

ABSTRACT
TRIUMPHANT PHILANTHROPISTS: INVENTING AN AMERICAN TRADITION
IN MILWAUKEE, WISCONSIN, AND THE NATION, 1844-1930

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This dissertation explores the development of American philanthropic foundations and the invention of philanthropic traditions, forms, and conventions in the United States during the Gilded Age and Progressive Era. The rapid accumulation of wealth during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries posed a series of complex economic, social, and political tensions for the nation following the end of the Civil War, and the invention of the philanthropic foundation by leading businessmen sought to solve those tensions through the planned and systemized redistribution of wealth. This exploration of philanthropy's history suggests that American capitalists invented a "new" philanthropic tradition in the nation through private giving for public benefit and facilitated the emergence of a self-aware philanthropic class in the United States. The subsequent philanthropic relationship constructed by foundations formed a new kind of social contract in American life, one between the giver and the recipients of the gift which required acceptance of private gifts for public endeavors. This social relationship forged an agreement between philanthropists and Americans that continues to this day. While Progressive politicians critiqued the power wielded through philanthropic foundations and sought ways to limit their influence, philanthropists ultimately triumphed over critics who labeled professionalized philanthropy as a "menace to the national welfare."