AP USH-Unit 6

**Meet Andrew Carnegie: The Two Andrews**


Generous and naive while often grasping and ruthless, Andrew Carnegie personally embodied the contradictions that divided America in the Gilded Age. At a time when America struggled--often violently--to sort out the competing claims of democracy and individual gain, Carnegie championed both. He saw himself as a hero of working people, yet he crushed their unions. The richest man in the world, he railed against privilege. A generous philanthropist, he slashed the wages of the workers who made him rich.

The roots of Carnegie's internal conflicts were planted in Dunfermline, Scotland, where he was born in 1835, the son of a weaver and political radical who instilled in young Andrew the values of political and economic equality. His family's poverty, however, taught Carnegie a different lesson. When the Carnegies emigrated to America in 1848, Carnegie determined to bring prosperity to his family.

Carnegie's climb from the slums of Pittsburgh to the mansions of New York paralleled America's transformation from a sleepy agricultural nation into the world's foremost industrial power. By 1868 Carnegie, then 33, was worth $400,000 (nearly $5 million today). But his wealth troubled him, as did the ghosts of his radical past. He wrote himself a telling letter, promising that he would stop working in two years and pursue a life of good works: "To continue much longer overwhelmed by business cares... must degrade me beyond hope of permanent recovery."

Yet Carnegie's business cares held him in sway. For three decades, he dominated the steel industry, and although he allowed himself time for vacations in Scotland and for his troubled courtship of Louise Whitfield, his thoughts rarely strayed from his mills.

Carnegie did not forget his radical roots. In a period of turbulent labor unrest, Carnegie publicly supported the unions. In his own mills, though, his position was less clear. He usually avoided using strike breakers, but drove a hard bargain and typically got his way, most notably during the bloody lockout at his Homestead works in 1892.

With his partner Henry Clay Frick, Carnegie broke the steel unions. His empire grew. By 1900, Carnegie Steel produced more steel than the entire British steel industry. When he sold the company to J.P. Morgan in 1901, Carnegie personally earned $250 million (approximately $4.5 billion today).

Carnegie then turned his enormous energies to philanthropy and the pursuit of world peace, hoping perhaps that donating his wealth to charitable causes would mitigate the grimy details of its accumulation. In the public memory, he may have been correct. Today he is most remembered for his generous gifts of music halls, educational grants, and nearly 3000 public libraries. By the time of his death in 1919, he had given away over $350 million (more than $3 billion in 1996 dollars).

Hard times and politics drove the Carnegie family from Scotland in 1848. Will Carnegie, young Andrew's father, was a weaver in Dunfermline, an ancient town fallen on hard times. For centuries, Dunfermline had taken pride in being Scotland's medieval capital. By the 1840s, however, the royal castle lay in ruins, as did the town's once-booming linen industry, which had long enjoyed a reputation for producing the finest damask linens in Great Britain.

Dunfermline weavers struggling to feed their families put their faith in a political panacea called Chartism, a popular movement of the British working class. The Chartists believed that by allowing the masses to vote and to run for Parliament, they could seize government from the landed gentry and make conditions better for the working man.

Carnegie's father Will and his uncle Tom Morrison led the Chartist movement in Dunfermline. In 1842, Tom organized a national general strike. Will meanwhile published letters in various radical magazines and was president of one of the local weavers' societies, which were conspicuous platforms for the Chartists.

Despite the enthusiasm of the Dunfermline Chartists, Chartism fizzled out in 1848, after Parliament rejected the Chartists' demands for the final time. The Carnegies, however, had heard encouraging reports from America. "This country's far better for the working man than the old one," assured Andrew's aunt, who had lived in America for the last eight years. Anything would be better than what they had now.

The Carnegies auctioned all their belongings only to find that they still didn't have enough money to take the entire family on the voyage. They managed to borrow the last of the money and found room on a small sailing ship, the Wiscasset. At the harbor in Glasgow, they and the rest of the human cargo were assigned tightly squeezed bunks in the hold. It would be a fifty-day trip-with no privacy and miserable food.

The Carnegies, like many emigrants that year, discovered their ship's crew undermanned; they and the others were frequently asked to pitch in. Many were not much help; half the passengers lay sick in their bunks, the roll of the sea too much. It was grueling. But there was always hope. The passengers traded stories about the lives they would find in the New World.

Finally, New York City came into sight. The ships sailed past the plush farmland and forests of the Bronx, dropping anchor off Castle Garden at the lower end of Manhattan. It was still seven years before New York would build an immigration station there and nearly half a century before Ellis Island would open. The Carnegies disembarked, disoriented by the activity of the city but anxious to continue on to the final destination-Pittsburgh.

The Carnegies booked passage on a steamer up the Hudson to Albany, where they found a number of jostling agents eagerly competing to carry them west on the Erie Canal. At 35 miles per day, it was slow travel and not particularly pleasant. Their "quarters" were a narrow shelf in a hot, unventilated cabin. Finally, they reached Buffalo. From there, it was only three more trips by canal boat. After three weeks travel from New York, they finally arrived in Pittsburgh, the place where Andrew would build his fortune.

When the Carnegies arrived in 1848, Pittsburgh was already a bustling industrial city. But the city had begun to pay an environmental price for its success. The downtown had been gutted by fire in 1845; already the newly constructed buildings were so blackened by soot that they were indistinguishable from older ones. Industrial waste fouled the The Carnegies lived in a neighborhood alternately called Barefoot Square and Slab town. Their home on Rebecca Street was a flimsy, dark frame house-a far cry from their cozy stone cottage in Scotland. As soon as he could afford it, Carnegie would move his family to the suburbs, away from Pittsburgh's tainted air.

"Any accurate description of Pittsburgh at that time would be set down as a piece of the grossest exaggeration," Carnegie wrote, setting aside his usually optimistic tone. "The smoke permeated and penetrated everything.... If you washed your face and hands they were as dirty as ever in an hour. The soot gathered in the hair and irritated the skin, and for a time ... life was more or less miserable."

Often described as "hell with the lid off," Pittsburgh by the turn of the century was recognized as the center of the new industrial world. A British economist described its conditions: "Grime and squalor unspeakable, unlimited hours of work, ferocious contests between labor and capital, the fiercest commercial scrambling for money literally sweated out of the people, the utter absorption by high and low of every faculty in getting and grabbing, total indifference to all other ideals and aspirations."

But if Pittsburgh had become a focus of unrestrained capitalism, it also drove the American economy. And to the men who ran them, the city's industries meant not just dirty air and water, but progress. Pittsburgh's furnaces symbolized a world roaring toward the future, spurred onward by American ingenuity and omnipotent technology.

"There is no woman good enough to marry my Andra."
-Margaret Carnegie

In 1880, Carnegie, at age 45, began courting Louise Whitfield, age 23. Carnegie's mother was the primary obstacle to the relationship. Nearly 70 years old, Margaret Carnegie had long been accustomed to her son's complete attention. He adored her. They shared a suite at New York's Windsor Hotel, and she often accompanied him-even to business meetings. Some have hinted that she exacted a promise from Carnegie that he remain a bachelor during her lifetime.

Louise was the daughter of a well-to-do New York merchant and a semi-invalid mother. Like Carnegie, Louise was devoted to her mother, who required constant medical attention. Unlike Margaret Carnegie, however, Mrs. Whitfield encouraged her daughter to spend time with her suitor. Carnegie's mother meanwhile did her best to undermine the relationship.

Undaunted, the couple were engaged in September 1883. It did not go well. With the engagement, Carnegie's biographer wrote, "the emotions became deeper, the talks more earnest, and the moods shifted from joy to dolefulness." Louise began to have doubts and started accepting invitations from other suitors, though she continued to see Carnegie.

On April 23, 1884, they broke off the engagement, but it didn't last. By the fall, Carnegie and Louise began to see each other again. Within weeks the wedding was back on.

For all their happiness, however, Carnegie and Louise kept the engagement a secret-for the sake of mother Margaret. In 1886, Margaret's health was again failing. In July, Carnegie wrote to Louise from his summer home in Cresson, PA. "I have not written to you because it seems you and I have duties which must keep us apart," he wrote. "Everything does hang upon our mothers, with both of us -- our duty is the same, to stick to them to the last. I feel this every day."

On November 10, 1886, Margaret Carnegie died. Even then, Carnegie was reluctant to make the engagement public, out of respect for his mother. "It would not seem in good taste to announce it so soon," Carnegie wrote Louise. They were finally married on April 22, 1887, at the Whitfield home. The wedding was very small, very quiet, very private. There was no maid of honor, no best man, no ushers, and only 30 guests.

In 1868, Carnegie wrote himself a remarkable memo in which he questioned his chosen career, a life of business. Even more remarkable, he kept the letter for his entire life, carefully preserving it in his files:

 Thirty three and an income of 50,000$ per annum. By this time two years I can so arrange all my business as to make no effort to increase fortune, but spend the surplus each year for benevolent purposes. Cast aside business forever except for others.



 Settle in Oxford & get a thorough education making the acquaintance of literary men -- this will take three years active work -- pay special attention to speaking in public.

 Settle then in London & purchase a controlling interest in some newspaper or live review & give the general management its attention, taking a part in public matters especially those connected with education & improvement of the poorer classes.



 Man must have an idol -- The amassing of wealth is one of the worst species of idolatry. No idol more debasing than the worship of money. Whatever I engage in I must push inordinately therefor should I be careful to choose that life which will be the most elevating in its character. To continue much longer overwhelmed by business cares and with most of my thoughts wholly upon the way to make more money in the shortest time, must degrade me beyond hope of permanent recovery.

 I will resign business at Thirty five, but during the ensuing years, I wish to spend the afternoons in securing instruction, and in reading systematically.

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/carnegie/index.html>