



# ‘The ignorance of the uneducated’: Ford Foundation philanthropy, the IIE, and the geographies of educational exchange



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## Abstract

During the early years of the Cold War, the Ford Foundation became one of the largest philanthropic foundations of the twentieth century, using its vast wealth to engineer a world according to its own ideas and principles. Educational exchange was crucial to the Foundation's plans for global modernisation and progress. As part of this grand vision, the Foundation contracted the Institute of International Education (IIE) to co-ordinate a series of international educational exchanges. The IIE had begun under the stewardship of private philanthropy in the interwar period, and by the end of the Second World War, its largest philanthropic supporter was the Ford Foundation. This paper examines how the Ford Foundation and the IIE used education to induce cultural, economic and social changes at a global scale. Educational exchange provided a productive technology of philanthropic power tying the development of human competencies to the administration of global society. The paper outlines how strategic exchanges were imagined and funded by the Foundation and co-ordinated by the IIE as part of a project of modernisation and exposition of geopolitical and transnational power. The paper considers a brief case study of exchange projects in India which served as a tool of development and social engineering. An exploration of the nature of philanthropic projects during the early years of the Cold War casts a significant light on the exercise of power by non-state, transnational bodies and the geographical vocabularies used to explain and justify international educational projects.

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In 1916 Henry Ford (1863–1947), the automobile industry magnate, set up a trade school in Detroit to train young men in disciplines, such as Mathematics and Mechanical Drawing, which would give them a future career in the automotive industry.<sup>1</sup> Ford argued that this was not a philanthropy or charity borne out of an emotional impulse; rather it was an objective and useful endeavour to engineer society through education. For Ford, ‘a philanthropy that spends its time and money in helping the world to do more for itself is far better than the sort which merely gives and thus encourages idleness. Philanthropy, like everything else, ought to be productive, and I believe that it can be’.<sup>2</sup>

Ford was not unique in this era in seeking to transpose his principles, philosophies and market values from industry in to the form of philanthropy. The largest American philanthropies were set up in the early decades of the twentieth century by Andrew Carnegie (1835–1919), John D Rockefeller (1839–1937), and later in the 1930s by Ford himself. As an institution codified by charter, the foundation was the typical channel through which philanthropy

was manifest at the beginning of the twentieth century, and was used as an executive function to set out programmes and assess potential grantees. Whilst each of these three men participated in philanthropic gift-giving before the establishment of their foundations, their organised philanthropy was the vehicle through which they could achieve large-scale and productive output, much like the systematised Ford factory or Carnegie steelworks.

The aim of this paper is to explore how the Ford Foundation, the largest philanthropy in terms of funds and resources to emerge during the Cold War, transposed its interests in shaping the world through educational exchange programmes of the Institute of International Education (IIE). Whilst the Ford Foundation only became a large grant-giving body after the death of Henry Ford, it retained the ethos of a philanthropic institution that aimed to shape the world through its global programmes. Over the past century American philanthropic foundations have supported vast numbers of projects, but education has been a field of particular interest. This paper focuses on the support of the IIE, an

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<sup>1</sup> F.R. Bryan, *Beyond the Model T: The Other Ventures of Henry Ford*, Detroit, 1997, 180.

<sup>2</sup> H. Ford, *My Life and Work*, Garden City, NY, 1922, 108.

organisation which was created in the interwar era with the funds of a large philanthropic foundation, the Carnegie Corporation of New York, but by the end of the 1940s had become the primary instrument of the Ford Foundation's educational exchange programmes. The IIE re-arranged its work to fit the Ford Foundation's idea of a strategic philanthropic mission and as such educational exchange programmes began to function as strategic conduits of a broader globalist ambition.

During the early years of the Cold War, the stakes of education were increasingly placed within a theatre of conflict and psychological war and harnessed by the state and foundations in transnational educational projects.<sup>3</sup> Geographers have shown how knowledge and education were crucial technologies in arranging and controlling the discursive and material elements of Cold War standoffs.<sup>4</sup> Infused with the Cold War hyperbole of imminent peril and nuclear apocalypse, Cull has argued that 'the first foray of the United States into cultural projection to dispel any Soviet cultural offensive was in the field of international education'.<sup>5</sup> The use of education in its broadest sense was a medium of both politics and power.<sup>6</sup> As this paper argues, in justifying its case for supporting educational exchange projects as a critical economic, social and global concern, the Ford Foundation placed a strong geopolitical emphasis at the core of its programmes.

This paper focuses on the administration of those educational exchanges at a time when these were specifically designed to expand American-instituted programmes on a global scale. Educational exchanges often complement foreign policy as a form of 'soft power' to advance geopolitical objectives through the transfer of people and materials across space.<sup>7</sup> Historical geographers have begun to show the ways in which exchange functions to produce this geopolitical composition as an instrumental strategy to shape cosmopolitan identities, through transnational connections and the patronage of particular disciplines and scholars.<sup>8</sup> The foundations saw exchange as means to control the development of knowledge and steer its application through a trained body of experts.<sup>9</sup> As Brown has argued, exchangees served as 'subjects of social psychology acquiring the personal and technical capacities by which as citizens they would save their societies from tumultuous change'.<sup>10</sup>

Despite the significant geographical and political questions emerging from the functions of the larger American

philanthropies, there has been surprisingly little work within geography exploring the synergistic links between power, society and the conception of modern philanthropy as it emerged within the larger foundations.<sup>11</sup> Whilst geographers have begun to acknowledge the importance of philanthropy to the shaping of education, there is no significant geographical scholarship exploring the development of strategic exchange programmes by the largest American foundations during the Cold War.<sup>12</sup> As such, this paper addresses Hay and Muller's suggestion that geographers should seek to 'question the unsophisticated assumption that philanthropy results in a benevolent redistribution of money or power'.<sup>13</sup>

Following an exploration of the historical geographies of philanthropy, the paper considers the reconstitution of the Ford Foundation after the death of both of its founders in the mid-1940s, through the geographical and political ideas of the Gaither Report, which outlined and justified a philanthropic focus on education defined by a desire for social and economic development. From this report which was written as Cold War tensions heightened and educational exchange was placed firmly on the government agenda, the Ford Foundation became a prominent agent in the distribution of technical aid overseas, expending \$500 million to development assistance between 1951 and 1959.<sup>14</sup> In particular the Ford Foundation began to target spaces for critical geopolitical intervention in a greater generative project of modernisation through technical and cultural exchange.<sup>15</sup> The final section outlines how the Ford Foundation practically conceived of its programmes alongside the IIE, within those countries which were seen as operating on the edge of the geopolitical Cold War environment, with a short case study of the Ford's work in India. Whilst much of the IIE's interwar work centred on bilateral exchange schemes in Europe, the support from the fledgling Ford Foundation enabled it to expand geographically into Asia and to conduct more instrumental exchange programmes. The philanthropic support of exchange provided a mechanism to spatialise philanthropic imperatives within a scalar geopolitics, tying the education of the individual to the improvement of global society. As such this paper seeks to show how the idea of educational exchange and a discourse of Cold War modernisation were shaped according to a transnational philanthropic imagination.

<sup>3</sup> See C. Simpson, *Science of Coercion: Communication Research and Psychological Warfare, 1945–1960*, Oxford, 1994; M. Farish, *The ethnographic board and the Second World War*, *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 95 (2005) 663–679; M. Farish, *The Contours of America's Cold War*, Minneapolis, 2010; A. Pinkerton, S. Young and K. Dodds, Postcards from heaven: critical geographies of the Cold War military–industrial–academic complex, *Antipode* 43 (2011) 830–844.

<sup>4</sup> J.P. Sharp, *Condensing the Cold War: Reader's Digest and American Identity*, Minneapolis, 2000; A. Pinkerton and K. Dodds, Radio geopolitics: broadcasting, listening and the struggle for acoustic spaces, *Progress in Human Geography* 33 (2009) 10–27; T. Barnes and M. Farish, Between regions: science, militarism, and American geography from World War to Cold War, *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 96 (2006) 807–826.

<sup>5</sup> N.J. Cull, *The Cold War and the US Information Agency: American Propaganda and Public Diplomacy, 1945–1989*, Cambridge, 2008, 5.

<sup>6</sup> H.A. Giroux, *On Critical Pedagogy*, New York, 2011.

<sup>7</sup> J. Nye, *Soft Power*, New York, 2004; I. Parmar and M. Cox, *Soft Power and US Foreign Policy: Theoretical, Historical and Contemporary Perspectives*, London, 2010, 1–3.

<sup>8</sup> See M. Heffernan and H. Jöns, Research travel and disciplinary identities in the University of Cambridge, 1885–1955, *British Journal for the History of Science* 46 (2013) 255–286; There is some mention of American interwar exchanges in T. Pietsch, *Empire of Scholars: Universities, Networks and the British Academic World, 1880–1939*, Manchester, 2013; See also T. Pietsch, Wandering scholars? Academic mobility and the British World, 1850–1940, *Journal of Historical Geography* 36 (2010) 377–387.

<sup>9</sup> J. Collins, Creating women's work in the academy and beyond: Carnegie connections, 1923–1942, *History of Education* 38 (2009) 791–808.

<sup>10</sup> N. Brown, Student, expert, peacekeeper: three versions of international engagement, *Australian Journal of Politics and History* 57 (2011) 34–52, 38.

<sup>11</sup> H. Hurd, C. Mason and S. Pinch, The geography of corporate philanthropy in the United Kingdom, *Environment and Planning C: Government and Policy* 16 (1998) 3–24; J.R. Bryson, M. McGuinness and R.G. Ford, Chasing a 'loose and baggy monster': almshouses and the geography of charity, *Area* 34 (2002) 48–58.

<sup>12</sup> Geographers have begun to explore the strategic nature of philanthropy in shaping contemporary higher education institutions. On this point see A. Warren, M. Hoyler and M. Bell, Strategic cultures of philanthropy: English universities and the changing geographies of giving, *Geoforum* 55 (2014) 133–142; A. Warren and M. Bell, Knowledge nodes and international networks of connection: representations of private philanthropy by elite higher education institutions, *Social and Cultural Geography* 15 (2014), 49–72.

<sup>13</sup> I. Hay and S. Muller, Questioning generosity in the golden age of philanthropy: towards critical geographies of super-philanthropy, *Progress in Human Geography* 38 (2014) 635–653.

<sup>14</sup> P. Bell, The Ford Foundation as transnational actor, *International Organization* 25 (1991) 465–478.

<sup>15</sup> C. Sneddon and C. Fox, The Cold War, the US Bureau of Reclamation, and the technopolitics of river basin development, 1950–1970, *Political Geography* 30 (2011) 450–460.

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