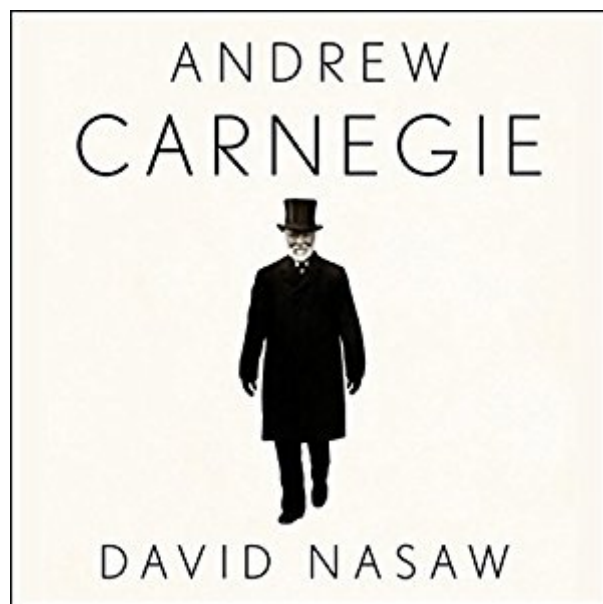


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# Andrew Carnegie



## Synopsis

Celebrated historian David Nasaw, whom The New York Times Book Review has called "a meticulous researcher and a cool analyst," brings new life to the story of one of America's most famous and successful businessmen and philanthropists in what will prove to be the biography of the season. Born of modest origins in Scotland in 1835, Andrew Carnegie is best known as the founder of Carnegie Steel. His rags to riches story has never been told as dramatically and vividly as in Nasaw's new biography. Carnegie, the son of an impoverished linen weaver, moved to Pittsburgh at the age of thirteen. The embodiment of the American dream, he pulled himself up from bobbin boy in a cotton factory to become the richest man in the world. He spent the rest of his life giving away the fortune he had accumulated and crusading for international peace. For all that he accomplished and came to represent to the American public—a wildly successful businessman and capitalist, a self-educated writer, peace activist, philanthropist, man of letters, lover of culture, and unabashed enthusiast for American democracy and capitalism—Carnegie has remained, to this day, an enigma. Nasaw explains how Carnegie made his early fortune and what prompted him to give it all away, how he was drawn into the campaign first against American involvement in the Spanish-American War and then for international peace, and how he used his friendships with presidents and prime ministers to try to pull the world back from the brink of disaster. With a trove of new material—unpublished chapters of Carnegie's Autobiography; personal letters between Carnegie and his future wife, Louise, and other family members; his prenuptial agreement; diaries of family and close friends; his applications for citizenship; his extensive correspondence with Henry Clay Frick; and dozens of private letters to and from presidents Grant, Cleveland, McKinley, Roosevelt, and British prime ministers Gladstone and Balfour, as well as friends Herbert Spencer, Matthew Arnold, and Mark Twain—Nasaw brilliantly plumbs the core of this fascinating and complex man, deftly placing his life in cultural and political context as only a master storyteller can. --This text refers to the Paperback edition.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

A mentor of mine once told me that 'to learn history, the only books you really need to read are great biographies'. His point was, of course, that within the confines of a well written story of one life the reader unearths a much larger landscape of the times, events, and issues that surround the subject. Having just finished David Nasaw's excellent 'Andrew Carnegie' I think my teacher would be pleased and fully approve as the book meets any objective criteria of quality and excels on every level. Here, we follow the figure of Andrew Carnegie from birth and each subsequent chapter of his full life. Carnegie's actions and thoughts are fascinating and Nasaw paints a masterful portrait of his subject. He uses a clear and concise tone to convey all of what is important and none of which that is not. You really feel like there is not a wasted word in the entire narrative. Along the way we get in depth -but never tedious- lessons on issues as wide ranging as the immigrant experience to a particular brand of evolutionary philosophy to the history of labor to turn-of-the-century American foreign policy.... Frankly, I was hooked from the beginning and thanks to the writing style and its intriguing subject the book's 800 pages fly by. Another positive is the way Nasaw gives the reader credit for being intelligent enough to decipher the facts he provides and then let the reader form his or her own conclusions. I appreciated the linear narrative approach as well, as too many current biographies tend to 'do too much' and jump all over the place. That's not the case here as Nasaw never loses his compass and the reader benefits as a result.

801 pages of biography. This is what David Nasaw has produced--a massive biography of Andrew Carnegie. Well known as a philanthropist, he gave away much of his fortune. For instance, one accounting notes the following (page 801): ". . .at the time of his death, Carnegie had given away more than \$350 million (in the tens of billions today). There remained but \$20 million of stocks and bonds. . . . In the seventh paragraph of his last will and testament, Carnegie directed that it be bequeathed, in its entirety, to the Carnegie Corporation. And with this he accomplished the final,

and to his mind, the most important goal he had set himself." In essence, he had given his entire fortune away. This book provides cradle to grave coverage of Carnegie, beginning with his origins in Scotland. Early on, the family moved to the United States, settling in the Pittsburgh area. Carnegie's first job was in a cotton mill when he was thirteen. He was close to his mother then and throughout his life. He quickly moved to a position as a messenger with a telegraph company and then, in a stroke of fortune, became a telegraph operator in a company. Here, he began an association at a young age with Thomas Scott and J. Edgar Thomson of the Pennsylvania Railroad. By 17, he was working for the Pennsylvania Railroad and on his way. The volume notes his small stature (barely five feet tall), but by 24, he was superintendent of the Pittsburgh Division of the rail company. Early on, he began to develop "rules for business" (e.g., see page 76). He was in a position to get involved over time with an oil company, with bridge building, with rail, coal, a bank, a grain elevator. And, of course, with iron and then steel.

Andrew Carnegie arrived in the United States from his native Scotland in 1848 as an unschooled and aimless 13 year old, became immensely wealthy at 26, retired from full-time work at 37, revolutionized the structure and working methods of the American steel industry, pestered five or six Presidents with unwanted advice on how to do their jobs, and died at 84 as the head of a philanthropic empire that girdled the globe and is even today a presence in many different areas of society. On the surface his life is the classic American rags-to-riches success story. David Nasaw, a history professor at the City University of New York, tells it with flavor and gusto in this blockbuster book --- but he also attempts the far more difficult task of explaining the man himself. In many ways the man Carnegie was far more interesting than what he accomplished. His boundless self-confidence, charm and infectious optimism helped to bring him his millions every bit as much as did the wheeling and dealing of his business transactions. He started out as a bobbin boy in a Pittsburgh cotton mill, working his way up the economic ladder through a gift for befriending people who could do him good, and ended up dominating the American steel industry from his castle in Scotland. All his life, he liked to portray himself as a former workingman, though his experience of that sort lasted only a teenage year or two. He kept publicly proclaiming sympathy for the laboring classes even as he depressed wages, broke unions, forcibly suppressed strikes and imposed longer working hours. He developed a systematic rationalization for these tactics and put them into a book called THE GOSPEL OF WEALTH.

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