 4.5 million Americans have since lost access to the program, according to federal and state data.

When the loss of SNAP funding affected nearly 25,000 people in Birmingham, Alabama, 16-year-old Sofia Nunez didn't wait for someone else to act. She started showing up to monthly neighborhood meetings — one of the first people under 30 to attend in years — and partnered with a local food ministry to build a community garden that provides produce to residents for free.

"The first step is making sure you're alive, and you have food, water, shelter," Sofia says. "If a community needs food first, that's still civic engagement."



## Improving the health of a community

**Nyra Govan, Saint George, SC**

In the small town of Saint George, 20-year-old Nyra Govan saw an opportunity to improve her grandmother's declining health and that of her neighbors.

Nyra showed up at town council meetings, built relationships, and made her pitch to run health programming for her community, like dance fitness classes, boxing, pickleball, and 5K events. But she needed a space to do it, so the town council handed over a public building to use — for free.

"Sometimes it's not about what the local government doesn't want to do," Nyra says. "Everybody has to have a hand in helping build the community."



## Getting offline, together

**Ben Forman, Boulder, CO**

Ben Forman got his first smartphone at age 11. By the time he was a teenager, he

could see what it was doing to him and his friends.

Now he's making a documentary and helping teenagers build healthier social media habits — not through willpower, but by doing it together. His insight: social media addiction isn't an individual problem, so the solution can't be individual either.

"It's almost impossible to convince 400 individual teenagers to go offline," Ben says. "But if you can convince the entire football team... if you do it in community, it makes it a whole lot easier."



## Making local elections simple

**Imre Huss, Cleveland Heights, OH**

At the age of eight, Imre Huss read his city's municipal code to figure out how to open a lemonade stand.

That early curiosity about how local government works never went away. When Imre noticed that local election information in Cleveland Heights, Ohio, was nearly impossible to find in one place, he built Govvy — starting with CH Votes, a platform that turns scattered candidate and policy information into a simple four-minute quiz that matches residents to the candidates who align with their values. Around 1,000 people used it during that year's local election.

"At the local level, there's this ability to say, if you engage, that pothole on your road might get fixed," says Imre, "because of the next mayor, the next city council member, that's a priority for them."



**Eighty-four percent of adults** believe political debate has become less respectful in recent years, according to a 2023 Pew Research Center study.



## Building room for discourse, not debate

**Ryan Gans, Tallahassee, FL**

At Florida State University, Ryan Gans runs Agree to Disagree — an event where students from every discipline sit down across from people they disagree with, follow ground rules, and talk.

Ryan met with nearly every dean at FSU to recruit 200 college students across areas of study, bringing together engineers, medical students, law students, and social work students to sit across from each other and approach the same political questions from completely different perspectives. Among the topics: abortion, guns, and government. "Our democracy was not built off of perfect agreement," Ryan says. "It was built off of discourse, and it's our job to continue that vision from our founding fathers." ♦

**Angely Montilla** is the program communications specialist at the Andrew Carnegie Foundation.

**Watch the video series** produced by writer and comedian Baratunde Thurston.



## OPPORTUNITY



In October 2025, the foundation hosted the Carnegie Summit on National Service, inviting nearly 100 participants from government, philanthropy, and the nonprofit sector to discuss what it would take to create a movement in support of national service.

**CREDIT:** Filip Wolak



# In Service to Community

National service programs at the state and local level can help young people gain work experience, meet community needs, and come together across political divides

**By Matt Schiavenza**

**Y**oung Americans between the ages of 16 and 24 are struggling to find good jobs,<sup>1</sup> and employment prospects are declining<sup>2</sup> for early-career workers in occupations disrupted by artificial intelligence. Meanwhile, communities are increasingly divided along political lines, leading to less civic engagement and trust in institutions.<sup>3</sup>

These issues have spurred calls for ways to help Americans reconnect with each other. More than a century ago, Andrew Carnegie wrote that one had a “duty to contribute to the general good of the community,” and his foundation is following his example with funding to promote paid service programs. Most recently, Carnegie committed \$10 million to establish the Service United Fund with the Schultz Family Foundation, a philanthropic collaborative to help states develop paid service programs in partnership with the National Governors Association.

“There are few more powerful ways to reduce polarization and foster social cohesion than by engaging young people in meaningful service together,” says Dame Louise Richardson, president of the Andrew Carnegie Foundation. “States are uniquely positioned to lead a new generation of service in America, and we are delighted to support governors in this effort.”

In October 2025, the foundation hosted the Carnegie Summit on National Service, where nine leaders were asked about the lifelong impact of service on their lives and its potential benefits for others.

“Our belief is that if we support a number of creative, successful programs at the state and local level, it will have a multiplier effect,” says Richardson. “Other states and cities will want to emulate them, and it will grow from the bottom up rather than being imposed from the top down.”



## Why National Service Matters

Prominent leaders explain how service can help young people gain work experience, meet community needs, and come together across political divides.

### Lloyd J. Austin III

Following a 41-year military career, Lloyd Austin served from 2021 to 2025 as the first Black person to be appointed as U.S. Secretary of Defense. Austin grew up in Alabama and Georgia as a standout student and athlete. On the advice of his father, a postal worker, he attended the U.S. Military Academy, following in the path of relatives who had fought in World War II and the Vietnam War.

“I always wanted to be able to be a part of something bigger than myself and also to be able to give back to this great country,” says Austin. “Where did you serve? That question seems to bond people a bit in ways that are difficult to describe.”

### Stephen Goldsmith

Stephen Goldsmith served as the chair of the Corporation for National and Community Service, the parent agency of AmeriCorps, under Presidents George W. Bush and Barack Obama. He previously served two terms as mayor of Indianapolis and as deputy mayor for operations in New York City under Mayor Michael Bloomberg. Goldsmith is now Derek Bok Professor of the Practice of Urban Policy at the Harvard Kennedy School. An Eagle Scout in his youth, Goldsmith’s career in public life began when he was elected Marion County prosecutor at age 32.

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“We can think about the results of service in two ways. One is the result on the person who serves. It gives that person purpose,” says Goldsmith. “The other is the effect it has on people who are served: the chances of them having a meal, the chances of them having a better place to live, an opportunity in life. So much of what our communities are about is a shared purpose, and that comes from serving others.”

## Asa Hutchinson

Asa Hutchinson served as governor of Arkansas from 2015 to 2023, during which he led the National Governors Association in 2021 and 2022. His career in public life includes stints as a U.S. attorney, a three-term U.S. Representative, the director of the Drug Enforcement Administration, and undersecretary at the Department of Homeland Security. He now teaches at the University of Arkansas School of Law.

“It is wonderful to think about a country in which everyone has a commitment to national service of some kind, whether it’s military service or serving your community. It would be more about the unifying of America and what we can accomplish together versus us all being siloed in our own individual worlds,” says Hutchinson. “In today’s environment, we have division, we have polarization. And one thing that service does is bring people together. So today, we need service more than anything.”

## Mike Johnston

After graduating from college, Mike Johnston taught at a high school in Greenville, Mississippi, through the Teach For America program, an experience he recounted in his book *In the Deep Heart’s Core*. Johnston



### Top, from left:

CNN national security correspondent Kylie Atwood, former Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin III, former U.S. Representative Major General Joseph Heck, and Colonel Rebecca Lange discuss the importance of national service during a panel discussion at the Carnegie Summit on National Service on October 9, 2025.

**Below:** The summit featured participation from leaders who described the impact of service on their lives and its potential benefit for others.

later became principal of a school for at-risk children in his native Colorado. His growing interest in education policy led to an advisory position in the Obama administration and, in 2023, his election as mayor of Denver.

“When you do firsthand service work, you get so closely connected to the people and the causes that they are now a part of you,” says Johnston. “I think at every stage of my career, that relentless commitment to the

purpose, the belief you can do hard things, and the willingness to get up every time you fall is what service taught me from day one.”

## Alan Khazei

Alan Khazei has devoted his career to promoting national service. He cofounded City Year in 1988, building it into a national youth service

organization that directly inspired AmeriCorps, and later founded Be the Change, Inc., which launched campaigns including Service Nation and Service Year Alliance. Khazei's father, a surgeon who immigrated to the United States from Iran, and his mother, an Italian American nurse anesthetist, instilled in him an appreciation of service at an early age.

"People don't have to agree on everything, but when we roll up our sleeves and we build a playground for kids who need one," says Khazei, "or we work in a school helping kids make sure they can read by third grade and graduate on time, or we take an abandoned lot and turn it into a park or an environmental garden, we learn that we have more in common than what divides us."

## John B. King Jr.

John King has served as the chancellor of the State University of New York since January 2023. He was previously U.S. Secretary of Education under President Obama from 2016 to 2017 and head of the Education Trust, a national civil rights nonprofit organization. Born in Brooklyn, New York, King lost both of his parents by the age of 12. King credits his teachers with saving his life and inspiring a lifelong devotion to education.

"One of the key barriers to service is: If I serve, will I be able to support myself?" says King. "And unfortunately, in many cases, we're relying on volunteers or we're relying on people taking income levels that are way below what they need to afford housing, and food, and a decent standard of living. That can't be the answer. We've got to make it so that if you choose to serve, it's a sustainable wage that's going to allow you to take care of your needs while gaining a set of skills that will help you over the length of your career."

## Alise Marshall

Alise Marshall is senior director of corporate affairs and social impact at Pinterest. Previously, she served as deputy chief of staff to the deputy secretary at the U.S. Department of Education. She later led economic programs at the Walmart Foundation and strategy at the Public Welfare Foundation before joining Pinterest in 2017. Marshall grew up in a small town in Kentucky, where her mother and grandmother worked with their local church and NAACP chapter to register voters.

"My grandmother took me alongside her on Saturday mornings once a month," says Marshall. "She was just literally helping folks in our local community with whatever they needed, whatever the need was, no ask was too big or too small. Seeing that from my earliest days contributed to my understanding that everything in life takes a village and takes people who are willing to contribute in meaningful ways to their community."

## Dame Louise Richardson

Dame Louise Richardson became president of the Andrew Carnegie Foundation in January 2023, having previously served as vice chancellor at Oxford University from 2016 to 2022 and principal and vice chancellor at St. Andrews University from 2009 to 2015. Richardson's experience with service began during her youth in rural Ireland, where her mother ran what she calls a "one-woman social welfare agency" out of her kitchen, helping neighbors in need and knitting together community through small actions. Later, Richardson took her own children on service trips to orphanages and schools in Honduras and India, where she worked with local

women on microfinance initiatives.

"I think America would change fundamentally if every young person did a service year away from home, interacting with people across race, region, and class, living in another community and contributing to that community," says Richardson. "I think they would learn very quickly how our society works, how communities work, how our democracy works. I think they would also have a sense of belonging to something bigger than themselves."

## Angelica Williams

As a child growing up in Detroit, Angelica Williams woke up to sounds of gunfire. When the Flint water crisis was discovered in 2014, Williams — then in fifth grade — volunteered at a food pantry and clothing closet to assist people in need. Following her graduation from Wayne State University, she joined Detroit's Board of Police Commissioners Youth Advisory Panel, helping ensure that young people are involved in decisions affecting the city's police department.

"I think that an America where service is an expectation and a rite and a privilege is also an America in which we are so much more understanding of one another," says Williams. "I think that normalizing the idea that volunteer and service leadership experience is just as valuable as business and work experience is pivotal in creating a world in which young people are able to elevate themselves to higher levels of prestige, to understanding, to confidence." ♦

**Matt Schiavenza** is the senior content editor and writer at the Andrew Carnegie Foundation.



**Watch** these leaders discuss why service matters.



### NOTES

**1.** The Schultz Family Foundation and HarrisX, a Stagwell Company, *The Broken Marketplace™: America's School-to-Work Crisis* (July 2025).

**2.** Erik Brynjolfsson, Bharat Chandar, and Ruyi Chen, *Canaries in the Coal Mine? Six Facts about the Recent Employment Effects of Artificial Intelligence*, Stanford Digital Economy Lab (2025, rev. 2026).

**3.** Megan Brennan, "U.S. Confidence in Institutions Mostly Flat, but Police Up," *Gallup*, July 15, 2024.

## OPPORTUNITY



**Left:** AmeriCorps National Civilian Community Corps members clear debris to help suppress the threat of wildfires.

**Center:** Volunteers with AmeriCorps Seniors help children in the classroom.

**Right:** Alumni of service years speak at the National Service Summit in Washington, D.C., in September 2025.

**CREDIT:** AmeriCorps and America's Service Commissions, Courtesy of Service Year Alliance



# What If 1 Million Young Americans Completed Service Years Annually?

Most young Americans support expanding AmeriCorps, but funding uncertainty is forcing organizations to find new models for national and state service

**By Gabriel Fine**



## Describe the problem you're addressing in five words.

Reduced pathways for successful adulthood

## Describe your solution in 10 words.

Expanding opportunities for young Americans to find purpose through service.

## Describe your progress in 15 words.

Creating the conditions to make service years a common expectation and opportunity for young Americans.

When Kristen Bennett graduated from college in 2008, the financial crisis was underway, and she struggled to find work. Then she learned about AmeriCorps's Volunteers in Service to America program through her university. AmeriCorps, a federally funded program, is the nation's leading provider of service years — yearlong, paid, full-time service opportunities in sectors ranging from disaster relief to education to health-care. Through the program, Bennett worked in her hometown, Rancho Cucamonga, as part of WE Connect, a campaign connecting low-income families hit by the recession to state services. "It opened my eyes to a very different part of the community I grew up in," Bennett says.

Bennett is now chief executive officer of Service Year Alliance, a nonprofit that launched in 2016 with a lofty goal: 1 million young Americans completing a service year annually. Its work includes educating

policymakers on how service addresses community problems while jumpstarting careers for young people.

Studies show young Americans see the value in national service. A 2021 survey by the nonprofit Voices for National Service found that 8 in 10 adults aged 18–24 supported increasing federal funding for AmeriCorps, for example. Yet the number of service opportunities has not significantly changed: Bennett estimates the total number of full-time service years has hovered around 65,000 in recent years. In April 2025, federal AmeriCorps funding was cut, ending service for more than 32,000 members; court orders and subsequent agreements later restored funding.

To help fund and sustain service year programs, Service Year Alliance is turning to states. In September 2025, Service Year Alliance launched the Center for State Service Innovation with funding from Carnegie Corporation of New York and Einhorn Collaborative. Through the center, Service Year Alliance plans to work with local leaders in eight partner states, beginning with California, Colorado, Kentucky, and New York, to develop alternative funding models and create 3,000 new service year opportunities annually. Bennett hopes that the center will be a hub for collaboration, where "anyone who wants to champion [service] in their state can go to find resources, thought leadership, and a partner to do it." ♦

**Gabriel Fine** is the content manager at the Andrew Carnegie Foundation.

## BY THE NUMBERS

**Around 65k** paid, full-time service year positions are available in the United States, according to an estimate by Service Year Alliance.

**More than 1.3 million** Americans have served in AmeriCorps.

**28%** of Americans volunteered for an organization between 2017 and 2023.

According to Service Year Alliance research,

**87%** of service year participants say they gained skills that helped prepare them for future employment, and

**77%** reported they were likely to engage in conversations with people they disagree with.

Service year alumni tend to be more civically engaged, with

**91%** voting regularly,

as opposed to around **65%** of the general population.

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# A \$100,000 Prize for Civics

In a country where fewer than a quarter of eighth graders are proficient in civics, the National Civics Bee rewards young people for learning how government works and how they can participate *By Wilfred Chan*

**T**he opportunity that led to 14-year-old Maanha Nasir's first-ever trip to the nation's capital, where she won a five-figure civics prize, almost died in her spam folder. She had never heard of the National Civics Bee. Her school, a self-paced online program

belonging to one of Washington state's lowest-ranked districts, offered no civics classes. When Nasir received an email inviting her to apply for the competition in 2024, she assumed it wasn't meant for her.

Civics — referring to the knowledge, skills, and habits people need to participate in a democratic society — has become a rare part of K-12 education. According to a 2024 survey by America's Promise Alliance, most young people say they discussed civics in school just a few times or not at all during the past year. Just one-quarter say they talk about civics at out-of-school activities.

What finally convinced Nasir to apply for the Bee was encouragement from a friend who had competed previously. To be selected, sixth, seventh, and eighth graders submit a proposal to address an issue in their community. Nasir had been researching inequality among her state's public-school districts, so she sent in an essay about it on a whim. She was stunned when she was named to compete in her local Civics Bee round, the start of what she calls a life-changing journey.

In an increasingly polarized country, the National Civics Bee, organized by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation with support from the Andrew Carnegie Foundation

and other funders, is part of a growing wave of programs to address what educators, scholars, and policymakers say is a crisis in civic knowledge. In 2022, only 22 percent of eighth graders reached the "proficient" level in civics on the National Assessment of Educational Progress, also known as the Nation's Report Card. One-third of eighth graders performed below the "basic" level, meaning they would likely be unable to describe the fundamental structure of the U.S. government. Adults aren't doing great either. A 2025 survey by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation found that more than 58 percent of Americans failed a basic U.S. civic literacy quiz. "The state of civic knowledge in America is too low," says Hilary Crow, who oversees the National Civics Bee as vice president of civics at the U.S. Chamber Foundation. "That leads to a lack of understanding of how to participate and create positive change."

Today, support for civics is growing, driven by its ability to bridge political divides. A 2022 national survey by iCivics, a Carnegie-supported nonprofit working to advance civic learning, found that four in five likely voters said civics education is important and two-thirds supported more funding for it. In 2021, a cross-ideological group of civics organizations, scholars, and educators published a framework for civics learning called Educating for American Democracy, organized by iCivics and funded by a grant from the Department of Education. The framework advocates for teaching students not only facts about U.S. history and government, but skills like debating respectfully and organizing community projects. In September 2025, the Department of Education announced more than \$153 million in grants for civics education in advance



**Left to right:** 2025 National Civics Bee runners-up Barrett Hodorek and Maanha Nasir and winner Aarit Koul celebrate alongside Hilary Crow, U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation vice president of civics.

**CREDIT:** U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation



of the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence.

Modeled after traditional spelling and geography bees, the National Civics Bee adds a substantial incentive for civic learning — a grand prize of a \$100,000 education savings plan contribution. Launched in 2022, it's both a knowledge competition (sample question: “Under the system of federalism, which level of government has the power to run elections?”) and a pitch contest, with students proposing projects to address community issues before a panel of judges. In 2025, more than 12,000 students participated in the essay round, and finalists from 39 states advanced through local and state competitions before converging in D.C. for an adrenaline-spurred, game show–like final hosted in 2025 by television personality Mario Lopez.

The U.S. Chamber Foundation is aiming to reach students like Nasir who may have few other civics opportunities. Four in five National Civics Bee contestants had never taken a civics or U.S. government course before competing, according to a December 2025 survey by the U.S. Chamber Foundation and Johns Hopkins University. It also wants to reach their parents. Nasir says a “feeling of inadequacy” nagged at her through her long hours of preparation. What helped was support from her mother, who grew curious about U.S. history as she helped Nasir study, and her

father, whom she calls her “cheerleader.” She received no help from her teachers or school, reflecting a broader issue: for decades, civics education in the United States has been neglected.

## The Case for Civics Education

The U.S. Chamber Foundation began its civics programming in 2019 amid growing concerns from the U.S. business community that polarization poses economic risks. That year, it copublished *The Business Case for Civics Education* with Harvard Business Review, noting that GDP is highest in countries with the most stable political systems. “We see a strong relationship between the strength of our democracy and the strength of our economy,” says Crow, who adds that civic skills, like critical thinking and collaborating with others across differences, are workplace skills.

The U.S. Chamber Foundation's civics work comes at a moment when civics education is regaining momentum after decades of policy that prioritized STEM-focused instruction in the name of economic competitiveness. Emma Humphries, the chief education officer at iCivics, traces the decline of civics to the 1957 launch of the Soviet satellite Sputnik. “After the launch, our entire

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national confidence plummeted as we saw our sworn enemies' satellites swirling above us in our front yards," she says. "The federal government got involved in education to prioritize STEM subjects, and it cut back on others."

That trend continued with the influential 1983 Department of Education report *A Nation at Risk*, which framed poor school performance as a threat to American security, and federal laws like No Child Left Behind in 2002 and Race to the Top in 2009, which tied funding to test scores in subjects like math and reading. In 2024, the federal government spent \$7.7 billion on STEM education, according to the executive branch's 2025 *Report on the Committee on STEM*. By contrast, it allocated just \$23 million to civics education in 2024, according to an analysis by CivxNow, a project of iCivics.

The big investment in STEM hasn't paid off for Americans equally, says Daniel Stid, a senior fellow at the American Enterprise Institute, who points to declining socioeconomic mobility in the United States — especially for working-class and non-college-educated Americans — and increasing polarization. "Though the push for STEM has been couched in terms of national competitiveness," Stid says, "it's concerned with how individual students are doing, not how communities are doing."

In 2022, Samantha Sandhaus, then a student at Philadelphia's Central High School, noticed that while some students at her school were going hungry, other students were throwing away certain food items untouched. She decided to start a community fridge to collect extra food for anyone to access throughout the day.

When the initiative caught on, Sandhaus decided to scale it beyond her campus and established a nonprofit called Feeding Philly. That led to burnout. "I didn't have a very healthy approach to leadership because it felt like the stakes were always very high," she says. "And sometimes it feels like other people around you just don't care as much, which can feel isolating."

Sandhaus soon found support. After being selected for the Civic Spring Project, a fellowship launched in 2020 at the nonprofit Institute for Citizens & Scholars, she was paired with two mentors — one, an experienced professional, and the other, a college student from Kentucky who had led a voting initiative as a teenager. The pair coached Sandhaus in weekly calls, advising her to delegate and work with partners.

The fellowship, now called Carnegie Young Leaders for Civic Preparedness and supported with funding from Carnegie, helps young people participate in their communities, says Rajiv Vinnakota, president of the Institute for Citizens & Scholars. A 2025 study by the organization found that while nine in 10 members of Gen Z care about their communities, their biggest barriers are not knowing how to start and doubting they can make a difference. One of their biggest motivators? Witnessing their friends get involved. "Young people get so much value and a sense of agency

from having someone in their age group who can say, 'I've actually done this, and I can help you,'" Vinnakota says.

Another finding from the 2024 survey by America's Promise Alliance: few young people trust public institutions — just 21 percent trust the education system and 12 percent trust government leaders — but more than two-thirds trust their peers at school. These findings inform the work of Generation Citizen, a Carnegie-supported nonprofit that works with schools to teach students how to address problems in their communities. The first steps of the curriculum build trust within classrooms, explains the organization's CEO, Elizabeth Clay Roy. "Students are encouraged to practice civil discourse with each other, ground comments in evidence, and identify common experiences," she says.

## 'Projects to Improve the World'

It's a cold and windy November morning in Washington, D.C. Arriving from Washington state, Maanha Nasir is amazed to see everyone on the street in corporate attire, some carrying briefcases — very different from the hiker-chic of the Pacific Northwest. "Somewhere along the way, I started to see myself in D.C.," she says. "It has this quality where it just makes you imagine things."

Nasir was there to compete in the 2025 National Civics Bee championship as one of 39 middle-school-aged contestants. The first round: a 90-minute team challenge in which they were randomly grouped to develop a response to a prompt, while judges graded their civics skills and dispositions. "The idea is that studying alone isn't going to win you the championship," says the U.S. Chamber Foundation's Crow. "You really have to represent what being a good member of the community looks like."

This year's prompt asked teams to propose ways to improve access to technology for low-income students and reduce what's often called the "digital divide." Nasir felt insecure — her online education meant she had less experience in group settings. Her team ran into conflict early on. "Someone pitched the idea of starting a nonprofit, and I countered that nonprofits are hard to establish and scale," Nasir says. About halfway through, "there was this moment when we worked past our differences and came to a mutual deal, including input from everyone," Nasir recalls. "It was so harmonious. I was just in shock."

Then it was time for the quiz round, with questions designed by the nonprofit Bill of Rights Institute, a Carnegie grantee. David Bobb, the president of the nonprofit and a coauthor of the Educating for American Democracy framework, says his team generated "thousands" of questions with the help of scholars and educators; game show standards experts were consulted to ensure the questions would be deployed fairly. The questions "aren't about 'gotchas,' aren't about trivia, but are about trying to push kids back to the

foundations, making them think about the ‘why’ behind our institutions and core ideas,” he says. Nasir’s long hours studying with her parents paid off: she sailed through.

That left Nasir as one of 10 finalists chosen to present her project on the national stage. She had spent months imagining this moment but didn’t realize there would be so many cameras. Weirdly, she didn’t feel nervous. “It felt like I was living it outside of my body,” she says. “I went up

National Civics Bee champion.

Brubaker says she was impressed by Nasir’s confident delivery, recalling her own anxiety as a contestant a year earlier. Throughout that competition, Brubaker heard a voice in the back of her mind that questioned her own ability — “All your competitors are super smart people, who says you can win?” — and sometimes felt insignificant among so many other young leaders. Now, as she studied the faces of the contestants on stage, she saw potential partners. “We need more people who are passionate about their projects to improve the world,” she says. “And this community of people makes me realize I’m not the only one.”

Last summer, after her National Civics Bee win, Brubaker enrolled in the Carnegie Young Leaders fellowship, where she leads an initiative with her Girl Scout troop to replace pollution-causing plastic glitter with an eco-friendly alternative. Her mentor is Sandhaus, the Civic Spring fellow who established Feeding Philly as a Central High School student, now a sophomore at Lehigh University. Sandhaus helped Brubaker’s team prep for testifying before the Anchorage School Board, which resulted in the board’s unanimous vote in December to ban plastic glitter. She also reminds Brubaker to delegate, advice that Brubaker says has made her leadership role “a lot less stressful and taxing.” The chance to turn her past mistakes into a way to help others has been an incredibly powerful experience, says Sandhaus. And having civically oriented peers makes Brubaker feel that change is possible.

When the judges’ scores for the 2025 National Civics Bee were tallied, Aarit Koul, a 14-year-old from Ohio, won the grand prize, a \$100,000 education savings plan contribution.

Nasir was awarded the third-place prize, a \$15,000 cash award. She also gained an enduring community, regularly texting with Brubaker and other bee contestants. She’s already hoping that her 10-year-old sister will compete two years from now. “I want to set a good example,” Nasir says. “Whatever I do lays a blueprint for what she may do in her future.” ♦

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**Wilfred Chan** is a former senior content editor and writer at the Andrew Carnegie Foundation.



on stage, and for the first time, my hands didn’t shake.”

What started as an essay a year ago was now a project with a name: WISE, or the Washington Initiative for Student Equity, designed to address school funding disparities by incentivizing richer districts to redistribute their surplus dollars to underfunded schools. She had already discussed the idea with local lawmakers and nonprofits — something she knew would help her establish credibility. Now it was time to convince the four judges: a CEO, two former U.S. cabinet secretaries, and a 15-year-old from Alaska, Emily Brubaker, the 2024



The National Civics Bee, open to students in grades 6–8, encourages young people to gain civics skills and knowledge.

**CREDIT:** U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation

#### NOTES

1. Rachel Brooks, Benjamin Hart, Golo Henseke, David Mills, James Robson, and Xin Xu, *Degrees of Difference*, The Sutton Trust (November 2025).

## OPPORTUNITY



## Who Should Have to Pass the Citizenship Test?

A national survey finds most Americans would fail. The Gilder Lehrman Institute aims to change that

**By Wilfred Chan**

### NOTES

1. "128 Civics Questions and Answers," U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (September 2025).

**P**icture a classroom full of high school students taking a 20-question test. The questions include: Why were the Federalist Papers important? Why did the United States enter the Persian Gulf War?

You might think they are taking the AP U.S. History exam. Instead, these questions form part of the civics portion of the U.S. citizenship test, one taken by millions of immigrants every year as one of the final steps in

the naturalization process. As civics knowledge among our country's students dips to historic lows, the test has become a classroom tool and a cause for reflection about what every citizen ought to know.

Federal data show that around nine in 10 applicants for naturalization pass the civics test each year, which requires correctly answering 12 out of 20 questions, chosen at random from a list of 128. The general public would fare much worse. Fewer than one in five Americans under the age of 45 would pass the citizenship test, according to a 2018 survey by the Institute for Citizens & Scholars, a Carnegie grantee. That figure roughly mirrors the 22 percent of eighth graders ranked as proficient in civics in the 2022 National Assessment of Educational Progress, known as the Nation's Report Card (the civics assessment is administered once every four years).

To understand the issue, journalist James Traub spent the 2023–2024 academic year touring public schools across the country, from Texas to Oklahoma to New York City, an experience he recounts in his book *The Cradle of Citizenship*. He observed that many schools seemed more comfortable with teaching skills like critical thinking than asking students to memorize historical facts. Traub thinks the two shouldn't be separated. "Having a large stock of knowledge is indispensable for gaining the kind of civic understanding that we want citizens to have," he says. "If newcomers have to demonstrate this knowledge, shouldn't students, too?"

That's why the nonprofit Gilder Lehrman Institute, a Carnegie grantee, is bringing the citizenship test into classrooms. In 2023, it launched K–12 educational resources based on the test, including practice tests and

# “If newcomers have to demonstrate this knowledge, shouldn’t students, too?”

– James Traub, author of *The Cradle of Citizenship*



short videos from historians explaining the rationale behind the correct answers. So far, 93,000 unique visitors have taken Gilder Lehrman’s online version. The idea is to “have everyone take the exam to confirm your competence as a citizen,” says James Basker, the president of the organization and a professor at Barnard College. The test also gives students a chance to contemplate the meaning of citizenship, he says. “It raises the question of, what should we as citizens know?”

For much of the nation’s history, there was no uniform civics assessment for naturalization. The first U.S. naturalization law, enacted in 1790, introduced a requirement that applicants pledge an oath of allegiance to the Constitution, though it did not specify whether they should have to demonstrate their understanding of it. Instead, well into the 20th century, immigration examiners had discretion to quiz applicants as they saw fit, according to historian Jack Schneider.

Amid Cold War fears in 1950, Congress added a requirement for applicants to demonstrate “a knowl-

## Pop Quiz:

Becoming a naturalized citizen requires answering 12 out of 20 civics questions, randomly selected from a pool of 128. Five of the possible questions<sup>1</sup> appear here (answers below).

1. How many amendments does the United States Constitution have?
2. What part of the federal government writes laws?
3. How long do Supreme Court members serve?
4. Who wrote the Declaration of Independence?
5. Why did the U.S. enter the Persian Gulf War?

1: 27 2: Legislative branch 3: For life 4: Thomas Jefferson 5: To force the Iraqi military from Kuwait

edge and understanding of the fundamentals of the history, and the principles and form of government, of the United States.” It wasn’t until 1986 that the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service established an official list of 100 questions for the test, many of them straightforward (“What are the colors of our flag?” “What is the White House?”). A 1997 congressional report criticized the test, noting that it relied on “memorization of discrete facts rather than on substantive understanding of the basic concepts of civic participation.” There were no changes until 2008, when the renamed U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services replaced some of the simpler questions with more conceptual ones like “What is the rule of law?” It modified the test again in 2025 to add questions like “Why is the Electoral College important?” bringing the total possible questions to 128.

Because the agency makes the questions and answers publicly available, the test can still be passed using rote memorization. That doesn’t diminish its educational value, says Gilder Lehrman’s Basker. The nonprofit holds an annual competition called the Citizenship Challenge, inviting students from grades 3 through 12 to submit an original question they believe should be added to the citizenship test. One finalist, a fifth grader, proposed, “What is the Americans with Disabilities Act, and when was it passed?” explaining, “My friend has cerebral palsy, and he needs extra support to fully participate in school ... The ADA is important because it makes sure no one is left out just because they have a disability.” Another finalist, a seventh grader, proposed, “What are you entitled to under the Fifth Amendment?” writing, “It is a cornerstone of our democracy that all citizens, but especially new ones, know their right to due process.”

In 2015, Arizona became the first state to require that high school students pass a civics test based on the citizenship test to graduate. As of 2026, there are 15 states with similar graduation requirements, according to data from CivxNow, a project of the nonprofit iCivics, a Carnegie grantee. Basker hopes that number can reach 50. “I like the idea that the test becomes a rite of passage for everybody,” he says. “It ratifies our common citizenship. It’s a way of demonstrating that we’re all in this together.” ♦

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## OPPORTUNITY



In rural South Dakota, Four Bands Community Fund offers loans to residents of the Cheyenne River Sioux Reservation to start small businesses. The reservation, pictured, is one of the United States' poorest areas.





## 8,000 People, 1.4 Million Acres, and Unemployment as High as 85 Percent

In South Dakota, a community fund helps Native Americans start small businesses. The fund is one of five local organizations working from Oregon to North Carolina to improve rural life in America

**By Wilfred Chan  
and Sue Dorfman**

## OPPORTUNITY

## The Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe reservation in South Dakota is among the nation's poorest areas, with unemployment reaching up to 85 percent in the frigid winter months. Here, where fewer than 8,000 people live across 1.4 million acres, economic opportunity can feel like a distant dream.

Lakota Vogel is one of the tribal members hoping to change that. She directs the nonprofit Four Bands Community Fund, which offers loans to neighbors to help them start small businesses. "It's not to become the next Mark Zuckerberg," Vogel says, "it's more to provide missing services within the community."

Across rural America — where jobs are scarce, hospitals are few, and industries have vanished — nonprofit groups like Four Bands are working to solve local problems. But while rural areas are home to one in five Americans, they receive just a sliver of philanthropic support, as little as 7 percent of grants from large funders, according to research by the Federal Reserve Board of Governors.

The Trust for Civic Life was created to solve this imbalance by channeling more national resources to groups like Four Bands. By pooling philanthropic support from funders including the Andrew Carnegie Foundation, the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, and Stand Together, the Trust directs funding to historically overlooked rural areas — distributing \$17.2 million in grants to support 150 groups and projects since launching in 2024.

The Trust used mapping data to prioritize regions with both a lack of funding and a lack of opportunities for residents, according to Tito Llantada, the organization's director of networks and programs. The data pointed to four regions: central Appalachia, tribal lands, the southwest border, and the Black Belt, referring to a region of the

South known for its fertile black soil and majority African American population. To help most effectively, the Trust awards the bulk of its grants to local organizations that distribute resources within their communities.

The following profiles contain close-up stories of the work of Four Bands and other groups funded by the Trust for Civic Life. The organizations are "trying to uphold and build a vision for the entire community," says Llantada, "that represents what the community truly wants." ♦

## ALABAMA

## Black Belt Community Foundation

The Selma-based Black Belt Community Foundation serves 12 Alabama counties historically defined by slave plantations. "This is a very economically neglected region of the United States," says Daron Harris, the foundation's public relations director. To ensure its grants are being made effectively, the foundation meets regularly with a network of more than 120 local representatives, from mayors to pastors to teachers. "They help us understand the communities' number one priority needs," says Harris, "and we target our funding efforts accordingly."

Among its grantees is the Freedom Quilting Bee Legacy, a group that continues the tradition of the nationally acclaimed cooperative of Black artists who during the civil rights movement produced quilts to generate income for their rural community in Wilcox County, Alabama. Today, in addition to supporting quiltmakers, the Freedom Quilting Bee Legacy provides resources like CPR and basic first aid classes to Wilcox County, where there is just one doctor for every 10,450 residents. "Our areas of the Black Belt are not adequately sourced with access to hospitals and medical services," Harris says. "If you're having a heart attack, you might have to wait for an hour or more for an ambulance."



Among the Black Belt Community Foundation's grantees is Freedom Quilting Bee, a cooperative of Black artists that supports quiltmakers and provides resources like CPR and basic first aid classes to residents in Wilcox County, Alabama.





**Below:** Adult nurse practitioner Demetric Childs-Hicks (center, wearing blue) teaches a CPR class.

## Demetric Childs-Hicks

Adult Nurse Practitioner  
and CPR Teacher

*When I was invited to Wilcox County to teach a CPR class, I knew it was rural, but I didn't realize how rural. Driving in, I was like, Oh my God. Trees and trees and more trees. Very few brick homes, and a lot of trailers.*

I have compassion for these rural communities because they lack so much. They might have just one health facility. You can't always get help right away. So when I was asked by the Freedom Quilting Bee Legacy to teach

this class, I told people to invite everyone they knew: members of their churches, anyone they saw in the grocery store. During the class, they shared stories that really touched me. One woman told me there had been a non-life-threatening gunshot wound, and it took the ambulance two hours and 45 minutes to arrive.

That's why CPR is so important. Some of the people I teach live 30 or 40 miles from a hospital. You need people in the community — bus drivers, daycare providers, schoolteachers — to be able to act right away. I always tell my students, don't do CPR

on a bed. Move the person to the floor, or you lower their chance of survival. And if an automated external defibrillator is available, get it immediately. The machine walks you through every step, even for infants. It can keep someone alive until help arrives.

The reaction I get is gratitude. People ask if they can come back just to sit in on another class. They thank me for sharing my stories. And I thank them for showing up, because every person who learns CPR is another chance at saving a life. In rural places, that knowledge doesn't just help one person: it helps the whole community.

## OPPORTUNITY



## OREGON

## Libraries of Eastern Oregon

In eastern Oregon, one of the nation's most sparsely populated regions, residents face long journeys and high prices for food. Disasters like ice storms or wildfires could mean that many Oregonians “lose access to food very, very quickly,” says Jared Hibbard-Swanson, who manages an Oregon State University Extension Service program on food security and safety. A 2024 analysis by Oregon State University’s Policy Analysis Lab found that between 2021 and 2023, food insecurity in rural Oregon increased to 20.7 percent, compared to 12 percent in the state’s urban areas.

A survey by the Oregon State University Extension Service found that many eastern Oregonians lived near farms but lacked the means to preserve surplus produce. In 2023, the university extension launched an initiative to teach classes and lend equipment for food preservation in partnership with the nonprofit Libraries of Eastern Oregon, a group supporting rural libraries. Initially offered at three libraries, the program has now expanded to 15 libraries across the state with support from Trust for Civic Life. Hibbard-Swanson says the program hasn’t just improved residents’ food security — it has strengthened their communities. “People are interested in learning these skills, regardless of political ideology or demographics,” he says, “because everybody eats.”

### Terri Emrich Master Food Preserver, Oregon State University Extension Service

*I grew up canning. We lived 30 miles from the grocery store, so my mom had a fruit room on the back porch with jars of whatever we needed. Every summer, we would get a truckload of corn, and I would have to help my mom shuck it all. We would “U-pick” 40-pound boxes of green beans, and I would have to snap them! As a kid, I was bawling my eyes out.*

The irony is that I longed for that once I grew up. I worked for Safeway supermar-

kets for 35 years, as a store director and in their division office. I saw the additives in our food, the items with three-year pull dates. I was selling Oreos by day and canning my own jam at night.

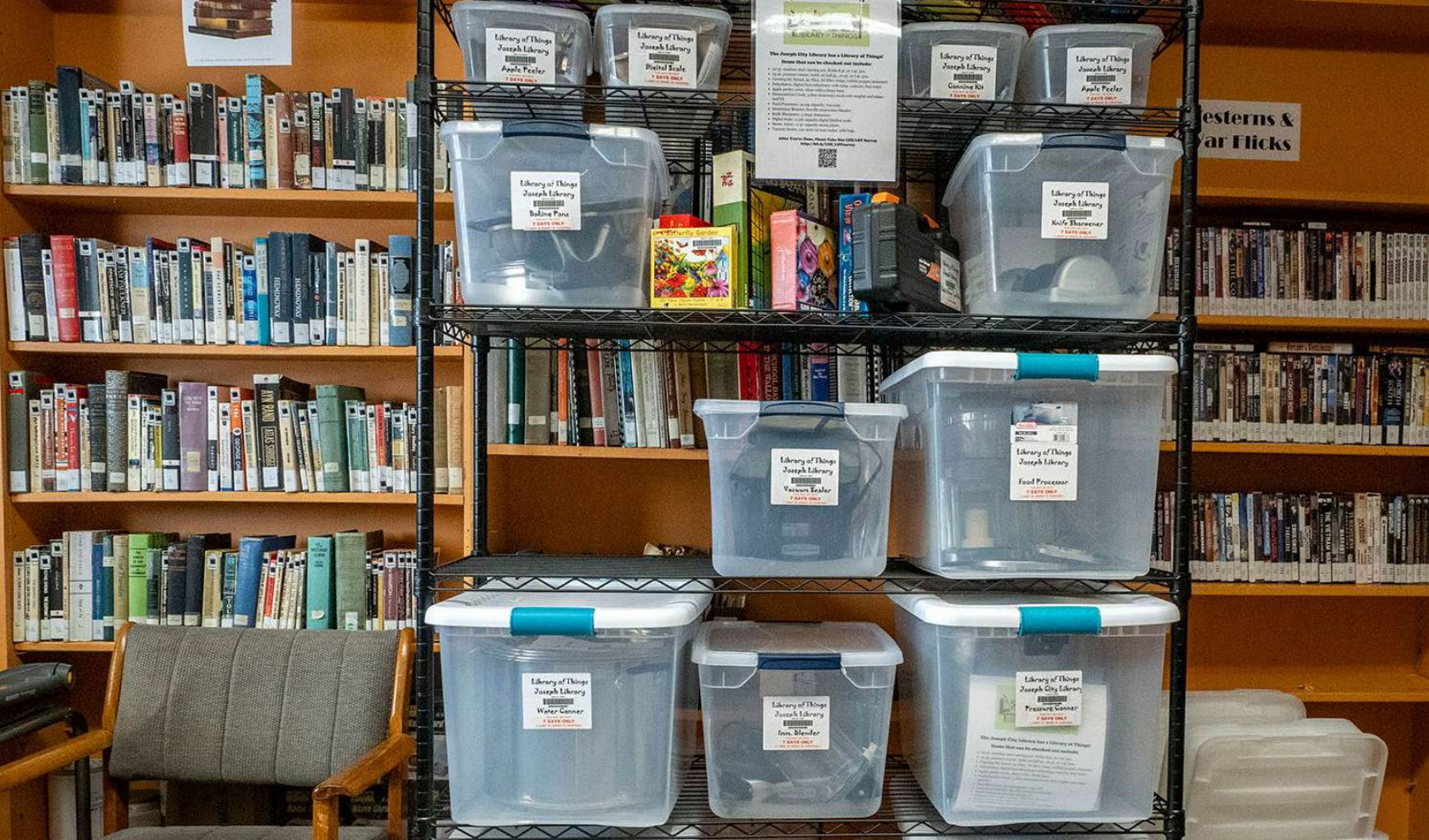
In 2014, I decided to train to become a master food preserver through Washington State University. Since then, I’ve logged hundreds of hours as a volunteer — teaching people how to water-bath can, pressure can, dehydrate, ferment, you name it. It’s about showing people how they can preserve quality food for themselves that meets a lot of their health desires. Some people come in nervous. They’ve been canning with

their grandma’s recipe and want to make sure it’s still safe. We help them connect the dots between tradition and food science.

Food preservation used to be mostly about saving money. These days, people do it for health, sustainability, and self-sufficiency. With Oregon’s farm-direct law, local farmers can now preserve things like jam or pickles and sell them without a commercial kitchen. It helps build local food systems and keeps more food in our region.



With support from the non-profit Libraries of Eastern Oregon, the Oregon State University Extension Service lends food preservation equipment to rural Oregon residents and offers classes on how to use it. At bottom right, a class participant lowers a jar into a canning pot as volunteer instructor Terri Emrich looks on.



## NORTH CAROLINA

## The Industrial Commons

Located in the rural foothills of western North Carolina's Blue Ridge Mountains, the town of Morganton, population 17,000, was once among the United States' leading textile and furniture manufacturing centers. But economic changes hit the town hard: unemployment exceeded 15 percent in the wake of the 2008 Great Recession as the large factories moved jobs overseas.

## OPPORTUNITY

The Industrial Commons, founded in 2015, is a nonprofit working to revitalize the region's economy by supporting and training local residents to launch worker-owned businesses — from cut-and-sew shops and textile upcyclers to bookkeeping firms — forming a cooperative economic network. “Most small to midsize businesses can't compete globally by themselves,” says Thea Yang, the nonprofit's director of values and culture, “but they can if they work together.”



typical nonprofit — we support worker-owned cooperatives, giving frontline workers real voice and decision-making power. Since 2017, through an enterprise we call Material Return, we've transformed 2.6 million pounds of textile waste into new yarn instead of sending it to landfills, while also investing in the next generation of workers and leaders.

I lead a program called Hometown Walkabout — community tours that bring together health-care workers, educators, nonprofits, and law enforcement to experience Burke County through the eyes of its people. They might learn the story behind a community meal, visit a local business, or share a cultural meal like a traditional Hmong dish cooked by my mother. The most powerful moments often come from newcomers, but from lifelong residents who say, “I never knew this.” In my lifetime, I've seen what was once a sleepy county become a vibrant community of young families and entrepreneurs.



### Thea Yang Values and Culture Director, The Industrial Commons

*I was born in Laos about a decade after the Vietnam and Secret Wars ended. By the time I was four, I had lived in three refugee camps. Like many Southeast Asian refugees, my family was resettled in Fresno, California, by the U.S. State Department. In 1993, we moved to western North Carolina, drawn by textile and*

*furniture jobs: work that sustained my parents until their retirement.*

This region was once the nation's furniture and textile capital. When those industries declined, they left deep gaps in our community. Today, Burke County is home to about 89,000 people in the foothills. We're majority white, but also deeply diverse, with fast-growing Hispanic, Asian, and African American communities.

The Industrial Commons isn't a

The Industrial Commons works to revitalize the economy of Morganton, North Carolina, by supporting and training local residents to launch worker-owned businesses — from cut-and-sew shops and textile upcyclers to bookkeeping firms.

## SOUTH DAKOTA

## Four Bands Community Fund

Native-led and based on the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe reservation, one of the nation's poorest areas, Four Bands Community Fund addresses high unemployment and a lack of services by training and funding residents to start businesses.

One of its most important tools is a simple one: space. In 2019, Four Bands launched an incubator that offers six low-cost storefronts plus the basics that make a first day possible: utilities, Wi-Fi, bookkeeping support, and help with marketing.

So far, the incubator has launched around 16 businesses, including a grocery store called Wóyute. "What's most rewarding for me is seeing clients go from uncertainty to confidence," says Alissa Benoist, the nonprofit's director of programs.

### Alissa Benoist Director of Programs, Four Bands Community Fund

*I'm motivated by the opportunity to help people turn their ideas into reality. Every day, I see how access to the right tools, knowledge, and support can change someone's life — and by extension, their family and community.*

I work for Four Bands Community Fund on the Cheyenne River Sioux Reservation in north-central South Dakota. We're a rural community the size of Connecticut, with more cattle per capita than people. About 45 percent of our population is under 18, and just a small percent of people are

employed. There's a lot of financial stress in multigenerational households relying on one income source.

We're in a food desert. We don't get to just buy bulk spices anywhere or organic food. That's where entrepreneurs like Donita come in. She started Wóyute, which means "grocery" in Lakota. She'd always been interested in the farm-to-table movement and wondered: Why is our food traveling 2,000 miles from here and coming back to us in processed form, when we're surrounded by all this land?

She started with our incubator space in 2019. We have six leasable spaces where people can test their ideas at low cost before we give them larger loans. Donita created a grocery store offering organic options where you knew

where the food came from. As she prepared your food, she'd explain how she made it and tell you where to buy the ingredients at her grocery store. After about a year and a half, she moved out, bought her own facility on the highway, and created a cooperative from everything she learned.

When a business like Wóyute succeeds, it creates jobs, strengthens culture, and inspires others to believe they can do it too. I've worked with so many who start out unsure if their idea will work, but through planning and persistence, they take a chance on themselves and thrive. Those moments remind me that every success begins with one small "yes."



Four Bands provides loans and resources to help clients start small businesses in an area where economic opportunities are scarce.

## OPPORTUNITY



Abara, a non-profit in El Paso, Texas, guides participants on a three-day program to better understand issues around immigration, including a hike up Mount Cristo Rey where they can view the U.S.-Mexico border.



**Opposite:** Abara program facilitator Clara Duffy (on table) leads a discussion with participants in the Abara Border Encounters program.



## TEXAS

## Abara

When viewed from above, the border cities of El Paso, Texas, and Ciudad Juárez, Mexico, appear to merge into a continuous area. Residents of these cities traveled back and forth with few restrictions until 1929, when the United States passed a law prohibiting unauthorized border crossings.

Today, El Paso has become a focal point of the national debate over immigration. It was here that the Trump administration piloted its “zero tolerance” immigration policy in 2017, which prosecuted any adults who crossed the border illegally, with no exceptions for asylum seekers. The city currently hosts some of the country’s largest detention centers for migrants, as part of the Trump administration’s mass deportation strategy. In August 2019, a mass shooter killed 23 people in an El Paso Walmart, writing in a manifesto that he wanted to target Hispanic immigrants. It was the deadliest attack on Latinos in modern U.S. history.

Abara is a nonprofit founded in El Paso in February 2019 to reduce polarization around immigration. “Abara starts with this idea that fear over immigration is dividing us,” says Nate Ledbetter, the organization’s director of partnerships and engagement. “Our response is to create spaces for connection and belonging to build peace.” Its signature initiative is a three-day program called Border Encounters, a guided trip that aims to humanize the people of the border region by arranging for visitors to have face-to-face conversations with everyone from migrant shelter residents to U.S. border agents and local immigration advocates.

In 2024, the nonprofit hosted 321 Border Encounters participants from 25 states, including students, teachers, and faith leaders. “It’s about inviting people to come and listen to the border,” says Ledbetter, “and to hear and see one another, especially across dividing lines.”

**Wilfred Chan**

is a former senior content editor and writer at the Andrew Carnegie Foundation.

**Sue Dorfman**

is an independent documentary and human rights photojournalist, media strategist, and educator. Her photos have appeared in outlets such as ABC News, CNN, The Guardian, and The Wall Street Journal.

### Nate Ledbetter

Director of Partnerships and Engagement, Abara

*We believe the border has something to teach the country. Our Center for Peace and Transformation is in El Paso, right up against the fence — just a few feet from Mexico. It’s where we host what we call Border Encounters: three-day trips through the border region, created in partnership with local leaders, that let people see things firsthand.*

We’ve had everyone from college students to faith leaders to policymakers. Some come in thinking they already understand the

border. Then they experience our site visits. And something shifts.

These encounters are not “tours” or acts of charity. We enter as guests — not saviors — listening to asylum seekers, shelter partners, and community leaders.

By invitation, we sit in circles, meet former Border Patrol agents, reflect at memorials, and pause to hear the desert itself. One person said to us, “The experience humanized migrants on a level I did not

anticipate.”

Nothing at Abara is dreamed up in a back office. Our campus, partnerships, and practices are shaped through listening with our community in Juárez-El Paso, one of the kindest, most hospitable commu-

nities I’ve ever known. In today’s polarized climate, we invite people from across the nation to come, let their guard down, and listen to what the border has to say.

*Originally published on carnegie.org on November 20, 2025.*



## OPPORTUNITY

# Opening Campus Doors for Low-Income Learners

The idea of the American Dream has become a mirage for millions. How are educational programs working to support upward mobility for students?

**By Drew Lindsay**

**E**ntering his last year of high school, Camren Daley was more than ready to close out his education. He was a good enough student — he got mostly B's and C's — but none of his classes interested him or seemed relevant.

Daley and his mother lived in government-subsidized housing in the Connecticut town of Manchester and scrambled to pay for rent, electricity, and groceries. “I wasn’t really thinking about college,” he says. “I was thinking about how to survive day to day.”

But that first semester of his senior year, Daley got a taste of college, courtesy of an online personal-finance class taught by a professor at the University of Pennsylvania’s Wharton School. He got an A, and virtually overnight, his future took on new possibilities.

In May, almost five years later, Daley walked across the commencement stage at the University of Connecticut, the first member of his family to get a college degree. A Phi Beta Kappa honoree with a near-perfect grade point average, a major in physiology and neurobiology, and a minor in chemistry, he has already lined up a paid internship at a Massachusetts General Hospital affiliate working at the intersection of neuroscience and the law. Eventually, he expects to go to law school, then get a PhD in neurobiology.

The Wharton class that inspired Daley was part of the National Education Opportunity Network (NEON), previously known as the National Education Equity Lab.

NEON partners with top schools like Wharton, Duke, Spelman, and Stanford to bring college credit-bearing online college courses to low-income students in schools nationwide. The organization, which has grown rapidly since its 2019 launch, has served more than 60,000 students across 34 states. The work is made possible through school district fees (40 percent) and philanthropic funds (60 percent). It’s a lean operation — there are only 36 staff members — built to scale quickly; NEON aims to reach 1 million students in the next decade.

NEON is part of a wave of efforts to supercharge education as an engine of social and economic mobility — work that could also tamp down the country’s runaway polarization. Like traditional investments in scholarship and financial aid, these ventures open campus doors often closed to low-income students. Collectively, they go further to ensure that those who go to college get their degree as well as postgraduation jobs or training.

“At its core, this is an economic mobility strategy,” says Leslie Cornfield, a former civil rights prosecutor who launched NEON with \$50,000 in seed money from the Andrew Carnegie Foundation. “Our public education



NEON scholars from Mathematics, Science Research and Technology High School in Queens visited Wesleyan University while enrolled in a course offered through NEON’s partnership with the school.

**CREDIT:** National Education Opportunity Network



## OPPORTUNITY

“Still, education is seen as one of the most reliable ways to increase upward mobility and is a natural counterweight to America’s polarization and frayed civic health.”

system was intended to be the great equalizer of opportunity, but too often it has the opposite impact for low-income students.”

All these ventures aim to restore one of America’s most celebrated features: the opportunity to climb the economic ladder, even if you start on its lowest rungs. This idea of the American Dream has become a mirage for millions, according to research by Harvard’s Opportunity Insights project, led by economist and Andrew Carnegie Fellow Raj Chetty. While more than 90 percent of children born in the 1940s grew up to earn more than their parents, that figure has plummeted to about 50 percent for children born in the 1980s.

Solutions range widely. The Trump administration has announced \$1,000 investment accounts for newborns — money to be tapped as adults for education, home ownership, or starting a business. Steve Ballmer, the former Microsoft CEO, and his wife Connie are investing hundreds of millions in mobility efforts that include criminal justice reform and affordable housing. NextLadder Ventures, a new \$1 billion philanthropic effort led by, among others, tech mogul Bill Gates and industrialist Charles Koch, aims to harness artificial intelligence and other technologies to help Americans achieve financial security.

Still, education is seen as one of the most reliable ways to increase upward mobility and is a natural counterweight to America’s polarization and frayed civic health.

A map of civic opportunities nationwide by county

found patterns of inequality tied to education as well as race, class, and immigration status. The map — produced by Johns Hopkins University’s SNF Agora Institute with support from the Andrew Carnegie Foundation — examined opportunities available through churches, neighborhood organizations, social-fraternal clubs, and other groups. “The more educated the county, the more likely it will have a density of civic opportunities,” says Hahrie Han, a Hopkins political scientist, inaugural director of the SNF Agora Institute, and a 2025 MacArthur Fellow.

Efforts to increase opportunities for education are not just targeting the tricky transition from high school to college. They knock down often unseen barriers for ages ranging from preteens to working adults.

Bard College, a 166-year-old liberal arts school, was among the first to bring intensive college prep to low-income high schoolers. It opened its first Early College campus in 2001 and now operates in five states and the District of Columbia, serving an early college enrollment of nearly 4,000.

After two years of instruction in the fundamentals needed for higher education, students jump into credit-bearing courses often found in the first year at top colleges; 73 percent of Bard students earn an associate degree upon finishing high school. Classes are often

### NEON and its counterparts, also Carnegie grantees, are posting impressive results:

- NEON participants like Daley are twice as likely as other students in high-poverty schools to enroll in a four-year college, according to data by Johns Hopkins scholar Robert Balfanz. These students also are more likely to get their degree.
- At Breakthrough New York, which starts in middle school, 98 percent of participants enroll at a four-year college. They also graduate at a rate 61 percent higher than their peers.
- At the 10 campuses of the Bard Early College, nearly 80 percent of students who go on to college earn a bachelor’s degree within six years. Two of its New York City campuses — in Manhattan and

Queens — posted the highest on-time college completion rates for low-income students at any public school in the state.

- Braven, a national nonprofit that provides career-planning resources to universities with large numbers of first-generation and low-income students, has a graduation rate of 92 percent. In 2025, 57 percent of its students landed a strong job or entered graduate school, compared to 45 percent nationally for all bachelor’s graduates.

### Education increases upward mobility, social networks, and the likelihood of volunteering and giving.

- Bachelor’s degree holders earn a median of \$2.8 million during their career — 75 percent more than if they had only a

high school diploma, according to the Center on Education and the Workforce at Georgetown University.

- Thirty percent of first-generation college graduates reach the top earnings quintile compared to 10 percent among their peers who do not obtain a college degree, according to research by the Carnegie-sponsored Sutton Trust.
- College graduates are more likely to have strong marriages and networks of friends — critical bulwarks given the “loneliness crisis” declared by the former U.S. Surgeon General Vivek Murthy in 2023.
- Compared to Americans with no more than a high school education, college graduates are more likely to volunteer and give to charity, according to a Lumina Foundation–Gallup study.



**Left:** Camren Daley celebrates being the first member of his family to earn a college degree.

**Right:** Students take part in Bard Early College courses.

**CREDIT:** National Education Opportunity Network and Bard Early College

taught as college-style seminars, and about 70 percent of teachers have a PhD, an MFA, or other terminal degree.

Janet Cuatlacuatl was one of the first students at Bard's Bronx campus, which opened in 2023 with support from the Andrew Carnegie Foundation. Cuatlacuatl found that her classmates and her teachers aggressively pursued their intellectual interests, whether robotics or music. "It made me feel not so alone in wanting to do something special," she says.

Her college advisors encouraged her to apply to Princeton. "I didn't believe that I had a chance to get in, but they pushed me to believe in myself," says Cuatlacuatl, who is now on a full scholarship at Princeton and is the first person in her family to go to college.

Breakthrough New York is another organization that helps low-income students set their sights on college at an early age. It offers 10 years of support beginning in middle school with a five-week summer school to prepare students for the next year's subjects.

Teachers come from AmeriCorps and are often first-generation college students — examples for Breakthrough students of how they, too, can make it in college, says executive director Nikki Thompson.

"The students have to see it to believe it," Thompson says. "And they have to hear it over and over again to internalize it."

While financial aid remains critical, it is also important to prepare students for college-level work, says Balfanz of Johns Hopkins. "Our research suggests preparation is even more powerful than money."

Other organizations are working with older students to use higher education to launch upward mobility.

Braven New York works in partnership with universities to complement their career-planning resources and ensure that large numbers of low-income and first-generation students receive the advice, industry networks, interview skills, and résumé-burnishing internships that their more well-off peers often get through family and friends.

"We want to ensure that the students who've done everything right are earning the return on investment for college and are on the path to the American Dream," says executive director Kilsys Payamps-Roure.

## OPPORTUNITY



NEON scholars from Chicago, Illinois, (left) and Miami-Dade County (right) are among more than 60,000 students NEON has served across 34 states.

**CREDIT:** National Education Opportunity Network



Braven offers a three-credit course in which students design a career plan; create cover letters, résumés, and LinkedIn profiles; conduct mock interviews with professionals; and begin to network and apply for positions. After the course, students can apply for one-to-one mentorship with a professional in their career field of interest, in addition to career search support for the first six months after graduation.

At the University of Baltimore, a public university with 2,900 undergraduate and graduate students, the average age for students pursuing a bachelor's degree is 31. These are typically individuals working in minimum-wage jobs or trapped in mid-career uncertainty. Many are referred to as college comebacks — students who have attended college but still lack a degree.

"Sometimes they've been to several other colleges and received six credits here and eight credits there," says Theresa Silanskis, vice president for advancement and external relations.

The school's academic programs are designed to prepare graduates for high-demand jobs in fields such as accounting and cybersecurity. Courses are offered

online, in person, or in a hybrid format. Professors regularly make accommodations for students who need to bring a child to class. "That's not out of the ordinary," says Silanskis.

Reach University offers even more flexibility for working adults, bringing a college degree program directly into the workplace. Partnering with K-12 schools, the six-year-old nonprofit enrolls typically low-paid staff — cafeteria and custodial workers, teacher and library aides, coaches — in an apprenticeship program that offers a bachelor's degree and teaching credentials. Students continue in their jobs, get credit for clinical work in the classroom, and take evening online classes. Once they become teachers, their salaries can double or triple, says Reach president Joe Ross.

The organization is taking the model into hospitals, starting soon in Washington state. "Every workplace can become a college campus if this grows," Ross says.

Reach is one of a growing number of programs that offer alternative paths operating outside traditional higher education. Increasingly popular as rising tuition and student debt raise questions about the value of college,



these programs include vocational training, coding boot camps, and short-term training for microcredentials. Many aim to increase economic mobility without a college degree.

Propel America trains low-income adults aged 18–26 for health-care positions such as medical assistants and care providers, helping participants access careers with strong potential wage growth and upward mobility. Propel partners with employers to ensure its programs align with workforce needs and hiring demand.

Training is fast by design — participants typically earn a credential, often with college credit, in a matter of months. Many young adults can't afford to go to college for years, defer income, and possibly accrue debt with no certainty about a job, says Chad Rountree, Propel's chief executive officer.

"Is college worth it? I'd say 'yes.' A degree still has immense market value," Rountree says. "But we shouldn't look at it as the only doorway to mobility. If education is going to deliver on its promise of mobility, it has to be more tightly connected to how people get hired, build skills, and advance over time."

**"Is college worth it? I'd say 'yes.' A degree still has immense market value."**

— Chad Rountree,  
Propel America CEO

When Camren Daley arrived at the University of Connecticut on a full scholarship nearly five years ago, he wasn't scared. "I had already got an A in an Ivy League course," he says, referring to his Wharton class. "I knew I was capable of great things, and I knew what it takes — discipline, a strong work ethic, and grit."

Even as he took organic chemistry, biochemistry, and other courses required for medical school, Daley was surprised to find that he was more prepared for college-level work than classmates with better high-school records. He had worked with Wharton teacher assistants and knew how to navigate an online course module.

Now leaving college, he is confident that he will have the financial security absent from his childhood. "Law is not a career," he says, "where you're going to have to be living dollar to dollar every day." ♦

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**Drew Lindsay** is a former writer and editor for Education Week and the Chronicle of Philanthropy.

**Our International Program** works to advance peace by eliminating armed conflict and supporting the conditions needed for understanding and resolving global security challenges.

# A More Peaceful World

Inside: Nuclear risks // satellites // and open-source intelligence

## In her role as CEO of the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, Alexandra Bell manages the Doomsday Clock,

an annual chronicle of existential risk. Created in 1947 to monitor the long-term danger of nuclear weapons after World War II, the clock was originally set at seven minutes to midnight — midnight representing catastrophe. In the intervening years, the clock has been set back eight times and forward 19 times.

The farthest from midnight was 17 minutes in 1991, with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War.

The nearest was 85 seconds in 2026, with the breakdown of arms control talks and global leadership.

Once a major topic of American discourse, attention paid to nuclear proliferation has frayed — just as treaties have expired and relations between major powers have grown worse. In the following pages, we assess the implications of our nuclear age. We also learn about the exponential increase in satellites now entering orbit, and how the risk of close encounters by rivals in space could lead to conflict on Earth. Meantime, we hear from a researcher using open-source satellite imagery to analyze nuclear trends on the ground. As international dynamics move to outer space and artificial intelligence persists as a factor, how will his organization train the next generation of nuclear experts?

“There still remains the foulest blot that has ever disgraced the earth, the killing of civilized men by men like wild beasts as a permissible mode of settling international disputes.”

Andrew Carnegie



PEACE



An image of actor Jason Robards from *The Day After*, an ABC television movie about the effects of a nuclear war on a small Midwestern town, which broadcast to 100 million people in 1983.

**CREDIT:** Dean Williams/American Broadcasting Companies via Getty Images



# A New Nuclear Age

As expired treaties and emerging tech push the Doomsday Clock to 85 seconds to midnight, experts warn that global nuclear risk is at its highest point in decades

**By Siobhan Roberts**

**O**n the evening of November 20, 1983, amid rising global protests against the nuclear arms race, 100 million Americans turned on their TV and watched *The Day After* — that week's ABC Sunday Night Movie. Set in Kansas and Missouri, the film depicts the aftermath of a fictional nuclear war between the United States and the Soviet Union.

"I remember how shocking it was," said Rose Gottemoeller, then 30 and embarking on a career in nuclear policy and Russian relations. She watched the film with her husband in the living room of their home in Falls Church, Virginia. Their first child, Daniel, then eight months old, was nursing on her lap. The movie's birth scene "packed a particular punch," she recalled. "I was horrified at the notion that my child could have come into such a setting, what a horror that would have been."

President Ronald Reagan wrote in his diary that the film was "very effective & left me greatly depressed." It led to a policy shift known as the "Reagan reversal." While in March 1983, Reagan had referred to the U.S.S.R. as the "evil empire" and proposed the Strategic Defense Initiative, a.k.a. Star Wars, in his 1984 State of the Union address, he declared that "a nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought."

Some 40 years later, Alexandra Bell, president and CEO of the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, was invited to an advance screening of *A House of Dynamite*, a Netflix thriller depicting the race to respond to an unattributed

ed missile launched at the United States. Over its first three days of release worldwide in October, the film drew 22.1 million views. Bell saw the film in August at the headquarters of the Motion Picture Association in Washington, D.C., one block north of the White House. Four nuclear experts of various stripes gathered by special invitation in the 118-seat theater, plus one security guard, who, at the movie's abrupt cut-to-black end, exclaimed into the darkness, "WHAT?!!"

"It was such a visceral reaction," recalled Bell, a policy expert and former deputy assistant secretary at the U.S. State Department. "I hear the same exclamation in my head all the time, but in more than 20 years of working on nuclear issues, I've never actually let it out."

In her role as CEO of the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, a Carnegie grantee, Bell manages the Doomsday Clock, an annual chronicle of existential risk. Created in 1947 to monitor the long-term danger of nuclear weapons after World War II, the clock was originally set at seven minutes to midnight — midnight representing catastrophe. In the intervening years, the clock has been set back eight times and forward 19 times.

The farthest from midnight was 17 minutes in 1991, with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War.

The nearest was 2026: 85 seconds to midnight. Bell, who sits on the *Bulletin's* science and security board that sets the clock, has often heard the feedback: "Oh, come on, be serious. Wasn't it worse during the Cuban Missile Crisis?"

In October 1962, the Cuban Missile Crisis marked the height of the Cold War, the closest the United States and Soviet Union came to full-scale nuclear conflict. It opened a period of treaty negotiations, ultimately leading to, for instance, the 1970 Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), designed to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons and ultimately eliminate nuclear arsenals.

"What we aren't seeing now that we did see following the Cuban Missile Crisis is a commensurate effort among leaders to reduce nuclear threats," Bell said. "That kind of sustained leadership to reduce nuclear risk is almost completely absent."

**S**ince the end of the Cold War in 1991, the worldwide nuclear arsenal has decreased from a peak of some 70,000 warheads to a current tally of 12,187, according to an inventory of global nuclear warheads, part of a study updated in March by the Federation of American Scientists and conducted with support from Carnegie.

**"This is the first time in about 50 years that the U.S. and Russia have had no major constraints on each other's nuclear arsenals."**

— **Rose Gottemoeller**  
Former Assistant Secretary of State for Arms Control, Verification, and Compliance and New START negotiator

There are now nine nuclear-armed states: the United States, Russia, China, the United Kingdom, France, Israel, India, Pakistan, and North Korea. Other countries like Iran, Canada, Germany, Brazil, and the Netherlands possess the technology and means to develop nuclear weapons.

"Nukes are back at the center of international politics," said Ankit Panda, Stanton Senior Fellow in the nuclear policy program at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and author of *The New Nuclear Age: At the Precipice of Armageddon* (Polity, 2025). "As relations between major powers grow difficult again, arms control has frayed and crumbled, removing many of the guardrails," said Panda.

The NPT remains as a bedrock treaty, but other major arms control agreements are no longer in effect.

In February 2026, the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START), a nuclear arms control agreement implemented in 2010, expired. "This is the first time in about 50 years that the U.S. and Russia have had no major constraints on each other's nuclear arsenals," said Gottemoeller, currently a lecturer at Stanford University and the author of *Security Through Cooperation: Space, Nuclear Weapons, and U.S.-Russia Relations after the Cold War* (Stanford University Press, 2026). As Assistant Secretary of State for Arms Control, Verification, and Compliance, she was the lead U.S. negotiator of the New START treaty.

Through the 1990s and 2000s, Gottemoeller recalled, arms control and the build-down of nuclear arsenals produced a sense of "a peace dividend." Public awareness waned.

Meanwhile, emerging technologies, including AI and advancing capabilities in space, have presented new risks. AI technologies have long been used in nuclear operations, with, for instance, early warning systems for incoming attacks. Panda noted that among nuclear states, "one of the few areas where you have some degree of agreement is that AI should not be making the decision about when nuclear weapons should or should not be used."

But, he added, "There's a riskier set of conversations starting to take shape around what people call decision support. If political leaders are navigating uncertainty in a crisis, should they be receiving analytical assessments about what's happening, the risks at play, from an artificial intelligence system?"

In the space domain, the United States assessed in 2024 that Russia was building a space-based, nuclear-armed anti-satellite weapon. In 2025, President Trump signed an executive order for the construction of the Golden Dome, a multilayer missile defense system with a constellation of space-based interceptors. "If the U.S. is going to exploit space, that creates a

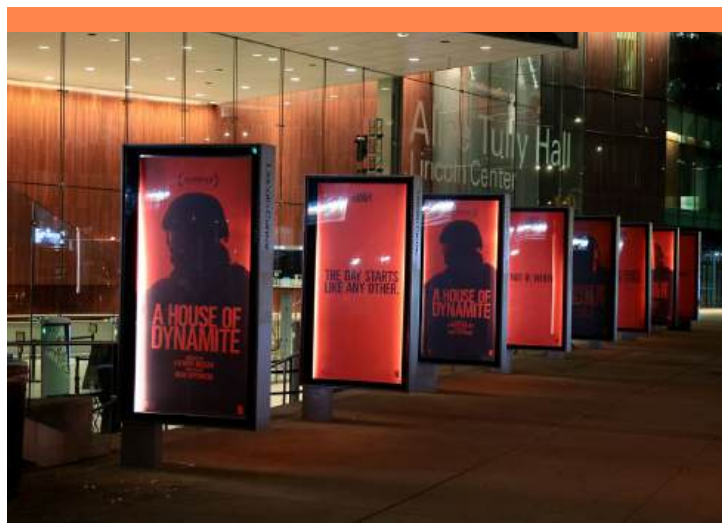
## PEACE

deep sense of potential anxiety in Russia and China,” said Panda. “They might have to plan for the worst, which will accelerate an arms race.”

Victoria Samson, in her role as chief director, space security and stability, for the Secure World Foundation, coedits the annual *Global Counterspace Capabilities Report*. The 2026 assessment documented an increase in the number of countries investing in space systems, seeking to enhance military capabilities and national security, and to develop counterspace capabilities that disrupt or destroy other systems via electronic warfare (such as satellite jamming and spoofing).

gram at the Center for International Studies at Sciences Po in Paris, created NUKEMAP, an interactive online simulation tool that makes the gradations of risk and harm more concrete. Choose your geographical target and the power of your warhead, then hit “DETONATE” and review the effects, such as blast damage and radiation radius.

The satellite engineer Isobel Porteous used NUKEMAP in a Stanford course with cyber policy and security researcher Herb Lin. It was part of an assignment: Simulate a nuclear attack on your hometown — for Porteous, Manhattan — and then list people you know who would die. The exercise “has a permanent place in my memory,” she said.



“Everyone wants a space plane,” said Samson — that is, an uncrewed spacecraft that conducts orbital missions. “Along the same lines,” she said, “a lot more countries are openly speaking about the need for bodyguard satellites that would deal with threats.” She added, “What does that mean exactly? It’s hard to say.”

“We’re in an exceedingly dangerous period right now,” said Scott Sagan, codirector of Stanford’s Center for International Security and Cooperation, a Carnegie grantee. “The last decade has been more dangerous, in terms of the risk of nuclear war, than any time since the height of the Cold War.” Specifically, Sagan cites the heightened tensions between North Korea and the United States, Russia’s war in Ukraine, and the war in Iran.

“I worry about a broad spectrum of risks,” said Alex Wellerstein, a historian of science and nuclear technology and a Carnegie grantee. Wellerstein, a professor at the Stevens Institute of Technology in Hoboken, New Jersey, and a visiting researcher at the Nuclear Knowledges pro-

**“If political leaders are navigating uncertainty in a crisis, should they be receiving analytical assessments about what’s happening, the risks at play, from an artificial intelligence system?”**

– Ankit Panda Stanton Senior Fellow in the nuclear policy program at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace

Porteous was first pulled into this domain when she learned in 2024 of Russia’s advances in a space-based nuclear weapon. “That was a big eye-opening moment for me,” said Porteous, who is head of business development and a member of the founding team at EarthTraq, a startup that builds space technologies. “I realized that if such a weapon existed, it would be a direct threat to the



**Left:** New START negotiator Rose Gottemoeller listens during a press conference on Capitol Hill on December 16, 2010, in Washington, D.C.

**Right:** Posters for the premiere of *A House of Dynamite*, directed by Kathryn Bigelow.

**CREDIT:** Brendan Smialowski and Dimitrios Kambouris via Getty Images

space systems that I was working on, and that civil space systems, commercial space systems, would be affected.” This became the subject of her honors thesis, with Gottemoeller as one of her advisors.

In Gottemoeller’s Stanford course on “Verification for 21st Century Arms Control Treaties,” Porteous learned that effective arms control treaties must include verification. Porteous noted, for example, that there is a treaty that prohibits nuclear weapons in space — the 1967 Outer Space Treaty — but it does not include any way to verify compliance; there is no enforcement mechanism.

**“The last decade has been more dangerous, in terms of the risk of nuclear war, than any time since the height of the Cold War.”**

– **Scott Sagan** Codirector of Stanford’s Center for International Security and Cooperation

**Left:** Russian Ambassador Mikhail Smirnovsky (left), U.K. Foreign Secretary Michael Stewart (center), and U.S. Ambassador Walter Annenberg (right) at the signing of the NPT on March 5, 1970.

**CREDIT:** Central Press/Getty Images, Alex Wellerstein/Mapbox



She developed her thesis project investigating the use of satellites for treaty verification. “It’s something that I think should be implemented,” she said. “I’m trying to find ways to promote that from a policy and technical-development perspective as much as I can.” At the end of May, she will share her technical feasibility study at an outer space treaty dialogue hosted jointly by the Geneva Centre for Security Policy, the Council on Strategic Risks, and the Secure World Foundation.

As Alexandra Bell of the *Bulletin* sees it, norms and understandings — even, to some extent, trust and cooperation between adversaries — are what made the bygone era of détente possible.

“The process of maintaining nuclear stability between the U.S. and the Soviet Union and then the U.S. and Russia was a constant churn of meetings, of scientific exchanges, of dialogues, sometimes exceedingly frustrating and seemingly purposeless,” she said. But even in the worst of conditions, the superpowers were still meeting with each other, talking about how to manage nuclear risk. “We no longer have that between the U.S. and Russia,” she said.

In this context, Bell emphasized the importance of the remaining Non-Proliferation Treaty and its 191 parties,

nearly every country on the planet, including five of the nine nuclear-armed states: China, France, Russia, the United States, and the United Kingdom. Renewed indefinitely in 1995, a review conference takes place every five years. The 2026 review conference met from April 27 to May 22 at the United Nations headquarters in New York, at a time when many countries were not particularly happy with one another.

“There are countries who feel like they’ve held up their end of the bargain and haven’t seen a return,” she said. “There are countries who feel like their security is at risk, and they want to prioritize their own national security over the overall goals of the treaty.”

“I would hope that all the states that are party to the treaty see that it’s more valuable to keep it in place than to withdraw,” said Bell. “The world absolutely cannot afford to lose that treaty.” ♦

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**Siobhan Roberts** is a regular contributor to The New York Times. Her latest book is *Genius at Play: The Curious Mind of John Horton Conway* (Princeton University Press, 2015).



**Right:** UN Secretary-General António Guterres speaks during the 11th Review Conference of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons at the United Nations in New York on April 27, 2026.

**CREDIT:** Angela Weiss / AFP via Getty Images

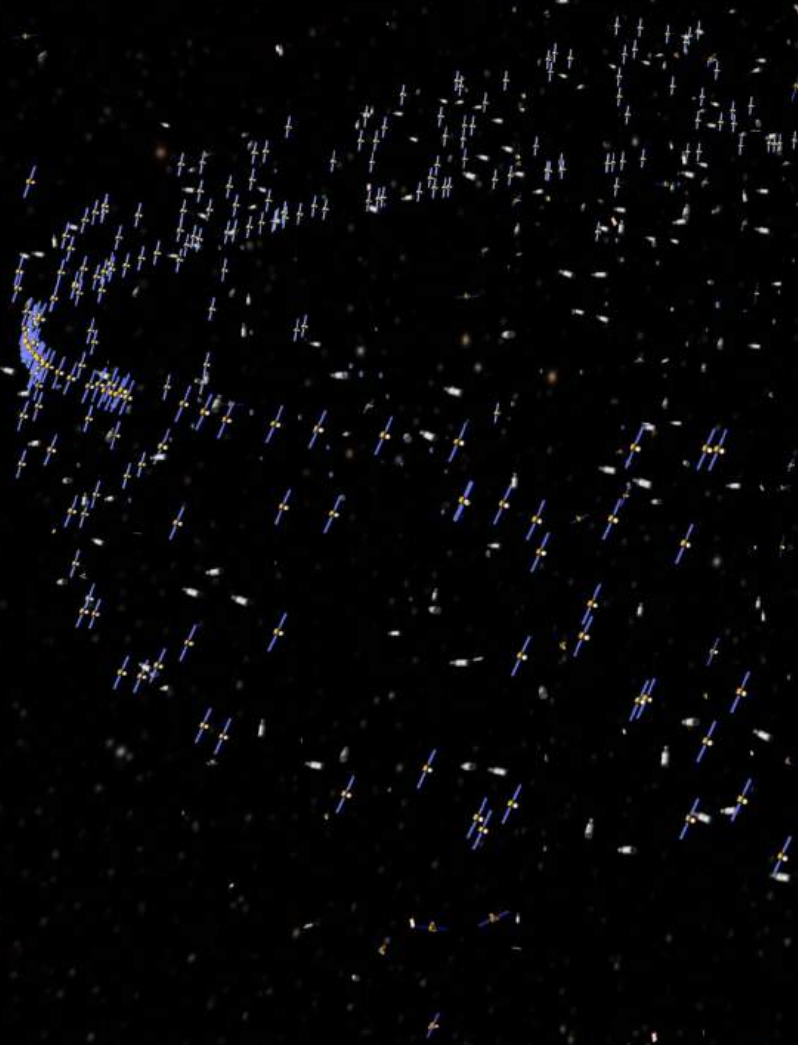
PEACE

# Space Stability Is Strategic Stability

Thousands of satellites in space introduce a high likelihood of chaos

**By Victoria Samson**

**S**pace has become ingrained in our daily lives — from GPS-enabled apps on our smartphones, to satellites being used to track storms and give weather forecasts, to satellite imagery and communication playing a decisive role in active military conflicts. Every single person on this planet is a user of space-derived data and services in some way, so interruptions or interference in space





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systems would have consequences for all. This disruption can come from many different places. One that is often overlooked is the increased number of satellites in orbit and how they have the potential to result in (inadvertent) escalation that could affect overall strategic stability.

The international community needs to coordinate these satellites and establish norms around space behavior, or we risk chaos. This is because we have gone from

among them the prohibition of nuclear weapons in space. These principles are further formalized in the 1968 Rescue Agreement (ensuring astronauts landing in foreign countries can get back home), the 1972 Liability Convention (establishing liability for damages by space objects), and the 1976 Registration Convention (requiring states to submit information about their launched objects to the United Nations).

As a non-state actor, SpaceX is not part of international discussions about what new agreements are needed to ensure that guardrails exist for evolutions in space. For example, there are ongoing conversations at the United Nations about how best to share information about tracking objects and activities in orbit known as space situational awareness (SSA), but as of now, there is no definitive agreement about how best to do this. There are additional sources of SSA data, including from commercial companies and national or regional systems, but there is no singular ground truth as to where objects are located in space.

There is an urgency to this work, given that the space domain is changing very quickly, and this is largely driven by the rise of very large constellations of satellites that provide services that people use every day. As of mid-April 2026, there are 15,454 active satellites in orbit. Of these, the United States has 11,671 satellites; Russia, 357; and China, 1,305. Of the U.S. satellites, 10,243 belong to SpaceX's Starlink constellation.

SpaceX has received permission for spectrum — the radio frequencies that can be used for

wireless data transmission — for 15,000 satellites. It has asked the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), which is charged with apportioning spectrum for non-military U.S. space operators, for possibly 30,000 more. Amazon just started launching its very large constellation, Amazon Leo, that is intended to consist of more than 3,200 satellites. China started launching two very large constellations within the last two years, Guowang and Qianfan, meant to comprise about 13,000 and 15,000 satellites, respectively. And this does not even touch upon



space being a domain where the primary actors are nation-states to one dominated by a singular actor, and that actor isn't even a country — it is a commercial entity and government contractor, SpaceX. This is a challenge from a stability perspective, because this is not how space governance has been set up.

Because SpaceX is a U.S. company, the United States must make sure that it follows international agreements, such as the 1967 Outer Space Treaty. The treaty lays out principles that nation-state signatories must follow,

**Previous:** A computer-generated image shows trackable objects in orbit around Earth. As of mid-April 2026, there are 15,454 active satellites in orbit.

**CREDIT:** European Space Agency / AFP via Getty Images

SpaceX launches a Falcon 9 rocket carrying the Grizu-263A satellite at Cape Canaveral Space Force Station on January 13, 2022.

**CREDIT:** Paul Hennessy/ Anadolu Agency via Getty Images

planned orbital data centers, for which companies this year have submitted filings with the FCC for constellations of 1 million (SpaceX), 88,000 (Starcloud), and 51,000 (Blue Origin), or China's notification to the International Telecommunication Union in late 2025 of a planned constellation of 200,000 satellites.

These very large constellations are all intended to be in LEO (low Earth orbit) at altitudes of roughly 500 to 1,100 kilometers. Chinese satellites must pass through U.S. constellations to get to their operating altitudes, yet there is no entity in charge of space traffic coordination. There is no one organization whose job it is to work out how satellites should be moved if it looks like there could be a close approach, meaning a possibility of a collision. The U.S. military sends out warnings of potential close approaches to all satellite operators, including Russia and China, as a matter of promoting spaceflight safety. What operators choose to do with that data is up to them. There is no requirement to act on notifications of close approaches, and there is no common understanding of what right-of-way is in space.

**As of mid-April 2026, there are 15,454 active satellites in orbit. Of these, the United States has 11,671 satellites; Russia, 357; and China, 1,305. Of the U.S. satellites, 10,243 belong to SpaceX's Starlink constellation.**

We have seen this nearly happen several times already. In December 2021, China told the United Nations that twice that year, its space station had to conduct evasive maneuvers to avoid Starlink satellites that it felt were uncomfortably close. And in December 2025, SpaceX reported that a Chinese satellite passed within 200 meters of one of its satellites.

Besides big changes in the number of actors, space is also the site of new activities, which offer additional challenges to existing governance mechanisms. For example, at present, there is no way to remove debris from orbit. Debris moves at very fast speeds, and its impact can damage or even destroy a spacecraft. Our continued ability to receive benefits from our use of space depends on the development of debris removal systems. While this type of technology could be designed for nonaggressive missions, it could also be repurposed into a threat. Any satellite that has the ability to maneuver, track objects, and get up close to dead satellites or pieces of debris can also conduct close approaches and possibly harm other satellites. Intention is hard to know until it is demonstrated, but actions alone can introduce the possibility of inadvertent escalation, as operators may take preemptive steps to protect their satellites against potential threats.

Space should not become a victim of its own success. The rapid progress of space-related technologies and capabilities means that international approaches to ensure its long-term sustainability must match that pace. Otherwise, these disruptions have the potential for global consequences. ♦

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**Victoria Samson** is chief director, space security and stability, for the Secure World Foundation, a Carnegie grantee that is working to strengthen compliance with the Outer Space Treaty by providing a space boot-camp for nuclear security professionals and developing dialogues among

nuclear security, space security, and commercial space experts to address security challenges. Samson is a member of the International Astronautical Federation's committee on space security and the Space Security Working Group of the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine's Committee on International Security and Arms Control.



These conditions introduce the possibility of two nuclear-armed rivals operating in relatively close altitudes, where situational awareness is imperfect, communication pathways are muddy and strained, and there is no agreement about responsible behaviors in space. This is where an accidental too-close approach could result in an inciting incident where conflict in space leads to conflict on Earth.

A SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket carrying 28 Starlink internet satellites, as seen from Altadena, California, on September 28, 2025.

**CREDIT:** Mario Tama/Getty Images

PEACE

# Eyes in the Sky

Large satellite fleets are imaging the globe with unprecedented precision, allowing analysts to uncover evolving nuclear risks

By Matt Korda

For decades, China maintained a relatively small nuclear arsenal of only a couple hundred nuclear weapons, compared to the thousands held by the United States and Russia. Everything changed, however, when 320 new silos in China — each of which could hold missiles carrying multiple warheads — were discovered in 2021 by open-source researchers.

For years, our team at the Federation of American Scientists and others across the field had been using breadcrumbs left by Chinese state media to track developments in the country's nuclear capabilities.

My colleague, Hans Kristensen, came across a short video from Chinese state media of a military exercise that led to a breakthrough. He used it to discover a previously unidentified 1,000-square-kilometer missile training area

featuring the construction of new types of missile silos covered by inflatable air domes. These domes, similar to those used for covering tennis courts during the winter, served a dual purpose: protecting the silos from extreme desert weather and hiding them from the prying eyes of satellite imagery analysts.

Within a one-month period, other researchers, including myself, used these distinctive domes to identify three more silo fields across northern China with room for 320 new silos — more than double the number of Russia's operational silos and only about 130 fewer than those of the United States. The new missile silos indicated an exponential increase in the size of China's nuclear arsenal and a genuine about-face for its nuclear force posture.

These discoveries, which were quickly validated by U.S. Strategic Command, made international head-

lines and received sustained coverage in hundreds of news outlets across the globe.

## No Security Clearance? No Problem

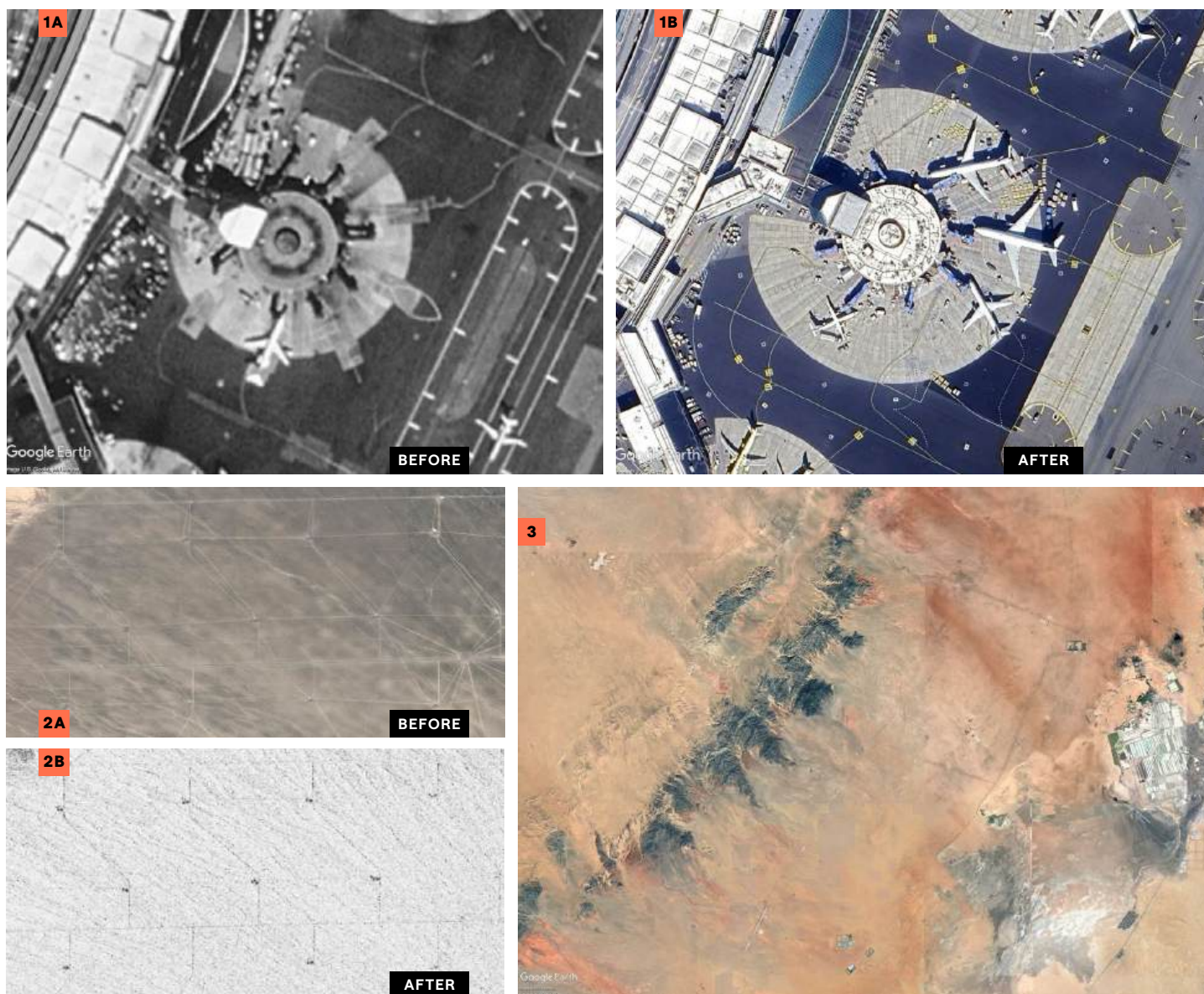
Emerging open-source tools, in the hands of well-trained analysts, are extremely powerful engines for investigation, transparency, and igniting global nuclear debates.

Hans has been a self-taught researcher with the Federation

The author presents at the Federation of American Scientists' inaugural boot camp, held in June 2025, which brought more than two dozen next-generation open-source practitioners from across the United States to Washington, D.C., where they participated in interactive modules, group discussions, and hands-on sleuthing.

**CREDIT:** Federation of American Scientists





## NOTES

**1A/1B.** Two images of Newark Liberty International Airport, 30 years apart (1995 and 2025). Sixteen years ago, the highest-quality resolution available from most commercial imagery providers was close to one meter, high enough to spot an aircraft on a runway. Today, some providers can now image the entire globe at 50 centimeters on a daily basis. **CREDIT:** U.S. Geological Survey via Google Earth Pro; Airbus via Google Earth Pro

**2A/2B.** Above, an electro-optical satellite image shows the northwest portion of

the Yumen missile silo field. Several silos are visible with roads and underground cables connecting them. Below, a synthetic aperture radar, which is capable of detecting minuscule instances of change, indicates that these roads have been disturbed between February 13 and 25, 2025 — possibly due to construction or someone driving heavy vehicles over them.

**CREDIT:** Airbus via Google Earth and Sentinel-1

**3.** Satellite imagery helped researchers at the Federation of American Scientists discover

a previously undisclosed 1,000-square-kilometer missile training area south of Jilantai, China. As satellite fleets get larger and more precise, open-source tools are increasingly useful for analysts to uncover evolving nuclear risks.

**CREDIT:** Sentinel Hub; Maxar/SecureWatch

**4.** Kristensen's geolocation led him to discover a previously undisclosed 1,000-square-kilometer missile training area with new missile silos covered by inflatable environmental shelters. **CREDIT:** Sentinel Hub; Maxar/SecureWatch;

Annotations by Federation of American Scientists

**5.** Images taken over several days reveal construction of another missile silo field near Hami, China. The silo was discovered by the author in July 2021.

**CREDIT:** Planet Labs PBC

**6.** Hans Kristensen used signatures in a CCTV-7 video and commercial satellite imagery to geolocate a Chinese military exercise. **CREDIT:** CCTV-7; Maxar/SecureWatch; Annotations by Federation of American Scientists

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of American Scientists for more than 20 years, and he is a world-renowned expert in a very particular methodology: counting nuclear weapons. This includes not just the numbers of weapons that each country possesses, but also the numbers of missiles, aircraft, and submarines that could carry them; the number of deployed weapons; and the yields of the warheads themselves — the measure of their destructive power.

In lieu of relatively scarce official disclosures, Hans has relied on pieces of open-source intelligence, commonly known as OSINT, snippets of typically unclassified data that can be obtained legally through clever sleuthing: budgetary documents, for example, or treaty disclosure data, Freedom of Information Act requests, or satellite imagery. This typically involves a lot of paperwork, which often makes Hans's office resemble that of an old-timey detective.



As the example of the domes demonstrates, this work is detective work. Each source reveals a small puzzle piece of information — the weight of a particular missile, for example, or the dimensions of a warhead storage bunker. Fitting the puzzle pieces together correctly reveals the intricacies of a country's nuclear arsenal.

In 2010, no nuclear-armed state had ever disclosed to the public how many nuclear weapons it possessed, making this work very difficult. Hans and his colleague Robert S.

Norris finished their calculations that year and settled on a final estimate for the United States of 5,100 warheads. As they were about to publish their number, the Obama administration — for the first time — declassified the number of weapons that were in the U.S. nuclear stockpile: 5,113.

Despite not having access to classified information, never having held a security clearance, and never working for the U.S. government, Hans was only 13 warheads off.

Over the years, this type of work has had direct policy impact. Not only does nearly every single nuclear stakeholder rely on these estimates for a common understanding of global nuclear arsenals, but diplomats and policymakers — themselves frustrated by chronic over-classification in their own national governments — have expressed that having third-party estimates has allowed them to engage more productively with their counterparts in other countries without revealing any sensitive information. It has also opened nuclear debates within more closed-off countries like China, where information is scarce and secrecy is the norm.

## A Golden Age for Nuclear Open-Source Intelligence

Sixteen years ago, the open-source nuclear landscape was still in its relative infancy. The highest-quality resolution available (and affordable) from most commercial imagery providers, for example, was close to one meter — high enough resolution to spot an aircraft on a runway, but not high enough to identify the specific type of plane.

Since then, new companies, researchers, programs, and tools have emerged that have unlocked a golden age for nuclear open-source intelligence. Today, for example, several providers are capable of imaging at 25 centimeters or better — high enough to see people. Other providers with smaller sensors but larger satellite fleets can now image the entire globe at 50 centimeters on a daily basis.

The capabilities of non-electro-optical imagery — such as synthetic aperture radar, which can see through clouds and collect images at night — are improving rapidly as well.

Here is how it works: imagine that it is nighttime, and you are standing about a foot away from a fence with narrow vertical slits. You want to see what is behind the fence, so you shine a flashlight through one of the slits; you will only see a small part of the scene behind the fence. But if you walk parallel to the fence, shining your flashlight through each slit, your brain will knit together each of those individually illuminated scenes to form a coherent image of the entire area.

Synthetic aperture radar follows the same principle: in this metaphor, you are the satellite, and your flashlight is the sensor. As the satellite flies through space, its onboard sensor emits radar pulses that fly to the target, bounce back to



the sensor, and get pieced together into one large scene.

Repeatable flight paths then allow analysts to obtain several images of the same site from different dates, layer them on top of one another, and calculate the relative change between them through a process called coherent change detection (CCD). While this technology is not itself new, the resolution quality of the images available in the commercial marketplace, coupled with the computing power unlocked by AI-enabled detection software, now allows us to observe extremely detailed instances of change.

Why might this be useful to a nuclear weapons analyst? Detecting minuscule instances of change allows you to see things that our eyes might otherwise not be able to see. For example, the electro-optical image of the Yumen missile silo field merely tells us that there is a road leading into this facility, but the CCD-enabled synthetic aperture radar image tells us that someone has driven in or out of the facility between these two dates. Not only could this help analysts better track changing nuclear postures, but it could also theoretically be used to help verify future arms control agreements.

Open-source tools like these can be extremely powerful in the right hands, and the field of OSINT experts is growing, both in size and in policy impact. But there is a lot of work to do. The learning curves are steep and the barriers to entry are high. It can take years for analysts to learn simply where and what to look for, and the imagery needed to look for it can be prohibitively expensive for individual researchers.

In addition, with few opportunities to learn open-source techniques outside of three-letter agencies, most nongovernmental open-source experts, me included, typically teach themselves how to use these powerful tools. But without formalized training and mentorship on OSINT ethics, empathy, and quality control, we risk supercharging the disinformation ecosystem through the proliferation

of reckless or incorrect analyses. And this is all before we throw AI-enabled deepfakes, increased state opacity, manipulated satellite imagery, and active conflict zones into the mix.

As a result, it is critical that organizations, educators, and funders put resources behind training the next generation of open-source nuclear analysts. This is why our team, with the help of the Andrew Carnegie Foundation, started our Open-Source Nuclear Analysis Bootcamp.

The inaugural boot camp, held in June 2025, brought more

than two dozen next-generation open-source practitioners from across the United States to Washington, D.C., where they participated in interactive modules, group discussions, and hands-on sleuthing. Throughout the boot camp, participants were introduced to tools and techniques such as Google Earth Pro, QGIS, 3D modeling, Google Dorking, Freedom of Information Act requests, and flight tracking. Our partners from the Stanley Center for Peace and Security introduced ethical frameworks for practitioners to apply to their investigations throughout the week.

Following the overwhelmingly positive feedback from participants and trainers, we were excited to host our second iteration of our open-source boot camp in Montreal, Canada, in June 2026. We received more than 250 applications from all over the world, and our second cohort included participants traveling from Australia, Canada, China, Czechia, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Kenya, the Netherlands, Scotland, Thailand, the United Kingdom, and the United States. They came from a variety of disciplines and backgrounds, including academia, journalism, think tanks, policy analysis, international organizations, and public education.

Given the significant demand for continued opportunities to learn and collaborate on open-source nuclear analysis, the Federation of American Scientists remains committed to fostering and developing an open-source intelligence community of practice, and we look forward to welcoming future participants to our programming over the coming months and years. ♦

*Originally published on [carnegie.org](https://carnegie.org) on July 8, 2026.*

**Matt Korda** is the associate director for the Nuclear Information Project at the Federation of American Scientists, where he conducts open-source research on global nuclear forces and trends.

GREAT  
IMMIGRANTS

# From Principle American: The Immigrant Founders of America

On the 250th Anniversary of the Declaration of Independence, Kwame Anthony Appiah writes about America as an identity defiantly asserted by people from elsewhere

**By Kwame Anthony Appiah**

**R**obert Morris was born in Liverpool, the great Atlantic port from which Britain sent out its ships to trade goods, migrants, and enslaved people across the ocean. By 1776, he was helping to finance a rebellion against the country of his birth. “I am a native of England,” he wrote, “but from principle am American in this dispute.” The sentence encapsulates something central to the country whose independence Morris joined in declaring. America was an identity, defiantly asserted, by people who had come from elsewhere and by their children. These were people rushing toward opportunity, fleeing hardship, seeking fortune, or trying to make a life under freer conditions.

The Declaration of Independence can be viewed as a sort of birth certificate; what’s clear is that the nation it announced remained far from the nation it would become. The document, maintaining that “these United Colonies are, and of Right ought to be Free and Independent States,” announced the

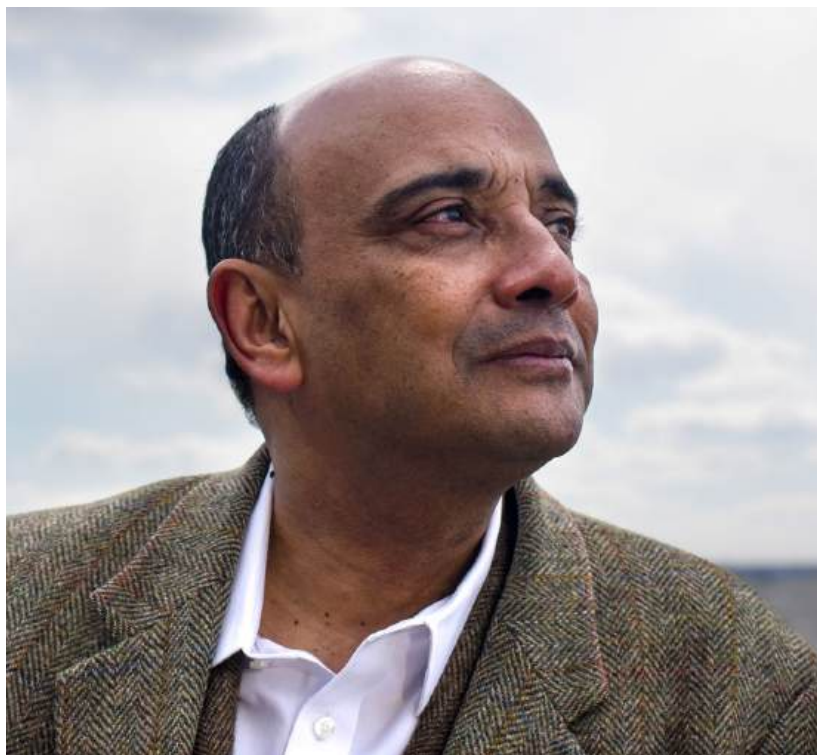
work of turning 13 colonies, with different histories, churches, economies, customs, and regional loyalties, into a single republic. The American “we” was, from the start, an act of improvisation, and immigrants were foundational to it. In older national stories, peoplehood is often imagined as something autochthonous that rises from a soil, a language, a shared ancestry, perhaps a sacred geography. That isn’t the American story. Here, belonging had to be argued into existence before it could be inherited.

Eight of the 56 signers of the Declaration were foreign-born. They came from England, Ireland, Scotland, and Wales, and they crossed in different ways. Francis Lewis, the Welsh-born signer, arrived from privilege. Educated at Westminster School in London, he turned inherited property into the capital needed to launch a merchant’s life in New York and Philadelphia. If there was any doubt about his membership in a transatlantic elite, his daughter married an Archbishop of Canterbury. Among the three signers with Irish origins, James Smith, a Philadelphia lawyer born in Ulster, and Matthew Thornton,



Born in London and raised in Ghana, Kwame Anthony Appiah was named a Carnegie Great Immigrant in 2017. He has been *The New York Times Magazine’s* Ethicist columnist since 2015.

**CREDIT:** Jennifer S. Altman



a New Hampshire doctor born in Ireland, represented the professional classes. George Taylor's crossing was rougher. He arrived with little money, indentured to the owner of a Pennsylvania forge. He rose from laborer to ironmaster, and to political representative. The distance between Taylor and Lewis reminds us how disparate the experiences of immigration can be. Some immigrants floated on family capital. Others sold years of labor for the chance at a better life.

The Scottish-born signers, both raised Presbyterian, lend another dimension to the story. James Wilson came to teach at the College of Philadelphia and later served as an associate justice of the first Supreme Court. John Witherspoon, a Presbyterian minister, was persuaded to come to New Jersey in 1768 as president of the College of New Jersey, later Princeton. Of all the signers, Witherspoon was the most recent to have become resident on the continent. Like so many others, he joined in declaring the independence of a place that had become his by conviction rather than ancestry.

If Morris's phrase "from principle am American" is arresting, it's because in much of the world, nationhood has been imagined as a bond between people and territory sanctified by some putatively ancient origin. America has had its own nativisms, its own racial and ethnic exclusions, to be sure. The founding "we," expansive in one sense, was notably restricted in another. No women signed the Declaration. No Black people did. No Native people did. No Jews did. They



**Kwame Anthony Appiah,**  
*Silver Professor of Philosophy and Law at New York University, is a renowned philosopher and the author of As If, Idealization and Ideals; The Lies that Bind: Rethinking Identity; Captive Gods: Religion and the Rise of Social Science; The Ethics of Identity; and Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers, among many other works.*

were, of course, available. Abigail Adams wouldn't have had to admonish her husband to "remember the ladies," if Massachusetts had sent her, too. Benjamin Banneker was already studying astronomy and surveying in Maryland. Haym Salomon, a Polish Jew, helped finance the Revolutionary War by raising and lending money to the American government, and died in poverty because the government never repaid him. Native nations occupied the continent long before Europeans gave the new republic a name.

Still, the ethnoterritorial ideal has never truly comported with America's self-image, because it could never plausibly describe the fundamental American

origin story: the United States began as a place made by arrivals. Indeed, the delegates to the Second Continental Congress were more disparate than any previous representative body in the British Empire had been. (Unlike the British Parliament then, composed by law entirely of Anglicans, at most 34 of the 56 men who

eventually signed the Declaration were members of the Church of England. One was even a Catholic!) And though America's founders did not create a fully democratic nation, they did help create a political tradition in which excluded people could ask, with force and effect, why the principles announced in 1776 failed to encompass them.

Two hundred and fifty years after the Declaration, it is worth remembering that the United States was not first a settled national community that later decided to admit immigrants but that immigrants and their children helped create that community in the first place. A political identity founded on principle is bound to be tested, argued over, and made capacious enough for subsequent generations. Andrew Carnegie's own life belongs to a later chapter of that story: the Scottish immigrant child who became an American industrialist, then spent much of his fortune building institutions through which others might educate themselves.

If the Declaration did not fix the meaning of America, it did set the terms for conversation and contestation over that meaning. Its signers included men who had changed countries, forged new allegiances, and helped create an identity that spoke of an active decision to belong. Morris's phrase still conveys the force of that beginning: "from principle am American." The nation's promise, and its burden, lies in the unending project of defining and refining that principle. ♦

*Originally published on [carnegie.org](http://carnegie.org) on June 29, 2026.*

## Meet the 2026 Class of Great Immigrants, Great Americans

Every Fourth of July since 2006, Carnegie has sponsored the Great Immigrants, Great Americans public awareness campaign to recognize the contributions of naturalized U.S. citizens. Today the honorees total nearly 800, representing 120 countries.

GREAT  
IMMIGRANTS



**Iman Abuzeid**  
COFOUNDER AND CEO,  
INCREDIBLE HEALTH



**Sunil Amrith**  
PROFESSOR OF HISTORY,  
YALE UNIVERSITY



**Nikesh Arora**  
CHAIRMAN AND CEO,  
PALO ALTO NETWORKS



**Mahzarin R. Banaji**  
PROFESSOR OF PSYCHOLOGY,  
HARVARD UNIVERSITY



**Sanjiv Chopra**  
PROFESSOR OF MEDICINE,  
HARVARD MEDICAL SCHOOL



**Ingrid Daubechies**  
PROFESSOR EMERITA  
OF MATHEMATICS,  
DUKE UNIVERSITY



**Hernan Diaz**  
AUTHOR AND ESSAYIST



**Jane Fraser**  
CHAIR AND CEO,  
CITI



**Johannes Fruehauf**  
FOUNDER AND CHAIRMAN,  
LABCENTRAL, AND PRESIDENT  
AND CEO, BIOLABS



**Gabriela Hearst**  
FASHION DESIGNER



**Abbas Karimi**  
PARALYMPIC SWIMMER



**Reshma Kewalramani**  
PRESIDENT AND CEO,  
VERTEX PHARMACEUTICALS



**Jeong H. Kim**  
ENGINEER, ENTREPRENEUR,  
AND PROFESSOR, UNIVERSITY  
OF MARYLAND

**T**he Great Immigrants, Great Americans initiative aims to increase public awareness of the economic and societal benefits of immigration. It is a tribute to the legacy of Andrew Carnegie, a Scottish immigrant who, like the Great Immigrant honorees, found success as an American and contributed enormously to his adopted country. During the past 20 years, the Carnegie database of Great Immigrants has grown into one of the largest online resources of its kind.

According to the American Immigration Council, there are 48 million immigrants in America, about half of whom are naturalized American citizens. Immigrants make up 14 percent of the

U.S. population and account for 23.6 percent of entrepreneurs, 28.4 percent of health aides, and 23.6 percent of STEM workers. Fifty-nine percent of startups valued at \$1 billion or more were founded or cofounded by immigrants, and 66 percent of billion-dollar companies in the U.S. were founded or cofounded by immigrants or the children of immigrants, according to a 2026 report by the National Foundation for American Policy.

The 2026 Class of Great Immigrants represents naturalized citizens from 21 countries who are leaders across academia, the arts, business, medicine, sports, science, technology, engineering, and math.



**Ling Ma**

AUTHOR AND PROFESSOR,  
UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO



**Cristian Măcelaru**

MUSIC DIRECTOR, CINCINNATI  
SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA AND  
ORCHESTRE NATIONAL DE FRANCE



**Guadalupe Maravilla**

VISUAL ARTIST



**Joel Mokyr**

PROFESSOR OF ECONOMICS,  
NORTHWESTERN UNIVERSITY



**Hiroshi Motomura**

PROFESSOR OF LAW,  
UCLA



**Gregory Nagy**

PROFESSOR OF CLASSICS,  
HARVARD UNIVERSITY



**Antonio Neri**

PRESIDENT AND CEO,  
HEWLETT PACKARD  
ENTERPRISE



**Cristina Rivera Garza**

AUTHOR AND PROFESSOR,  
UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON



**James A. Robinson**

UNIVERSITY PROFESSOR,  
HARRIS SCHOOL OF PUBLIC  
POLICY, UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO



**Hock E. Tan**

PRESIDENT AND CEO,  
BROADCOM



**Omar M. Yaghi**

PROFESSOR OF CHEMISTRY,  
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA,  
BERKELEY



**Michelle Zatlyn**

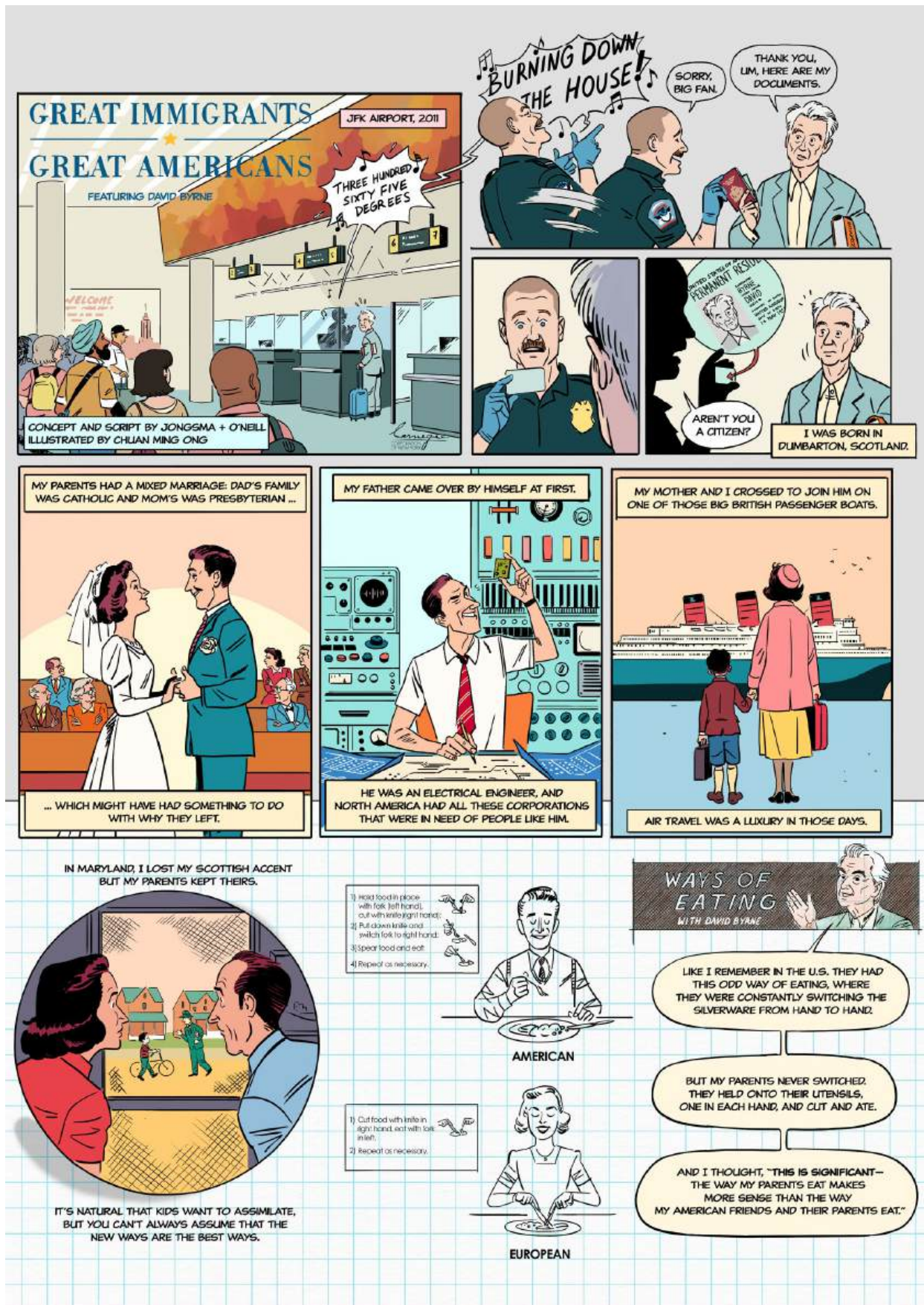
COFOUNDER AND PRESIDENT,  
CLOUDFLARE

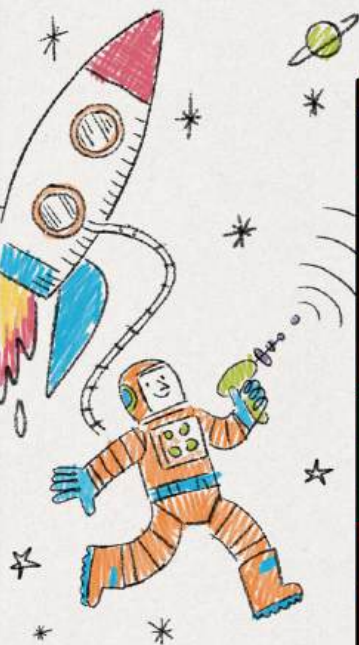


# GREAT IMMIGRANTS

Carnegie's Webby Award-winning Great Immigrants, Great Americans Comic Series features first-person stories of naturalized U.S. citizens, including groundbreaking musician David Byrne.

**Watch** an animation about his immigrant story.





IN JUNIOR HIGH, I STARTED TO DRAW COMICS AND CARTOONS ABOUT THE THINGS THAT SOMEONE MY AGE WOULD BE INTERESTED IN.

HEY MR. TAMBOURINE MAN  
PLAY A SONG FOR I'M NOT SLEEPY  
ME AND THERE IS NO PLACE I'M GOING TO

THEN I STARTED HEARING POP MUSIC FOR THE FIRST TIME.

I THOUGHT, SOMEHOW, SOMEWHERE OUT THERE, THERE'S THIS SECRET NETWORK OF PEOPLE, PERCEIVING THE WORLD IN A VERY DIFFERENT WAY.

AND I THOUGHT, IF I COULD PLAY IN A BAND, WHAT WOULD THAT FEEL LIKE?



WHEN PEOPLE SAY THAT THEY FIND MY WORK MOVING, I DON'T KNOW WHAT IT MEANS TO THEM.

A LOT OF THAT CAME FROM MY EXPERIENCE AS AN IMMIGRANT — OF HAVING JUST A LITTLE BIT OF DISTANCE, SO I COULD ASK THE QUESTIONS:

HOW DO PEOPLE RELATE TO ONE ANOTHER? WHAT DO THEY DO? WHY DO THEY DO THINGS THAT WAY?

BUT I HAVE THE ABILITY TO STEP BACK AND LOOK AT MYSELF AND THE WORLD I LIVE IN WITH KIND OF DISPASSIONATE EYES.

SO I HELD ONTO THAT GREEN CARD FOR A LONG TIME — UNTIL, TO VOTE IN ELECTIONS, I HAD TO BECOME A CITIZEN.

I EVEN STARTED MENTIONING IT FROM THE STAGE ...

OKAY, I'M A CITIZEN NOW, AND THIS IS THE PERCENTAGE OF PEOPLE WHO VOTE IN LOCAL ELECTIONS — THEY ARE THE PEOPLE WHO HAVE DECIDED OUR FUTURE.



Local election voters, NY ( $\approx 23\%$ )

I WOULD SHINE A LIGHT ON A PERCENTAGE OF THE THEATER AUDIENCE, AND MAYBE IT GOT SOME OF THEM TO GO AND VOTE.

THIS IS SOMETHING WE AIM FOR, RATHER THAN SAYING "THIS IS WHO WE ARE," IT'S ABOUT WHO WE CAN BE.



DAVID BYRNE WAS THE LEAD SINGER AND GUITARIST OF THE SEMINAL ROCK BAND, THE TALKING HEADS, AND HAS BUILT A MULTIFACETED CAREER AS A MUSICIAN, RECORD PRODUCER, CONTEMPORARY ARTIST, AND FILMMAKER. HE HAS WON A GRAMMY, TONY, A GOLDEN GLOBE, AND AN ACADEMY AWARD. WORKING WITH HEADCOUNT, HE PROMOTES VOTER REGISTRATION AND PARTICIPATION. READ MORE GREAT IMMIGRANT STORIES AT: [CARNEGIE.ORG/IMMIGRANTSTORIES](http://CARNEGIE.ORG/IMMIGRANTSTORIES)

# Carnegie Libraries Crossword Puzzle

By Kelly Devine

LIBRARIES  
& LEGACY

Andrew Carnegie's influence as a philanthropist is a topic that artist Tommy Mishima knows well. For *Making Home — Smithsonian Design Triennial*, a 2025 exhibition at the Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum,<sup>1</sup> he created a board game called *Philanthropy*. Inspired by Monopoly, the game's objective is to become the most influential philanthropist through grantmaking, fundraising, and research. Mishima also created a set of complex drawings and charts for the exhibit that captured the power and intersections of Carnegie's giving.

In this crossword puzzle, Mishima gamifies one of Carnegie's most influential acts of philanthropy: his funding of more than 2,500 Carnegie Libraries around the world between 1881 and 1917. "I've been making puzzles and games for my friends since I was a teenager," says Mishima, who immigrated with his family to New York City at age 17 from Lima, Peru. "I have always been interested in using games to create narratives and tell stories." ♦



## Across

**2** Public library that received a record-breaking donation in 1901 from Andrew Carnegie to build 66 new branches, creating the largest free public library system in the country

**5** The intellectual \_\_\_\_\_, nickname for the Washington, D.C., Carnegie Library during the Depression

**7** Author who wrote his book *The Sportswriter* in a Carnegie Library

**9** Small Carnegie Library in Scotland founded in 1903

**13** Playwright and author of *A Streetcar Named Desire* who frequented the Clarksdale, Mississippi, branch as a boy

**14** With 33-Down, country where Carnegie funded public libraries

**16** Carnegie Library in Humboldt County, California, or an exclamation used to celebrate a discovery

**17** University of \_\_\_\_\_ Graduate Library School offered the nation's first doctorate in library science with Carnegie funding

**18** Bibliophile whose collection of rare manuscripts and books by Black authors was acquired by the New York Public Library with a \$10,000 grant in 1926 from Carnegie's foundation

**19** Andrew Carnegie was often called the Patron \_\_\_\_\_ of Libraries

**20** Andrew Carnegie established the academic library of this historically Black university with a \$20,000 gift in 1900

**21** This Carnegie Library opened in Minnesota in 1901 and originally housed two Tiffany windows

**22** Thirteen Steps to \_\_\_\_\_: many Carnegie Libraries include this architectural feature from the street to the entrance

**24** Name of Andrew Carnegie's younger brother who immigrated from Scotland to 28-Down with Andrew in 1848

**27** \_\_\_\_\_ for the people: what Andrew Carnegie called free public libraries

**30** Carnegie's secretary who rejected decorative architecture in the design of libraries

**31** American president who attended the dedication of the Carnegie Library in Washington, D.C., in 1903

Crossword puzzle and illustration of the Braddock Carnegie Library by **Tommy Mishima**. Born in Lima, Peru, Mishima received his MFA from Rhode Island School of Design and his BFA from Parsons School of Design. He has exhibited in galleries across the United States and Europe.

## NOTES

**1.** The Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian Design Museum occupies a 64-room mansion in New York City where Andrew Carnegie lived from 1902 until his death in 1919.

**34** Andrew Carnegie considered a free library to be the best \_\_\_\_\_ that can be given to a community

**35** Household item referenced in Andrew Carnegie quote "upon which the aspiring may climb"

**37** West Coast university founder who was praised by Andrew Carnegie in his essay "The Gospel of Wealth" for wisely administering his surplus wealth

**39** \_\_\_\_\_ Library Association received \$2 million from Andrew Carnegie's foundation in 1926 to strengthen the library profession

**40** \_\_\_\_\_ Brothers, American musical duo, pioneers of country rock, who did their homework at the Shenandoah, Iowa, Carnegie Library

**41** Libraries were Andrew Carnegie's first major demonstration of his \_\_\_\_\_, or giving away one's wealth for the public good

**25** Technology innovator that transformed one of the most famous Carnegie Libraries

**26** Andrew Carnegie described free public libraries as "Cradles of \_\_\_\_\_"

**28** City in Pennsylvania that received the first Carnegie Library grant in 1886

**29** Spanish \_\_\_\_\_, architectural style found in many Carnegie Libraries in California

**32** President of the International Federation of Library Associations from 1931 to 1936

who served as a consultant for many of Carnegie's library projects

**33** See 14-Across

**36** Carnegie Library in New Hampshire designed by architects Randlett & Griffin

**38** El \_\_\_\_\_, city in Texas that approved a tax to support the maintenance of its Carnegie Library, a condition of all the library grants made by Andrew Carnegie

## Down

**1** Items that changed Andrew Carnegie's life when he was too poor to buy them

**3** Phrase that appears on Carnegie's personal bookplate

**4** Material made of fired clay used in the construction of most Carnegie Libraries

**6** State where Route 66 begins that received funding for 106 Carnegie Libraries

**8** Town in Pennsylvania where the first Carnegie Library opened in the United States in 1889

**10** Beaux \_\_\_\_\_, French name for a 19th-century architectural style favored by Andrew Carnegie

**11** This Carnegie Library in Woodbine, Iowa, maintains a popular collection of \_\_\_\_\_ pans, baking tools for patrons to borrow

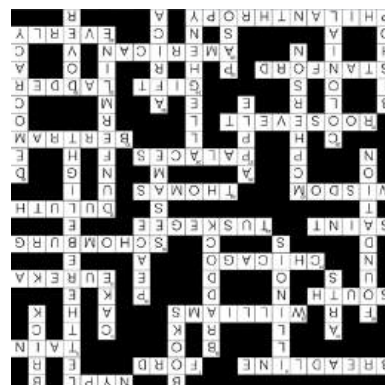
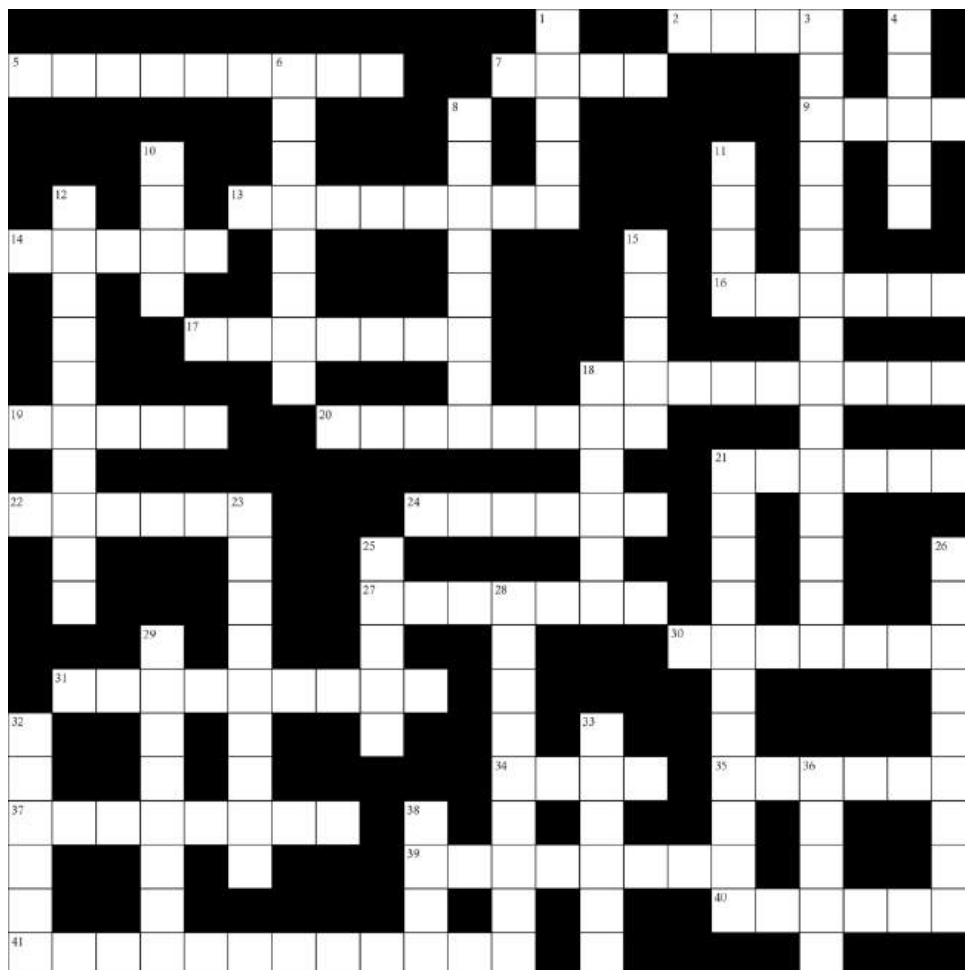
**12** Andrew Carnegie \_\_\_\_\_: new name adopted in 2026 by Carnegie Corporation of New York

**15** \_\_\_\_\_ Palace Library, international law library in The Hague established as part of Carnegie's campaign for peace

**18** \_\_\_\_\_ Street, children's television show funded by Carnegie's foundation that links Carnegie's library legacy to educational programming

**21** Scottish city and location of first Carnegie Library

**23** Pulitzer Prize-winning author who grew up visiting the Carnegie Library in Savannah, Georgia



**Kelly Devine**  
is the principal  
director,  
content and  
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Foundation.

LIBRARIES  
& LEGACY

# Celebrating America at 250: Carnegie Libraries

From New Jersey to Oklahoma, Carnegie Libraries are spending their unexpected \$10,000 gifts



## Bayonne, NJ

The Bayonne Public Library, built in 1903, is providing elementary school students with copies of Frank Murphy's easy reader book about the American Revolution, *George Washington and the General's Dog*, and producing events about American history and the role of women in the Revolutionary War.



Visit [carnegielibraries.org](http://carnegielibraries.org) to read more stories about how local institutions that have played a key role in their communities for over a century are spending \$10,000 and explore a Communicator Award-winning interactive map that allows you to find a Carnegie Library near you.

“It was from my own early experience that I decided there was no use to which money could be applied so productive ... as the founding of a public library,” wrote Scottish immigrant, steel titan, and philanthropist Andrew Carnegie in his 1920 autobiography. A champion of the free public library movement of the late 19th century, Carnegie funded the construction of 1,681 public libraries in the United States between 1886 and 1917.

Having immigrated to Allegheny, Pennsylvania, from Scotland in 1848, Carnegie often recalled the life-changing experience of having access as a teenager to the private library of Colonel James Anderson, a retired businessman, who offered to lend books to workers every Saturday. “He only had about 400 volumes in his library, but they were valuable books, and I shall never forget the enjoyment and the instruction I gained from them when I was too poor to buy books myself,” Carnegie told *The*

*New York Times* in 1899. “Is it any wonder that I decided then and there that if ever I had any surplus wealth I would use it in lending books to others?”

On October 22, 2025, the more than 1,350 Carnegie Libraries still operating across the country learned that they would each receive a \$10,000 check in the mail. The libraries were invited to use the funds to celebrate America's 250th anniversary, further their mission, and benefit their community. James Barron of *The New York Times* reported the news about the gifts, opening with the question: “If a check for \$10,000 that you weren't expecting came in the mail, how would you spend the money?”

“At first the board and I were not sure if a check was really coming in the mail,” reported Mia Adams, director of a Carnegie Library in De Land, Illinois. “It seemed too good to be true! But then it showed up, and we rejoiced all week.”

Discover how branches from Munhall, Pennsylvania, to Little Rock, Arkansas, are using their \$10,000 gifts to fund archival preservation, community gardens, and more. ♦



### De Land, IL

Goose Creek District Library, built in 1912, is building a new community garden.



### Elk City, OK

The Elk City Carnegie Library, built in 1915, is enhancing the exterior of its library, adding a bench, planters, and landscaping to create a greater sense of community.

### Puyallup, WA

The Puyallup Public Library, built in 1913, is improving public access to computers and information.



### Orleans, IN

Orleans Public Library, built in 1915, is creating a new outdoor children's area that will be used for programs and events.



### Munhall, PA

Carnegie Library of Homestead, built in 1898, is preserving its archive, which captures the history of one of the longest continuously running Carnegie Libraries in the United States.

LIBRARIES  
& LEGACY

# I Love My Librarian

Meet the 2026 I Love My Librarian Award honorees, recognized for their expertise, dedication, and profound impact on the people in their communities

**L**ibrarians serve at the center of our communities. Whether they are working with elementary school-age children or at universities, librarians facilitate knowledge and understanding, expanding access to literacy and library services and providing outreach and support to patrons. As Deb Sica, a 2026 honoree from the San Francisco Bay Area, notes, “Libraries are by the people, for the people, and of the people.”

In partnership with the American Library Association and the New York Public Library, the Andrew Carnegie Foundation recognizes 10 exceptional librarians every year with the I Love My Librarian Award. The 2026 honorees were chosen from a pool of more than 1,300 nominations. Each will receive a \$5,000 cash prize in honor of their exceptional public service. ♦



**“Everyone knows they’re welcome at the library, wherever they are in life. Whether they’re unhoused, or older, or have gone a whole week without a real conversation with someone else.”**

**Tracy Fitzmaurice**, Jackson County Public Library (former), Sylva, North Carolina



**“One of the biggest misconceptions about libraries is that they’re quiet spaces. This used to be true, but not anymore. They’re hubs, the heartbeat of the school, the place where things are happening.”**

**Jenny Cox**, Georgetown Middle School, Georgetown, South Carolina



**“In a society that often runs on ‘this is mine, this is yours,’ a public library says this: ‘This is all of ours, and we all contribute to and share in the common good.’”**

**Deb Sica**, Alameda County Library, Fremont, California



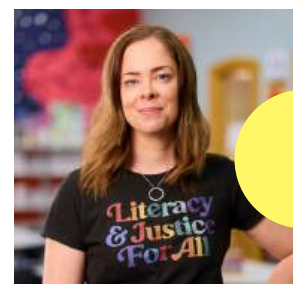
**“People tend to undervalue what librarians contribute, which is a mistake. We’re pretty resourceful in general, like jacks of many trades.”**

**Joanne Doucette**, Massachusetts College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences, Boston



**“While some people might see my role as just putting together fun programs for kids and families, it’s really about the relationships and human connection underneath all that.”**

**Zachary Stier**, Ericson Public Library, Boone, Iowa



**“I’ve tried to create a space that feels open, welcoming, and exciting for all students. We’re constantly running events and programs, bringing outside visitors in, and asking the kids directly: ‘What do you want to do?’ And then we make it happen.”**

**Christine Szeluga**, Cranford High School, Cranford, New Jersey



**“Kids don’t take things for granted the way adults sometimes do. I guess I’m a bit of a big kid myself, because I still get really excited about a free book.”**

**Valerie Byrd Fort**, University of South Carolina/South Carolina Community Center for Literacy, Columbia



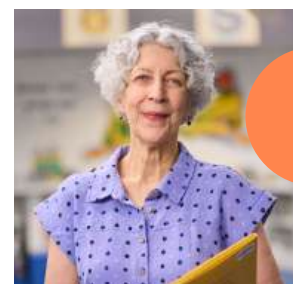
**“When it clicks for a student, that’s my serotonin. My dopamine. It’s the best feeling, because everyone feels overwhelmed by information coming at them from everywhere. The moment a student can say, ‘I found exactly what I needed on my first search,’ it makes them feel empowered.”**

**Mahasin Ameen**, Indiana University, Indianapolis



**“A library is not just a room of books. A library is the heart of a school. It’s the intersection of community, criticality, creativity, collaboration, and communication. So many important things happen there.”**

**Mia Gittlen**, Milpitas High School, Milpitas, California



**“Everything a child experiences adds to their ability to learn. The more imaginative their surroundings and activities are, the more their minds will expand.”**

**Mary Ann Russo**, Hubbard Public Library, Hubbard, Ohio

LIBRARIES  
& LEGACY

# Andrew Carnegie: To Try and Make the World in Some Way Better

How an immigrant from Scotland rose from poverty to define modern philanthropy, establish libraries around the world, and fight for world peace

**By David Nasaw**



**A**ndrew Carnegie was born in Dunfermline, Scotland, in 1835, the eldest son of a failed linen weaver and an entrepreneurially minded mother who kept shop and took in

work from local shoemakers to put food on the table. At age 13, after no more than a year or two of formal schooling, young Andrew set sail with mother, father, and younger brother for America. Poor though the Carnegies were, they were supported by his mother's extended family and

by the Scottish emigrants who had preceded them to America and Allegheny City, across the Allegheny River from Pittsburgh. Andra, as he was called, was put to work as a bobbin boy at a cotton mill, but after less than a year in the mill, found work as a telegraph messenger, taught himself Morse code, and was hired as private telegraph operator and secretary to Thomas A. Scott, the Pittsburgh division superintendent of the Pennsylvania Railroad. For the next 12 years or so, he would work for the railroad. At age 30, Carnegie resigned his position to go into business for himself with his former bosses, Tom Scott and J. Edgar Thomson, the president of the Pennsylvania Railroad. Together, they organized a series of companies — with Scott and Thomson as secret partners — that were awarded insider contracts to supply the Pennsylvania Railroad with raw materials and build its iron bridges. By his early thirties, Carnegie had, with help and investment capital from his friends, accumulated his first fortune — in Pennsylvanian oil wells, iron manufacturing, bridge building, and bond trading.

His business career was, to this point, not unlike that of other ambitious English-speaking immigrants who made their fortunes by being in the right place at the right time. In the early 1870s, he moved away from the source of his income, Pittsburgh, to New York City. He would continue to oversee his iron and bridge companies from his hotel suite in New York — which he shared with his mother. Day-to-day decision-making was delegated to a succession of partners, including his brother Tom, Henry Clay Frick, and Charlie Schwab. He seldom attended board meetings and visited Pittsburgh only three or four times a year.

For the next 30 years, his workday was confined to a few hours in the morning — and an occasional luncheon or dinner — but he accomplished as much in these hours



**Opposite:** Andrew Carnegie (center) and members of the Anglo-American Peace Centenary Committee, standing in front of City Hall in New York City.

**CREDIT:** Library of Congress

**Right:** A statue of Andrew Carnegie in Pittencrieff Park in Dunfermline, Scotland.

**CREDIT:** Jean Morrison

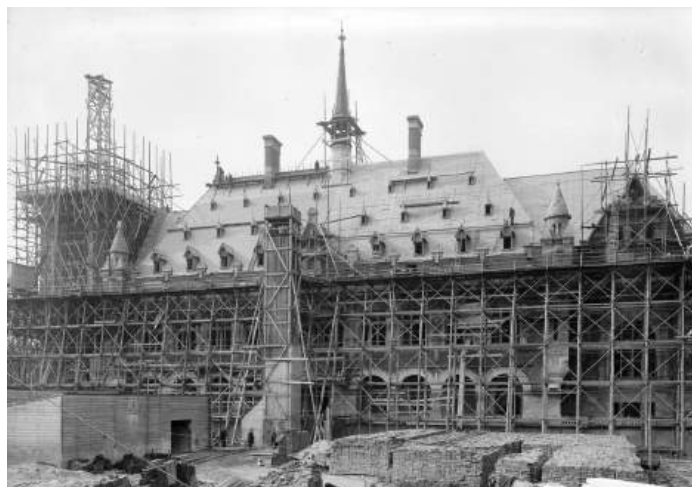
LIBRARIES  
& LEGACY

as most men do in a week, and was proud of it. Although he professed to have made the move to New York for business reasons, there were more important considerations behind his decision to live a day's journey by train from his manufactories. He was thrilled with his success as a businessman and capitalist, but far from satisfied. He wanted more from life — and would spend the rest of his days in pursuit of it. His ultimate goal was to establish himself as a man of letters, as well known and respected for his writing and intellect as for his ability to make money. He had as a child and young man

the role of cultural and political liaison between what he referred to as the two branches of the English-speaking race. He became the confidant of Republican presidents and secretaries of state and Liberal prime ministers and cabinet members, and inserted himself into the domestic and foreign affairs of the United States and Great Britain.

Meanwhile, his fortune grew and grew. Every major business decision he made appeared, in retrospect, to have been the right one. He was the first Pittsburgh iron manufacturer to move into steel, then the first steel-maker to diversify production from

charged with a specific task: free tuition for Scottish university students; pensions for American college professors; a scientific research institution in Washington, D.C.; a library, music hall, art gallery, and natural history museum in Pittsburgh; a Hero Fund for civilians; a “peace endowment.” Only as he approached his later seventies did he realize that, with his payout from selling Carnegie Steel at 5 percent a year on more than \$200 million, he was running out of time to give away his fortune. Disheartened that he would fail at the most important task he had taken on — to wisely give back



Watch three Telly Award-winning videos narrated by actor Brian Cox on how Carnegie rose from poverty to define modern philanthropy, establish libraries around the world, and fight for world peace.

read widely and memorized large portions of Robert Burns's poetry and Shakespeare's plays. In New York and London, he continued his self-education. He befriended some of the English-speaking world's most renowned men of letters, among them Herbert Spencer, Matthew Arnold, Richard Watson Gilder, editor of *The Century Magazine*, and Sam Clemens; published regularly in respected journals of opinion on both sides of the Atlantic; wrote two well-received travelogues and the best-selling book *Triumphant Democracy*; and with his “Gospel of Wealth” essays established himself as the moral philosopher of industrial capitalism. He spent half of each year in Britain, delegating to himself

steel rails to structural shapes. To his partners' dismay, he plowed most of the companies' profits back into the business, integrating horizontally and vertically, modernizing, expanding, and securing steady cheap supplies of raw materials by buying a majority interest in the H. C. Frick coke works and leasing Rockefeller's iron ore mines in the Mesabi Range at a huge discount. By 1901, when he sold his interest in Carnegie Steel to J. P. Morgan, he was arguably the richest man in the world.

On retirement, he accelerated his giving to communities for library buildings and church organs so that parishioners could be introduced to classical music. He also set up a number of charitable trusts, each

to the community the millions he had accumulated — he established the Carnegie Corporation of New York to receive and disperse whatever was left behind when he died.

He had entered retirement intending to devote all his time and efforts to his philanthropy. But his last years were consumed with another cause: world peace. Arguing against his own self-interest — Carnegie Steel made millions manufacturing steel armor plate for the U.S. Navy — he campaigned for naval disarmament, then an international court, a league of peace, and treaties of arbitration between the nations of Europe and the United States. With considerable rhetorical power, he opposed American intervention in the Philippines



**Left:** Andrew Carnegie (center, front) and his family in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

**CREDIT:** Frank E. Bingaman

**Center:** The Peace Palace, funded by Carnegie, under construction in The Hague.

**CREDIT:** Peace Palace

and the British war with the Boer Republics in South Africa. As the European nations, followed closely by the United States, entered into an escalating naval arms race, he inserted himself into the diplomatic mix as an insider with access to the White House and Westminster. He would spend the rest of his days as an outspoken “apostle of peace,” commuting back and forth between his homes in New York and Scotland and the world’s capitals. Only at age 80, in the second year of the Great War, did he recognize that his efforts had been in vain. He spent his last years in silence, isolated from his friends, unable to return to his home in Scotland, his optimism shattered.

A Scotsman in America, an American in Britain, businessman, capitalist, steelmaker, author, philanthropist, peace activist, pamphleteer, son, husband, and father, Carnegie wore his many hats well. He was in his long life seldom at a loss for words, never fearful of taking on a new role or task, and never less than passionate. ♦

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**David Nasaw** is a historian, two-time Pulitzer Prize finalist, and bestselling author of *The Last Million*, named a best book of the year

by NPR, Kirkus Reviews, and History Today, and, according to *The Economist*, one of the “six must-read books on the Second World War”; *The Patriarch*, a New York Times *Five Best Non-Fiction Books of the Year*; *Andrew Carnegie*, a New York Times *Notable Book of the Year* and the winner of the New-York Historical Society’s *American History Book Prize*; and *The Chief*, winner of the Bancroft Prize. He is the Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr. Professor of History Emeritus at the CUNY Graduate Center and a past president of the Society of American Historians. In 2023, Nasaw was honored by the New York Public Library as a “Library Lion.”



**Right:** (Left to right) Robert C. Ogden, then-U.S. Secretary of War William Howard Taft, Booker T. Washington, and Andrew Carnegie celebrating the Tuskegee Institute’s 25th anniversary in 1906.

**CREDIT:** Frances Benjamin Johnston

# Notable Events

## WHAT'S NEW



**1.** Carla Hayden, the 14th Librarian of Congress, presents Dame Louise Richardson with an award at the Brooklyn Public Library's annual gala. **CREDIT:** Brooklyn Public Library



### 1. PRESIDENT

## Honoring Carnegie's Commitment to Libraries

Carnegie president Dame Louise Richardson was a guest of honor during the Brooklyn Public Library's annual gala on May 6, where she and the foundation were recognized for providing "people from all walks of life with access to books and information, ensuring Andrew Carnegie's visionary mission will endure for another century." Other honorees included actor Jeffrey Wright and comedian Bowen Yang. Richardson was presented with the Gala Award by special guest and library advocate Carla Hayden, who served as the 14th Librarian of Congress from 2016 to 2025. "Anyone can walk through those doors," Hayden said of public libraries, "and find knowledge, community, and possibility waiting for them."



**2.** Jonathan Tepperman, vice president, International Program (left), speaks with Refugees International president Jeremy Konyndyk (center) and University of Notre Dame's Peter Quaranto (right) during a panel for UN Peacebuilding Week. **CREDIT:** Alejandro Rovira



### 2. A MORE PEACEFUL WORLD

## The Future of U.S. Conflict Prevention

On June 23, Carnegie convened experts in peace and security during the inaugural United Nations Peacebuilding Week. As the world experiences higher inter-state conflict than at any point since World War II, panelists discussed how to rebuild institutions, address the humanitarian costs of conflict, and foster public support for peacebuilding.



**3.** Harvard University's Danielle Allen speaks during a gathering on civic and career skills at Carnegie's offices. **CREDIT:** Filip Wolak



### 3. LADDERS OF OPPORTUNITY

## Civic Skills as Career Skills

On June 10, representatives across education, research, policy, and business gathered at Carnegie's offices to explore how civic skills intersect with workforce skills and economic mobility. Kerry McKittrick, director of the Harvard Project on Workforce, led the sessions, as the group explored emerging research, questioned assumptions, and identified opportunities for collaboration.

# What's Happening In Our Community



## 4. NATIONAL SERVICE

### Carnegie Summit on National Service

In October 2025, the foundation invited nearly 100 participants from government, philanthropy, and the nonprofit sector to discuss what it would take to create a movement in support of national service. The summit underscored service's potential to provide young people with opportunities, help communities meet public needs, and strengthen trust and belonging among Americans.



## 5. CARNEGIE LIBRARIES 250

### America at 250

On July 22, Carnegie staff took a curator-led tour of an exhibition at the Museum of the City of New York about the city's role in the American Revolution and the diverse individuals who shaped it. Carnegie funded the show as part of a special initiative to support cultural organizations that foster civic participation in honor of America's 250th anniversary.



**4.** Journalist and former Carnegie trustee Judy Woodruff moderates a conversation with Governor Spencer Cox of Utah during the Carnegie Summit on National Service in October 2025.

**CREDIT:** Filip Wolak



**5.** Commemorating America's 250th anniversary, *The Occupied City: New York and the American Revolution* at the Museum of the City of New York explores the city's role in the country's independence.

**CREDIT:** Alejandro Rovira



## 6. ANDREW CARNEGIE FELLOWS

### Researching the Roots of Polarization

The 2025 cohort of Andrew Carnegie Fellows met at Carnegie last fall to introduce their work to one another as they embarked on two years of research and writing funded by the foundation. The fellows, who are academics and public intellectuals from across the country, are exploring political polarization in the U.S. and ways to reduce it.



## 7. NATIONAL SERVICE

### The Service United Fund

On August 1, Carnegie announced a \$10 million commitment to establish a philanthropic fund to support the National Governors Association's Service United campaign to expand paid service opportunities in states. Carnegie's Dan Vallone, senior director of strategic initiatives, moderated a panel on how states, businesses, and higher education can work together to create service programs.



**6.** Dame Louise Richardson (center) with the 2025 cohort of Andrew Carnegie Fellows during a gathering at the Carnegie offices last fall.

**CREDIT:** Jack Duran



**7.** Dan Vallone, senior director of strategic initiatives at Carnegie, moderated a panel at the NGA's Summer Meeting, where the association's Service United campaign and Carnegie's Service United Fund were announced.

**CREDIT:** National Governors Association

# Andrew Carnegie

## Fellows Program

### WHAT'S NEW



"Carnegie seeks to understand how and why our society has become so polarized and what we can do to strengthen the forces of cohesion."

– **Dame Louise Richardson**  
President,  
Andrew Carnegie  
Foundation



Political polarization is characterized by factors such as threats to free speech, the decline of civil discourse, disagreement over basic facts, and a lack of mutual understanding and collaboration.

**T**he 2026 Class of Andrew Carnegie Fellows marked the third year of the program's focus on developing a body of research on political polarization in the United States. The foundation has committed up to \$18 million over the three-year period to understand how we can reduce political polarization and what can be done to strengthen the forces of cohesion in the United States, an overarching priority for the foundation's grantmaking. Each fellow receives a grant of up to \$200,000 to support their two-year research project, enabling them to devote significant time and resources to their work.

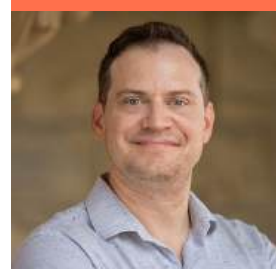
### Expanded Focus in 2027

For the next three years, beginning with the 2027 cohort, the program is broadening its focus beyond domestic perspectives to ask what the U.S. can learn from the experience of polarization in other countries. Some of the questions that the program will pursue:

- What has been the relationship between populism and polarization in other countries?
- How have some countries managed to avoid polarization?
- What can we learn from countries that have undergone periods of polarization, such as South Africa, Colombia, and Northern Ireland?
- Under what conditions has polarization escalated into political violence?
- Under what conditions has polarization taken root/accelerated/declined in other countries?

"Andrew Carnegie warned that 'mutual ignorance breeds mutual distrust,'" said Dame Louise Richardson, president of the foundation and chair of the Andrew Carnegie Fellows jury. "Like our founder, we believe in the diffusion of knowledge and understanding to advance a more peaceful world."

Since its founding in 2015, the program has awarded over 320 fellowships, representing more than \$60 million in grants. Meet the 2026 fellows.



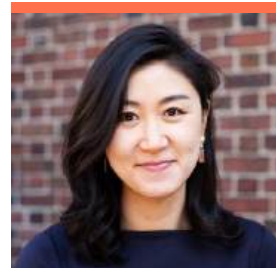
**Adam Bonica**

Professor of Political Science,  
Stanford University



**Ceren Budak**

Associate Professor, School of Information, University of Michigan



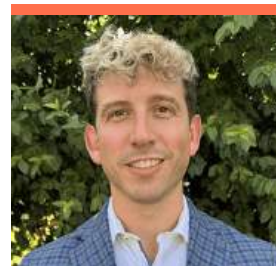
**Eunji Kim**

Assistant Professor of Political Science, Columbia University



**Allison Orr Larsen**

Taylor Reveley Research Professor and Alfred Wilson & Mary I. W. Lee Professor of Law, William & Mary Law School



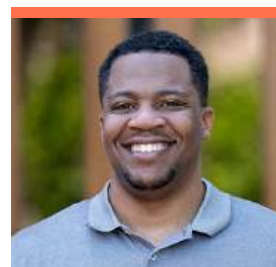
**Wayde Z. C. Marsh**

Assistant Professor of Political Science, University of Tennessee, Knoxville



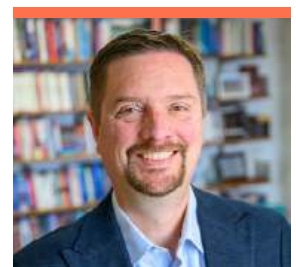
**Deborah S. Mower**

Director, The Center for Practical Ethics, Professor of Philosophy, and Mr. and Mrs. Alfred Hume Bryant Lectureship in Ethics, University of Mississippi



**Michael Strawbridge**

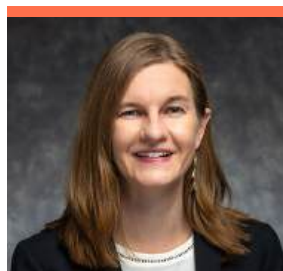
Assistant Professor of Political Science, Washington University in St. Louis



**Matthew Avery Sutton**

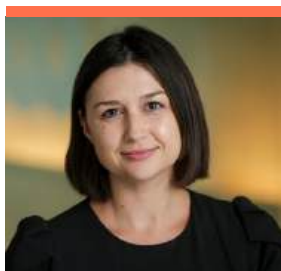
Claudius O. and Mary Johnson Distinguished Professor and Chair, Department of History, Washington State University

# Introducing the 2026 Class of Andrew Carnegie Fellows, who are researching how and why American society has become so polarized



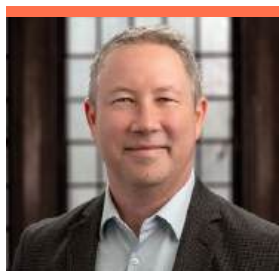
**Katlyn Marie Carter**

Associate Professor of History,  
University of Notre Dame



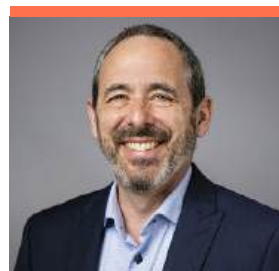
**Kathryn Falb**

Assistant Professor, Bloomberg  
School of Public Health, Johns  
Hopkins University



**Daniel Martinez HoSang**

Professor, American Studies and  
Political Science, Yale University



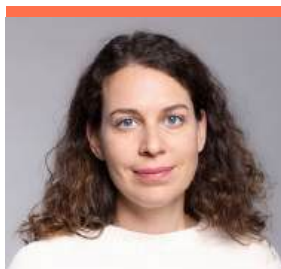
**Stephen Kantrowitz**

Linda and Stanley Sher Professor,  
Department of History, University  
of Wisconsin–Madison



**Darren Linvill**

Professor, Department of Com-  
munication, and Codirector of the  
Media Forensics Hub, Clemson  
University



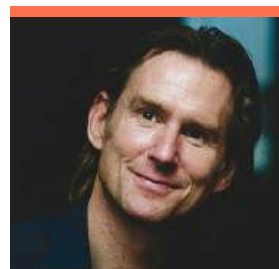
**Ayse Lokmanoglu**

Assistant Professor, Emerging Me-  
dia Studies, and Affiliated Faculty,  
Computing and Data Science,  
Boston University



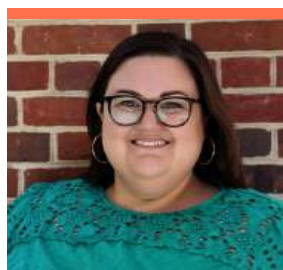
**Ben Lyons**

Associate Professor, Department  
of Communication, University  
of Utah



**Neil M. Maher**

Professor, Federated Department  
of History, New Jersey Institute of  
Technology



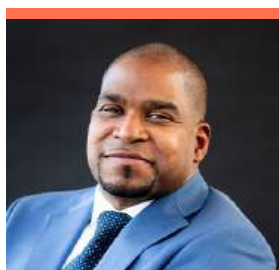
**Cecilia Márquez**

Hunt Family Assistant Professor  
of History, Duke University



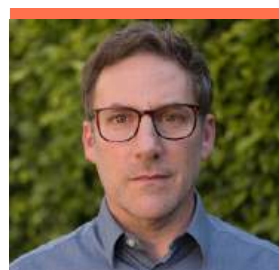
**Jessica Pisano**

Professor of Politics, The New School



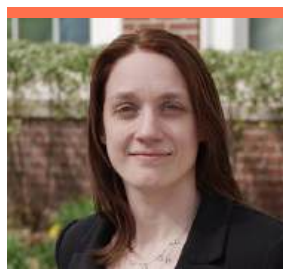
**Melvin L. Rogers**

Edna and Richard Salomon  
Distinguished Professor of  
Political Science, Brown University



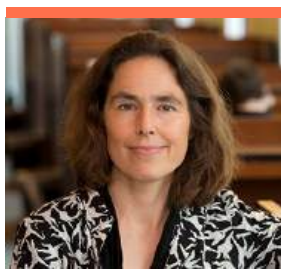
**Stuart Soroka**

Professor, Departments of Com-  
munication and Political Science,  
University of California, Los Angeles



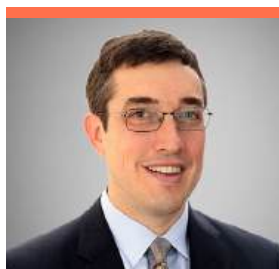
**Kristin Lunz Trujillo**

Assistant Professor, Department of  
Political Science, Boston College



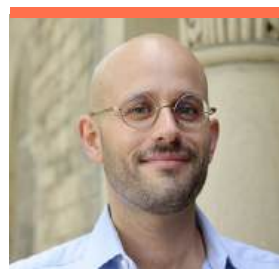
**Liza Vertinsky**

Professor of Law, Francis King Carey  
School of Law, University of Maryland



**Christopher S. Warshaw**

Professor, McCourt School of Pub-  
lic Policy, Georgetown University



**Chagai M. Weiss**

Assistant Professor and Andrea  
and Charles Bronfman Chair in  
Israel Studies, University of Toronto

# Andrew Carnegie

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The Braddock  
Carnegie Library  
in Pennsylvania  
was the first  
Carnegie Library  
to open in 1889.



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