

SPECIAL EDITION



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AUGUST 2026



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AMERICA AT 250

— THE INSTITUTIONS THAT SHAPED AMERICA —

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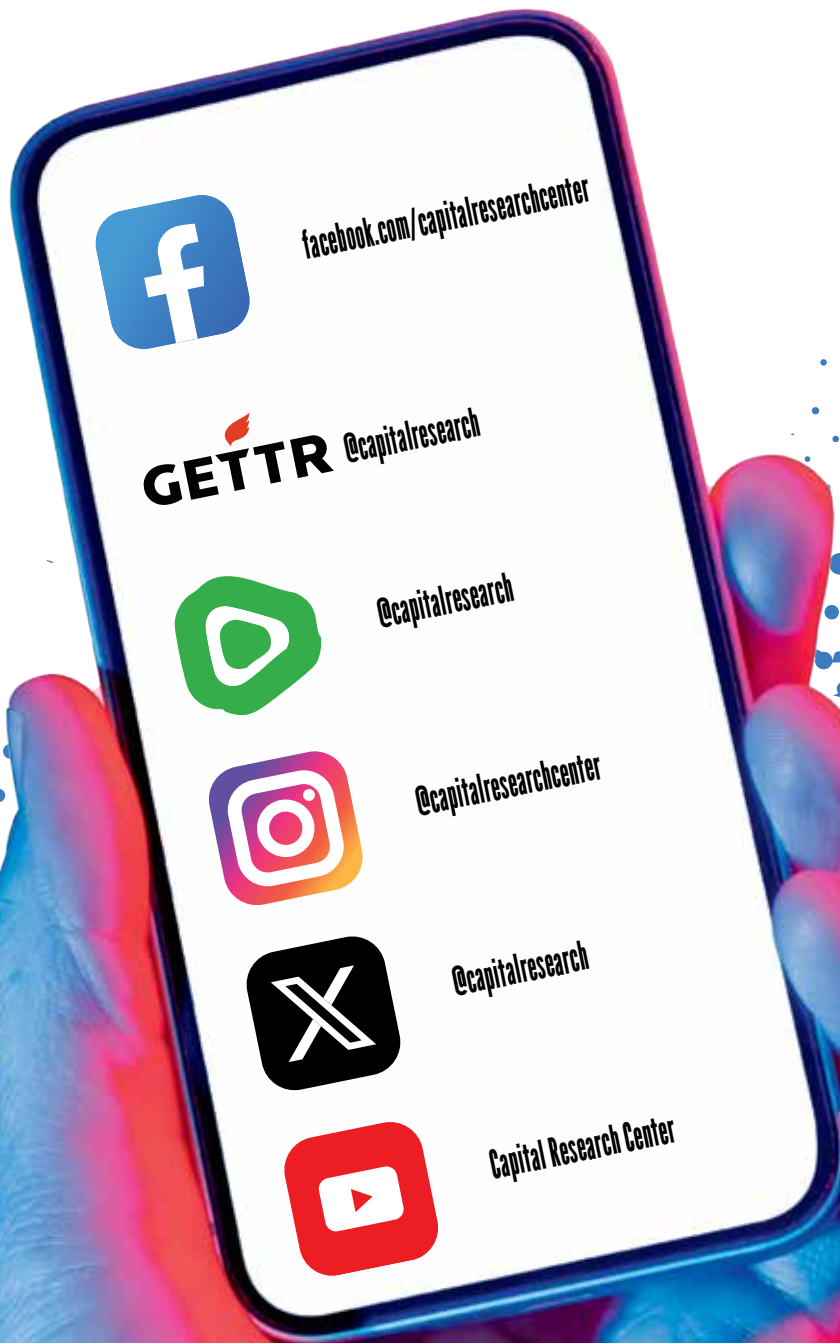
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CAPITAL RESEARCH CENTER
AMERICA'S INVESTIGATIVE THINK TANK



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CRC was established in 1984 to promote a better understanding of charity and philanthropy. We support the principles of individual liberty, a free market economy, and limited constitutional government—the cornerstones of American society, which make possible wise and generous philanthropic giving.

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An old dog on our 250th birthday, America can become young again

This special issue of Capital Research profiles some of the movements that have been teaching Americans to hate what we should love about ourselves.

By Ken Braun



When the World Cup soccer tournament was hosted in America this summer, visitors from relatively rich societies across the globe filled their social media posts with astonished and (mostly) positive reactions to the culture that Americans (at best) take for granted.

Anyone with an old dog or cat knows the drill when they bring a new puppy or kitten into the home. The elderly pet begins running around with a spring in its step, lying around less, and generally remembering what it was like to be young again.

While still young in the history of nations, America, on its 250th birthday, has become an old dog in relation to the high standards we set for ourselves. Our Founding and Constitution were designed to take full advantage of the Enlightenment and the Industrial Revolution, even as both pillars of modern civilization were born elsewhere and still relatively new in 1776.

No society leaned into those bold and beautiful ideas like young America, and we still have no rivals. The truth became abundantly clear this summer, when the World Cup

soccer tournament came to our shores. Visitors from relatively rich societies across the globe filled their social media posts with astonished and (mostly) positive reactions to the culture that Americans (at best) take for granted and (all too often) malign as too individualist or greedy and whatnot.

On the most mundane level, nothing became as treasured to our visitors as the discovery of mere ranch dressing. World Cup fans tried to cart so many bottles of ranch back home that TSA issued a cheeky advisory:

Are you kicking around the idea of flying home with your favorite dip? If you're traveling within the U.S., make sure to keep your carry-on sauces to 3.4 ounces or less and place any larger containers in your checked bags. Some heroes wear capes. Others bring ranch.



Our World Cup visitors this summer found us to be a nation of unusually friendly people providing unimaginably awesome stuff to total strangers.

An ABC News report summarized the general phenomena:

Across TikTok, Instagram and other social media platforms, fans from around the world are sharing their reactions to uniquely American experiences, from sprawling supermarkets and self-serve ice dispensers to oversized pickup trucks, fire engines and what many describe as exceptionally friendly customer service.

A tourism researcher quoted in the report provided this analysis:

What Americans consider ordinary is often extraordinary to visitors. [...] A giant supermarket aisle, free ice water, refillable drinks or a cheerful grocery clerk may be just another Tuesday for Americans, but for someone visiting from Scotland, Brazil or Japan, these experiences are fascinating cultural discoveries.

In summary, our visitors this summer found us to be a nation of unusually friendly people providing unimaginably awesome stuff to total strangers. Jesus advised us to love our neighbors as ourselves, but it took almost eighteen more centuries before an entire civilization was purpose-built to put that ideal into practice.

The magic of America is that it rewards people who do wonderful things for total strangers they don't



Alexis de Tocqueville (Théodore Chassériau—Versailles)

Source: Public Domain, <https://commons.wikimedia.org>

even know *and might not even like* if they did know them. Even treating your *enemies* well can make you very rich in America. The reactions from our World Cup visitors reveal that America is still alone on the forefront regarding this revolution in human ethics.

So that is how the world saw America this summer, on our 250th birthday. It was as if a huge army of Alexis de Tocqueville clones had come back nearly two centuries after publishing *Democracy in America* . . . and found even more to love.

Too often nowadays that is not how the old dog America has been taught to see itself. This special issue of *Capital Research* profiles some of the movements that have been teaching

Americans to hate what we should love about ourselves.

Kali Fontanilla's essay examines the work of the Zinn Education Project, a nonprofit that has been injecting the anti-American teachings of Howard Zinn into high school and college curriculums. After analyzing multiple Zinn lessons that impugn the American Revolution, our Constitution and capitalism, plus endorsements from those teaching these toxic lessons, Kali concludes:

That isn't education. It's slander with footnotes. And it is precisely what four decades of Zinn have handed America's children in place of their inheritance.

The American Dream is that inheritance, and in the 20th Century California was the headquarters. But the dream in California has become a nightmare in the 21st century. In this issue, California-based writer Chris Bray profiles a plague of left-wing nonprofits that have helped fuel the decline.

Unfortunately, as Bray notes, what starts in California doesn't stay there:

California isn't separate from America. It's the bleeding edge of what America threatens to become, the social laboratory for a cultural transition. The state concentrates the dose of the burgeoning American poison. [. . .] California is a cultural leader in the view that private enterprise is cruelty and greed, while anything that doesn't make a profit is inherently virtuous and decent.

Quoting an industry report, Bray notes that California's nonprofit sector now accounts for one of every 14 jobs in the state. That's a lot of *not* profiting.



Virtuous nonprofits still exist in mighty form, but the sector is also riddled with anti-American NGOs that portray our virtues as vices, often using the money built from our virtues to try to destroy them.

Emphasizing the sheer size of this infrastructure is a sidebar report showing that the city of Oakland has 67 decidedly left-wing nonprofits within its borders—or more than one per square mile. Many of them, and possibly all of them, preach “economic justice.” Yet their combined net assets of nearly \$1.9 billion would be enough to write a \$31,000 check to every man, woman and child living below the poverty line in Oakland.

According to Mike Watson’s essay in this issue, American Big Labor has enjoyed a historical reputation of being more sensible and market-friendly than the more Marxist-inspired European labor unions. In Watson’s analysis, even this charitable history is exaggerated (after all, communies used to run some major American labor unions). And he shows how today’s Big Labor has been racing so fast to the left that it’s difficult to distinguish it from the most stridently left-wing movements America has to offer.

Banker and industrialist Andrew Mellon epitomized the special genius of the American system and, in so doing, left behind one of America’s largest charitable fortunes. Alas, in a too-familiar story, the wealth creator is long gone, and the wealth he built is now being used to tear down the reputation of an America that made it all possible. Robert Stilson’s profile of the Mellon Foundation notes, among other revelations, that the philanthropy bureaucrats spending Mellon’s money today are dishing out \$1,000 *per minute*

to prove American history is “an unbroken line of racist oppression.”

Ironically, what these tales all have in common is the inversion of an American virtue de Tocqueville praised. He put it this way in *Democracy in America*:

Americans of all ages, all conditions, and all dispositions constantly form associations. They have not only commercial and manufacturing companies, in which all take part, but also associations of a thousand other kinds—religious, moral, serious, futile, general or restricted, enormous or diminutive.

What he was speaking of was America’s charitable sector, now known as our nonprofits or nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). That virtuous sector still exists in mighty form, and it’s not difficult to find many (if not most) of today’s charities promoting the American culture that made their good works possible.

But our nonprofit sector is also riddled with anti-American NGOs that portray our virtues as vices, often using the money built from our virtues to try to destroy them. Their version of America isn’t that of a charming old dog that has forgotten its greatness but instead that of a rabid dog that should have been put down before it ever grew up.

Our World Cup visitors this summer haven’t been exposed to that lie, and it showed. On our 250th birthday, they showed up like happy puppies to remind the old dog of what it once was. And if we pay attention to them, then unlike an *actual* old dog, America really can become young again. ■

Sincerely,


Ken Braun
Editor-in-Chief





CAPITAL RESEARCH CENTER
AMERICA'S INVESTIGATIVE THINK TANK

READ CRC'S NEW REPORT!

ENEMIES OF ENERGY

The Myths, the Movement, and the Money

BY KEN BRAUN

A lively report profiling what are currently the fifteen most influential opponents of nearly 90 percent of the fuels that built modern America and sustain our prosperity, their known donors, and the myths used to support the movement. Read the full study at **CapitalResearch.org**.

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Irredeemable Zinn: Howard Zinn's miseducation of America

To celebrate America's 250th birthday, the Zinn Education Project aims to teach only the nation's sins, none of its greatness, and to prevent our students from becoming proud of what we have and what we have accomplished.

By Kali Fontanilla

America turns 250 this year. It should be a moment of pride and reflection on what we have built, the sacrifices that built it, and what it still represents to the free world. Instead, a generation has been taught that America is a story of theft, oppression, racist founders, and irredeemable sins. This is not an accident but rather the intended outcome of a coordinated effort to replace civic education with constant grievance against America. And the late Howard Zinn, an avowed Marxist, is its founding father.

This is how it works in practice. A left-leaning schoolteacher assigns a chapter from a book to a classroom full of 10th-graders, introducing it with cryptic and conspiratorial language: "This is the real history *they* don't want you to know about." The teacher doesn't say "here's another perspective to consider," nor "here's a primary source, let's analyze it together." Instead, kids are teased with insider-club language of "they have been lying to you about America, and this book has the truth."

The vague villain hidden behind the "*they*" pronoun isn't revealed, as that might lead to questions about why "they" were unable to stop the supposedly truth-telling



As America marks its 250th anniversary the Zinn Education Project has positioned itself as the counter-messaging to anyone who wants students to feel pride in the accomplishment of the nation's founders.

teacher from spilling all these alleged secrets in a government-funded classroom.

That's the Howard Zinn franchise in a nutshell.

And I say *franchise* deliberately, because Zinn's *A People's History of the United States* is no longer just a book. It's a brand, a distribution network, and a mainstream curriculum replacement that has been boldly reshaping what American



For context, Karl Marx's Communist Manifesto ranks 7th on the overall most-assigned list, appearing on 11,407 syllabi across all college courses. The Federalist Papers didn't crack the top 100. That tells you everything you need to know about the ideological direction of American higher education.



Zinn wrote: “I wanted my writing of history and my teaching of history to be a part of social struggle. I wanted to be a part of history and not just a recorder and teacher of history.” In a 2005 interview, he put it plainly: “I don’t believe in neutrality. I believe neutrality is impossible.”

children and college students understand about their own country for 45 years.

More than four million copies of *A People’s History* have been sold since 1980. When I was a left-leaning college student I had a copy of his book on my shelf. It has been assigned in high schools and colleges in all 50 states. *A People’s History* ranks among the top 15 most-assigned books within American college history syllabi.

For context, Karl Marx’s Communist Manifesto ranks 7th on the overall most-assigned list, appearing on 11,407 syllabi across all college courses. The *Federalist Papers* didn’t crack the top 100. That tells you everything you need to know about the ideological direction of American higher education.

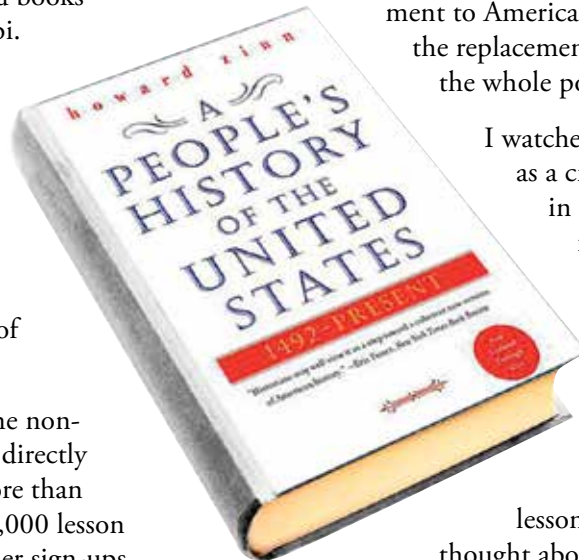
The Zinn Education Project (ZEP), the non-profit built to push Zinn’s framework directly into K-12 classrooms, now counts more than 179,000 registered teachers, with 822,000 lesson plan downloads and several new teacher sign-ups every month. The ZEP is a joint project of two left-wing charitable nonprofits: Teaching for Change and Rethinking Schools. The Teaching for Change mission statement is: “Building social justice **starting in the classroom**” [emphasis in original]. Similarly, Rethinking Schools is “dedicated to sustaining and strengthening public education through social justice teaching and education activism.”

So, it’s easy to think of the ZEP as more “reeducation” than education.

One teacher featured on the ZEP’s website, a high school social studies teacher in Portland, Oregon, said it without apology:

The Zinn Education Project is my compass in a sea of corporate textbooks, packaged common core curriculum, and standardized testing. My entire curriculum is based on lessons that can be found on the Zinn Education Project.

Another teacher, a high school history teacher in Evanston, Illinois, describes nine years of using ZEP materials by saying that his students “can speak to the power of deconstructing the narratives of Christopher Columbus and Abraham Lincoln’s efforts that have replicated white supremacy.” The lessons, he says, “invigorate students’ desire to learn and disrupt the status quo.” This isn’t a supplement to American history education. It has become the replacement, and disrupting the status quo is the whole point.



I watched it personally during my 15 years as a credentialed public schoolteacher in California. The teachers reaching for these lessons were not neutral educators who stumbled into bad material. They were true believing, left-leaning teachers who looked upon the classroom as an opportunity for social change rather than academic instruction. They wanted free, pre-packaged lessons that confirmed what they already thought about America. The Zinn Education Project was happy to oblige with activist-designed material that is pre-loaded with the moral authority of “social justice.”

Howard Zinn was a self-described Marxist and once a secretive Communist Party member. He was a political activist first, a historian second, and he didn’t hide those priorities. In 1995, Zinn wrote: “I wanted my writing of history and my teaching of history to be a part of social struggle. I wanted to be a part of history and not just a recorder and teacher of history.” In a 2005 interview, he put it plainly: “I don’t believe in neutrality. I believe neutrality is impossible.”

And when it came to the economic system of the country whose history he was teaching, Zinn didn’t hide his contempt. He openly declared that “capitalism has always been a failure for the lower classes.” In March 2009, he celebrated the financial crisis by saying: “The American capitalist system is falling apart. And good! I’m glad it’s falling apart.” This is the man whose framework shapes the

worldview of hundreds of thousands of American students.

Zinn's education project distorts, omits, and reframes American history to build a predetermined conclusion: that America is guilty, that Western civilization is the source of great suffering, should not be celebrated, and the only answer is a dismantling of the systems freedom-lovers hold dear. A look at some of the ZEP's most popular lessons taught to students across America demonstrates how this occurs.

Zinn miseducation #1: Columbus the villain

Here's what a history lesson looks like when the verdict is decided before the trial begins.

The *People vs Columbus* is a Zinn lesson designed as a mock trial in which students are asked to determine who is responsible for the deaths of the Taíno people after 1492. Sounds like critical thinking, right? Except the lesson opens by declaring, without qualification, that a genocide was committed in the years after 1492 on the islands inhabited by the Taíno. The lesson material throws out the Taíno population at the time of Columbus's arrival as five million, then quietly walks it back further in, quoting: "When you arrived in the Greater Antilles, there may have been as many as a million or even 3 million Taíno on the islands. According to Bartolomé de las Casas, by 1542, there were 200 observable Taíno left."

Let's do some math that no teen in a classroom is going to attempt.

If anywhere from one million to five million Taíno died in roughly fifty years, that works out to between 20,000 and 100,000 deaths per year (quite the range), which works out to be around 50 and 300 Taíno killed every single day, without a break for *half a century*. This would mean that Columbus and a few hundred men were running a



The Zinn Education Project's attack on Christopher Columbus, a key part of its war on Western civilization, includes an active campaign called Abolish Columbus Day, where they declare that celebrating Columbus means celebrating colonialism, racism, and genocide.

literal bloodbath on several islands simultaneously for fifty years straight.

This ZEP lesson presents the numbers as settled fact. I doubt any student stops to wonder whether that accounting is even logistically possible, and that is intentional. Absorbed in a riveting story with death and violence, kids don't question outlandish numbers handed to them with moral authority attached.



Pre-Columbus America was no paradise. It was a complex, often violent world, exactly like everywhere else on Earth in 1492. Teaching students otherwise isn't justice; it is just a different kind of lie.

The lesson also doesn't bother to mention that if there truly were millions killed, the majority would have been from disease. Instead, it repeatedly states that Columbus and his men were killing all the Taíno, throws out speculative and exaggerated population

numbers, and leaves students with the impression that the ever-guilty Europeans slaughtered all.

And the source material the lesson draws on describes Taíno society in unrealistic, idealized terms. The Taíno are depicted as an island full of angels, striving to feed all people and maintaining a spirituality that respected all animals (including their main animal food sources), as well as natural forces like climate, season, and weather. By day, they fished and

planted gardens. By night, they discussed the coming seasons in perfect ecological harmony. So peaceful. So pure. So completely stripped of any complexity that might complicate the morality play the ZEP needs to run.

Just in case the anti-colonial messaging wasn't clear enough, the lesson helpfully identifies the most egregious villain: not Columbus, nor even Spain, but private property. According to the lesson:

The real responsibility lies with a system that values property over people. European society was set up so that an individual had to own property to feel secure. There was no security without private ownership of property. If you were poor, you could starve. By contrast, the Taíno had no 'poor,' and no one starved. The Taíno shared the land and resources and respected Mother Earth. They saw—and still see—all living beings as interconnected.

A good communist lesson can't just have individual villains. It needs to blame a system, and the system that is blamed in this lesson is a bedrock of our free American society. And the Taíno aren't just sympathetic victims in this telling. They live in a socialist utopia, a pre-capitalist paradise where nobody owns anything and nobody goes hungry. This is not an accurate retelling of history; it is ideological fiction dressed as education. The archaeological and true historical record of pre-Columbian societies tells a far messier story, but messy doesn't serve the lesson plan.

The ZEP's attack on Columbus, a key part of its war on Western civilization, doesn't stop at the classroom. The website features an active campaign, listed under the official campaigns tab, called Abolish Columbus Day, which declares that celebrating Columbus means celebrating colonialism, celebrating racism, and celebrating genocide.

The Zinn framework never asks students to consider that conquest, territorial expansion, and brutal warfare are not exclusively European inventions imported to an innocent continent of brown people in 1492. These were, and are, universal human behaviors, including among indigenous peoples.

The Aztec Empire was not a peace-loving nature commune. The Aztecs were a militaristic empire that practiced mass human sacrifice on a staggering scale, with tens of thousands of captives killed yearly to appease their many gods. When Hernán Cortés arrived in Mexico, the neighboring tribes, the people the Aztecs had been raiding, enslaving, and sacrificing for generations, did not mourn his arrival. They allied with Cortés to bring down their oppressors.

The Comanche were one of the most formidable and feared raiding societies in North American history, regularly taking captives and running extensive slave networks. The Cherokee owned black slaves and, when the Civil War came, a significant faction fought for the Confederacy to protect that institution. None of this appears in ZEP curriculum because it complicates the clean moral narrative they need: white, European, and capitalist is bad, while brown, indigenous, and commune-style economy is good.

Ironically, a documentary named *The Columbus Controversy: Challenging How History Is Written*, is listed as a supplementary resource on the ZEP lesson page. It was produced

for classrooms by American School Publishers, a Macmillan/McGraw-Hill company, one of the major mainstream curriculum publishers. Using this documentary's romanticized revisionism rips up the premise that the ZEP is bravely countering a whitewashed establishment narrative. In this case the ZEP is regurgitating widespread leftist propaganda promoted by massive publishing houses to the majority of classrooms in the country.

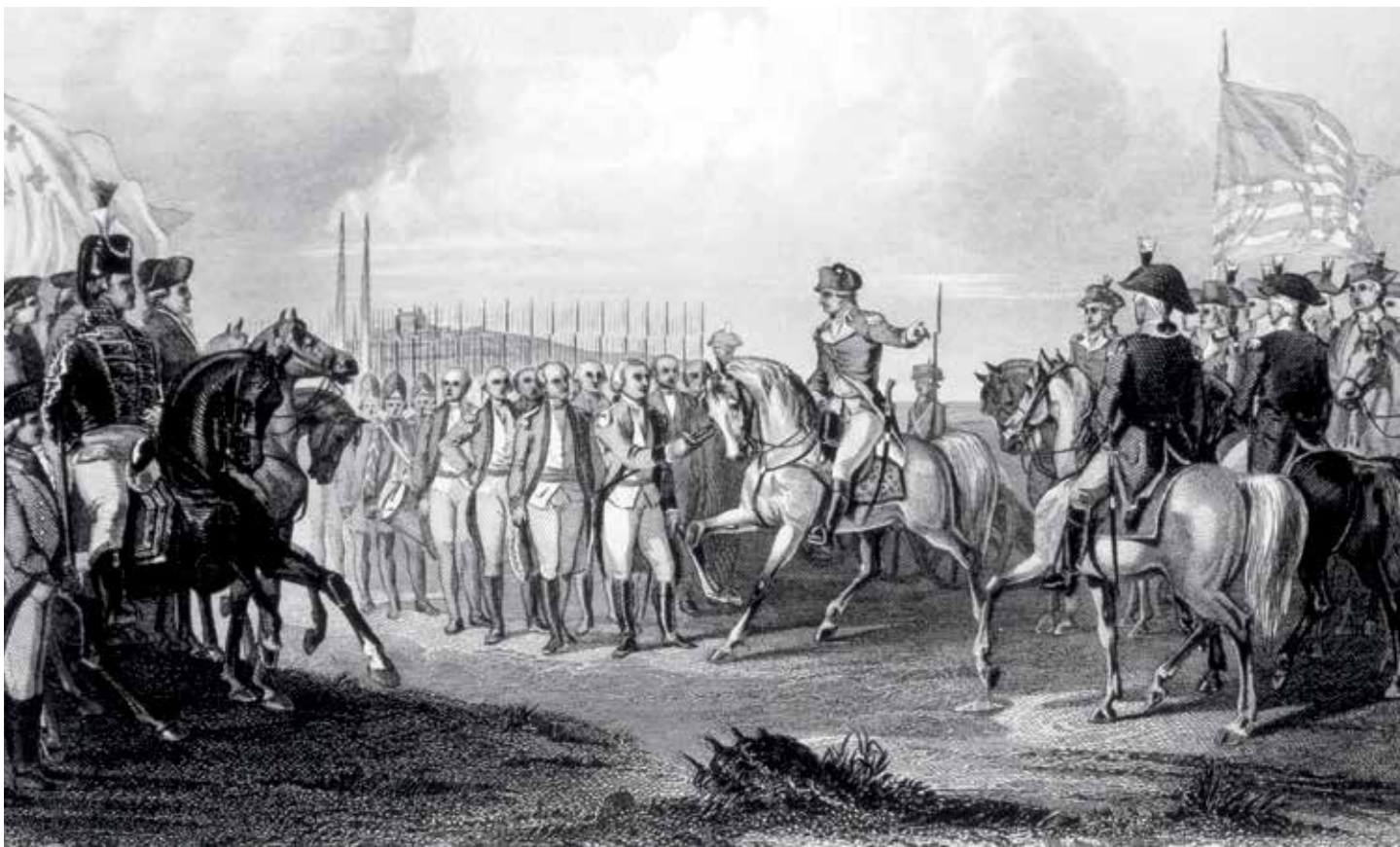
Pre-Columbus America was no paradise. It was a complex, often violent world, exactly like every-

where else on Earth in 1492. Teaching students otherwise isn't justice; it is just a different kind of lie.

CC —————
Telling students the American Revolution failed because it didn't immediately abolish slavery is like telling students that the Wright Brothers failed because the 1903 Flyer couldn't cross the Atlantic. It judges a first flight by the standards of a destination that the flight itself made possible.

Zinn miseducation #2: The Founders as villains

The idea for this report came to me as I stood in the slave quarters at Mount Vernon. I was there with colleagues from the Capital Research Center, walking through what remains of the lives of the 317 enslaved people who worked Washington's beautiful estate when he died in 1799. They



Credit: Jack Hamilton Photography / Shutterstock.com

General George Washington, pictured above at the Battle of Yorktown accepting the surrender of British General Charles Cornwallis, wrote in 1786 that there was “not a man living who wishes more sincerely than I do to see a plan adopted for the abolition of it.” Washington also freed his enslaved people in his will.

lived in cramped spaces, in close proximity to the grand main house, and seeing how they lived, I could feel the weight of what those people endured.

I didn’t leave feeling like Washington was a hero without flaw. I left feeling the full complexity of the contradiction: a man who led a revolution for human liberty while holding other human beings in bondage. That tension is real. It deserves to be taught. What it does not deserve is what the Zinn Education Project does with it.

As America marks its 250th anniversary the ZEP has positioned itself as the counter-messaging to anyone who wants students to feel pride in the accomplishment. Their FAQs on the American Revolution, published this year, explains:

In 2026, many of the groups that have led the campaigns to ban books and censor history are focusing their efforts on the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence. These include the Heritage Foundation, Hillsdale College, Moms for Liberty, PragerU, Turning Point USA, and more. We are focusing on the 250th anniversary as well.

Their answer to Turning Point USA and the rest of us is a lesson catalog designed to ensure that students spend the anniversary of American independence learning about everything the Revolution failed to accomplish rather than what it did. Since the ZEP has a plethora of lessons on this subject, the FAQ document itself is worth examining in detail, because it reveals exactly how ZEP frames the founding for the 176,000 teachers in its network.

Asked whether the American Revolution put into motion “the inevitable wheels of liberty” that led to emancipation, the ZEP answers flatly: “No. The idea that emancipation was inevitable after 1776 is a national myth.” The document goes further, arguing that students should learn “what the American Revolution changed, rule by a king, and what it did not, including slavery, settler colonialism, and unequal political power.”

Telling students the Revolution failed because it didn’t immediately abolish slavery is like telling students that the Wright Brothers failed because the 1903 Flyer couldn’t cross the Atlantic. It judges a first flight by the standards of a destination that the flight itself made possible.

Asked whether it is unfair to judge the Founders by today's moral standards, the ZEP answers no, and their reasoning deserves scrutiny. They argue that critiques of slavery existed at the time, so they are not applying modern standards to the condemnation of slavery. That's partially true, there were some abolitionists in 1776. But what ZEP is actually doing in its lessons is far broader than noting that some contemporaries opposed slavery. It is asking students to evaluate the entire founding through a 2026 lens of systemic racism, settler colonialism, and capitalist exploitation.

These frameworks didn't even exist in 1776 and wouldn't exist today if the American Revolution hadn't been successful.

Here is the question the ZEP never asks: What world were the Founders actually operating in?

In 1776, slavery existed on every continent. No nation on earth had universal abolition. No prior civilization had established individual rights against the power of the state the way the Founders did. The very moral vocabulary that the ZEP uses to condemn the founding (human rights, self-determination, equality before the law) is an aftermath product of the American Revolution.

The FAQ goes further still. Asked whether the American Revolution was "the most revolutionary" independence war, the ZEP answers no, arguing that the 1804 Haitian Revolution (which abolished slavery outright) was more "genuinely revolutionary." What ZEP doesn't tell students is that the Haitian Revolution was followed by more than a century of devastating poverty, political instability, authoritarian rule, and isolation. The revolution in Haiti was marked by the slaughter of white people and inspired by the bloody French Revolution. The model the ZEP holds up as superior to the American founding produced one of the poorest and most chronically unstable nations in the hemisphere.

But there is a deeper problem with using Haiti as the yardstick, and it quietly demolishes the entire premise of the lesson. The ZEP celebrates Haiti precisely because the enslaved liberated themselves. Self-liberation on that scale is almost unheard of in human history. Haiti stands very nearly alone. It is the only time in the modern world that an

enslaved population overthrew its masters by force and then founded a sovereign nation.

Everywhere else, freedom came from the outside or from above. The British Empire didn't end slavery through a slave revolt; it was abolished by Parliament. The trans-Atlantic slave trade's top benefactor, Brazil, ended slavery by imperial decree in 1888. And the four million people enslaved in the

United States were freed not by their own uprising but by the Union Army, the Thirteenth Amendment, and 360,000 Union soldiers who died making emancipation real.

Slaves almost never freed themselves, anywhere on earth. Which means the very standard the ZEP uses to indict the American founding is one that virtually no nation in history has ever met.

Yes, many of the major Founders owned slaves. This should be taught. But what ZEP buries is that nearly all of them expressed, at some point, a genuine desire to see the institution ended.

Washington wrote in 1786 that there was "not a man living who wishes more sincerely than I do to see a plan adopted for the abolition of it." Washington also freed his enslaved people in his will.

Jefferson, for all his catastrophic hypocrisy on the subject, originally drafted language condemning the slave trade directly into the Declaration of Independence.

John Adams owned no slaves and called the institution "an evil of colossal magnitude."

Benjamin Franklin, who had owned slaves earlier in his life, became president of the Pennsylvania Abolition Society and in 1790 personally submitted one of the first antislavery petitions to Congress.

Alexander Hamilton was a founding member of the New York Manumission Society, which worked to end slavery in New York and educate freed black children.

James Madison, despite being a slaveholder himself, said at the Constitutional Convention that it would be "wrong to admit in the Constitution the idea that there could be property in men."



A good communist lesson can't just have individual villains. It needs to blame a system, and the system that is blamed in this lesson is private property ownership—a bedrock of our free American society.

None of this excuses the moral failures of men who preached liberty while holding human beings in bondage. But it tells a fundamentally different story than the ZEP's version, which is the oversimplified idea that the Founders were simply property-protecting elites with little to no moral reckoning on the subject.

Back at Mount Vernon, some of the stories that stayed with me were those of Hercules, Washington's chef, who earned money on the side, with Washington's permission, by selling kitchen leftovers. Hercules eventually escaped to freedom in 1797 and was formally freed under the terms of Washington's will. William Lee, Washington's personal valet through the entire Revolutionary War, was freed immediately upon Washington's death. These were people with some agency navigating a brutal institution on their own terms wherever they could. The ZEP has no room for this context and complexity, because none of it serves the thesis of "Founding Fathers as villains."

Thomas Sowell put it this way: "What was special about America was not that it had slavery, which existed all over the world, but that Americans were among the very few peoples who began to question the morality of holding human beings in bondage." And in *Race and Culture* he wrote that slavery was "peculiar" in the United States only because human bondage was inconsistent with the principles on which the nation was founded. Historically, it was those great principles that were peculiar, not slavery.

Is it about time that we have a Sowell Education Project with K-12 lessons based on his work?

Zinn miseducation #3: The Constitution as enemy of the people

Unfortunately, there is no Sowell Education Project. There is only the ZEP, and once it has finished prosecuting the men who founded the country, it turns on the thing they



The Zinn Education Project doesn't just want students to question the Constitution. It wants them to see it as a weapon aimed at them. Contrast that with Fredrick Douglass, who read that same Constitution after surviving the horrors of slavery, and declared it a "glorious liberty document."

built. The Zinn Education Project doesn't just want students to question the Constitution. It wants them to see it as a weapon aimed at them.

The Constitution Gallery Walk is a classroom activity designed for grades 6 through 12 in which students move from station to station through a series of posters, each one building on the last toward a single predetermined conclusion. The ten posters carry titles such as "A Constitution for the One Percent," "Rights for Property, Not People," "Built to Block Change," and "Checks, Balances, and Barriers." Each delivers a bite-sized Marxist critique of the founding document in large, easy-to-read font. No counterargument or nuance, just the verdict, repeated ten times around the room.

Here's a sample of what students are reading as they walk from poster to poster. The Constitution, students are told, "was written in secret by 55 wealthy white men to serve a tiny minority and clamp down on the rights of everyone else." The system of checks and balances "protects economic elites by constraining the efforts of the majority of people to change an unjust status quo." The Preamble is "not even legally binding." And the whole document is "a feature, not a bug, created by the Framers to stifle the public will in perpetuity."



Credit: Raupixel.com / Shutterstock.com

The Comanche were one of the most formidable and feared raiding societies in North American history, regularly taking captives and running extensive slave networks. The Cherokee owned black slaves and, when the Civil War came, a significant faction fought for the Confederacy to protect that institution. None of this appears in ZEP curriculum.

This is the document that protects your right to speak, to worship, to refuse unreasonable searches of your home, and to face your accuser in court. Is this document “stifling the public will in perpetuity?”

The ZEP website publishes the teacher testimonials from this activity. A high school social studies teacher in Flushing, New York, reports that after completing the gallery walk, students “commented on how the Constitution was written in secret and how the system of checks and balances helped only certain groups of people.” She adds, with apparent satisfaction, that students “felt that the Constitution was an old document that should continue to be revised and compared it to the Bible.” She closes by noting that students “are really afraid for their future, and I am too.”

Read that again. The desired outcome of this lesson, proudly reported by the teacher who taught it, is that students leave the classroom afraid of the US Constitution and their future. It is also worth noting that the students walked away

viewing the Constitution the way secularists view Scripture, as an outdated text written by fallible men that enlightened people no longer have to take seriously.

The recommended reading list for the lesson makes these goals even clearer.

We the Elites: Why the U.S. Constitution Serves the Few by Robert Ovetz, listed for high school students, calls the Constitution “a rulebook to protect capitalism for the elites” and concludes that “change can only be made by tearing up the rule book and starting over again from the bottom up.” That quote is featured on the ZEP website.

The Constitutional Bind by Aziz Rana argues that Americans’ reverence for the founding document has “unleashed an interventionist national security state abroad while undermining the possibility of deeper change at home.” This turns history on its head. The Constitution is nothing if not a list of *limits* on government power and abuse, drawn

up in response to what our Declaration of Independence referred to as a “history of repeated injuries and usurpations” inflicted by the British.

There are obviously far too many modern examples of where the Constitution has failed to keep the government in check. But it’s educational malpractice to blame those failures on the Constitution written to prevent the abuses and the people who celebrate that honorable objective.

The gallery walk, the books, and the teacher testimonials all celebrate students who are frightened and skeptical of their own founding document. None of this is accidental. It is a curriculum with a goal, and the goal is a generation of young Americans who feel no particular attachment to (or obligation to defend) the document that has protected human liberty longer than any other in the history of the world.

Frederick Douglass read that same Constitution after surviving the horrors of slavery and called it a “glorious liberty document.” The ZEP is handing middle schoolers a poster that calls it a “tool of the one percent.” One of those readings produces proud citizens. The other produces jaded radicals.

Zinn miseducation #4: Become the Black Panthers

I have a simple question for any parent reading this. Would you be comfortable knowing that your 10th grader spent a week in school studying the Black Panther Party’s political manifesto and was then assigned to write their own version of it?

That’s what this next ZEP lesson asks students to do.

The lesson is called “*What We Want, What We Believe*”: *Teaching with the Black Panthers’ 10-Point Program*. The goal is for students to study the Panther’s 1972 platform, analyze

it as a model of political organizing, and develop their own Ten Point Programs that reflect their personal and community grievances. This lesson is also available in Spanish, because, of course, it is vital that English learners know about the grievance list of the Black Panthers, right?

The ZEP’s framing of who the Panthers were is, to put it charitably, selective. The lesson describes the Black Panther Party as an organization that “sought social justice for African Americans and other oppressed communities through a combination of revolutionary theory, education, and community programs.” And yes, their community programs, such as breakfast programs and free clinics, were real and should be acknowledged as part of the movement.

But that is less than half the story.

There is no mention of the Panthers’ documented history of violence, murder, and criminal enterprise. No mention of Huey Newton (the cofounder of the Black Panthers) and his conviction for voluntary manslaughter of a police officer. No mention of the FBI’s COINTELPRO program, which could have been used as legitimate debate material about real government overreach. Issues like these are not mentioned because honesty about the Panthers’ record would complicate the heroic framing the ZEP needs.

And there is no mention of what the Panthers did to Alex Rackley.

In May 1969, Rackley was a 19-year-old member of the party’s New York chapter. That’s when fellow Panthers in New Haven decided he was an FBI informant. They held him captive at the chapter’s headquarters and tortured him for days, scalding him with boiling water to force a taped confession. On May 21, two Panthers, Warren Kimbro and Lonnie McClucas, drove Rackley to a swamp in Middlefield, Connecticut, and shot him in the head and chest on the orders of national field marshal George Sams, Jr. Kimbro and Sams later pleaded guilty for their part in the crime and McClucas was convicted by a jury.



I have a simple question for any parent reading this. Would you be comfortable knowing that your 10th grader spent a week in school studying the Black Panther Party’s political manifesto and was then assigned to write their own version of it? That’s just one example of a Zinn Education Project lesson.



*Slaves almost never freed themselves, anywhere on earth.
Which means the very standard ZEP uses to indict the American founding
is one that virtually no nation in history has ever met.*

A teenager was tortured and executed by the very organization the ZEP asks tenth graders to model their manifestos on, and the lesson never says a word about it.

This is an intentional omission, and a common theme of their methods. When the ZEP wants students to condemn a group, it spares them nothing: the Columbus lesson narrates the slaughter of the Taíno in graphic detail and exaggerates the body count past anything serious historians will defend. When ZEP wants students to admire a group, the violence vanishes. A documented torture-murder by the Panthers, against one of their own, doesn't earn a sentence, while a contested death toll from five centuries ago gets a full mock trial.

The Panthers were also a Marxist-Leninist organization that openly advocated armed revolution against the United States government. Their Ten-Point Program describes the American government as "racist and fascist." This is the document that the ZEP lesson asks students to study and then rewrite as their own.

Some other points from the Program:

- Point Two states that if American businessmen will not provide full employment, "the technology and means of production should be taken from the businessmen and placed in the community." Seizing the means to production is textbook Marxism.
- Point Three calls the American government flatly racist and demands reparations, citing "the slaughter of over 50 million Black people" by American racists.
- Point Seven demands an end to "police brutality and murder" and declares it the right of all black and oppressed people to "arm for self-defense of our homes and communities against these fascist police forces."
- Point Eight calls for an end to "all wars of aggression" and declares it "the right of the people to defend themselves by any means necessary against their aggressors."
- Point Nine calls for the "ultimate elimination of all wretched, inhuman penal institutions," not demanding reform of the prison system, but elimination of it.

The author of the ZEP Panther lesson is upfront about his expectations. He writes that he had hoped his predom-

inantly black students would demonstrate "a stronger, more personal connection to the injustices experienced by the black community" and that he was "expecting all the students to be frustrated with the world, ready to let loose their seething resentment and alienation." He was, in his own words, disappointed when some students weren't angry enough. He was grading his students on their level of radicalization.

Now look at what the students actually produced, which the ZEP publishes approvingly.

One student created a Ten Point Program demanding the dismantling of capitalism: "We want the mask of capitalism lifted, and economic classes disbanded." He demanded an end to "the war against Iraq to protect U.S. oil prices," an immediate end to "corporate funding of education," and concluded: "The enslavement of the middle and lower classes by the bourgeoisie must be put to a stop." The teacher describes this as demonstrating "a growing consciousness" and notes that classmates were "impressed by Marcus' articulation of political ideas."

A 10th grader demanded the abolition of economic classes and asserted that hard-working Americans were enslaved by the bourgeoisie. The teacher's response was admiration.

Another student produced what amounts to a full-blown leftist policy platform: free housing for homeless people, more people of color in schools, less police brutality, and free healthcare for low-income people. Some of these are legitimate policy positions that reasonable people debate. But this is a ten-point program modeled on a Marxist-Leninist revolutionary party's manifesto, produced by a fifteen-year-old who has been primed for two weeks with materials presenting the American government as racist and fascist. The lesson isn't teaching civic engagement. It's teaching a specific conclusion about what is wrong with America and recruiting students to demand it be fixed on the Panthers' terms.

A third student wrote a Ten Point Program for the LGBTQ community. The teacher notes approvingly that the student "did not feel comfortable sharing her piece in class" due to what he calls "the level of homophobia in our society and our schools." A high school student writing a political mani-

festos for a cause she is afraid to share out loud, in a classroom that has spent weeks priming her to see American society as oppressive and her school as a site of homophobia—The ZEP presents this as a success story.

Here is what the lesson never asks. Was the Black Panther Party’s diagnosis of America accurate? Were their proposed solutions constitutional? Did their advocacy of armed self-defense against police produce better or worse outcomes for black communities? What happened to the neighborhoods where the Panthers were most active? Were the community programs sustainable, and why did they ultimately collapse? What alternatives existed, and what did those alternatives achieve?

None of those questions appear. The Panthers are presented as a model. Students are asked to adopt the model for their own grievances. The teacher grades them on how much resentment is sown.

Zinn miseducation #5: Defenders of communists

Let me be clear about what the Subversives: Stories from the Red Scare lesson actually is before the ZEP’s framing of it gets into your head. It is a mixer activity in which students are assigned the identities of 27 people targeted during the McCarthy Era, and the lesson material admits that many were literal Communist Party members or close affiliates. Then students are asked to circulate the classroom speaking in first person as those characters. The lesson is designed for grades 6 through 12. Sixth graders are role-playing as communists who believe themselves to be victims.

The lesson’s author opens by stating one of the ZEP’s explicit organizational goals: “One of the guiding tenets of the Zinn Education Project is that the transformational social change so desperately needed will never come from above, from presidents and CEOs. It will come from people like us, like our students — and like the many everyday people profiled in this lesson.”

This is a mission statement for a political movement. The lesson is a recruiting tool.



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It gets worse. The author is not merely interested in rehabilitating the historical reputations of people who were treated unfairly during the McCarthy Era. She is drawing an explicit line from the 1950s to today. The lesson states plainly: “Today, activists who call for abolition of prisons and police, or a complete moratorium on fossil fuel extraction, or a jobs guarantee for every American, are often dismissed as impractical, imprudent, utopian, and yes, sometimes they’re red-baited as well.”

Read that carefully. The lesson is not just teaching the McCarthy Era. It is teaching students that anyone who criticizes people calling for the abolition of prisons and police is engaged in the same McCarthyite repression of the 1950s. If you question the sanity of defunding the police, or ending American energy production, then you are the new McCarthy.

This is being taught to sixth graders.

The lesson also makes explicit what it thinks is happening to the left today:

Whereas ‘communist’ became shorthand for any undesirable person or belief in the eyes of the elites, so today ‘voter fraud’ is used by Republicans to disenfranchise ‘undesirable’ voters who threaten to upset their traditional seats of power, and Critical Race Theory acts as a sweeping indictment of white supremacy’s critics.

That is a direct partisan attack on Republicans, embedded in a history lesson, for middle schoolers.

Now look at what the lesson actually produces in classrooms. A high school teacher in Woodbridge, Virginia, reports that her favorite part is when students conclude that people who were “homosexual, community leaders, social activists, people of color” were targeted and labeled as communists, presenting a communist apologist view that government concern about actual Communist Party members as nothing more than racism and homophobia. A high school teacher in Baltimore reports with satisfaction that students “made connections between their lives and the lives of historical figures” after learning about communist organizers who were surveilled by the FBI.

But the most revealing testimonial comes from a student teacher in Albuquerque, New Mexico, who taught the lesson and then published his students’ written responses on the ZEP’s website. One student wrote:

I think a lot of people can agree derogatory terms are always going to be around. Today, people see words like [slur] to describe and discriminate against the trans community. During the BLM movement, Trump would call the African American protesters thugs, even when they had peaceful protests. But he called white RIOTERS who broke into the Capitol building were simply “rightfully angry American civilians.”

That student’s response was submitted to the ZEP’s website as evidence of a successful lesson. A student who just spent a class period roleplaying as Communist Party members and union radicals has now connected that experience to a defense of BLM protests and an attack on Donald Trump.

The student teacher calls it “an energetic success.” The ZEP publishes it as a glowing testimonial.

Another student wrote that the lesson showed “people who had differing ideas from white America” were targeted, conveniently erasing the documented reality that many of the historical figures in the mixer lesson were actual members of an organization that was actively working with the Soviet Union during the Cold War, and some of them were white.

Here is what the lesson doesn’t teach. The Soviet Union was a totalitarian state responsible for the deaths of tens of millions of its own citizens through gulags, engineered famines, and political executions. The Communist Party USA did receive direction and funding from Moscow. Julius and Ethel Rosenberg, whose story is touched upon in the lesson’s broader unit, were in fact passing nuclear secrets to the Soviets. The Venona papers, declassified in 1995, confirmed that Soviet espionage in the United States was real and extensive.

None of this is in the Zinn lesson. Doing so would complicate the lesson’s portrait of McCarthy-era victims as pure-hearted social justice organizers crushed by a racist, homophobic government.

McCarthyism did produce some genuine injustices. Some people who were not Soviet agents lost jobs and reputations through guilt-by-association and little evidence. That is true and worth teaching. What is not true is the lesson’s implication that anti-communism was simply a cover for suppressing civil rights and labor activism, that everyone targeted was innocent, and those that criticize the far left’s plans to abolish prisons and fossil fuels are the direct heirs of McCarthy’s persecution.

Zinn miseducation #6: America the terrorist

Two weeks after nearly 3,000 Americans were murdered at the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, the Zinn Education Project had a lesson plan ready. It’s called “Whose



Thomas Sowell put it this way: “What was special about America was not that it had slavery, which existed all over the world, but that Americans were among the very few peoples who began to question the morality of holding human beings in bondage.”

Terrorism?” and it is one of the most methodologically dishonest pieces of classroom material I have ever read. (And I have read a lot of them.)

Here’s how it works. Students are given ten historical scenarios involving violence, civilian deaths, and the abuse of power. But the names of every country involved have been replaced with fictional ones. The teacher who designed the lesson is upfront about why: he didn’t trust students to label American actions as terrorism if they knew America was the one doing them. His solution was to hide the ball. Strip away prior knowledge, strip away national identity, and guide students toward the conclusion he had already reached before the lesson started.

Every single one of those ten scenarios implicates the United States or Israel. Every one. The US funding of Nicaraguan

Contras, who attacked schools and clinics. The US missile strike on a Sudanese pharmaceutical plant. US corporations paying poverty wages abroad. US military aid to Israel. US investment in apartheid South Africa. US backed sanctions on Iraq. The IMF and World Bank, institutions the lesson frames as instruments of American economic terror, forcing Zambia to pay debt service instead of buying AIDS medicine.

Ten scenarios. Ten indictments of America and its allies. And even setting aside what’s missing from the lesson, what’s actually in it doesn’t hold up to basic scrutiny. Each scenario is stripped of any historical complexity, presented in clean black-and-white terms that make the moral verdict obvious before the students even start discussing the issues.

Take the Israel-Palestine scenario. The conflict between those two groups spans decades of wars, terrorist attacks in both directions, complicated land disputes, and a history that serious scholars have spent careers trying to understand. The ZEP gives 11th graders a paragraph. One paragraph, written to produce one conclusion, with no context for how the conflict began, what preceded it, or what any of the parties actually wanted.



The same three targets pop up in every Zinn Education Project lesson: property ownership, capitalism, and the Constitution. Those aren’t side characters for the American way. They are the bedrock of the American experiment.

Or consider the Monsanto scenario. A corporation develops genetically modified seeds and plants and tests crops in India. The farmers, furious, announce they will burn every genetically modified crop to the ground, and they threaten to destroy Monsanto’s offices. Now, the ethics of genetically modified crops is a genuinely complex debate and one worth having in a classroom. Reasonable people disagree.

But the lesson isn’t a debate. It wants students to ask whether Monsanto is the terrorist. The farmers who are literally announcing plans to destroy property and threaten corporate offices? The lesson presents them as righteous resisters. The corporation that invented the seeds? Terrorists.

This reminded me of watching the BLM riots of 2020, when activists and their media allies tied themselves in knots trying to label police officers protecting businesses as agents of state sponsored terror, while actual buildings were burning, windows were being smashed, and stores were still being looted. The rhetorical trick is the same: stretch the definition of terrorism so far that it covers your political enemies, then contract it just enough to exclude your political allies, even when they are literally setting things on fire.

The ZEP's lesson teaches this trick to middle schoolers and calls it critical thinking. It doesn't sharpen students' ability to define terrorism. It teaches them to apply the word selectively and strategically, always in one direction.

Not one of the ZEP terrorism scenarios uses the substance of the September 11 attacks on America. Not one involves Hamas suicide bombings on Israeli buses. Not one involves Iranian-sponsored terrorism. Not one involves the Taliban's systematic murder and enslavement of Afghan women. Not one involves the persecution of Christians in Nigeria, Pakistan, North Korea, or China. Not one involves the Uyghur concentration camps in China. Not one involves any act of violence committed by any majority-Muslim government or organization, anywhere on Earth, in the entire history of the world.

The lesson was written in the immediate aftermath of 9/11. Its stated goal, in the teacher's own words, is that the more students understand American power, "the less likely they are to want to extend it." He wanted fewer Americans willing to defend America. He wrote a lesson plan to produce them. And ZEP put it in 176,000 teachers' hands.

The teacher closes by quoting a student he presents as evidence of success:

I also realized how many terrorism acts the U.S. has committed. When our government doesn't define terrorism, it makes me think that they just want a free shot to kill anyone they want.

That's a ninth grader. That is what this lesson produced. And the teacher wrote it down and published it proudly.

Now look at what the teachers using this lesson today have to say about it. A high school social studies teacher in Nashua, New Hampshire, calls it his favorite ZEP lesson because "it lets the educator teach from the perspective of the other, which is crucial to the classroom of today." A high school social studies teacher in Skowhegan, Maine, reports that her students "believe that terrorism is exclusive to Middle Eastern-based groups or religious zealots," and that the lesson fixes this problem: "My students are always amazed at how many of these situations actually involved the United States as the perpetrator of things that they



Asked whether the American Revolution put into motion "the inevitable wheels of liberty" that led to emancipation, the Zinn Education Project answers flatly: "No. The idea that emancipation was inevitable after 1776 is a national myth."

deem to be terrorism." A high school teacher in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, celebrates the moment when students have their "Aha!" moment as "their stereotypes are shattered." That stereotype apparently being the assumption that America is generally a force for good in the world.

And then there is the middle school teacher in Pennsylvania who teaches this lesson to students whose main point of reference for terrorism was 9/11 and then, for homework, assigns them a worksheet identifying all the fictional country names with their real counterparts. He notes proudly that with his more advanced AP students, he extends the lesson by connecting it to January 6th. Because of course he does.

The one teacher who tries to add any balance notes that she tells students that "this is not meant to vilify the United States, but to make sure that we are looking at all of these examples in order to discover the truth." The truth? With a lesson where every single scenario indicts America and zero scenarios indict any other actor on Earth?

Now, in the spirit of the lesson's own methodology, here is one more scenario they forgot to include. The names have been changed.

A corporation operating in the country of Amorica receives over half a billion dollars annually from the Amorican federal government. It operates hundreds of pregnancy clinics

concentrated in low-income, minority neighborhoods. Its founders explicitly wrote about reducing the population of what they considered “undesirable” groups, using words like “human weeds” to describe the poor and minorities.

Today, the corporation performs the majority of its procedures in communities of color. In Amoria’s largest city, more babies of one particular ethnic group are often terminated than are born alive in a given year.

The corporation lobbies aggressively against any legal restrictions on these procedures, funds political campaigns, and has cultivated relationships with media organizations that consistently describe its work as “healthcare.” Government officials who question its taxpayer funding are accused of waging a war on women.

Questions: 1. Which, if any, of these activities should be considered “terrorism” according to your definition? 2. Who are the “terrorists?” 3. What more would you need to know to be surer of your answer?

Amoria is the United States. The corporation is Planned Parenthood. The city is New York, where for several years running, more black babies were aborted than born alive. The founder is Margaret Sanger, whose eugenicist writings are extensively documented and whose organization has quietly scrubbed her name from its flagship clinic. The annual federal funding has sometimes exceeded \$600 million.

By the lesson’s own logic and its own methodology, this qualifies for the exercise. You will never find it in a ZEP lesson plan because the exercise was never about thinking consistently. It was about thinking correctly. And correctly, in ZEP world, means one direction only, and that is guilt about America, and away from any instinct to defend it.

Zinn miseducation #7: Teaching one side of the Israel-Palestine conflict

If you were going to teach 9th graders about one of the most complex, politically contested conflicts in modern history, with Jewish students, Muslim students, and Palestinian students potentially sitting in the same room, would you design a lesson whose conclusion is written before the students open their mouths?

That is exactly what the ZEP’s “Teaching the Seeds of Violence in Palestine-Israel” does.

Released in 2024, following the October 7, 2023, Hamas attack on Israel, the lesson is a mixer activity in which students play 17 historical figures and circulate the classroom in character. The stated central question is: “What is the source of this violence?” But the answer is provided before the question is fully asked. The lesson’s organizing framework, drawn from Rashid Khalidi’s *The Hundred Years’ War on*

Palestine, declares upfront that the modern history of Palestine is best understood as a colonial war waged against the indigenous population to force them off their land. Students are then asked to find the seeds of this preordained crime.

I took a deep dive into this lesson when it was being taught at Grant High School in Portland, Oregon, in a 9th-grade class. Students were assigned to play historical characters

such as Theodor Herzl, the Viennese father of Zionism; Lord Balfour; an idealistic young Zionist settler; a Beirut landlord who sold vast tracts of Palestinian land; and Palestinian peasants who were evicted from their homes. Students were asked to internalize these roles so thoroughly that they could “become” that person in the activity, speaking only in the first-person.

The lesson also warns students not to use accents, noting that it would be culturally insensitive—apparently unaware that the entire exercise had already sailed far past that point.

And here is the thing nobody seems to want to say out loud: these role assignments are random. That means a Palestinian student could be assigned to play the role of the father of Zionism. A Jewish student could be assigned to play a Palestinian peasant displaced by Jewish settlers. In a room full of students with real families and real identities, that is not pedagogy but rather a traumatizing liability for students who may have real emotional stakes in this conflict.

The “Possible Defendants” handout makes the lesson’s orientation unmistakable. Students choose who is guilty of laying the groundwork for today’s violence from a list that includes Zionism, Theodor Herzl, the Balfour Declaration, private ownership of land, and nationalism. Hamas does not appear. October 7th is mentioned in the introduction only to be immediately set aside. The lesson’s explicit purpose is to establish that the violence did not begin with the Hamas attacks. The sample essay the ZEP publishes as a model names Arthur Ruppin, the early Zionist land organizer, as the individual “most responsible for today’s violence,” calls his work “the poisonous seed,” and concludes he practiced



If you question the sanity of defunding the police, you are the new McCarthy. Sixth graders are being taught this.

apartheid. That is the exemplary piece chosen to show students exactly what a successful paper looks like.

The teacher testimonials shared on the ZEP website are candid about what the lesson produces. A teacher in Phoenix reports students connecting current Israeli policy directly to “the ideology and policies of Zionists” and comparing Palestine to other colonial projects such as India, Sudan, and the Congo. A teacher in New Jersey describes the current situation in Gaza not as contested or alleged but simply as “the current genocide.” A teacher in Michigan reports her class classified the war as genocide, then examined campus protests as a natural follow-up

Here is what the lesson does not include: no role for any victim of October 7th; no representation of the 1,200 Israelis killed that day; no mention of Hamas’s founding charter; no Israeli civilians living under years of rocket fire; and no hostages. The lesson covers history only through 1922, a convenient stopping point.

A student conclusion published approvingly on the ZEP website captures the lesson’s destination perfectly: “Zionists are invading, and the core of Zionism is removing all non-Jews completely. Zionists don’t try to cooperate at all. Just remove.” That is what this lesson produces. And somewhere in America tonight, a teacher is downloading it for free and calling it history.

Slander with footnotes

Seven lessons about different centuries, different continents, different villains, but the same verdict typed up before a single student walks into the classroom. Columbus, the Founders, the Constitution, the Red Scare, the Black Panthers, the War on Terror, and the birth of Israel. A curriculum that arrives at the same conclusion no matter the subject isn’t teaching anyone how to think. It’s handing them what to think and trusting that fifteen-year-olds won’t notice the verdict was pre-determined by the lesson creator.

Look at what is demonized, because that’s the part the “social justice” packaging is designed to hide. Every lesson takes aim at a specific load-bearing wall of Western civilization. Columbus is convicted not as a man but as an agent of “oppressive” private property. The Constitution becomes

a rigged contract written by the “privileged” one percent. The Panthers’ demand to seize “the means of production” is handed to 10th graders as a template to copy.

The same three targets pop up every time: property ownership, capitalism, and the Constitution. Those aren’t side characters for the American way. They are the bedrock of the American experiment. The ZEP knows this. A generation taught to feel shame toward those institutions is a

generation that won’t lift a finger to defend them. They’ll either join the revolution or stand by sympathetically as it happens. That’s what the ZEP wants for our America’s school children.

Here is another reason that should infuriate every parent, regardless of politics. Teachers are burning class hours on this while the country is

in the middle of a genuine literacy collapse. On the 2024 Nation’s Report Card, about 40 percent of 4th graders scored below the most basic reading level, the highest percentage since 2002, and one in three 8th graders fell below basic, the worst result in the test’s history. Among high school seniors, 32 percent now read below basic. Two in five children can’t reliably understand a paragraph, and the response from the teachers who use the ZEP is to spend a week staging a mock trial of Christopher Columbus.

They cannot teach kids to read a sentence, but they have found the time to teach them to resent their country.

Imagine someone took your life and wrote down only the worst of it. Every dirty deed, every drunken night, every unkind word. Imagine they didn’t stop there. They exaggerated it, took your actions out of context, invented a few sins you never committed, and assembled the whole thing into the ugliest possible portrait of who you are. Then they handed that portrait to a room full of children and called it your biography.

That isn’t education. It’s slander with footnotes. And it is precisely what four decades of Zinn have handed America’s children in place of their inheritance. As the country turns 250, the genuinely radical act, the one Zinn spent his career arguing against, is to tell students the whole of it: the sin and the glory, the contradiction and the achievement. Teach them all of it, and they can be trusted to love this country with their eyes wide open, and to carry it through another 250 years. ■



They cannot teach kids to read a sentence, but they have found the time to teach them to resent their country.

The nonprofits that ate the California Dream

From the birth of Hollywood to the rise of Silicon Valley, California in the 20th century was the headquarters of the American Dream and what seemed like limitless prosperity. But 21st century California has been replacing profitable industries with politicized nonprofits and—not coincidentally—trading its prosperity for poverty.

By Chris Bray

California was *America*, fearless and productive. It gave us memories of test pilots over the Mojave Desert, Wozniak and Jobs in a garage, and Gregg Toland and Orson Welles cutting a hole in the floor of a sound stage on the RKO lot to get a lower camera angle for *Citizen Kane*. It's where the dreamers went to make things. It started dying about forty years ago, but it took us a while to notice.

California in 2026 is home to a formidable collection of supposedly *non*-governmental organizations—NGOs—that proclaim their commitment to social justice and economic equity. They're *helping*. That's their industry.

The California Endowment, with “more than \$4 billion in assets,” pursues “the mandate to ensure health and justice for all.”

The James Irvine Foundation, with a \$3.6 billion endowment, seeks “fair and just outcomes for all Californians.”

The Weingart Foundation, with about \$900 million in assets, “partners with communities across Southern California to advance racial, social, and economic justice for all.”

The California Wellness Foundation focuses on “civic engagement and power-building to elevate community voices and priorities,” and has about a billion dollars in assets to help them elevate those voices. That's presumably a lot of voice-elevating.

And so on. The California Association of Non-Profits last published a detailed report on the size of the state's nonprofit sector in 2019, concluding that “one in every 14 California jobs is at a nonprofit.” For a current estimate, the national advocacy organization Independent Sector reports that the state has 144,728 non-profit organizations, 123,321 of which are public charities. Together, those organizations employ an estimated 1,112,268 people.



Credit: CBS Television, Public domain / Wikimedia Commons.



Credit: Capitol Records, Public domain / Wikimedia Commons.

California Dreamin' by The Mamas and the Pappas (top) and California Girls by the Beach Boys (bottom) were early examples of a musical movement influenced by the magnetic pull the state had on Americans in the middle of the 20th century.



According to Rep. Ro Khanna (D-Silicon Valley), “Republicans believe that if you let the wealthy spend capital, it will make Americans prosperous. Democrats believe that the federal government investing in the healthcare & education of our people will make America prosperous & productive.”

Also, California leads the country in poverty. A recent report from *CalMatters* notes that “California’s rate, 17.7%, means that nearly 7 million of its residents are impoverished, 5 percentage points higher than the national rate and tied with Louisiana.”

A massive “fairness” industry, partnering with communities to advance social and economic justice for all, isn’t advancing social and economic justice for much of anyone, while they get in the way of the productive and useful part of the state. Advocacy, even expensive advocacy, doesn’t appear to produce what the advocates call “justice.”

So, what *does* it produce? The California Policy Center, a rare conservative nonprofit in the state, offers a report with a suggestion:

“Over the last 50 years, a well-resourced network of donors, foundations, advocacy groups, and unions have developed a strategy to build a funding infrastructure capable of shaping policy, public opinion, and electoral outcomes.”

All of that works together as one integrated unit, and all of it imposes extraordinary costs on the culture, economy, and politics of the state.

An NGO-controlled state legislature

Consider the story of a single California NGO and the person who ran it.

You can read about the origins of the non-profit corporation now called SBX Youth and Family Services on their website, starting with the founding of a student group at Rialto High School in 1995. Then came the big milestone of high school graduation for “the founding members... including our first President Corey Jackson,” which happened in 2000. Jackson did political work for years, leading the group that would become SBX, while drawing a paycheck as a field representative for a series of legislators.

Then came the lawsuit: In 2018, the Inland Empire non-profit, that was then still called Sigma Beta Xi, and the ACLU, sued Riverside County over the operation of a program run by probation officers for at-risk youth, the Youth Accountability Team (YAT). The ACLU and its plaintiff argued that “YAT treats children who have not been convicted of crimes like hardened criminals with surprise searches, unannounced home visitations, strict restrictions on who participants can speak to, curfews, and interrogations into intimate details of their lives. It’s a program far more likely to be applied to youths of color.”

The county settled the lawsuit. Among the conditions: a promise to provide millions of dollars in direct county funding “for community-based organizations to provide services to youth.” Sigma Beta Xi and its president were finally *funded*, steadily and reliably. An NGO was consistently connected to a source of taxpayer dollars, and Jackson could lead it as full-time work.

You can see the result in Sigma Beta Xi’s Form 990; the financial disclosure reports that nonprofits file with the IRS. In 2022, the group reported \$2,398,366 in “contributions and grants,” reporting its activities in all-caps:

MENTORING APPROXIMATELY 400 STUDENTS ON 15 VARIOUS SCHOOL CAMPUSES LOCATED IN THE INLAND EMPIRE METROPOLITAN AREA OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA.

Take a moment to divide \$2.4 million by 400 for yourself. Sigma Beta Xi also reported that it had paid a salary of \$97,390 to its CEO and president, Corey Jackson.

Near the end of that year, Jackson left the nonprofit for his new job as a California state legislator.

This story is typical of California. When the legislature encounters NGOs, it meets itself. Legislators tend to come from the world of activism and nonprofits, not from business. They don't end up making laws because they used to make things or build something. Instead, their professional background is "fighting for access to" or "ensuring that everyone gets a chance to." The legislature is a little island of NGO culture, comfortable with the language and presumptions of professional badgering and hectoring.

State senator Maria Elena Durazo has just been elected to the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors. Here's the opening of the "Meet Maria" page on her campaign website:

A farm worker organizer. A student activist.

A sweat shop organizer and union reformer.
A national immigration leader.

A Democratic National Committeewoman.
LA County's Labor Federation President.

A State Senator.

Arrested over 13 times for leading non-violent
Civil Rights and Worker Rights protests.

This is who makes the laws and shapes the state budget in California. Government and the thing ironically called "non-governmental organizations" eloped while no one was looking. NGOs are GOs, living in good part on government grants while they shape the debate that guides state government. Legislators and NGO executives are partners and peers. They march in step.

The former Assembly Speaker Anthony Rendon came to the legislature through a series of NGOs, including a stint as "executive director of Plaza de la Raza Child Development Services, Inc., which provides comprehensive child development and social and medical services to over 2,300 children and families throughout Los Angeles County."

The reptilian Silicon Valley Assemblyman Marc Berman, a lawyer, worked for a while at private law firms, but then he found his true calling: "While serving on the Palo Alto City Council, Marc worked for the Silicon Valley Education Foundation, a non-profit focused on increasing access to high-quality STEM education and closing the achievement gap in Bay Area public schools."

Senator John Laird "served as executive director of the Santa Cruz AIDS Project."

Assemblywoman Mia Bonta, the wife of California Attorney General Rob Bonta: "Prior to being elected to the State Assembly, Mia served as the CEO of Oakland Promise, a cradle-to-college and career preparation initiative across Oakland public schools."

Assemblywoman Stephanie Nguyen "served as the Executive Director of Asian Resources, Inc. (ARI) to ensure that all communities, especially the low-income, immigrant, refugee, limited English-speaking, formerly incarcerated and undocumented, have access to support and services to help them get one step closer to self-sufficiency."

And on, and on, and on. The NGOcracy governs California. NGOs are the farm team for elected office, and the players on the big league team play the game they learned as they came up through the minors.

The California Dream

The idea of America is apparent in everything from Slater Mills to Henry Ford's River Rouge plant and the SpaceX Starbase. Americans have perceived themselves as makers, builders, and restless people who *moved* and created. The 1893 Chicago World's Columbian Exposition was a party the country threw for itself in front of the world, with



The California Association of Non-Profits last published a detailed report on the size of the state's nonprofit sector in 2019, concluding that "one in every 14 California jobs is at a nonprofit."

200,000 electric lights (in the first electrified World's Fair), a towering steel-framed Ferris wheel, and giant exhibition buildings to show off American industry: Look at what we can *do*. Just go look at the photographs of the fair's Electricity Building, and try not to burst into nervous laughter at the audacity of the thing.

California epitomized that America, building prosperity as a *maker* state, a place of explosive growth and major industry. It *buzzed*. Not actually, but close enough. The birth of movies and television were the birth of Hollywood. The birth of computers was also the birth of Silicon Valley. The Cold War was the birth of an aerospace industry that relied on industrial innovation even as it paid the bills with government funding. Lockheed Martin's Skunk Works sits in the Mojave Desert because that's where that stuff happened. There are still outdoor spaces in the desert north of Los Angeles where you can find public monuments to wild men in white polyester shirts and black clip-on ties, the cowboy-engineers who tried to fly whatever the aerospace companies tried to build.

Affluent and ambitious, California became a cultural center because there was money to pay for the cultural stuff. Pasadena is a center of Arts & Crafts architecture because Pasadena was a center of East Coast industrial wealth that went looking for nice weather; the famous Greene and Greene-designed Gamble House was built with soap money. Richard Neutra left Austria to build Modernist homes in places like Palm Springs. Bakersfield was an important center for mid-century modern architecture because there was oil money there. Important architects wanted to build, so they went to the place where people were doing that.

Restless and always building, California drew Americans from other states. A population of a little less than seven million people in 1940 grew to twenty million by 1970, drawn by aerospace jobs and postwar prosperity. Now it's close to forty million.

That population has also begun, for the first time, to shrink. Remarkable news headline from March of this year: "Los Angeles County sees largest population decline in the U.S., census data shows." A county of ten million people has



Credit: ArtByArthur / Shutterstock.com

Affluent and ambitious, California became a cultural center because there was money to pay for the cultural stuff. The birth of movies and television created Hollywood and epitomized America. But the population has now begun, for the first time, to shrink, with Los Angeles County seeing the largest population decline in the U.S.

become a county of 9.7 million people; 54,000 left in a single year, from the middle of 2024 to the middle of 2025.

Los Angeles isn't alone. A January report from the Public Policy Institute of California describes a relentless tide of outmigration from the whole state. "From 2010 through 2024 (the year of the latest data) almost 10 million people moved from California to other states," the report concludes, "while just over 7 million people moved to California from other parts of the country, according to the American Community Survey. In fact, according to Department of Finance estimates, the state has lost residents to other states every year since 2001."

Here's a clue about who's leaving and who's coming: In ten years, statewide public school enrollment has declined by half a million children.

In 2024, a Republican state senator made the theme of flight explicit, speaking during a legislative hearing in Sacramento to tell families to run. "If you love your children," said Senator Scott Wilk, "you need to flee California. You need to flee."

"Born and raised in this state, I love this state," Wilk added. "I'm not going to stay in this state. Because it's just too



California built prosperity as a maker state, a place of explosive growth and major industry. It buzzed. Not actually, but close enough. Restless and always building, California drew Americans from other states. A population of a little less than seven million people in 1940 grew to twenty million by 1970, drawn by aerospace jobs and postwar prosperity.

oppressive. And I believe in freedom, and so I'm going to move to America when I leave the legislature."

Wilk was wrong about one thing: California isn't separate from America. It's the bleeding edge of what America threatens to become, the social laboratory for a cultural transition. The state concentrates the dose of the burgeoning American poison.

Let a Californian tell you about that poison. Rep. Ro Khanna, who represents Silicon Valley in the U.S. House, reacted to the SpaceX IPO and the expansion of Elon Musk's personal net worth by laying out a competing vision about the origins of correct prosperity. "Republicans believe that if you let the wealthy spend capital, it will make Americans prosperous," he wrote. "Democrats believe that the federal government investing in the healthcare & education of our people will make America prosperous & productive."

That's not a uniquely Californian vision, and U.S. Senators such as Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren weighed in from New England with a similar vision. But California is a cultural leader in the view that private enterprise is cruelty and greed, while anything that doesn't make a profit is inherently virtuous and decent. Mean Elon Musk is making rockets, cheap global satellite-based Internet access, electric cars, a platform for open discourse, and *money*, and that's very bad.

The California Community Foundation

There are some problems with this division of the world into the categories of *greedy* and *virtuous* based on the presence of profit.

In the spring of 2026, visitors walking through Downtown Los Angeles heard music coming from the plaza at the center of the county-owned Music Center, a collection of performing arts venues. Following the sound, people walking through the city emerged onto the plaza to see names projected on the walls of the public space, all under the same all-caps word: "TAKEN: Rosalina, at home with her children."

The projected names were a project of Am I Next?, a group that questions the enforcement of immigration law in emotionally loaded language designed to create a sense of universal menace: People are being *taken* by roving gangs of kidnappers, essentially at random, so everyone is in danger.

The Am I Next? website explains:

Through projections, billboards, and visual storytelling, the campaign brings real faces and truths into public view—reminding us that when one voice is silenced, all voices are at risk. It is both an act of resistance and an invitation for collective responsibility.

Whether you agree with them or not, the Am I Next? campaign makes no *argument*. It doesn't take an explicit position on immigration law, and it doesn't discuss the backgrounds of people "taken" by federal agents. Did they have deportation orders after a hearing in front of an immigration judge? Did previous administrations also deport people?

All that factual background is unaddressed. In a message broadcast onto the walls of the city, the fear-centered message is that people being arrested are essentially being disappeared, *taken* like kidnapping victims. It portrays enforcement of laws as inherently cruel and improper, like the actions of a drug cartel and its foot soldiers.

The donation page for the Am I Next? website explains that it is "made possible" by the California Community Foundation, a donor advised fund that claims to be America's fourth largest community foundation.

This appears to mean that Am I Next? is a fiscally sponsored project within CCF. Operating this way within the CCF would free Am I Next? from the legal and paperwork hassles of operating as an independent nonprofit. This is one of the reasons why fiscal sponsorships are used in the philanthropic world to incubate new NGOs.

But a more controversial advantage for this arrangement is that a giant donor advised fund such as CCF isn't legally required to explain how much it is spending on Am I Next? nor which of CCF's 1,900 separate donor accounts the



The Beverly Hillbillies, a CBS comedy that ran for the entirety of the 1960s, celebrated the potential for just about everyone to find their American Dream in California.

funding came from. For the year ending June 2024 (CCF's most recent publicly available annual IRS filing) CCF reported \$1.9 *billion* in net assets and more than \$215 million in donations.

A video perched on the home page of Am I Next? features CCF president Miguel Santana, as he looks into the camera and asserts that arrests undertaken in the enforcement of immigration law "are basic violations of all of our rights." He doesn't explain that claim, but he expands it in the next sentence: "As Americans, we are asking: Am I Next?"

We probably aren't next if we didn't sneak into the country. But the amygdala-punching message of fear projected on the landscape of the city is a product of philanthropy, and "social justice" is a just check written by somebody to fund the inflated social terror.

A social justice nonprofit leader claiming to speak for the humble and oppressed can cash some nice checks of his own. Financial disclosure reporting from the California

Community Foundation hasn't caught up to Santana's tenure as the fairly new president of the fund, but the *Los Angeles Times* has reported that his starting base salary was \$640,000 a year.

According to his LinkedIn profile, Santana has held board and other leadership positions at several other left-leaning foundations, but he was also the chief administrative officer for the City of Los Angeles, and a top executive for Los Angeles County. He has moved easily between NGOs and the governments that often fund them.

In its 2024 IRS filing, CCF reported \$16.5 million in government grants, out of which they reported having paid \$2.5 million in immigration advocacy grants. Rather than a *nonprofit*, CCF is best thought of as a taxpayer-assisted hedge fund that profits from emotionally manipulative virtue signaling.

The homelessness nonprofits

Aside from symbols and performance, what's the real *product* produced by the California NGO?

Start answering that question by looking at something that isn't an NGO.

The Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority (LAHSA) is a joint powers agency, formed, and for a while financed, by both the City of Los Angeles and Los Angeles County, with state and federal grants to round things out. Lavishly backed through special local taxes approved by voters, LAHSA has been dogged by credible allegations of waste and fraud.

In 2025, the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors voted to pull its homeless services funding out of LAHSA and bring the tax dollars back under direct county control. A year later, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development sent LAHSA a long letter announcing the end of federal funding for the authority. A government agency formed to end homelessness didn't accomplish much and spent a fortune doing it, leading to a series of attacks on its scope and authority.

On its website, here's how LAHSA describes its service model, and the bold letters are from the original:

Through LAHSA, funding, program design, outcomes assessment, and technical assistance are provided to **more than 100 nonprofit partner agencies** that assist people experiencing homelessness achieve independence and stability in permanent housing.

In California, government spending on homelessness is infamously porous and curiously untraceable. An extraordinary report from the California State Auditor, released in 2024, concluded that “the State allocated nearly \$24 billion for homelessness and housing during the last five fiscal years, or from 2018–19 through 2022–23,” but couldn’t show where the money had gone or what all that spending had accomplished.

According to the audit, California:

... has not tracked and reported on the State’s funding for homelessness programs statewide since its 2023 assessment covering fiscal years 2018–19 through 2020–21. Currently, it has no plans to perform a similar assessment in the future. In the absence of an up-to-date assessment, the State and its policymakers are likely to struggle to understand homelessness programs’ ongoing costs and achieved outcomes.

Lots of spending, but a struggle in the dark to understand the point of it all.

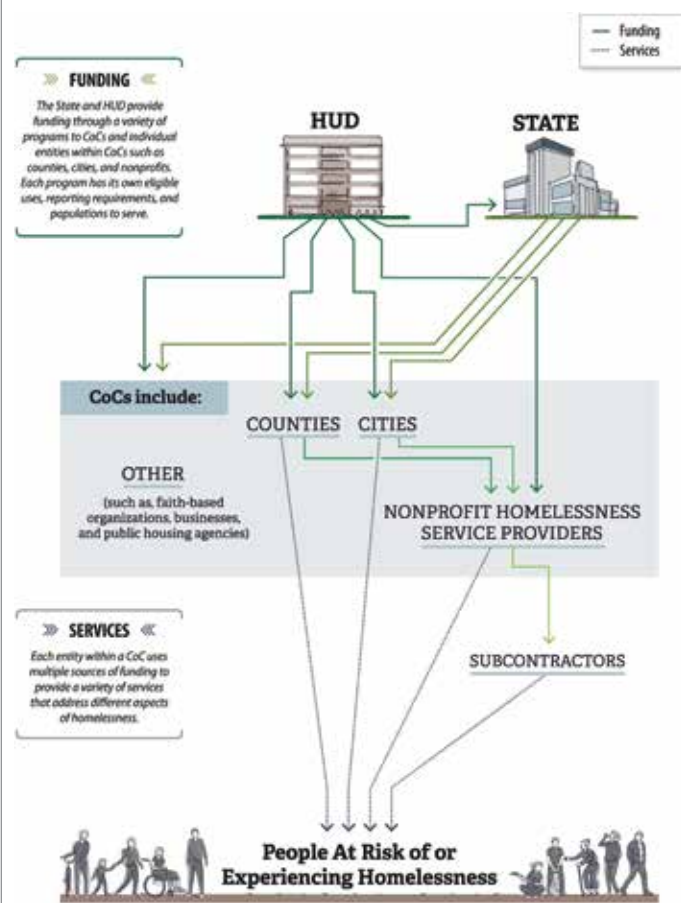
If you scroll through that report, you’ll find this chart, pictured to the right.

In this chart, “CoCs” are continuum of care agencies, the authority that provides oversight to make a diverse set of interventions work together. They ensure “community-wide planning and strategic use of resources.” At least that’s the theory.

But as the chart also shows, homelessness money raining from the sky reaches actual homeless people only after passing through a long series of sluices, each with salaries to pay and offices to rent. Go back to LAHSA’s statement about its work: In *one* of California’s fifty-eight counties, LAHSA supports “**more than 100 nonprofit partner agencies.**”

Chasing outcomes, Los Angeles City Controller Kenneth Mejia sent investigators to look at publicly funded safe housing sites that were meant to help the homeless transition into permanent housing. Contracts with charities for “Indoor Safe” facilities came with a series of requirements,

FIGURE 3
There Are Many Layers to Homelessness Funding and Services



Source: State law; grant agreements; documentation from Cal ICH, HUD, CDSS, HCD, cities, and counties; and a service provider’s website.

including the mandate that they regularly provide hot meals and fresh food with their government funds. Actual outcome from an on-site audit: “The service provider’s food inventory consisted almost entirely of instant ramen noodles.”

One of Mejia’s site audits led to indictments, as the CEO of the nonprofit Abundant Blessings—whose prior experience running organizations was that he owned a Yogurtland franchise in Santa Monica—was charged with fraud in state and federal courts.



In 2024, a Republican state senator made the theme of flight explicit, speaking during a legislative hearing in Sacramento to tell families to run. “If you love your children,” said Senator Scott Wilk, “you need to flee California. You need to flee.”



The NGOcracy governs California. Legislators tend to come from the world of activism and nonprofits, not from business. They make laws that reflect the experience of making things or building things.

From the federal indictment of Abundant Blessings CEO Alexander Soofer:

Rather than providing the services for which he billed these public entities, Soofer pocketed at least \$10 million. He used that public money for a down payment on his \$7 million Westwood home, millions of dollars of upgrades to that home, private schooling for his children, lavish spending in Las Vegas, private jet travel, and stays at luxury resorts across the United States—from Hawaii to Florida. Soofer also appeared to use \$475,000 to purchase a vacation property in Greece, sending this money to a Greek property developer.

Digging into details, the probable cause affidavit submitted to the district court by an FBI agent described the moment when investigators allegedly tried to question the members of the board that oversaw Abundant Blessings and discovered that it didn't exist. Then the FBI started piling up paragraphs alleging *precisely* where LA's homeless services money had gone:

Hermes is a luxury retailer, and the luxury goods SOOFER and his wife purchased with taxpayer dollars include \$910 for women's Chypre sandals with goat lining, \$260 for a men's Faconnee tie, \$1,250 for men's Paris calf-skin loafers, \$455 for a men's Chevaux en Symetrie tie, and \$2,450 for a men's trotting jacket.

You see, for-profit corporations are greedy, but nonprofits are inherently kind and decent.

Where homeless money flows to nonprofits, it tends to become hard to track. Remember the description of the Weingart Foundation near the start of this report? News stories in Los Angeles reported that the foundation, "one of L.A.'s biggest homeless service providers," received more than \$100 million in public funds in just a few years while also being "continuously out of compliance with federal deadlines to turn in audits—known as 'single audits'—since early 2022."

California's perennially unsolved homeless crisis is the story of an army of NGOs spending absurd quantities of

public money toward no apparent purpose while collecting enormous administrative salaries to perform the public appearance of virtue. Skid Row funds \$455 Hermes ties. How virtuous.

The end of ranching

The connection between symbols of virtue and the realities of wealth again becomes clear in California's controversies over the management of public lands.

In 2022, a coalition of three environmental nonprofits sued the National Park Service over the presence of historic cattle ranches at Point Reyes National Seashore, in an area called West Marin that sits about an hour north of San Francisco. The "dairy empire" on the point had begun in the 1850s, so the litigation targeted agricultural operations that had been run continuously on the same land for about 170 years.

Intervening, a fourth environmental group that wasn't a party to the lawsuit offered to negotiate a settlement between the ranchers and the environmental groups, while the park service postured as an onlooker despite being the actual defendant. The Nature Conservancy (TNC), a giant NGO with net assets exceeding \$8 billion, was described in news stories as a neutral arbiter, an organization with no interest in the case "which helped facilitate the mediation." TNC convinced twelve of the fourteen ranchers at Point Reyes to take settlement payments and leave, ending most ranching there.

The Nature Conservancy also funded the settlement that it negotiated, and a series of remarkable stories in the *Santa Rosa Press-Democrat* began to reveal details in that effort that changed the appearance of TNC's intervention.

First, in January of 2025, the newspaper described the way The Nature Conservancy pitched the end of ranching at "swank private fundraisers involving high-profile Bay Area philanthropists," securing cash for "a settlement reached without public input and that is not subject to federal regulations." Through the instrument of legal action brought by a group of NGOs, private equity wrote checks to end 170 years of ranching on a piece of public land. Here, from

the reporting of *Press-Democrat* writer John Beck, is what it looks like when a nonprofit works to influence the use of public resources:

Making the rounds in the affluent Marin County enclave of Ross on Jan. 12, 2023, they stopped by the house of Dan Kalafatas and his wife, Hadley Mullin. He is chairman of the global climate strategy company 3Degrees, and she is senior partner and senior managing director at the private equity firm TSG Consumer Partners. Together, they agreed early on to support the cause and to help raise funds and spread the word to their well-connected friends.

The Nature Conservancy's donors "hopped in a convoy of SUVs" for a private tour of Point Reyes, then later attended a fundraising dinner "at a \$20 million, 7-bedroom estate in Ross, not far from the Lagunitas Country Club." There was valet parking, and the caterer provided ranch-themed cocktails. As Beck's second story in the series noted, the dinner was "a who's who of Bay Area entrepreneurs, investors, tech execs and venture capitalists," and one later told him that she looked around the room and "didn't see any Point Reyes ranchers or West Marin farmers, or really anyone she knew from West Marin."

And then a third story from John Beck in the *Press-Democrat* made the whole process very clear: The State of California had allocated \$10 million to The Nature Conservancy to fund TNC's post-ranching management of the public land at Point Reyes, and had committed the funding long before the ranchers had agreed to the settlement. The neutral arbiter trying to convince the ranchers to settle and leave had a direct financial interest in their departure.

"In effect," Beck wrote, "state funding was already set aside to restore land that ranchers had not agreed to vacate." The Nature Conservancy officials told Beck that if the ranchers had not agreed to leave, they would have just used the money anyway to do other restoration work at Point Reyes. But they didn't claim that the ranchers had known about the state funding while they negotiated with the group that was set to receive it.



Credit: Created by UVL / Shutterstock.com

In 2022, a coalition of three environmental nonprofits sued the National Park Service over the presence of historic cattle ranches at Point Reyes National Seashore. The Nature Conservancy, a giant NGO with net assets over \$8 billion, convinced twelve of the fourteen ranchers to take settlements and leave, ending most ranching there.

"When you pull back the curtain," a former Point Reyes rancher told Beck, "you start to maybe understand a little bit more about what happened."

And that's correct: you do start to maybe understand a little bit more. Private equity, NGOs, and government worked in partnership to produce an outcome that wasn't explained to people outside the circle they created. This story is about as California as it gets.

The purest California NGO story

Or maybe it's this one, the purest form of the California NGO story.

The Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights of Los Angeles (CHIRLA) marries all the themes together. It's a nonprofit service provider that nestles up against a nonprofit political activist group, a *helping people* group that by the most remarkable coincidence also assists politicians in the pursuit of power while being lavishly funded by the governments those politicians run.

In 2024, Los Angeles Mayor Karen Bass proudly announced that she had secured federal funding from the Biden administration so that local migrant support groups could provide housing and free stuff— "supportive services"—to new arrivals from other countries. The federal government's USA



Credit: John Doukas/Shutterstock.com Asset ID: 2638697259

The Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights of Los Angeles (CHIRLA), which receives a majority of its \$30-\$40 million budget from state and local government grants, has faced allegations that it organizes anti-ICE demonstrations and uses illegal immigrants to canvas neighborhoods for candidates.

Spending website reports that CHIRLA got a \$450,000 grant to provide “citizenship education and training.”

At CHIRLA, that much government cash would barely register. Parsing public records, the Capital Research Center’s InfluenceWatch offers a long list of government grants to the organization, mostly from one predictable source:

In 2023, CHIRLA received nearly \$34 million in government grants, primarily from the State of California, accounting for roughly three-quarters of its \$44.9 million in revenues. In 2022, CHIRLA received \$25.6 million in government grants, more than 80 percent of its \$31 million in revenues.

Among those grants were \$1.28 million from the City of Los Angeles between 2017 and 2025. And CHIRLA is also funded by the Los Angeles County Office of Immigrant Affairs. So they’ve run the table: CHIRLA gets paid by city, county, state, and federal governments.

Once again blurring boundaries, this NGO is lavishly funded by the government—so really kind of a GO—and

also took in tremendous amounts of cash from philanthropic foundations: \$3 million from the Weingart Foundation, \$1,325,000 from the James Irvine Foundation, \$2,275,000 from the Evelyn and Walter Haas, Jr. Fund, and so on. Government and philanthropic tributaries run into the same financial rivers.

Funded in good part with taxpayer dollars, CHIRLA also has an affiliated political action fund (using the same name: CHIRLA Action Fund) that endorses candidates for public office, loudly and often, and then canvasses neighborhoods for its preferred candidates. Among many others in a long list, the leaders of CHIRLA recently stood alongside Xavier Becerra to endorse his campaign for California governor. CHIRLA also endorsed Eunisses Hernandez for L.A. City Council. And, of course, they endorsed Karen Bass for mayor while Bass proudly declares her commitment to finding CHIRLA more government funding.

Defending itself against allegations that it crosses boundaries between charity and politics, CHIRLA insists that it isn’t involved in partisan questions and political campaigns.



California isn't separate from America. It's the bleeding edge of what America threatens to become, the social laboratory for a cultural transition. The state concentrates the dose of the burgeoning American poison. California is a cultural leader in the view that private enterprise is cruelty and greed, while anything that doesn't make a profit is inherently virtuous and decent.

Instead, CHIRLA does “citizenship education” and “supportive services” while the CHIRLA Action Fund issues endorsements and provides campaign support.

That's true, so far as the *letter* of the law goes, but in *spirit* it gets more complicated.

Look up the IRS filings for both CHIRLA and the CHIRLA Action Fund, and this is what you'll find: CHIRLA is a non-profit that's run out of an office at 2533 W. Third St., Suite 101, and the wholly separate CHIRLA Action Fund is a different organization that's run out of an office at 2533 W. Third St., Suite 101. If you have a question about CHIRLA, they list Zerihoun Yilma as their point of contact, while the CHIRLA Action Fund lists Zerihoun Yilma as their point of contact.

See, totally separate! Both are run by Angelica Salas, who also serves as a board member at the Latino Community Foundation and the California Wellness Foundation, while serving as a member of the state government's California Racial Equity Commission.

CHIRLA explicitly describes its “Immigrant Political Power Project” as an effort that “targets new citizens, Latinos, and English learners to build a voter base from scratch, with enough power to sway state politics.”

Here's how they do that: “We reach out to these community members to build relationships, speaking with them in their language between four and seven times before election day about diverse issues—from their access to state safety-net programs to registering for the census.”

And finally, the group calls the Immigrant Political Power Project “a joint project of CHIRLA and CHIRLA Action Fund,” openly erasing the line between what are supposed to be separate organizations.

The conservative news website *RedState* frequently covers CHIRLA, with managing editor Jennifer Van Laar discussing (for example) allegations that the nonprofit organizes anti-ICE demonstrations and uses illegal immigrants to canvass neighborhoods for candidates.

Where does CHIRLA end and Democratic politics begin, and what boundaries sit between those things and government use of taxpayer dollars at every level? That's not a question that invites serious answers. A bowl of soup is eaten with one spoon.

Ruin is an industry

The California legislature passes somewhere north of a thousand bills every year while considering about double that number, so there's not much time for committee hearings. Bills tend to get a few minutes of testimony, a witness or two in favor, and a witness or two in opposition reading short statements into the record.

Then comes the unfortunate and hurried ritual known as the “me toos.” Committees invite everyone who wants to speak to come to a microphone at the front of the hearing room, but the me toos are only allowed to say three things: name, organization, and position. Speakers who try to wedge in a sentence as an actual argument—I'm *opposed*, because...—are quickly shut down.

Under a headline about legislators silencing witnesses, a 2025 story on the news website *CalMatters* described a legislative hearing on a proposed bear hunting bill in which people traveled to the Capitol from all over the state and then had experiences like this one: “One of the bear bill's supporters, Elizabeth Washoe, took a day off work, filled up her vehicle with \$5-plus a gallon gas before she left Modoc County and made the five-hour drive to the capital, only to be given a few seconds at the mic.” This treatment tends to offend people, and legislators tend not to care at all.

The reality in California is that the me toos are giving the important testimony when they say the names of their organizations. That's the information the lawmakers are listening for, and it's all they need to hear. Bills advance on the basis of teams and relationships. Planned Parenthood Affiliates of California, in favor. SEIU, in favor. Trevor Project, in favor. And the message is received.

To continue spooling out examples of the way California NGOs work is to keep telling the same story: blurred boundaries, cronyism and incestuous boundary-crossing, and partisan power-seeking dressed up as a passion for social justice.

To talk about the controversies in California over election results being reversed a week after the election because of late-arriving ballots is to talk about ballot harvesting by public sector unions and “social justice” NGOs.

To talk about the legislature’s pathological focus on anti-family bills is to talk about sexual identity activism from full-time activists at well-funded NGOs.

To talk about the decline of the cities and the ubiquity of homeless encampments and fatal overdoses on the street is to talk about “harm reduction” NGOs and the teams of “outreach workers” who spend their days getting paid to enable self-destructive behavior.

To talk about the middle class being priced out of homes in California is to talk about the army of NGOs that exist to advocate for affordable housing and the growing cost of

building in the face of relentless professional activism that increases the cost of each new home.

Ruin is an *industry*.

As California grows a laundry list of serious social failures, the one thing you absolutely can’t blame is the availability of resources. “During Gavin Newsom’s governorship,” the Hoover Institution wrote in 2024, “California’s state budget grew over 63 percent, rising from around \$200 billion in 2019 to about \$327 billion in the current fiscal year ending June 30. After adjusting for inflation and California’s population losses since 2019, this represents a 38 percent per person increase in real (inflation-adjusted) state government spending.”

California has combined ever-growing government spending with stubborn poverty, entrenched homelessness, failing infrastructure, and taxpayer-funded political activism that serves the people who govern the state. Its true client class is the NGO sector, and its growth industry is the office tower full of professionals who claim to ensure access to justice.

As I write this, Governor Gavin Newsom is complaining that the FBI is talking to his friends. We don’t know what they’re looking for, but his former chief of staff has pleaded guilty to federal charges that she stole political campaign funds to pay for a lavish lifestyle. She was joined in that scheme by a high-ranking staffer for Xavier Becerra, who will probably be the next governor. They see a pot of money and they assume it’s for them: for their nice hotels, for their expensive dinners, for their living room furniture.

There’s a reason for this kind of thinking in California, a state without boundaries. To understand the state and its decline, read a five-year-old news story in the *Los Angeles Times*: “Facebook, Google, other corporate giants flooded Newsom with record \$226 million in charity donations in 2020.”

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California’s perennially unsolved homeless crisis (as seen in the area surrounding San Francisco City Hall) is the story of an army of nongovernmental organizations spending absurd quantities of public money toward no apparent purpose while collecting enormous administrative salaries to perform the public appearance of virtue.



Credit: Robert Harding Video / Shutterstock.com

The old California Dream was an invitation to build. The new California Dream is an invoice. Every social crisis becomes a revenue stream, every failure becomes an argument for more funding, and every public problem is routed through another NGO.

On its face, the headline doesn't make sense: How do corporations flood the governor of a state with charity donations? Does a governor run charities?

But the controversy over “behested payments” is precisely a crisis over the state's NGO cronyism. When you get into the details, here's what the actual donations look like:

Three organizations, including Silicon Valley Bank, collectively gave \$175,000 this year on behalf of the governor to the California Partners Project, a nonprofit launched by First Partner Jennifer Siebel Newsom that focuses on promoting gender equity and understanding the impact of technology and media on children.

Large companies doing business in California gave money to the governor's wife through her non-profit, apparently because of their corporate commitment to “gender equity.”

A little later, in 2024, the governor intervened in a dispute between Indian tribes over federal approval for a new casino, backing one tribe over another. You've already guessed the background, which the *Washington Free Beacon* discovered:

In April 2024, a few months before Newsom sent his letter to the Biden Interior Department, the Democratic governor requested Graton Rancheria to contribute \$500,000 to his wife's charity, the California Partners Project. And in April 2025, one month before Newsom filed his lawsuit against

the Trump administration, he again asked Graton Rancheria to contribute another \$500,000 to his wife's charity.

As you can see, it's a very charitable state, and everyone is committed to *helping*. That is the California story now: a state that once made movies, airplanes, houses, computers, suburbs, highways, and fortunes now makes explanations for failure. It makes equity plans, listening sessions, advocacy campaigns, fiscal sponsorships, grant applications, litigation strategies, and public-private partnerships. It makes careers for the people who promise to fix the problems that their own system keeps producing.

The old California Dream was an invitation to build. The new California Dream is an invoice. Every social crisis becomes a revenue stream, every failure becomes an argument for more funding, and every public problem is routed through another office full of professionals who speak in the moral language of service while living on the proceeds of decay.

This is why California can spend more and more money while becoming less and less governable. The state has not merely failed to solve poverty, homelessness, disorder, corruption, and decline. It has built a political economy around them. The ruins are not incidental to the system. They *are* the system. ■

Editor's Note: If this article interested you, consider reading CRC's October 2025 Report Infiltrated: The Ideological Capture of Homeless Advocacy, available at [CapitalResearch.org](https://capitalresearch.org).

OAKLAND: THE NGO CITY

If the Bay Area city's rich, left-wing NGOs really wanted to help the poor, then they could afford to liquidate their combined assets and give a \$31,000 check to every man, woman, and child in Oakland who is living below the poverty line.

By Ken Braun



Credit: Jacob Boomsma / Shutterstock.com

As the adjoining report notes, California contains an extraordinary collection of well-funded nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) that promote left-wing policies. The report also notes that the “N” for these lefty NGOs is often missing because many have been pocketing big grants from state, local, and federal taxpayers to advance their missions.

Studying just one California town—Oakland—is illustrative. A recent Census Bureau report shows the Bay Area community is home to nearly 441,000 people living on just 56 square miles. Residing among them are at least 67 definitively left-leaning policy NGOs that file their tax returns from Oakland. That’s more than one lefty nonprofit per square mile.

With the anomalous exception of Washington, DC, it is hard to imagine another American city with so many left-wing NGOs per capita. Oakland has one for every 6,600 residents. (And this counts only the definitively *left-wing* NGOs, not all of Oakland’s nonprofits.)

According to their most recent IRS filings, the combined net assets of the 67 lefty Oakland NGOs equaled nearly \$1.9 *billion*.

The Census Bureau reports a poverty rate of 13.4 percent for Oakland, which works out to nearly 60,000 men, women, and children living below the poverty line in the city. Many of Oakland’s lefty NGO’s preach “economic justice.” If they all agreed to liquidate their assets and give the money to Oakland’s poorest people, it would yield \$31,000 per person, or \$124,000 for each impoverished household of four.

Oakland’s original and oldest left-wing NGO is probably the Sierra Club (net assets \$111,253,422) and its educational affiliate, the Sierra Club Foundation (net assets \$180,648,301). The Sierra Club has worked to block the production and use of all hydrocarbon fuels (oil, natural gas, and coal) and even opposes nuclear power, which produces no emissions except

water vapor. That’s almost 90 percent of all the energy Americans use.

Many other Oakland-based NGOs have opposed the use of all hydrocarbon and nuclear fuels. These include (*but are not limited to*) the Movement Strategy Center (net assets \$54,935,730), the Greenlining Institute (\$43,392,738), GRID Alternatives (\$34,868,354), the Black Lives Matter Global Network Foundation (\$23,538,600), PowerSwitch Action (\$23,306,950), Vote Solar (\$14,139,336), the California Environmental Justice Alliance (\$5,463,037) and International Rivers (\$1,677,825).

Oakland’s largest left-wing NGO is the California Nurses Association (CNA), with net assets of \$435,071,522. CNA’s national affiliate, National Nurses United (NNU)—net assets \$49,381,098—also files tax returns from Oakland. A notation on the most recent publicly available return from CNA notes the two have a “joint employee” agreement in which

“substantially all NNU employee related expenses, including payroll and employee benefit costs, are paid through the CNA payroll system and NNU reimburses CNA...”

In 2015, *The Nation* credited NNU for giving Bernie Sanders his “first major” endorsement for the 2016 U.S. presidential race. NNU has also promoted Medicare for All, publicly opposed the production of American hydrocarbon energy, and formally opposed free trade deals such as the Trans-Pacific Partnership. More recently, NNU has been a sponsor of the #NoKings rallies against the Trump administration.

Similarly, Oakland is also home to two affiliates of the SEIU, arguably the most stridently left wing major union in America: SEIU Local 1021 (net assets \$58,833,345) and SEIU United Healthcare Workers West (\$42,390,952).

Some of Oakland’s lefty NGOs pursue almost comical missions, such as giving the Bay Area back to native tribes. The Sogorea Te’ Land Trust (net assets \$54,252,353) “facilitates the return of indigenous land to indigenous people.” To this end they have created the “Shuumi Land Tax,” which is “a voluntary annual contribution that non-Indigenous people living on

traditional Lisjan Ohlone territory make to support the critical work of the Sogorea Te’ Land Trust.”

Translation: “If you live on our land, then give us some money so we can keep bothering you about living on our land. Your donation is the purest form of virtue signaling.”

But despite the \$54.2 million net egg, the Sogorea Te’ Land Trust has a long way to go. So far, even the federal government won’t recognize the Ohlone tribes, let alone their allegation that they should be given some of America’s most expensive real estate.

Here is an alphabetical listing of the 67 left-wing NGOs operating from Oakland:

Akonadi Foundation	California League of	Common Counsel	Prism Reports (Prism)
350 Bay Area	Conservation Voters	Foundation	PSE Healthy Energy
Community Initiatives	Education Fund	Critical Resistance	Rose Foundation for
Alliance for Safety and	California Nurses	Dream Corps	Communities and the
Justice	Association	East Bay Alliance for a	Environment
Amazon Watch	Center for Cultural Power	Sustainable Economy	San Francisco Baykeeper
Anti Police-Terror Project	Center for Environmental	Essie Justice Group	School of Unity and
Asian Immigrant Women	Health	Filipino Advocates for	Liberation
Advocates	MediaJustice	Justice	SEIU Local 1021
Asian Pacific Environmental	Center for Story-Based	Greenbelt Alliance	SEIU United Healthcare
Network	Strategy (SmartMeme)	Greenlining Institute	Workers West
Asylum Access	Center for Third World	GRID Alternatives	Sierra Club Foundation
Bay Area Legal Aid	Organizing	Institute for Public Accuracy	Sierra Club
Beneficial State Foundation	Centro Legal de la Raza	International Rivers	Sogorea Te’ Land Trust
Black Lives Matter Global	(Centro Legal)	Lynn Handleman Charitable	Solidaire Network
Network Foundation	Changelab Solutions	Foundation (Left	Sustainable Economies Law
Business Climate Finance	Children Now	Tilt Fund)	Center
California Collaborative for	Cultural Engagement	Maynard Institute	TransformCA
Immigrant Justice	Laboratory	Movement Strategy Center	Vote Solar
California Environmental	Center for Cultural Power	National Equity Project	Vote.org
Justice Alliance	Clean Energy Leadership	National Nurses United	Western States Legal
California Environmental	Institute	Oakland Institute	Foundation
Voters (EnviroVoters)	Color of Change	Planting Justice	Women’s Foundation of
		PolicyLink	California
		PowerSwitch Action	



The Sierra Club has worked to block the production and use of all hydrocarbon fuels (oil, natural gas, and coal) and even opposes nuclear power, which produces no emissions except water vapor. That’s almost 90 percent of all the energy Americans use.



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An Epitaph for a distinctly American labor movement, at 30

In 1996, a former trade unionist came not to praise the American labor movement but to bury it, as its radicalization to the left against what was then an increasingly conservative mainstream of American public life demonstrated that a uniquely “American” labor unionism was no more. In the decades since Max Green’s monograph was published, American labor has moved even farther left.

By Michael Watson

In 1996, Max Green, a former operative for New York’s United Federation of Teachers (UFT) who broke with trade unionism, wrote *Epitaph for American Labor: How Union Leaders Lost Touch with America*. In it, he detailed how labor unions over a crucial two decades of the Long Decline (the Lane Kirkland era running the AFL-CIO after 1979) found themselves on the left-wing of American life shortly after Big Labor’s heyday in a center-left mainstream that commanded the heights of American politics and culture.

To a certain trade unionist (typically one who considers himself politically centrist or center-right), the story of American unions goes something like the following:

Drawing on a distinctive American labor tradition separate from the Marxist class-conflict model of their European comrades, organized labor (a reliable and unquestionable proxy for the American working man) stood with his country through two World Wars and a global struggle with Communism. While demanding “more”—in Samuel Gompers’s word—for the honorable worker, American trade unions never succumbed to the siren song of class conflict and state ownership of the means of production (old-fashioned socialism), demonstrating labor’s “conservative heart.” In so doing, organized labor earned the respect of the American people and privileges for its institution for all time—perhaps even to include the privilege to compel membership and private financial support.



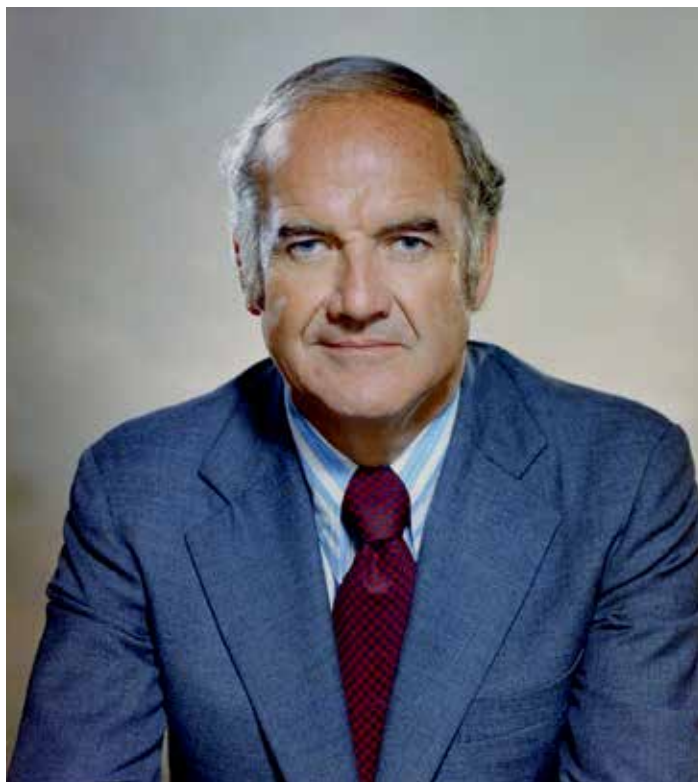
Samuel Gompers, founder of the American Federation of Labor and pictured above, demanded “more” for the honorable worker, yet the early American trade unions never succumbed to the siren song of class conflict and old-fashioned socialism, demonstrating labor’s “conservative heart.”

This is bunkum. In America organized labor has differed from its European counterparts not in philosophy but rather in practical realities. Americans have proven to be more conservative over time than Europeans. We have retained our religious identification and practice and have identified individual effort as more important to success than communal or state action. And Americans have maintained a large and powerful military.

All of these actions have been to the longstanding irritation of our European cousins.

But the American labor movement has declined in broad membership and left the rump of labor unionism dominated by government workers, para-statal workers who nominally work for private employers (but whose employment

Credit: AgnosticiPreachersKid, CC BY-SA 4.0, creativecommons.org/Wikimedia Commons



A crucial breaking point was the presidential campaign of Sen. George McGovern (D-SD) in 1972. That year, the AFL-CIO, for the only time in its united history to date, declined to endorse the Democratic nominee for president.

is ultimately dependent on government spending), and ideologically motivated private-sector workers, such as journalists and graduate students. With this shift, *American Big Labor* has come to look more *European* than American.

Green lamented the beginning of that evolution back in 1996. In the decades since, the drift left has become more severe.

Meet the McGovernites

A crucial breaking point was the presidential campaign of Sen. George McGovern (D-SD) in 1972. That year, the AFL-CIO, for the only time in its united history to date, declined to endorse the Democratic nominee for president. Notably, it could not bring itself to endorse McGovern's rival Richard Nixon, despite Nixon having proved more amenable to Great Society liberalism than his Republican successors would.

Big Labor—at a time it really was “Big,” commanding roughly one-fourth of the nonagricultural private-sector workforce—sat comfortably in a Democratic Party main-

stream defined by the New Deal and the Great Society in domestic policy and Harry Truman and Lyndon Johnson in foreign policy. But President Johnson's ever-expanding conflict in Vietnam put strain between the midcentury center-left mainstream and the New Left—a New Left labor itself had midwived through the funds and institutional support of the United Auto Workers.

By 1972, the New Left had simply become the left, and it presented one of its own to the country for election in the form of Sen. McGovern. Despite McGovern's impeccable pro-Big Labor credentials—he had hailed the formation of the UAW-Teamsters Alliance for Labor Action on the Senate floor—his dovish foreign policy and rhetorical alignment with the blame-America-first left was too much for old-line, Cold War liberals like the AFL-CIO's top two men, George Meany and Lane Kirkland, to stomach.

But the McGovernites, despite their 49-state electoral pasting in November 1972, were the future of the Democratic Party, not Meany and Kirkland. This was one of the operating theses underlying the dearly departed *Emerging Democratic Majority*, a widely praised 2002 book that predicted enduring demographic dominance for the Democratic Party. As with all theories of American political coalitions, it lasted until it didn't.

That had ramifications for Big Labor, which Max Green outlined:

As recently as twenty-five years ago [1971], those who called themselves traditional liberals (as against New Politics liberals) saw organized labor as perhaps the only hope for resisting the onslaught of the Left against the nation's economic system, social culture, and foreign policy. Leaders of the Left agreed: the New Left and then the McGovernite wing of the Democratic Party took aim at the union movement, regularly denouncing labor leaders as defenders of America's capitalist, racist, and imperialist establishment.

The McGovernites' victory might have been inevitable, given that their coalition constituencies were growing while Big Labor had already passed its peak and entered the Long Decline. But even declining factions can still fight brutally to keep their place in a coalition or shape its future—even the New England moderate Republicans have not all gone to their rest. But Big Labor did not fight; as Green notes:

But, to the surprise of supporters and critics, labor put up little resistance to the Left. For all intents and purposes, the movement capitulated to it in less than a decade; by the early 1980s, labor

had changed sides. Increasingly disaffected from American capitalism, it relinquished any serious claim to a distinctive character and for the first time became an integral part of the American Left. Organized labor came to mirror the Left in its criticism of capitalism; in its commitment to statist economic policies; in its abandonment of the traditional American value of individualism in favor of the race and gender-based policies of the civil rights, feminist, and gay rights movements; and in its strong penchant for challenging the pursuit of U.S. interests abroad, particularly but not exclusively its opposition to the now bipartisan policy of promoting free market economies through free trade and other means.

A better candidate for when Big Labor *initially* lurched to the left would be in the 1930s and 1940s, when the Congress of Industrial Organizations was both shot through with Communists and deeply influential in the Franklin Roosevelt administration. Whether Green was right that the Long Decline was the “first time” organized labor “became an integral part of the American Left,” he identifies a major dynamic, one that the succeeding three decades only exacerbated.

Since Big Labor’s Long Decline became unmissable in the 1970s and 1980s, coalition dynamics have driven the union movement from the center of the liberal coalition to its activist-left flank. It is possible to trace organized labor’s alienation in three of the areas Green discusses.

First, there is economics, where (contrary to myths about long-dead labor leaders like Samuel Gompers) the union movement has consistently supported not just “big government,” but economic central planning with full employment as a singular goal, inflation be damned.

In foreign policy, the AFL-CIO continued to assert its support for efforts to contain and roll back international communism. But in practice, it obstructed American efforts

in Central America, tried to block the Reagan defense buildup by holding it hostage for left-wing domestic interests, and endorsed the socialist-to-communist programs of leftist leaders in Africa and Latin America. The passing from the scene of Kirkland specifically has only accelerated this trend.

In social policy, organized labor lost its socially moderating factions, what Green quoted AFL-CIO political (COPE) director Al Barkan as calling “the old New Deal coalition of ethnics.” This promoted ever closer union with organized identity-politics groups, feminist activists, and LGBT interests.

From socialism through socialism lite to socialism again

The original American trade unionists were at least socialism-curious. Samuel Gompers flirted with Georgism, studied the political writings of Karl Marx extensively, and firmly committed himself to Marx-influenced class analysis. But Gompers ultimately chose to pursue collective bargaining with private companies rather than state ownership of the means of production, the old definition of “socialism,” which would be adopted by British unionists when their Labour Party took power after World War II.

Gompers’s view was not universal; he, in fact, was ousted from union office by socialists in 1894 for a single one-year term. More enduring challenges came from Big Bill Haywood’s Industrial Workers of the World, which combined violent militancy with radical politics until the Woodrow Wilson administration’s complete disregard for civil liberties saw it broken up and Haywood exiled to the nascent Soviet Union; and Eugene V. Debs’s Socialist Party, which received between 2.8 percent and 5.99 percent of the national vote in presidential elections from 1900 through 1920.



Despite McGovern’s impeccable pro-Big Labor credentials—he had hailed the formation of the UAW-Teamsters Alliance for Labor Action on the Senate floor—his dovish foreign policy and rhetorical alignment with the blame-America-first left was too much for old-line, Cold War liberals like the AFL-CIO’s top two men, George Meany and Lane Kirkland, to stomach.

Organized labor endorsed much of the expansion of government undertaken by the New Deal and Great Society. But both those experiments in social democracy in America lacked Big Labor's great desideratum: a full-employment guarantee. This would have included a requirement to reduce working hours below the five eight-hour days specified under New Deal-era legislation that essentially nationalized a long-standing union demand. Cutting working hours (without a reduction in pay, naturally) remains a union demand; in its 2023 strike against the Detroit Three auto manufacturers, the UAW demanded a cut to a 32-hour week that it did not receive in final agreements.

The problem for Big Labor in the 1970s and 1980s, as it remained in the Biden administration through the present, is inflation. Green writes:

Labor denied that any trade-off existed between inflation and unemployment. [...] As long as some industrial capacity was unutilized (and there almost always seemed to be some, by labor's account), the solution to inflation would be to produce more goods by hiring more workers. [...] Similarly, whereas conventional economists held that interest-rate hikes would reduce inflationary pressures by reducing demand, labor argued that the opposite was true because increasing interest rates raised the cost of borrowed money and therefore the total cost of production.

The union position described by Green on interest rates has been consistently disproved by events. The era of "inflation targeting" by the Fed, which lasted from the late 1970s through the 2008 financial crisis, relied on raising interest rates to cut the growth of the money supply. It worked so well that annual inflation never exceeded 4 percent from 1990 through 2022, when the Biden administration adopted the Old Labor platform of expansionist fiscal policy while the Fed dawdled in raising interest rates to knock down price increases. (If the Trump administration gets its wish of low interest rates despite continued price-increase pressures, it will likely regret it.) Likewise, echoes of the union position against "automation"—increasing productivity—are heard

today as well in campaigns against data centers, autonomous taxis, and other high-technology advances.

Perhaps most notable for the purposes of tracing labor's continued march to the progressive left is Green's account of the beginnings of the environmentalist-labor alignment. He wrote:

Labor's preoccupation with increasing union jobs explains why the AFL lined up with the no-growth wing of the environmental movement in scoffing at green taxes—effluent charges designed to give companies an incentive to reduce pollution with maximum efficiency—as "licenses to pollute," even though virtually all economists, liberal as well as conservative, thought otherwise. The alternative favored by the AFL and its environmentalist allies was a government requirement that companies use the best available technology.

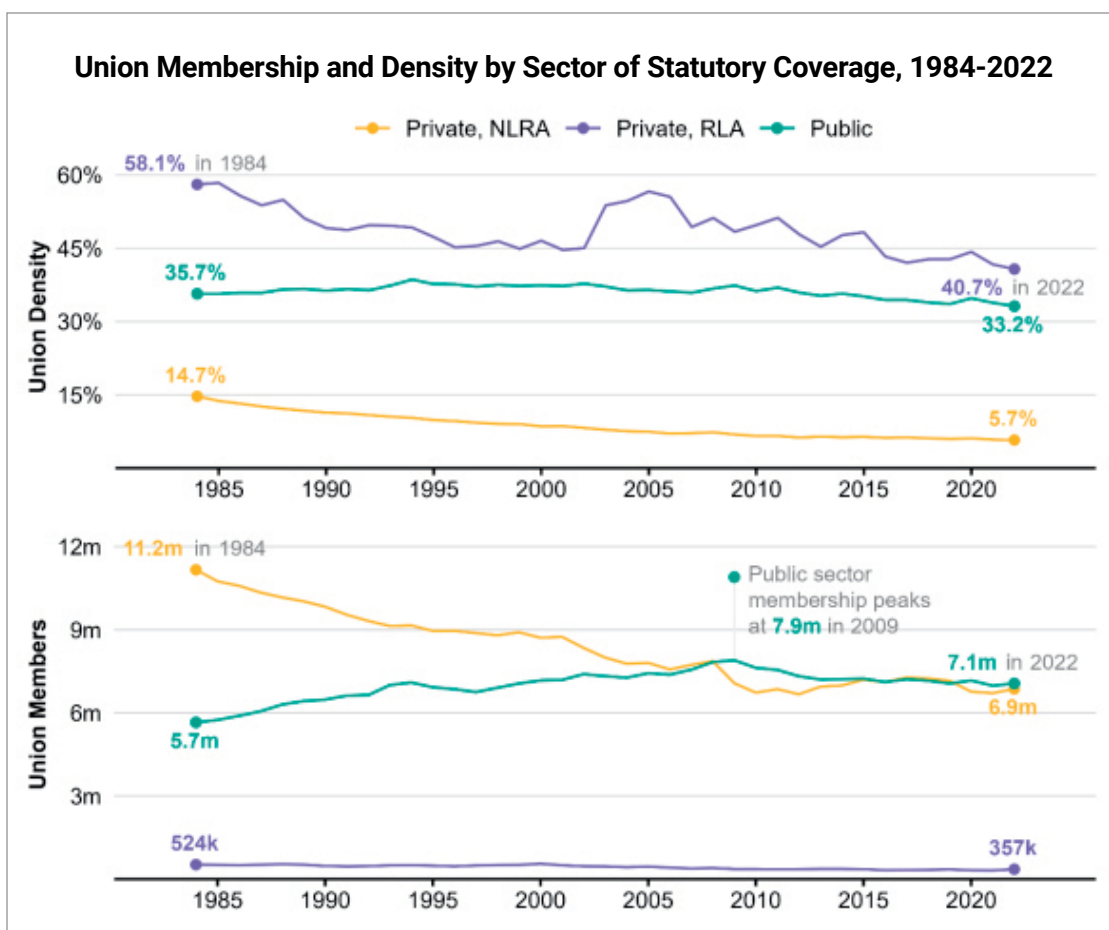
Green described the AFL-CIO's support for the mandate as largely cynical, noting, "Without any specific reference to unions, [economist Alan] Blinder concluded that 'in effect environmental regulations act as a perversely discriminatory tax that deters innovation and favors outmoded plants with low productivity.'" And those outmoded plants with low productivity were more likely to be unionized or served by unionized services (like unionized coalfields) than their modern counterparts.

Cynical abuse of the legislative and regulatory process continues to define the green-labor alliance. During the Biden administration, Congressional Democrats proposed restricting a \$4,500 tax credit for purchasing electric cars (a Big Green payoff) to cars manufactured where "the final assembly of such vehicle occurs at a plant, factory, or other place which is operating under a collective bargaining agreement negotiated by an employee organization." That means a union shop (a Big Labor payoff).

Further aligning today's labor with the radical left than it was even at Green's *Epitaph* is the continued shift away from "true" private-sector unionism. Yesterday's Big Labor was dominated by collective bargaining at firms engaged in ordi-



The first notable flowerings of anti-American labor foreign policy, as opposed to merely hapless foreign policy, came in Central America, especially El Salvador and Nicaragua.



The estimates for public-sector union density include federal employees (including employees of the U.S. Postal Service) and state and local employees. State and local employees are not covered by the FSLMRS, but may be covered by state or municipal/local laws.

nary commercial activities, such as shipping, manufacturing, private construction, personal services, and shopkeeping. Today's Big Labor is dominated by government workers and "private-sector" firms that are existentially dependent on the government (loosely classifiable as "parastatal," though unlike "true" parastatals in Europe they aren't typically owned by the government).

The government sector-share of union members has grown noticeably since Green wrote in 1996. That year, the Union Membership and Coverage Database reports that of just under 16.3 million total union members, just under 6.9 million were public-sector workers, putting 42.1 percent of unionists in government work. By 2025, total union membership had fallen to about 14.7 million, but government-union membership had *grown* to approximately 7.3 million, raising the government's percentage to 49.6 percent.

But that government proportion does *not* include the parastatals such as New York City hospitals dependent on the state Medicaid system that are organized by the

powerful 1199SEIU, the "union that rules New York." Similar examples include graduate student unions at nominally private universities such as Harvard and Stanford that rely on government grants and tuition subsidies; unionized defense contracting firms; unionized construction firms dependent on government project-labor agreements; and similar "private" businesses with a tenuous-at-best tie to *private* commerce.

It should therefore not be surprising that since John Sweeney, the former SEIU leader and card-carrying Democratic Socialists of America member, was elected to lead the AFL-CIO in 1996, the union movement has increasingly supported government control of the economy. Its

(remaining) members rely on Big Government, not private enterprise, for their daily bread.

The anti-American left, with forced dues

Green had no time for the myth, promoted by labor unionists, that labor unions had contributed meaningfully to winning nations on the Western side of the Cold War. (The exception was Poland, where the trade union Solidarity used support from the AFL-CIO in its campaign for the downfall of the Soviet-backed regime.) Green wrote:

Not that [the AFL-CIO's] anti-Communist efforts had been effective: just as labor's ability to raise wages was more apparent than real, so was the part it played in the West's victory in the cold war more myth than fact. Its intentions were praiseworthy. But, more often than not, the particular policies it supported were counterproductive. The stress on building trade unions abroad was a mistake of the



With white ethnics leaving organized labor and its political coalition, Big Labor turned to a more loyal constituency: Organized civil-rights advocacy groups.

first order. In not a single country did unions play the kind of role that American labor predicted. And, for the most part, foreign unions promoted statist policies that prevented or impeded economic growth and, in so doing, contributed to the creation of economic and social conditions that Communist Parties and other left-wing anti-American movements exploited.

American labor unionists in mid-century, when American Big Labor was reaching its height in political power, membership density, and economic influence, had a theory on how to keep European and industrialized Asian countries out of the Red camp. In their view, influential in the Truman administration, advancing market economics would be a total waste of time that would only *promote* Communism because the real fight to keep countries anti- or non-Communist was *on the left alone*, with control of the trade unions by democratic socialists being critical to preserving democracy. According to Green, the AFL (at this point, the non-Communist federation compared to the Communist-infiltrated CIO) argued the following:

The AFL also grossly overestimated the political importance of any given country's trade union movement. Labor leaders strove to convince America's opinion leaders and policy makers that control of a nation's trade unions was decisive in a nation's future. "As the war in Europe came to an end," wrote David Dubinsky, "it became increasingly obvious that the question of whether democracy was to revive in the countries overrun by Hitler and Mussolini lay in the trade unions." But what seemed obvious then, does not seem so in retrospect.

Instead, Green notes, it was *guns*, not *butter*, that decided a country's alignment in the Soviet-American struggle: "In postwar Eastern Europe, the most important factor turned out to be the balance of international forces, which determined whether the USSR could send in the Red Army to support a Communist takeover or to put down an anti-Communist insurrection."

Indeed, in Japan the administration of Allied Supreme Commander and de-facto viceroy Douglas MacArthur, responding to a general strike by the Communist-affiliated

Sanbetsu union federation, rejected the AFL approach outright. Green wrote:

To deal with the general problem of labor unrest, SCAP [Supreme Commander Allied Powers, MacArthur's office] proposed new labor legislation that would deny government workers collective-bargaining rights and would deny workers in government enterprises the right to strike. Richard Killen, who had been chosen chief of SCAP's Labor Division with the blessing of both the AFL and the CIO, responded by resigning in protest. Later in the year, both U.S. labor groups passed resolutions condemning what they considered an antilabor policy that would drive Japanese workers and their country into the waiting arms of the Communists.

But Japanese workers and their country did not go into the Red camp. Instead, the small-c conservative and largely pro-U.S. Liberal Democratic Party would govern the country from its formation in 1955 through 1993 without interruption and for all but roughly six years from 1955 through the present day.

Green assessed labor's contribution to the conclusion of the Cold War as likewise overstated and saw in the final years of the Soviet Empire the beginnings of an anti-American leftism that has flourished in the years since the *Epitaph*. The first notable flowerings of anti-American labor foreign policy, as opposed to merely hapless foreign policy, came in Central America, especially El Salvador and Nicaragua.

El Salvador was ruled by an anticommunist faction facing leftist insurgencies, and the Reagan administration supplied it with arms—which created problems for the AFL-CIO, which had factions within it that opposed supporting the anticommunist government. Regarding El Salvador, Green wrote:

The AFL-CIO leadership was fighting a rearguard battle against an internal Left that was desperately trying to be part of a "progressive" political coalition in the United States. Operating under the name of the National Labor Committee in Support of Democracy and Human Rights in El Salvador, this labor Left included unions representing approximately half of the membership of AFL-



Credit: Guiding Principles Art by Caryn Davidson

The guiding principles of the teachers union in the DC suburb of Prince George's County as they called for members and students to participate in Black Lives Matter week included "fostering a queer-affirming network," "embracing and making space for trans siblings," and "disrupting the Western-prescribed nuclear family structure."

CIO-affiliated unions. Although the national labor committee sometimes talked in the same language of conditionality as the AFL-CIO, it was understood by all that what it really supported was an absolute cutoff [of military aid].

Meanwhile in Nicaragua, the AFL-CIO "was highly critical of the Sandinistas [the ruling leftist political movement]. Moreover, criticism was the extent of the AFL-CIO's opposition; it never supported aid to the armed resistance. As they had in El Salvador, unions that were part of the 'National Labor Committee' prevented the AFL-CIO from supporting the military dimension of U.S. policy in Nicaragua."

After the fall of international Communism, the left, and what remains of Big Labor with it, subtly shifted from

Moscow-directed Marxism-Leninism to Third Worldism as its defining foreign approach. And so, today's unions, perhaps led by Shawn Fain's UAW and its Harvard graduate-student vanguard, side with Palestinian extremists against Israel (formerly a labor-left idyll). As I wrote shortly after the October 7, 2023 Hamas attacks:

And as Labor Zionism crafted in the ashes of the Nazi Holocaust has declined in popularity on the Left, intersectional theory has risen. And intersectional and "decolonization" theory targets "settler colonial" nations for ultimate elimination—among them perhaps first and second are the United States and Israel. Let the would-be buyer beware.

Race, open borders, and The Acronym

McGovern's platform was legendarily summarized as "Acid, amnesty, and abortion"—legalization of drugs, forgiveness for draft dodgers, and, well, "abortion" speaks for itself. (While famous right-leaning Washington journalist Robert Novak reported the statement, he wrote late in life that its source was Sen. Thomas Eagleton (D-MO), who ironically was briefly McGovern's running mate.)

While that trifecta was too much for Meany and Kirkland, Big Labor (well, Smaller Labor) would shortly move in that direction as well. In doing so they followed their liberal-progressive co-partisans (and also the civil rights groups that some union leaders had worked alongside in securing the Civil Rights Act and Voting Rights Act) down the path to replacing the American ethos of equal treatment under law with racial box-ticking and affirmative-action set-asides.

The principal cause of Long Decline and contemporary-era labor unions becoming far-left social-policy groups is a familiar one: Unions' memberships became unrepresentative of American working people. In a discussion of Big Labor's support for school integration by the highly controversial strategy of busing, Green notes:

By the mid-1970s, white flight [the exit of mostly white, middle class families to the suburbs in part to avoid their children being bused], clearly, had defeated the efforts of courts and government agencies—cheered on by labor leaders and other bulwarks of establishment liberalism—to force the integration of big-city public schools. At the same time, white withdrawal triggered the decline of precisely the working-class urban neighborhoods that had long nourished trade unionism. In the early 1980s, after the damage was done, [AFL-CIO Committee On Political Education or COPE] Director AI Barkan was to lament that "thirty or forty years ago we had pure working-class precincts ... [but] not anymore. The old New Deal coalition of ethnics is going. We're losing the Italians, the Irish."

By 1984, the "white ethnics" who had been the backbone of the labor movement and its socially (if not economically) centrist faction were gone. Green writes:

[In] the 1984 presidential election, when Walter Mondale, the Democratic challenger, endorsed by the AFL-CIO, received the votes of 55 percent of union members and their families. To reach this figure, he had needed the votes of 95 percent of black union members and their families. A clear majority of white union members and their families had voted for labor's nemesis, Ronald Reagan. Labor was now politically at odds with the working-class constituency that it claimed to represent.

With white ethnics leaving organized labor and its political coalition, Big Labor turned to a more loyal constituency: organized civil-rights advocacy groups. While the relationship between unions and the civil rights cause was messier than today's union propagandists claim, through the 1960s union leaders like A. Philip Randolph and Walter Reuther proved staunch allies of the campaigns for the Civil Rights and Voting Rights Act. The partnerships developed on those campaigns, and the general social-democratic leanings of civil rights leaders (such as Randolph), led to further cooperation on left-of-center economic campaigns (including labor organizing).

This alliance has remained ironclad at the institutional level no matter how radical the racial-interest left has become. The Chicago Teachers Union, perhaps America's most radical and most powerful government-worker union, joined the Movement for Black Lives in hailing leftist terrorist and cop killer Assata Shakur. The National Education Association essentially endorsed the left wing Omnicause, resolving to "provide an already-created, in-depth study that critiques empire, white supremacy, anti-Blackness, anti-Indigeneity, racism, patriarchy, cisheteropatriarchy, capitalism, ableism, anthropocentrism, and other forms of power and oppression at the intersections of our society." They are hardly alone.

In Green's day, the union alliance with organized feminist groups (the "abortion" in Sen. Eagleton's trifecta) was the social issue radicalization of the moment, and immigration was (believe it or not) a source of cross-party directional policy consensus. The 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act had normalized the status of a large number of illegal immigrants in exchange for tougher enforcement of other immigration laws. (Whether the latter actually happened is, charitably, disputed.)



With white ethnics leaving organized labor and its political coalition, Big Labor turned to a more loyal constituency: Organized civil-rights advocacy groups.

By the mid-1990s, concern with the rate of illegal immigration had reached a point that even a Democratic presidential administration felt pressured to act in a restrictionist direction. A U.S. Commission on Immigration Reform authorized by a 1990 law and chaired by liberal former U.S. Rep. Barbara Jordan (D-TX) made numerous recommendations to tighten immigration controls, some of which made it into the 1996 bipartisan Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act.

Big Labor, which had previously been hostile to or at times neutral on immigration, opposed the legislation, part of its millennium-era turn toward becoming what a *New Republic* writer characterized as the organized faction that is “a more steadfast champion of generous immigration reform” than any other “aside from Latino activists.” Once again, the pressures of leftist coalition-building overrode any countervailing forces, and Big Labor joined the leftist Omnicause. More importantly, the ideologically leftist-in-outlook unions that pushed the open-borders approach like the SEIU, the United Food and Commercial Workers, and Unite Here gained influence within unionism itself, reinforcing the trend.

And because it is such a hot-button issue in the “culture wars,” one cannot leave the field while ignoring Big Labor’s relationship to the institutions that claim to represent the people with what might delicately be called “personal interests” defined by an ever-expanding acronym. The Canadian government, always a useful counterfactual for the question “What if America never had a conservative movement?,” is partial to “2SLGBTQI+” to describe its “sexual and gender diverse communities.”

Green’s *Epitaph* was clearly written in a past that might as well have been a foreign country. In discussing Big Labor’s 1980s and early 1990s outreach to what today might be referred to as “The Groups,” he calls them “organized homosexuals,” terminology that shows (by how jarring it is to the 2026 ear) just how much mainstream acceptance of gay and lesbian relationships has increased in the past three decades.

But, like The Groups themselves, Big Labor has moved far ahead of the country’s acceptance of what were once called “alternative lifestyles.” While a comfortable majority of Americans are accepting of or indifferent to same-sex couples who live otherwise normative lives (that Donald Trump’s Treasury Secretary, Scott Bessent, is himself in a same-sex marriage, was not a matter of controversy on his nomination), the aggressive promotion of transgenderism, especially to children, in recent years has proven extremely controversial.

And Big Labor has been there right alongside The Groups (like the Human Rights Campaign, Trevor Project, and GLAAD) pressing the vanguard of the “TQ” (transgender and “queer”) in The Acronym. The *Wall Street Journal* editorial board has noted:

Unions, allied with Democrats, have long supported a progressive agenda that includes collective bargaining for abortion coverage and transgender healthcare. The model language the AFL-CIO recommends to local chapters says “all health plans offered to bargaining unit members shall cover comprehensive . . . reproductive healthcare services, including contraceptives, abortion services . . . and gender affirming care.”

In 2012 the Service Employees International Union unanimously approved a resolution “calling on local unions to bargain for trans-inclusive healthcare.” The NewsGuild of New York/Communications Workers of America said in 2022 it “unequivocally supports access to abortion as a healthcare right.”

And this support for social-liberal vanguardism is not simply a matter of allowing consenting adults to do as they wish. Using a radical-left framework proffered by the left-wing-to-radical-left Action Center on Race and the Economy, the teachers union in the D.C. suburb of Prince George’s County demanded that the county “endorse and encourage Schools.” Among the “thirteen guiding principles” of that movement are “fostering a queer-affirming network,” “embracing and making space for trans siblings,” and “disrupting the Western-prescribed nuclear family structure.”

When Green wrote his *Epitaph for American Labor*, the writing was already on the wall that organized labor’s Long Decline would continue and that organized labor would further radicalize away from the American mainstream. The election of John Sweeney to lead the AFL-CIO in 1995 had already shown the rising power of the government-worker and ideologically leftist unions within the labor movement. The continued exit of traditional private-sector workers and their replacement by government workers and those in “political” employment such as journalists, nonprofit advocates, and graduate students has only accelerated the trends Green described that had led to Sweeney’s rise. To the extent that American labor was ever distinctly “American”—it probably was, at least in its rejection of the outright nationalization of industries, in the 1940s and 1950s—it is no more. ■



**INFLUENCE
WATCH**

Launched this spring, the new ***InfluenceWatch*** features enhanced searching, visualized financial information for nonprofits, and a modernized reading experience.



What We Watch

- Complete profiles on nearly 12,000 organizations and activists
- 30 active researchers adding new information on a daily basis
- In-depth investigations on The No Kings protest groups, labor unions, George Soros, Arabella advisors and other activists

Our Influence

- Close to 30 million pageviews since launch
- Over 1 million searches each month with page 1 Google Search results
- Over 230,000 backlinks from high-profile sites
- Strong performance in AI results



CAPITAL RESEARCH CENTER
AMERICA'S INVESTIGATIVE THINK TANK

America through the eyes of the Mellon Foundation

One of America's largest grantmakers, the Mellon Foundation, has been disbursing \$1,000 per minute to grantees, many of which see our nation's history as an unbroken tale of racist oppression.

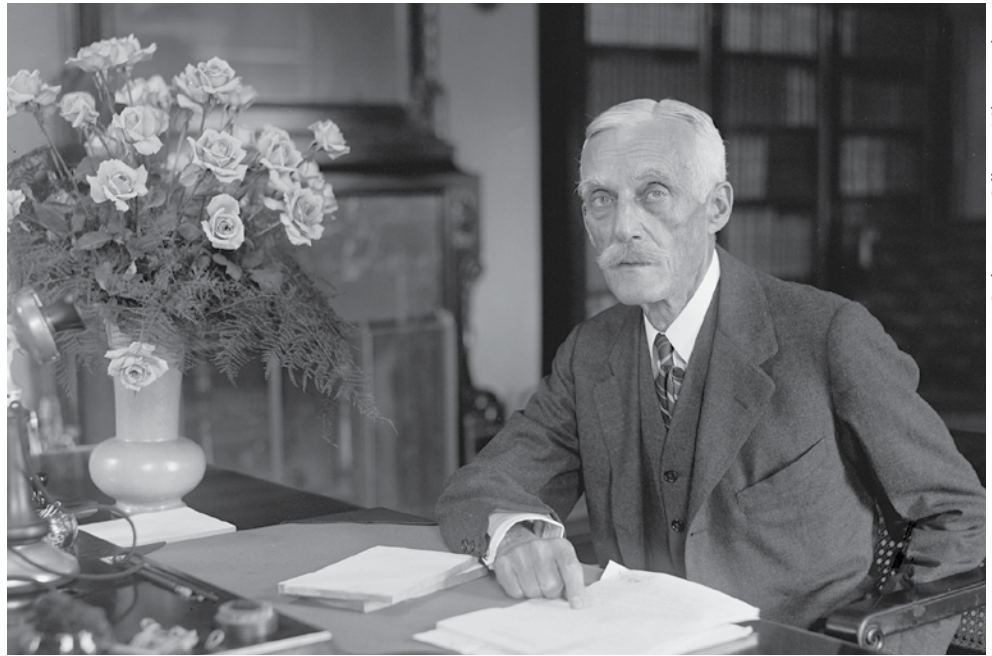
Robert Stilson

As Americans commemorate our country's 250th anniversary, at least one major philanthropy evidently sees little in that history to celebrate. To the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation and its grantees, the story of the United States appears largely as one unbroken line of racist oppression. In deploying its considerable leverage over art and humanities funding to promote this narrative, the Mellon Foundation illustrates much of what is presently wrong with elite institutional philanthropy.

"A Major Strategic Evolution"

The Mellon Foundation exists among a rarefied Big Philanthropy peerage. In 2024, it paid out more than \$555 million worth of grants and reported net assets of over \$7.2 billion. That year, it was a larger grantmaker than the Rockefeller Foundation (\$233.3 million), the W.K. Kellogg Foundation (\$286.5 million), the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation (\$287.7 million), the Packard Foundation (\$350 million), the MacArthur Foundation (\$356 million), and the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation (\$403 million). These numbers can be difficult to fathom—in 2024, the Mellon Foundation gave away the equivalent of more than \$1,000 per minute.

Named after business magnate, philanthropist, and conservative Republican Treasury Secretary (1921–1932) Andrew W. Mellon, the foundation was established in 1969 by his children Ailsa Mellon Bruce and Paul Mellon. Ailsa died that same year,



Secretary of Treasury Andrew Mellon (above) reformed the tax structure of the U.S. government in the 1920s. Today, his namesake foundation--which paid out \$555 million in grants in 2024--illustrates much of what is presently wrong with elite institutional philanthropy.

but Paul continued to shape the foundation's grantmaking for decades. In his 2007 book *The Foundation*, Joel L. Fleishman likened Paul's influence to "soft power," noting that while he "imposed no explicit constraints on his foundation," his interest in art, the humanities, and education strongly influenced the foundation's priorities through "his moral authority and the passion of his convictions."

Today, the Mellon Foundation is the self-described "largest funder of the arts, culture, and humanities" in the country. A recent profile in *The Atlantic* noted that "today, no single entity, including

the federal government, has a more profound influence on the fiscal health and cultural output of the humanities than





Tyler Austin Harper of The Atlantic summarized Mellon's new approach to its philanthropy as finding "value in arts and letters only insofar as they advance approved, left-leaning causes," and described some of what the foundation had recently chosen to fund as "cartoonishly progressive" initiatives that read like "conservative satire."

the Mellon Foundation." Such a monopoly naturally brings with it considerable societal influence. While funding for the arts and humanities is an important, broadly uncontroversial, and traditionally "charitable" philanthropic purpose, its implementation at Mellon in recent years has taken on a deeply divisive ideological character.

Much of this can be traced to its president Elizabeth Alexander, whose personal website describes her as "a nationally recognized thought leader on race, justice, the arts, and American society." An author and former professor who once chaired the African American Studies Department (now the Black Studies Department) at Yale University, Alexander famously recited original poetry at Barack Obama's 2009 presidential inauguration. She also previously directed the Ford Foundation's creativity and free expression program, which in turn conducts Ford's very substantial (and decidedly left-leaning) grantmaking for documentary films. In 2024, the Mellon Foundation paid Alexander more than \$1.5 million in compensation, plus more than \$500,000 in additional employee benefits and \$150,000 in expenses/other allowances.

Upon taking the helm at Mellon in 2018, Alexander surveyed the foundation's grantmaking and decided that going forward it would work to ensure that "each grant, every penny, contribute[s] in some demonstrable way to a more fair and just society." In practice, this has meant applying an explicitly left-wing sociopolitical lens to its philanthropy, with an overriding emphasis on categorizing humanity by race, ethnicity, or some other immutable characteristic.

In hindsight, 2020 was something of a watershed year for the American charitable sector—one in which it collectively expanded (both quantitatively and qualitatively) its commitment to left-wing ideological causes, particularly with respect to issues of race/ethnicity. Often, this was couched in terms of a new (or renewed) organizational emphasis on one or more forms of "justice"—social justice, racial justice, environmental justice, etc. Big Philanthropy was certainly no exception to this trend. Indeed, it was a driving force.

In June of that year, amidst the upheaval of the then-on-going Black Lives Matter protests and riots, the Mellon

Foundation publicly announced that it had undergone a "major strategic evolution," and would henceforth prioritize "social justice in all of its grantmaking." Believing that the United States suffers from "fissures, primal wounds, [and] original sins that are unameliorated and bare," Alexander decreed that going forward "there won't be a penny that is going out the door that is not contributing to a more fair, more just, more beautiful society."

Mellon has since veered hard to the left. In 2025, it added Patrick Gaspard to its board of directors, explaining that his professional experience would be crucial to advancing the foundation's mission. That experience includes stints as director of the White House Office of Political Affairs during the Obama Administration, executive director of the Democratic National Committee, national political director at the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), president and CEO of the Center for American Progress, and president of George Soros' Open Society Foundations. It is a career that reflects the increasingly overlapping worlds of philanthropy and politics.

Grantmaking

Structurally, the Mellon Foundation's grantmaking is divided into four general areas: arts and culture, higher learning, humanities in place, and public knowledge. It also operates three special "presidential initiatives," through which it seeks to use funding for the arts and humanities to "move us closer to justice, lifting up historically underserved and overlooked communities."

Writing in *The Atlantic*, Tyler Austin Harper summarized Mellon's new approach to its philanthropy as finding "value in arts and letters only insofar as they advance approved, left-leaning causes," and concluded that "a multibillion-dollar politicized grant-making entity has a stranglehold over humanities research and teaching, and is using that power to push them in a direction that blurs the boundaries between scholarship and activism, pedagogy and politics." Harper described some of what the foundation had recently chosen to fund as "cartoonishly progressive" initiatives that read like "conservative satire."



Amidst the upheaval of the then-ongoing Black Lives Matter protests and riots, the Mellon Foundation publicly announced that it had undergone a “major strategic evolution,” and would henceforth prioritize “social justice in all of its grantmaking.”

It is not difficult to find examples to justify this characterization. In 2023, Mellon awarded a \$1 million grant to Princeton University to support a new fellowship program “designed to mentor graduate students and early career researchers of the ancient Mediterranean as they center critical race studies in their scholarship and teaching.” Princeton president Christopher Eisgruber boasted that the initiative “engages the complexities of race, ethnicity, and racism with the academic study of ancient Roman and Greek cultures, and challenges foundational assumptions about knowledge production.”

Some of the Mellon Foundation's grantmaking appears designed primarily to denigrate and delegitimize American society and institutions, past and present. One of the foundation's presidential initiatives is a \$125 million grantmaking program called "Imagining Freedom," which aims to counter what the foundation calls "the criminal legal system's forces of dehumanization, isolation, and separation." It claims that the American criminal justice system intentionally prevents prisoners—presumably including those convicted of extremely serious offenses—"from leading full civic, creative, and intellectual lives and deprives the public of their voices and perspectives." Mellon believes that "the arts and humanities have unique power to interrupt the narrative and cultural forces upholding the criminal legal system."

Indeed, Mellon is evidently opposed to the very idea of imprisoning convicted criminals. One \$6 million grant

to the University of California, Santa Cruz was made to support the school's Visualizing Abolition project, the stated purpose of which is to use art to help build "a world without prisons." A \$3.65 million grant to UCLA was earmarked "to chronicle the many impacts of policing and mass incarceration in Los Angeles." Mellon gave more than \$1.7 million to fund the Movements Against Mass Incarceration project at Columbia University, which aspires to "possible futures beyond the status-quo fixtures of prisons and policing," and which blames America's incarceration rate on "the persistent, systemic criminalization of Black, Latinx, Indigenous, Queer, and low-income communities."

Racism is central to the Mellon Foundation's philanthropic worldview, particularly as it relates to how American history and contemporary society are perceived and portrayed. In 2020, it awarded 16 grants to universities—worth a combined \$72.3 million—under its Just Futures Initiative program. The purpose of this grantmaking initiative was to help the American public understand “the nation’s racist past” and to create “socially just futures” through what it called a “cultural and social transformation.” Illustrative grants, which are a caricature of ivory tower ultra-leftism, include:

- \$5 million to Columbia University for the development of a model curriculum on Racial Justice and Abolition Democracy. The curriculum begins with a module for teaching students how “racism came to be



The Montpelier Foundation, which is the charity responsible for curating James Madison's famous home, received over \$5.7 million to establish "a memorial to the individuals who were enslaved at Montpelier." The Thomas Jefferson Foundation received \$3.5 million from Mellon for a similar project at Monticello.

a foundational form of domination, extraction, and exploitation in the United States from the colonial period to the present," and ends with an exploration of how the country might one day abolish "prisons, police, and the death penalty, as well as borders, the wage, capital, and other systems and structures that stand in the way of equal human flourishing and liberation."

- \$5 million to the University of Wisconsin-Madison for the Humanities Education for Anti-racism Literacy

in the Sciences and Medicine (HEAL) project, whose vision for the public university includes "reckoning with impacts of settler colonialism and white supremacy and actively seeking to repair legacies of its colonial and extractive histories and harms done particularly to Black, Native, Indigenous as well as other people of color." It also aims to develop educational systems that "include critical historical analysis of power structures, racism, white supremacy, and settler colonialism in their core curricula." One associated undergraduate course promised students an examination of "how processes of empire building, settler colonialism, and racial capitalism have shaped Western natural sciences since the Enlightenment." Another was designed to be "a social history of the creation and maintenance of structural racism in American universities and society."

- \$4.974 million to Brown University for the Reimagining New England Histories: Historical Injustice, Sovereignty and Freedom project, which asserts that "it is necessary for America to confront its past and to grapple with the its [sic] histories of Indigenous dispossession, attempted genocide and slavery." In doing so, the project hopes to "displace the myth of the founding of the New England colonies as a 'city on the hill.'" Through its K-12 curriculum program, Reimagining New England Histories suggests that teachers should attempt correct the "Thanksgiving myth"—in which Americans supposedly "celebrate the outcomes of settler colonialism without having to revisit the horrors"—by instructing students in the observance of a "National Day of Mourning" to recognize "a history in which wealth, resources, and land were violently transferred from one group of people to another."

- \$4.52 million to the University of Oregon for the Pacific Northwest Just Futures Institute for Racial and Climate Justice, which asserts that "higher educa-

tion can help rectify the devastating consequences of intersectional racism and climate change,” and which characterized campus monuments to the region’s early American pioneers—which were vandalized in 2020 and subsequently removed—as “landmarks to Indigenous displacement and genocide.”

It is worth noting that the diversity championed by Mellon and its grantees does not appear to extend to ideological differences. In 2024, the foundation gave the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) more than \$1.5 million to create a Center for the Defense of Academic Freedom, which was to have the somewhat ironic purpose of “confronting the recent surge of political and ideological attacks on American higher education.” A recording recently obtained by *City Journal* revealed that the AAUP’s center was itself plotting ideological attacks on new university institutes designed to promote viewpoint diversity and/or classical liberalism on campus—commonly known as “Civics Centers.” Isaac Kamola, the AAUP center’s director, spoke of “naming and shaming and discrediting and undermining the legitimacy” of what he called “these right-wing centers,” with the ultimate goal being “to knock them out.”

The Monuments Project

Perhaps the most notable of the Mellon Foundation’s funding campaigns, particularly in the context of America’s 250th birthday, is the Monuments Project. Originally a \$250 million commitment announced in 2020, it was subsequently doubled to \$500 million, making it the largest grantmaking initiative in the foundation’s history and one of president Elizabeth Alexander’s “signature initiatives.” A press release ambitiously—or ominously, given the foundation’s worldview—declared that the Monuments Project would “transform the way our country’s histories are told in public spaces” by funding the creation of new monuments and the removal or “contextualizing” of existing ones. The

project’s stated goal was to “recalibrate the assumed center of our national narratives to include those who have often been denied historical recognition.”

According to its 2025 annual report, Mellon had disbursed more than half of its \$500 million total Monuments Project commitment as of that year. A search for the phrase “Monuments Project” on the foundation’s online grants database (which only covers through 2024) returns 112 separate grants totaling approximately \$215.1 million. More than 85 percent of recipients were American non-profits (including universities), more than 13 percent were American governmental entities (including tribal governments), and one recipient was a foreign entity located in South Africa. Grant recipients located in Virginia received the most money (\$30.6 million), followed by the District of Columbia (\$27.7 million) and California (\$25.8 million). Eighteen states did not have any Monuments Project grantees, although this does not necessarily mean that no project funds supported work in those states.

Race, ethnicity, and other immutable group identities appear central to the Monuments Project’s funding criteria, and some of the largest grants concerned slavery. The largest single award was a four-year \$11 million grant to the city of Richmond, VA for “a cultural space located at the Shockoe Bottom train shed that memorializes and commemorates the history of slavery” in the city. That money ultimately led to the creation of the recently-opened Shockoe Institute, whose mission is to “reveal the enduring impact of racial slavery on our shared American experience, inspiring both reflection and action.” The institute’s main exhibit begins with a section explaining how “ingrained notions of superiority” among early European colonists “led to conflict, repression, and enslavement, setting the stage for later forms of racial control.” It ends with a display entitled “American Apartheid,” which asks visitors to reflect on how slavery and historical discrimination continue to perpetuate racial inequalities today.



The curriculum begins with a module for teaching students how “racism came to be a foundational form of domination, extraction, and exploitation in the United States from the colonial period to the present,” and ends with an exploration of how the country might one day abolish “prisons, police, and the death penalty, as well as borders, the wage, capital, and other systems and structures that stand in the way of equal human flourishing and liberation.”

Other large grants went to the homes of America's founding fathers. The Montpelier Foundation, which is the charity responsible for curating James Madison's famous home, received over \$5.7 million to establish "a memorial to the individuals who were enslaved at Montpelier." The Thomas Jefferson Foundation received \$3.5 million from Mellon for a similar project at Monticello.

In 2023, Mellon awarded a two-year \$6.8 million grant to the city of Chicago in order to support certain priority initiatives of the Chicago Monuments Project. One of these is a public art "intervention" at an equestrian monument to George Washington on the city's South Side, intentionally timed to coincide with America's 250th anniversary. It aims to explore what the city calls "the contradictions of American founding narratives and their connection to Black history," and to reconsider "the power of names, complexity of legacy, and the people and stories that are chosen to be memorialized." The so-called "Other Washingtons" project will serve to deflect attention away from the nation's first president and to "other Washingtons who deserve recognition for impacting Chicagoans or the nation as a whole."

Monument Lab

One relatively unknown nonprofit called Monument Lab has played an outsized role in the Mellon Foundation's Monuments Project. Previously a fiscally sponsored project of a group called CultureTrust Greater Philadelphia, it now operates as an independent 501(c)(3) charity. Monument Lab was Mellon's very first Monuments Project grantee, and the group's leftist iconoclasm underpins the entire program. Paul Farber, Monument Lab's co-founder and director, has sat on Mellon's board since early 2024.

Mellon made a total of \$12 million worth of grants to Monument Lab from 2020-2024. Though the two groups' fiscal years do not align and a precise calculation is therefore impossible, Mellon is clearly Monument Lab's dominant funder. From July 2022 through June 2024 Monument Lab brought in a total of \$8.3 million in revenue from all sources, while from January 2023 through December 2024 the Mellon Foundation gave the group \$8 million.

The money Mellon disbursed to Monument Lab included funds earmarked for a National Monument Audit, which was designed to inform future Monuments Project grants. The audit (which was completed in 2021) concluded that "the story of the United States as told by our current monu-

ment landscape misrepresents our history." Specifically, it took issue with American monuments being "overwhelmingly white and male" and disproportionately depicting "war and conquest." In a forward she penned for the audit, Elizabeth Alexander wrote that "our commemorative landscape needs to change if we are to move towards a more just and equitable future." Others, of course, would say that Mellon and Monument Lab simply wish to re-depict American history to suit their own ideological agenda.

That agenda is quite radical even by Big Philanthropy's standards.

One article featured on Monument Lab's website is summarized with a blurb declaring that "the gruesome monstrosity of whiteness undergirds America's systems—haunting its public spaces, pedestals, and policies." Another justified the illegal vandalism and/or destruction of so-called "colonialist, imperialist, and racist monuments," claiming that such acts demonstrate "the power of the revolutionary collective movement." It continued:

Toppling is not a destructive act; the preservation and relocation of these monuments is destructive. Toppled racist monuments should not be retrieved from the bottom of rivers. These direct actions should not be undone by cities, auctions, museums, historians, preservationists, or conservators. Efforts to preserve these monuments and prevent their toppling signal a desire to allow them to continue to exert their power as objects, to uphold the ideas they stand for, and, perhaps most significantly, to communicate that property is more important than people.

A post entitled "Christopher Columbus: We Never Wanted Him Here"—authored by a Massachusetts Institute of Technology associate professor—depicts what it calls "the twilight of Columbianism" through images of the explorer's decapitated head. Though evidently no longer offered for sale, as recently as 2025 customers could purchase



The so-called "Other Washingtons" project will serve to deflect attention away from the nation's first president and to "other Washingtons who deserve recognition for impacting Chicagoans or the nation as a whole."



Credit: Aleksandr Dyskin / Shutterstock.com

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shirts reading "Topple False Histories" and "The Future of Monuments is Radically Collective" through Monument Lab's online store. Considering its status as Monument Lab's most important funder, one can only assume that the Mellon Foundation shares its grantee's sentiments.

Thoughts and Questions

As the Heritage Foundation's Brenda Hafera has written, the Mellon Foundation's grantmaking highlights a "fundamental disagreement over how we should view America. Is the ethos of America best represented by the equitable portrayal of identity characteristics? Or is it our unifying maxim enshrined in the Declaration of Independence that all men are created equal, which points to our common human dignity and capacity for self-government?" Mellon, Hafera correctly observes, "seeks to displace the value of human equality with that of inclusivity. Such a project is fundamentally flawed, steeped in assumptions about power and the importance of identity characteristics."

People are, quite simply, people. They should be evaluated and remembered as individuals. Decision-making that is rooted in the delineation of certain "kinds" of people has an exceptionally poor historical track record. In embracing a maximalist ideological worldview obsessed with categorizing and dividing Americans based on group identities, the Mellon Foundation embraces a profoundly harmful narrative. And by reducing the history of the United States to simply one of racist oppression, it embraces an objectively false one.

Moreover, by alienating Americans who are proud of their heritage—and Mellon's opinions notwithstanding, that heritage justifies mountains of pride—the foundation forfeits the opportunity for good-faith discussions over some very fair questions about how certain individuals (such as those connected to the Confederacy) or events are portrayed in public memorials, and whether there are some worthy Americans who deserve more recognition for their achievements than they currently receive. Public commemoration is not a zero-sum game.

Finally, what does all of this say about the nature of the philanthropy that the American people are collectively incentivizing through the tax code? The Mellon Foundation has decided to use its multi-billion-dollar ancestral American fortune to change the way in which America remembers its ancestors. Would ordinary taxpayers see this as an act of charitable benevolence worthy of federal tax-exemption, or undemocratic and presumptuous elitism? More bluntly: what exactly is the "good" that Mellon is doing with its billions? Big Philanthropy has come under increasing public and political scrutiny from Americans who are rightly asking precisely such questions. This is to say nothing of the choice words Andrew W. Mellon himself might have for the foundation that bears his name.

In a recent interview, Elizabeth Alexander said that if she had to choose one word to describe the United States at its 250th anniversary, it would be "work-in-progress." No doubt this is true—anything imperfect can be improved, and nothing created by man will ever be perfect. But we have much progress to celebrate at our semiquincentennial. While Mellon and its grantees try to drive wedges into our national cracks, the American people can look to the bridges we've built across chasms. ■

Editors Note: this is an updated and expanded adaptation of a previous article published by the Capital Research Center in August 2025.



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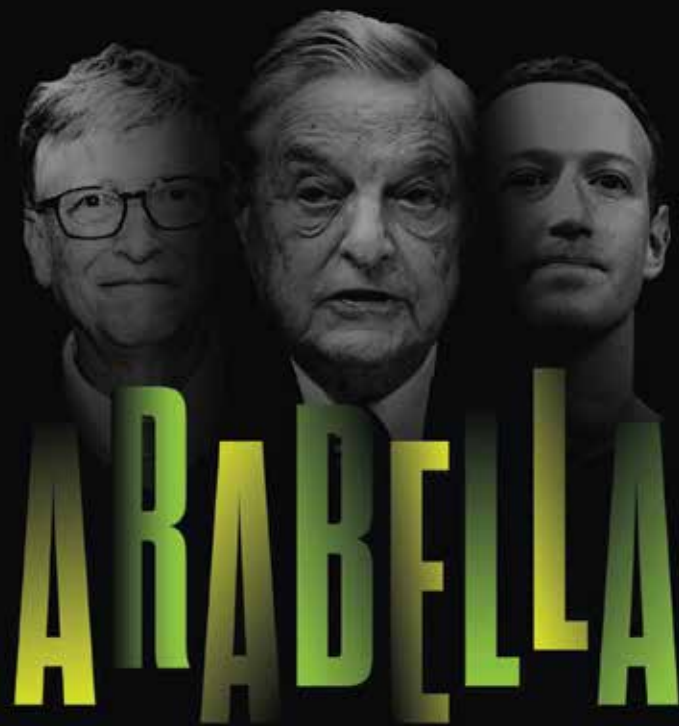
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BY SCOTT WALTER

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This book reveals the major role Arabella has played in battles over Supreme Court nominations, abortion, women’s sports, school discipline, environmental policies, fake local news outlets, “Zuck Bucks” that manipulate election offices, and much more. Its money and influence aimed at transforming America explains why even left-leaning media are alarmed. An “opaque network,” writes *The New York Times*, that funnels “hundreds of millions of dollars through a daisy chain of groups supporting Democrats and progressive causes.”

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