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CARNEGIE REPORTER

DAME LOUISE RICHARDSON
On why polarization is a problem

IAN BREMMER
On a world defined by polarization

ARUNA D'SOUZA
On the global income gap



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CARNEGIE® REPORTER

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The Carnegie Library in McCook, Nebraska, built in 1908, was one of 1,681 libraries whose construction Andrew Carnegie funded in the United States. **Take a road trip to America's Carnegie libraries on page 26.** CREDIT: MARK MCDONALD

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Illustration by Chloe Cushman

WELCOME TO THE **CARNEGIE REPORTER**

Progress moves at the speed of trust. I recently heard this expression for the first time as MIT's Deb Roy explained his work at the Center for Constructive Communication where they are developing tools to understand how we talk about opposing views. In a different discussion, Suzanne DiMaggio of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace described her experience leading high-level, unofficial meetings known as Track II talks between nongovernmental representatives of Iran and the United States. The greatest challenge to convening talks is pretty basic: establishing trust.

Roy and DiMaggio are among our many grantees working on reducing political polarization. Carnegie is committing tens of millions of dollars in annual support to figure out what drives division, and on the flipside, what cultivates understanding among individuals, communities, and nations. In this edition of *Carnegie Reporter* magazine, we explore the causes and consequences of these forces, drawing from top thinkers, elected leaders at the local and state levels, and even experts in the field of conflict resolution.

In a challenge to our assumptions, Dame Louise Richardson, the president of Carnegie and the past head of Oxford University, writes that Americans are not as divided as we might think. In fact, evidence shows there is widespread misunderstanding of the views held by members of one political party about the views held by those in the other party. On the international front, Eurasia Group's Ian Bremmer tells us what me might expect when no country, including the United States, is willing to set an agenda and maintain the international order. Governor Thomas H. Kean, a former Carnegie chair of 22 years, who also chaired the bipartisan 9/11 Commission, provides greater context based on decades in politics and philanthropy during a conversation with former *Financial Times* editor and past Carnegie trustee Lionel Barber.

These are big picture perspectives on a problem that starts with individuals. What can each of us do to reduce polarization in our own communities? We share results from a series of surveys that asks local government leaders about polarization. Commissioned by Carnegie and conducted by CivicPulse, we learn that most believe division is hurting the country but far fewer see negative effects in their own communities. Yet there is a surge in demand for help from grassroots organizations such as Braver Angels, which holds workshops across the country to help people deal with differences. We report on a recent session for Republican and Democratic lawmakers in New Hampshire, while in North Carolina, we visit a fellowship program that brings together bipartisan groups of policymakers to talk through issues about public education.

At a time when public trust in government and institutions is depressingly low, Carnegie has renewed its focus on the philanthropic vision of our founder, Andrew Carnegie, who used his vast fortune to build 2,500 free public libraries worldwide. Our commitment includes millions of dollars in new grants for programs such as English language lessons for adults and college readiness and civic engagement for teens. The outpouring of "library love" for these trusted institutions and all they do for their communities has been astounding. To help tell this story, we produced an interactive map that allows readers to search their zip code and learn about Carnegie Libraries. That's how we met retired journalist Mark McDonald, who traveled to more than 150 of the nation's Carnegie Libraries as part of a road trip through American history. He shares his remarkable photographs in our Center Point section. In our second photo feature, meet the 10 winners of the 2025 I Love My Librarian Award, our annual tribute with the American Library Association. Join us in celebrating these trusted public servants.

As part of Carnegie's longstanding support for immigrant integration, we meet the citizens who sponsor refugees as part of Welcome.US, showing how compassionate resettlement can also bridge cultural divides. We explain the complexities of legal immigration and the need for policy reforms reached through bipartisan consensus. We also celebrate the contributions of naturalized citizens with comics featuring honorees from our annual Great Immigrants, Great Americans celebration. This issue's comics feature DC comics president Jim Lee; Flint, Michigan, public health advocate Dr. Mona Hanna; and librarian Homa Naficy, who is also a past honoree of the I Love My Librarian Award. When we celebrate the 20th anniversary of the Great Immigrants tribute, we will send you news about our free comic book.

We hope that you will trust us to bring you a philanthropic perspective on important issues with every *Carnegie Reporter,* and together, we might make some progress. Our Communications team welcomes your feedback — email me directly at CFC@carnegie.org. ■

Celeste Ford

Chief Communications Officer
Carnegie Corporation of New York



Braver Angels participants embrace following the performance of "Mind the Gap," a collaborative theater program for people across political divides, at the 2024 Braver Angels National Convention in Kenosha, Wisconsin. CREDIT: BRAVER ANGELS

FROM THE **PRESIDENT**



CREDIT: FILIP WOLAK

WHY POLARIZATION IS A PROBLEM

Carnegie Corporation of New York's president identifies grounds for optimism as she leads philanthropic efforts to understand and mitigate political polarization in America

By **Dame Louise Richardson**

The term *polarization* is constantly invoked, less often defined. Essentially, it refers to the degree to which different segments of society hold opposing views on policy, values, and ideology. One expects politics to be polarized — indeed, a two-party system is based upon it — but a well-functioning democracy assumes agreement on a core set of values and disagreement around policy that is based on competing interpretations of evidence.

Increasingly in the United States, debate has been replaced by the assertion of immutable positions and the assumption of bad faith by the other side. In turn, this has been marked by the emergence of what academics refer to as "affective polarization," that is, the phenomenon of people of opposing views feeling animosity towards one another. This matters for the cohesion of society. If one actively dislikes another, one is less likely to interact with them, further solidifying the separation. Moreover, if one actively dislikes another, one is less likely to work with them on matters of shared interest. With less interaction there is less empathy, less appreciation of the other's point of view, and less understanding of their motives. Political identity becomes a social identity, which in turn reinforces the separation.[1]

Few dispute the fact that America is polarized. A September 2024 Gallup poll found that a record 80 percent of U.S. adults believe Americans are greatly divided on the most important values, while just 18 percent believe the country is united. Not only is the percentage of those who believe the country to be divided higher than ever before, but the view is held broadly consistently across gender, age, race, political affiliation, and educational attainment.[2]

Returning to the United States after living in the United Kingdom for 14 years, I have been struck by the extent and the pace of political polarization. I am no stranger to political polarization: As vice-chancellor (president) of the University of St. Andrews and then the University of Oxford, I lived through the 2014 referendum on Scottish independence and the 2016 Brexit referendum. One would think that there is nothing more polarizing than a national referendum that reduces complex, long-term, economic, political, and symbolic issues to a binary choice, with a clear winner and loser. But the United States, by any measure, is more politically polarized than either Scotland or England pre- or post-referendum.

Successful democracy requires give and take, compromise around policy, accepting gains and losses, respecting rules, peaceful transfer of power. All this is more difficult if you believe the other side is morally compromised, a threat to democracy, and that your side has a monopoly on virtue. When political polarization cripples legislative compromise and leads to gridlock, it both impedes progress on important legislative matters and engenders distrust in the efficacy of democratic institutions. In more extreme cases, as in Hungary and Turkey, democratic institutions themselves are hijacked. At its worst, polarization can create the conditions for political violence and ultimately cause democratic institutions to collapse, as we are seeing in Venezuela.

Carnegie Corporation of New York has long committed to a program called Strengthening Democracy. Recently, we refocused this program to support efforts to understand and mitigate political polarization in the United States. We are supporting short-, medium-, and long-term approaches to what is a deeply complex issue, and we are detecting some grounds for optimism amidst the gloom.

Preliminary research and polling that we have supported suggest that the population at large is less polarized than our political leaders and that smaller communities are less

Preliminary research and polling that we have supported suggest that the population at large is less polarized than our political leaders.

polarized than larger ones. Moreover, they demonstrate that there is actually a strong convergence of opinion among Americans on many core issues, but widespread misunderstanding of the views of those on the other side of the political spectrum.

One of our grantees, the Dartmouth Polarization Research Lab, finds that politicians drive polarization by intentionally creating and amplifying divisions.[3] One of our fellows, Chris Tausanovitch, has demonstrated that the U.S. Senate has long been more polarized than the electorate, and his current research seeks to explain why.[4] He suggests that this is due to "party sorting," that our parties have become much more homogenous while the ideology of the public as a whole has not changed very much.

A CivicPulse survey of local government officials that we commissioned found that while the overwhelming majority — 87 percent — believe political polarization has a negative effect on the country as a whole, less than a third — 31 percent — see the same within their own communities. This implies a direct correlation between the size of the community and the extent of polarization, with communities under 50,000 being least polarized. The findings were consistent across Republicans and Democrats and confirm the intuitive sense of those of us who grew up in small communities: knowing your neighbors and fellow community members can mitigate polarization.

Respondents explained the relative lack of polarization as a consequence of their focus on practical matters. One leader of a large Southern town put it this way: "State and federal elected officials are stoking these divisions. At the local level, we have our hands full simply providing basic services." A Republican governing board member of a large town in the Midwest put it best: "There is not a Democratic or Republican way to put in a sewer."[5]

These findings are consistent with those of other surveys indicating that we may not be quite as polarized as we think, or as our national politics would suggest. A 2024 AP-NORC poll found that nine out of 10 Americans agree on core beliefs about what it means to be American.[6] A 2023 Walton Family Foundation report found that broad agreement on the importance of compromise for successful collaboration (88 percent), and Americans are far more likely to say that it is important to compromise to get things done (75 percent) than they are to say that it is important to fight for your values even if it means not finding a solution (15 percent).[7]

Other research has pointed to the misunderstanding of the views of those on the other side.[8] The Polarization Research Lab survey reveals a wide gap between respondents' beliefs and how their beliefs are perceived by members of the other party.[9] Bryony Payne of King's College and her colleagues have found similar results,[10] while Michael Pasek at the University of Illinois Chicago has reviewed surveys that demonstrate both Democrats and Republicans personally value core democratic characteristics but severely underestimate opposing party members' support for the same characteristics.[11]

Such evidence appears to suggest that we are not actually as polarized as we think, or as our political leaders or media moguls would like us to believe, notwithstanding a deeply polarized media and an ever-increasing reliance on highly unreliable social media for information and analysis.

There can be little doubt that social media, with its emphasis on binary reactions — like/dislike, thumbs up/thumbs down, swipe left/swipe right, follow/unfollow — contributes to societal polarization. The proliferation of misinformation and conspiracy theories, and the speed with which they can traverse the globe, undermines evidence-based analysis and fuels distrust. It was Tacitus who said long ago: "Truth is confirmed by inspection and delay; falsehood by haste and uncertainty," and he was not thinking of the internet or the 24-hour news cycle.

It has taken us a long time to get to this point, and it is likely to take us a long time to get out of it. I was a student of Bob Putnam in the early '80s when he was working on the link between social and political developments in the Italian regions — research that led him to publication of the now famous *Bowling Alone* in 2000. More than

anyone else, he has cataloged the collapse of social capital in America today — but as the perennial optimist that he is, he also points in his 2021 book, *The Upswing*, to the reformers who turned the Gilded Age into the Progressive Era as an inspirational example of how American society can change.[12]

As political philosopher Michael Sandel[13] and author David Brooks[14] have reminded us, it is impossible to understand polarization without examining the social and economic developments of the past 40 to 50 years. Market-driven globalization has led to an extraordinary growth in inequality. In 1978 the average CEO made roughly 30 times what the average worker made. In 2023 that ratio was 290 to 1.[15] The divide between winners and losers has deepened, breeding resentment and poisoning politics. The American idea of meritocracy has also led those who are the winners to believe on some level that they deserve their success, and conversely, that those who haven't taken advantage of their opportunities are somehow less worthy, while completely forgetting how advantage and opportunity are passed from generation to generation via our educational system and social networks.

I believe that philanthropy has a role in lancing this boil of polarization; indeed, I see it as our responsibility. It will take a long-term, multifaceted approach that supports hands-on societal efforts to bridge divides while also supporting reforms to the features of our political system that encourage partisanship. It will require support for academic research that helps us to understand the nature, depth, and likely trajectory of polarization. It will require collaboration across philanthropy, and across sectors, working with educational institutions, business, and government. It will require working with those of different ideological backgrounds, and critically, it will require a robust, free, independent media environment that is trusted to provide objective information as an antidote to the Wild West of social media.

At Carnegie, we make no claim to having the answers, and we hope foundations with a range of missions will see that they can play a role. There are any number of opportunities for grantmakers to get involved. In addition to supporting researchers exploring the phenomenon of polarization, we are backing those testing the efficacy of policy options such as open primaries, ranked choice voting, and citizen assemblies. We are supporting states, such as Utah and Maryland, that are introducing national service initiatives to create opportunities for meaningful interaction across race, region, and class, and to inculcate a sense of commitment to one's community. We are also supporting the teaching of civics in schools, as well as opportunities for students from across the country to learn about, and visit with, one another. We also fund efforts to teach media literacy and combat disinformation, and we support a robust free press. Finally, we are returning to our roots with support of free public libraries, which Andrew Carnegie described as the "cradle of democracy."

There is so much more to be done, but the stakes have never been higher. ■

Dame Louise Richardson is president of Carnegie Corporation of New York. 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. This article is an adaptation of "How Philanthropy Can Bring Red and Blue Together," first published by the *Chronicle of Philanthropy* in March 2025. Printed with permission.

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CARNEGIE **CONVERSATION**



Thomas H. Kean and Lionel Barber, former trustees of Carnegie Corporation of New York, at Carnegie's Manhattan offices. CREDIT: FILIP WOLAK

‘NOTHING IS UNFIXABLE’:

GOVERNOR THOMAS H. KEAN ON DIVISION, BIPARTISANSHIP, AND PHILANTHROPY

The former New Jersey governor and longtime Carnegie board chair discusses political polarization and why compromise is not a dirty word

By **Lionel Barber**

Governor Thomas H. Kean embodies great American leadership. A former history teacher who became one of New Jersey’s most beloved governors, he won support from Republicans and Democrats to enact education reforms that were replicated across the country. He brought his faith in bipartisanship to lead the 9/11 Commission, whose unanimous 9/11 Commission Report led to the largest intelligence reforms in the nation’s history.

I was lucky to witness his influence up close as a trustee on the board of Carnegie Corporation of New York, where he served for three decades — 22 of those as chair. He was a master of the light touch. When he spoke, everyone snapped to attention. His gentle humor headed off trouble, early. If forces engaged, he quickly identified the middle ground. As the United States grew increasingly polarized, his thoughtful guidance of our board became ever more crucial.

Governor Kean stepped down from his role as chairman in 2024. I had the privilege of catching up with him at Carnegie’s offices recently to reflect upon his years of service, why he still believes in political compromise, and where he thinks America is headed from here.

LIONEL BARBER: At its most basic, the purpose of philanthropy is to advance the common good. But today the common good is not so obvious, and this is proving deeply divisive. How to deal with this?

THOMAS H. KEAN: Division can be productive in a democracy, but not to the extent we have it today. We’ve got to look at that divisiveness, look at its roots, and see if there’s any way society can deal with it.

In my lifetime, the things that I’m most proud of were the result of compromises, like leading the New Jersey Assembly and the 9/11 Commission. In the end, there were always good people coming together to come up with a solution that everybody could accept.

BARBER: On the 9/11 Commission, crucially, you made it a precondition that it was bipartisan.

KEAN: Yes. We had 10 people: five Democrats, five Republicans, appointed by the most political people in Washington. When I first arrived, they were sitting separately, in Republican and Democratic caucuses.

The first thing I did is refuse to lead the Republican caucus, so it stopped. And a funny thing happened, when the Republican caucus hadn't met for two or three weeks, the Democrats looked at each other and said, "Well, why are we doing this?" And they stopped as well. In public as well as in our private meetings, I made sure every Republican sat next to a Democrat, and this was just one of the things that started to lead toward a bipartisan consensus.

BARBER: There's a wonderful book by Bernard Crick called *In Defence of Politics* — I remember reading [it] as a student at Oxford many years ago — which argues that politics and compromise are necessary to solve problems without resorting to force. But now compromise has become a dirty word.

KEAN: Well, I've done it all my life. I used to teach history — that was my first job. What I remind people is that without compromise, there wouldn't be a United States of America. The so-called New Jersey Plan helped resolve differences over the representation of small states and large states. That compromise helped create the longest-lasting democracy in the world.

When I was in the New Jersey legislature, I was the lucky Speaker of the House where there was no majority by either party. The first thing I did is say, "I'm not going to accept any bill for passage without a Republican and a Democratic sponsor." It became one of the most productive legislatures I ever served in, and when the speakership was up for reelection, both parties reelected me unanimously.

When I was governor, I never had a senate of my own party, and yet, they never blocked a major appointment. We worked on bills together, and when we got them through, I praised the sponsors in the Democratic Party, and then we got along. We're still friends.

BARBER: Do you think it's possible for Carnegie to help rebuild the center in American politics?

KEAN: It'd be a wonderful thing for Carnegie to take on. Without people able to see both sides of the issue, you never get important issues resolved.

BARBER: I've never seen America so divided, and I'm just about old enough to remember 1968, the assassination of Martin Luther King, and the tremendous turmoil then. But it feels today as if the challenges are even bigger because of the depth of inequality, technological change, and also far greater diversity.

KEAN: I had dinner the other night with the historian Doris Kearns Goodwin. What she said to me is: we've had some terrible problems in this country, but after we've come through the other side, we've ended up better. We ended up better after the Civil War. We ended up better after the Gilded Age, we ended up better after the Depression, we ended up better at the end of the Vietnam War. Each of those things she mentioned was troubling to the country at that time — but our history is that we muddle through and emerge on the other side better, not worse. Hopefully, this will happen again.

What Andrew Carnegie set up for us, the issues that he asked us to address — they're just as relevant today, and that's what we're still doing.

– **Thomas H. Kean**

BARBER: You've seen so much over three decades at Carnegie. Have your views on philanthropy's role changed over that time?

KEAN: Older foundations like Carnegie may have changed the way we do things, but we haven't changed our mission. What Andrew Carnegie set up for us, the issues that he asked us to address — they're just as relevant today, and that's what we're still doing.

I think philanthropy has got to take chances. Philanthropy is really risk capital, in some ways. For Carnegie, this is money that has been given by a benefactor who's not here anymore. And so it's money we should use in ways that perhaps no other organization would use it. To solve great problems, we have to take some risks.

BARBER: Perhaps we should turn to Andrew Carnegie himself: every time I go on a cycling trip in the north of England or in Scotland, I come across one of his libraries. What do you think he can tell us about tackling today's problems?

KEAN: Andrew Carnegie understood the importance of education. He was from the poorest of the poor in Scotland, and when he was a small boy, he basically taught himself in libraries. He understood that without that education, his future would've been limited. Today, that's probably even more true. If there's one thing that frustrates me, it's that the problems in education we were

talking about on the first day I joined the board, still haven't been solved.

BARBER: What insights have you gained about grantmaking?

KEAN: Even the best foundations, including Carnegie, make mistakes. Not all your grantees work out — and if you take chances, they shouldn't. But you've got to recognize when that happens.

One of the things I tried to do is look at all grantees as if they were new. If you don't do that, you can get attached to particular grantees and fund them year after year, forever. Then you've closed your doors to new grantees, because your money's spent.

You have to be open to the grant you don't expect. Every now and then, it's a remarkable grant, somebody you shouldn't ignore.

BARBER: Is there work that you're especially proud of?

KEAN: At Carnegie, we were talking about the importance of preschool education long before anybody else. And because of what we did, this country now understands that early childhood education is essential.

BARBER: You've looked at the world, you've looked at the work of Carnegie. You remain an optimist.

KEAN: I'm by nature an optimist, I think. There are a lot of things that look to be almost unfixable, but if you look at history, nothing's unfixable. ■

Thomas H. Kean is an honorary trustee and former chair of the board of trustees of Carnegie Corporation of New York. He served as governor of New Jersey for two terms from 1982 to 1990. He also chaired the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States, known as the 9/11 Commission, which was responsible for investigating the causes of the September 11 attacks and providing recommendations to prevent further terrorist attacks.

Lionel Barber is a former trustee of Carnegie Corporation of New York. He served as editor of the *Financial Times* from 2005 to 2020. During his editorship, Barber led the digital transformation of the *FT*, winning multiple prizes for its journalism, including three Newspaper of the Year awards. His latest book is *Gambling Man*, a biography of Masayoshi Son. He has lectured on issues such as foreign policy, transatlantic relations, and monetary policy.

FUTURE GOVERNORS TAKE A CRASH COURSE IN SCHOOL POLICY

How the Hunt–Kean Leadership Fellows program aims to counter polarization

By **Leslie Brody**

When Kirsten Baesler, a Republican elected to lead North Dakota's education department, wanted to test how a slogan would sound to more liberal listeners, she ran it by state Senator M. Teresa Ruiz, a Democrat in New Jersey.

Baesler wanted to say her top priority was "not schools, it's not classrooms, it's not teachers, it's not even students, it's all about children." She worried that might come across as disrespectful to educators, so she asked for feedback from Ruiz, who replied it sounded fine.

"The last thing I want to be is a polarizing figure," Baesler said.

The two politicians met through the Hunt–Kean Leadership Fellows program, which has helped officials find common ground in small settings where they can speak freely across party lines. Named after two former governors known for their commitment to education — James B. Hunt Jr., a North Carolina Democrat, and Thomas H. Kean, a New Jersey Republican — it launched in fall of 2014 to provide a crash course in education policy for future governors and other up-and-comers. Its organizers thought too many candidates lacked a deep understanding of how schools work. Beyond offering information and varying perspectives on a broad range of issues — from testing and achievement gaps to budget constraints and AI — the fellowship aims to reduce the political polarization that can hurt progress.

Carnegie Corporation of New York made its first grant in 2015 to help establish the fellowship and has provided $2.25 million in funding over time. Today, the program has a broad range of funders, including the Bezos Family Foundation, Bloomberg Philanthropies, John M. Belk Endowment, Walton Family Foundation, and Saul Zaentz Charitable Foundation. Their support helped the institute develop a network of 263 fellows from all 50 states and the District of Columbia. Eleven are now sitting governors. Participants are nominated by alumni, institute board members, and colleagues. Only one new fellow can come from each state.

Interest in joining the free program, which covers travel and hotel expenses for participants, has grown as word spread. The current cohort of 32 fellows — more than double the pioneer group of 15 — met in Washington, D.C., this past December for a three-day conference. The agenda included a panel of governors, a visit to a charter school, case studies and talks by experts in brain science, the value of early learning, growing the childcare workforce, intervening in troubled schools, and other challenges. Fellows have meetings online monthly and will reconvene in August. To keep conversations flowing, they agree to quote participants' comments only if they get consent.

"They're able to speak about issues that are really politically divisive," said Javaid Siddiqi, president of the nonprofit Hunt Institute, which runs the fellowship from its offices in Cary, North Carolina. "Back home in a committee meeting or on the floor when the media is around, they're not able to hear each other because they're so worried about what they're saying and what voters will hear. Here they're able to sit with thought leaders and experts, and grapple with heady issues, hear each other, and see the political lens the other side is looking through."

Eleven sitting governors have participated in the Hunt–Kean Leadership Fellows program since its establishment in 2014:

- Governor **Spencer Cox** (R – UT)
- Governor **Bob Ferguson** (D – WA)
- Governor **Maura Healey** (D – MA)
- Governor **Katie Hobbs** (D – AZ)
- Governor **Mike Kehoe** (R – MO)
- Governor **Brad Little** (R – ID)
- Governor **Tate Reeves** (R – MS)
- Governor **Kim Reynolds** (R – IA)
- Governor **Sarah Huckabee Sanders** (R – AR)
- Governor **Josh Stein** (D – NC)
- Governor **Gretchen Whitmer** (D – MI)

In Siddiqi's view, the nonpartisan program has had tangible impacts, such as helping fellows pursue efforts to build more diverse teacher pipelines in Illinois and craft proposals to allow charter schools in North Dakota.



Javaid Siddiqi, president of the Hunt Institute (right), with former governors James B. Hunt Jr., a North Carolina Democrat (center), and Thomas H. Kean, a New Jersey Republican (left), at a Hunt–Kean Leadership Fellows convening. CREDIT: THE HUNT INSTITUTE



The Hunt Institute's 11th cohort, comprising 256 elected officials from all 50 states and the District of Columbia, convened for their first meeting in December 2024. CREDIT: THE HUNT INSTITUTE

The fellowship program grew out of a relationship between Hunt, who governed North Carolina for four terms (1977–1985 and 1993–2001) and Kean, who led New Jersey for two (1982–1990). They saw the need for greater cooperation between the parties long before political polarization became a major national issue. Both were members of Carnegie's board of trustees. Kean served on the Carnegie board for almost 30 years, including 22 years as chair. They were alarmed at the mediocre performance of America's education system and saw an urgent need for bipartisan collaboration to improve students' performance.

The obstacles to politicians working together were especially clear during the Obama era, when many governors were dismayed to see a push to create national K–12 standards, known as the Common Core, collapse largely due to partisan rhetoric. Eventually, nearly all states adopted some form of the uniform goals for mastery by each grade level, but these efforts generally had to be rebranded as state blueprints to win local approval.

The Hunt–Kean Leadership Fellows program, established after the Common Core controversy, aims to help leaders dive into education debates with data, polite discourse, and open minds.

"Our commitment to you is to offer multiple perspectives," said Siddiqi. "At times, you're going to feel affirmed in your thinking; at times, you'll feel stressed."

When fellows arrive for the first meeting, they often don't know who comes from which party. Name tags don't mention political affiliation, but their leanings become clear through their discussions. Evaluations after the December conference showed fellows' enthusiasm for the networking opportunities and panels, though some wanted more time for questions and answers. Noting that political leaders tend to monologue, one requested "time limits for all who hold the microphone."

Baesler, North Dakota's state school superintendent, says participants approached issues from different perspectives but often shared common goals, such as a desire for proven academic progress. In her view, Democrats often value state tests for equity purposes, to show when disadvantaged children are getting left behind and need better services, while Republicans tend to promote annual testing to show whether schools are using taxpayers' money wisely to create a skilled workforce and robust economy.

"You get to that common point of agreeing on the value of testing," Baesler said, "and then you can get to the deeper conversation about the specificity of tools, or their frequency, or who's really being held accountable."

Ruiz, majority leader of New Jersey's senate, said she has nominated other legislators to join the program because it is helpful to have colleagues who aren't on the education committee delve deeper into discussions about the nitty-gritty. "It's wonderful to bring in other people from different avenues," she said.

Ruiz remains committed to collaboration in New Jersey. Just last August, a bill she sponsored to establish a student literacy working group was signed into law with bipartisan support. It's progress that she knows will require work to uphold.

"Too often," she added, "politics is the best enemy of good policy." ■

Leslie Brody, a freelance writer and former newspaper reporter, spent more than a decade on the education beat, most recently at *The Wall Street Journal*.



CREDIT: ANNIE GUGLIOTTA / GZERO MEDIA

WELCOME TO A WORLD DEFINED BY POLARIZATION, INSTABILITY, AND DISRUPTION

Eurasia Group's Ian Bremmer analyzes a new era when no country is both willing and able to drive a global agenda and maintain international order

By **Ian Bremmer**

If we encountered our planet as an alien species today, what would we see?

An extraterrestrial visitor would no doubt be awed by the remarkable speed and scale of human progress in recent decades. Today, more than half of the world's population belongs to the global middle class, and over 100 million people continue to be lifted from poverty every year. Two-thirds of humanity can now go online, up from just 16 percent 20 years ago. International air travel keeps getting cheaper, allowing more people to work in and travel to more places. Global trade continues to grow despite facing all sorts of backlash, and new technologies like artificial intelligence will create unprecedented opportunities to connect the world in ways we can't even begin to imagine.

But take a closer look, and we've got big problems.

The United States and China, the two most powerful countries in the world by a wide margin, assertively reject responsibility for the rest of the planet. They cast an eye at enemies first and foremost within their own borders and worry increasingly about threats to their stability. Both are informed by political and economic value systems focused on the short term, despite the increasingly obvious reality that they're not working for most of their people — especially their increasingly disillusioned youth.

A "community of nations" is today the stuff of fairy tales, with governance that isn't meeting the needs of citizens. Our challenges — from climate change and pandemics to technological disruption and security threats — are increasingly global. They demand far stronger international cooperation than is thought desirable or would be feasible with the institutions that exist today. And the political actors most essential to strengthening global institutions are moving in the opposite direction.

We are heading back to the law of the jungle — where the strong do what they can and the weak suffer what they must. This is the G-Zero world I've been writing about for over a decade now: an era when no one power or group of powers is both willing and able to drive a global agenda and maintain international order.

This leadership deficit will reach critical mass in 2025, creating a recipe for endemic geopolitical instability. The risk of a generational world crisis, even a new global war, is higher than at any point in most of our lifetimes.

The central problem facing the global order is that core international institutions — the United Nations Security Council, the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and so on — no longer reflect the underlying balance of global power. This is a geopolitical recession, a "bust cycle" in international relations that can be traced back to three fundamental causes, in ascending order of importance.

First, the West failed to integrate Russia into the U.S.-led global order after the Soviet Union's collapse, breeding deep resentment and antagonism. We can argue about who's to blame, but the consequences are undeniable: Now a former great power in severe decline, Russia has transformed from a potential partner into the world's most dangerous rogue state, bent on destabilizing the U.S.-led order and forging military-strategic partnerships with other chaos actors like North Korea and Iran.

Second, China was brought into the international order — crucially as a member of the World Trade Organization — on the presumption that global economic integration would encourage its leaders to liberalize their political system and become responsible global stakeholders as defined by the West. Instead, China grew far more powerful but no more democratic or supportive of the rule of law. Deepening tensions, and even confrontation, between China and the West, are the result.

Third, and perhaps most consequentially, tens of millions of citizens in advanced democracies concluded that the globalist values their leaders and elites had been promoting no longer worked in their favor. Rising inequality, demographic shifts, and technological disruption have eroded trust in democratic institutions and reduced these nations' capacity for global leadership. Nowhere has this been more consequential than in the still-indispensable nation, the United States, where President Donald Trump has both fed and profited from this antiglobalist, antiestablishment surge.

There are three ways out of a geopolitical recession: reform existing institutions, build new ones better aligned with current power realities, or destroy the old system and impose new rules through force. While all three are happening to some extent, in 2025 the focus is on the third.

The United States is still the only nation powerful enough to lead — in fact, it's in many ways more powerful than ever, at least compared to its allies and adversaries. But it is no longer willing to serve as world sheriff, architect of free trade, and promoter of common values. President Trump's second term will definitively consolidate America's retreat from global leadership. But Trump himself is a vessel and a symptom, rather than the cause, of the absence of U.S. leadership. Most concerning — and most structural — is the United States' war against itself. A nation not at all in decline economically, militarily, or technologically nonetheless faces severe political polarization and dysfunction.

Most Americans agree that there are forces inside the United States intent on destroying democracy — they just disagree on the nature and identity of those forces. Nearly half of the country sees Trump's authoritarian rhetoric and contempt for the rule of law as existential threats to the republic. But the president won the election on the back of



From left to right: David Sanger, White House and national security correspondent for *The New York Times*; Ian Bremmer, president and founder of Eurasia Group and GZERO Media; and Brad Smith, vice chair and president of Microsoft at the Munich Security Conference in February 2025. CREDIT: GZERO MEDIA.

the belief that Democrats, "deep state" bureaucrats, and mainstream media had already subverted democracy by persecuting Trump, lying to the public, committing large-scale voter fraud, and enabling widespread lawlessness and illegal immigration.

The information environment is particularly troubling. Americans don't listen to the same news or read the same headlines, don't agree on the basic terms of debate, and increasingly don't engage with each other at all. A deeply polarized and increasingly nonfunctional information ecosystem delivers diametrically opposed visions of the country and the world to partisan voters entirely incurious about what is and isn't true. The difference between the worldviews of the two roughly equivalent political sides in the United States has only grown as a consequence, making disagreement between Democrats and Republicans greater than the country has seen before.

Powerful interests have always controlled mass media, but algorithms coupled with unregulated social media platforms subject to top-down manipulation and control are making it increasingly hard to discern fact from fiction. Of course, the unprecedented increase in misinformation would not be as significant if there wasn't a growing appetite for it among citizens whose trust in nearly all civic institutions has sunk to record lows.

When our leaders actively subvert the truth for political gain, they subjectivize our very reality. The advent of generative AI further fuels this trend, making it possible to create plausible evidence for any storyline and create uncertainty about what's real. This "choose-your-own-reality" approach to information undermines the very foundations of democratic discourse. If everything from elections to disaster relief can generate a conspiracy theory, the other side can always be wrong. More importantly, you can always be right. Democracy can't work if we aren't even able to be wrong sometimes.

People of all political persuasions increasingly believe their democracy is broken. They are right. More worryingly, many now see the only possible solutions as outside the political system. Americans have been primed to view their fellow countrymen on opposite sides of the political spectrum as "enemies of the people," and a growing number see violence as legitimate. To be clear, the United States is not on the precipice of civil war. But much of the country feels like it is. The U.S. is accordingly set to experience dramatically more political division, dysfunction, and even violence in coming years.

Insofar as Americans can't agree on fundamental values or credibly and consistently commit to any policies, this political dysfunction will matter much more for the rest of the world than for the U.S. itself. A house divided may be able to stand for a long while, but it cannot be counted on to uphold global security, free trade, and the rule of law.

This needn't be catastrophic if other countries were able and willing to fill the leadership void. But America's traditional allies face unprecedented political weakness. Canada's government has just collapsed. So has Germany's, where populist parties are likely to make gains in the upcoming federal elections. France is in the throes of a protracted political crisis. The United Kingdom is led by an unpopular new government still finding its feet. Japan's ruling party has lost its majority, with new Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba unlikely to last long. South Korea's political system is in disarray. Rather than stepping into the breach, these nations are focused on playing geopolitical defense — keeping their heads down and hoping to avoid becoming targets of disruption.

Most concerning – and most structural – is the United States' war against itself. A nation not at all in decline economically, militarily, or technologically nonetheless faces severe political polarization and dysfunction.

Meanwhile, the Global South, despite growing economic heft, lacks both the cohesion and capability to lead. India, the strongest and most plausible global leader among developing nations, remains a lower-income country, focused on building bridges mainly in support of its national interests. Gulf states like Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, despite their growing ambitions, lack the standing to drive global reforms.

For its part, China — the second most powerful country on Earth and only contender to fill America's shoes — couldn't replace the role of the United States if it wanted to. Not only does it lack the legitimacy and "soft power" needed to attract a stable following, but its ongoing economic woes, combined with President Xi Jinping's prioritization of national security and political control, leave Beijing too preoccupied with domestic challenges.

In short, with no one willing and able to lead global reform and renewal efforts, what's left is ever greater geopolitical instability, disruption, and conflict. Power vacuums will expand, global governance will languish, and rogue actors will proliferate. The world will grow more divided and more combustible. The most vulnerable will pay the biggest price. Without effective global leadership, these crises will feed on each other and become harder to solve.

We're entering a uniquely dangerous period of world history on par with the 1930s and the early Cold War. This doesn't mean we're headed toward World War III or even a U.S.-China cold war, though both scenarios become more likely in a G-Zero world. The more immediate danger is the unraveling of the world's security and economic architecture leaving many spaces — both countries and crucial domains like cyberspace, outer space, and the deep seas — ungoverned and undergoverned, wide open for rogue actors to increasingly operate with impunity.

Nature abhors a vacuum.

These challenges are profound.

But I would still rather be alive now than at any other time — and not only because I was incredibly fortunate in the geopolitical lottery draw. I've never been so excited by the opportunities afforded by new technologies, especially the human capital and industrial breakthroughs that AI is about to unleash. And while that means even more concentration of wealth in the hands of an extremely privileged and unaccountable group, this new globalization also has the potential to extend prosperity to millions (and soon billions) of people who otherwise would have no such access.

Technological innovation, economic growth, and human progress are happening daily – but they're happening despite, not because of, the politics. The question is how much damage the politics will do. And the answer increasingly appears to be "a great deal." All we can do is try to bring more understanding to our political divisions and do more to work against them. ■

Ian Bremmer is president and founder of Eurasia Group, a leading global research and advisory firm, and GZERO Media, a digital media company providing news coverage of international affairs. Eurasia Group and GZERO Media are Carnegie Corporation of New York grantees. This article is an adaptation of "What Happens When No One's in Charge," first published by GZERO Media in January 2025. Printed with permission.

HOW POLARIZED ARE WE?

It depends on where you look. A series of surveys finds that local government is far less affected by division than at the national level — even after the 2024 presidential election

Political polarization has become a defining feature of national politics in America and, more recently, of state politics. Widespread claims by academics, journalists, and politicians about the divisions and dysfunctions in American society suggest that political polarization has affected government at every level. Has it?

Two new national surveys, conducted from August to October 2024 and January to March 2025 by the nonprofit research organization CivicPulse and commissioned by Carnegie Corporation of New York, reveal a different story about local government. The series of surveys, *Polarization in America: Survey of Local Government*, shows that local government is navigating divisive challenges more successfully than their state or federal counterparts. They are also better able to address and reduce its most harmful effects.

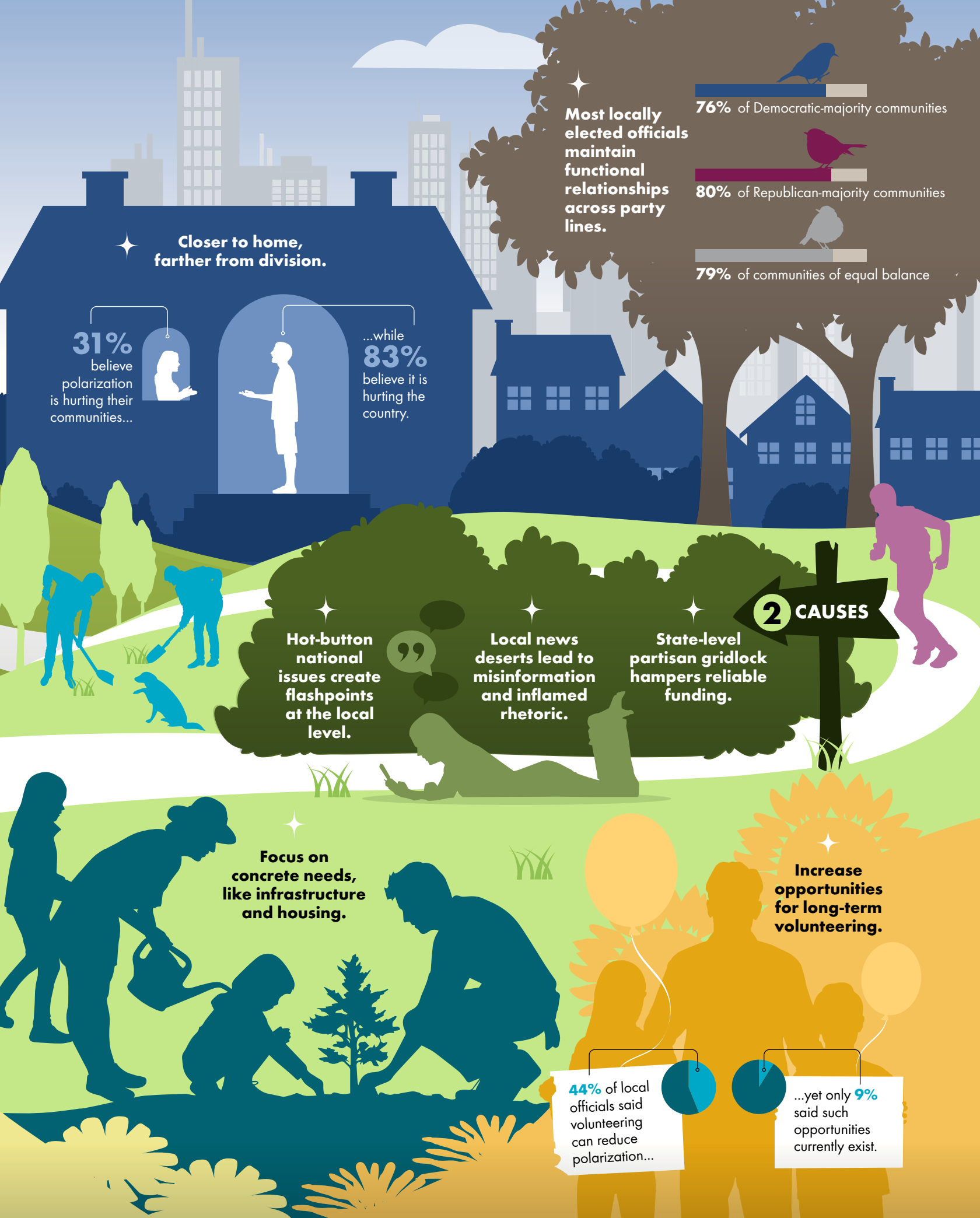
Political events have less immediate impact on perceptions of polarization in local communities, according to the most recent survey. Before and after the 2024 election, views on polarization remained mostly unchanged: both surveys saw 31 percent of local government leaders see polarization as negatively affecting their communities while most (87 percent and 83 percent, respectively) saw it as negatively affecting the country.

The surveys, which aim to understand the impact of polarization, identify solutions, and strengthen communities, involved more than 1,400 locally elected officials in local government, including members of city councils, county commissions, and school boards. Here is what they are saying about polarization in America. ■

Download the surveys and sign up for updates.



GRAPHIC BY MSJONESNYC


Most locally elected officials maintain functional relationships across party lines.
76% of Democratic-majority communities
80% of Republican-majority communities
79% of communities of equal balance
Closer to home, farther from division.
31% believe polarization is hurting their communities...
...while 83% believe it is hurting the country.
2 CAUSES
Hot-button national issues create flashpoints at the local level.
Local news deserts lead to misinformation and inflamed rhetoric.
State-level partisan gridlock hampers reliable funding.
Focus on concrete needs, like infrastructure and housing.
Increase opportunities for long-term volunteering.
44% of local officials said volunteering can reduce polarization...
...yet only 9% said such opportunities currently exist.



The Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh is one of nearly 1,700 that Andrew Carnegie funded in the United States.

Carnegie Libraries hold a special place in American history and in the hearts of generations of Americans. Building them was the mission of Scottish immigrant, American steel magnate, and philanthropist Andrew Carnegie (1835–1919). Our foundation, which Carnegie established in 1911, published a definitive study of the library program in 1963, and today, that historical data is available through an interactive map that captures Andrew Carnegie's unprecedented philanthropic achievement, which brought hundreds of libraries to American communities across the country.

CARNEGIE LIBRARIES ACROSS AMERICA

FIND A CARNEGIE LIBRARY NEAR YOU

Starting in 1881 with a gift of a library to his birthplace of Dunfermline, Scotland, Andrew Carnegie — and later our foundation, which he established in 1911 — gave some $56 million to build 2,509 public libraries. Of these Carnegie Libraries, 1,681 were built in the United States. The rest were located in other parts of the English-speaking world, ranging from Great Britain to New Zealand, and from South Africa to the West Indies. In addition to gifts for public libraries, Carnegie funded 108 library buildings on college campuses in the United States, which are also included in the mapping project. Find out if there is a Carnegie Library near you by visiting carnegie-libraries.com.

The primary source for the mapping project, *Library Program 1911–1961*, was a study written by Florence Anderson, the then-secretary of Carnegie Corporation of New York, and was published by the foundation in 1963. The study uses primary sources and archival records to compile facts and figures on all Carnegie grants for library purposes during the foundation's first 50 years.

Some of the original library buildings no longer exist or have been repurposed in various ways. We'd love to know more about the current use of the Carnegie Library in your neighborhood.

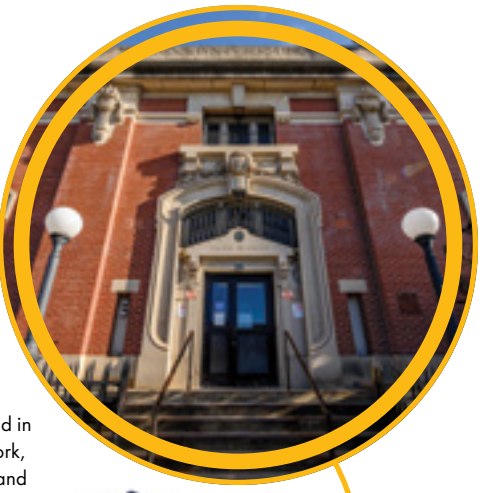
Send us your photos and stories by using the QR code or visiting carnegie-libraries.com.



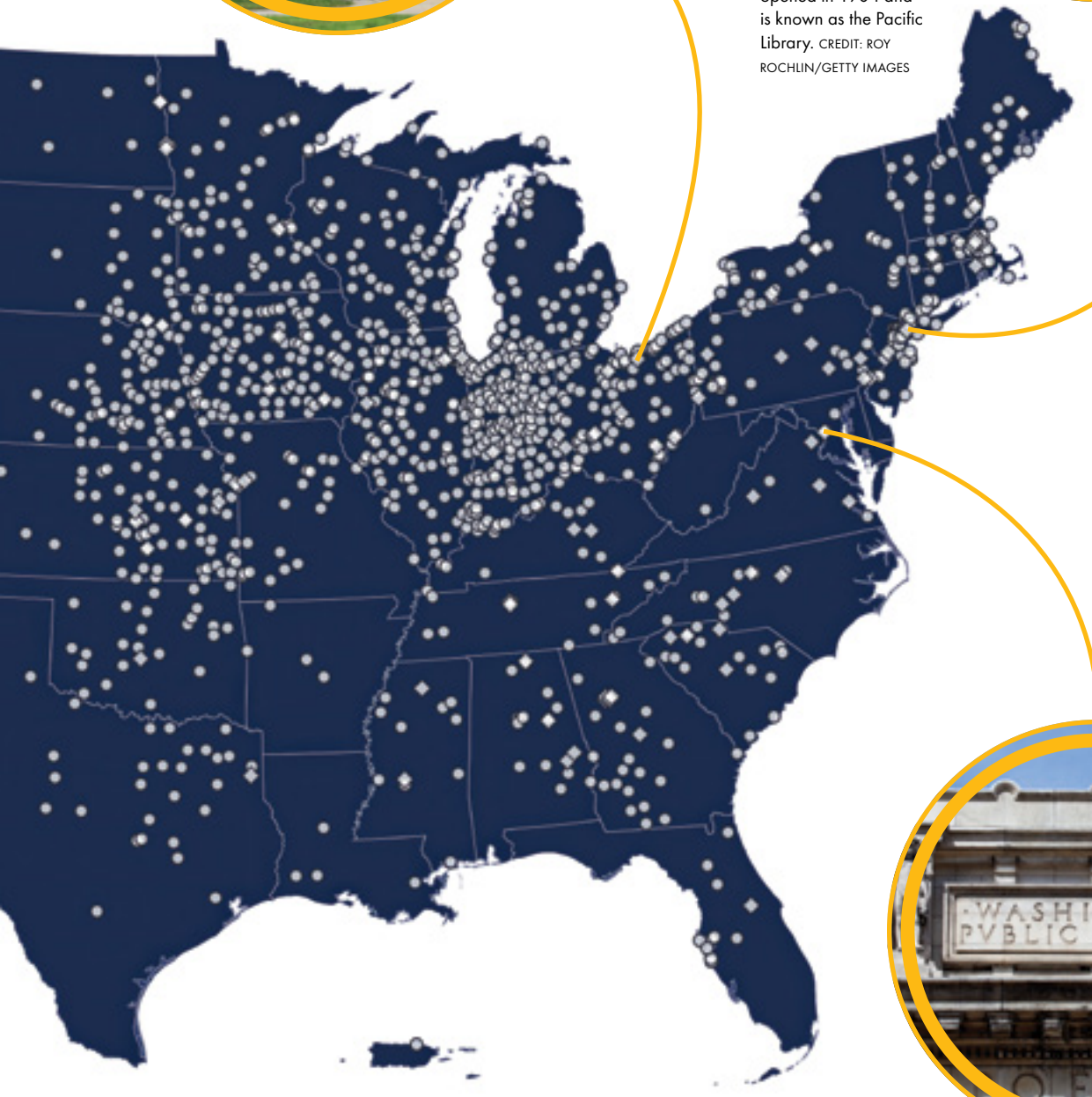
In 1903 Carnegie provided $10,000 to fund the construction of the San Luis Obispo Carnegie Library in California. Granite and sandstone from local quarries add to the architectural features.
CREDIT: NNEHRING/GETTY IMAGES



Carnegie funded 108 libraries on college campuses, including Oberlin College's main library in Ohio, which is now home to classrooms, labs, and offices. CREDIT: DOUGLAS SACHA/GETTY IMAGES



The first Carnegie Library constructed in Brooklyn, New York, opened in 1904 and is known as the Pacific Library. CREDIT: ROY ROCHLIN/GETTY IMAGES



Andrew Carnegie attended the opening of Washington D.C.'s Central Public Library in 1903. The Beaux-Arts style building was later acquired and restored by Apple and opened as the Apple Carnegie Library store in 2019. CREDIT: CAROL M. HIGHSMITH/BUYENLARGE/GETTY IMAGES



ANDREW CARNEGIE: A LIBRARY TIMELINE

Philanthropist and immigrant Andrew Carnegie changed the library landscape in America and provided a vision for philanthropic support that endures today. Here are some highlights.



Sixteen-year-old Andrew Carnegie (right) with his younger brother, Thomas.

1848 | Andrew Carnegie's Dream of Lending Books to Others

Andrew Carnegie and his family immigrated from Scotland to Allegheny (now Pittsburgh), Pennsylvania, in 1848, when he was 12 years old. Carnegie often recalled the **life-changing experience of having access**, as a working boy, 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?"



Braddock Carnegie Library, located in the town where Carnegie's steel mill operated, was the first Carnegie Library to open in 1889.

1886 | America's First Carnegie Library

In 1886 Andrew Carnegie wrote to officials of Allegheny, Pennsylvania, proposing a $250,000 gift **to build a free public library** in the city where he and his family had immigrated, on the condition that it would be maintained by the city. After some hesitation, the city accepted, and the library opened in 1890 with a national dedication event that included remarks by President Benjamin Harrison.

While Allegheny was the first Carnegie Library to receive a gift, the Braddock Carnegie Library, located in the town where Carnegie's steel mill operated, was the first to open in 1889. Carnegie, and later his foundation, contributed more than $40 million to erect 1,681 public library buildings in 1,412 communities in the United States. "The taste for reading is one of the most precious possessions of life," said Carnegie. "I should much rather be instrumental in bringing to the working man or woman this taste than mere dollars. It is better than a fortune."



A librarian at Page School in Arlington, Virginia, shows children a Japanese book from the Caro Lane Collection, circa 1940. CREDIT: FPG/HULTON ARCHIVE/GETTY IMAGES

1926 | Strengthening the Library Profession

In 1926 Carnegie Corporation of New York gave $2,000,000 to endow the American Library Association, which Andrew Carnegie previously had endowed with a $100,000 gift in 1902. The 1926 grant was part of a $5 million, 10-year program that aimed to strengthen the

library profession by supporting the activities of the association and by improving training opportunities.

The program also included endowment funds for existing library schools and the establishment of the first school for graduate training in librarianship — the University of Chicago Graduate Library School, which launched in 1926 with $1,385,000 in Carnegie grants and offered the nation's first doctorate in library science. Another major focus of the program comprised grants to colleges and universities for the development of their libraries, chiefly through the purchase of books.



Researchers at work in the Division of Negro Literature, History and Prints at the 135th Street library in 1938. CREDIT: THE NEW YORK PUBLIC LIBRARY, SCHOMBURG CENTER FOR RESEARCH IN BLACK CULTURE, PHOTOGRAPHS AND PRINTS DIVISION

1926 | A Library Collection Dedicated to Black Life

In 1926 Carnegie Corporation of New York funded the New York Public Library's acquisition of **a foundational archive of works on Black life, history, and culture**. Spanning more than 10,000 rare manuscripts and books by Black authors, the collection had been amassed over decades by Black bibliophile Arturo Alfonso Schomburg, who wanted to make it accessible to the public. Today, the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture has grown to more than 11 million items and is a world-leading research institution dedicated to the history and knowledge of people of African descent worldwide.



A $10 million Carnegie investment in South Africa's library system in 2004 established model public libraries like Cape Town's Central Public Library. CREDIT: CENTRAL LIBRARY, CAPE TOWN

2004 | Revitalizing African Libraries

Beginning in 2004 Carnegie Corporation of New York invested more than $10 million to revitalize South Africa's public library system and to strengthen libraries in selected universities in Uganda, Tanzania, Ghana, and Nigeria. As a result, model public libraries have been created in the South African cities of Cape Town, Johannesburg, Pietermaritzburg, and Pretoria. Government investment increased and services for patrons expanded significantly in these cities, while university libraries also upgraded their technology with Carnegie support. These major investments were a continuation of Andrew Carnegie's funding of public library buildings in South Africa since 1911.



On the day of its announcement of a $4 million grant to New York City libraries, Carnegie Corporation of New York president Dame Louise Richardson welcomed (from left to right) Queens Public Library president and CEO Dennis M. Walcott, Brooklyn Public Library president and CEO Linda E. Johnson, and New York Public Library president and CEO Anthony W. Marx to her office at Carnegie headquarters in Manhattan. CREDIT: JACK DURAN/CARNEGIE CORPORATION OF NEW YORK

2024 | Carnegie Renews Its Commitment to Libraries

In 2024 Dame Louise Richardson, president of Carnegie Corporation of New York, announced renewed support for libraries and their essential role in communities. A $4 million grant to the New York, Queens, and Brooklyn public library systems expanded adult language and workforce development services as well as teen civics and college access programs. The foundation also made a $500,000 grant to the Library of Congress to reimagine public engagement with historical materials and announced a $5 million grant initiative to support public libraries nationwide seeking to deliver services to underresourced communities. The grants aim to strengthen the role of libraries as trusted community institutions as part of the foundation's broader commitment to reducing political polarization.

A CARNEGIE LIBRARY ROAD TRIP

Journalist Mark McDonald has traveled to more than 150 Carnegie Libraries in the United States. What he saw and learned, he says, made him proud to be an American

Words and photographs by **Mark McDonald**









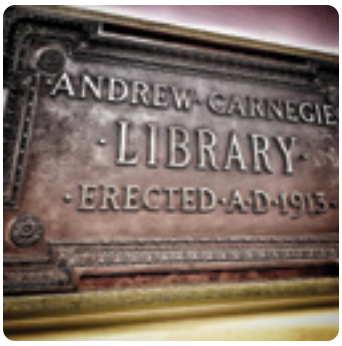






Andrew Carnegie's portrait still hangs in many of the nearly 1,700 libraries he funded in the United States. Since 2021, journalist Mark McDonald has visited more than 150 Carnegie Libraries across the country, documenting them through photographs and stories.
CREDIT: MARK MCDONALD









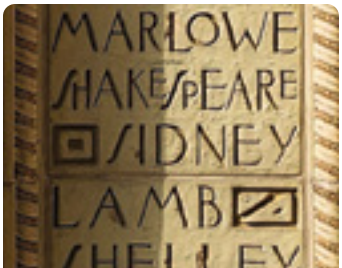












For 25 years, Mark McDonald lived overseas as a foreign correspondent, covering the Afghanistan and Iraq wars for *The New York Times* and other publications. When he returned to the United States to teach journalism at the University of Michigan, he was "pretty confused about how I felt about the country," he says.

Serendipitously, the university gave McDonald an office in an old Carnegie Library that the university had bought and turned into classrooms. A self-described "history nut," in 2021 McDonald began breaking up his semiannual drives between Michigan and his home in New Mexico with what became a "nerdy hobby": visiting more than 150 Carnegie Libraries in big cities and small towns throughout the Midwest and beyond. For McDonald, the libraries symbolized a story about America's defining optimism. "I figured out that the library was one of the important buildings for a young, ambitious, aspiring town," he says. "People were hungry for learning. These little towns saw a library as a stake in the ground: 'we're here to stay. We're in it for the long run, for our children and grandchildren.' And that really got to me." At each location, McDonald chatted with librarians and locals, uncovering hidden stories. "There was somebody notable and breathtaking who came out of every little town," he says. "These libraries kick-started a golden century for America."

McDonald submitted his Carnegie Libraries photos and essays as part of the Carnegie Libraries mapping project, which allows people to search for the nearly 1,700 Carnegie Libraries that Andrew Carnegie and his foundation funded in the United States. McDonald also shares the stories on Facebook, where his posts have attracted loyal followers, among them fellow retired correspondent Michael Goldfarb, who has called McDonald's Carnegie Library posts "the most pleasurable postcards I get to read." In the following pages, *Carnegie Reporter* presents a selection of his photos and essays, which have been excerpted and edited for length and clarity.

– Wilfred Chan, Senior Content Editor and Writer

Avondale, Ohio

The shelves were lined with books, the windows had been polished, and a chandelier was about to be hung over the circulation desk. Winter was almost over, that first week of March 1913, and Cincinnati was set to open a new library in the Avondale neighborhood.

A gift from the steel baron Andrew Carnegie — one of nine branches he endowed in Cincinnati — the unusual Spanish Colonial design has aged beautifully. The Carnegie still has plenty of its original millwork inside, plus tapioca-colored brick, deeply coffered ceilings, and a soaring 30-foot rotunda that could accommodate a SpaceX rocket. But the real showstopper is the Rookwood pottery on either side of the front doors. Fluted columns, wedding-cake swirls of terracotta, vertical panels inscribed with the names of long-ago writers — it makes for a kind of American cuneiform, all done in a warm, egg-noggy color.

There are fewer people in the neighborhood now — barely 11,000 — than when the Carnegie was first built. But the library abides: a homework helper on site every day, hot meals for youngsters after school, story hours, DVDs and graphic novels, a telescope you can check out — anything to draw the kids inside. It's heroic work, unsung and patriotic.



The names of famous writers are inscribed in the columns flanking the entryway to the Carnegie Library in Avondale, Ohio.

Clarksdale, Mississippi

You can see it in the archives — a 1919 entry written with a fountain pen — how his grandmother brought him to the library here in Clarksdale, Mississippi — they would walk over from the Episcopal rectory where they lived. Thomas Lanier Williams was in primary school then and staying with his grandparents — still 20 years away from changing his first name to 'Tennessee' — and you can imagine him at one of the oak tables in the Carnegie Library, working his way through *Robinson Crusoe* and Huck Finn — a frail, wheezing, lonely little kid — his stern, shoe-salesman father called him Miss Nancy — and out of all that he became America's greatest playwright.

Another of our great writers, Richard Ford, wrote his best novel here, right here, in the main floor reading room of the Carnegie Library. *The Sportswriter* is set in New Jersey, but Ford, who was born over in Jackson, said he chose Clarksdale on purpose: "The Carnegie Library [there] is a refuge. They offered me a haven. I want to be remembered in a place where people go read books. Literature can be a way for society to address what it doesn't want to address."



As a boy, playwright Tennessee Williams visited the Carnegie Library in Clarksdale, Mississippi. Richard Ford wrote the novel *The Sportswriter* in the reading room.

McCook, Nebraska

The little Burlington Railroad town of McCook, Nebraska, is just a hundred miles or so from the exact center of the country — the Lower 48, that is — and it doesn't get much more "heartland" than McCook.

In 1905 the town asked Andrew Carnegie for a grant to build a library, and the steel baron came through with $9,500. An architect from Denver delivered a striking Spanish Colonial Revival design but when the budget grew to $11,000, Carnegie had to kick in the extra money to get the place finished in 1908. Very unusual for Mr. C to pay for cost overruns. He also did not approve of the city using the library as its polling place, police court, council chambers, and the office where you paid your water bill. He had paid for a library — and only a library. He sent an angry letter to the council saying this sort of mission creep was "a breach of faith." That was enough to set things right.

The library was a tiny beauty, so tiny, alas, that McCook eventually outgrew it. They built a god-awful, vaguely modernist carbuncle in 1969, and the old Carnegie became part of the High Plains Museum. It's spectacular inside, with vaulted timbered ceilings, plenty of the original oak furniture and shelves, and nostalgic artifacts from McCook High School. Carnegie's portrait hangs over a splendid brick fireplace in the old reading room.



The Carnegie Library in McCook, Nebraska, still retains its vaulted timbered ceilings and original oak furniture and shelves.


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CABANNE · BRANCH



A Beaux-Arts masterpiece, the Cabanne branch Carnegie Library in St. Louis, Missouri, features Indiana limestone, terracotta carvings, pressed brick, tile mosaics, granite, mahogany, and marble.

St. Louis, Missouri

One of Carnegie's first big gifts was a million-dollar grant to St. Louis for a main library and six branches. The main library downtown is monumental, majestic, and worthy of the Medicis. The Cabanne branch on Union Boulevard opened in 1907 and it's a Beaux-Arts masterpiece, too. They just don't make 'em like this anymore — Indiana limestone, terracotta carvings, pressed brick, tile mosaics, granite, mahogany, marble. Every inch of the exterior seems decorated; it's almost too much to take in. The interior is great, too, despite a horrifying dropped ceiling that obscures what must be a Vatican-grade rotunda in the vestibule. Cabanne is one of the very few Carnegie Libraries in America with four fireplaces.

Soldan High, a Gothic brick Matterhorn of a school, opened just two years after the library, and Soldan kids have been regulars at the Carnegie ever since. Among the Soldan alums who used the library: the writer A.E. Hotchner, who was Ernest Hemingway's best friend and a cofounder with Paul Newman of the Newman's Own brand; the R&B singer Fontella Bass, who had the hit song "Rescue Me"; a former managing editor of *The New York Times*, Gerald Boyd; the former Secretary of Defense Clark Clifford; and William Martin, the longest-serving chairman of the Federal Reserve.



The Carnegie Library in Elizabeth, New Jersey, was designed by the same architect behind the immigration hall at Ellis Island.

Elizabeth, New Jersey

The early "library" here was actually a selection of books rather than a fixed building, and the collection was kept at various times at the Nags Head and other taverns, a tobacco store, a hotel, a laundry, and the post office. A women's club agreed to keep the collection at one point, but only after all the novels had been removed. Fiction, they ruled, was too frivolous.

Finally, in 1910, the steel magnate Andrew Carnegie offered the city a $75,000 grant for a permanent home for the library, plus another 50-grand for two branch libraries. The Carnegie in Elizabeth was designed by Edward Lippincott Tilton, a classical scholar who was the architect of the immigration hall at Ellis Island. The library has some wonderful bones — original metal-frame stacks, vaulted ceilings, a marble interior staircase — and one report from the 1912 dedication ceremony said it was "reminiscent of an Italian palazzo."

Libraries aren't just libraries anymore, whether they're urban, suburban, or rural, and during my visit to Elizabeth, there were regular PA announcements alerting patrons to free services at the library — citizenship, literacy, and ESL classes; SNAP and Medicaid enrollment; help with ID cards for French-speaking immigrants from Haiti; sign-ups for GED tutorials; and a reminder of free showers at a church around the corner.

There was somebody notable and breathtaking who came out of every little town. These libraries kick-started a golden century for America.

– Mark McDonald

New Haven, Connecticut

New Haven, Connecticut, dedicated a new library in December 1916, in the blue-collar neighborhood of Fair Haven. Andrew Carnegie had given the city $60,000 to build three branch libraries, and Fair Haven was the first to open. The library sits across the Mill River from Yale University, in an area once called Clamtown because of its long history of fishing and oystering.

The Fair Haven Carnegie is very much a working library, and it's bright and busy inside, although not much to look at from the street. Carnegie Library grants after 1910 were largely controlled by the steel tycoon's private secretary, James Bertram, and he cast a cold, implacable eye on every new application. He rejected the florid, highly ornamented architecture seen in the Carnegie Libraries of earlier years, and his letters to municipal grantees were often scolding and abrupt. He told them to forget about the marble stairs and copper domes they wanted. He railed against friezes, frescoes, and fireplaces.

"We're a transactional library," one staffer told me. English is not the first language in 48 percent of area homes, so the library offers bilingual story times, books in Spanish for adults and kids, fax and copy machines, test prep manuals, giveaways of herb and vegetable seeds, plus a city social worker comes in one day a week.



After 1910, Carnegie Library grants were largely maintained by Andrew Carnegie's secretary, James Bertram, who often rejected the florid, ornamental architecture of earlier libraries.

Savannah, Georgia

Twelve of Andrew Carnegie's libraries were intended solely for African Americans, and 11 of those were in the South, including the one across from Dixon Park here on East Henry Street.

Carnegie had given Savannah $75,000 in 1910 for a whites-only library on Bull Street downtown. It's a white whale of a neoclassical building — built mostly of Georgia marble — with a towering entrance porch, parapets above, gardens below, and a couple of massive Ionic columns. The Carnegie Colored Library, meanwhile, got a grant of just $12,000, which meant small, which meant brick, which meant no columns. The handsome Prairie-style building opened in 1915.

The roof and the floors started giving way in the 1990s, and the library was closed and vacant for seven years until a $1.3 million renovation got it going again in 2004. James Alan McPherson, the first Black author to win the Pulitzer Prize for fiction, grew up here — as did Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas five years after him. They were regulars at the Carnegie Colored Library. Growing up, as boys becoming men, McPherson and Thomas just needed a little elbow room, and that's precisely what the Carnegie gave them. McPherson called their library "a lifesaver."



Celebrated novelist James Alan McPherson and Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas both grew up frequenting the Carnegie Library in Savannah, Georgia, one of 12 originally intended solely for African Americans.



The quarter-sawn tiger oak circulation desk takes center stage at the Carnegie Library in Shenandoah, Iowa.

Shenandoah, Iowa

The boys were barely out of kindergarten when they began singing together, live, every morning, on a 6 a.m. radio show in Shenandoah, Iowa — billed as "Little Donnie and Baby Boy Phil." After the show they'd go to school, and after school they'd walk together to the Carnegie Library on Elm Street to do their homework. The Everly Brothers were in high school when they moved from Shenandoah to Nashville, and in 1957 their first record made the pop, country, and R&B charts — "Bye Bye Love."

As it was with the Everlys, walking to the Carnegie Library here after school was the drill for Jay Scheib, a third-generation farm kid from Shenandoah. "I'd check out a lot, a lot, a lot of books," Scheib, now a playwright, a director of stage plays, ballets, and operas, and a professor of music and theater at MIT, told me. "I mostly read about kids like me, kids growing up on the Plains. *Little House*, *Nancy Drew*, the *Great Brain* books. That library was such a great place for me."

The Carnegie Library here is no palazzo, but the original circulation desk still has pride of place, front and center, just like opening day in 1905. It has been tricked up a little, yes, and it's maybe carrying a little too much varnish, but the quarter-sawn tiger oak is still burning bright.

Palestine, Texas

The Carnegie Library out here in the piney woods of East Texas is something special among the nearly 1,700 public libraries that Andrew Carnegie built in the United States. It was vacated, mothballed, and left for dead — then was renovated and reborn as a working library.

When Palestine outgrew its Carnegie several decades ago, the whole collection was moved to an unused school on Cedar Street — until 2009 when the roof caved in. Further relocations to an empty storefront and an old mall were a bust — the whole collection, truth be told, was homeless. The forsaken Carnegie, meanwhile, had a string of tenants like the Daughters of the American Revolution and a railroad museum.

But then Palestine made the bold decision to restore and retrofit its Carnegie rather than knock it down and build a new one in its place. The supervising architect made sure the good stuff was preserved in the renovation — the 20-foot-high stamped-tin ceilings, the lath-and-plaster walls, the original millwork, and the pine floors that have just the right amount of give and creak. Mr. Carnegie agreed to a $15,000 grant to build the library in 1912. She's small but she's fierce, and she's a beauty. ■

Mark McDonald is a former international correspondent for *The New York Times*, among other publications, and a former journalism professor at the University of Michigan. You can view more of his Carnegie Library posts on Facebook.



The East Texas library — renovated and reopened in 2023 — preserved its stamped-tin ceilings, lath-and-plaster walls, original millwork, and pine floors.

We'd love to know more about the current use of the Carnegie Library near you. Send us your photos and stories by using the QR code or visiting carnegie-libraries.com. They may be featured in forthcoming issues of *Carnegie Reporter* magazine.


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FOR THE LOVE OF LIBRARIANS

MEET THE 2025 I LOVE MY LIBRARIAN HONOREES

Carnegie Corporation of New York in partnership with the **American Library Association** and the **New York Public Library**

Learn more about the honorees by using the QR code or visiting fortheloveoflibrarians.org.

Bringing books and joy to displaced families in Hawaii. Providing health access in underserved communities in Ohio. Creating hope for incarcerated youth in Delaware. This is the work of America's most beloved librarians, civic heroes who are strengthening and serving communities every day.

In partnership with the American Library Association and the New York Public Library, Carnegie Corporation of New York celebrates 10 exceptional librarians every year with the I Love My Librarian Award. The 2025 honorees were chosen from a pool of more than 1,300 community-based nominations and were each awarded a $5,000 prize in recognition of their exceptional public service.

PHOTO CREDIT: THOMAS INGERSOLL



Analine Johnson helps young readers overcome obstacles.

At the United Independent School District in Laredo, Texas, Analine Johnson has spent more than two decades helping students facing poverty, language barriers, and other obstacles. She raised more than $20,000 to help low-income students purchase their first books, created an after-school literacy program for emerging bilingual students, and spearheaded a "Lil Library Box" in a local park to keep kids reading all year round.

"Mrs. Johnson has built libraries that are more than just spaces for books — they are places where dreams are nurtured, confidence is built, and futures are shaped," a nominator wrote.

Nelson Santana shares his community's stories.

At Bronx Community College in New York, where the majority of students identify as Hispanic or Black, Nelson Santana has secured the donation of thousands of books, launched an exhibition on Dominican activism, and led a campuswide reading initiative featuring novels like Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*.

"Professor Nelson Santana represents the very best of what a modern librarian can be," wrote his nominators. "Innovative, inclusive, scholarly, and deeply committed to student success."



Missy Creed provides health access in her community.

As the consumer health librarian at the Ohio State University's Wexner Medical Center, Missy Creed works beyond the library's walls. She leads dozens of outreach events each year, delivering bilingual health materials and reaching patients, families, and underserved neighborhoods with reliable, easy-to-understand information.

"She truly enjoys and embraces any effort to get appropriate information into the community's hands," one colleague said. "She boldly goes where others might not go."



Charlotte Chung helps every student find a book.

At Suncrest Elementary School in West Virginia, Charlotte Chung is making sure every student can find a book that speaks to them — literally. She secured major grants to build a multilingual collection, giving students access to books and audiobooks in their home languages.

That's meant the world to students — like the Suncrest kindergartener who, sharing a Spanish-language audiobook with her classmates, proclaimed, "This is my book! This book is for me!"



Jamar Rahming turns library love into community love.

At the Wilmington Institute Free Library in Delaware, Jamar Rahming has transformed a once-underused library in a historically challenged city into an educational and cultural center. He has launched statewide literacy initiatives, built partnerships to support families in need, and invited visitors like LeVar Burton and Angela Davis to inspire residents.

As a Wilmington Public Library board member put it: Jamar and his staff "have helped the Wilmington Library to thrive and, in turn, helped the community to thrive."

Jessica Gleason delivers hope on four wheels.

After wildfires devastated Lahaina, Hawaii, in 2023, Jessica Gleason rolled in with the Holoholo Bookmobile, bringing books, internet access, and children's story times to families who had lost everything. In just weeks, she established regular stops at parks, schools, churches, and even the district courthouse, offering not just library services, but a sense of stability and community.

"Amid all the uncertainty, fear, and grief, Jessica has been a steadying presence and a force for positive action," a fellow librarian wrote. "And she continues to work in and with Maui's West Side community, developing connections that are helping so many heal and grow beyond their tragic losses."



Peggy Griffith creates second chances.

At the Ferris School, a secure treatment facility for court-committed teens in Wilmington, Delaware, Peggy Griffith makes the library a place for personal growth. She modernized the collection, curated books on resilience and healing, and expanded access to the statewide library network. Whenever one of her students reenters the community, she gives them a public library card and a personalized letter of encouragement.

"Peggy exemplifies how a caring librarian and access to books and literacy can provide not only knowledge, but also healing and a sense of hope," one nominator wrote.



Candice Hardy makes every student feel at home.

At Miles College, a historically Black college in Fairfield, Alabama, Candice Hardy has turned the once-quiet Learning Resources Center into a place of culture, civic engagement, and student support. She has brought in local Black artists for exhibitions, launched voter registration drives, and hosted a career-readiness closet to provide students with professional clothes — all while making the library somewhere students can be themselves.

"Ms. Hardy deeply cares about every student that walks through the door of the library," a student wrote. "She goes out of her way to make sure that everyone feels welcome. Whether it is a smile, a kind word, or simply being there to help, her presence makes it a comforting place for all."



Abby Armour is repatriating ancestral belongings.

Under Abby Armour's leadership, the Mukwonago Community Library is repatriating sacred objects from the thousands of Native American items in its Grutzmacher Collection, gifted to the library in 1965 by artifact collector Arthur Grutzmacher.

"Ms. Armour personally hand-delivered the items," said the president of the Wilton Rancheria Tribe of California. "Her utmost respect to our ancestors' belongings and to the tribe will never be forgotten. Because of this dedication, our items are home. This is what makes the Mukwonago Community Library not just a role model for Wisconsin libraries, but a role model for all libraries."



Theresa Quiner supports a remote community's needs.

At the Kuskokwim Consortium Library in Bethel, Alaska — a rural city accessible only by plane or boat — Theresa Quiner serves both the University of Alaska Fairbanks Kuskokwim campus and the region's largely Yup'ik and Cup'ik population. Whether hosting rural skills classes, inviting teens to join movie nights and gaming clubs, or supporting families experiencing homelessness, she helps the community far beyond books.

"Theresa tirelessly builds programs and partnerships that meet the real needs of Bethel — from housing and homelessness support to cooking classes and Indigenous celebrations. She makes the library a place where everyone belongs," one nominator wrote.

WHAT WOULD IT TAKE FOR POLITICIANS TO FIND COMMON GROUND?

ONE STATE HOUSE TRIES AN EXPERIMENT

More than 90 New Hampshire state legislators participate in a Braver Angels workshop to help them move from personal attacks to understanding

By **Joanne Omang**

In another era, the budget discussion of a nursing home project in Strafford, New Hampshire, might have been routine. Which construction bid was best? Which features were essential? Instead, it "descended into personal attacks," said Allan Howland, Strafford's representative in the state legislature, calling it one of "the worst" meetings he'd ever attended.

Political polarization is part of everyday life in America — even in New Hampshire, where citizens have long met with presidential hopefuls of both parties during primary season. In Strafford, in late 2023, debates over a $170 million proposal for a 215-bed nursing home exploded into shouting matches, threats, and demands for an investigation. The project collapsed the following spring.

Howland, a Democrat, spoke to a December gathering in the sun-dappled state house chamber, where he and more than 90 fellow state legislators from different parties were attending a workshop on how to avoid such debacles. Howland believed bipartisanship was the "the only way forward," but said "horrible" experiences like the nursing home fight weighed on him.

The two-hour workshop, led by a nonprofit called Braver Angels, aimed to help. The mostly volunteer-run organization was launched after the 2016 election as an experiment, gathering a small group of people — half Clinton voters, half Trump voters — in an Ohio church basement to see if they could talk with each other. Since then, Braver Angels has grown into the nation's largest grassroots organization working to bridge political divides, hosting thousands of workshops and conversations to engage people with opposing stances. The group's objective: not to change their views on issues, but to offer practical tools for patching up fractured political and personal relationships.

New Hampshire's session was part of a new Braver Angels initiative aimed at state legislatures, now expanding to other states with support from Carnegie Corporation of New York. The workshop was requested by Sherman Packard, New Hampshire's Speaker of the House and a Republican, and co-moderated by Beth Malow, a neurologist and science communicator who has worked with Braver Angels since 2017 as a trained volunteer facilitator. Standing at the House Speaker's dais, Malow reminded the lawmakers, "We're here to talk skills, not policies. We're not going to solve the polarization problem in our country today."

The first principle: "If you're going to disagree with someone, focus on connecting first." Instead of starting off with debate, Malow suggested empathy, such as: "Hey, I get that. I get why you feel that way. I understand your concern."

> We have to figure out how to listen and learn from each other to get anything done.
>
> – **New Hampshire State Rep. Hope Damon**
> (D – Sullivan County No. 8)

Co-moderator Paul Catsos asked each legislator to partner with someone from another party and share with each other, then the whole group, why they had come.

"We have to figure out how to listen and learn from each other to get anything done," said Sullivan County Rep. Hope Damon, a Democrat. "I am gravely concerned that if we don't see each other as human beings who basically all want the same things — a safe, productive, comfortable life — we will disintegrate into something very ugly."

For practice, Malow laid out two typical opposing positions on the real-world issue of crime and law enforcement. Position one: "There are some bad apples in law enforcement, but most officers are doing a good job, and it's demoralizing for them to hear that our elected officials don't support them." Position two: "Crime comes from poverty and discrimination, and it can only be solved by addressing these problems."

At Malow's direction, each legislator identified which position they disagreed with more. Then, they drafted statements to address someone holding that position, to show that they understood it.

Lebanon Rep. Tom Cormen, a Democrat, acknowledged position one: "You're concerned about increasing crime and the effect of anti-policing talk — it demoralizes law enforcement, and you hope that the community will support the police."

Allenstown Rep. Matthew Pitaro, a Republican, responded to position two: "I am happy to hear your proposal addresses multiple avenues of approach."

Malow noted that if such descriptions were inaccurate, voicing them offered the other person an opportunity to address them.

Then, she asked legislators to find new partners and search for an area of agreement, no matter how small. "If it's a policy that you can't agree with, maybe you can recognize a common value."



New Hampshire state representative Thomas Cormen (left), a Democrat, speaks to state representative Brian Nadeau (right), a Republican, at a Braver Angels event on December 19, 2024. CREDIT: PAT CALLEY / BRAVER ANGELS

"This topic is important for us to focus on and deserves our attention," said Nicholas Bridle, a Hampton Republican.

Seth Miller, a Democrat representing Dover, responded, "I think we agree that there's a large challenge around public safety, and we need to come up with a solution to address that."

Mark Pearson, a Rockingham Republican: "I agree we need to address better the issues of discrimination, poverty, and mental health." Common ground seemed to be growing.

Malow praised the group. "You guys are just nailing this." Nods and smiles increased.

Toward the end of the session, a few legislators shared their gratitude.

Eric Turer, a Democrat representing a swing district, said he had recently helped bring a Braver Angels session to his community. "The folks that I least expected to attend that event were who showed up," he said. People from opposing political camps "worked through this exercise, and left understanding each other as people. I can still see those little seeds growing in our town."

House Speaker Sherman Packard, a Republican representing Rockingham, sounded upbeat. "Let's carry forward the lessons learned today, and remember that even when we disagree, we must always strive to engage with understanding and respect," he said. The workshop, he added, "certainly opened a lot of minds as to how we can move forward over the next two years."

Douglass Teschner, Braver Angels' New England regional leader and a former New Hampshire state representative, closed out the session. "You are leaders and people are watching you," he told the group. "Maybe how you treat each other is more important than any legislation you're going to pass." ■

Joanne Omang is a former reporter, foreign correspondent, and editor for *The Washington Post*. The *Post*'s first woman foreign correspondent, she is now a freelance writer, editor, and consultant.

About **Braver Angels**: Established in 2016, and now with more than 12,000 members, Braver Angels is one of the nation's leading grassroots political depolarization organizations and a Carnegie grantee. Its newest initiative, Braver Politics, fosters opportunities for elected officials, staff members, and constituents – at the national, state, county, and local levels – to develop the skills and commitment to work together across political differences.



How to Have Better Conversations

➔ Connect First, Then Share Your View

Before jumping into disagreement, show that you understand where the other person is coming from. A simple "I get that you see it this way..." can lower defenses and open the door to real dialogue.

➔ Focus on Understanding, Not Winning

Instead of debating, aim for "accurate disagreement." That means summarizing the other person's position in a way they'd say is fair — even if you don't agree.

➔ Assume Good Intentions

It's easy to assign bad motives to people on the "other side." Try to focus on the potential consequences of their ideas, not on questioning their character.

➔ Listen for Common Ground

Even in strong disagreement, you can usually find shared values — like wanting safe neighborhoods or strong families. Name those overlaps, even if they're small.

➔ Speak for Yourself, Not Your Party

Avoid broad labels. Instead of saying "You Democrats..." or "You Republicans...," use "I" statements and focus on your personal perspective.

To learn more, visit ***braverangels.org****.*

THE AMERICAN EXCHANGE PROJECT IS CREATING CROSS-COUNTRY FRIENDSHIPS

Many Americans have never traveled outside of their own state. The American Exchange Project hopes to change that

By **Wilfred Chan**





In the summer of 2016, David McCullough III, a rising senior at Yale, borrowed his mom's Mazda CX-9, leaving their leafy Boston suburb to drive 7,100 miles across the country. He spent two months in three communities: Cotulla, Texas; South Dakota's Pine Ridge Indian Reservation; and Cleveland, Ohio. While each town was a world away from his own, the people he met, befriended, and learned from "changed his life," he says.

The experience inspired him to team up with Paul Solman, an economics correspondent at *PBS NewsHour*, and Robert Glauber, a Harvard Business School professor, to create the American Exchange Project: a-first-of-its-kind domestic exchange program that sends high school students on a free weeklong trip to an American hometown vastly different from their own. The goal is simple: to help bridge divides. Over the last four summers, nearly 1,000 students have traveled on 150 exchanges across 36 states, many of them leaving their home state for the first time.

The organization hopes to eventually make a week in a different town as common to the high school experience as the prom. "Because when we reach out," McCullough says, "We begin to understand in the end and underneath it all, there is no 'other,' just one big 'us.'" ■

Wilfred Chan is the senior content editor and writer at Carnegie Corporation of New York.

Describe the problem you're addressing in five words.

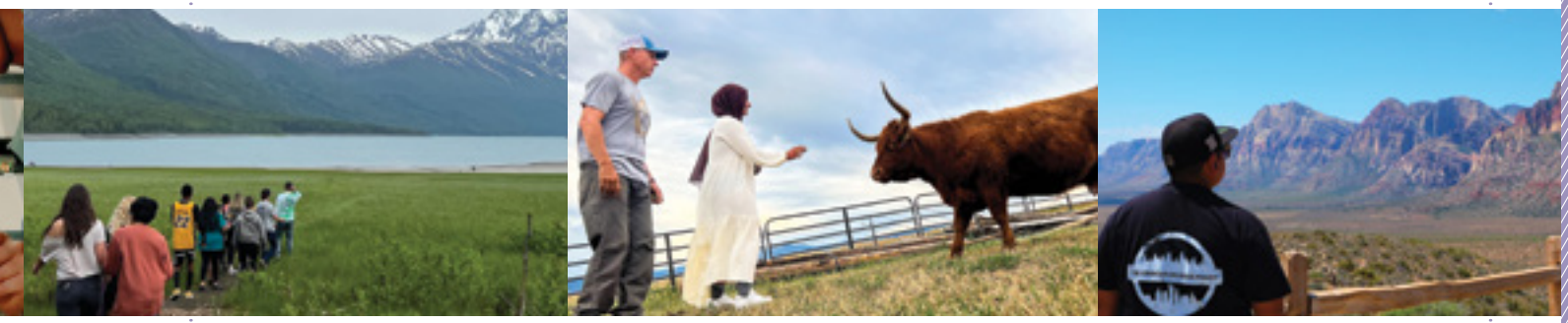
Cultural divisions tearing Americans apart.

Describe your solution in 10 words.

Fund students to visit an American community unlike their own.

Describe your progress in 15 words.

We've helped nearly 1,000 students across 36 states build lifelong connections with each other.



Nearly 1,000 students have traveled between 36 states as part of the American Exchange Project. CREDIT: AMERICAN EXCHANGE PROJECT

BY THE NUMBERS

22 David McCullough III's age when he set out on the cross-country road trip that inspired the American Exchange Project. **7,100** the number of miles David McCullough drove in his mom's Mazda CX-9. **50%** of 2024 American Exchange Project travelers had never been to another state. **54%** of young people in America have never seen a cow in real life, according to a recent survey. **55** hometowns across the country will participate in the American Exchange Project in 2025. **400** the population of Riggins, Idaho: the program's smallest host town. **$3 million** the amount of a new grant from Carnegie Corporation of New York to support the expansion of the American Exchange Project to all 50 states.

POLARIZATION: WHAT ARE WE LEARNING?



Research by the 2025 class of Andrew Carnegie Fellows will examine the causes of division in America

By **Wilfred Chan**

ILLUSTRATIONS BY CHLOE CUSHMAN

Surveys show a growing number of young American men believe men are being treated unfairly in society. New research asks how beliefs like these contribute to political polarization.

Many of us now live in neighborhoods surrounded by people who vote like us. A new project examines the data to understand how this could be shaping our political views.

Does your state make it easy or hard to vote? New research will analyze how Americans' voting experiences are becoming more polarized, and whether that's making our views on voting more polarized, too.

These are among the 26 research projects funded by Carnegie Corporation of New York through its 2025 Class of Andrew Carnegie Fellows, each of whom have received a $200,000 grant to pursue their projects and share their knowledge with the public. The program is currently committed to spending three years focused on the causes of political polarization and finding ways to help decrease it.

Our newest fellows are asking bold questions about what's driving division in America — and pursuing solutions that reach into our communities, voting systems, and digital spaces.

The following is a preview of some of the fellows' work.

A story of two coal towns

Jessica M. Smith, Colorado School of Mines

What We Know

Energy transition is unsettling America's coal country. That includes Gillette, Wyoming — whose politics have grown extreme as it doubles down on fossil fuels — and Pueblo, Colorado, which is working against partisanship as it pivots toward clean energy.

Key Questions

Why are these coal towns, separated by 450 miles of railroad track, taking such different paths? How do residents' feelings about work affect their sense of national belonging?

Goals

Publish a book about these coal towns to help the country envision an energy transition that strengthens civic life.





When war brings extremism home

Barbara Elias, Bowdoin College

What We Know

Veterans of counterinsurgency warfare often carry profound psychological burdens: four times as many U.S. veterans of post-9/11 conflicts and active-duty personnel have died by suicide than in combat. At the same time, nearly one in five of the January 6th rioters served in the U.S. military, many of them in Iraq or Afghanistan.

Key Questions

Why would wars meant to create stability abroad bring instability home? How does failed counterinsurgency abroad contribute to domestic radicalization?

Goals

Analyze primary source documents, including court records and declassified intelligence files, to identify risk factors for extremist politics among former counterinsurgents; share the findings with the public.

How do communities of color respond to polarization?

Christopher Sebastian Parker, University of California, Santa Barbara

What We Know

Roughly one-third of today's eligible voting population belongs to communities of color. The U.S. is expected to become a majority-nonwhite country by 2045. Race is a component of partisan identity, where the Republican party is often associated with whites and the Democratic party with communities of color.

Key Questions

How does polarization, through the idea of racial threat (the "great replacement theory"), mobilize communities of color? Does it cause them to embrace the political system or become alienated from it?

Goals

Collect data from a panel study of people of color to assess their responses to racial threat over time and how it impacts their views on democracy; publish the findings in a book.



Investigating the 'manosphere'

Cynthia Miller-Idriss, American University

What We Know

Women now outnumber men among higher education degree earners, while traditionally male-dominated jobs have declined. Meanwhile, men are more likely to die from overdose, suicide, and alcohol abuse, amid surging reports of male loneliness, depression, anxiety, and isolation. In online spaces for young men, these grievances are filtered through narratives that blame women and feminism for taking men's opportunities.

Key Questions

Are sexist views fueling political polarization and antidemocratic mobilization in America? Why is misogyny such a significant predictor of mass violence?

Goals

Publish a book with explicit strategies to deal with misogyny's impact on democracy, including by addressing the challenges young men face.



Do our neighborhoods polarize us?

Jacob Brown, Boston University

What We Know

Increasing numbers of voters live with little exposure to neighbors who voted differently. Measurement challenges make it difficult to link geography to political behavior.

Key Questions

Does political homogeneity perpetuate itself, as voters become more politically similar to their neighbors? Does living in a political "bubble" make residents more polarized in how they view politics?

Goals

Use data on U.S. voters to publish a book about the causes and consequences of political segregation in the United States.





The roots of climate partisanship

Caleb Scoville, Tufts University

What We Know

Environmental politics wasn't always partisan. For example, President Richard Nixon, a Republican, created the Environmental Protection Agency, and helped pass landmark legislation like the Clean Air Act.

Key Questions

How did environmental issues transform into partisan issues in the United States? Are there some areas of environmental policy that are less divisive than others?

Goals

Analyze decades of political records to retrace how the environment became politicized over time; share the findings in a book.

Polarization in our voting experiences

David Niven, University of Cincinnati

What We Know

Americans' voting experiences are increasingly polarized. Some states' residents stand in line for hours to vote, while other states' residents can drop their ballots in the mail. In recent years, Americans' views on the voting process have also become more polarized.

Key Questions

How can we accurately assess the voting experience nationwide? How do voters' different experiences at polling places contribute to polarized views?

Goals

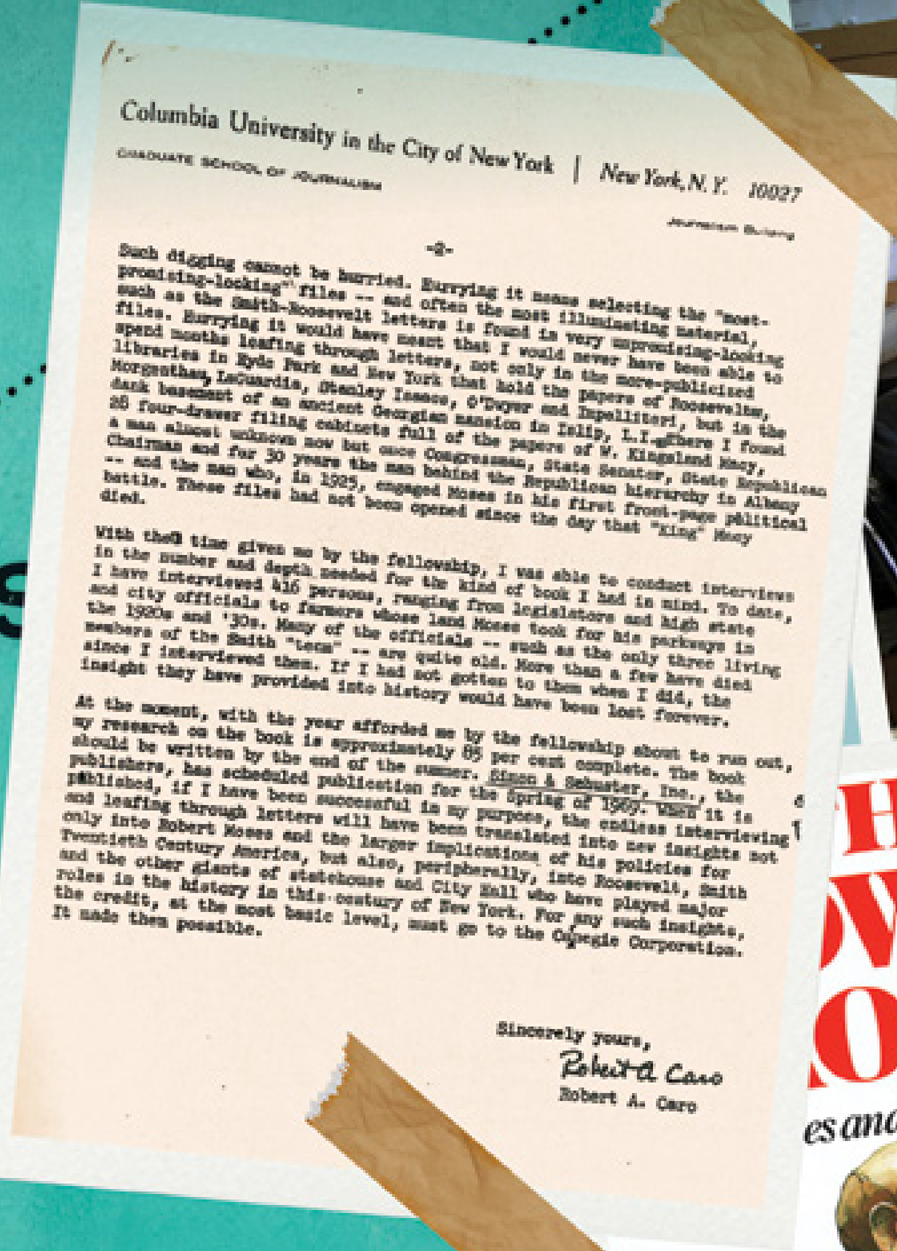
Describe and analyze the voting experience across the country using voter data from the nonpartisan Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law. Publish a book that analyzes where, how, and why the voting experience varies, its origins and effects, and offer ideas about how voting experiences could be made more fair and less partisan. ■

Meet the 2025 Class of Andrew Carnegie Fellows

THE POWER BROKER AT 50

A Carnegie fellowship in 1967 provided time for Robert Caro to investigate how political power really works. His resulting book about Robert Moses won a Pulitzer Prize and is as relevant as ever

By **Kelly Devine**



Columbia University in the City of New York | New York, N.Y. 10027

GRADUATE SCHOOL OF JOURNALISM

Journalism Building

-2-

Such digging cannot be hurried. Hurrying it means selecting the "most-promising-looking" files -- and often the most illuminating material, such as the Smith-Roosevelt letters is found in very unpromising-looking files. Hurrying it would have meant that I would never have been able to spend months leafing through letters, not only in the more-publicized libraries in Hyde Park and New York that hold the papers of Roosevelt, Morgenthau, LaGuardia, Stanley Isaacs, O'Dwyer and Impellitteri, but in the dank basement of an ancient Georgian mansion in Islip, L.I., where I found 28 four-drawer filing cabinets full of the papers of W. Kingsland Macy, a man almost unknown now but once Congressman, State Senator, State Republican Chairman and for 30 years the man behind the Republican hierarchy in Albany -- and the man who, in 1925, engaged Moses in his first front-page political battle. These files had not been opened since the day that "King" Macy died.

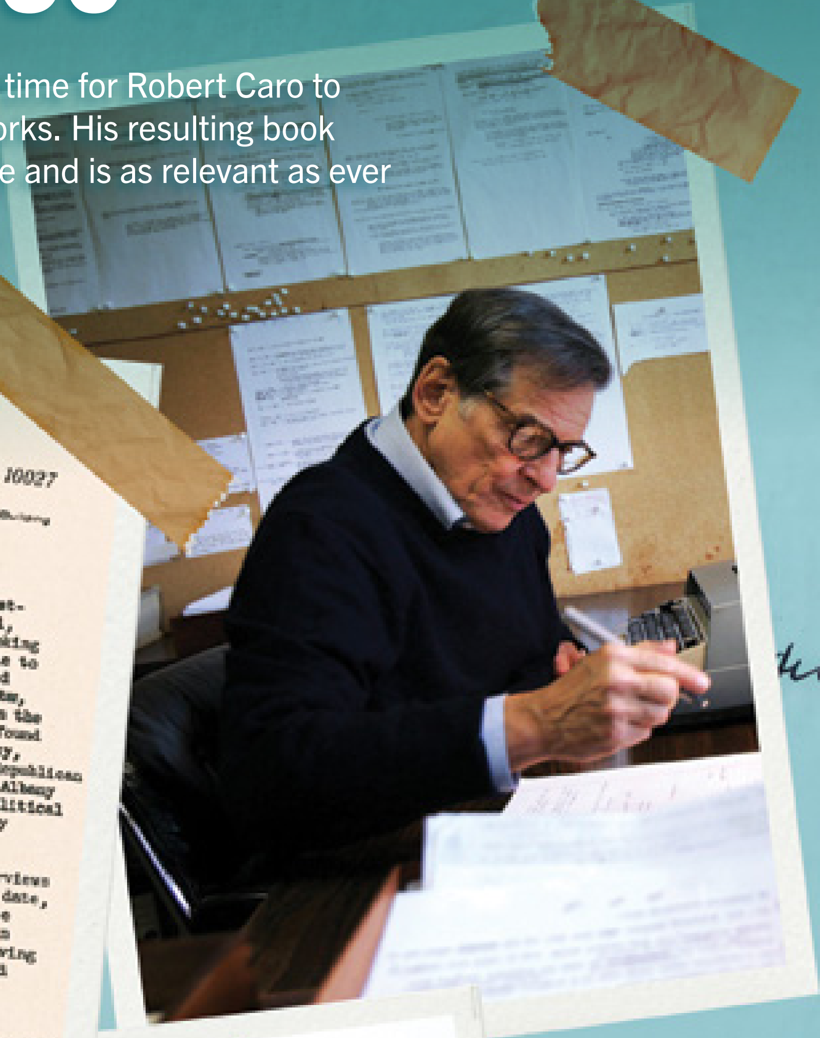
With the time given me by the fellowship, I was able to conduct interviews in the number and depth needed for the kind of book I had in mind. To date, I have interviewed 416 persons, ranging from legislators and high state and city officials to farmers whose land Moses took for his parkways in the 1920s and '30s. Many of the officials -- such as the only three living members of the Smith "team" -- are quite old. More than a few have died since I interviewed them. If I had not gotten to them when I did, the insight they have provided into history would have been lost forever.

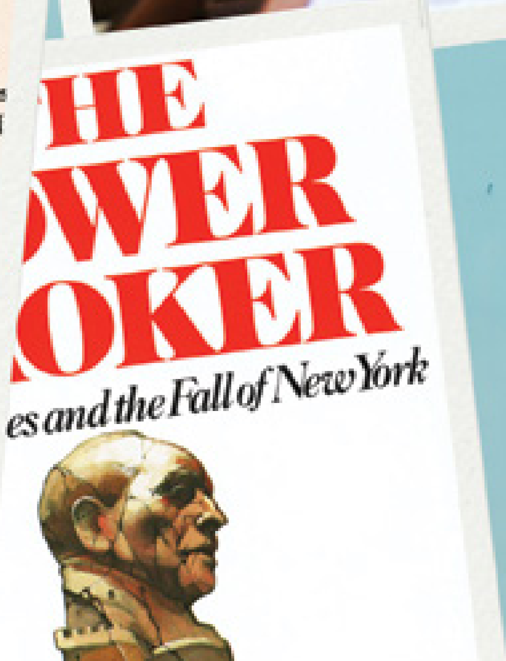
At the moment, with the year afforded me by the fellowship about to run out, my research on the book is approximately 85 per cent complete. The book should be written by the end of the summer. Simon & Schuster, Inc., the publishers, has scheduled publication for the Spring of 1969. When it is published, if I have been successful in my purpose, the endless interviewing and leafing through letters will have been translated into new insights not only into Robert Moses and the larger implications of his policies for Twentieth Century America, but also, peripherally, into Roosevelt, Smith and the other giants of statehouse and City Hall who have played major roles in the history in this century of New York. For any such insights, the credit, at the most basic level, must go to the Carnegie Corporation. It made them possible.

Sincerely yours,

Robert A. Caro

Robert A. Caro





In 1966 Robert Caro was working on his first book. A 31-year-old reporter at *Newsday* at the time, he had become intrigued by Robert Moses, who had never been elected to a public office but nonetheless wielded tremendous political power for 44 years, between 1924 and 1968, through the administrations of five mayors and six governors.

Caro and his wife didn't have any savings so he couldn't afford to quit his job, and trying to write the book as a full-time reporter wasn't working. Then he heard about a fellowship that had been established by Carnegie Corporation of New York to provide the time, environment, and resources "for individuals with the capacity and motivation to undertake appraisals in depth of major problem areas in contemporary society." The fellowship was a precursor to the establishment of the Andrew Carnegie Fellows program in 2015, which to date has supported the research of nearly 300 scholars in the humanities and social sciences.

Caro was awarded a Carnegie fellowship in 1967. When *The Power Broker*, weighing in at 1,286 pages (his original draft was more than a million words), was published in 1974, it was immediately heralded as groundbreaking. It went on to win the Pulitzer Prize for biography the following year and sell hundreds of thousands of copies. It is currently in its 74th printing.

Fifty years after the publication of what *The New York Times* recently called a "revered classic," the volume and its extraordinary influence are being celebrated with an exhibition, *The Power Broker at 50*, at the New York Historical Society (through August 3, 2025). Caro's book reveals how an unelected city planner destroyed communities as he reshaped New York City — more than half a million people lost their homes when Moses built expressways, like the Cross Bronx Expressway, through their neighborhoods. The exhibit features a selection of handwritten notes, photographs, and edited manuscript pages from Caro's archives.

In 1968, at the conclusion of his Carnegie fellowship, Caro wrote to Professor Penn Kimball at the Columbia Graduate School of Journalism, underscoring the importance of the support for scholarly research and the impact that the Carnegie grant had on the development of *The Power Broker*.

The Carnegie fellowship, "enabled me to leave my job at *Newsday* and devote full time to the book. It gave me a salary, some badly needed secretarial help, a part of my expenses — it gave me, in sum, time," Caro wrote in his letter to Kimball, dated January 16, 1968. "And time is what is needed to do a book like the biography I had in mind."

Caro explained that Moses's own files were closed, as they had been for the prior 43 years, to researchers. "To put together a picture of the man — and of his monumental and largely unexplored influence on the future of New York State, New York City, and the urban politics of the entire nation — requires vast amounts of digging in other collections of original source material," Caro continued. "Such digging cannot be hurried."

Often the most illuminating material is found in "very unpromising-looking files," observed Caro. With the time allowed by the fellowship, Caro interviewed 416 persons, "ranging from legislators and high state and city officials to farmers whose land Moses took for his parkways in the 1920s and 30s. Many of the officials … are quite old. More than a few have died since I interviewed them. If I had not gotten to them when I did, the insight they have provided into history would have been lost forever."

At the time his fellowship ended, Caro reported that his research on the book was approximately 85 percent complete. "If I have been successful in my purpose," Caro wrote, "the endless interviewing and leafing through letters will have translated into new insights not only into Robert Moses and the larger implications of his policies for Twentieth Century America, but also, peripherally, into [Franklin D.] Roosevelt, [Alfred E.] Smith, and the other giants of statehouse and City Hall who have played major roles in the history in this century of New York." Caro concluded: "For any such insights, the credit, at the most basic level, must go to the Carnegie Corporation. It made them possible."

After *The Power Broker*, Caro turned from investigating urban political power to national political power. In June 2008, Caro visited Carnegie's headquarters in New York City to celebrate the publication of *The Passage of Power*, the fourth book in his epic *The Years of Lyndon Johnson*. (He is currently working on the fifth and final volume.) "I'm not interested in telling the life of a great man. My interest is in political power and how it works," Caro said at the time. "The U.S. is a democracy, so we the people are supposed to have the power. Therefore, the more we know about how political power really works, the better we can do — not just theoretically, but really." ■

Kelly Devine is principal director of content and dissemination at Carnegie Corporation of New York.

← Clockwise from left to right: Letter from Carnegie Corporation of New York archives at Columbia University; Photo by Dima Gavrysh / Bloomberg via Getty Images; Cover design for *The Power Broker* by Paul Bacon, courtesy Penguin Random House; Background image notes by Robert Caro, from his archive at the New York Historical.

WANT GREATER PROSPERITY? MIND THE GAP



Why are the richest 20 percent of countries 30 times richer than the poorest? Three researchers have an answer, and it won them a Nobel Prize

By **Aruna D'Souza**

CREDIT: JONATHAN NACKSTRAND/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

For the past 25 years, Daron Acemoglu, Simon Johnson, and James A. Robinson have worked — individually and collaboratively — on the question of why some nations are rich and others are poor. In 2024 they were awarded a Nobel Prize in Economics for their research on a question that has become increasingly pressing: why are the richest 20 percent of countries now 30 times richer than the poorest?

Reducing such inequity "is one of our time's greatest challenges," said Jan Teorell, a member of the economic sciences committee at the December 10 ceremony in Stockholm, where Acemoglu, Johnson, and Robinson were honored for their "studies of how institutions are formed and affect prosperity," a theme that runs through their numerous papers and publications.

Pinning down the reasons for the persistence of such wealth disparities has occupied economists for a long time, including a number of previous Nobel Prize recipients. It's a surprisingly knotty problem, because there are so many ways in which rich countries and poor countries differ. In the 1990s, many researchers turned to geographical factors such as climate, topography, disease, and availability of resources to explain economic disparities. "The fact that some people were interpreting this as a causal relationship struck Jim [Robinson] and myself as rather brazen," Acemoglu said in his Nobel Prize lecture in December.

"Our contribution was to say, what's behind those stories?" Johnson said in a recent conversation. "What's the deeper cause, what are the historical roots of that discrepancy?"

At the heart of Acemoglu, Robinson, and Johnson's work is their ability to show that the decisive factor is the type of political and economic institutions that exist in different sites — including public education, voting rights, market regulation, legal protection of property rights, and court systems that uphold those rights and rules — and who they were built to serve.

Johnson searched for answers in an unusual place: archives recording the numbers of deaths of early European colonists in the years after their arrival in a new territory. He focused on data before 1850 — prior to the emergence of modern medicine and coinciding with the formative period of European colonial expansion. He was building on the research of Philip D. Curtin,

the late historian of Africa and the Atlantic slave trade, especially his 1989 book *Death By Migration: Europe's Encounter with the Tropical World in the 19th Century*, which focused on the mortality rates of English and French soldiers deployed in the tropics.

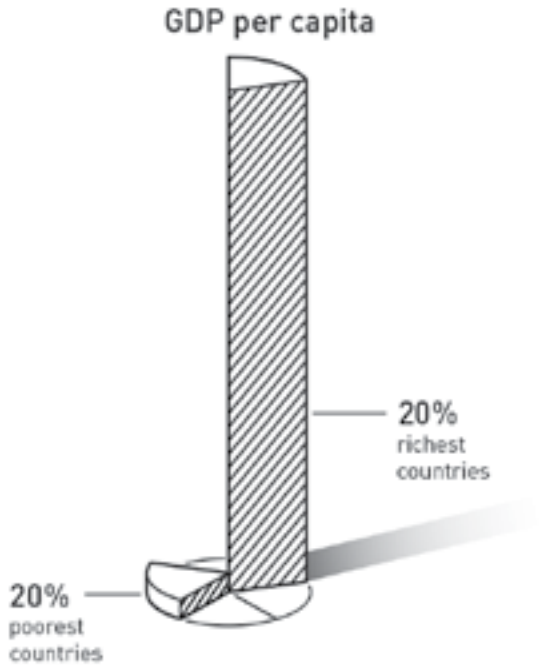
Based on colonial-era records, the laureates concluded that when colonists faced significantly higher mortality rates — because of disease, harsh climate, or violent resistance, say — they tended to set up institutions that served a fairly narrow set of interests. In places where the threat to colonists' lives was less marked — and these include many settler-colonial states, such as the United States, Canada, and Australia, for example — colonizers tended to set up institutions that, over time, created more prosperity on average.

"In our work, what we've identified are these institutional and political differences between developed and underdeveloped countries, and the way in which there's enormous differences in how inclusive the societies are in terms of the opportunities and incentives they give people," said Robinson in an interview with the Nobel Foundation. "Our work is focused on trying to show how these different institutional structures create poverty or prosperity."

Acemoglu traces his interest in the relationship between prosperity and politics to living through the consequences of Turkey's military coup in 1980, which was triggered in part by the political instability caused by an economy on the verge of collapse, with triple-digit inflation, high unemployment, and a persistent trade deficit. He was in seventh grade at the time. Twelve years later, as a PhD student at the London School of Economics, he attended a talk by James Robinson, and over the course of the next few years, the scholars explored their shared interest in the historical roots of institutions and their long-term impact on economic outcomes.

In the late 1990s, now in the U.S. and teaching at MIT, Acemoglu met Simon Johnson, who had recently taken a position at the Sloan School of Management. The two began a conversation about colonialism and institutions. Acemoglu, Johnson, and Robinson published their first paper together in 2001, drawing together the different threads of their work and kicking off their prolific, decades-long collaboration.

Acemoglu and Robinson share a connection to Carnegie. Robinson was awarded a research grant for his Carnegie Scholar project "Understanding the Institutional Determinants of Comparative Development" in 2002. Acemoglu's research received support from the foundation through an Andrew Carnegie Fellowship in 2017. The scholars' first book together, *Economic Origins of*



The richest 20 percent of the world's countries are now around 30 times richer than the poorest 20 percent. CREDIT: JOHAN JARNESTAD/THE ROYAL SWEDISH ACADEMY OF SCIENCES.

Dictatorship and Democracy, in 2005, built in part on Robinson's Carnegie-supported research, sought to explain why democracies and dictatorships rise and fall, and demonstrated that such transitions between democratic and authoritarian regimes are deeply tied to who is allowed to prosper in a particular political formation.

In their 2012 book *Why Nations Fail,* Acemoglu and Robinson examine two towns named Nogales — one in Arizona and one just across the border in Mexico — which were almost identical in terms of geography, climate, and the demographic and cultural background of residents. Yet those residents experienced stark differences in income, lifespan, educational achievement, and other factors.

Acemoglu and Robinson proposed that the contrast could be accounted for by the fact that the Arizona town developed more inclusive institutions — systems designed to benefit the greatest number of people rather than just a small, powerful elite, that protected property rights, and that conferred democratic rights — whereas the Mexican town did not. In Nogales, Mexico, societal and political conditions made it less desirable, or even risky, to set up and run companies.

Why Nations Fail became a *New York Times* bestseller. In addition to publishing research articles in scholarly economics journals, the laureates are committed to writing more accessible books with the hopes of reaching the broader public, said Acemoglu.

A cornerstone of the Nobelists' thinking is the role of democracy — which is characterized broadly by the



From left to right, Nobel laureates Daron Acemoglu, Simon Johnson, and James A. Robinson pose with their diplomas and medals at the Nobel Foundation in 2024. CREDIT: NOBEL PRIZE OUTREACH/ANNA SVANBERG (LEFT), DANN LEPP (CENTER AND RIGHT)

existence of inclusive institutions which benefit a broad swath of people — in ensuring prosperity.

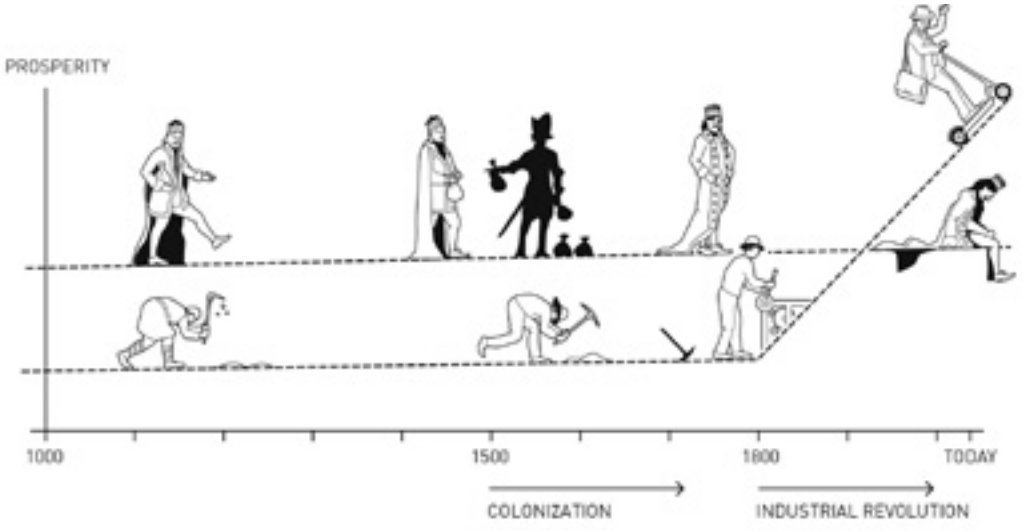
"Every prosperous country today, historically, was extractive," said Robinson in his interview with the Nobel Foundation. "Think of the United States, you know, think of the history of slavery and the expropriation of indigenous people. And there was a struggle to create more inclusive institutions and a more inclusive society."

Creating more inclusive institutions leads to a more inclusive society, but that transition is unlikely to come from the top, according to Robinson. "Inclusive institutions are not created by well-meaning elites," Robinson said in the interview. "They're created by people who fight for their rights and fight for a different vision of society."

Robinson cited the civil rights movement as an example "of people getting organized collectively to fight for their rights, to fight against extractive economic and political institutions in the United States in the 1950s and 1960s."

Acemoglu and Robinson address the importance of democracy, and its contemporary condition, in their 2019 book *The Narrow Corridor: States, Societies, and the Fate of Liberty*. "In *The Narrow Corridor*, we view the foundations of liberty and democracy to be quite fragile at the best of times — more so in the U.S. for a variety of reasons, going back to the early design choices that were made," Acemoglu said.

Among the potential consequences of a democracy in decline, Johnson said, are economic ones. "The strength of democracy is that it gives many people the opportunity to invest in themselves and their families, in their communities, in their companies, and it protects them against arbitrary seizure or expropriation." When the erosion of democratic institutions leads to political uncertainty and risk, he explained, the more likely adverse economic conditions will arise.



Paradoxically, the parts of the colonized world that were relatively the most prosperous around 500 years ago are now those that are relatively poor. CREDIT: JOHAN JARNESTAD/THE ROYAL SWEDISH ACADEMY OF SCIENCES

> Inclusive institutions are not created by well-meaning elites. They're created by people who fight for their rights and fight for a different vision of society.
>
> – **James A. Robinson**

Acemoglu and Johnson's work recently has taken on the thorny question of how technology fuels prosperity. In their 2023 book *Power and Progress: Our Thousand-Year Struggle Over Technology and Prosperity*, they challenge the idea that technological advancement inevitably leads to progress. Through case studies stretching back to the Middle Ages in Europe, they warn that new developments like artificial intelligence will only benefit society if they are used to build tools that empower the majority of people rather than enrich a few.

Acemoglu said that one of his next projects is a continuation of his work on AI, research he undertook while he was an Andrew Carnegie Fellow in 2017. Another, also connected to his Carnegie-supported research, will revisit his early book with Robinson, *Economic Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*.

"I think democracy is in crisis, so it is a good time to think about what factors created this crisis," Acemoglu explained. "Which aspects were inevitable, which aspects of it were due to different choices and mistakes that were made, and what is now possible. What can we do to revive democracy?"

While the laureates don't underestimate the challenges today's world poses for the development and sustenance of inclusive institutions, nor are they without optimism. "Institutions are always about choices," said Acemoglu at the Nobel Prize ceremony. "What worries us also gives us hope. We can build better institutions and choose a direction for technology that creates more good jobs. But this has to be a collective effort." ■

Aruna D'Souza writes on the role of institutions in shaping ideas about art, society, and culture. She is a regular contributor to *The New York Times* and *4Columns*, and is the author of *Whitewalling: Art, Race & Protest in 3 Acts* and *Imperfect Solidarities*.

About the Laureates

Daron Acemoglu is Institute Professor of Economics at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. He was an Andrew Carnegie Fellow in 2017.

Simon Johnson is the Ronald A. Kurtz (1954) Professor of Entrepreneurship at the MIT Sloan School of Management.

James A. Robinson is Institute Director of the Pearson Institute and Reverend Dr. Richard L. Pearson Professor and University Professor at the Harris School of Public Policy and Department of Political Science at the University of Chicago. He was a Carnegie Scholar in 2002.

Further Reading

Daron Acemoglu and James A. Robinson, *Economic Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy* (Cambridge University Press, 2005).

Daron Acemoglu and James A. Robinson, *Why Nations Fail: The Origins of Power, Prosperity, and Poverty* (Crown Currency, 2012).

Daron Acemoglu and James A. Robinson, *The Narrow Corridor: States, Societies, and the Fate of Liberty* (Penguin, 2019).

Daron Acemoglu and Simon Johnson, *Power and Progress: Our 1000-Year Struggle Over Technology and Prosperity* (PublicAffairs, 2023).

The immigrant journey is not an easy one. But for many … the library can offer a glimmer of hope and a community connected to their needs as they embrace our shared civic values while never losing their identities.

— Homa Naficy
2024 Great Immigrant Honoree

THE COMIC SERIES

GREAT IMMIGRANTS ★ GREAT AMERICANS

Concept and Script by **Jongsma** + **O'Neill**
Illustrations by 王泉明 **Chuan Ming Ong**

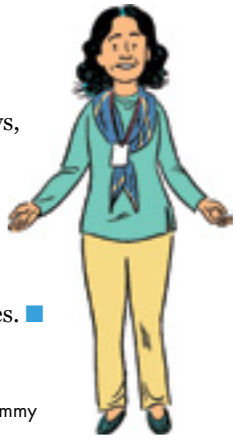


Every Fourth of July, Carnegie Corporation of New York celebrates the exemplary contributions of immigrants to American life, as part of its focus on reducing political polarization and strengthening democracy. To highlight their stories, the foundation has commissioned a new comic series that illustrates how naturalized citizens are contributing to communities across the country. In the following pages, learn more about the inspiring stories of three of these Great Immigrants: Jim Lee, Homa Naficy, and Mona Hanna.



Naficy, who came to America from France to earn a master of library science, is a librarian and immigrant advocate of Iranian descent whose work has welcomed and aided hundreds of immigrants every year. Hanna, who grew up as an immigrant in suburban Detroit after her family fled Iraq during the Baath regime, is a pediatrician who uncovered the Flint water crisis in Michigan and led efforts to "make sure that the American Dream" was still a possibility for the city's 10,000 children.

Lee, whose parents immigrated to Midwest America from South Korea when he was in elementary school, holds a Guinness World Record for the best-selling comic book of all time. When Lee arrived in the United States, he knew no English, but his identification with Superman, the ultimate immigrant, "brought me into the American culture," he says, providing sanctuary from the pressures of being an immigrant kid who desperately wanted to fit in. He is now the president, publisher, and chief creative officer of DC and the artist for many of DC's best-selling comic books and graphic novels, including *Superman: For Tomorrow*.

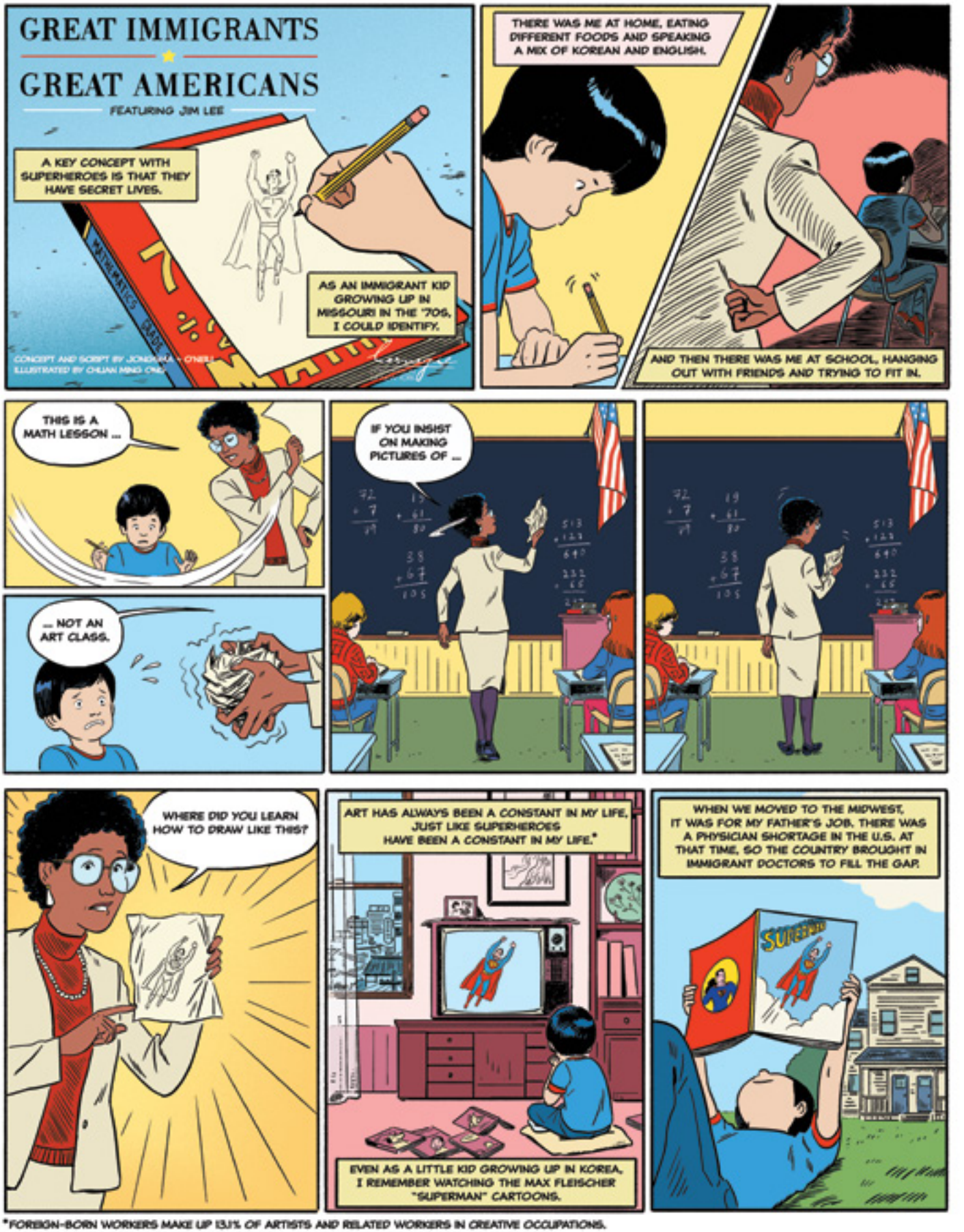


Learn more about the comic series and our new free comic book at carnegie.org/immigrantstories. ■

Eline Jongsma and **Kel O'Neill** lead Jongsma + O'Neill, a nonfiction storytelling studio. They are Sundance fellows, Emmy nominees, and the creators of the immersive exhibition *Loot: 10 Stories*, which won the 2024 XR-History Award.

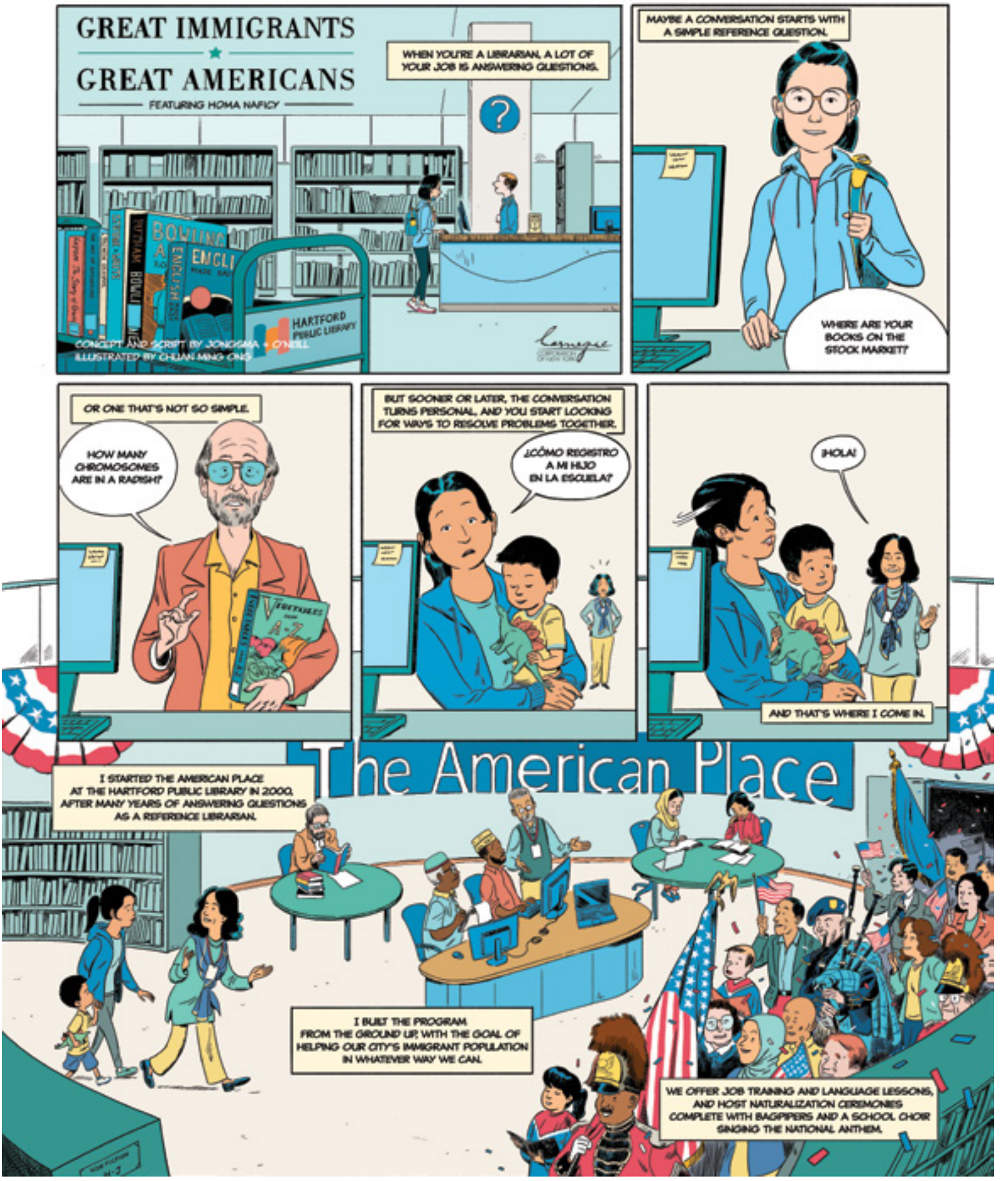
Chuan Ming Ong is a Dutch illustrator whose illustrations have appeared in publications including *The New Yorker*, the *Los Angeles Times*, and *Nikkei Asia*.

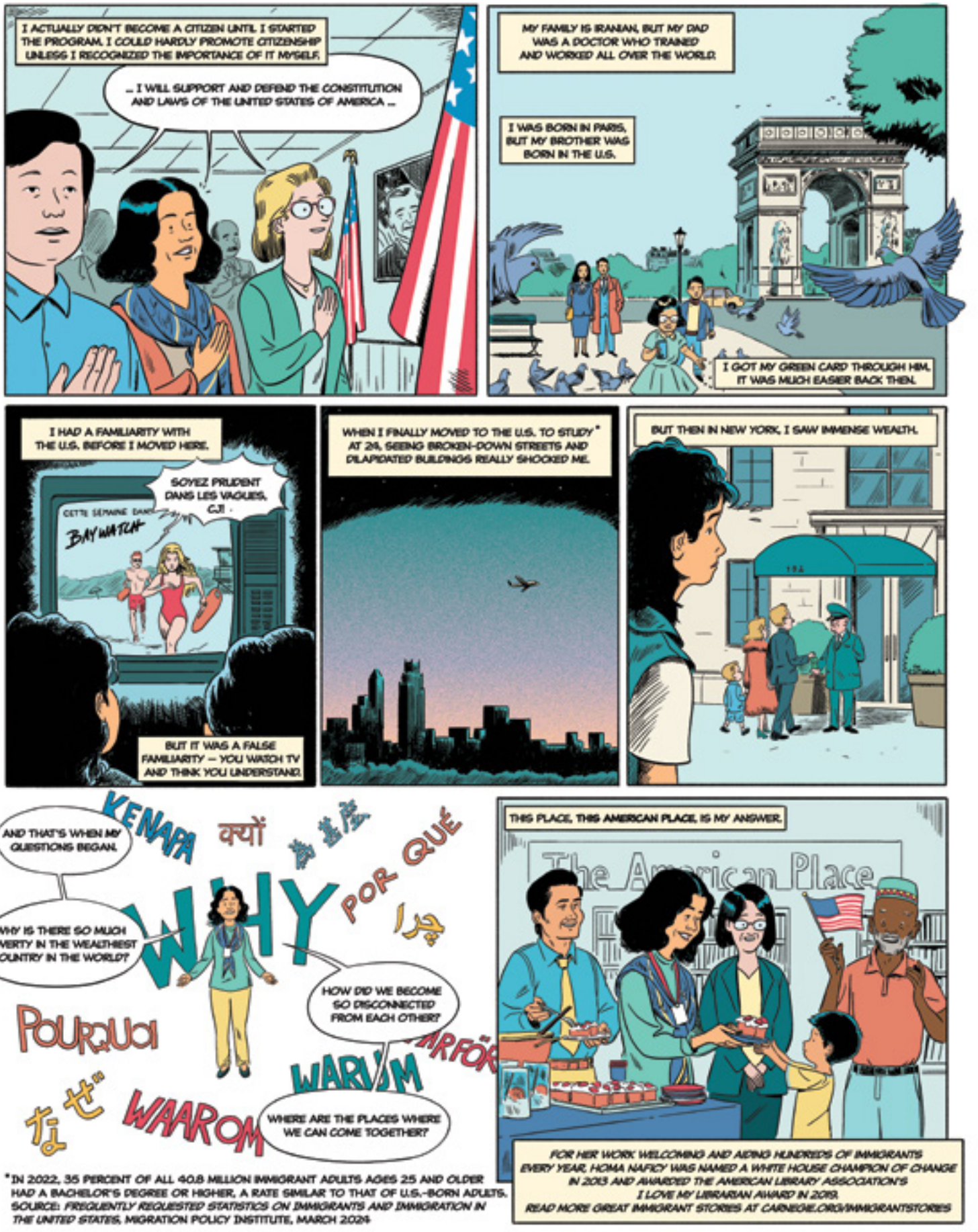
Share on social using **#GreatImmigrants**



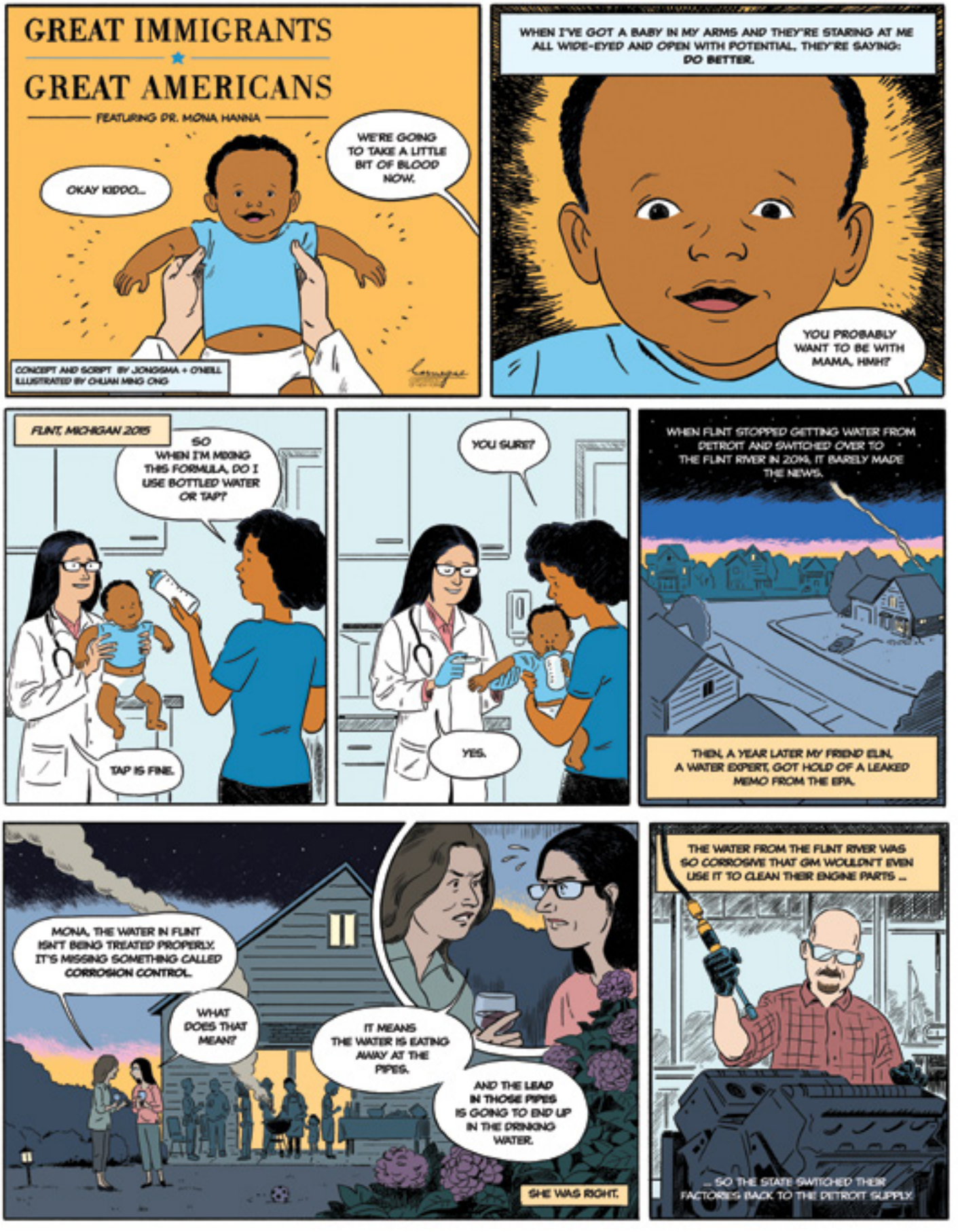
*FOREIGN-BORN WORKERS MAKE UP 13.1% OF ARTISTS AND RELATED WORKERS IN CREATIVE OCCUPATIONS.
SOURCE: IMMIGRANTS IN CREATIVE INDUSTRIES, AMERICAN IMMIGRATION COUNCIL, AUGUST 2019

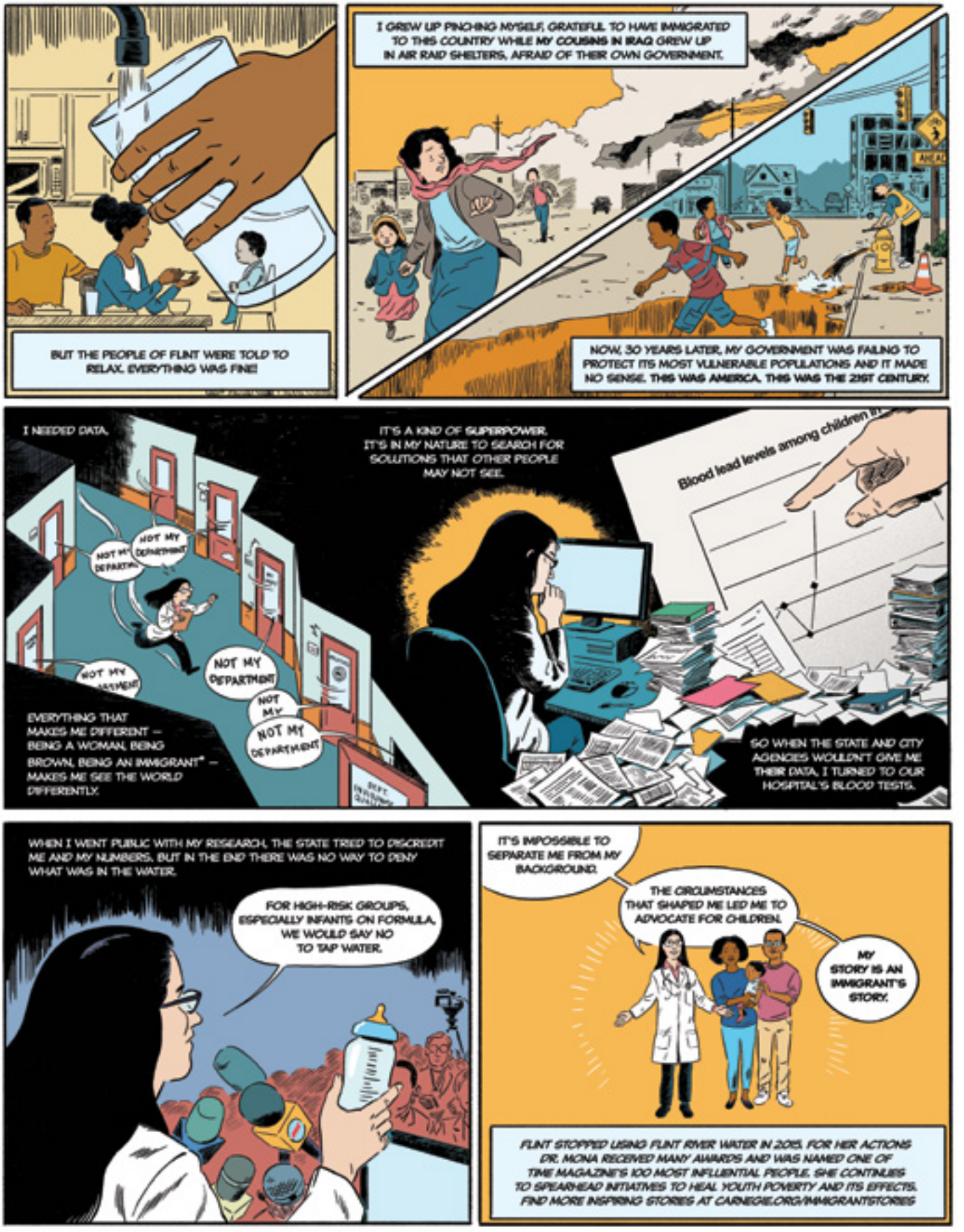

MY PARENTS WANTED ME TO BE A DOCTOR AND FOLLOW MY FATHER'S FOOTSTEPS, BUT I WAS JUST CONSTANTLY DRAWING. IT WAS THE THING I LOVED AND FOUND SOLACE AND ESCAPE IN.
EVERY SUNDAY, I WOULD MEET UP WITH MY FRIEND BRANDON CHOI AT CHURCH, AND IN THE HOUR AFTER SUNDAY SCHOOL ENDED, WHEN THE ADULTS SERMON WAS STILL GOING ON, WE WOULD DRAW.
HOW LONG SHOULD WE MAKE THE TUSKS?
LONGER THAN THAT.
WHEN I FORMED IMAGE COMICS IN THE '90S, SOME OF THE CHARACTERS WE CREATED IN THOSE SESSIONS ACTUALLY ENDED UP BECOMING CHARACTERS IN OUR COMIC BOOKS.
WILDC.A.T.S
IF I LOOK BACK AND CONNECT THE DOTS, I COULD SAY THAT BEING AN IMMIGRANT WAS AN INTEGRAL PART OF THE WAY I LOOKED AT STORYTELLING.
... BUT I MUST HAVE FELT A KINSHIP WITH THESE OUTCAST CHARACTERS WHO DIDN'T FIT INTO SOCIETY, AND HAD SUPER POWERS AND SECRET IDENTITIES.
AND JUST LIKE THEM, I WAS NEVER STRIVING FOR THAT ONE UNIFIED IDENTITY.
AT THE TIME I WAS JUST THINKING, "OH COOL. THIS GUY SHOOTS BEAMS OUT OF HIS EYES," OR "THIS GUY HAS SUPER STRENGTH" ...
I FELT MORE COMFORTABLE BEING ABLE TO HAVE DIFFERENT SIDES TO MYSELF AND ASSIMILATING WHEN NEEDED ...
... WHICH I THINK IS A BIG PART OF THE IMMIGRANT EXPERIENCE.
IT'S JUST LIKE IN THE COMICS: WE CAN BE CLARK KENT AND SUPERMAN.
JIM LEE
JIM LEE IS THE PRESIDENT, PUBLISHER, AND CHIEF CREATIVE OFFICER OF DC. HE IS ONE OF THE MOST SUCCESSFUL COMIC ARTISTS AND WRITERS OF ALL TIME. HE HAS RECEIVED NUMEROUS ACCOLADES INCLUDING A HARVEY AND MORE. HIS FUNDRAISING HAS SUPPORTED COMIC BOOK STORES, HUNTINGTON'S DISEASE, AND CHILDREN'S MENTAL HEALTH. READ MORE GREAT IMMIGRANT STORIES AT CARNEGIE.ORG/IMMIGRANTSTORIES


GREAT IMMIGRANTS
GREAT AMERICANS
FEATURING HOMA NAFICY
WHEN YOU'RE A LIBRARIAN, A LOT OF YOUR JOB IS ANSWERING QUESTIONS.
HARTFORD PUBLIC LIBRARY
CONCEPT AND SCRIPT BY JONGSMA + O'NEILL
ILLUSTRATED BY CHUAN MING ONG
MAYBE A CONVERSATION STARTS WITH A SIMPLE REFERENCE QUESTION.
WHERE ARE YOUR BOOKS ON THE STOCK MARKET?
OR ONE THAT'S NOT SO SIMPLE.
HOW MANY CHROMOSOMES ARE IN A RADISH?
BUT SOONER OR LATER, THE CONVERSATION TURNS PERSONAL, AND YOU START LOOKING FOR WAYS TO RESOLVE PROBLEMS TOGETHER.
¿CÓMO REGISTRO A MI HIJO EN LA ESCUELA?
¡HOLA!
AND THAT'S WHERE I COME IN.
The American Place
I STARTED THE AMERICAN PLACE AT THE HARTFORD PUBLIC LIBRARY IN 2000, AFTER MANY YEARS OF ANSWERING QUESTIONS AS A REFERENCE LIBRARIAN.
I BUILT THE PROGRAM FROM THE GROUND UP, WITH THE GOAL OF HELPING OUR CITY'S IMMIGRANT POPULATION IN WHATEVER WAY WE CAN.
WE OFFER JOB TRAINING AND LANGUAGE LESSONS, AND HOST NATURALIZATION CEREMONIES COMPLETE WITH BAGPIPERS AND A SCHOOL CHOIR SINGING THE NATIONAL ANTHEM.



*IN 2022, 35 PERCENT OF ALL 40.8 MILLION IMMIGRANT ADULTS AGES 25 AND OLDER HAD A BACHELOR'S DEGREE OR HIGHER, A RATE SIMILAR TO THAT OF U.S.-BORN ADULTS. SOURCE: *FREQUENTLY REQUESTED STATISTICS ON IMMIGRANTS AND IMMIGRATION IN THE UNITED STATES*, MIGRATION POLICY INSTITUTE, MARCH 2024

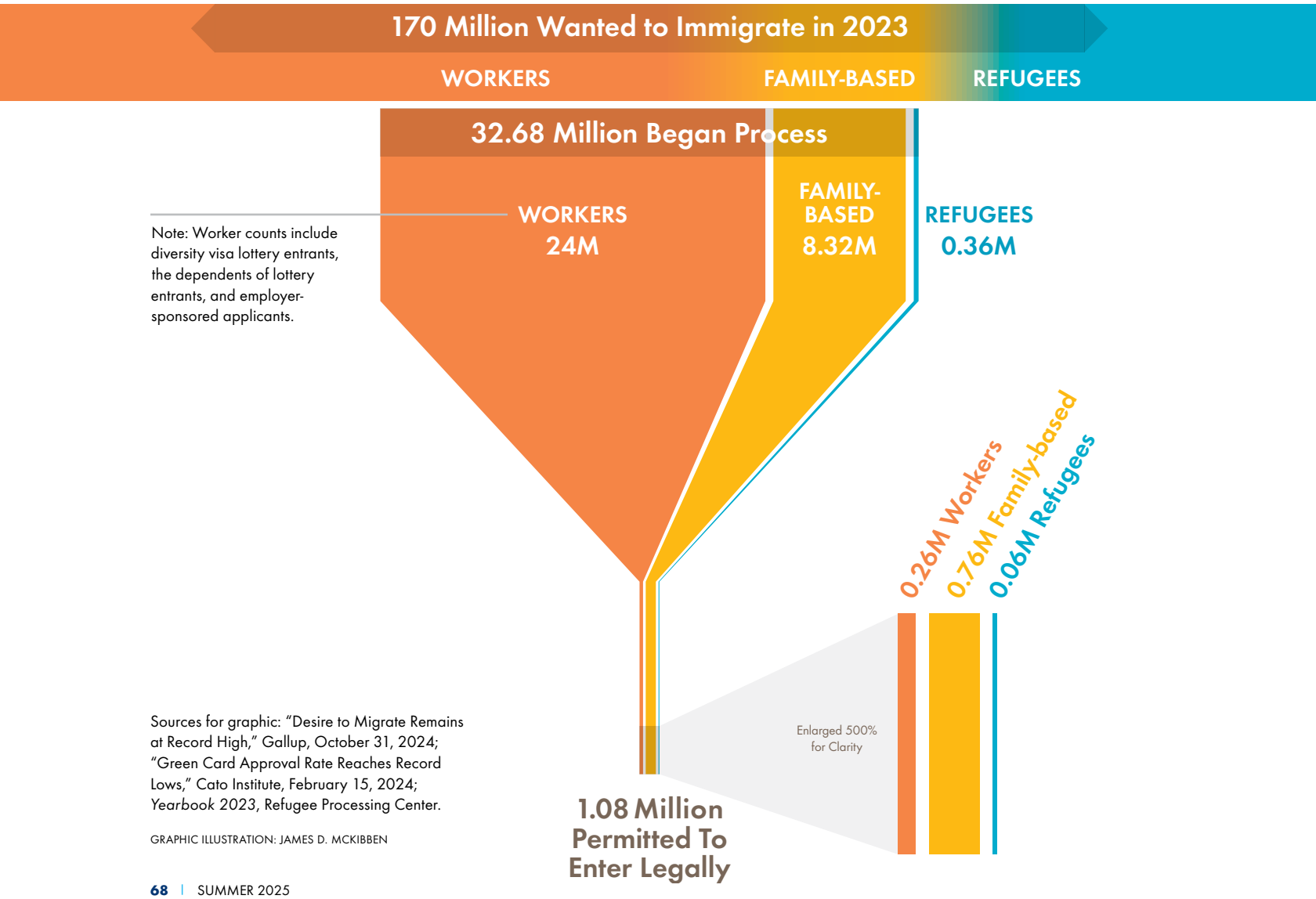

GREAT IMMIGRANTS
GREAT AMERICANS
FEATURING DR. MONA HANNA
OKAY KIDDO...
WE'RE GOING TO TAKE A LITTLE BIT OF BLOOD NOW.
CONCEPT AND SCRIPT BY JONGSMA + O'NEILL
ILLUSTRATED BY CHUAN MING ONG
WHEN I'VE GOT A BABY IN MY ARMS AND THEY'RE STARING AT ME ALL WIDE-EYED AND OPEN WITH POTENTIAL, THEY'RE SAYING: DO BETTER.
YOU PROBABLY WANT TO BE WITH MAMA, HMH?
FLINT, MICHIGAN 2015
SO WHEN I'M MIXING THIS FORMULA, DO I USE BOTTLED WATER OR TAP?
TAP IS FINE.
YOU SURE?
YES.
WHEN FLINT STOPPED GETTING WATER FROM DETROIT AND SWITCHED OVER TO THE FLINT RIVER IN 2014, IT BARELY MADE THE NEWS.
THEN, A YEAR LATER MY FRIEND ELIN, A WATER EXPERT, GOT HOLD OF A LEAKED MEMO FROM THE EPA.
MONA, THE WATER IN FLINT ISN'T BEING TREATED PROPERLY. IT'S MISSING SOMETHING CALLED CORROSION CONTROL.
WHAT DOES THAT MEAN?
IT MEANS THE WATER IS EATING AWAY AT THE PIPES.
AND THE LEAD IN THOSE PIPES IS GOING TO END UP IN THE DRINKING WATER.
SHE WAS RIGHT.
THE WATER FROM THE FLINT RIVER WAS SO CORROSIVE THAT GM WOULDN'T EVEN USE IT TO CLEAN THEIR ENGINE PARTS ...
... SO THE STATE SWITCHED THEIR FACTORIES BACK TO THE DETROIT SUPPLY.



*26% OF PRACTICING PHYSICIANS AND SURGEONS IN THE UNITED STATES ARE FOREIGN-BORN.
SOURCE: *IMMIGRANT HEALTH-CARE WORKERS IN THE UNITED STATES*, MIGRATION POLICY INSTITUTE, APRIL 2023

HOW PEOPLE IMMIGRATE LEGALLY TO THE U.S.

The country's legal immigration pathways often involve long wait times, complex procedures, and unpredictable politics



Sources for graphic: "Desire to Migrate Remains at Record High," Gallup, October 31, 2024; "Green Card Approval Rate Reaches Record Lows," Cato Institute, February 15, 2024; *Yearbook 2023*, Refugee Processing Center.

GRAPHIC ILLUSTRATION: JAMES D. MCKIBBEN

Nearly 35 million. That's how many non-U.S. citizens had applications pending for green cards that would allow them to live and work legally and permanently in the United States as of 2024. But with the government capping the number of green cards it issues at a little more than one million per year, an overwhelming majority of applicants will have to wait years, if not decades, in a state of limbo. The wait for temporary, employment-based visas can be equally frustrating.

Immigration to the United States has become increasingly difficult. While Democrats and Republicans are deeply divided on immigration policy, immigration is one issue where Americans find agreement around the need for improvement. A December 2024 poll by the Associated Press–NORC Center for Public Affairs Research found that about half of U.S. adults say immigration should be a top focus for the U.S. government.

> Fixing the problems with legal immigration should be a bipartisan priority.
>
> – **Doris Meissner,** Migration Policy Institute

"Given how immigration is such an important part of our history and our competitive advantage as a society, fixing the problems with legal immigration should be a bipartisan priority," said Doris Meissner, director of the U.S. Immigration Policy Program at the nonpartisan Migration Policy Institute, a Carnegie Corporation of New York grantee.

An August 2024 Pew survey found that nearly half of both Democrats and Republicans support maintaining current levels of legal immigration, and most Americans believe that highly skilled workers should be given priority over other immigrants.

"We have been able to build support for immigrants and immigration in places you wouldn't expect to see," said Jeremy Robbins, executive director of the American Immigration Council, a Carnegie Corporation of New York grantee. "That tells me there's hope for progress."

The following is a high-level summary of the available pathways to legal immigration, along with the challenges related to each.

Family-Based Immigration

The most common way to immigrate legally is through a family relationship. In 2023 people in the family-based categories made up 64 percent of the immigrants who were granted green cards.

This is by design: the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, signed into law by President Lyndon B. Johnson, created an immigration system that preferences immigrants with family relationships to Americans. While there is no limit on the number of green cards that may be issued for "immediate family members" — spouses, minor children, or parents — other family members of U.S. citizens, such as adult children and siblings, may apply for "family preference" visas, which have strict limits.

Challenges: As of late 2023, there were nearly four million people waiting overseas for family preference visas to become available. Due to limited staffing and processing capacity, the United States has at times failed to reach its annual limits on these types of visas, leaving hundreds of thousands of green cards "unused" in the family-based categories.

Adding to the problems is that the Immigration and Nationality Act places limits on family preference and employment visas so that no more than 7 percent of these visas can go to people from any single country each year. These limits do not reflect current immigration demand. As a result, individuals from countries with large numbers of applicants (such as Mexico, India, and China) face long waits.

"The 1965 law quickly proved itself to be out of step with what was really happening with the economy and immigration flows," said Meissner.

Employment-Based Visas

The second-most common pathway for legal immigration is through work, with an employer generally having to petition for an immigrant to come and fill a specific job role.

Employment-based green cards are divided into five "preference" categories, with the priority given to workers with "extraordinary ability," followed by professionals with advanced degrees, other workers, special cases, and finally immigrant investors, who may qualify for residency by making a significant investment in a U.S. business that creates new jobs.

The United States also admits a limited number of people through temporary work visas. There's strong demand for the H-1B visa for highly skilled workers, which many immigrant workers have come to rely on while they wait for an immigrant visa to become available.

Challenges: The approval process for both permanent and temporary employment-based visas can be long, complex, and costly, often leaving applicants and employers waiting for years, and discouraging others from going through the process.

Even after a 1990 law increased the cap on employment-based green cards from 54,000 to 140,000, demand for such green cards has surged, resulting in extensive delays. Because employment-based green cards are also subject to per-country caps, the wait can be extremely lengthy for individuals from countries with large numbers of applicants.

Similarly, caps on temporary work visas keep tens of thousands of applicants in limbo overseas while contributing to hiring challenges throughout the U.S. economy. In April 2024, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services said it had received 470,000 eligible registrations for its annual lottery for H-1B visas; by law, it may approve only 85,000 per year.

"We are hurting ourselves by denying opportunities to people who want to come here and contribute to the U.S. economy as workers and entrepreneurs," said Stuart Anderson, executive director of the National Foundation for American Policy (NFAP), a Carnegie grantee and nonpartisan research organization that focuses primarily on immigration.

Diversity Visas

Often called the "green card lottery," the U.S. State Department makes 55,000 "diversity visas" available each year for individuals from countries with low rates of immigration to the United States. The program was created by Congress in 1990 to diversify the U.S. immigrant population.

Challenges: The diversity visa program is highly competitive; in 2023 more than 9.5 million people applied for the program's 55,000 lottery spots.

In the final year of his first term, President Trump suspended the awarding of these visas; the action was overruled by a court decision that forced the administration to reinstate the program.

We are hurting ourselves by denying opportunities to people who want to come here and contribute to the U.S. economy as workers and entrepreneurs.

– **Stuart Anderson,** National Foundation for American Policy

Refugees and Asylum

Both refugees and asylum seekers may be fleeing persecution in their home countries, but there are some important differences between them. In general:

- **Refugees** apply for refugee status from outside of the United States, and are admitted into the country if they are approved. Under U.S. law, the president sets a cap on annual refugee admissions at the start of each fiscal year.
- **Asylum seekers** are individuals already present in the United States who apply for protection from within the country. There is no cap on the number of asylees who may be approved each year.

Refugees and asylum seekers, if admitted, may apply for green cards and eventually citizenship.

Challenges: The world faces a migration crisis as growing numbers of people are displaced from their homes. In 2024 the United Nations counted 43.7 million refugees and 8 million asylum seekers worldwide.

The United States has welcomed more than 3 million refugees from other countries since 1975, and typically grants asylum to thousands of applicants a year. However, experts say the system for processing and resettling refugees and asylum seekers remains underfunded, overburdened, and hindered by political divides.

During the last year of the Biden administration, the cap on refugee admissions to the U.S. was set at 125,000 per year, up from a record low of 15,000 during the first Trump administration. In the opening days of his second administration, President Trump suspended all refugee resettlement in the United States; he also effectively suspended asylum indefinitely. As of March 2025, both measures face challenges in the courts.

Humanitarian Relief

Additional humanitarian relief measures allow certain people to enter and/or remain in the country temporarily.

These programs include "humanitarian parole," granted case-by-case to people with an urgent need to enter the country (for example, to address a medical emergency), and Temporary Protected Status (TPS), granted to people from designated countries that are confronting armed conflict and other crises.

Generally, humanitarian relief programs don't offer recipients a direct path to citizenship — but recipients may apply for a green card if they qualify through other means, like family or work.

Challenges: Humanitarian relief programs can suddenly change with a new presidential administration. For example, on the first day of his second term, President Trump terminated humanitarian parole programs that the Biden administration had adopted for immigrants fleeing turmoil in Cuba, Haiti, Nicaragua, and Venezuela. As of March 2025, the Trump administration has rescinded the TPS designations for Venezuela and Haiti. ■

Additional Resources

How the United States Immigration System Works: A fact sheet from the American Immigration Council provides a summary with statistics on the U.S. immigration system.

Why Legal Immigration Is Nearly Impossible: A detailed analysis by the Cato Institute explores the U.S. immigration system.

The Green Card Game: Could you navigate the U.S. legal immigration system? Play the game by Cato Institute.

WELCOME TO THE U.S.

A rural Iowa town came together to provide homes and jobs to Ukrainian refugees. Will they be able to keep the community they've created?

By **Siobhan Roberts**



Every Sunday in DeWitt, Iowa, Yana Mamadaliieva and her family, refugees from Ukraine, attend mass at St. Joseph Church, sitting with fellow Ukrainians and newfound Iowan friends in pews at the back left of the nave. This out-of-the-way spot was originally chosen so they could converse during the service — without disturbing others — about the side-by-side English-Ukrainian text for the order of mass, printed out by an Iowan member of the congregation.

The Mamadaliievi family came to DeWitt in 2023, emigrating from Kryvyi Rih as they fled the Russia-Ukraine war. They are among some 22 Ukrainian families who, over the past couple of years, have settled in DeWitt. Nataliia Matiitsiv, with her husband and three children, made the journey last October from a small city near Lviv in western Ukraine. "Our whole life was in five suitcases," said Matiitsiv. "When we arrive here, there is a new light for us. The people here are like angels."

DeWitt — town motto "Crossroads to Opportunity" — is a small farm community, population 5,500. Located in Clinton County, it is about 25 miles west of the Illinois border along the Mississippi River. Politically, it leans conservative: President Trump received nearly 59 percent of the vote in Clinton County, where just around one in every 50 of residents is foreign-born. Residents here have welcomed their new neighbors, joining communities across the country in an effort that could now be at risk.

Many Ukrainians who have found their way to the United States arrived via Uniting for Ukraine, a Biden-era humanitarian parole program under which those fleeing the war could resettle here with the support of an American sponsor. Those families and their sponsors were in turn supported by Welcome.US, a national nonprofit funded in part by Carnegie Corporation of New York.

Welcome.US was launched in 2021 by former Obama and Bush administration officials to help Afghan refugees following the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan. It has been expanded to support sponsors and newcomers from countries including Cuba, Haiti, Nicaragua, Venezuela, and Ukraine. The initiative has contributed to the mobilization of an estimated two million sponsors in 12,000 zip codes and all 50 states — supporting nearly 800,000 newcomers, including many of the 280,000 who have arrived from Ukraine.

Anya McMurray, the president of Welcome.US, said the organization "taps into the desire of Americans and American institutions to live up to our shared values."



CREDIT: KEVIN E. SCHMIDT/ZUMA WIRE/ALAMY LIVE NEWS

Immigration shouldn't be framed as a "crisis that's happening to us," she added, but "an opportunity to be part of the solution, heal our divides, and ensure that America remains a land of opportunity."

In January, the Trump administration ended the refugee program for Cubans, Haitians, Nicaraguans, and Venezuelans, and paused Uniting for Ukraine — leaving Ukrainians in DeWitt and across the United States unsure of their future.

'A sense of belonging'

In the Midwest, the Iowa Newcomer Integration Community and Exchange (IA NICE), has helped welcome 76 Ukrainians. A nonprofit, IA NICE was launched in 2022 by DeWitt resident Angela Boelens with support from the Welcome.US network; this year Welcome.US gave IA NICE a small, one-time grant. The leadership of IA NICE is equally Democrat and Republican, according to Boelens, though its volunteers, donors, and contributors are predominantly Republican.

Boelens, a business administration instructor at Augustana College, became a sponsor soon after Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022. Her great-grandmother arrived in the United States during World War II, pregnant, speaking only Polish, and soon thereafter a widow. "An Italian family in South Chicago was there to help her and took her in," said Boelens. Only recently did Boelens learn that she has some Ukrainian ancestry.

Soon after sponsoring one family, whom she met via Welcome.US's online platform, a second family asked for sponsorship, and she agreed. Boelens had an empty house with two kitchens where the newcomers could live. Then came requests from a third family, and a fourth.

Boelens asked a friend, a local banking executive, about other empty houses in town. In a matter of days he raised money through an investors group to purchase two houses for use by refugees as transitional housing. Boelens launched the nonprofit, and from there, community momentum grew. The local hospital system donated two transitional houses; another businessman lent one house.

Over time, IA NICE developed a successful model for helping refugees integrate into DeWitt. The newcomers arrive to a fully furnished temporary house, a stocked fridge, and a loaner car. Volunteers help them do paperwork, navigate health care, and enroll in the school system.



Angela Boelens, president and founder of Iowa NICE (second from left at back), welcomed the Matiitsiv family when they arrived at Chicago O'Hare International Airport last October. CREDIT: ANGELA BOELENS

Sharon Roling, the principal at St. Joseph, a Catholic school with 180 students from preschool to eighth grade, hoped the school could be a "safe haven for the children." Their decision to help, she said, is rooted in the Catholic Social Teaching principles: respecting the dignity of individuals; standing in solidarity.

Four Ukrainian boys from two families joined the school; the first time Roling heard them laugh, she thought to herself, "Ok, this is a good sign — it means they are starting to feel a sense of belonging here." Google Translate came in handy, as did the school's buddy system — and now the two older Ukrainian students are big buddies looking out for younger Iowan students.

Newcomers typically achieve self-sufficiency in three months without relying on state or federal refugee benefits. IA NICE volunteers are pragmatic, helping the newcomers get the qualifications — such as English language skills — and accreditations necessary for employment. "We get them jobs," said Boelens.

At the local library, IA NICE holds English lessons for the Ukrainians, who also learn through online courses, apps, books, or tutors. Yana Mamadaliieva, an esthetician and tattoo artist, acquired two licenses in the United States, one for esthetic procedures, the other for permanent makeup. While studying, she put stickers scribbled with terminology all over her house, on the walls, furniture, mirrors, appliances, like vocabulary flashcards. In January 2025, she opened her own business, Yana Beauty, and rents an office at Salon Elle on 6th Avenue in DeWitt. Her husband, Anar Mamadaliyev, worked jobs at Ukrainian oil and compound feed factories, on construction sites, and on ships. In the U.S., he studied for his commercial driver's license and now works for Wendling Quarries, a mining company.

> This has been an organic effort by our community, and it's been driven by the heart. It's the right thing to do for Ukrainians."
>
> **– Angela Boelens**

Another newcomer, Iryna Hzyhko, had been a realtor in Kyiv. In DeWitt, she worked for a time cleaning houses. Then she studied to become a certified nursing assistant, but she needed to score 70 percent on the written portion of the exam to pass — a significant challenge. She received tutoring from Karen McWilliams, a retired registered nurse who serves on the IA NICE board and also helps the Ukrainians get doctor's appointments — the local clinic where McWilliams had worked for 27 years agreed to provide services to the refugees as they arrived.

Living just a couple of blocks apart, McWilliams and Hzyhko met frequently to discuss words and phrases and their meaning. All the hard work paid off: Hzyhko passed the exam and landed a job at a nursing home. McWilliams said she focused on giving Hyzhko confidence and reassuring her that she was learning English correctly, "because it is a difficult language to learn." Now, Hyzhko also serves on IA NICE's board of directors.

As Boelens began building support for IA NICE, speaking to large groups in town — such as the Lions Club and the Rotary Club — she at times met skepticism. "There were some raised eyebrows," she recalled. "Just the words 'immigrant' and 'refugee' struck a nerve or fear in some people. But we made a really, really deliberate effort to educate people. And very early on, once they understood who the Ukrainians were and got to know them, it was just kind of across-the-board, unanimous, widespread acceptance and welcoming."

When Donald Thiltgen, who served as Dewitt's mayor from 2000 to 2021, heard about the Ukrainians' arrival, he invited three families to a barbecue. This was the beginning of a close friendship — now they gather not only for barbecues but also birthday parties and holidays. Two of the Ukrainian women volunteered to help maintain his large garden in the country. Together they gardened and canned vegetables, and shared recipes and customs.

'Remain calm and supportive'

Faith is a big part of the DeWitt community: most IA NICE volunteers and donors belong to a church, whether Catholic or Methodist or Baptist. On a Sunday in February, Boelens was invited to speak at the end of St. Joe's service to assuage concerns: A policy update sent from Welcome.US had warned the White House could soon terminate the Ukrainian refugees' humanitarian parole status — which would cause them to lose legal status and put them at risk of deportation.

Boelens asked the congregation to "remain calm and supportive of the families, and to thank all of our elected officials for their work trying to resolve the issues."

Boelens said she tries to maintain cooperation and avoid pointing fingers. Earlier this year she met at length with officials in Republican Senator Chuck Grassley's office. And, in a 15-minute Zoom meeting, she made her case directly with the senator, advocating for extending humanitarian parole for Ukrainian refugees; she said Grassley listened but did not comment on the situation. In an emailed statement, Grassley said, "Americans stand with the Ukrainian people in the pursuit of peace and an end to Putin's bloodshed. I welcome the day where all Ukrainians can feel safe in their homeland."



Yana and Anar Mamadaliyev's son (middle) worked with fellow students at St. Joseph School, observing crystals they created using salt and water in their fifth-grade science class. CREDIT: BETH GRAVERT

Currently, information and optimism are hard to come by. In April some Ukrainians received a "notice of termination of parole" via email from the Department of Homeland Security. It stated that they had seven days to leave the country: "Do not attempt to remain in the United States — the federal government will find you." Within 24 hours, the notice was rescinded; a department spokesperson said it had been sent "in error," according to news reports.

Boelens reminds policymakers that DeWitt's interests — which she calls "not insignificant" — are also at stake. In material terms, newcomers have already contributed to growth in population and school enrollment, and to economic development, through taxes, mortgages, filling jobs, and starting businesses.

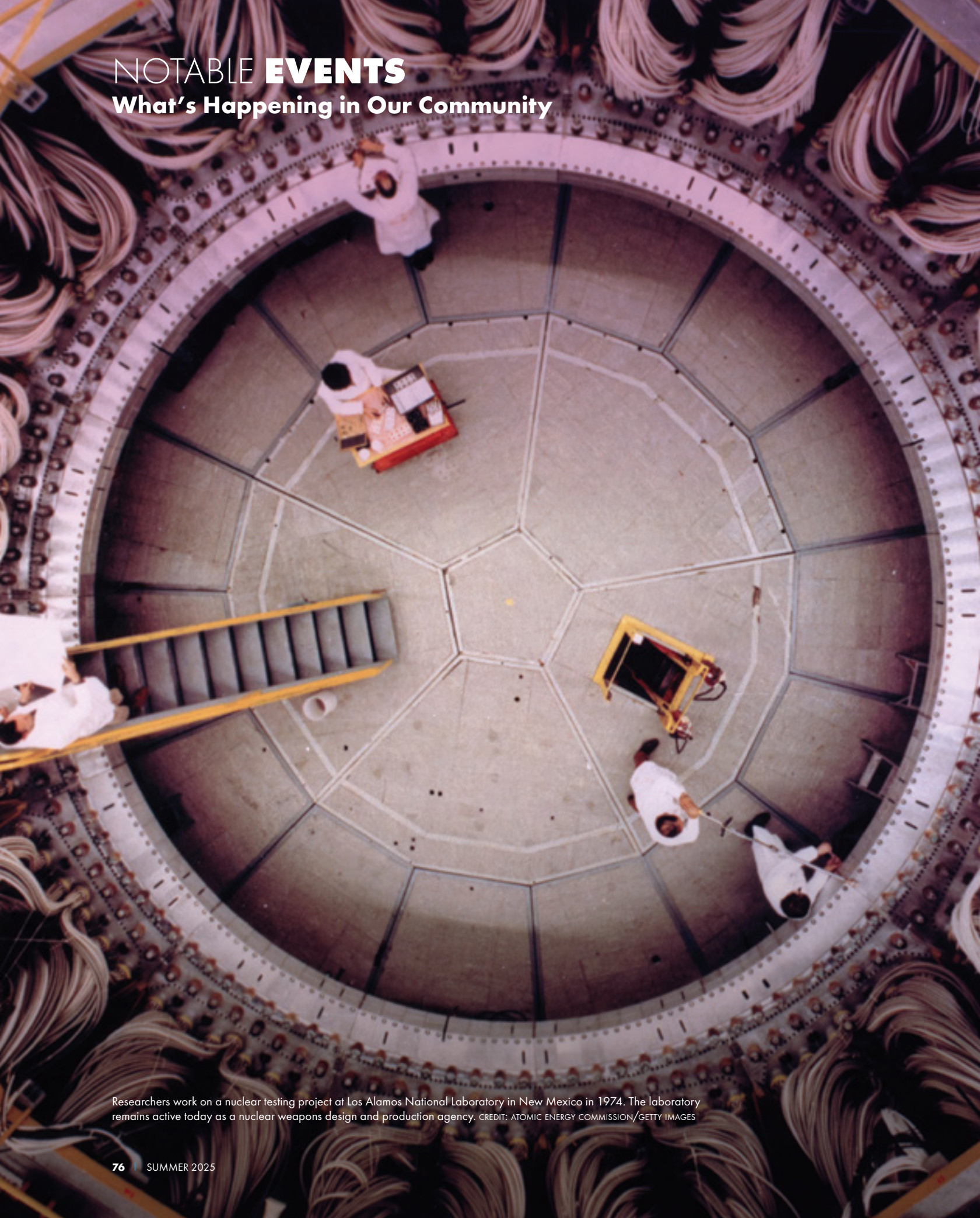
Ultimately, though, "this has been an organic effort by our community, and it's been driven by the heart," she said. "It's the right thing to do for Ukrainians."

Describing the intangible rewards, Boelens often cites Saint Francis of Assisi's prayer for peace: "Grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console, to be understood as to understand, to be loved as to love. For it is in giving that one receives." ■

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).

NOTABLE **EVENTS**

What's Happening in Our Community



Researchers work on a nuclear testing project at Los Alamos National Laboratory in New Mexico in 1974. The laboratory remains active today as a nuclear weapons design and production agency. CREDIT: ATOMIC ENERGY COMMISSION/GETTY IMAGES



Mariano-Florentino (Tino) Cuéllar, president of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, in conversation with Dame Louise Richardson, president of Carnegie Corporation of New York, at the 2025 Carnegie International Nuclear Policy Conference. CREDIT: PAUL MORIGI/CARNEGIE ENDOWMENT FOR INTERNATIONAL PEACE

Carnegie Launches Consortium to Reduce Nuclear Dangers

In the 1960s, President John F. Kennedy warned that as many as 25 countries could possess nuclear weapons by the 1970s. That widespread adoption never materialized, thanks in part to international agreements and philanthropic investment in arms control, public education, and nuclear security research.

"The risks of nuclear war are rising, and philanthropy should not sit on the sidelines," said Carnegie president Dame Louise Richardson in her remarks at the Nuclear Policy Conference in Washington, D.C., on April 22. Richardson noted that funding for nuclear security work has sharply declined even as conflicts in Europe, the Middle East, and Asia drive more countries to reconsider nuclear weapons programs. Emerging technologies like AI and space systems, she added, are further complicating crisis management.

In response, Carnegie is leading a new consortium of philanthropic organizations aimed at reducing these evolving nuclear threats. With initial pledges totaling up to $10.2 million over the next two years, the consortium includes Longview Philanthropy, PAX sapiens, Founders Pledge, and an anonymous donor. The initiative is structured to foster collaboration among both funders and grantees, encouraging proposals that address emerging risks in ways that cut across disciplines.

"We believe that nuclear weapons should no longer be treated as separate from other security challenges," Richardson said, emphasizing the need for new approaches and unconventional thinking.

The initiative continues Carnegie's decades-long commitment to nuclear security, which has included over $160 million in grants since 1983. "Together," Richardson said, "let us do everything we can to ensure that a nuclear weapon is never used again."



A Morgan Library & Museum exhibition explored the life and legacy of Belle da Costa Greene, one of the most influential librarians in American history. Carnegie Corporation of New York funded two Belle da Costa Green Curatorial Fellowships. CREDIT: FILIP WOLAK



Nadine Burke Harris, pediatrician and former California Surgeon General, speaks at Common Sense Media's Summit on Kids and Families in March 2025. CREDIT: KIM WHITE

Belle da Costa Greene Fellows Honor First Director of the Morgan Library

Belle da Costa Greene, a Black woman who passed as white, became one of the most influential art curators of the early 20th century, shaping the Morgan Library & Museum's world-renowned collection and becoming its first director. On April 15, Carnegie staff attended a recent exhibition exploring Greene's life and legacy — the Morgan's most visited show ever — guided by the Belle da Costa Greene Curatorial Fellows, whose positions are funded by Carnegie Corporation of New York.

The exhibition highlighted Greene's efforts to democratize access to art through photographic reproductions and educational outreach, to expand the library's holdings to include works from around the world, and, in a male-dominated field, to prioritize mentoring other women, creating opportunities for them to enter and advance in the library world.

For Sam Mohite, a Belle da Costa Greene Curatorial Fellow, the experience of bringing Greene's legacy to life for visitors was transformative. "Through transcribing and encoding Greene's letters and leading guided tours through the show, I've become closely acquainted with our first director's lasting impact on the institution as well as the many ways her story has deeply affected our visitors," said Mohite.

Carnegie Backs Initiatives to Address Youth Mental Health and Digital Safety

Common Sense Media's second annual summit, with support from Carnegie, gathered prominent voices in education, technology, and child advocacy, including Geoffrey Canada, Hillary Clinton, John King, and Margaret Spellings. The March 24–25 event underscored the findings of a new report from Common Sense Media that revealed rising concerns about youth mental health, economic instability, and technology's impact on young people.

According to the report, 67 percent of kids and teens rate their mental health as "just fair" or "poor," while 53 percent of parents believe their children would be better off with less social media use. Despite these concerns, 49 percent of parents and 44 percent of young people feel "hopeful" about the future.

The findings emphasize the urgency of Carnegie-funded efforts to expand youth mental health support and promote safer digital spaces, reinforcing the foundation's commitment to creating pathways for young people to thrive in a rapidly changing world.



Dame Louise Richardson, president of Carnegie Corporation of New York (center right), joined Daniel Stid of the American Enterprise Institute (left), Kathryn Bradley of the Stuart Foundation (center left), and Hanna Skandera of the Daniels Fund (right) for a panel at iCivics' Civic Learning Week National Forum in March 2025. CREDIT: P BEAUDOUIN, HOOVER INSTITUTION



On November 20, 2024, Carnegie trustee Judge Ann Claire Williams (Ret.) moderated a panel with students who took college-level courses while they were still in high school through the National Education Equity Lab, a Carnegie grantee working to expand college access for students from low-income high schools. CREDIT: FILIP WOLAK

Richardson Reaffirms Support for Civic Education at National Forum

During iCivics' Civic Learning Week National Forum on March 13, Dame Louise Richardson joined a panel with leaders from the Stuart Foundation and the Daniels Fund to emphasize the value of civic education in bridging divisions and strengthening democracy.

Richardson underscored civic education's potential to reduce polarization, calling it a "source of optimism" that enjoys broad bipartisan support. "This is a no-lose proposition," she said. "At an absolute minimum, people will know more about their society, about their community."

For nearly a decade, Carnegie has invested in civic learning programs, including iCivics, which equips young people with the tools to participate fully in civic life. As part of its civics work, Carnegie recently made a grant to the American Exchange Project, a nonprofit that offers young people opportunities to experience life in communities different from their own.

Carnegie and National Education Equity Lab Expand College Access for Underserved Students

Carnegie hosted a convening with leaders from some of the nation's most distinguished universities to celebrate a growing effort to expand college access for students from underperforming high schools. The event on November 20, 2024, highlighted the work of the National Education Equity Lab, which partners with universities to offer dual-enrollment courses taught by faculty at top institutions.

Presidents from Barnard, Brown, Cornell, Howard, and Wesleyan joined Carnegie leaders and Ed Equity Lab representatives to discuss how their institutions are creating new pathways to college-level learning. The event featured student voices as well, with several Lab alumni sharing how the program boosted their academic confidence and reshaped their postsecondary goals.

During a panel moderated by Carnegie trustee Judge Ann Claire Williams (Ret.), Howard University president Ben Vinson III addressed students directly: "You are ready — so ready — for what's next." In March 2025, Carnegie awarded a $3 million grant to support the continued expansion of the initiative, which has already reached 25,000 students in 32 states. ■

‘THE MOST IMPORTANT THING I’VE DONE’

The 2025 Carnegie Medal of Philanthropy honorees on how philanthropy can make the world in some way better than we found it

By **Celeste Ford**

Receiving the 2025 Carnegie Medal of Philanthropy at Edinburgh’s historic Signet Library, Carol Colburn Grigor CBE asked, “Whoever met an unhappy philanthropist?” Grigor was referring to her joy in supporting the arts, influenced by her father, an arts benefactor and musician who encouraged her to play the piano. Much like Andrew Carnegie, he was determined to give away his fortune before he died, declaring that “his checks will bounce.”

Grigor was among the philanthropists who talked about their giving in practical and moving ways at the May 7 event, held near Andrew Carnegie’s birthplace in Dunfermline, Scotland. Carnegie Corporation of New York president Dame Louise Richardson emceed the event as four additional philanthropists were awarded the medal: Barbara and Amos Hostetter, and Joe Neubauer and Jeanette Lerman-Neubauer. The Carnegie Catalyst Award — honoring nonprofits that inspire people to help one another — was presented to Comic Relief, cofounded by two of the UK’s biggest names in television, film, and stage, Richard Curtis CBE and Sir Lenny Henry.

Since 2001, the Medal of Philanthropy has been awarded every two years to philanthropists whose work embodies Andrew Carnegie’s ideals — a total of more than 70 individuals overall. Although many are household names, the Class of 2025 is best described as aiming high while keeping their profiles low. Barbara and Amos Hostetter used his middle name when establishing the Barr Foundation, which invests in the arts, climate, and education, particularly in the Boston area. The couple said their approach to philanthropy was modeled on Amos’s leadership of Continental Cablevision, the company he cofounded. “We invest in leaders, we center our grantees, we act with humility, and we’re open to risk, all with the goal of reaching for very bold solutions,” said Barbara, the foundation’s chair.

Joe Neubauer moved from Palestine to the United States by himself at age 14 after the Nazis “destroyed everything,” attended college on scholarships, and grew a food services group into a publicly traded company that employs 250,000 people worldwide. He and his wife, Jeanette Lerman-Neubauer, a corporate communications specialist, created the Neubauer Family Foundation in Philadelphia as a “moral obligation.” Lermen-Neubauer said, “There are a lot of thorny problems out there to solve. Let’s each find a thread, a community, and start pulling.” Neubauer sounded like Andrew Carnegie when he said, “Doing philanthropy thoughtfully is almost as difficult as making money, but it’s much more rewarding.”

In addition to the Catalyst Award, Comic Relief received a $50,000 grant from Carnegie Corporation of New York. Curtis and Henry created the humanitarian relief organization in 1986 in response to the famine in Ethiopia. Since then, they have raised more than £2 billion to help alleviate poverty worldwide, leveraging pop culture and their Red Nose Day to make fundraising fun and “to change laws, attitudes, and behaviors.”

“Comic Relief is the most important thing I’ve done in my life,” Henry said. “Your work and I hope ours, will inspire a whole new generation to live rich, satisfying lives, and allow others to live full lives.” Curtis invoked Andrew Carnegie’s words: “To try to make the world in some way better than you found it, is to have a noble motive in life.” ■

Celeste Ford is the chief communications officer at Carnegie Corporation of New York.









Top: From left to right, 2025 Carnegie Medal of Philanthropy honorees Joe Neubauer and Jeanette Lerman-Neubauer, Carol Colburn Grigor CBE, and Barbara and Amos Hostetter, and 2025 Carnegie Catalyst Award honorees Richard Curtis CBE and Sir Lenny Henry at a ceremony hosted by Carnegie Dunfermline Trust, Carnegie UK, and the Carnegie Trust for the Universities of Scotland on May 7, 2025.

Right: From left to right, Andrew Carnegie's great-grandson William Thomson, Dame Louise Richardson, and CEO of Carnegie Dunfermline and Hero Fund Trust Gillian Taylor plant a silver birch at Pittencrieff Park in Dunfermline, Scotland.

Bottom left: Carnegie Medal of Philanthropy honorees received Andrew Carnegie busts.

Center left: Choristers from the National Youth Choir of Scotland performed at the 2025 Carnegie Medal of Philanthropy ceremony.

CREDIT: SANDY YOUNG

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