

❖ The Liberal Foundations of Media Reform? Creating Sustainable Funding Opportunities for Radical Media Reform

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Abstract

Today in America, tens of thousands of philanthropic foundations finance social change and, in the year 2000 alone, these foundations distributed \$26.7 billion worth of grants. To date, while scholarly attention has been paid to the role of right-wing foundations in promoting a neoliberal media environment, few studies have critiqued the role of liberal foundations in funding similar media reforms. Thus with next to no critical inquiry from media researchers, the Ford Foundation – which is arguably one of the most influential liberal foundations – supplied over \$292 million to American public broadcasting between 1951 and 1977 and continues to fund progressive media groups like FreePress and Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting. This paper provides a much needed overview of the problematic nexus between liberal philanthropy and progressive media reform, and concludes by providing a number of recommendations for how media activists may begin to move away from their (arguably unsustainable) reliance on liberal philanthropy.

Philanthropy is a word that rarely crops up in American (or any other) mass communications research. This is strange because public broadcasting was built on the back of the financial aid provided by liberal philanthropic institutions like the Ford Foundation. In fact, only a handful of studies have critically reflected on the effect of liberal (i.e. progressive) philanthropy on the American media, or examined its historic influence on efforts to reform the mass media. This research void is not peculiar to media studies, instead it exemplifies a more general trend which extends across all academic disciplines. Indeed the effects of philanthropy have been thoroughly marginalised from scholarly discourses (Roelofs, 2003, 27-63). One can only conclude that the majority of researchers ascribe no importance to the activities of the tens of thousands of philanthropic foundations that thrive in America's uniquely charitable culture.

This media research blackout raises interesting questions, as it would be strange if some of the world's most successful capitalists (turned philanthropists) would collectively provide tens of billions of dollars a year to finance social change that has little or no real researchable effects (the exact figure was \$26.7 billion in 2000). Surely some of the world's most successful business elites would want to see some tangible outcomes flowing from their philanthropy? Therefore, depending on whether philanthropic activities are beneficial or detrimental to democratic processes, it would seem more reasonable that the influence of philanthropic endeavours should be either happily celebrated and encouraged, or vigorously critiqued and discouraged – but definitely not ignored.

With the rise of global neoliberalism, which serves to alienate electorates (consumers) from the trappings of liberal democracy and openly seeks to replace social welfare with corporate welfare, some scholarly attention has documented the remarkable success of right wing foundations in forcing these changes (e.g. Peschek, 1987). Yet if anything, the response of the Left, (that is, those who oppose corporate-led globalisation and who are demanding more participatory forms of governance), has been to acknowledge the vision and ideological cohesion of the Right's strategies and then to issue calls for liberal foundations to adopt similar tactics (e.g. see the work of the US-based Democracy Alliance) in order to turn back the neoliberal tide (Edsall, 2005). This elitist answer to the neoconservatives' organising strategies has been widely commended, but it is a solution that denies the theoretical insights that could be derived from a deeper understanding of the historical

hegemonic role that liberal foundations have fulfilled within American democracy.

This paper seeks to throw some light on the so far neglected influence of liberal foundations on media developments and reform by adopting a three pronged approach. First, it will briefly review the limited literature concerning the influence of liberal foundations on social change. The paper will then provide a critical review of the role that liberal foundations have played in shaping the American media environment, from 1930 through to the 1970s, as well as examining the reliance of many progressive media reform groups on the Ford Foundation in the past few decades. Finally, this study will reiterate some of the problems associated with relying on liberal foundations to finance progressive social change and radical media reform groups and will conclude with a number of recommendations for generating sustainable funding sources for a form of media reform that is aligned with participatory principles.

Liberal Foundations and Social Change

In stark contrast to the democratic rhetoric of the philanthropic activities of liberal foundations, much evidence contradicts their democratic credentials. No doubt all philanthropists are attempting to strengthen a democracy of sorts, but the root problem (or issue at stake) lies in differing definitions of democracy. Progressive activists tend to call for more substantial or participatory forms of democratic governance (Pateman, 1970), while liberal foundations tend to be more interested in promoting procedural democracy or polyarchy (Dahl, 1971). These differences should not be wholly unexpected as the money undergirding all of the major liberal foundations is derived from the world's most rapacious capitalists, albeit ones with a penchant for supporting liberal-democratic reforms. Thus it is fitting that the endowments of the most influential liberal philanthropists – the Ford, Rockefeller, and Carnegie Foundations' (sometimes referred to as the "big three") – were based on the business empires of Henry Ford, David Rockefeller Sr., and Andrew Carnegie respectively. Interestingly, in recent years the big three's work has become overshadowed by the new kid on the block, the Gates Foundation, which in 2006 alone distributed over \$1.5 billion worth of grants.

Liberal foundations started seriously funding progressive activist organizations (like the Civil Rights Movement) in the 1960s. Through a process referred to as strategic philanthropy, liberal foundations were able to successfully moderate civil society by directing the bulk of their funding towards more conservative progressive groups, thus reducing the relative influence of more radical activists through a process either described as channeling or coopting (Arnove, 1980; Barker, In Press; Colwell, 1993; Jenkins, 1998; Fisher, 1983; Roelofs, 2003; Wilson, 1983).¹ Counter to popular misunderstandings of their work, rather than promoting progressive and more participatory forms of democracy, liberal philanthropy actually serves the opposite purpose by helping preserve gross inequalities thereby legitimising the status quo (Brown, 1979; Guilhot, 2007; INCITE!, 2007; Lundberg, 1975; Roelofs, 2007). Arnove and Pinede (2007, 393) observe that although the largest, most influential liberal foundations "claim to attack the root causes of the ills of humanity, they essentially engage in ameliorative practices to maintain social and economic systems that generate the very inequalities and injustices they wish to correct." Indeed Arnove and Pinede (2007, 4222) conclude that although during the past few decades these foundations have adopted a "more progressive, if not radical, rhetoric and approaches to community building" that gives a "voice to those who have been disadvantaged by the workings of an increasingly global capitalist economy, they remain ultimately elitist and technocratic institutions".

The inherent contradiction of progressive activists receiving significant support from liberal elites becomes clearer when it is understood that the two most influential liberal foundations, the Ford Foundation and the Rockefeller Foundation, first created and continue to provide substantial financial aid to elite planning groups like the Council on Foreign Relations and the Trilateral Commission (Shoup & Minter, 1977; Sklar, 1980). The next section of this paper will now describe the historical role of liberal foundations in shaping the development of the mass media.

Liberal Foundations and Early "Media Reform"

A comprehensive review of the involvement of all liberal foundations is beyond the scope of this paper, therefore this study will investigate the media-related activities of the two most influential liberal foundations, the Ford and Rockefeller Foundations (Berghahn, 2001, 143; Nielsen, 1972, 46-98). In the late 1970s, Marilyn Lashner (1976, 1977) provided the first significant overview of the importance of liberal foundations in media 'reform' activities – from the late 1920s through to the 1970s. However, a critical (albeit limited), examination of the media-related activities of liberal foundations only eventuated in the 1990s when William Buxton (1994) published his seminal, (but little noted), critique of the influence of Rockefeller philanthropy on

mass communications research. In the same year, Robert McChesney (1994) also published his influential book on the history of the media reform movement in the 1930s, which provides much useful information on the early media activities of liberal foundations. Therefore, using McChesney's work as a launching point, this paper will now provide a thorough exploration of the role of liberal foundations on media development in the United States.

Media Reform in the Depression

According to McChesney (1999, 189), in the 1930s the "single most important" players in the media reform movement were educators whose field of work has been strongly influenced by the largesse of liberal foundations (Arno, 1980). Educators despaired over commercial radio broadcasters' single-minded pursuit of the profit motive before all else, and so in October 1930 they launched the National Committee on Education by Radio (NCER) with the aid of a five-year \$200,000 grant from the Payne Fund (McChesney, 1999, 197). McChesney described the NCER as an "explicitly anti-establishment organization", and the Payne Fund considered itself to be a "fighting committee" to combat commercial interests. To bolster the NCER's campaign, in 1931 the Payne Fund provided a further \$50,000 to a parallel project "to mobilize newspaper, congressional, and popular support for broadcast reform" (McChesney, 1999, 198-9). In fact, during this period Payne Fund sponsorship of media reform was so great that it "dwarfed all other expenditures for broadcast reform combined" (McChesney, 1994, 62).

In July 1930, just months prior to the establishment of NCER, John D. Rockefeller, Jr. and the Carnegie Corporation formed the National Advisory Council on Radio in Education (NACRE).² Then for the next few years NACRE received annual grants of \$20,000 and \$23,000 from John D. Rockefeller, Jr. and the Carnegie Corporation respectively – at this time the Rockefeller Foundation had yet to be formally established (McChesney, 1999, 206). NACRE differed most significantly from NCER in their desire that educators should work with, not against, the two dominant commercial networks, the National Broadcasting Company and the Columbia Broadcasting Company (McChesney, 1999, 190).³ Henry Suzzalo, the educational advisor for the Carnegie Corporation, explicitly noted that it was NACRE's task to ensure that "radio under private ownership succeed in this country" which NACRE willingly helped along by "undercutting the sentiment for broadcast reform in the educational community" and facilitating the broadcast networks infiltration of oppositional groups associated with NCER (McChesney, 1999, 209).

While NCER was clearly more progressive than NACRE and championed the need for structural reform of broadcasting, in many ways NCER still remained an elitist organization, one example of which can be seen by their dismissal of the educational importance of entertainment programming which led to their clash with organized labor (McChesney, 1999, 203). So even though "[a]ll of the NCER officers were individually enthralled by the [example set by the] British Broadcasting Company ... [collectively they] determined that it would be politically impossible to achieve such a system in the United States, so it was never formally proposed or advocated" (McChesney, 1999, 204).

In the long-term, NCER's elitist approach to media reform worked against them as it meant that, despite their strong opposition to NACRE, they kept their hostility hidden "[b]eneath a cordial public veneer" (McChesney, 1999, 210) – a tactic that effectively served to keep both the public and educators mystified as to the differences between the two reform groups (Barnouw, 1966, 57). Of course this only worked to help NACRE and the network broadcasters who were in a prime position to dominate the media coverage of the controversy (McChesney, 1999, 214). Another problematic aspect of NCER's lobbying efforts arose because they sharply delimited their campaign to the issue of radio broadcasting and so consequently their arguments were easily undermined by their failure to extend their critiques of radio broadcasting to capitalism itself (McChesney, 1994, 264).

NCER's media reform efforts were effectively defeated by 1934, a point marked symbolically by the creation of the 1934 Communications Act. To ensure that NCER (abruptly) brought an end to their campaign, politicians quickly moved to exert political pressure on the Payne Fund, in 1935 going so far as warning them that "the Fund might be in some danger" if it continued funding NCER (Representative Chester C. Bolton cited in McChesney, 1994, 230). Shortly after this (and other warnings) "the Payne Fund informed the NCER that it might continue to fund the group, at a greatly reduced level, for another year provided the purpose of the NCER be changed to 'cooperate with established radio stations and networks'" (McChesney, 1994, 230). NCER signalled their final demise in January 1936 and accepted these terms when they agreed to receive a two-year \$15,000 grant from the Payne Fund (McChesney, 1994, 231). Ironically, just after NCER's hopes for reform

were extinguished, NACRE issued a study in 1937 reviewing their past four years work which amazingly "denounce[ed] cooperation as unworkable and failed" (cited in McChesney, 1994, 231).

McChesney (1994, 261-2) concluded that the two primary reasons the reform movement failed were: (1) their 'political incompetence', in part due to their 'establishment' credentials, which meant they "had little capacity for engaging in the type of full-scale political battle that was necessary"; and (2) the economic depression, which undermined the viability of the already diminishing number of non-profit broadcasters, weakening the case of reformers campaigning against the commercial broadcasters who were in one of the few industries to prosper during the early years of the depression (McChesney, 1994, 234-5). In conclusion the defeat of the broadcast reform movement was much more than a victory for oligopolistic, commercial broadcasting, in fact it was a defeat for the very notion that the public had the right to determine how best to structure its broadcasting services. (McChesney, 1994, 256)

Once the 1934 Communications Act came into effect, the Rockefeller Foundation rapidly began to "broaden and deepen its support for cooperation between educators and broadcasters" (Buxton, 1994, 155). Buxton notes that although this change appeared to be related to prior Rockefeller commitments, it actually represented a fundamental shift in the thinking of their Humanities Division, which was interested in promoting work that examined how popular media could be used to influence the 'masses' (1994, 155).⁴ According to Buxton (1994, 156) the person in charge of the execution of the Rockefeller Humanities Program was the newly recruited assistant director, John Marshall (who worked alongside the program director, David H. Stephens).

Rockefeller Media Developments: Post 1934

In 1935 the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) established the Federal Radio Education Committee (FREC) – which was chaired by John W. Studebaker – to examine ways in which broadcasters and non-profit groups could work together. The following year, Levering Tyson – the first Director of NACRE – reported that he "expected few results from the activities of [FREC's initial] subcommittees, except for the technical subcommittee under the direction of Hadley Cantril" who is widely regarded as a founding father of modern mass communications research (cited in Buxton, 1994, 161). Just days later, John Marshall met with Cantril, and proposed that the Foundation finance his research (Buxton, 1994, 161). Cantril, however, was not funded directly by the Rockefeller Foundation but instead (in January 1937) he was offered a place on the FREC committee that would decide which research proposals should be supported, and it was not surprising that Cantril envisaged that his own work should "serve as the organizing framework for all of the studies under consideration" (Buxton, 1994, 163).⁵ Cantril was then joined on the FREC committee by two other educators (W. W. Charters and Levering Tyson) and three broadcasters. Buxton observed that:

Marshall was undoubtedly pleased at the composition of the "informal committee" [which later became an executive committee]. The three educators represented were firmly in the Rockefeller camp, and the industry spokesmen had views congenial with the thinking in the Humanities program radio project. Not only would this review committee provide direction to the proposed projects, but it could serve as a mediating body between the Rockefeller Foundation, and FREC ... (Buxton, 1994, 163)

Indeed, Buxton (1994, 168) concluded that the Rockefeller's involvement in communications research and policy in the 1930s indicates "the degree to which a wealthy and powerful private philanthropy can shape, influence – and possibly even determine – the policy-formation process."

Lashner's (1976, 532) pioneering study correctly noted that foundation support for educational broadcasting was withdrawn in the late 1930s (not to be renewed until "the growth of FM and the advent of television"), but she neglected to mention that during the late 1930s, the Rockefeller Foundation still "underwrote much of the most innovative communication research then underway in the United States" (Simpson, 1994, 22). Indeed as Morrison (1978) illustrated, Harold Lasswell's (1948, 37) dictum "Who; Says What; In Which Channel; To Whom; With What Effects?" evolved from a number of seminars sponsored and organized by the Rockefeller Foundation between 1939 and 1940. A close analysis of the Rockefeller Foundations archives also determined that John Marshall (not Lasswell) first formulated "Lasswell's" phrase (on May 8, 1940) during one of these seminars (Buxton, 2003, 297). This seminar series (also referred to as the Communications Group or the Communications Seminar) was a very important investment for the Rockefeller Foundation, as its intellectual outputs helped map the future of American communications research.⁶

Critically, the Communications Group acknowledged the need to develop ways in which to manufacture public

consent for desired policy changes, noting in 1940 that: "Government which rests upon consent rests also upon knowledge of how best to secure consent ... Research in the field of mass communication is a new and sure weapon to achieve that end" (cited in Buxton, 2003, 310). This is significant because even *before* the US had joined World War II, the Communications Group were laying the foundations for developing more effective ways to manufacture public consent (Glander, 2000, 47; for more on the manufacture of consent, see Herman & Chomsky, 1988).

The Ford Foundation: The Intelligence Communities Foundation of Choice

Christopher Simpson's (1994, 9) examination of communication research in the US between 1945 and 1960, showed that after federal government grants, the "principal secondary source of large-scale communication research" funding came from the large foundations like the Carnegie Corporation and the Ford Foundation, which "usually operated in close coordination with government propaganda and intelligence programs" (Simpson, 1994, 9).⁷ Media research funded by the Rockefeller Foundation from the late 1930s onwards thus "laid the groundwork for a wide range of national security projects that were eventually absorbed by the state" (Gary, 1996, 125 & 148). In fact, during the 1950s the Ford and Rockefeller Foundations' activities were highly entwined with those of the CIA's, and both were considered to be "conscious instruments of covert US foreign policy, with directors and officers who were closely connected to, or even members of American intelligence" (Saunders, 1999, 138; Berman, 1983).

Not coincidentally, many of the veterans of the US government's Office of War Information (a wartime propaganda agency) went on to become powerful foundation executives. For example, Charles Dollard became head of the Carnegie Corporation, Leland DeVinney worked for the Rockefeller Foundation, William McPeak became vice president of the Ford Foundation, and W. Parker Mauldin went on to become vice president of the Population Council – a group that received most of its funding from the Ford Foundation (Clausen, 1984, 212). Likewise in 1951, Paul Hoffman, who had administered the Marshall plan for the US government, made a smooth transition to become the first president of the Ford Foundation. Hoffman's recruitment also marked the Ford Foundation's transition to the big league, as recent endowments had made it the largest and most influential philanthropic foundation in the World. Two years later, another former Marshall planner, Richard Bissell (who incidentally had worked under Hoffman), also joined the Ford Foundation. Bissell maintained close links with the CIA during his tenure at Ford and eventually left the Foundation in 1954 to become special assistant to Allen Dulles in the CIA (Bissell, 1996, 75; Saunders, 1999, 139).

An early example of the close secretive links between the Ford Foundation and the CIA was evident in 1948 with the creation of the monthly German magazine *Der Monat*, a magazine that was launched:

... to construct an ideological bridge between German and American intellectuals and, as explicitly set forth by [Melvin] Lasky, to ease the passage of American foreign policy interests by supporting 'the general objectives of U.S. policy in Germany and Europe'. ... Across the years, *Der Monat* was financed through "confidential funds" of the Marshall Plan, then from the coffers of the Central Intelligence Agency, then with Ford Foundation money, and then again with CIA dollars. (Saunders, 1999, 30)

A few years later, in 1952, under the guidance of James Laughlin, the Ford Foundation created its Intercultural Publications program with an initial \$500,000 grant. In Laughlin's words this program was designed not "so much to *defeat* the leftist intellectuals in dialectical combat as to lure them away from their positions by aesthetic and rational persuasion" (cited in McCarthy, 1987).

In large part due to the "vociferous advoca[cy]" of Shepherd Stone, who directed the Ford Foundation's International Affairs division from 1954, the Ford Foundation from 1956 onwards also provided the CIA's main propaganda outlet, the Congress for Cultural Freedom (CCF), with sizable grants: for example, in 1960 the CCF received \$550,000 (Berghahn, 2001, 224). Saunders (1999, 143) also pointed out that Stone acted as the "key link between the Congress and the Ford Foundation."⁸ Increasingly intimate relations between CCF and the Ford Foundation were also facilitated by the Ford Foundation's director, John J. McCloy (as of 1953), who simultaneously served informally as President Eisenhower's chief political advisor and had an agreement with the intelligence agency that the Ford Foundation would serve as a cover for CIA projects (Bird, 1992, 426-9).⁹ McCloy's official biographer Kai Bird points out, that prior to coming to the Foundation, while McCloy was High Commissioner of Germany:

The largest chunk of the CIA's budget ... went to financing Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty, whose propaganda activities McCloy strongly supported. Even in the summer and fall of 1950 ... McCloy still believed

[in opposition to many of his colleagues, that] the Cold War would be won mainly with ideas, not arms. (Bird, 1992, 357)

Furthermore, prior to joining the Ford Foundation, McCloy "took a personal interest" in *Der Monat*, as he considered that "there was no better way to win the battle for Germany's intellectuals", and CIA payments, some as high as \$50,000, "became common in West Germany during McCloy's tenure" as High Commissioner (Bird, 1992, 357-8). Before leaving Germany, McCloy even wrote to the Ford Foundation asking them to consider funding certain CIA operations like *Der Monat* (Bird, 1992, 358).

From then on the Ford Foundation became an important pass-through in the CIA's war on Communism. Examples of media groups funded via the Foundation in this regard included: the East European Fund (associated with George Kennan) which worked closely with the Chekhov Publishing House;¹⁰ the International Rescue Committee; and the World Assembly of Youth (Chester, 1995, 51; Saunders, 1999, 142). The Ford Foundation also provided \$850,000 for the CIA-funded Center for International Studies (CENIS) "which emerged as one of the most important centers of communication studies midway through the 1950s" (Marchetti and Marks, 1974, 175; Simpson, 1994, 82). Bissel (1996, 75), who left the Ford Foundation in the fall of 1952, notes in his autobiography that his friend Max Millikan resigned from the CIA in 1952 to direct CENIS's research, and he adds that because they had "similar interests" he was "able to get the trustees of the Ford Foundation to fund research at CENIS."

In 1966, McGeorge Bundy moved straight from his position as Special Assistant to the President in Charge of National Security to the presidency of the Ford Foundation – a position he held until 1979 (Saunders, 1999, 142).¹¹ The CIA-organized CCF, as previously noted, continued to be an important recipient of Ford largesse, and by the early 1960s it had received \$7 million from the foundation (Saunders, 1999, 142). In 1964, the CCF created the London-based magazine, *Censorship*, which Saunders (1999, 335) suggests "was the model for Index on Censorship, [which was] founded in 1972 by Stephen Spender, with a substantial grant from the Ford Foundation." The CCF's funding of International PEN was also controversial, as "the CIA made every effort to turn PEN into a vehicle for American government interests" (Saunders, 1999, 362).

In 1967, when it became common knowledge that the CCF was a CIA-front, the Ford Foundation quickly stepped in to take over its entire funding (Coleman, 1989, 224-7). However, the Ford Foundation gradually reduced their grants from \$1.3 million for 1968 to \$0.6 million by 1972 to "encourage the new organization to find other sources of funds – or dissolve" (Coleman, 1989, 225). Stone became the Congress's new president and chief executive, a post in maintained until 1973; as Saunders (1999, 412) cynically observed, "Everything had changed, but nothing had really changed."

The Institutionalization of Liberal Propaganda

Although it is clear that the Ford Foundation played a strong system supportive role in the United States, Saunders (1999, 144) notes that the "convergence between the Rockefeller billions and the US government exceeded even that of the Ford Foundation." Former Rockefeller Foundation chairman, John Foster Dulles, and president, Dean Rusk (1952 to 1960) went on to become secretaries of state; the Ford Foundation's John J. McCloy served as a Rockefeller trustee; and Nelson Rockefeller provided an integral link to the CIA (Saunders, 1999, 144). Indeed, Nelson Rockefeller was "among the most prominent promoters of psychological operations, serving as Eisenhower's principal advisor and strategist on the subject during 1954-55" (Simpson, 1994). This helps explain why during the 1950s, the Rockefeller Foundation provided grants to the "the CIA's MK-ULTRA (or 'Manchurian Candidate') programme of mind-control research" (Colby and Dennett, 1995, 265-266; Saunders, 1999, 144; also see Marks, 1979).

According to Simpson (1994, 60-1, 81), while Leland DeVinney headed the social science funding at the Rockefeller Foundation in the 1950s, the Foundation "appears to have been used as a public front to conceal the source of at least \$1 million in CIA funds for Hadley Cantril's Institute for International Social Research."¹² Prior to this in 1940 with a \$90,000 grant, the Rockefeller Foundation had established the Office of Public Opinion Research at Princeton University, which was also led by Cantril (Parmar, 2002, 253) who as discussed earlier had been an integral member of FREC. Glander (2000, 88) notes that in the same year the US government's Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs, Nelson Rockefeller, invited Cantril to study public opinion in Latin America. Thus in 1941 Cantril accepted this position and along with George Gallup set up a company called American Social Surveys. In 1942, Cantril then set up The Research Council Inc with his associate Lloyd Free (who was the secretary of the Rockefeller Communications Groups) in an office within his own Psychological Warfare Research Bureau at Princeton (Glander, 2000, 88). Interestingly subsequent media

investigations have shown that The Research Council received "almost limitless" funds from the government, mostly in the form of covert funding channelled to them from the CIA (Annon, 1977, 37). Therefore it is not surprising that during World War II, the government ran its G2 program in an office within Cantril's Psychological Warfare Research Bureau (Parmar, 2002, 256).

Another leading communications researcher who received support from both the Rockefeller and Ford Foundations was Bernard Berelson. Prior to World War II Berelson had worked at the University of Chicago, but after WWII he directed the Columbia University Bureau of Applied Social Research. His first project there was undertaken with Paul Lazarsfeld, which was published in 1944 as *The People's Choice* (Lazarsfeld et al., 1944), and received funding from the Rockefeller Foundation amongst others (Glander, 2000, 78). During this study Berelson and his colleagues began developing the theoretical underpinnings for what would become known as "the two-step flow of communications," which was further developed in their 1954 book *Voting* (Berelson et al., 1954), which again received financial support from the three largest liberal foundations, the Rockefeller and Ford Foundations, and the Carnegie Corporation (Glander, 2000, 79). Glander argues that contrary to popular interpretations of these studies and the two-step flow of communications (exemplified in Lazarsfeld and Katz's (1955) *Personal Influence*) which imply limited media effects, their work had:

... enormous practical utility to propagandists and advertisers, because identifying ... opinion leaders and finding particular ways in which to persuade them has led to an increased capacity to persuade the larger population. This was precisely what was motivating Lazarsfeld and his colleagues in sharpening the conceptualization of "the two-step flow," and this conceptualization was widely used by propaganda organizations, including the Voice of America and the United States Information Agency. (Glander, 2000, 108)¹³

The Ford Foundation's Public Broadcasting System

Only after having reviewed the historical links between liberal foundations, the US government, the intelligence community and the mass media, it is possible to really appreciate the ideological allegiances of the liberal foundations. Therefore, it is perhaps shocking to observe that the Ford Foundation "used to be the single largest source of contributions to public television" and during its "early years, Ford grants literally kept the system alive" (Powell & Friedkin, 1983, 418). In fact, between 1951 and 1977 the Ford Foundation alone supplied over \$292 million to public broadcasting (Magat, 1979, 181-2).¹⁴ Lashner (1976, 531) notes that "most experts admit that foundation support has shaped the cause and the course of the [Public Broadcasting] [S]ystem to a position it would otherwise not have been able to attain." Lashner also observed that:

... the most important moment in the history [of] th[e] movement [for public television] came in 1951 when the recently enriched Ford Foundation launched The Fund for Adult Education and set about dispersing its massive resources to the development of educational broadcasting, particularly television. (Lashner, 1976, 532)

The Fund's first project was to launch the Radio-Television Workshop, which was created to "explore the possibilities of educational programming within the framework of the commercial system" (Lashner, 1977, 241). Lashner describes Omnibus – which was first broadcast in 1952 over CBS – as the "most ambitious" project organized by the workshop which won many commendations, but after five seasons it was cancelled, apparently because "its limited audience appeal eventually made it unpalatable as a commercial enterprise" (Lashner, 1977, 241). Then:

In 1964, [President] Johnson's Office of Education sponsored a conference on long-range financing for educational television. The most significant result of that conference was the formation in November 1965 of the Carnegie Commission on Educational Television, which was assigned to examine public television financing issues. (Jarvik, 1997, 18)

With a \$500,000 grant, the Carnegie Corporation then appointed the 15 strong Carnegie Commission on Educational Television (Lashner, 1976, 533), and in January 1967 they released their finding in a report titled *Public Television: A Program for Action*. This report concluded: "that a well-financed and well-directed educational television system, substantially larger and far more pervasive and effective than that which now exists in the United States, must be brought into being if the full needs of the American public are to be served."¹⁵ President Johnson then picked up the baton and pushed for the rapid creation of a Corporation for Public Broadcasting to administer the distribution of federal funding for public broadcasting. Shortly thereafter, on November 7, 1967 – just two days after the first Ford Foundation funded Public Broadcasting Laboratory

show was aired on educational television – the idea for establishing the CPB became law (Barnouw, 1970, 295). President Johnson also decided to review the CPB's funding arrangements annually (contrary to the Carnegie Commissions recommendations for long-term funding) which "put PBS on a very short leash and compromised its independence from the outset" (Lee and Solomon, 1992, 85).

Like many pioneering foundation-supported projects, the generous grants that served to launch public television were quickly phased out when public broadcasting was able to stand on its own two feet, and the lucrative Ford grants ended in 1977 (Powell & Friedkin, 1983, 418). Furthermore, as foundation support decreased public broadcasting became increasingly reliant on corporate support (Powell & Friedkin, 1983, 419).

Lashner's (1976) study examining the Ford Foundation's role in promoting public broadcasting, concluded that "philanthropic foundations have emerged with a heroism to be applauded" but despite her evident support of their efforts she ended with a note of caution that this should not "cloud whatever flaws may exist" which (if found) should be "matters for further investigation" (Lashner, 1976, 544). Since then although critiques of public broadcasting have been plentiful – see for example Rowland's aptly named *Continuing Crisis in Public Broadcasting* (1986, 270) which agreed with Williams' (1974, 36-39) earlier study that described public broadcasting as a mere 'palliative' to society's problems – only Glenda Balas (2003, 93-120) has drawn attention to the fundamentally elitist nature of the Ford Foundation's support for public broadcasting.¹⁶ Balas surmises that:

Just as the Great Society contained public TV's potential as a change agent, the Ford Foundation's influence limited its range, scope, and audience base. Moving through a liberal arts initiative into public policy and taste engineering, the foundation put educational TV to use in meeting its own agenda for U.S. society: promoting liberal arts education, elite culture, and governance by experts. Not only did this work to authorize the discourse and interests of the educated classes, it also contained diversity, silenced popular speech, and entrenched a class-based hierarchy of knowledge and taste. (Balas, 2003, 96-7)

Ford Foundation Funding for Contemporary Media Organizations

Historically, the Ford Foundation has certainly been one of the most influential liberal foundations financing social change and media-related activities. So it is no surprise that their pioneering, entrepreneurial funding strategies have now spawned an entire cottage industry of liberal (and more activist-orientated) philanthropic foundations which fund progressive causes. Having already examined some examples illustrating the Ford Foundation's pre-1980 media funding strategies, this section will now focus on their post-1980s grantees in order to determine if their funding priorities have changed over time. At this point it is worth noting that although some organisations may only receive small grants from the Ford Foundation, these grants are still important, as they send an important agenda setting signal to the wider philanthropic world, allowing grantees to leverage funding from the multitude of other like-minded foundations, governments and/or corporations (Dowie, 2001, 94-5).

Contrary to their decidedly anti-democratic history, the Ford Foundation's grant making process has always been transparent, with their grantees listed in their annual reports – which in turn are all online. Arguably, this openness has helped the Foundation present their work as democratic, the implication being that, as they appear to have nothing to hide, they must be doing 'good'. Picking up on the success of this strategy, foreign policy-making elites appear to have learnt a valuable lesson, as the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), the US's most important democracy manipulating organization operates in much the same way as the Ford Foundation, and lists all their grantees on their website. Furthermore, by adopting the powerful rhetoric of democracy, the NED, like the liberal foundations, has successfully shielded the true anti-democratic nature of their work from serious interrogation (Barker, 2006). That said, the liberal foundations' cooption of progressive activists appears to be far more subtle than that undertaken by the NED, which regularly lends its support to neoconservative organizations or anti-democratic labor groups seeking to overthrow 'enemy' governments. The end result of both organizations' work though is very similar, as both support dissent in ways that will prevent significant challenges to the deeper structural elements of society that actually serve to perpetrate injustices. Finally, although liberal foundations effectively exist to maintain the capitalist status quo, this does not prevent them from supporting a limited number of activists who are seeking radical social change. In fact, sponsoring radicals is integral to their overall mission, as arguably it allows them to keep a close eye on the ideas of radicals, while simultaneously enabling them to improve their progressive PR credentials (thereby helping to deter critical investigations of their work). Bearing this in mind, this paper will

now provide a brief overview of the role the Ford Foundation has played in supporting media projects over the past few decades.

Perhaps in response to the media war waged by the reactionary Reagan administration (Hertsgaard, 1988), in 1988 the Ford Foundation launched "a media program to support projects using film, video, and radio to explore public policy issues." Funding for this media program was modest to begin with, and by 1992 they had only dispersed 43 media grants worth a total of just under \$14 million. This began to change in 1993, when in that year alone they awarded \$9.3 million worth of grants for media projects. By 2005, the Ford Foundation was distributing just under \$38 million of grants for media projects (of which approximately \$2 million was for international media programs).

During the early years of the Ford media program, one particularly interesting \$200,000 grant was awarded (in 1991) to Blackside Inc. so they could produce a film about Malcolm X. This is noteworthy as throughout the 1960s the Ford Foundation had worked to undermine public support of Malcolm X, by providing selective support to more moderate black leaders (Haines, 1984; Jenkins & Eckert, 1986). Yet despite the controversial nature of this documentary's funding, the film was released in 1994 as *Malcolm X: Make it Plain*, with no public examination of the Ford Foundation's sponsorship of the film. Continuing on their longstanding interest in civil rights, in 1993 the Ford Foundation gave a substantial proportion of their overall media grants to the Civil Rights Project, which received a \$1.5 million "supplement for a public television series, *America's War on Poverty*, documenting the programs initiated by the federal government in the 1960s to assist disadvantaged groups." Again, there is an obvious conflict of interest here, as the Foundation itself was the primary architect of the government's War on Poverty (Raynor, 1991). In the same year, the Foundation also provided another group with \$0.7 million to produce a "documentary film series titled *Chicano! A History of the Mexican American Civil Rights Movement*, and another group with \$0.5 million to make "a television series documenting the contemporary women's movement." Like the Malcolm X example, there is evidence to suggest that the Ford Foundation also played a crucial role in undermining the radicalizing tendencies of both the Chicano and Women's movements (Jenkins, 1998, 214-5; Proietto, 1991), but again there is no critical commentary of these documentaries with regards to their controversial funding.

In a manner similar to the aforementioned examples, in 1993 the Ford Foundation gave \$55,000 to the American NGO, Media for Development International (MDI), to make a documentary "on micro enterprise credit programs in the United States and in developing countries." Ford funding for this project is worth mentioning as MDI has received aid from numerous government agencies (including the US Agency for International Development), a number of corporations (including British Petroleum), and from the key democracy manipulating organization the National Endowment for Democracy (NED).¹⁷ However, the Ford Foundation's funding links with the NED does not end here as in 1995, the NED-linked Canadian Committee to Protect Journalists (now known as the Canadian Journalists for Free Expression, CJFE) received \$160,000 from the Ford Foundation. This organization is important because in 1992, with aid from the Ford Foundation, they organized the inaugural meeting of the International Freedom of Expression eXchange (IFEX), which is an influential international network of media organizations.¹⁸ Although CJFE itself has not received any direct grants from the NED, a large proportion of the members of IFEX have received support from the NED (details outlined in full in Barker, 2007). Furthermore, even some IFEX members who have not received NED funding are indirectly linked to the NED. For example, the Media Foundation for West Africa (a NGO based in Ghana that was established "to defend and promote the rights and freedoms of the media")¹⁹ received \$68,000 from the Ford Foundation in 1997 (the year it was launched) and \$400,000 in 1999, and half of the ten organizations they collaborate with have received support from either the NED or one of its sister organizations.²⁰ One of these groups, Media Rights Agenda (Nigeria), also received a \$170,000 grant from the Ford Foundation in 2001.

Another controversial Ford Foundation grantee is the Internews Network. Created in 1992, Internews is an "independent" international media agency that has a long history of collaboration with the US government (from whom it receives 80 percent of its annual US\$20 million budget) and the NED amongst others. Internews receives regular support from the Ford Foundation and since 1998 they have obtained nine grants worth just over \$1.5 million. Of particular interest is a grant they received in 2005 to organize the Global Forum for Media Development conference (held in Amman, Jordan) with 14 other media groups, eight of which have also received NED aid in the past (Barker, 2007). Other media rights groups that have received both Ford Foundation and NED aid, include the Institute for War and Peace Reporting, the Panos Institute (Senegal), the Independent Journalism Centre (Nigeria), and Article 19 (for further details see Barker, 2007) .

Based on this preliminary and selective review of some of the Ford Foundation's recent grantees it is clear that many questions still remain unanswered about the Foundation's ulterior motives for supporting media projects. The Foundation still supports cutting edge media research in American universities (recipients in 2005 included the American University, the University of California, New York University, San Francisco State University, San Jose State University, the University of Southern California, and St John's University), and as the previous NED-linked examples illustrated it still invests a lot of resources in supporting international media projects. Likewise, the Ford Foundation also supports a large number alternative media groups, amongst which are a large number of media organizations upon which American (and global) progressive activists rely (see Feldman, 2007). Perhaps the best known of these is the progressive media watchdog, Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting (FAIR), which has received four Ford grants, totalling \$350,000 since 1997. Other well known progressive media groups that have been the recipients of the Ford Foundation's largesse in the past few years also include, the Center for Investigative Reporting, the Center for Public Integrity, Democracy Now, Free Press, Media Channel, the Prometheus Radio Project, and the Independent Press Association (which received a massive \$2.1 million in 2005). Furthermore, two lesser known groups, the Center for International Media Action and Funding Exchange (a progressive philanthropic foundation) received Ford funding in 2005. The former group was awarded a grant to "strengthen media reform/media justice organizations in the United States and create linkages to organizations working on global media and communications issues"; and Funding Exchange received support to "enable the Media Justice Fund to promote socially responsible communications policy through grassroots advocacy."

Conclusions

As this paper has demonstrated, considering the antidemocratic credentials of liberal foundations, it is perhaps unlikely that a truly progressive media reform movement (under-girded by participatory principles) can rely upon the support of liberal philanthropists. Therefore, it is a matter of urgency that all progressive media groups (whether they receive liberal foundation support or not) publicly address the ethics and sustainability of receiving funds from elitist organizations like the Ford Foundation. To date, few researchers have examined the conservatising effects of liberal philanthropy on social change, but the issue facing media activists is the same one facing all progressive activists worldwide. For example, Barker (In Press) recently illustrated the damaging effects liberal philanthropy has wrought on the environmental movement.

So the question remains: what type of funding mechanisms can provide the basis for sustainable radical media activism? Fortunately, the answer to this question is rather simple, but before solutions can be implemented media groups will first need to acknowledge that a problem exists. Given the paucity of information about and interest in this subject, it is likely that this will be the most difficult step for activist organizations to make. It is unreasonable to assume that the evidence presented in this paper will be enough to radically alter the high regard many activists have for liberal philanthropists. Therefore, the first step that I propose needs to be taken is to launch a vibrant public discussion of the broader role of liberal foundations in funding social change – an action that will rely for the most part upon the interest and support of grassroots activists all over the world. Only then, once media activists have considered all the evidence, will it be possible for them to decide collectively upon the most appropriate way to fund truly sustainable radical media activism.

Of course in the short-term it is possible (and desirable) for individual media groups to begin supporting and developing more appropriate funding bodies. However, it is crucial to remember that the power of liberal foundations rests upon their ability to work behind the scenes promoting their favoured groups' hegemony within the public sphere. Thus countering their power will most probably necessitate the wholesale rejection by the media reform movements of everything liberal foundations stand for. If this step is not taken, it seems unlikely that truly progressive philanthropic organizations would ever receive much public support (both morally and financially), or move beyond their currently marginalized status.

With a growing literature on the anti-democratic influence of liberal foundations, a number of authors have begun discussing the types of funding mechanism best suited to promoting participatory democracy and radical social change. Institutional inertia alone is likely to render the democratization of liberal foundations impossible (Bothwell, 2005), therefore, inspiration for democratic forms of philanthropy may draw hope from existing philanthropic organizations that utilize constituency-controlled funding with community members and progressive activists occupying board positions. Alternatively, activists may choose to model their funding strategies on indigenous philanthropy, like African *stokvels*, or adopt the *Women's Funds* model, both of which aim to break down the divide between donor and grantees by inviting everyone to be a donor (Moyer, 2005; Ostrander, 2005, 44-5). In this way, progressive activists may be able to devise democratic funding

strategies that can harness and distribute the generous philanthropic donations of the general public, which for the most part are currently harvested by those NGOs with the best public relations and few democratic structures. Perhaps then social change may be able to move more freely in directions dictated by the mass public rather than elite and undemocratic liberal foundations.

Footnotes:

1 Radical activists were also literally eliminated by the CIA and FBI during this period (see Churchill and Van der Wall, 1990).

2 NACRE "was established by the American Association for Adult Education (AAAE), which itself had been established by the Carnegie Corporation in 1926" (McChesney, 1994, 52). McChesney (1994, 52) adds that the "Carnegie Corporation and the AAAE were unabashed proponents of commercial broadcasting stations." NACRE board of directors included Robert M. Hutchins (president of the University of Chicago), Robert Millikan (president of the California Institute of Technology – who later joined the CIA (Bissel, 1996, 75)), Walter Dill Scott (president of Northwestern University), Owen Young, and Levering Tyson (an adult educator from Columbia University) who was the Director of NACRE (McChesney, 1994, 53). Interestingly, in 1930 Robert Millikan had reversed his support of the non-profit Pacific-Western Broadcasting Federation, not long after his university had received a \$6 million gift from the Rockefeller family and a \$3 million donation from AT&T (McChesney, 1994, 79). The Rockefeller family was well connected to at least one founding father of propaganda, as John D. Rockefeller's chief PR man was Ivy Lee – who was recruited by Hitler in the interwar period (during the last year of his life) to "make Nazi principles and methods less hateful to the average American citizen" (Irwin, 1969, 267-68). Critically, in 1934, Lee played an integral role in developing Columbia Broadcasting Company's successful campaign against non-commercial media interests (see Balas, 2003, 50-4).

3 "Perhaps the most important member of the NACRE's board of directors was ... [Robert M.] Hutchins" who although at times had been critical of commercial broadcasting, was a reliable reformer due to "his belief that the status quo was entrenched" (McChesney, 1999, 207).

4 Mass communications "was of interest because it was so closely bound with problems of generating public consent for the policy measures undertaken during the 'emergency' period of World War II" (Buxton, 2003, 298-9).

5 With the approval of FREC, in 1937 Cantril received a two-year \$67,000 grant from the Rockefeller Foundation for his Princeton Radio Research Project (Buxton, 2003, 299). The first director of this project was Paul Lazarsfeld – who emigrated to America from Austria on a Rockefeller Fellowship (Glander, 2000, 40) – as "neither Cantril nor Frank Stanton was willing to assume the position" (Buxton, 2003, 302). Interestingly, Theodor W. Adorno was hired by Lazarfeld in the late 1930s, and reflecting on his time working with Cantril, Adorno recalled that the Princeton Project's "charter, which came from the Rockefeller Foundation, expressly stipulated that the investigations must be performed within the limits of the commercial radio system prevailing in the United States. It was thereby implied that the system itself, its cultural and sociological consequences and its social and economic presuppositions were not to be analyzed" (cited in Rowland, 1983, 61).

Incidentally, in 1937 the (progressive) Institute for Propaganda Analysis was formed and headed by Cantril. However, by 1941 their operations were wound down, partly as a result of the political pressures created by their opposition to the Roosevelt Administrations defense policies, and consequently many of the people associated with the institute moved from being strong opponents of propaganda to becoming influential proponents for its use (Glander, 2000, 24). During the final years of its existence the Institute was unable to obtain support from the Rockefeller Foundation (apparently because their "work was not 'unassailably scientific' " – Sproule, 1987, 70) – and they faced increasing pressure from other powerful business and political constituents, including the Catholic Church and even the Teachers College of Columbia University (Glander, 2000, 24).

6 "Besides Marshall, other Rockefeller Foundation officers included Stevens, May, and R. H. Havighurst. The academic members of the original Communications Group included Lasswell; Lynd; Lazarsfeld; Cantril; Geoffrey Gorer, an Oxford-trained anthropologist; Lyman Bryson, an adult education specialist; Donald Slesinger, former dean of the Social Sciences at Chicago and director of the American Film Center; I. A. Richards, literary theorist and sematicist; Douglas Waples of the University of Chicago, the leading

researcher on print communication and reading behavior, and Charles Siepmann, a communication analyst for the BBC [Lloyd] Free served as secretary." (Gary, 1996, 132-3)

7 This was also a time when their total psychological warfare budget was around \$1 billion a year, with the US federal government spending between \$7 million to \$13 million each year on communications research in universities and think-tanks (Simpson, 1994, 9).

8 Prior to World War II, Stone (a close friend of Hadley Cantril) had been an editor at the *New York Times*, during the war he then worked with G2 (Intelligence), and in 1949 he worked in Germany as Director of Public Affairs under the American High Commissioner John McCloy, finally arriving at the Ford Foundation in 1952, where he stayed until 1967 (Berghahn, 2001, 27; Saunders, 1999, 143).

9 John J. McCloy was a longtime Wall Street colleague of William Donovan who was director of the (US intelligence agency) Office of Strategic Services and ran the government's secret black propaganda operations (Simpson, 1994, 24). During World War II, while acting as the Assistant Secretary of War, McCloy "established a small, highly secret Psychologic Branch with the War Department General Staff G-2 (Intelligence) organization" (Simpson, 1994, 25). McCoy was a key player in the philanthropic world, as when he became the president of the Ford Foundation, he was also chairman of the Rockefellers' Chase Manhattan and a member of the Council on Foreign Relations (Bird, 1992, 108). Saunders (1999, 141) observed that McCloy had also been a former president of the World Bank, while Bird (1992, 428) noted that in the 1950s, McCloy served as a member of the Rockefeller Foundation's board of trustees.

10 Chekhov Publishing House is still funded by the Ford Foundation; for example, in 1995 they received a \$190,000 grant from the Ford Foundation.

11 For a discussion of McGeorge Bundy's links to the CIA in 1949 and 1954 see (Bird, 1998, 106, 141).

12 Cantril received CIA funds to "gather intelligence on popular attitudes in countries of interest to the agency" and his studies "could serve as a checklist of CIA interventions of the period: Brazil, the Dominican Republic, Egypt, India, Nigeria, Philippines, Poland, and others" (Simpson, 1994, 81; Cantril, 1967, p 1-5, 44; for further details on these interventions see, Blum, 2004)

13 "[I]t is only a secret to historians of mass communications research that Lazarsfeld and Katz's 1955 text *Personal Influence* was essentially an attempt to refine the means by which propaganda could be aimed at opinion leaders ... Propagandist (and Freud's nephew) Edward L. Bernays thought that Lazarsfeld had stolen the idea of the opinion leader from him, although Lazarsfeld argued that he had given this notion a new twist by maintaining that opinion leaders could be found in all social strata and not just within the educated class, as Bernays had maintained. Lazarsfeld himself spoke freely of the commercial and ideological applications of the two-step flow of communications research. And the United States Information Agency, among other organizations, noted the idea's practical utility and trained USIA officers how to locate these opinion leaders and devise ways to influence them. Like other work Lazarsfeld and the bureau conducted for commercial and governmental organizations, the dominant paradigm of personal influence had its origins and reason for existence in the applied needs of the propagandist." (Glander, 2000, p 209-10)

14 "[T]he Carnegie Corporation, the second most generous supporter of the system, has from 1961 contributed upwards of \$7 million." (Lashner, 1977, 235)

15 <http://www.current.org/pbbp/carnegie/CarnegieISummary.html> Accessed 10/02/07.

16 Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting (FAIR), a US-based media reform group has focused a lot of its energy on illustrating the pro-corporate bias of PBS. For a selection of FAIR critiques of public broadcasting authored between 1989 to 1999 see http://www.fair.org/index.php?page=19&media_outlet_id=16. For further critiques of public broadcasting please refer to work of Cumings (1992), Hoynes (1994), and Ledbetter (1997).

17 <http://www.mfdi.org/> See Sponsorship info. Accessed 10/02/07.

18 <http://www.ifex.org/fr/content/view/full/23232/> Accessed 10/02/07.

19 <http://www.mfwaonline.org/en/home.php> Accessed 10/02/07.

20 Centre for Conflict Resolution (Uganda) 1998 Westminster Foundation (WF); West African Journalists Association (Ghana) 1997 WF; Media Rights Agenda (Nigeria) 1998, 2000 NED; Media Institute of Southern Africa 1997 WF; Article 19 1996, 1997 WF, 1997 Rights and Democracy.

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