

Robert Wehmann

Andrew Carnegie: The Ethics of Andrew Carnegie and his “Gospel of Wealth”

Social Studies/Ethics

New York State

Andrew Carnegie was a poor Scottish immigrant who would come to be a symbol of what some call the “American Dream”. A rags-to-riches entrepreneur who through his establishment and ownership of Carnegie Steel would make him in the 1890’s the richest man in the world. Later in his life, adhering to his own publication, “Gospel of Wealth”, Carnegie he would be known as a leading philanthropist. However, the labor force at his mills would disagree as they struggled and suffered while producing the profits for the richest man in the world. How should the “Gospel of Wealth” be considered, when in conflict with those that produce such wealth?

Estimated time:

3 days

Guiding Questions:

- What are differences in the lives of management and labor?
- Are economic inequalities acceptable in a society?
- What may one consider the best method of improving the lives of labor?
- Does the “Gospel of Wealth” best explain the best method for distributing wealth to the working class?

Unit Goals / Learning Objectives:

- Close-read and critically analyze excerpts of Andrew Carnegie’s “Gospel of Wealth”
- Study and analyze living and labor conditions of employees and management of Carnegie Steel.
- Collaborate with classmates to develop and justify positions of employees and management as it relates to wealth and living and labor conditions.
- Develop a position, and express both orally and in written form, on the ethics of using Andrew Carnegie’s “Gospel of Wealth”.

Standards:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.2
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.6
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.7
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.10
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.11-12.1.A
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.11-12.1.E
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.11-12.9

Materials & Technological Needs:

- Lesson may be conducted in person or virtual classroom

- Handouts/files provided
- Internet access may be required

Lesson Activities:

Day 1:

Pre-Lesson Preparation (1) — Establishing and assessing foundational understanding

1. Collaborating in pairs/groups, students will establish responses to questions that based on their prior knowledge and experiences
 - a) What factors contribute to someone achieving success?
 - b) What barriers exist that prevent some people from achieving success?
 - c) Should government assume an active role in making income more equal throughout society?

Pre-Lesson Preparation (2) — Providing Historical Background for Students

1. Provide a brief explanation/overview of ideas of Social Darwinism, Individualism, and Communism as to how they relate to the Gilded Age.
2. Overview and discussion of achievements of Andrew Carnegie, including rise, business success, wealth and assets, and philanthropy.

Resource: PBS Documentary - Andrew Carnegie: The Richest Man in the World
<https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/films/carnegie/>

Day 2:

Lesson Presentation: Guided Practice/Independent Work

Provide students with a “gallery walk” guide.

1. Students will take part in a “gallery walk” of primary source documents and displays of visual aids.
2. Set up a document station for each of the source documents/displays.
3. Create groups of students.
4. Students move as groups from each document station, eventually rotating through all stations using the Gallery Walk - Student Discussion Guide.
5. Students will debrief and discuss in whole group, using Gallery Walk - Student Discussion Guide as foundation for discussion.

Day 3:

Students may work individually or collaborate in pairs/threes to read and discuss the “Gospel of Wealth” excerpts and complete the worksheet that accompanies each reading selection.

1. Distribute the excerpt of “Gospel of Wealth” and discussion questions.
2. Ask the students to read the document and complete the “Gospel of Wealth” discussion questions. Options may include:
 - a. The students can read the selection silently

- b. Do or do a “shared reading” within their pairs or small groups.
 - c. Teacher may elect to read aloud while students read the documents silently.
3. Upon completion of the discussion sheet, facilitate discussion, exploring responses to the critical-thinking questions.

Assessment/Closure:

Invite students to create their own version of “Gospel of Wealth” in the form of a “press release” of at least 8-10 sentences.

The document will:

- Clearly state their position on a policy for the distribution of wealth.
- Identify your audience or who you hope to reach with your speech
- Consider the specific place from which to deliver their position
- Record the message using video or audio platform
- Design a social media plan to release the message to the public

Gallery Walk Student Discussion Guide

Station #1:

- Compare and contrast the working conditions of Carnegie Steel Management versus that of the Carnegie Steel Workers:
- Describe what you see as the working conditions of the steelworkers (sights, sounds, smells, environment, etc.):

Station #2:

- How do the employees in Labor and Advisorship appear similar?
- What differences do you see between the two groups of men?
- Review the setting of their environment, how is it different?

Station #3

Looking at the exterior of steel worker housing:

- Put yourself in the scene. What do you see around you? What does it feel like? What does it smell like?
- Does it seem a just reward for the laborer? Why? Why not?

Looking at the interior of steel worker housing:

- What three things are most notable to you?
- Also, point out something you'd like AND dislike if you lived there?

Looking at Living Conditions - Ownership/Management:

- How would you describe the houses of Carnegie Steel Company ownership?
- What are your thoughts about the orchestration?

Station #4:

- Explain the conditions to which steelworkers children were exposed:
- What are the hazards of 2 water wells, two outhouses, and open streams of drain water?

Station #5:

- Approximately how many Carnegie libraries we're located in our state?
- How could the following be a good use to the general population?
 - Donations of Libraries:
 - Donations to/for colleges:
 - Donations of church organs:

Station #6:

Select a political cartoon.

- What message is the cartoonist implying?
- Why did the cartoonist depict Carnegie in this way?
- Is the cartoonist justified in their depiction Andrew Carnegie? Explain.

“The Gospel of Wealth” by Andrew Carnegie (Excerpt)

Original: Andrew Carnegie, "Wealth," *North American Review*, 148, no. 391 (June 1889): 653, 657-62.

Headnote: Andrew Carnegie was a poor Scottish immigrant who would come to be a symbol of what some call the “American Dream”; an entrepreneur who through his establishment and ownership of Carnegie Steel Company would make him in the 1890’s the richest man in the world. Later in his life, Carnegie gave away some \$350 million (approximately 90% of his wealth and the equivalent of approximately \$10 billion today) mostly to build public libraries and endow universities. Below is an excerpt of his 1889 essay, “Gospel of Wealth”, where he outlines his beliefs about the role that the wealthy should play in society.

(1) The problem of our age is the proper administration of wealth, so 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...

(2) The contrast between the palace of the millionaire and the cottage of the laborer with us today measures the change which has come with civilization... We assemble thousands of (workers) in the factory... of whom the employer can know little or nothing, and to whom the employer is little better than a myth.

(3) Rigid (classes) are formed, and, as usual, mutual ignorance breeds mutual distrust. Each (class) is without sympathy for the other, and ready to credit anything (disapproving) in regard to it...

(4) Thus is the problem of Rich and Poor to be solved. (6) There remains... the true antidote for the temporary unequal distribution of wealth, the reconciliation of the rich and the poor... in which the surplus wealth of the few will become, in the best sense, property of the many...

(5) This, then, is held to be the duty of the man of wealth: To set an example of modest, unostentatious living, shunning display or extravagance; to provide moderately for the legitimate wants of those dependent upon him; and, after doing so, to consider all surplus revenues which come to him simply as trust funds, which he is called upon to administer, and strictly bound as a matter of duty to administer in the manner which, in his judgment, is best calculated to produce the most beneficial results for the community.

(6) The man of wealth thus becoming the mere trustee and agent for his poorer brethren, bringing to their service his superior wisdom, experience, and ability to administer, doing for them better than they would or could do for themselves. . .

(7) A well-known writer... admitted the other day that he had given a quarter of a dollar to a man who approached him... he knew nothing of the habits of this beggar; knew not the use that would be made of this money, although he had every reason to suspect that it would be spent improperly.

(8) The main consideration should be to help those who will help themselves... 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 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.

(9) ...The man who dies leaving behind many millions of available wealth, which was his to administer during life, will pass away "unwept, unhonored, and unsung"... Of such as these the public verdict will then be : "The man who dies thus rich dies disgraced." (10) 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."

Gospel of Wealth Discussion Questions:

1. Explain in 2-4 meaningful sentences the main idea of Carnegie's essay.
2. Who do you think was the intended audience for this writing, "Gospel of Wealth? How do you know this?
3. According to Andrew Carnegie, what are the duties of the man of wealth? Start with answering: Is wealth yours to keep or do you hold it for others?
4. See #3 of essay. Carnegie states, "rigid (classes) are formed, and, as usual, mutual ignorance breeds mutual distrust. Each (class) is without sympathy for the other." What does this mean?
5. Carnegie says in #5 of the essay, "the duty of the man of wealth: To set an example of modest, unostentatious living, shunning display or extravagance". Has Carnegie lived his own words? Yes/No, and provide examples based on evidence from our gallery walk.
6. Carnegie shares an anecdote (see #6 and #7 of essay) of a writer who gives a beggar money. According to Carnegie, what is the problem with such giving?
7. Carnegie mentions in #8 of the essay, "The main consideration should be to help those who will help themselves." What form of "help" is best suited for the workers and their families? Higher wages or public libraries/universities/recreational facilities? Explain.
8. According to Carnegie, "The man who dies thus rich dies disgraced." He did donate 90% of his wealth to projects (libraries, universities, the arts, etc.). Yet, he and his managers were known to be ruthless when keeping wages low for the employees at his steel mills. How would you describe Carnegie's legacy? Use examples from the gallery walk.
9. What aspects of this document might be relevant to current situations today?

Visual Aids for Gallery Walk

The ethics of Andrew Carnegie and his “Gospel of Wealth”

Station #1: Working Conditions - Carnegie Steel



Henry Frick's office at Carnegie Steel Works, Homestead, Pennsylvania, July 25, 1892

"Henry C. Frick," Digital Public Library of America,
<http://dp.la/item/0bhf8174183c2515d095e649e5218222>

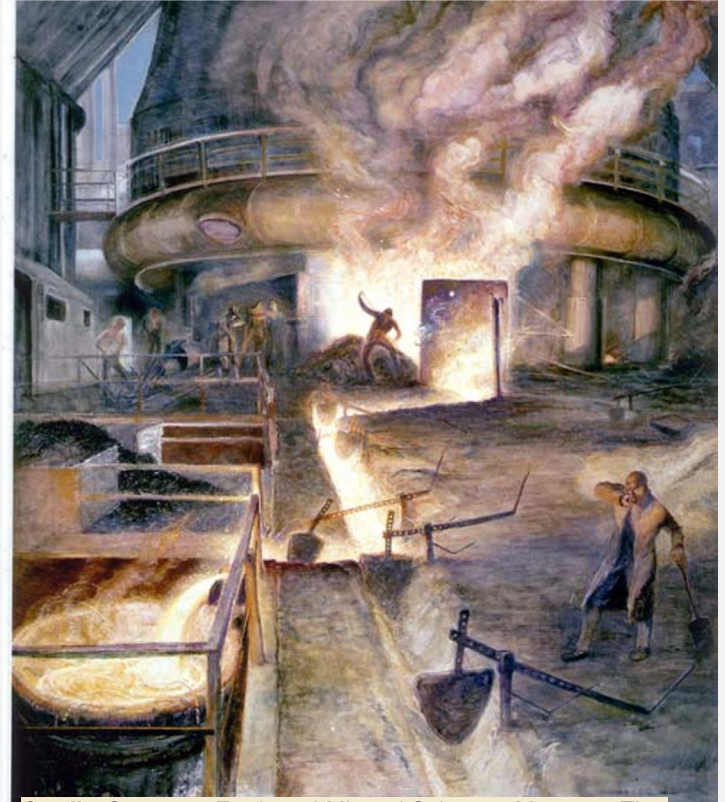


Carnegie Building - Headquarters Carnegie Steel
Source: John C. Bragdon - *Pittsburgh and Allegheny Picturesque*, 1905
(<https://archive.org/stream/pittsburghallegh00pitt#page/n11/mode/1up>)

Station #1: Working Conditions - Carnegie Steel Workers



Credit: Collection of William J. Gaughan, AIS 94:3, Archives Service Center, University of Pittsburgh



Credit: Courtesy, Earth and Mineral Sciences Museum, The Pennsylvania State University

Station # 2: Workers: Carnegie Steel Laborers



Credit:

top: Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania

<https://explorepahistory.com/displayimage.php?imgId=1-2-A77>

According to Captain Jones of the Edgar Thomson Works, "Germans, Irish, Swedes, and 'buckwheats," [young American country boys] judiciously mixed, make the most effective, tractable force you can find. Scotsmen do very well, are honest and faithful, Welsh can be used in limited quantities. But Englishmen have been the worst class of men—sticklers for high wages, small production and strikes."

In the early 1900s increasing numbers of Slovaks, Hungarians, Poles, and Russians and single men from central and eastern Europe. Working typically under the direction of an English-speaking foreman, most labored in tough unskilled jobs that demanded both strength and endurance.

Station #2: Workers: Carnegie Steel Management/Advisors



The photograph is of The Advisory Board members of the Homestead Steel Strike. During the 1892 Homestead strike, Carnegie managers put tremendous pressure on skilled workers, and used bribes and threats to intimidate and coerce members of the advisory committee to go back to work. It was common talk that David Lynch, seated second from the left, had been bought off by Frick, who paid for his daughters' college tuitions.

Credit: Courtesy of the Rivers of Steel National Heritage Area.

<https://explorepahistory.com/displayimage.php?imgId=1-2-1E07>

Station #3: Living Conditions: Carnegie Steel Workers



Long stairway in mill district of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division
<http://loc.gov/pictures/resource/fsa.8c29017/>



Source: *The Pittsburgh Survey*, titled *Homestead: The Households of a Mill Town*



Glen Alley, a few blocks from Frick Park, Homestead

Source: *The Pittsburgh Survey*, titled *Homestead: The Households of a Mill Town*.

Station #3: Living Conditions: Carnegie Steel Workers



Two-room tenement. The kitchen, 15 by 12 feet, was steaming with vapor from a big washtub set on a chair in the middle of the room. On the side of the room a bed, along with sewing machine and stove. Upstairs in the second room were one boarder and the man of the house asleep. Two more boarders were at work, but at night would be home to sleep in the bed from which the others would get up.



Night Scene in a Slavic Lodging House: Three men in the far bed, two in each of the others, twelve in the room. In some of these lodgings day workers sleep at night in the beds occupied by night workers in the daytime.

Station #3: Living Conditions - Ownership/Management



Frick House - "Clayton"

Source: <https://www.thefrickpittsburgh.org/clayton>



**Skibo Castle - Scotland
Carnegie (European) residence**

Source: <https://www.carnegieclub.co.uk/>



An orchestrion. Automated music player. Carnegie and Frick EACH owned one.

Cost \$5,000 in 1892 (equivalent of ~\$500,000 in 2022)

Station #4: Living in a Steel Town: Labor's Children



Children playing in an open (drain) flow of water.



Willow Alley, Braddock: Rubbish in rear yard where children play. There are 2 hand-pump water wells for drinking and bathing and 2 outhouses for 30 apartments.

Taken from Volume 4 of *The Pittsburgh Survey*, titled *Homestead: The Households of a Mill Town*

Station # 5: Andrew Carnegie and his “Gospel of Wealth”

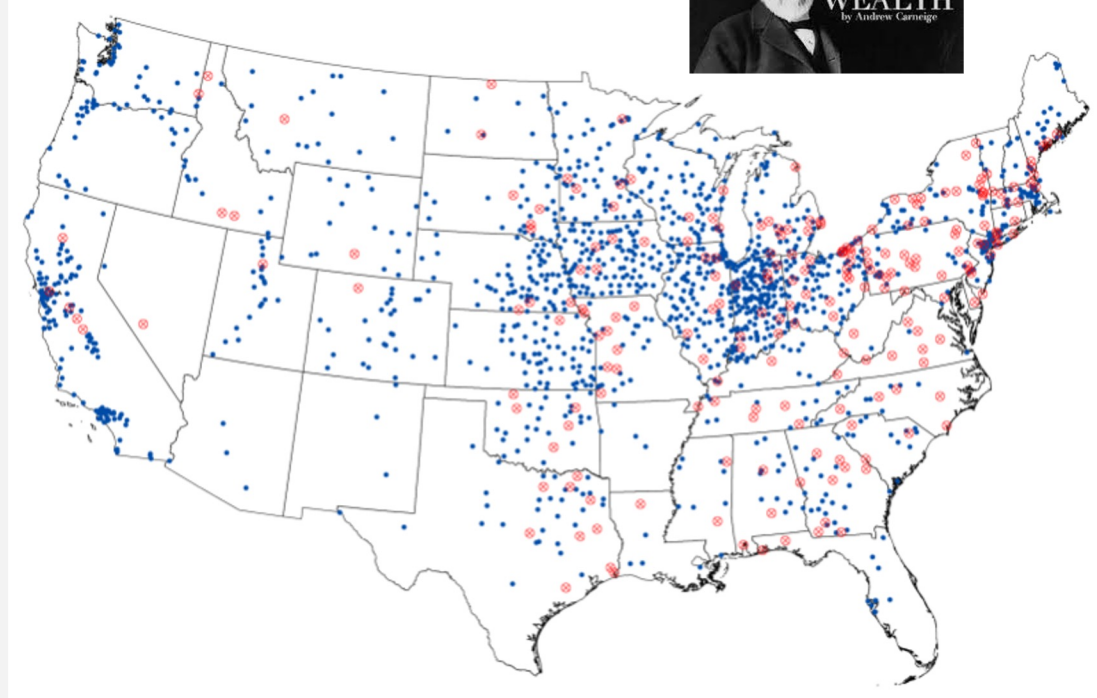
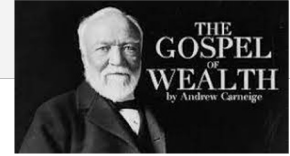
Andrew Carnegie distributed nearly \$350,000,000 of his wealth. (Approximately \$10 billion today.)

Carnegie funded the building of 2,509 "Carnegie Libraries" worldwide between 1883 and 1929.

Of those, 1,795 were in the United States: 1,687 public libraries and 108 academic.

He also distributed money to:

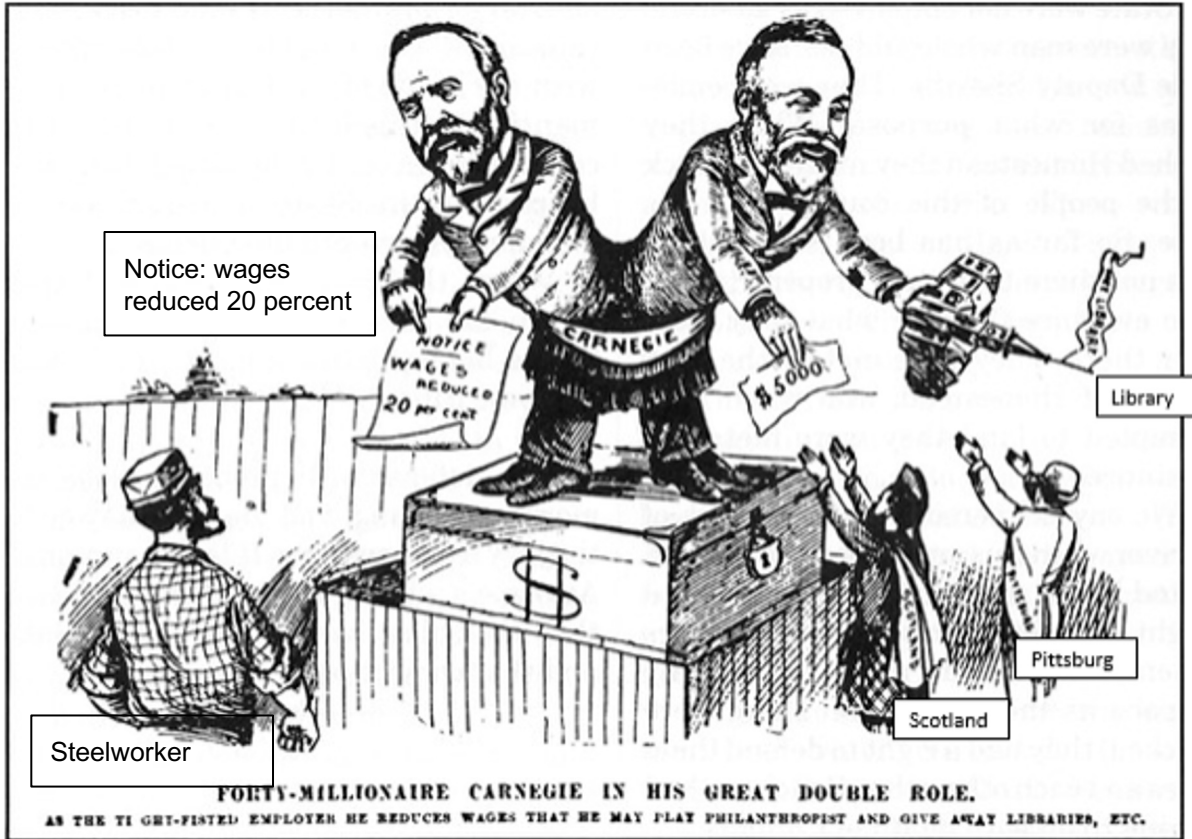
- Churches (for church organs)
- establish college/universities of higher learning
- assist smaller colleges
- Several trusts for art and humanities



Each blue dot is the location of a Carnegie Library.

Source: Source: Bobinski (1969) and Jones (1997) Jones, T. (1997). Carnegie Libraries Across America: A Public Legacy. Wiley.

Station #5: Carnegie in the Press: Political Cartoon



Forty-millionaire Carnegie in his Great Double Role

Caption reads:

As the tight fisted employer he reduces wages that (so) he may play philanthropist and give away libraries, etc.

Station #5: Carnegie in the Press: Political Cartoon



PROMISE AND PERFORMANCE.

Chorus of Workingmen—Mr. Carnegie, you are worth several millions. Can't you give us wages enough to clothe and feed our families, and send our children to school?

Mr. Carnegie—I have ordered wages reduced from 23 to 60 per cent, and that goes. See?

Chorus of Workingmen—But you told us when we voted the Republican ticket in 1888 that we would get high tariff and high wages with Harrison.

Carnegie—Bah! Fools! (Aside to Frick—Close the works and crush these people.)

"Promise and Performance".

Andrew Carnegie sitting on bags of money during the Homestead Strike 1892.

The caption reads:

Chorus of Workingmen -- Mr. Carnegie, you are worth several millions. Can't you give us wages enough to clothe and feed our families, and send our children to school?

Mr. Carnegie -- I have ordered wages reduced from 23 to 60 percent, and that goes. See?

Source: St. Paul daily globe. (Saint Paul, Minn.), 03 July 1892.
<https://www.loc.gov/rr/news/topics/homestead.html>