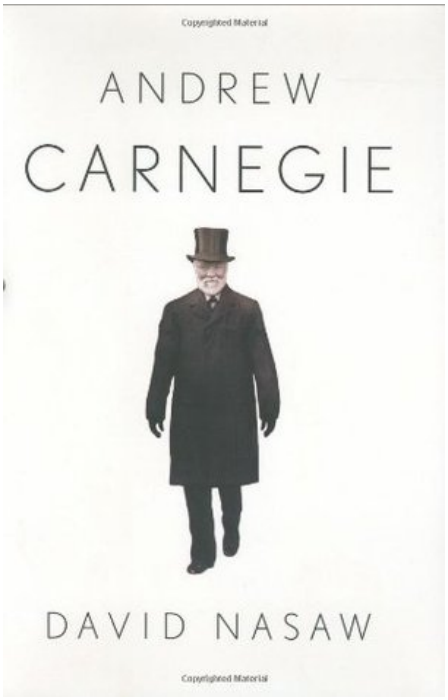

Andrew Carnegie

David Nasaw

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Majestically told and based on materials not available to any previous biographer, the definitive life of Andrew Carnegie-one of American business's most iconic and elusive titans-by the bestselling author of *The Chief: The Life of William Randolph Hearst*.

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With a trove of new material-unpublished chapters of Carnegie's *Autobiography*; personal letters between Carnegie and his future wife, Louise, and other family members; his prenuptial agreement;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 facinating and complex man, deftly placing his life in cultural and political context as only a master storyteller can.

Andrew Carnegie Details

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ISBN	:	9781594201042
Author	:	David Nasaw
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Genre	:	Biography, History, Business, Nonfiction, North American Hi..., American History, Biography Memoir

From Reader Review Andrew Carnegie for online ebook

Frank Stein says

The reader gets a real sense of Carnegie's personality from this book. Carnegie was extremely sociable, intelligent, funny, unassuming, and, in a less flattering light, repetitive and stubborn. Nasaw plumbs countless letters, diaries, newspaper articles, and business papers to come up with this complete and extensive picture of one of the most important personalities of the nineteenth century, and I'm glad he did.

Unfortunately the book is simply too long and too suffused with personal details. In fact, Carnegie's character seems so set in stone from an early age that by his 70s it seems unnecessary to quote numberless letters confirming his personal exuberance and optimism. Also, the extensive focus on his personal life (he and his wife's housekeeping, their travels, hobbies, etc.) detracts from a discussion of his more substantial contributions, to business and philanthropy.

Nasaw does show that the 5 foot tall Carnegie bestrode his era like a colossus. His Carnegie Steel Company dominated its industry, as well as railroad and skyscraper construction, for decades. This despite the fact that even though he worked his way up from a poor Scottish childhood, he never believed in excessive work and celebrated the life of leisure even as the leader of one of the world's largest corporations. He basically retired by age forty.

Still, he left numerous other fortunes in his wake, including that of his irascible and unsociable partner Henry Clay Frick, who Carnegie tried to treat like a son and friend but who turned away all of Carnegie's love. When JP Morgan bought out Carnegie Steel in 1901, absorbing it into US Steel, Carnegie found himself the owner of hundreds of millions of dollars in gold bonds that he then used to finance every philanthropic pursuit imaginable. Today there is still Carnegie Hall, the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Carnegie-Mellon University, the Carnegie Libraries, the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, and the Carnegie Corporation. There are few areas of modern life that his wealth did not touch. Yet Carnegie earned so much money from interest he barely managed to spend it as quickly as he earned it. Despite his best hopes, he still died a rich man. Today, his wealth and foundations live on.

His extensive influence means his life certainly deserves an expansive treatment, but I'm not sure this is one I would recommend.

Tony says

Excellent biography of Carnegie, steel magnate, philanthropist and peace advocate.

Carnegie lived his own *Gospel of Wealth*, accumulating a fortune and then giving most of it away in his own lifetime. The contradiction of course is that he made his wealth by brutal treatment of his workers. A 12-hour day in a steel mill hardly encourages one to head to the library after work. Nasaw doesn't attempt to explain the contradiction. Rather he shows the incongruity over and over again through Carnegie's words and actions. He renders Carnegie a villain, sure; but also, and mainly, an ass.

This is reiterated in Carnegie's later years when, as peace advocate, he befriended men of power in both America and Great Britain. They all took his money, exchanged fawning correspondence with him, and then

made fun of him behind his back. Samuel Clemens wrote of Carnegie, "He thinks he is a rude, bluff, independent spirit, who writes his mind and thinks his mind with an almost Fourth of July independence, whereas he is really the counterpart of the rest of the human race in that he does not boldly speak his mind except when there isn't any danger in it. He thinks he is a scorner of kings and emperors and dukes, whereas he is like the rest of the human race: a slight attention from one of these can make him drunk for a week and keep his happy tongue wagging for seven years." My, my, with friends like these.

After assailing William McKinley for what he perceived to be his imperialistic nature, he championed Theodore Roosevelt. Go figure. TR too took his money and heaped praise, but behind his back referred to "the male shrieking sisterhood of Carnegies." Leave it to Roosevelt, more than annoyed at Carnegie's Peace pestering, to capture the essence: "If Andrew Carnegie had employed his fortune and his time in doing justice to the steelworkers who gave him his fortune, he would have accomplished a thousand times what he has accomplished or ever can accomplish in connection with international peace." Ouch. And amen.

One error, writing that "Carnegie was delighted with Roosevelt's election in 1908", did not diminish this otherwise meticulously researched history of a very complicated man.

Kate says

Good and very comprehensive biography of Andrew Carnegie.

It kind of ran out of steam for me after he retired from the steel business to focus on his philanthropy, especially the world peace bit.

I wanted to hear more about his disagreements with Frick, and would have also liked the book to focus more on his legacy for labor, steel, Pittsburgh, philanthropy etc., instead of just stopping when he died.

Jan-Maat says

[since my legs were short then this still involved the long march down Fawnbrake Avenue pass the Monkey puzzle tree

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Mary Pressman says

Read Samuel's review... I do not need to repeat what he said. I found this book to be a fascinating look into a time in our country that tended to be glossed over in my school time history classes. We studied all the wars and did not focus much on the amazing growth of the American industrial sector after the civil war. Andrew Carnegie was a man full of contradictions. There is much to admire in his story, but there is much to be disgusted by as well. However, after reading this biography, I do think that history has been all that kind to Carnegie. His complicated relationship with the "working man" is fascinating to me. He viewed individual workers as cogs in his economic engine, yet wanted to provide access to information and education to those who worked for him. He was a self educated man and wanted his workers to have the opportunity to be so as well, yet worked them so hard that the average person had no time or energy to take advantage of his libraries. I believe that he distanced himself from the day to day operations of his mills because he could not

reconcile these two aspects of himself. I ended up being heartbroken by his failed attempt to influence the leaders of his day on the folly of American Imperialism. He had placed great faith in the idea that the human race would naturally evolve to a place of peaceful resolution of conflict. It appeared that elected leaders gave him access to promote his ideas, yet took advantage of his generosity and laughed at him behind his back. The Great War broke this man's spirit. He died not knowing that his ideas would still not be realized almost a century later- and perhaps never will be. Andrew Carnegie's story is quintessentially American. Organizations founded by his generosity continue to do good work to this day. We should honor him for that.

Chrissie says

I am certainly glad to have read this book. I had no idea that I would come to first loathe the man and then pity him. Read the book and find out why.

Andrew Carnegie (1835 – 1919) was born in Dunfermline, Scotland. His father, a weaver made jobless by industrialization, moved the entire family to Allegheny, Pennsylvania, USA, in 1848. The father having little ambition and the family meagre income, Andrew, being the oldest son, began work as a bobbin boy. He worked his way up to telegraph messenger, then telegraph operator. Both Andrew and his mother had higher visions and plans. We follow his path year by year. Self-made, he became a steel tycoon and robber baron, a man of letters and at the age of 66 after retiring Andrew had become the world’s wealthiest man. Following the doctrine of philosopher Herbert Spencer, he dedicated the remaining years of his life to philanthropy and peace.

As steel tycoon he was ruthless and pushed his men to the utmost, showing no compassion or understanding for workers. His goal in life to make as much money as possible so he could return it to the poor is blind to the fact that what a worker wants is not a gift or an endowment or access to a library, but decent wages enabling adequate living standards! While others are slaving away, he (Andrew) who is so intelligent, clever and wise worked only a few hours a day! He traveled, entertained, owned sumptuous houses and accoutrements, read, wrote and gave speeches lecturing others on the proper way of living. He was so full of himself, self-satisfied, ebullient and jocular, but totally unaware of the fact that he was a total pain in the butt to the dignitaries, presidents, and emperors whom he saw as his equals. His behavior is pitiful to observe! Pitiful also because his optimistic enthusiasm in support of arbitration and negotiation, for a League of Peace and a World Court fell on deaf ears. Not a soul was listening.

A hypocrite and an idealist. He adored adulation. This book shows you the whole man. We see what he does, how he acts and what he says, year by year. The chapters move forward chronologically a few years at a time. The research is thorough and not one-sided. At times the information included is excessive. Many quotes are provided both about Carnegie and by him. We lean about the man from how he expresses himself. The author does comment on the veracity of that said, but occasionally I would have appreciated further analysis.

On completion of the book there remain for me some questions. What was it that induced Carnegie while still young to give away his riches? We are referred to his ardent support of Herbert Spencer, but is that the whole explanation? I think he had an inner need to be looked up to, to be exalted and to be praised. What is the cause of this? Secondly, I wish Andrew’s relationship with his mother had been more thoroughly analyzed. He married in 1887 at the age of 52 and only after her death. What is the explanation for the hold she had on him?

The audiobook is narrated by Grover Gardner. I liked it a lot, so four stars. It is easy to follow and clear. He neither dramatizes nor uses separate intonations for family members or friends.

Andrew Carnegie Is not your normal person. We are all aware of his philanthropy but here is the man behind the deeds. It takes a while to read this book, and you are sure to get annoyed, but I think it is worth reading.

Peter Mcloughlin says

Very detailed account of the life of Andrew Carnegie his rise from lowly beginnings his early work ethic his wheeling and dealing his risk-taking which paid off in the steel business which made him a titan. His conscience his fickle relationship with it when it came to his business affairs. His desire later in life to do good for the world. His flirting with socialist ideas, His responsibility for crushing workers at his Homestead plant in 1892. His quest for world peace and the end of his life and era at the end of WWI. He made a mark and will be remembered if we are still around to remember him for a long time.

Anna Mussmann says

Several historians have lately pointed to the striking parallels between the Gilded Age and our own. They lived in a time of polarized politics. So do we. They saw industry changing society. So do we (in our case, it's Google and Facebook vs. steel companies and railroads). They were abandoning more traditional theology for optimistic social reform. So, surely, are we. Reading about the men who shaped the dawn of the 1900's has never been more relevant.

This massive tome is an experience in itself. I've read several biographies tof Carnegie lately, and could tell that Nasaw had access to fascinating material not discussed in other sources.

Nasaw follows Carnegie's career from his beginning as a Scottish immigrant, to his days as a railroad man, a bonds salesman, and then steel magnate; followed by years as a political activist and philanthropist extraordinaire (after making his vast fortune, Carnegie's goal was to give it all away before he died).

Carnegie's worldview was hugely influenced by Darwinism--he was sure that the human race was getting better and better. Somehow this seemed to justify the idea that he was right to squeeze his workers, crushing unions and demanding the men labor 12-hour shifts seven days a week (for increasingly lower wages); and yet could still see himself as a friend of labor and benefactor of the common man. The apparent hypocrisy was actually the fruit of deep and sincere beliefs.

Nasaw quotes a revealing speech in which Carnegie provided justification of his approach: "Even if it had been possible to share his surplus with his workers without damaging the viability of the enterprise, to do so was neither 'justifiable or wise, because there are higher uses for surplus wealth than adding petty sums to the earnings of the masses. Trifling sums given to each every week or month--and the sums would be trifling indeed--would be frittered away, nine times out of ten, in things which pertain to the body and not to the spirit; upon richer food and drink, better clothing, more extravagant living, which are beneficial neither to rich nor poor. These are things external and of the flesh; they do not minister to the higher, the divine, part of man.' It was far better, Carnegie insisted, to hold on to the surplus and concentrate it 'in one great educative institution, lasting for all time which ministers to the divine in man, his reason and his conscience, and thus

lifts him higher and higher in the scale of being.’”

I had not realized how closely Carnegie’s career was tied to the politics of the era, nor how much of a celebrity he was. He dedicated his last years to the cause of world peace and was crushed by the onset of World War I. I wonder if the heady power of a vast fortune factored in to his optimistic idea that he could help achieve the end of war. Perhaps it’s not so different from Mark Zuckerberg’s announcement that he is going to help eradicate all disease by the end of the century.

The book’s length seemed like a drawback at first--I felt that some explanations were repetitious, and thought the author should have been more selective about the long excerpts from Carnegie’s correspondence. However, by the end, I appreciated the immersion experience all those long excerpts provided. In the end, Nasaw’s biography makes for a fascinating, leisurely source of bedtime reading (or really, in my case, reading done while nursing the baby!).

Richard says

I rarely read anything that's not about early 19th Century, but, on a whim, I bought this recent biography about Andrew Carnegie;philanthropist, steel king and robber baron.
Carnegie was the proto-typical "poor boy made good" and was one of the richest men in the world. and he was a true conundrum; filthy rich, yet he thought it was his duty to give away as much as he could before he died to philanthropic causes. and, even though he did give away millions to those less fortunate, he had a general disdain for the poor, even those who wored in his steel mills!
This is a well written book! I came away with mixed feelings about Carnegie; I liked him but I also was disgusted by him.

Ryan Knoll says

I'm sorry, I just couldn't finish this book. Andrew Carnegie's life is so damn boring! he basically gets rich early by doing some arms-length deals and goes on vacation for about 40 years while cutting wages for his workers and feeling justified in doing so.

Carl Rollyson says

Why did Andrew Carnegie give away all of his money? This is the question that Carnegie's biographers have to confront. David Nasaw's authoritative new biography goes a long way toward answering the question, even if he cannot—perhaps no biographer can—ultimately fathom Carnegie's complex motives and temperament.

Mr. Nasaw deftly dismisses the conventional explanations. Carnegie did not feel guilty about accumulating a vast fortune. He did not feel he had earned his wealth immorally, let alone illegally. J.P. Morgan's claim that Carnegie became the richest man in the world when he sold his steel corporation to Morgan did not embarrass Carnegie a bit. Carnegie did not build his famous public libraries or establish his endowments for peace and social welfare as public relations ploys. Long before he became a controversial public figure,

during a period when he was regarded as a pro-union supporter of the workingman and a rebuke to the robber barons of the Gilded Age, he had resolved to divest himself of his capital.

Mr. Nasaw's probes Carnegie's personality and philosophy — which Carnegie wrote up as "The Gospel of Wealth" — to describe an individual who believed he owed his good fortune to his community, a key term in the Carnegian lexicon. Unlike many self-made men (Carnegie was the son of a feckless Scottish weaver), he did not claim he had succeeded through hard work and genius. Carnegie scoffed at businessmen who put in 10- and 12-hour days. Even at the height of his involvement in business, Carnegie rarely spent a full day in his office. He disliked the go-getter mentality and counseled his fellow Americans to make opportunities for leisure. Carnegie loved to travel, read, attend the theater, and generally absorb culture, which he regarded not as a frill but as a necessity.

Carnegie headed for the country's cultural capital, New York City, as soon as he could break away from commitments in Pittsburgh, where he had begun his rise as a messenger boy and telegraph operator before graduating to Pennsylvania railroad executive positions. Pittsburgh had set him up to sell bonds and form partnerships in the iron and steel industries based on insider trading (not yet designated a crime or even considered immoral). What Mr. Nasaw dubs "crony capitalism" formed the basis of Carnegie's success.

But the ebullient Carnegie — one associate called him the happiest man he had ever met — had literary aspirations and quoted Shakespeare liberally. He befriended influential figures like Matthew Arnold and William Gladstone, not to mention the man who became his philosophical mentor, Herbert Spencer. Indeed, Spencer and Shakespeare went hand in hand for Carnegie to the point that he could close a deal quoting either writer.

Herbert Spencer, Mr. Nasaw believes, is the key to Carnegie's decision to give away his money. Spencer believed in evolutionary progress and that the "apogee of human achievement was industrial society," Mr. Nasaw writes. "What counted most for Carnegie was not simply that Spencer had decreed that evolutionary progress was inevitable and industrial society an improvement on its forbears, but that this progress was moral as well as material." Businessmen like Carnegie were not the creators of this progress but its agents. They arose out of the community that fostered their efforts.

In Carnegie's view, Spencer was not merely presenting ideas. For him, Spencer's notions were laws, and so in "The Gospel of Wealth," Carnegie refers to the "Law of Accumulation of Wealth" and the "Law of Competition." In this positivist reading of history, Carnegie met the world head-on — very much as he does in the evocative photograph on the cover of Mr. Nasaw's biography. Carnegie is shown walking toward us, open to whatever experience has to teach him. Naturally, then, he argued that he should give back what the world had, in effect, bestowed upon him. So certain was Carnegie that great wealth must be redistributed that he even argued against the notion of inheritance for children of the wealthy. Let them, as well, meet the world head-on.

With so much empathy for his community, then, how could Carnegie have consorted with Henry Clay Frick, a notorious and brutal strikebreaker? Unions, Carnegie concluded, did not understand that the Spencerian world, had periods of downs as well as ups—as Mr. Nasaw's illustrates in his redaction of the philosopher:

"It seems hard than an unskillfulness which with all his efforts he cannot overcome, should entail hunger upon the artisan," Herbert Spencer had written, almost as if he were advising Carnegie not to give in to the demands of employees. "It seems hard that a labourer incapacitated by sickness from competing with his stronger fellows, should have to bear the resulting privations. It seems hard that widows and orphans should be left to struggle for life or death. Nevertheless, when regarded not separately, but in connection with the

interests of universal humanity, these harsh fatalities are seen to be full of the highest beneficence.

Or as Carnegie himself notes in the social Darwinist "The Gospel of Wealth" (included in a new Penguin paperback edited by Mr. Nasaw): "While the law may be sometimes hard for the individual, it is best for the race, because it insures the survival of the fittest in every department." As you may already have gathered, Carnegie was a better stylist than Spencer.

But a mystery remains in the heart of Andrew Carnegie's heart. When he published "Triumphant Democracy," which essentially ignored the terrible suffering that Spencer's version of evolutionary progress entailed, Spencer himself wrote Carnegie: "Great as may be hereafter the advantages of enormous progress America makes, I hold that the existing generations of Americans, and those to come for a long time hence, are and will be essentially sacrificed." What did Carnegie say to that? Mr. Nasaw does not comment, except to say, "What mattered most was that he be taken seriously as a thinker and author."

In other words, Mr. Nasaw does not know what Carnegie thought of Spencer's rebuke. Instead of just shilling for capitalism, shouldn't Carnegie have explored its devastating consequences as well? Failure to do so deprived Carnegie of the very status of literary figure and thinker he craved.

Didn't Carnegie understand as much? And shouldn't Mr. Nasaw probe this fatal flaw? Instead, he writes that Carnegie "wore his many hats well." So he did, when he looked in his own mirror. But biography ought to reflect perspectives not available to the subject. Even where evidence is lacking, some rather sharp questions have to be asked of a subject who did so much good while refusing to acknowledge that it arose out of so much questionable philosophy.

Louise says

Carnegie, gone for almost a century, continues to touch the lives of millions of people. He did not just build libraries, he solidified the public library movement by the requiring that cities tax themselves to maintain the gift. The landscape of Carnegie libraries across the world is stunning. While the buildings today are all but obsolete for library service, one wonders how this institution might have developed without his initial impetus. Carnegie made wise investments in the future. He left us not only the libraries but a whole host of educational and arts establishments, hero funds and institutes for the public good.

The paradox, of course, is how this man with so much generosity and foresight, made the money he gave to the future. In his youth, he is what we would call today a "chicken hawk" supporting the Civil War and hiring a replacement so he could sell railroad services to the Union. He began his fortune with what today would be the illegal "insider trading" that landed Martha Stewart and others in jail. His disowning (and denying memory of) his labor practices in interviews and hearings certainly suggests he knew the moral issues involved. While his employees worked 12 hour days (probably his manager Frick too) in industrial heat, he enjoyed a 4 hour day when he worked. We have heard of absentee landlords, here is the ultimate absentee. Nasaw points out his tariff protected profits grew exponentially, while his workers' incomes declined 67%.

Nasaw gives us, essentially, a reference book on this remarkable man. He came from poverty in Scotland where he was influenced by his Chartist uncles. Equal to his optimism, prescience on business, world events and the role of women, race, peace and disarmament, is his blind spot to the feelings of not just the underpaid and overworked mill workers but also those whom he trusts such as Frick, Taft and T. Roosevelt.

We get a small portrait of wife, Louise and gilmpse of their daughter, Margaret. Louise, in a pre-nup agrees to give away his/her fortune. We don't learn about successive generations. Mother and daughter are of interest, since, the philanthropy set their lives on a different course than their financial peers.

Biographers have to make decisions as to whether their book will be an interesting story for the general reader or a documentation of all that is unearthed. Nasaw achievement is that he has opted for documentation, and has put it together in a readable way. Many will pass it up for its length, but for another group, it will be a must read and keep. For the next biographer, whom I predict will delve into Carnegie's inner life this volume will undoubtedly serve as a road map.

I love the cover! The b & w photo, the robber barron attire and posture, and the kindly Santa Claus face! It's like he is staring out at you through the ages.

Jana says

I've long been fascinated with the Gilded Age and this book has been a great treasure trove of information. It was surprisingly readable for a biography, though I do have to complain about the way that the timeline seemed to jump a bit. It didn't detract too much from the overall reading experience, but when one seeks out to have a clear timeline, one is forced to read some things over again. (And I also had a hard time dealing with the fact that I feel as if the Johnstown flood thing wasn't given enough notice.)

The portrait that it paints of Carnegie, I have to say, is surprisingly likeable. (Though that might just be my fascination with the man talking.) What I found particularly striking is his relationships towards Tom Scott, H. C. Frick, and the later presidents of the latter half of his life. I even found myself chuckling a bit when I read the parts about his too-large ego (particularly during the times that he saw fit to lecture the presidents), which is quite surprising to say the least. I had formed several ideas as to what my reading experience of this book would be like but never once did I think that I would actually be *laughing*. That should tell you something about the readability of this book.

Then again, I am horribly attached to the figures of the Gilded Age so I might be a bit biased here.

I finished this book left with great respect towards Andrew Carnegie (not that I haven't respected him before--you could say that I just respected him even more), though a bit disillusioned about some aspects of his life. I'm willing to bet on the fact that Carnegie spent the majority of his life vacationing rather than actually *doing* business. I'm also rather turned off by the whole Homestead affair, which isn't that strange (I mean, who *wouldn't* be turned off by Homestead thing?). I've also found the man to be very hypocritical, which I didn't really expect so that's kind of a surprise.

I'm not gonna lie, I still like the man very much and I look up to him, but this biography gave me a portrait of 'Andrew Carnegie: The Man' instead of 'Andrew Carnegie: The Philanthropist' or 'Andrew Carnegie: The Self-Made Millionaire', and that is more than I could ever have asked.

Overall, a great book.

Samuel says

During the second half of the nineteenth century and into the early twentieth century, Horatio Alger's rags-to-riches fanned the flames of the national myth that any person, no matter their economic background, could make it rich in the free market and opportunity-prone economy of the United States. While many scholars have focused on how mythical this was--the rich and privileged had obvious head starts and unique advantages over lower class Americans and less well-connected immigrants--Andrew Carnegie is a living embodiment of someone who came to America in poverty and became not only wealthy, but one of the wealthiest men in the world in his lifetime. Unlike other men of wealth, Carnegie did not preach the virtues of "hard work." In fact, as he earned money, climbed the economic ladder, and took more and more managerial roles, he worked less and less hours and made more and more money in a reverse ratio. He coined and promoted the "Gospel of Wealth" to describe how taking opportunities and getting lucky on timing is what really leads one to financial success. While he was a shrewd businessman to be sure, he tried to distance himself from [union] workers, because he did not have patience or sincere empathy for them. Instead he publicly made statements to the effect that he took their side--well-paid workers ensures the best quality work--while scheming behind the scenes to ensure financial viability (thus he would cut wages as needed but slide work hours from 8-12 hours a day so that the workers could still get "enough" money and he wouldn't lose out on production).

Born in Scotland, his family moved to Pennsylvania in the mid-nineteenth century. Carnegie moved from manual labor to technical work (sending/receiving telegraph messages) to managerial work seeing to the construction of telegraph lines and then railroad lines. His BIG money, however, first came with oil investments right before the Civil War when its use--replacing whale oil--was first being developed. From their he invested and heavily. Eventually he would best become associated with establishing--dominating more accurately--the steel industry in Pittsburg. He was a philanthropist, donating funds particularly for public libraries and theaters with the idea that high culture and learnedness should be offered to the lower classes for free that they might benefit therefrom. He spent a good chunk of his time traveling in Europe as well as selling bonds there. He always had ambitions to catch up on what he felt was a cultural illiteracy of European high arts so that he could be a world-class writer. He did not marry until his 50s and had one daughter. Overall, he was a complicated man. He made tons of money and lived a life without want but felt duty-bound (not religiously or guilt-driven however) to donate his wealth to education and public services. He benefitted tremendously from wartime demands for steel, oil, and other investment returns during the Civil War and the Franco-Prussian war, but he traveled and promoted his peace program in an attempt to prevent world war. This is a very interesting person, and David Nasaw has done an admirable job researching and crafting this biography.

*(pp. 1-255, 309-427)

Clif says

There is nothing more fascinating than a life story. The dice are doubly thrown when sperm meets egg, first in the combination of genes through heredity, and at the same time in the time at which a life comes into being. At birth such powerful factors as temperament are already set, but what tests will temperament meet? Would the great people of one century be great if they were born in another? Almost certainly not. We are the result of our ancestry and also of our time.

There are some characteristics that are beneficial to success regardless of place and time - positive outlook, eagerness to do what is asked, curiosity, intelligence, dedication, etc. These are all things that Andrew Carnegie possessed. What employer doesn't like an employee who gets the job done quickly, thinks of ways to do the job better, puts those ideas to use and never complains?

Rags to riches stories, Carnegie's life being a perfect example, are not to be laughed at. Environment can be met and conquered. We all have to do it just to survive, but when the environment perfectly suits the personality, anything is possible. It's been said of some wealthy people that, were their source of wealth to be eliminated, they would soon be back in the money from another source. This is not fiction, though it is hardly the rule that most wealthy people would like to believe it is.

Author David Nasaw provides the perfect amount of commentary in this epic account of the fascinating life and times of a tiny (5 feet tall) but wonderfully personable man who was a giant of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Any biography needs a well informed author to intercede in her reporting of events to provide background, allowing the reader to fully appreciate the significance of whatever event in a life is being described. At the same time, the author cannot overshadow the individual about whom he writes. Finding the perfect balance, Nasaw makes this 850 page story a delight. You investigate U.S. history as you find out about the man.

Carnegie was overbearing in telling several U.S. presidents what to do and exactly how to do it, but was not one to trifle with as he had the attention and approval of the American public (not to mention his donations). His dedication after retirement to give away his fortune was popular, particularly since he did so in a very public way - donating over 1700 public library buildings and several times that many organs. In addition he started the teachers pension fund that we now know as TIAA and several foundations such as the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace that still operate today. Never at a loss for words, he delighted in answering reporters' questions and relentlessly appeared as a speaker before groups in the U.S. and Europe, where his sense of humor and direct manner always engaged his listeners.

Carnegie was a shrewd businessman. He vowed that he would never be part of any operation that he did not control and he kept his businesses closely held, owning the majority of stock (all privately held) himself. Though already wealthy before getting involved with steel, it was in steel that he became the wealthiest man in the world, due to his own excellent management that always poured earnings back into the company and kept his factories running to keep and win customers even when the market dropped and competitors stopped production. His ability to foresee the market for steel paid off again and again.

Yet he, like all of us, had blind spots. While he claimed that the market should rule, kept the wages of his workforce not a penny higher than that of his non-unionized competitors, and successfully eliminated unions from his factories, he hypocritically approved of the tariff on steel that protected his profits by keeping European competition out of the United States. He claimed to be a working man himself though he had only done manual labor for a year as a young man.

His relationship with Henry Clay Frick, who ran his steel and coke works while Carnegie spent the better part of each year, year after year, enjoying his estate in Scotland or traveling the world is almost a book within the book. Frick endured the sweat and stress and drew the hatred of working men during the infamous company vs labor confrontation at the Homestead mill, while Carnegie enjoyed the profits and gave the impression (a wrong one) that he was removed from the day to day decisions. Credit the telegraph with setting a wealthy man free.

He did not for a moment believe he was depriving the members of his labor force for his own benefit.

Instead, he felt that his wealth was better spent (after he personally had all he wanted) on what he considered the public good (libraries, institutes, etc.). Were his men to have better wages, they would only squander it on foolish things such as women and drink. That the thousands of workers who produced his wealth had no say in this was of no matter. In such a way does rationalization work for the wealthy.

From his birth well before the Civil War to his death shortly after the First World War, Carnegie's life was exactly the one he wanted to live. He lacked nothing, enjoyed almost every day and was appreciated not only by the many people he befriended but also by the public at large. He was upbeat to a fault, fun to be with, a perfect and very willing host at his estate and likely to bring a smile to any face, if only for his gnomish appearance.

And I haven't even mentioned his work for world peace, a major part the book!

Arminius says

Andrew Carnegie’s parents left Scotland due to a severe economic slump when America slid into recession and stopped buying imported Scottish Linen. Linen was the main industry of Dumfermline, Scotland. His father was a handloom weaver who was often out of work. So they decided to move to western Pennsylvania where relatives had emigrated years before in hopes of a better life.

Andrew was thirteen years of age when his family settled in Cresson, PA, near Pittsburgh. He was startled by the bustling cities activity and almost instantly saw the great potential of his new home.

With a father who still failed to get work, Andrew looked for his own job. He landed one in a factory. He soon afterwards found a better job. In the 1850’s, before telephones, messages were electronically wired to a telegraph machine in Morse code. An interpreter would translate the Morse code into text on sheets of paper. A messenger would then deliver this to the intended recipient. He applied for and received a messenger job at a busy office. He memorized streets and people so he became very quick at delivering these messages.

A point not to overlook was his affable personality. He was quite friendly and gregarious. On his deliveries he met a lot of people. But his intellect helped launch him into a promotion as the telegraphic operator, interpreting Morse coded messages.

This experience landed him a job as a telegraphic operator and assistant to Thomas Scott, one of the powerful Pennsylvania Railroad heads. He became a friend and confident of Thomas Scott. This relationship was the big break in Andrew’s life. Scott let Andrew into one of the best kept secrets of the rich in the late 1800’s –the stock market. Scott knew the best publicly held companies and always offered Andrew a piece of the pie. Andrew received tremendous dividend payments from these investments. He also earned a promotion to superintendent of the Pennsylvania Railroad. In this position, he learned all about the Rail Road.

After about three years he left the Rail Road and focused on buying companies that supported the Rail Road.

So he bought Oil, Coal, and Iron businesses. He understood that steel was about to become a major U.S. industry. So he adroitly turned his energies to the Steel industry.

He knew that Steel would become one of world's greatest assets so he created Edgar Thomas Steel works in Braddock, PA. In the 1860's steel work was commanded by skilled workman who knew exactly how to mix the components to eradicate impurities. Correspondingly, these skilled workmen got paid what they wanted. Andrew heard of a new way which would strip this power from these skilled workmen. So he traveled to England where they were already using a process called the Bessemer process. This process involved containers which blew air through pig iron which expelled the impurities that the iron contained.

Andrew learned that he could keep tract of his businesses by accurate accounting. This led him into a life of semi retirement at the age of 40. He moved to New York and followed his company from accounting reports while letting his brother and others manage the company. While in New York he sought the company of the wealthy and educated. It seems that he had to prove himself in intellectual circles. He often debated his companions on various issues but always with humor and an agreeable attitude. He also pursued a career in the literary field writing a few books and numerous articles for magazines. He uncharacteristically wrote articles in support of unions. But while unions were fighting for eight hour days his workers were forced to work 12 hour days.

He traveled to Europe numerous times and caroused with Europe's elite people. He not only wanted sophisticated friendships with these aristocrats but also knew these people could provide profitable business.

He often said he was lucky. In some ways he was right. But he was hard working and always fighting for the cheapest way to produce steel. He benefited from the protective tariffs of the 19th Century (which kept foreign steel out of America). He also benefited from the frenzy to use steel to produce railroad tracks which the U.S. government paid to him. This demand for steel by the U.S. government made him one of the wealthiest men in America.

As he aged he spent his living days trying to disperse his wealth throughout society. Two of his main philanthropic projects were the building of numerous libraries throughout the world and providing needed organs to many churches. He also set up and funded the Carnegie Institute for Science as well as museums. His one huge goal however was to establish World peace. He lobbied President Theodore Roosevelt, President Taft, Kaiser Wilhelm II and various English politicians to form a "League of Peace" in order to arbitrate conflicts between nations. All though they gave him an ear they never took him seriously. He was a pompous "know it all" and just as this attitude disturbed the greats of his day it left me with a slight dislike of this late 19th C and early 20th C titan.

Mikey B. says

I consumed this 800 page biography at home and while traveling in trains and planes. It's a huge book on a character whose name we now associate mostly with a few buildings and charity foundations. It was a long slog to consume – but the main reason I managed to complete it is the wonderful and lucid writing of the

author – David Nasaw. Throughout we are given a lively picture of the era and the personalities – from Andrew Carnegie, his mother, wife and daughter, his several business partners (such as Henry Clay Frick), and to the Presidents he sought to influence.

We follow Andrew Carnegie from a poor family that emigrated from Scotland to the U.S. (Pittsburgh) – and how he became a rich businessman – very rich. Overall I found him to be a quirky fellow. But he was no dour Scotsman – he was very talkative on a great range of subjects and was forever optimistic. He formed lasting friendships easily, mostly with men.

He had his mother live with him until she died in 1886, when he was 50 years old. Up to that time he had been pursuing, on and off, Louise Whitfield for several years. They finally married in 1887, she was 30 and he was 51. Their first and only child (Margaret) was born in 1897. Part of what I am trying to point out is that the guy, who was a millionaire several times over and would be quite ruthless in his business dealings – did not want to unsettle the relationship he had with his mother, by marrying the woman he loved.

Carnegie always seemed to be flying at a very high altitude above his factories - especially his iron and steel workers. He could not see the drudgery of their lives. He himself was very careful to not overwork himself – and was perpetually on vacations, whether in Europe or in the U.S. Carnegie was a traveling phenomenon - and crossed the Atlantic several times – and did one world tour. He was constantly advising his business associates of the importance of time off – and often would take them on his jaunts (all expenses paid for). But not his factory workers, who he kept on a 12 hour day, seven days a week. At one point the unions succeeded in getting an 8 hour day. Carnegie then proceeded to crush the unions – and it was back to lower salaries and a 12 hour day. Carnegie was no friend of the worker – but he was totally oblivious to this – thinking that he was beloved by them because he gave them employment.

Possibly he felt his donations, the building of libraries and philanthropies, made up for this. Many buildings, in Pittsburgh and New York, bare his name. The author does not explore the idea that Carnegie sought to immortalize himself through these grandiose structures. Many libraries in the U.S., Canada and the U.K. were started and funded by Carnegie. Interestingly he also believed that wealth should not be inherited – that it should be given away (or otherwise to be taxed by the government).

After he retired in the 1890’s (J.P. Morgan bought off his iron and steel companies) Andrew Carnegie became a tireless crusader for world peace. This is commendable. But like many business people who become involved in politics he overestimated his influence; perhaps not realizing that politicians would not behave like his salaried business partners. Presidents, like Teddy Roosevelt, became irritated of Carnegie’s sometimes fawning and other-times unstoppable flow of advice. Carnegie did not realize that he was being scorned and ridiculed behind his back. Mark Twain, a friend of Carnegie, also was given to caustic remarks.

The author gives a wide canvas – but as mentioned, the length is excessive.

Steven Peterson says

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, become 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. As he became successful, he and his mother enjoyed visiting the old family home in Scotland, Dunfermline.

He married quite late in life (after 50), but appears to have had a happy marriage; he also became a father later in life and appears to have done well in that role. By that time, he had withdrawn some from day to day running of his endeavors and spent much more time in New York and abroad than in Pittsburgh.

The book illustrates the ambitions of Carnegie to be more than an industrial baron. He wrote books, he hobnobbed with political leaders, authors, and scientists. He strove to be recognized as more than a wealthy individual. Nonetheless, he was a hard businessman. At one point, he took pride in developing "win-win" tactics with his employees; by the time of the Homestead strike, he had obviously moved in a different direction, as he supported a touch, hard-nosed attack on unions and employees.

Among his goals developed in the latter part of the 19th Century--to give away his rapidly developing fortune. He donated for development of libraries, he created an organization devoted to peace, he funded an organization aimed at advancing the sciences, he provided support for faculty and students at colleges, he endowed the Carnegie Corporation, he supported music, and so on.

In the end, this book, although very long, is well written, so that the pages fly by. Nasaw does a fair job portraying Carnegie, warts and all. He notes his tough stance against his own workers (after earlier having been praised as a friend of labor), his sometimes ostentatious efforts to become known as a man of letters, his desire to give world leaders a piece of his mind (irritating people like Teddy Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson in the process). In the end, despite his diminutive stature, he was a giant in American history.

David Yeoh says

Amazed at all the journals and letters revived and preserved. Long read but I can feel like I ve known this person and his character after the read. Portrays a very human like figure despite his magnate achievements. From impoverished immigrant uneducated beginnings to genius wealthiest Titan, with an unidentified source of ability to flick a switch- opinionated yet emotionally aware, unswayable, and ability to strategically

executed swiftly with reason and foresight logic. Almost a self thought grandmaster chess player in business. So much information and raises a lot of questions about his thinking process, but results is in the pudding. So many issues and constant problems thru his business, but when retired and worry free he slumped into slight depression, evident that problems are a sign of life. Wonderful I thought, so glad I picked it up.

Bill P. says

while watching a history channel series on industrial titans of the 19th and early 20th century, it occurred to me that I owned a copy of this bio of Andrew Carnegie as they interviewed the author, David Nasaw as one of their talking heads. While my lasting impression of the history channel series was that it deserved very low marks,(they also used Donald Trump as one of their modern day talking heads, that alone disqualifies the series as any serious review of history)David Nasaw's book was pretty exhaustive in his coverage of Carnegie's life.

For most of the book, I harbored the impression that Carnegie was a delusional hypocrite and indeed his single minded drive to amass wealth so he could give it away later came at the cost of treating his workers as virtual captive slaves. He never seemed to understand or care that his laborers were actual human beings and his breaking of the Homestead strike was the clearest demonstration of just how callous and oblivous he was. He may have given the Pittsburgh people a beautful library, but they were never given a day off to visit it as he insisted on 12 hour days, seven days a week.

This is an 800 page tome, and it certainly took me a long while to get thru it. The other striking thing about Carnegie was that he spent the vast majority of his life, after amassing his wealth at a very early age, on vacation. All the time sending directives to his managers about how to break the unions, fire anyone who might protest those twelve hours days. As I said, an ultimate hypocrite.

Then Nasaw turns the tables abit as Carnegie in his later years, completely out of the steel business and in the business of giving away his money, turns his attention to trying to bring the principle nations to a mutal table in the name of peace. He works himself to exhaustion in the cause, and when World War 1 breaks out, his heart breaks and the reader finally really feels sympathy for him.

Not a casual read, but one with a strong message for all the hedge fund and wall street millionaires. if you make your money on the backs of those under your control or at your mercy, the world will remember you for the asshole you are.
