

THE QUEST FOR INNOCENCE: A CRITICAL EXAMINATION OF PHILANTHROPY

A CAPSTONE

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Sitting at the kitchen table, having just turned 10, I was presented with a brown leather book filled with rows and columns. What had first appeared daunting turned exciting after some explanation. The book was, in fact, a ledger meant to keep track of my allowance. Never having had an allowance before, this was incredibly thrilling—a little step towards independence! What made my allowance different from the ones I saw in Disney Channel shows, however, was its three components: spending, saving, and giving, divided third, third, third. My \$1 a week giving allowance was my first step into the world of philanthropy—however modest (\$52 a year is not usually celebrated as a “large” donation). I began to see how money can be used other than to buy comic books and stuffed animals. When I had amassed what amounted to a measurable gift, my parents introduced me to a few philanthropic organizations that aligned with my interests. I could give a goat to a family in Africa or buy books for a group of little girls. These early donations lifted my gaze: there was a feeling of goodness that came from giving, and in time, I realized that philanthropy was something I wanted to prioritize. Growing up, I found myself in the company of adults who designate large percentages of their income to give or who take on large philanthropic projects. The course of my conversations with them revealed a bit of a not-so-secret secret, that the moral and financial impacts of philanthropy are a gift to both philanthropist and recipient alike.

It wasn't until my introduction to mutual aid at the height of the Black Lives Matter movement in 2020 that I ever thought to question the moral high ground I saw bestowed from philanthropy. For the first time, I was participating in mutual aid, which involved donating to individuals, not accredited, 501(c)(3) nonprofits and foundations. Sending money to someone who had asked for help on Instagram was new to me. In my life, this type of giving, akin to giving cash to houseless people, had always come with the admonition, “They might just use this

money to buy drugs,” and I had to overcome those biases to participate in this newfound form of philanthropy. While it was exciting and validating to see the ask for aid be answered, I also perceived many peers and adults using their Black Lives Matter donations as a sort of “Get out of jail free” card. The donations seemed to comprise a permission slip to avoid engaging in difficult conversations about racism or the many demands of the movement. Uncomfortable dinner table discussions turned largely into how donations had saved those in need, instead of diving deeper into the work outside of philanthropy we all had to do. Many of us positioned ourselves and our donations in a savior-victim light, and in our saviorism, we found innocence from our earlier complicity in the movement. Philanthropy seemed to be about granting—and gaining—innocence. The new halo hanging over our heads seemed to obviate the imperative that we dive deeper into why philanthropy has the facility to gloss over other work that must be done to investigate and eradicate systemic issues. Why does saying that you donated to a specific cause accord you such a moral boost in society? If you care so much about an issue, why is your work allowed to stop at a yearly donation to a cause? I started thinking more and more about these questions, which resulted in some cognitive dissonance, as I was also complicit. Philanthropy *can be* good; there is nothing inherently or necessarily malicious about donations—but is the issue that black and white?

From these observations, I turn to examine larger philanthropists such as Andrew Carnegie and foundations such as The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Through these investigations, I find that these philanthropists create the dominant conception of philanthropy I and many of my family members and peers work within. I argue that saviorism and innocence are embedded in this conception, and because of this approach the nuance surrounding giving is lost. More specifically, I examine the ways dominant philanthropists routinely position

themselves as saviors and the recipient as the victim, which has the effect of absolving them of being more critical about and attentive to the problems they purport to address, such as worker's rights or school systems in the United States. By examining philanthropists' reputations as benevolent givers, I demonstrate the broad impact and limitations of this particular approach. For example, many of their failed attempts at philanthropy are swept under the rug by their humane reputations, and they continue to hoard wealth under the tax loopholes large philanthropic foundations allow. To bolster these arguments, I converse with transnational feminist scholarship and sociological theories focused on saviorism and innocence. I conclude by examining decolonial philanthropy and mutual aid to illustrate two forms of giving that reject notions of saviorism and innocence. In doing so, I do not aim to provide concrete answers or solutions to the issues inherent in traditional philanthropy. Rather, I aim to highlight possibilities that are more attentive to the needs of the recipient and that do not serve to uplift the innocence of the giver.

Historical + Cultural Context of Philanthropy

In the United States alone, there are upwards of 1.54 million philanthropic organizations. In 2020, 2.3% of our GDP was classified as philanthropic giving ("Charitable Giving Statistics"). To put that proportion in perspective, the agricultural industry comprises 0.9% of our GDP; government spending accounts for 12%; and educational services, healthcare, and social assistance classifies 8.6% of United States GDP ("GDP Share by Industry U.S. 2021."). That year, \$471.44 billion was donated by residents of the United States to various charities, a 5.1% increase in donations from the previous year ("Charitable Giving Statistics"). The United States has seen continued increases in giving in recent decades and with the influx of tech billionaires impacting philanthropy, philanthropy is expecting \$20 trillion in donations in the next half

century (Callahan). This significant growth calls for additional investigation of the implications of giving.

With respect to the billionaire-led discourse of philanthropy, economic class must be reviewed in terms of amount of giving. Both Andrew Carnegie and Bill Gates' respective legacies call to those with wealth to spend as much of their time giving as they do receiving. As income rises, so do donations and the number of members of that bracket that give to charity. In terms of average donations as compared to funds available, high-net-worth households give around 2-3% of their income whereas households that make under \$25,000 a year donate around 12% of their annual income ("Statistics on U.S. Generosity"). 93% of those in high-net-worth households donate in comparison to 37% in low-net-worth households, making donations by the rich much more common but monetarily small in relation to their income. While there are more high-net-worth households giving, the amount that they give does not adjust proportionately to their yearly income. If a guiding feature of philanthropy dictated by the likes of Gates and Carnegie is to not hoard wealth, the discourse of philanthropy must shift to adequate wealth distribution, not just giving small amounts often. I argue that while dominant philanthropists show giving as an imperative of the wealthy, the way in which they do so does not translate into effective giving and provokes questioning the motivation and effect behind these donations, both morally and financially.

Most of American society today acts within a model of philanthropy that has its origins in Christian practices which dictate the "inherent" morality of giving. This system entails that the wealthy give alms to the poor to help ensure their place in heaven. Matthew 19.21 reads, "Jesus answered, 'If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me'" (New Testament). This enduring model

promotes the innocent rhetoric that revolves around giving—one can “buy” their way into heaven by donations despite any other wrongdoings they have committed along the way. Similarly, Leviticus 19.9-10 reads, “When you reap the harvest of your land, do not reap to the very edges of your field or gather the gleanings of your harvest. Do not go over your vineyard a second time or pick up the grapes that have fallen. Leave them for the poor and the foreigner. I am the LORD your God” (Old Testament). This passage explains the importance of giving away wealth instead of collecting its benefits to the detriment of others. The significance of this shows that this giving fulfills God's wishes, ensuring a place in heaven—therefore qualifying giving as overwhelmingly benevolent. This rhetoric directly connects to the use of philanthropy to absolve oneself of wealth guilt. Philanthropy is not only seen as a way to get into heaven, but also teaches that reaping the harvest is meant to be shared philanthropically.

The dominant conception of philanthropy in the United States has intricate ties to transnational feminism, as transnational feminism examines how colonialism, globalization, modernity and postmodernity work to create and enforce specifically gender norms throughout the non-Western world. Transnational feminist scholar Chandra Mohanty states that “western feminist scholarship on the third world must be seen and examined precisely in terms of its inscription in these particular relations of power and struggle” (63). Because of the Western world's hegemonic position—working to enforce control over world development—philanthropy has meaningful connections to transnational struggles, specifically those that Mohanty touches upon. Philanthropy that circulates throughout the world from the West must be looked at critically as it is inherently weighted with the intricacies of power relations. I argue that much of philanthropy, through its ties to saviorism and innocence, works to uphold the power of the giver,

and that interrogation through a transnational lens will assist in working through the specificities of giving.

Transnational studies also dive deep into the narrative of the victim, and thus, the narrative of the savior. The construction of the “good, innocent victim” is essential to philanthropy—to be the purist philanthropist, one needs to save the purist victim. This construction, combined with philanthropic work, shows how philanthropy is rendered meaningful by very specific players. Philanthropy turns into a regime of care for the humanized victim. Rania Kassab Sweis discusses the narrative of the victim in “Saving Egypt’s Village Girls,” where she argues that there are “tranquilizing conventions” connected to philanthropic depictions of certain victims, namely young people. Sweis states these conventions include “a perceived childlike innocence, a basic human goodness, a developing (hence vulnerable) body and the ways in which young people are thought to embody the future” (30). These narratives of victimhood humanize the usually dehumanized population which deem them virtuous to donate to. The tranquilizing conventions of victims also lead to othering, as to be a victim in need of saving, one must become the “other,” and be kept at a distance. The construction of the victim arises in many formations of aid, where the donor decides how to give, who to give to, and why. This is vital to keep in mind especially when paired with the fact that in 2014, the United States donated \$43.9 billion in private donations (i.e., donations from individuals, not foundations, government, or corporations) for overseas aid. Overseas aid, in the case of philanthropy, is overwhelmingly directed towards the Global South from the Global North. The Global South is viewed as the victim, the other, and the Global North spends billions to maintain the savior-victim relationship. The second highest donations for overseas aid come from the United Kingdom, donating a “mere” \$4.9 billion in comparison (“Statistics on U.S. Generosity”). The

discourse of philanthropy created and maintained by billionaires in the United States leads to negative constructions of victim and saviors, leading to necessary interrogations about how to shift the discourse to reject notions of saviorism and victimhood.

Saviorism

It is important to recognize how the savior/victim narrative has shaped philanthropy that many privileged communities in the United States operate within. Pursuant to this contention, Anne McClintock argues paranoia is the driving force for values of the United States. More specifically, she defines paranoia as “*an inherent contradiction with respect to power: a double-sided phantasm that oscillates precariously between deliriums of grandeur and nightmares of perpetual threat, a deep and dangerous doubleness with respect to power that is held in unstable tension, but which, if suddenly destabilized (as after 9/11), can produce pyrotechnic displays of violence*” (53). In other words, paranoia creates the enemy, or the other. A precarity towards grandeur, leading to acts of either saviorism or violence, results. I argue that this brand of paranoia manifests itself in philanthropic giving on one side and more overt, violent nationalism on the other, although both aim to achieve a similar goal—establishing the United States as the powerful giver and savior.

Looking at saviorism through monetary philanthropy, the logics of giving are ever-present in the United States, specifically in the forms of paternalistic aid versus agentic aid. Paternalistic aid is a direct form of deciding what is best for someone. Projecting what you believe to be best on others engenders a sense of individual power, making a seemingly selfless act only for the benefit of oneself. Paternalistic aid restricts freedom of choice: instead of giving a houseless person a twenty-dollar bill and having them decide what to do with it, the giver buys a sandwich, a water, and some socks for the houseless person. With agentic aid, on the other

hand, the giver hands over the twenty-dollar bill and allows the houseless person to decide what is best for themselves at that moment instead of having the giver decide. These two opposing forms of aid relate directly to the idea of the savior complex driving philanthropic giving. Schroeder et al. find that dehumanized groups, such as impoverished or racially marginalized communities, tend to receive more “in-kind” donations (paternalistic donations) than cash donations (2). The study concluded that people who give paternally believe themselves to have judgment and mental capabilities superior to those of the receivers, and “believe that paternalistic aid will be more effective for others than for oneself, effectively treating other adults more like children” (Schroeder et al. 1). Paternal providers endorse this form of giving as they believe it not only allows them control over the recipient’s actions, but also maintains their desired social hierarchy—the recipient being dependent on the giver (Schroeder et al. 18). Schroeder et al. derive that agentic aid is significantly more effective than paternalistic aid, calling for more cash donations or donations that would lead to more autonomous action from the recipient.

Because of the results achieved with the aforementioned study, a charity called GiveDirectly, which specializes in agentic aid, performed a study done in a small Kenyan village. GiveDirectly donates money to poor communities with no preconditions or strings attached—meaning, one doesn’t have to “prove” oneself in advance or after the fact to be the virtuous victim who will do good with donations or money. Families in the Kenyan village each received two payments of \$500 over the course of a year. To put this dollar amount in perspective, many of the households were making the equivalent of \$2 a day. Contrary to the common notion that those receiving “free handouts” will squander it all on alcohol or cigarettes, Jacob Goldstein found many people used their money in “productive” ways. While this study was done to track the effectiveness of agentic aid, it ended up highlighting the abiding dilemma

in philanthropy—Who is the productive, “good” recipient? The key differentiation with agentic aid is to be okay with donating cash without needing to feel reassured that the recipient will do with the money what the giver deems to be worthy or correct. One resident of the Kenyan village bought himself a motorcycle with his gift so that he could ferry people around for a small fee, which increased his daily income from \$2 a day to \$9. Other residents became microretailers, reselling wholesale items, or purchasing mills to charge neighbors for ground corn. At its core, GiveDirectly tests what we view as a right in the United States—people should have agency over their money and what they choose to do with it (Goldstein). Tracking GiveDirectly’s work has both positives and negatives for agentic aid research. Seeing that this money was used in “productive” ways, one could be more likely to start donating money instead of making in-kind donations. However, measuring the effectiveness of this mode of giving perpetuates the notion that there are “good” recipients and “bad” recipients, and reinforces the idea that the giver should have control over how the given money is used. This study, while “effective” in some ways, highlights the thorny issues inherent in all forms of philanthropy and provides an excellent example of the need to think critically and honestly about what one is hoping to get out of philanthropic action.

As shown through its Christian roots and discourse created by billionaire donors, the United States views philanthropy as an expression of virtue. Marcel Mauss claims giving “differs fundamentally from other forms of resource allocation because its primary focus is not the material resource but the social relationship that is created or reinforced” (Hattori 3). As much as a savior needs a victim, the savior also needs a witness to the benevolent act they have committed. This “witness” could be something as small as the option to attach your name to a donation, according you a type of social recognition. Mauss even calls to the recipient's response

as a way to reaffirm the giver's "goodness." This reaffirmation can take the form of a brochure thanking you for your donation; even spam emails after the fact work to remind you of your goodness and therefore legitimizes a moral order of society. Affirming a giver's goodness for their donations, without further critical investigation to see how these donations were made, what effect they will have, or the reasons behind that giving perpetuates philanthropy as an overarching moral good. If one can so easily be the benevolent savior, with witnesses to their saviorism, why wouldn't they donate? The problem here would not be the donating, but the ability to get such quick moral recognition that I believe to have detrimental impacts on future giving. Additionally, in accepting these gifts, Mauss proposes that the recipients are acknowledging the moral virtue of the donors and therefore agree to change themselves according to normative standards invoked by the giver (Hattori 10). Although these gifts are not necessarily public acts, there is an internal reinforcement of those who save and those who are saved—buttressing the savior/victim narrative of the United States.

Innocence

When many of us think about innocence, we think of children or cute cuddly animals. We think of a lack of guilt, "innocent until proven guilty" as our legal slogan, and innocent actions that we can take to be a better member of society. Within philanthropy, there are two notions of innocence that take place: the innocent victim and the innocent savior. I argue that these two work together to boost even higher the innocent savior. Showing support for innocent victims through action or philanthropy also then shows your sympathy, your freedom from guilt, and thus your innocence. Innocence is often used politically, most notably with those in the public eye—for example, Donald Trump deployed the innocence rhetoric in response to Syrian Chemical Strikes that happened in 2017. The United States ordered a missile attack on the Al-Shayrat Air

Base in response to the use of banned chemicals in an attack ordered by Syrian President Bashar al-Assad on his own people (Garamone). Former President Trump responded to this attack, saying “it crossed a lot of lines for me. When you kill innocent children, innocent babies, babies, little babies, with a chemical gas that is so lethal...” (Borger et al.). The use of innocence in this situation and specific quote is applied in a way that positions Trump as the innocent one, although many of the children that he impacts in the United States are not depicted in such an emotional way. Using this rhetoric serves to boost his own and the United States innocence and positions the United States as having a set of morals that would ban us from ever doing such a thing. The question is not only why some victims are considered innocent and some are not, but how do we see innocence arise as a response to uplift our own moral reputations?

I claim that philanthropy, while tied to saviorism, is often linked to a quest for innocence. In “A World Without Innocence,” Miriam Ticktin defines innocence as freedom *from* guilt, promoting a space of moral purity. Moreover, the etymology of the word is “not to know,” which Ticktin argues may be more significant to how we view innocence (578). On that note, Ticktin asks, “what does it mean not simply to be empty of knowledge, but specifically to *not know*?” (578). Along these lines, philanthropy’s connection to innocence absolves us of our need to dive deeper into social and political issues. More specifically, our feelings of urgency about a particular issue are dampened because of the moral high ground that U.S. discourses of philanthropy have created. This moral high ground, the creation of innocence in this case, makes it so we not only have social power in innocence but simultaneously have absolved ourselves of the need to know more. Ticktin argues that innocence provides a conceptual space that turns into a mythical theory, claiming we start “displacing politics to the limit of innocence in a never-ending quest, and in the process the structural and historical causes of inequality get

rendered invisible” (578). Philanthropy has often been critiqued as an apolitical entity, and with the connection to innocence involved in giving, philanthropy turns into an almost ephemeral action. Allowing philanthropic action to be apolitical has detrimental effects as philanthropic pursuits are political in nature—they are addressing political problems that one takes a stand on with their donations. I argue that the implications of this connection could become dangerous for philanthropic action, as it can work to absolve guilt from past wrongdoings and exonerate oneself from doing more critical work outside of philanthropy.

When innocence is applied in philanthropy it is often in response to PR scandals. For example, Jeff Bezos, former CEO and current executive chair of Amazon, was under fire for unethical labor practices for Amazon workers, but has committed to giving away \$124 billion in his lifetime (Fung). Bezos was under inspection from federal prosecutors in New York and the Department of Labor surrounding unsafe workplace conditions. They also investigated fraudulent conduct in place to hide injuries from OSHA (Katersky). While his reputation was on the line for these practices, Bezos announced his plan to “devote the bulk of his wealth to fighting climate change and supporting people who can unify humanity in the face of deep social and political divisions” (Fung). As Amazon’s executive chair, he has faced extreme scrutiny from lawmakers, regulators, civil society groups, and has impacted many debates about unionization in the past years. The commitment to social change through philanthropy does not reflect any social changes implemented in Amazon’s labor practices—using philanthropy to cover up other scandals or use as a Bandaid fix is a way to weaponize a sense of innocence that is widely available through the U.S. discourse of philanthropy.

It is important to further note the often conflation and precarious line between innocence and ignorance. Similarly to Ticktin, James Baldwin argues innocence is to be ““protected against

reality, or experience, or change,’ and to succeed ‘in placing beyond the reach of corruption values [one] prefers not to examine’” (Balfour 373-374). Of interest here is Baldwin’s focus on inequality and injustice. He claims innocence protects “beliefs about the character of American society from the countervailing evidence of American history” (Balfour 374). I see this arise in philanthropy: as stated earlier, giving is used as a way to not only maintain the innocence as shown in Ticktin’s definition, but to allow ignorance about deeper rooted issues of society. For example, billionaires who partake in the famous “Giving Pledge,” founded by Warren Buffet and Bill and Melinda Gates, commit themselves to giving back to society and often call to social inequalities when discussing philanthropy. In reality, many of these donors support very traditional causes, such as alma-matters of already prestigious universities or medical research. 80% of donors in the United States claim that donating to support social change and causes is a high priority for their giving, whereas only 20% of them actually spend money to support social-justice related charities (Schmitz and McCollim 121). Foundations that are specifically focused on donations towards communities of color have never exceeded 8.5% of total philanthropic spending in the United States despite the billionaires that stake their philanthropy on these causes (Schmitz and McCollim 121). The publicity benefits granted to billionaires in global philanthropy allows them to maintain a level of ignorance that does not further any social issues they claim to support. The majority of those involved in the Giving Pledge, which is built up of some of the most famous faces in the United States, “paint a traditional picture of philanthropy with no significant transformative and critical perspectives questioning wealth accumulation in the first place” (Schmitz and McCollim 121). I argue that this ties into the precarity between ignorance and innocence that Baldwin highlights. The “get out of jail free card” that the act of “doing” philanthropy awards is enough to maintain ignorance about wealth

accumulation or social justice issues simply because of the pledge to give. The giver can either be granted the innocent, benevolent savior, or can absolve themselves of critique of ignorance by giving, therefore once again regaining some type of benevolence and social power. I will be using this precarity that Baldwin introduces to assess how that aids in philanthropic action and asking how ignorance fits into the realities of philanthropic discourse and giving in society.

The Father of Modern Philanthropy: Andrew Carnegie

Scottish immigrant, Andrew Carnegie, made a lucky investment in the Adams Express Company while working on the Pennsylvania Railroad in 1856 that jump started his fortune. At 30 years old, he had investments in iron works, railroads, steamers on the Great Lakes, and oil wells. He also created the Carnegie Steel Corporation, which turned into the largest steel manufacturer in the world (“Andrew Carnegie’s Story”). Carnegie became a bit of a spokesperson for capitalist goals, often advocating for a barrier between laborers and the rich and for laborers to work their way up to the top as he had. Known as “The Father of Modern Philanthropy,” Andrew Carnegie advocated for the moral benefit of philanthropy and called to high income people to donate the majority of their wealth before they die (“Andrew Carnegie’s Story”). For example, Carnegie’s book about the realities of wealth and philanthropy, *The Gospel of Wealth*, claims “the man who dies thus rich dies disgraced” (15). This assertion is very reminiscent of the goals of the Giving Pledge, and billionaires have often based their giving off of his influence. Carnegie started his philanthropy by building 1,412 public libraries across the United States and abroad. Carnegie donated the equivalent to \$1 billion in today's dollars—this puts in perspective the influence of his philanthropy, notable not only for its size but also because philanthropy was uncommon at the time (Stevenson 237). The decision to build libraries was reflective of his ideals—if man could teach himself the tricks of capitalism, he could become rich.

Growing up as a poor immigrant, Carnegie prided himself on his independent wealth and believed in the power of libraries to assist others in doing the same (“Andrew Carnegie’s Story”).

Carnegie’s Innocence

It is important to note, however, the political economy in which the timing of Carnegie’s donations took place. In his own mills, there was a class war being waged over the laborers right to define what production looks like for the future of the company. Instead of changing the ways he managed his labor forces, he donated public libraries in the places where the laborers were upset about class (Stevenson 242). One of the most influential sites of this class conflict was Homestead, PA. According to labor historian Philip Foner, “Homestead was ‘one of the bloodiest clashes between capital and labor in American history and aroused nationwide and international attention’” (Stevenson 242). Throughout the late 1880s and early 1890s, there were repeated clashes between the Carnegie Corporation, the Amalgamated Association of Iron and Steel Workers, and the Knights of Labor. The Amalgamated Association of Iron and Steel Workers had bargained exceptionally good wages and rules, but the Carnegie Corporation was determined to break the union to cut down on labor costs and maintain production rates. The conflict ended with the defeat of the union in 1892 and made a profound political shift in American labor rights and the state of unions. The daily wages of Homestead employees decreased 1/5th and their average hours went from eight hours a day to 12 (“1892 Homestead Strike”). This shift not only impacted union laws but also Carnegie’s reputation as seven workers and three guards died in a gun battle during a union strike at Homestead (Rees 510). As an attempt to help his bruised character, Carnegie dedicated a library six years after the defeat to the working men and women of Homestead. Homestead’s economy was Carnegie’s creation and one of his most profitable impacts on the labor markets. By this time he was one of the most prominent steel manufacturers

in the world and was vocal about maintaining his labor practices to cultivate as much financial growth as possible.

In an attempt to absolve himself of the guilt that came with the intense conflict over labor practices, Carnegie became a philanthropist. In his eyes, social and labor tensions in industrial production are inevitable, and “employees become more like human machines to the employer, and the employer becomes almost a myth to the men.’ The result: ‘capital is ignorant of the necessities and the just dues of labor, and the labor of the necessities and dangers of capital. This is the true origin of the friction between them’” (Stevenson 244). From this view, public libraries in capitalist societies fulfill important functions like access to education and understanding the intricacies of labor. These libraries also helped Carnegie legitimate the wealth gap by his assertion: “‘I should much rather be instrumental in bringing to the working-man or woman this taste [for reading] than mere dollars. It is better than a fortune’” (Stevenson 244). This emphasis on the value of useful knowledge not only allowed and uplifted the wealth gap but also posed Carnegie as the benevolent millionaire who believes in the poor.

Saviorism

The savioristic roots of Carnegie’s philanthropy highlight the negative impacts that this kind of action can create. He uses paternal aid as the primary focus of his philanthropy—instead of giving Homestead laborers fair wages, changing their working conditions, or just outrightly giving money to the town, he built a public library. As aforementioned, paternal aid provides in-kind aid—aid that provides a direct outcome that one believes to be best. Paternal aid attempts to be the savior, as it recognizes that there are people in need but decides the real need for the recipient; in this case, public libraries instead of ethical labor practices. Reading about society, economics, and politics in public libraries is how Carnegie got his start in business and how he

fit in as an American from Scotland (“Andrew Carnegie’s Story”). He then wrote about these beliefs in *The Gospel of Wealth*, claiming “one of the serious obstacles to the improvement of our race is indiscriminate charity...[which] encourages the slothful, the drunken, the unworthy” (Carnegie 20). He believed poor people do not know what to do with money and would waste it “in the indulgence of appetite” (Carnegie 15). This authorized him to decide who is worthy or unworthy of charity, stemming from the moral high ground created by his independent wealth that is only furthered by paternal aid. Laborers of Homestead did not respond well to this donation—one famous quote from a worker states: “Increase our wages. What good is a book to a man who works 12 hours a day, six days a week?” (Stamberg). Carnegie’s response to these recurring demands is riddled with saviorism: “If I had raised your wages, you would have spent that money by buying a better cut of meat or more drink for your dinner. But what you needed, though you didn’t know it, was my libraries and concert halls. And that’s what I’m giving to you” (Stamberg). The assumption that workers would not know what they needed is dehumanizing and enforces the ties to philanthropy and saviorism. Carnegie donated public libraries to absolve himself of guilt from the Homestead conflict and in doing so attempted to save the community and in turn took away their agency in deciding what is best for them. His unwavering belief that other Americans could lift themselves out of poverty by following in his footsteps proved to cultivate his philanthropic career but did not do much to work with the recipients to see what they actually benefit from.

Philanthropy’s Ties to Capitalism

Carnegie thought of philanthropy as the only alternative in a capitalist society. He was adamantly against the socialist equitable redistribution of wealth, and thought that the inequality gap was just and necessary, as “the ‘great irregularity’ of incomes was more desirable ‘than

universal squalor” (Zhulina 53). He believed that objectors to the capitalist system compromise civilization as a whole, believing “while the law may be sometimes hard for the individual, it is best for the race, because it insures the survival of the fittest in every department” (Carnegie 6). Carnegie asserted that those who are the most talented will create capital and those who are not have individually failed. He recognizes the need for some assistance in this; therefore creating public libraries for them to realize their potential. This view created the discourse and structure of philanthropy as we see it now; performatively bringing together the needy and the rich, with the view that the government is by nature imperfect so the rich can come in and save the day. In reality, performing philanthropy became a way to control the state—NYU professor Alisa Zhulina states “if they were going to lose most of their wealth to federal and state taxes anyway, performing philanthropy becomes a desirable alternative that allows them to promote policies that further their business interest” (54). Philanthropy performs the role of “conscience money,” allowing the detrimental economic effects enacted by the wealthy to be absolved of in one donation (Zhulina 52). The reality is the inception of philanthropy was to control the state to benefit large philanthropists' political and social goals under the guise of benevolence. Carnegie's work ties into this as an apolitical response to political issues. His response had control over the policies in place for union workers and influenced union workers rights in decades to come (Rees 510). I return to the question of the implications of such philanthropy with this historical truth, and wonder if and how philanthropy can be shifted to reflect different goals.

Carnegie's Impact and Implications

Carnegie's impact today has not wavered. His foundations, libraries, and schools are still prominent in society, and The Carnegie Medal of Philanthropy is something to strive for. He is

used as the marker of a “good philanthropist,” not only by these awards but by the inspiration he has given to philanthropists now (MacGillis). David Rubenstein, a “patriotic philanthropist,” discussed this idea of the good philanthropist in his Carnegie Medal of Philanthropy acceptance speech. He claimed Carnegie gave him a letter from beyond, stating that ““Philanthropy is something that anyone can do and everyone should do...Good philanthropists invariably live very long lives and when their time is up they are warmly welcomed into a special place in Heaven”” (MacGillis). This model of philanthropy—doing philanthropy to ensure a special place in heaven—is dangerous. Using philanthropy to exonerate any wrongdoings that have been done throughout your life does not reflect the stated goals of philanthropists and can lead to careless philanthropy that may do more harm. Carnegie reflects this letter that Rubenstein creates in *The Gospel of Wealth*, stating that rich men should be grateful for the opportunity to “organize benefactions from which the masses of their fellows will derive lasting advantage, and thus dignify their own lives” (Carnegie 17). As philanthropy purports to be for the common good, this perspective demonstrates an ego-centered approach. Specifically, using philanthropy as a way to “dignify their own lives” illustrates how it can often be corruptly motivated, and undermines the central objective of philanthropy. Using Carnegie as the marker of the good philanthropist is a narrow-minded view of what philanthropy can look like—using donations to improve public image, while reinforcing the circumstances of economic injustices. I believe that this quest for innocence, not only internal innocence but innocence as awarded by others (this takes the form of awards for philanthropy, reputational shifts, etc.) is intrinsically tied to dominant notions of philanthropy in the United States.

The Main Players: The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation

It is almost impossible to enter into the world of philanthropy without encountering the largest private philanthropic organization in the United States: The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. The Gates Foundation operates with an endowment of more than \$70 billion, thanks to Bill Gates' Microsoft funds (Beatty). Microsoft stock bolstered the first \$20 billion of the foundation's endowment and continues to add to their spending power, donating over \$36 billion as of 2021 (Schwab). Bill and Melinda equate the work that they do to the values passed down by their parents. They claim they were taught "anything is possible" when helping local communities and communities abroad ("Bill & Melinda Gates"). Their driving ethos is that philanthropy is necessary for ensuring all lives have equal value. They began by donating Microsoft computers to public libraries throughout the United States, and have since expanded to addressing inequalities outside these borders. For example, the Foundation was startled by the unavailability of vaccines in other countries. According to the Foundation, "The private sector didn't sell them in low-income countries because it wasn't clear there would be buyers. Governments tried to step in, but they weren't in a position to bring all the pieces—the funding, the partnerships, the logistics—together to make it work" ("Bill & Melinda Gates"). This gap served as the impetus of the foundation, driven by the belief that philanthropy has a critical role to play in the health and well being of all people.

The Gates Foundation prides itself on methods "based on logic, driven by rigor, results, issues, and outcomes," and this method has pushed them to one of the top philanthropic foundations in the United States—however, this logic does not come without its failures ("Bill & Melinda Gates"). This method is very much based in Bill Gates' technology background—data-driven logics drive the best results, just like an algorithmic code. This approach also works to maintain political neutrality in an attempt to reach the most people (Zhulina). Gates

adopts very neutral language in his messages, most famously saying the Foundation's mission is helping "people in poor countries who shouldn't die, not die. Especially children" (Beaty). Who could argue with that logic? Obviously no one wants unnecessary deaths, especially of children, but the main issue that arises is that Bill and Melinda Gates get to have the decision making power involving *who* shouldn't die. They choose where to funnel money and where not to, and they can pull out of that decision as quickly as they entered it. As a businessman, this is the perfect setup for money-making endeavors, but for issues as complicated as philanthropy, the ability to pull out of a project with no consequences can have incredibly detrimental outcomes for the recipient.

One of the Gates Foundation's famous examples that details its vast monetary and social power is its entry into the United States school system. The Foundation believed that breaking large schools into smaller schools would improve test scores, increase attendance rates, and improve college enrollment. To do this, the Foundation spent billions of dollars creating over a thousand small schools throughout the country, and once the results began rolling in, Bill Gates and his team decided that the results yielded were insufficient to their original goals. Because Bill Gates was the arbiter of what a successful school looked like, his ability to pull out of this project left schools in the lurch, with half-changed structural systems. He cost taxpayers almost \$600 million throughout the course of this seven-year project helping develop a system called "Common Core" (Miller). Common Core was a set of national curriculum standards that taught specifically to the test, which devalued arts classes and health and sexual education. After years of these standards, there were "no significant improvements" from these students or schools (Miller). His narrow goals proved to work poorly in changing something as nuanced as school systems. This is an example of what Peter Greene refers to as "Gatesian reform," which involves

efforts guided by particular kinds of data (Greene). In this case, the Foundation's efforts were primarily guided by test scores, not other sites of data such as student-teacher relationships, peer relationships, or participation. In response to this "failed" initiative, the Gates newsletter concluded "that they should examine some of their own assumptions, change their approach, or invite a different set of eyeballs to look over their programs" and that "they should just do what they're doing, but do it harder" (Greene). This reflected a lack of understanding of the great intricacies that projects such as these possess, and a belief that their version of reform will work if they just "do it harder." This savioristic view of development claims that they know best in terms of philanthropic projects—The Gates Foundation can easily afford, both reputationally and financially, another failure at this size, but the reality is these projects have significant impacts on those who they target as in need of saving.

Gates' attempt at radically changing school systems ties into colonial and racist savior tendencies. The Foundation's philanthropic work has historically targeted communities of color, especially in the Global South, and this project was no exception, specifically targeting low-income communities of color. Critics of this project describe this work as "a colonizing, neutralizing, and supervising force in Black schools and communities" (Schwab). Transnational feminist scholars Chandra Mohanty and Jacqui Alexander discuss the social organization of the school system and its connections to national projects. They emphasize the importance of looking at the "spatialities of power and the ways in which they operate in and through the academy, as well as within political movements whose identities are not constituted within it" (Kolmar et al. 560-569). They attend to the politics of location and the politics of knowledge production in this critique, and I believe that Gates' global power has implications in the attempted shift in schooling. Mohanty and Alexander's knowledge reveal the implications for

knowledge production defined by one rich, White, and endlessly powerful man who did not take the time to do sufficient research on schooling and decided that his form of knowledge production would be beneficial to all of society. This savior-driven attempt has clearly defined these students and communities as victims and him as the all-knowing savior. Gates changing schooling to a data-driven, test score based site for knowledge alongside the targeting of low-income predominantly Black communities is directly related to Mohanty and Alexander's transnational critiques of academia and highlights the existence of saviorism attempts in philanthropy.

Discomfort with wealth often drives giving, as shown in Carnegie's philanthropy, and the Gates' are no different. Melinda Gates often depicts her reaction to her wealth, publicly proclaiming "I'm deeply uncomfortable with the amount of wealth I have, and I think the majority of it should go back to society" (Albrecht). First, Melinda Gates claims there is something inherently wrong with the accumulation of this kind of wealth, and she views philanthropy, not changes in taxes or other policy changes, as a way of absolving herself of this discomfort or guilt. In the Foundation's annual letter, Melinda depicts philanthropy as "a basic responsibility of anyone with a lot of money" (Zhulina 50). Categorizing philanthropy in such a way makes it seem like the only reasonable wealth distribution option. As Ticktin points out, philanthropy is now seen as a way to have "freedom from guilt," allowing Gates to donate her way towards innocence. Baldwin's conception of innocence posits it as being protected against the realities of society, choosing to turn a blind eye to some situations out of fear or discomfort, which relates directly to Melinda Gates's statements (Balfour 373-374). Using philanthropy to not examine the systemic reasons for excessive wealth is a form of protection that creates an ideal of innocence. The version of philanthropy that the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation

purports to help their wealth distribution does not actually work to garner as much change as they believe. It furthers wealth hoarding and social benefits, and with their immense social power it pushes other wealthy people to engage in the same philanthropic pursuits as they do, binding many of them to only one version of philanthropy or wealth distribution.

Attending specifically to Melinda Gates' comments about her wealth discomfort, philanthropy is an interesting path to take as charitable tax loopholes can assist wealth hoarding. According to studies done by The Nation, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation has seen "an 11 percent tax savings on their \$36 billion in charitable donations through 2018, resulting in around \$4 billion in avoided taxes" (Schwab saint bill). Tax scholars estimate that multi-billionaires see "tax savings of at least 40 percent—which, for Bill Gates, would amount to \$14 billion—when you factor in the tax benefits that charity offers to the super rich: avoidance of capital gain taxes (normally 15 percent) and estate taxes (40 percent on everything over \$11.58 million, which in Gates's case is a lot)" (Schwab). This allows billionaires such as Gates to continue to pour money into failed projects and not lose anything—in some cases, making money back—and permits them to maintain and hoard excessive amounts of wealth. This has numerous impacts: on the one hand, their seemingly innocent and savioristic acts in response to their compiled wealth actually benefit them not only in social capital but monetary gain, but taxpayers are impacted by the tax benefits that these donations afford.

Expanding from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation specifically, charitable organizations go through processes to "legitimize" their work to qualify for a charitable contribution deduction. Small charitable organizations, individuals, foreign charities, and certain private foundations are not deductible, which works to funnel donors to larger qualified organizations to ensure tax deductions. In general, deductions of up to 50 percent of adjusted

gross income are allowed in charitable contribution deductions (“Charitable Contribution Deductions”). For large donations, especially donors that are very active in philanthropy, this can result in a lot of money back, leading to more incentives for donations which does not go unnoticed in donor decision making.

The establishment of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation gave rise to a new reputation of the benevolent giver for Bill Gates. His previous reputation as a cutthroat CEO riddled with scandals received this welcome change—in 2002, for example, Microsoft was required to settle and pay billions resulting from a lawsuit that claimed Microsoft had acted unfairly in attempt to suppress the development of the browser Explorer in order to maintain its Windows monopoly (“Complaint: U.S. v. Microsoft”). Gates also had ties to Jeffrey Epstein and was under fire for inappropriate office emails with female colleagues and one office affair (Schwab). He is now one of the most admirable, benevolent billionaires on Earth, earning a glowing reputation for his COVID-19 efforts, eliminating malaria in over 18 countries, receiving Time’s “Person of the Year with the title “Good Samaritan,” (“Time Magazine Cover”) and paving the way for other philanthropic tech billionaires through the creation of the Giving Pledge (Gates). Gates is a prime example of philanthropy’s benefit as a “way out” of scandals and critique.

This PR shift has caused many other tech billionaires to take a page out of Bill Gates’ book and join the “Giving Pledge,” founded in 2010 by Bill Gates, Melinda Gates, and Warren Buffet. The Giving Pledge “aims over time to help shift the social norms of philanthropy toward giving more, giving sooner, and giving smarter” (Schmitz 2). This is based on Gates’ stated value of giving while you are still alive—reminiscent of Carnegie’s values, a way to grapple with his discomfort of wealth hoarding. What makes this pledge unique is its lack of guidelines, it only invites billionaires to donate at least half their wealth throughout their lifetime. The Giving

Pledge population is made up of mostly White male U.S.-based billionaires, such as Mark Zuckerberg, Larry Ellison, and Marc Benioff. Because of its lack of rules, there is very little incentive to stay accountable to giving—there are no rules that express how often or how much giving must take place, which means that once signed, the more immediate social result is the reputational benefits that its members receive, which is incentive enough for billionaires especially under fire. The Giving Pledge is known as a benevolent step for billionaires to join, its goal to “stimulate discussion about philanthropy among the ultrawealthy and unleash a wave of metooism among others that would bring about ‘the Second Great Wave of Philanthropy’” (Strom). This pledge is largely based around its reputational push for billionaires to join—a sort of peer-pressure of philanthropic benevolence: if you join, you will be part of a club for the “good” billionaires. Bill Gates recognizes that the nature of the pledge makes it unable to “measure how much the group gets people to do more giving or do it in a better way” (Strom). Gates said that even with this inability to measure, he expects the social impact to be quite positive (Strom). Because the main recognizable benefits of the Giving Pledge are the reputational benefits, not necessarily the actual giving it does, the Giving Pledge serves as mostly a helpful PR addition for whenever billionaires are under social pressure surrounding their excessive wealth. One of the pledges’ founders, Warren Buffett, publicly proclaims that these billionaires’ pledges may be even more significant than their money donated because “‘they’re messages to the future..they will be influencing philanthropy 10, 20, 50 years from now” (Feloni). He considers these pledges as “heroes, whether it’s Mark Zuckerberg or Brian Chesky” (Feloni). Describing billionaires who sign the pledge as heroes and asserting that their stated pledge may be more impactful than the giving itself dictates the social power that the United States has given philanthropy. Giving shouldn’t be about getting your name on Forbes “America’s Top Givers” or “America’s Most

Generous Givers 2023” lists, and I argue that the public nature billionaire pledges such as the Giving Pledge prove to deliver mostly self-serving goals.

Alternative Forms of Philanthropy

In spite of all the foregoing, it is indisputable that philanthropy, in all its various forms, has the potential to do great “good.” The trouble is not inherent in the act of giving itself, but rather in the motivations for doing so. With the structures that are in place in the United States, Bandaid fixes that philanthropy provides are essential. This is not to disregard the importance or the valuable work that philanthropy has done or will continue to do; wealth distribution in this way is very vital in many situations. That said, giving to relieve oneself from the wrongdoings one may have done, or guilt from wealth, needs to be challenged as a true act of philanthropy. Of course, a nobly given dollar is worth as much as one ignobly given, and they are equally helpful to the benefitted organization, however, donations made with self-indulgent intentions can have negative results from careless philanthropic choices, as seen with Carnegie and Gates’ work. I return to my question: what are the implications of saviorism and innocence being the guiding frameworks of the United States’ dominant form of philanthropy?

Many of the main philanthropic players benefit from the limiting bounds of the dominant conception of philanthropy, but it is important to recognize how to move beyond this conception to expand philanthropy’s advantages. Edgar Villanueva, award-winning author and activist, writes about philanthropy decolonized, which I believe is a necessary framework when donating under this system—researching who to donate to, how much to give, and exploring why you feel so inclined to do so. He describes philanthropic foundations as “racism in institutional form...colonialism in the empire’s new clothes” (Ifra). Villanueva’s positioning connects to my argument that saviorism and innocence are intertwined with the discourse of philanthropy—both

are ways to pardon wealth and power. Philanthropy works within—and, in some circumstances, works to uplift—colonial systems through savioristic donations. Charitable tax benefits and foundation loopholes perpetuate colonial systems that assist with wealth hoarding, thereby preserving wealth and power beneath a disguise of benevolence. Villanueva calls on donors to not only recognize the histories and legacies bound up in philanthropy but also be intentional about working to eradicate them. As shown through the example of Andrew Carnegie, these legacies are tied to very self-centered goals that work to advance the wealth divide. As much of Carnegie’s philanthropic work in the earliest years of the 20th century continues to inform philanthropic discourse today, it is necessary to be careful and deliberate with philanthropic action. Villanueva is particularly disapproving of the “us versus them” ideology that seems prevalent in philanthropy that we see in the United States currently. The paternal aid and savior complex-guided donations are key examples of this—each new philanthropic donation under dominant foundations further reinforces this narrative.

Villanueva further decries what he calls the “colonizer virus” and asserts that it is living in all of us (White, middle-upper class people specifically, in the case of this capstone). He says this causes us to “divide, control, and exploit” (Olivarez 149). He argues that instead of using wealth to perpetuate colonial legacies, that one can eradicate the virus by redirecting philanthropy to be used to “connect, relate, and belong” (Olivarez 150). Villanueva is thus not calling for the end of philanthropy. He sees how giving can be helpful—or, in many cases, necessary, especially working within the confines of the United States government, and seeks instead of eradicating it fully to shift the thought process behind it. He proposes to guide one's thinking with his “Seven Steps to Healing: Grieve, apologize, listen, relate, represent, invest, repair” (Olivarez 151). It is important to note that only the last step of the seven, repair, includes

monetary donations. There are six key steps preceding it which interrogate the true reasons one seeks to donate—steps which compel us to grapple with not only the systems within which they exist under, but also all the ways in which those systems have benefitted them and consequently hurt others.

Villanueva's decolonial efforts are bolstered by questions suggested by philanthropic activists Nicolette Naylor and Nina Blackwell that I feel are vital to consider in the steps prior to giving. I will share only a few in this discussion, viz., "Where did the money that we 'give' come from? How do we understand our relationship to wealth, power and whiteness? Why do we continue to privilege the experience, knowledge, and understanding of those (often white development workers, academics, and white-led nonprofits) who are far removed from the issues we say we want to solve? What makes us think that *our* capacity, strategies, and actions are more likely to succeed than those of people who live the reality everyday? Why do we trust some organizations over others, just because they are bigger, have more resources, or use English as their first language for operations and knowledge production?" (Naylor and Blackwell). These questions connect with Villanueva's work as they ask philanthropists to pause, consider their reasons for deciding on a particular beneficiary and also the possible implications of such a donation. Taking the time to assess and acknowledge one's relationship with wealth is an imperative within the current discourse of philanthropy. Many dominant philanthropists today publicly proclaim discomfort with their wealth and as aforementioned use philanthropy as a way to mitigate this discomfort—being attentive to the nuances of wealth and power in relation to philanthropy is integral to philanthropic efforts. Naylor and Blackwell's final three questions I believe directly relate to the tendency toward parental aid instead of agentic aid—why do we believe that our ideas are better, or that a certain 501(c)(3) will deploy our donation more

responsibly than a smaller, “non-recognized,” charitable organization? I believe that the foundations of billionaires such as Bill and Melinda Gates and signatories of the Giving Pledge do not think critically about these questions. These gifts of the major donors do not in themselves villainize philanthropy, but offer insight into how dominant practices of philanthropy in the United States can possibly do more harm than good.

Putting yourself first in philanthropic endeavors goes against the underlying purpose of philanthropy; which is making gifts or donations of some kind to raise the wellbeing of others. The otherwise laudable goal of raising the wellbeing of others requires careful and honest consideration of the possibility or probability that wellbeing looks different to different people. In the examples of The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation’s work and Carnegie’s library buildings, they used their own biases to decide what would be best for the people they were trying to help. Using this savior mentality proved to be a failure for the recipients. They were both guided by discomfort surrounding the amount of wealth they had amassed, and thus were too intent on giving it all away as soon as possible instead of making careful decisions. Wealth distribution is vital, however wealth distribution in this way only helps the Gates’ and other billionaires accumulation of wealth and uplifts their reputation to have more wealth flowing in. There are dangerous implications when saviorism and innocence guides giving, and I call to the questions raised by Nicolette Naylor and Nina Blackwell above to exhibit the work that should be done prior to the donation—work that should be just as valued as the donation itself.

Mutual Aid

An alternative construction of philanthropy gaining in popularity in the United States has proven to work directly against the dominant form of philanthropy. According to Dean Spade, lawyer and mutual aid activist, mutual aid is a form of philanthropy that works through collective

participation and coordination to meet others' needs that are not often met through the systems that are in place (Spade 11). Mutual aid has been in circulation in marginalized spaces for a long time now, and while there are likely many more collectives, the first government recognized mutual aid society was established in 1787 in a primarily Black community in Philadelphia. Richard Allen and Absalom Jones founded the Free African Society, assisting in people finding work, education, homes, and healthcare (Rivet). The city recognized them as a society after their work fighting the Yellow Fever epidemic in 1793 (Aberg-Riger). More mutual aid societies began sprouting up, made up of daycares, orphanages, eldercare, shelter, and offered monetary support for healthcare and did general fundraising for community needs. Particularly prominent in mutual aid's genealogy was its rise during the COVID-19 pandemic. Educator, abolitionist, and organizer Mariame Kaba and Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez created an online toolkit that explained the basics of mutual aid and how to create or bolster a mutual aid organization in any community. Their toolkit, *Mutual Aid 101*, featured the slogan "Solidarity, not Charity" (Ocasio-Cortez and Kaba). They asserted that health, well-being, and human dignity are intertwined social imperatives and therefore should be considered as priorities in philanthropic initiatives. This wording directly rejects that reminiscent of parental aid, that often defines well-being for others, and suggests instead that philanthropy should grant recipients dignity. *Mutual Aid 101* further admonished that mutual aid is not "charity or a way to 'save' people" (Ocasio-Cortez and Kaba). The guiding principles of mutual aid designate no savior and no victim, and offer a reminder that those in need are still dignified individuals who should have the agency to act for themselves. This deliberate phrasing rejecting saviorism is fundamental to mutual aid work and I believe essential to shift our flawed legacy of philanthropy.

Mutual aid is based on the belief that those most directly impacted by crises possess the most useful insight to solve them, by means of pooled wisdom and collective action. Spade concludes, “mutual aid projects are participatory, solving problems through collective action rather than waiting for saviors” (18). This is a complete divergence from the normative, “expertise”-based social work, and recognizes that conventional saviors are not often the most useful helpers and may not have the best interests of those in need at heart, but also highlights the power of collective action. Mutual aid is a form of philanthropy, but defines itself as outside of the normative notions and practices of philanthropy. Mutual aid’s rebuke of conventional philanthropy is that it is not designed to get to the root of the problem, rather, “it is designed to help improve the image of elites who are funding it and put a tiny, inadequate Band-Aid on the massive social wound that their greed creates” (Spade 23). It is necessary to expand dominant discourse of what shape philanthropy can possibly assume, incorporating these alternative principles and priorities. This involves thinking creatively and honestly through the rationales behind giving and the forms which one’s giving takes—is it money to a foundation, is it labor hours, is it collective action in some form? Including mutual aid as a viable form of giving helps to broaden and more deeply develop one’s thinking behind philanthropy.

The intricacies of the United States’ discourse around legacy notions and practices of philanthropy are deeply enmeshed in systems of oppression that continue to benefit the giver. Because of this, I argue that saviorism and innocence are inextricably intertwined in the ways in which we give and the reasons why we give. I call to examine and think critically about our relationship to wealth, power relations, giving, and innocence in these actions. While there are many more forms of philanthropy that I did not examine, I do believe that prominent givers exert undue, unwelcome, and inappropriate influence over our expectations and realities of

philanthropy, to everyone's detriment. Each donation made, each volunteer hour worked, all must be proffered only after careful and honest examination of how saviorism and innocence show themselves in our philanthropic actions.

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