

103. Andrew Carnegie, *The Gospel of Wealth* (1889)

Source: Andrew Carnegie, "Wealth," *North American Review* (June 1889), pp. 653-64.

One of the richest men in Gilded Age America, the industrialist Andrew Carnegie promoted what he called the Gospel of Wealth, the idea that those who accumulated money had an obligation to use it to promote the advancement of society. He explained his outlook in this article in the *North American Review*, one of the era's most prominent magazines. Carnegie would become famous for practicing what he preached. He helped to fund the creation of public libraries throughout the United States and overseas, and gave money to philanthropies and charities ranging from Carnegie Hall in New York City to the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. But as an employer, he was tyrannical, strongly opposing labor unions and approving the use of violence against his own workers, including in the Homestead strike that took place three years after the publication of this article.

THE PROBLEM OF our age is the proper administration of wealth, that the ties of brotherhood may still bind together the rich and poor in harmonious relationship. The conditions of human life have not only been changed, but revolutionized, within the past few hundred years. In former days there was little difference between the dwelling, dress, food, and environment of the chief and those of his retainers. The Indians are to-day where civilized man then was. When visiting the Sioux, I was led to the wigwam of the chief. It was like the others in external appearance, and even within the difference was trifling between it and those of the poorest of his braves. The contrast between the palace of the millionaire and the cottage of the laborer with us to-day measures the change which has come with civilization. This change, however, is not to be deplored, but welcomed as highly beneficial. It is well, nay, essential, for the prog-

ress of the race that the houses of some should be homes for all that is highest and best in literature and the arts, and for all the refinements of civilization, rather than that none should be so. Much better this great irregularity than universal squalor. Without wealth there can be no Mæcenas. The "good old times" were not good old times. Neither master nor servant was as well situated then as to-day. A relapse to old conditions would be disastrous to both—not the least so to him who serves—and would sweep away civilization with it. But whether the change be for good or ill, it is upon us, beyond our power to alter, and, therefore, to be accepted and made the best of. It is a waste of time to criticize the inevitable. . . .

The growing disposition to tax more and more heavily large estates left at death is a cheering indication of the growth of a salutary change in public opinion. The State of Pennsylvania now takes—subject to some exceptions—one tenth of the property left by its citizens. The budget presented in the British Parliament the other day proposes to increase the death duties; and, most significant of all, the new tax is to be a graduated one. Of all forms of taxation this seems the wisest. Men who continue hoarding great sums all their lives, the proper use of which for public ends would work good to the community from which it chiefly came, should be made to feel that the community, in the form of the State, cannot thus be deprived of its proper share. By taxing estates heavily at death the State marks its condemnation of the selfish millionaire's unworthy life.

It is desirable that nations should go much further in this direction. Indeed, it is difficult to set bounds to the share of a rich man's estate which should go at his death to the public through the agency of the State, and by all means such taxes should be graduated, beginning at nothing upon moderate sums to dependants, and increasing rapidly as the amounts swell. . . .

In bestowing charity, the main consideration should be to help those who will help themselves; to provide part of the means by which those who desire to improve may do so; to give those who desire to rise the aids by which they may rise; to assist, but rarely or

never to do all. Neither the individual nor the race is improved by almsgiving. Those worthy of assistance, except in rare cases, seldom require assistance. The really valuable men of the race never do, except in case of accident or sudden change. Every one has, of course, cases of individuals brought to his own knowledge where temporary assistance can do genuine good, and these he will not overlook. But the amount which can be wisely given by the individual for individuals is necessarily limited by his lack of knowledge of the circumstances connected with each. He is the only true reformer who is as careful and as anxious not to aid the unworthy as he is to aid the worthy, and, perhaps, even more so, for in almsgiving more injury is probably done by rewarding vice than by relieving virtue. . . .

The best means of benefiting the community is to place within its reach the ladders upon which the aspiring can rise—free libraries, parks, and means of recreation, by which men are helped in body and mind; works of art, certain to give pleasure and improve the public taste; and public institutions of various kinds, which will improve the general condition of the people; in this manner returning their surplus wealth to the mass of their fellows in the forms best calculated to do them lasting good.

Thus is the problem of rich and poor to be solved. The laws of accumulation will be left free, the laws of distribution free. Individualism will continue, but the millionaire will be but a trustee for the poor, intrusted for a season with a great part of the increased wealth of the community, but administering it for the community far better than it could or would have done for itself. The best minds will thus have reached a stage in the development of the race in which it is clearly seen that there is no mode of disposing of surplus wealth creditable to thoughtful and earnest men into whose hands it flows, save by using it year by year for the general good. This day already dawns. Men may die without incurring the pity of their fellows, still sharers in great business enterprises from which their capital cannot be or has not been withdrawn, and which is left chiefly at death for public uses; yet the day is not far distant when the man

who dies leaving behind him millions of available wealth, which was free for him to administer during life, will pass away “unwept, unhonored, and unsung,” no matter to what uses he leaves the dross which he cannot take with him. Of such as these the public verdict will then be: “The man who dies thus rich dies disgraced.”

Such, in my opinion, is the true gospel concerning wealth, obedience to which is destined some day to solve the problem of the rich and the poor, and to bring “Peace on earth, among men good will.”

Questions

1. Why does Carnegie think it is better to build public institutions than to give charity to the poor?
2. Why does Carnegie believe that “the man who dies thus rich dies disgraced”?

104. William Graham Sumner on Social Darwinism (ca. 1880)

Source: Albert G. Keller, ed., The Challenge of Facts and Other Essays by William Graham Sumner (New Haven, Conn., 1914), pp. 17–27. Keller concludes that the essay from which this excerpt is taken was written during the 1880s.

During the Gilded Age, large numbers of businessmen and middle-class Americans adopted the social outlook known as Social Darwinism. Adherents of this viewpoint borrowed language from Charles Darwin's great work *On the Origin of Species* (1859), which expounded the theory of evolution among plant and animal species, to explain the success and failure of individual human beings and entire social classes. According to Social Darwinists, evolution was as natural a process in human society as in