

# Newspaper as Archive: Contextualizing Andrew Carnegie and Public Library Munificence, *New York Times*, 1880-1899

A N N B O U R N E , U N I V E R S I T Y O F A L A B A M A

## EXPLORATION

### CONSIDERATIONS

Over the time period specified:

- Does the prominence of newspaper stories mentioning Andrew Carnegie's philanthropy and libraries vary?
- Do the framing and tone of the newspaper stories mentioning Andrew Carnegie's philanthropy vary?
- Do the framing and themes of the newspaper stories mentioning Andrew Carnegie's philanthropy and libraries vary?

### KEY EVENTS

Funding of Reading Room at Edgar Thomson Works in Pittsburgh-area town of Braddock, PA	1881
Labor lockout and strike at Pittsburgh-area town of Homestead, PA	1892
Dedication and opening of Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh	1895

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With a nod to the selective nature of historical text, collective memory evolves as patterns of authority receive recognition.

Lippman (1922) stresses that newsworthy rendering of events, such as those presented in *The New York Times*, merges with the "pictures inside the heads of human beings," the readers.

"Authoritative" and "distinguished from the cheap, mass-appeal newspapers of slightly smaller format that emerged at the end of the nineteenth century" (Gorman & McLean, 2003), *The New York Times* serves as a repository for records of historical value.

Access to these static narratives promotes understanding, interpretation, and, finally, representation of an evolving composite of Andrew Carnegie. He was a controversial force in the development of public libraries and a character for whom inflated charisma and immeasurable enthusiasm defined his pursuits. Frequently his motives were met with skepticism, cynicism, and opposition.

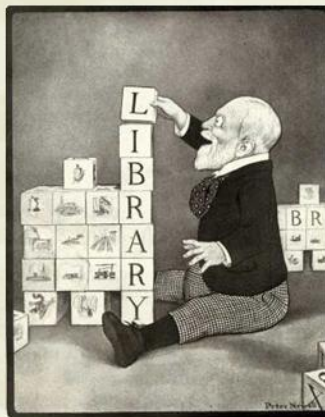
Drawing directly from his own immigrant status and nationalistic American spirit, Carnegie promoted recognition for the critical consideration that reading materials be available to all citizens, including marginalized populations—seemingly a belief in equality of opportunity but not necessarily of outcome.

Newspapers were a primary and significant form of mass communication and of historical record during the late nineteenth century.

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Identifying newspapers as archives and wrangling the ProQuest Historical Newspaper database facilitate exploratory research into society's changing perceptions toward dramatic cultural shifts at this time in United States history.

This icon to the excess of the Gilded Age and aspirant of the subsequent Progressive Era stood on the shoulders of laborers in the steel industry.



The early years of Carnegie philanthropy, labeled by historians as a paternalistic period, stretched from the inception of a reading room established for steel mill employees who worked grueling 12-hour shifts, seven days a week, to the devastating Homestead Strike that stretched from June to November 1892 to the dedication of the controversial Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh.

The nation fueled his ambitions and yielded to his successes, but the newspaper served as mouthpiece for an ensnared worker community and ultimately housed disgruntled commentaries as society's focus shifted from approval to reconsideration of an obvious incongruent distribution of wealth.

One intriguing biographical piece on Andrew Carnegie published in 1899 in *The New York Times* emphasizes the significance of the philanthropist's persona as hullabaloo unfolded around the development of public libraries. Here a double-edged comment favors the characterization of Carnegie's generosity in establishing public library buildings: "His readiness to found free libraries, his friends say, actually amounts to a mania."

Credited with developing framing theory, sociologist Erving Goffman recognized that "humans organize by experience...and discern situations by framing them in the familiar" (Treviño, 2003). Rummaging the archive of *The New York Times* articles contemporary to Carnegie's lifetime certainly promotes magnificent historical research opportunities.

*The featured cartoon portraying Andrew Carnegie appeared in Harper's Weekly, April 11, 1903.*

## ABSTRACT

This investigation demonstrates contextualization of the past through analysis of articles, a preserved collection, regarding Carnegie's funding of public library buildings published in *The New York Times* between 1880 and 1899, a span of years punctuated by the funding of a reading room at the Edgar Thomson Steelworks in Braddock, the labor strike at Homestead steel mill, and the dedication of the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh. Framing theory effectively serves such purpose.

Examination and interpretation of the digitized representation of historical records found in the newspaper as archive allows expanded interpretation of collective memory: the portrait of an American icon, a nation balancing prosperity and desperation near the close of a century, and Andrew Carnegie as significant and controversial force in the development of public libraries in the Gilded Age and the Progressive Era.