

The Eugene and Agnes Meyer Foundation

The real legacy of the Washington Post

By Kevin Mooney

Summary: *For seven decades, a foundation created with money from the Washington Post's owners has been trying to help push America further to port. You have probably never heard of it, but it continues to exercise significant influence in America's capital city and beyond.*

Created in 1944, the low-profile Eugene and Agnes E. Meyer Foundation may not be as large and prolific as the Tides Foundation, the Rockefeller Foundation, or the Ford Foundation, but it funds the same garden-variety left-leaning causes. While it rarely attracts media coverage, the Meyer Foundation has been cutting a larger figure for itself in recent years. Based in the nation's capital, it concentrates its efforts on "improving the lives of low-income people in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan region."

So, just how influential is the Eugene and Agnes E. Meyer Foundation? Its small size belies some high-level connections. Former board members include Attorney General Eric Holder, who is making every effort to take down voter identification laws across the country while refusing to investigate ACORN and its affiliated and successor organizations.

The Meyer Foundation's board of directors is jam-packed with Washington power players. Among them are Joshua Bernstein, a D.C.-

area real estate developer who founded the Jewish Venture Philanthropy Fund; Antoinette Cook Bush, executive vice president of Fox News' parent News Corp.; Ginger Lew, former member of President Obama's White House National Economic Council (no relation to Treasury Secretary Jack Lew); financier William Dunbar; Barbara J. Krumsiek, CEO of Calvert Investments Inc.; James J. Sandman, president of Legal Services Corp., the single largest funder of civil legal aid for poor people in the U.S.; Barbara Lang, CEO



Agnes Meyer wrote a six-part report in the *Washington Post* in 1945 that celebrated Saul Alinsky's activism in the Chicago slums.

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of the DC Chamber of Commerce; and Robert G. Templin Jr., president, Northern Virginia Community College.

The family of board member Deborah Ratner Salzberg is connected with some powerful Democrats, including President Obama. Ratner family members are big contributors to the Democratic Party and the president. They operate Forest City Enterprises, a vast real estate company based in Cleveland, Ohio. Deborah is the daughter of co-chairman Albert Ratner. She runs Forest City's Washington, D.C. office. Bruce Ratner, who is a cousin to Albert Ratner, runs the company's New York City subsidiary.

Bruce Ratner bought off local opposition, including the New York branch of ACORN, to make way for the Atlantic Yards Project in Brooklyn. The massive 22-acre residential and retail complex includes a stadium for the Brooklyn Nets basketball team.

Another of Albert Ratner's cousins, Michael Ratner, is president emeritus of the radical Center for Constitutional Rights, a Greenwich Village-based public interest law firm

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whose lawsuits have hurt America's ability to defend itself from terrorist groups. Michael's sister is PBS commentator turned Fox News analyst Ellen Ratner.

Julie L. Rogers, the Meyer Foundation's CEO for the past 27 years, intends to retire in June 2014. In mid-October 2013 the foundation announced that its board's search and transition committee had chosen the McCormick Group to manage the search for a successor.

Rogers is a pillar of the left-of-center philanthropic establishment. From 2002 to 2008, she served on the board of the Council on Foundations. She also served on the boards of the Foundation Center, Venture Philanthropy Partners, and the Forum of Regional Associations of Grantmakers. Her biography on the Meyer website boasts that she's received a multitude of awards, including *Washingtonian* magazine's "Power 100" and "Washingtonian of the Year." She was named one of *Washington Business Journal's* "Women Who Mean Business," and *Washingtonian* recognized her as one of the "100 Most Powerful Women in the DC Region" and one of the "Top 45 Who Shaped Washington."

Before joining the Meyer Foundation in 1986, Rogers was staff director of the D.C. City Council's human services committee. She also taught in the Montgomery County, Maryland public school system.

The foundation that Rogers has run for so many years now has assets worth \$183.5 million, according to its most recent publicly available IRS filing. It had net investment income of \$10.9 million in 2011 and a budget of \$8.6 million. It disbursed just under \$6 million in the form of 222 grants to various causes in 2011. Foundation Search ranks the Meyer Foundation 629th among U.S. foundations by assets. It garners 18th among foundations by assets in the District of Columbia.

The foundation's mission statement is philanthropic boilerplate. According to its website, the foundation's mission is to identify and invest "in visionary leaders and effective community-based nonprofit organizations that are working to create lasting improvements in the lives of low-income people in the Washington, DC metropolitan region, and ... strengthen the region's nonprofit sector as a vital and respected partner in meeting community needs."

Radical Roots

The Meyer Foundation may behave like a run-of-the-mill liberal philanthropy, but it has some radical roots and occasionally dabbles in radical causes. Co-benefactor Agnes E. Meyer, the wife of former *Washington Post* publisher Eugene Meyer and great grandmother to the current publisher, Katharine Weymouth, was attracted to the radicalism of Saul Alinsky, the community organizing guru and author of *Rules for Radicals*.

Lost in history, but available in archives of the *Washington Post*, is a six-part report written by Mrs. Meyer and published in 1945 that celebrated Alinsky's activism in the Chicago slums. The series, entitled "The Orderly Revolution," is what initially garnered national attention for Alinsky, enabling his so-called social justice message to reach Americans who might otherwise never have heard of his work. President Harry Truman was so impressed by the policy ramifications laced throughout Mrs. Meyer's report that he ordered 100 reprints made.

Agnes Elizabeth Ernst Meyer was the daughter of German immigrants. She was born and raised in New York City. One of the first women reporters hired by the *New York Sun*, she had a long and influential career in journalism. In 1909, she married Eugene Meyer, a multimillionaire who held several prestigious financial positions in the U.S. federal government.

Mr. Meyer served as chairman of the Federal Reserve Board from 1930 to 1933 and was later named as the first president of the

World Bank. It was after the Herbert Hoover administration ended in 1933 that Meyer purchased the *Washington Post*, providing his wife with a powerful journalistic platform. Her political views became decidedly more progressive during the World War II era, according to the “Eleanor Roosevelt Papers” held by the George Washington University. Meyer supported Adlai Stevenson over Dwight Eisenhower in the 1956 election and switched from the Republican to Democratic Party in 1960. She was a persistent supporter of the creation of a new federal Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. President Lyndon Johnson once said she had more influence on his education policies than any other single individual.

Her federal-centric influence continues in the work of her namesake foundation. As the 2013-2014 school year was about to begin, Carmen James Lane, a senior program officer for the Meyer Foundation, made it clear in public statements that grant money would be used to help expand federal control over local educational programming. This will be done by supporting the Common Core State Standards Initiative, which sets national standards for English and math.

Using “Race to the Top” grants from the Department of Education for leverage, the Obama administration has successfully induced 46 states into accepting the Common Core. Under this arrangement, Washington, D.C. bureaucrats will be well positioned to dictate school curriculum, warns education policy analyst Lindsey Burke in a recent study.

“The constitutional authority for education rests with states and localities, and ultimately with parents—not the federal government,” Burke explains. “The federal government has crossed this line in the past, but dictating curriculum content is a major new breach that represents a critical level of centralization and a major setback for parental rights.”

Burke adds:

“Adopting Common Core national standards and tests surrenders control of the content taught in local schools to distant national organizations and bureaucrats in Washington. It is the antithesis of reform that would put control of education in the hands of those closest to the student: local school leaders and parents.”

Principled state leaders still have ample opportunity to unwind themselves from Common Core obligations and restore educational freedom. Burke, for example, suggests that governors and state lawmakers withhold any funding that would be used to bring state curricula into line with federal dictates. Meanwhile, the Meyer Foundation is making every effort to ensure that the Common Core becomes firmly entrenched within the next few months. Potential grantees know that funding could be withheld unless they submit to federal control.

“The Common Core informs the questions I ask,” explained Lane, the Meyer senior program officer, in an interview with Grantmakers for Education. “It’s changing the conversation.” Here’s a list of questions Lane asks when she receives education grant applications:

*How does the proposal integrate with or reinforce existing efforts in schools to implement the Common Core? Does it take into account existing timelines and milestones in schools’ implementation plans?

*Is there compelling evidence that the project strategically addresses a real, high priority gap in Common Core implementation?

*How is the grantee ensuring that activities are tightly aligned with Common Core expectations and meet a high bar for quality?

*Does the proposal include strong leadership and buy-in from state or district leaders, school principals, or teachers?

Not too much wiggle room there to sidestep the Common Core.

School choice proponents have good reason to be concerned with the education programming on the receiving end of support from the Meyer Foundation. Charter schools, which are widely viewed as incubators of reform by Republican governors and free market think tanks, are susceptible to federal influence via the Common Core.

Last year, the Meyer Foundation granted \$160,000 to the E.L. Haynes Public Charter School in Washington, D.C., so it could partner with the D.C. public school system to develop “competency based pathways to high school graduation” over two years. Not only is the project “creating a new pathway,” but it is also “being done in such a way that’s aligned with the Common Core,” Lane has noted.

The Eugene and Agnes E. Meyer Foundation has also given money to Teach for America—\$40,000 in 2011—the best-known alternative recruiting organization for aspiring teachers. Groups like Teach for America are shaking things up by reforming public schools incrementally and from the inside. They are making inroads for future reformers to build on. While small in staff size and budget, they create opportunities for entrepreneurs to change the system. Teach for America puts “shock troops on the front lines in the education reform battle, offering a new way to bring a different kind of teacher into the classroom,” wrote Phil Brand in the February 2008 *Organization Trends*.

The 501(c)(3) nonprofit was founded more than two decades ago by Wendy Kopp, then a senior at Princeton, to create a new corps of teachers who would become future education leaders. “Kopp has since guided more than 17,000 college graduates through the TFA program, which selects top graduates from diverse backgrounds and majors (only 2% major in education),” Brand observed. It “gives them an intensive five-week summer training course, and then uses state-approved alternative certification programs to train them while they teach in poor and minority urban and rural school districts.”

The Meyer Foundation also provided initial, critical support to the Community Development Support Collaborative (CDSC) in partnership with the Fannie Mae Foundation. The CDSC grew out of the Washington Regional Association of Grantmakers, which was set up to help improve the quality of life in the D.C. area. The CDSC was closed in 2011. “For 18 years, the CDSC brought together key players in the District’s foundation and banking communities and made us true partners in strengthening low income neighborhoods and the non-profits that serve them,” Julie Rogers, the foundation’s outgoing president, has said. “The CDSC’s long life is a testament to the power and effectiveness of collaboration.”

While Meyer has understandably backed away from advertising its relationship with Fannie, it remains open and receptive to collaborative efforts aimed at expanding social welfare programs in 2013.

Meyer Grants Fuel Liberal Activism

In May, the foundation’s board of directors approved 76 grants totaling more than \$2.8 million and focusing on four areas of interest; namely, Education, Healthy Communities, Economic Security, and a Strong Nonprofit Sector. Meyer has a particular interest in supporting “Multi-issue research

and advocacy groups and coalitions that propose and advocate for policies aimed at reducing poverty and strengthening the safety net in the region. Key issue areas include creating and preserving affordable housing, ensuring access to high-quality health care, securing home rule and voting rights for the District of Columbia, and improving access to public benefits (such as TANF [Temporary Assistance for Needy Families], food stamps, unemployment insurance, disability benefits, and the EITC [Earned Income Tax Credit].)”

As Congress wrestles with “comprehensive immigration reform,” Meyer is doing its part to fund advocacy groups that provide new arrivals from Latin America with support services. The \$20,000 grant awarded to the Legal Aid Justice Center in 2013 will be used “to support the Immigrant Advocacy Program in Northern Virginia.” The organization’s “Immigration Advocacy Program,” which operates out of offices in Charlottesville and Northern Virginia, has secured over \$2 million in wages for “migrant farmworkers, day laborers, and other low-wage immigrant workers that were earned but never paid,” the Center claims in its literature. The group’s attorneys also make every effort to keep their clients involved in public policy debates that affect immigration policy.

The Legal Aid Justice Center has received \$20,000 from Meyer every year since 2009. With elites in both major parties pushing for some form of amnesty for illegal aliens, Meyer knows how to drum up sympathy for new arrivals from Latin America. That’s why the activities of CASA de Maryland, another grant recipient, are heavily publicized and promoted by the foundation. Here’s a snippet from a section of the website that highlights grantee stories:

“For Gustavo Torres, the anti-immigrant fervor that’s taken hold in the United States cuts him like a knife. In Maryland, where he serves as executive director of CASA de Maryland, the largest Latino and immigrant organization in the state, one of CASA’s day

worker centers was recently doused with gasoline during its opening week.” Immigrants are subjected to intense mistreatment, Torres claims. “It is really hard to see the way some people treat my community,” he says. “It breaks my heart.”

Torres is described as a “former journalist” and “a fearless activist” who started out “as a student and union leader in his native Colombia.” His CASA organization’s 2008 May Day of Action for Immigrant Rights included the Communist Party USA among its official participants, and he has ties to other radical groups such as the FMLN in El Salvador. CASA has been funded by George Soros and the deceased Venezuelan strongman Hugo Chavez. (For more on Torres and CASA, see the Sept. 2012 *Organization Trends*.)

The current U.S. Secretary of Labor, Thomas Perez, previously served on the board of CASA. Perez, a leftist lawyer known for his in-your-face tactics, was also an assistant attorney general at the Department of Justice and a top aide to the late Sen. Ted Kennedy (D-Mass.). At the Justice Department, Perez led the Obama Administration’s assault on voter ID laws. As a member of the Montgomery County, Maryland Council in 2003 he tried to force governments to accept fraud-prone *matricula consular* ID cards issued by Mexican consular offices.

Maryland has 98,000 immigrants who are legal and eligible for citizenship, according to CASA. Since 2008, the group has received \$185,000 from the Meyer Foundation.

Local Issues with National Ramifications

Since the foundation remains focused on the capital city, some of the causes it supports seem limited and parochial in scope. But that’s only true on the surface. In reality, the grant money is attached to policy proposals that could have significant national implications.

Anyone who supports statehood for Washington, D.C., for instance, can thank Meyer

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for keeping the effort afloat with generous contributions to the DC Appleseed Center for Law and Justice. Since 2008, the foundation has donated \$290,000 to the organization, including \$45,000 this year. Most conservatives are cool to the idea of making the District of Columbia the 51st state because D.C. residents are the most reliable Democratic constituency in America. President Obama received 91 percent of the vote in the District in 2012, down from 93 percent in 2008. In 2004 John Kerry garnered 89 percent.

Walter Smith, the DC Appleseed executive director, co-authored a *Washington Post* op-ed with Paul Strauss, the D.C. shadow senator, criticizing the D.C. City Council for delaying a referendum that could convert the attorney general position into an elected position; this would be a huge step forward for the proponents of statehood.

DC Appleseed is also a strong proponent of gun control legislation. Even in the aftermath of the landmark 2007 Supreme Court ruling which affirmed that the Second Amendment guarantees an individual right to bear arms (*Heller v. District of Columbia*), the group has made it clear it will fight tooth-and-nail to preserve the District's continuing restrictions on gun ownership.

Meyer has donated \$260,000 to D.C. Vote, which describes itself as "dedicated to securing full voting representation in Congress and full democracy for the more than half a million residents of the District of Columbia."

Since 2008, the foundation has directed \$55,000 to the Virginia Interfaith Center for Public Policy, which regards the implementation of Obamacare as a major priority.

The Meyer Foundation also funds what is arguably the most politically powerful special interest group in Virginia, the Piedmont Environmental Council (PEC), which maintains control of conservation easements throughout the state. The nonprofit, based in Warrenton, Virginia, has taken in \$132,000

from Meyer since 2007. (For more on PEC, see Cheryl K. Chumley's profile of the group in *Organization Trends*, April 2007.)

The original idea behind the easement regime was to allow financially stressed landowners to receive tax breaks in exchange for entering into a conservation agreement that would lock away parts of their land from future development. Critics charge that what began as a benign program has been converted into government land grab schemes, with groups like PEC leading the charge.

PEC board members include Margaret "Peggy" Richardson, who served as the IRS Commissioner under President Bill Clinton. After a Virginia farmer named Martha Boneta received an IRS audit in the mail that followed on the heels of a dispute between her and PEC over the terms of her easement, suspicion fell on Richardson. In media interviews, the Clinton-era official denied any involvement with the audit.

Not All Its Giving Is Political

The Meyer Foundation funds a lot of programs that aren't aimed advancing the goals of the Left. For example, the foundation has given \$283,000 in grants since 2003 to Martha's Table. This Washington, D.C. soup kitchen is the nonprofit that President Obama volunteered at in a widely covered photo opportunity on Oct. 14, during the recent government shutdown.

Meyer has also donated \$715,000 since 2001 to World Arts Focus in Mt. Rainier, Md. The nonprofit runs Joe's Movement Emporium, a 20,000 square foot community center. The foundation has provided \$245,000 since 2002 to the Alexandria Seaport Foundation in Virginia. That group takes troubled young men ages 17 to 21 and points them in a new direction by giving them apprenticeships. It also provides on-site academic classes in GED preparation.

Other local, Washington, D.C., organizations to benefit from Meyer Foundation grants are Brainfood, which teaches area students how

to cook (\$220,000 since 2000); Computer CORE, which gives young people computer skills and teaches English-as-a-second-language (\$196,000 since 2003); and Jubilee Housing, a nonprofit that provides low-cost housing and support services to the poor in Washington's Adams Morgan neighborhood (\$480,000 since 1999).

Conclusion

Although the Meyer Foundation funds many plain-vanilla nonprofits and lacks the monetary heft of a Ford Foundation, its deep roots in radicalism and its influence in the nation's capital make it a significant player in left-wing philanthropy. It deserves more attention than it has received so far.

Kevin Mooney is a national investigative reporter based in Washington, D.C., who writes for the Daily Caller, the American Spectator, and TheBlaze.

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Many thanks.

Terrence Scanlon
President

PhilanthropyNotes

Despite the rotten economy, many private foundations are bouncing back financially. Overall, foundations experienced a 12 percent gain in their endowments last year, the *Wall Street Journal* reports. A study by the **Council on Foundations** and the **Commonfund Institute** examined the finances of 140 private foundations with a total of \$78.7 billion in assets. The 12 percent jump compared favorably to a decline of 0.7 percent in 2011.

A separate *WSJ* article notes that five years after a major financial crisis rocked Wall Street, major figures associated with the dramatic downturn are opening up their wallets for charity. Former **Countrywide Financial Corp.** CEO **Angelo Mozilo**'s foundation gave \$2 million for a pediatric intensive-care unit in Tarzana, Calif. Former **Bank of America** CEO **Kenneth D. Lewis** donated \$100,000 to a group that runs a foster-care home in Charlotte, N.C. There is no such thing as dirty money, according to **Sean Dobson** of the **National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy**. "As the leader of a nonprofit, you're typically hard-pressed for resources," he said. "It's pretty hard to turn down money."

The **National Organization for Marriage** is suing the **IRS** in federal court seeking damages over the illegal release of its donor list from the confidential part of its 2008 IRS filing. The list went to the group's arch-enemies at **Human Rights Campaign** (HRC), which harassed the donors. HRC's president, **Joseph Solmonese**, was then a national co-chairman for President **Obama**'s re-election campaign. "This is a federal crime," says NOM president **Brian Brown**. One of NOM's lawyers is **Cleta Mitchell**, of counsel to **ActRight Legal Foundation**.

While President Obama's politicized IRS was busy harassing conservative groups, it was also advising black nonprofits on how far they could legally go in campaigning for Obama and other Democratic candidates, writes **Hoover Institution** media fellow **Paul E. Sperry** in *Investor's Business Daily*. In 2012 the IRS "audited big GOP donors and blocked Tea Party groups trying to obtain tax-exempt status as part of what House investigators suspect was an effort to re-elect the president," he says. At the same time top administration officials, including Attorney General **Eric Holder**, "met in Washington with several dozen prominent black church ministers representing millions of voters to brief them on how to get their flocks out to vote." The "summit" to mobilize religious African-Americans voters was hosted by the all-Democratic **Congressional Black Caucus** in May 2012.

Goldman Sachs WATCH

A former employee is suing the Federal Reserve Bank of New York, claiming she was wrongfully terminated because she refused to alter the results of her investigation into mega-bank Goldman Sachs. Carmen Segarra's federal lawsuit says the New York Fed pressured her to modify her report about Goldman's legal and compliance divisions. She says she refused in May 2012, and was then unceremoniously canned a few days later. "Segarra's finding led the New York Fed's Legal and Compliance risk team to approve downgrading Goldman's annual rating pertaining to policies and procedures, the lawsuit said," according to a news report.