

Gospel of Wealth Analysis

Grade Levels: 10, 11, 12

Time Commitment: 90 Minutes

Subject(s): U.S. History, Civics, Economics

Overview: This lesson introduces the question, “What is the government’s role in the economy?” Students will learn about the laws and norms of the American government and economy in the 18th and 19th centuries by analyzing Andrew Carnegie’s *Gospel of Wealth* (1889).

Materials:

- Student Handouts
- Smartboard or Projector
- Colored Pencils, Markers, or Crayons
- Printer
- Sticky Notes
- Blank Paper

Opener (15 Minutes):

1. Students should grab three sticky notes and answer three questions that are written or projected on the board.
 - i. What are the 3 most important things that the government pays for?
 - ii. What is something the government spends money on that it should not?
 - iii. What is something that the government does not fund, but should?
 - a. Students should write one answer per sticky note. Once completed, students will stick their notes under the corresponding answer.
2. Discuss as a class and tally the results. Ask students why they responded the way they did.

Activity (70 Minutes):

1. Using the Slides for Class Discussion (Pages 6-37), guide the class through a brief overview of the government’s role in the American economic system. Introduce Andrew Carnegie and his *Gospel of Wealth*.
 - a. **Note:** Be sure to preview the slides and hide or remove any that do not fit how you plan to conduct the lesson (i.e., answers to analysis questions).
2. Divide the students into small groups, and hand out the Excerpts of Carnegie’s *Gospel of Wealth* (Page 3) and the Student Analysis Sheets (Pages 4-5) for them to work together on.
 - a. Students can work at their own pace, or you can guide them through the excerpts using the Slides
3. Once the group completes the Analysis Sheets, tell them to create a Political Cartoon that demonstrates Carnegie’s beliefs about wealth, rich vs. poor, and/or the accumulation of wealth.
 - a. This can be done on paper with art supplies - Colored Pencils / Markers / Crayons
4. Once student groups have completed their political cartoons, have them post them around the room for a gallery walk. Allow all students to look at the cartoons, and have them vote on which one is “the best.”

Closer (5 Minutes):

1. Pose the following Exit Ticket:
 - a. Carnegie believed the rich should administer wealth for the public good rather than pass it down to heirs. Do you agree with this philosophy? Why or why not?

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Tips & Tricks for the Activity

- The political cartoon can be created digitally using various graphic design websites or tools your students have access to.
 - Alternatively, if your division allows student access to AI, students can create them digitally using a prompt that they write.
- The cartoons can be uploaded to Padlet if you prefer a digital platform.
- Student voting can be done however you see fit: likes, comments, hand voting, and tallying all work!

Extension Activity Ideas

- Have students find one additional primary source from the same era, and write a short paragraph explaining how that primary source supports or contradicts Carnegie's claims.
- Students can research and create one additional cartoon of other "Robber Barons" (such as Rockefeller, Vanderbilt, or Morgan).
- At the end of the activity, revisit the opener questions (What are the 3 most important things that the government pays for? What is something the government spends money on that it should not? What is something that the government does not fund, but should?). Have students compare how their answers might have changed or stayed the same.

Modified Activity Ideas

- Assign only one section of readings to the entire class to read and work on together.
 - Make it a class discussion rather than a group discussion, and have students draw individual cartoons after the class discussion.
- Provide vocabulary for students to review as they read their assigned section of the reading. Potential vocabulary might include:
 - **Tariff:** A tax placed on goods imported from another country, designed to make foreign products more expensive and protect local businesses.
 - **Bessemer Process:** A technological development that allowed for the mass production of steel at a lower cost.
 - **Social Darwinism:** The belief that the strongest or fittest individuals and businesses naturally rise to the top, often used to justify economic inequality.
 - **Paternalistic:** An approach where those in power, such as wealthy industrialists, make decisions for others, believing they know what is best for them, similar to a parent making decisions for a child.
 - **Retainers:** People who work for or serve a wealthy person or family.

Gospel of Wealth Analysis

Reading: Andrew Carnegie, *Gospel of Wealth* (1889)

Name: _____

Block: _____

Andrew Carnegie, the American steel titan, explains his vision for the proper role of wealth in American society:

Excerpt 1: The problem of our age is the administration of wealth, so that the ties of brotherhood may still bind together the rich and poor in harmonious relationship. The conditions of human life have not only been changed, but revolutionized, within the past few hundred years. In former days there was little difference between the dwelling, dress, food, and environment of the chief and those of his retainers. . . . The contrast between the palace of the millionaire and the cottage of the laborer with us today measures the change which has come with civilization.

This change, however, is not to be deplored, but welcomed as highly beneficial. It is well, nay, essential for the progress of the race, that the houses of some should be homes for all that is highest and best in literature and the arts, and for all the refinements of civilization, rather than that none should be so. Much better this great irregularity than universal squalor. Without wealth there can be no Maecenas. The “good old times” were not good old times. Neither master nor servant was as well situated then as today. A relapse to old conditions would be disastrous to both—not the least so to him who serves—and would sweep away civilization with it. ...

.....

Excerpt 2: The price which society pays for the law of competition, like the price it pays for cheap comforts and luxuries, is also great; but the advantages of this law are also greater still, for it is to this law that we owe our wonderful material development, which brings improved conditions in its train. But, whether the law be benign or not, we must say of it, as we say of the change in the conditions of men to which we have referred: It is here; we cannot evade it; no substitutes for it have been found; and 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. We accept and welcome, therefore, as conditions to which we must accommodate ourselves, great inequality of environment, the concentration of business, industrial and commercial, in the hands of a few, and the law of competition between these, as being not only beneficial, but essential for the future progress of the race. ...

.....

Excerpt 3: This, then, is held to be the duty of the man of Wealth: ... becoming the mere agent and trustee for his poorer brethren, bringing to their service his superior wisdom, experience, and ability to administer, doing for them better than they would or could do for themselves.

.....

Excerpt 4: The laws of accumulation should be left free; the laws of distribution free. Individualism will continue. But the millionaire will be but a trustee for the poor; entrusted for a season with a part of the increased wealth of the community, but administering it for the community far better than it did, or would have done, of itself. The best in minds will thus have reached a stage in the development of the race in which it is clearly seen that there is no mode of disposing of surplus wealth creditable to thoughtful and earnest men into whose hands it flows save by using it year-by-year for the general good. This day already dawns.

Gospel of Wealth Analysis

Student Analysis Sheet

Name: _____

Block: _____

INSTRUCTIONS:

Use the *Gospel of Wealth* reading to answer the following analysis questions.

For all short answers, please provide at least one complete sentence to answer the question AND a quote from the text that supports your answer.

1. Fill out the HIPP Chart below:

Historical Context: What is going on?	
Intended Audience: Who is it written for?	
Purpose: Why was this written?	
Point of View: What is the bias?	

2. In Excerpt 1, what does Carnegie like about the inequality that exists in his day?

3. Based on Excerpt 2, what is the benefit of competition as Carnegie sees it?

Gospel of Wealth Analysis

Student Analysis Sheet

Name: _____

Block: _____

4. Based on Excerpt 3, what does Carnegie believe about the ability of the poor?

5. Based on Excerpt 4, to what benefit does Carnegie see individualism and the personal accumulation of wealth?

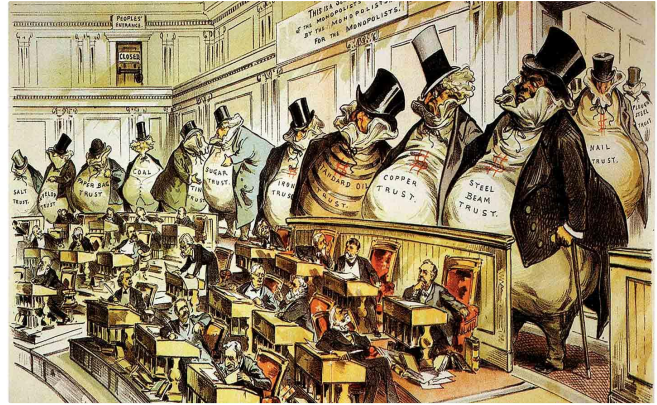
6. In your opinion, who should care for and ensure security for poor Americans if not the millionaires? Why?

7. Create a political cartoon to demonstrate Carnegie's beliefs about wealth, rich vs poor, and accumulation of wealth. Provide a description to explain what it is.

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

The U.S. Government's Role In The Economy

18th and 19th Century



LATE 1700S

A New Nation's Economy

1789

Constitutional Power to Tax

The newly ratified Constitution officially grants the federal government the power to levy taxes, establishing a vital financial foundation for the young republic.



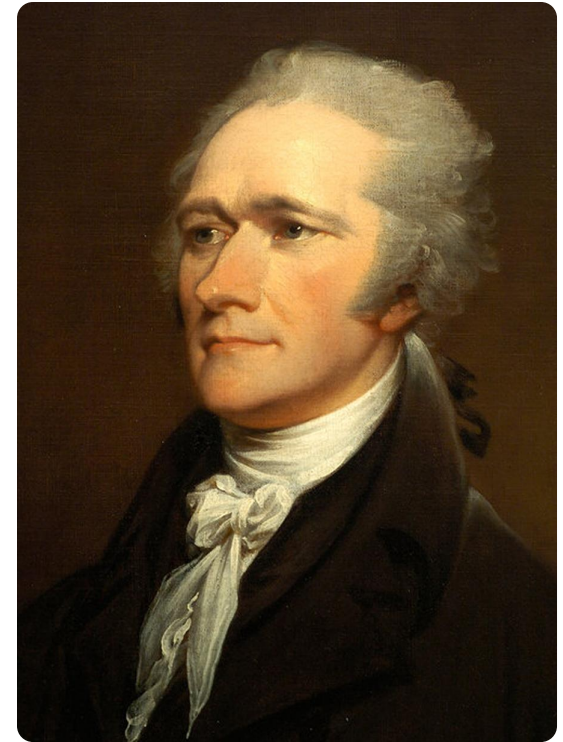
The Hamiltonian System

Alexander Hamilton strongly championed a national bank and protective tariffs to safeguard domestic industries, eventually paving the path toward the comprehensive American System.



The American System

An economic plan integrating a national bank, protective tariffs, and nationwide internal improvements like roads and canals.



Hamilton - Cabinet Battle #1



Tariffs



Protective Policy

A trade policy intended to "protect" and support domestic industries by making foreign competitors less viable.



Import Tax

A tax placed directly on imported goods, paid by the importer immediately upon arrival in the United States.



Consumer Cost

Importers typically pass these added tax costs directly onto consumers, resulting in raised retail prices.

How Tariffs Work: A Simple Case Study



Country A (Domestic)

\$12

A towel manufactured domestically in Country A is sold at its natural market price with no added duties.



Country B (Import)

\$10 + \$2 tax

A towel manufactured for \$10 in Country B, but hit with a 20% protective tariff (\$2) at the border, raising its final cost.



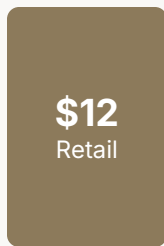
Equalized Market

\$12 retail

Both towels now retail at \$12, stripping Country B of its price advantage and shielding domestic producers in Country A.

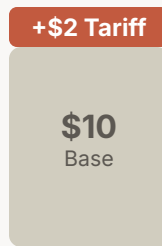
How Tariffs Work: A Simple Case Study

Towel Made in Country A (Domestic)



Sold at its natural market price with no added import duties.

Towel Made in Country B (Import)



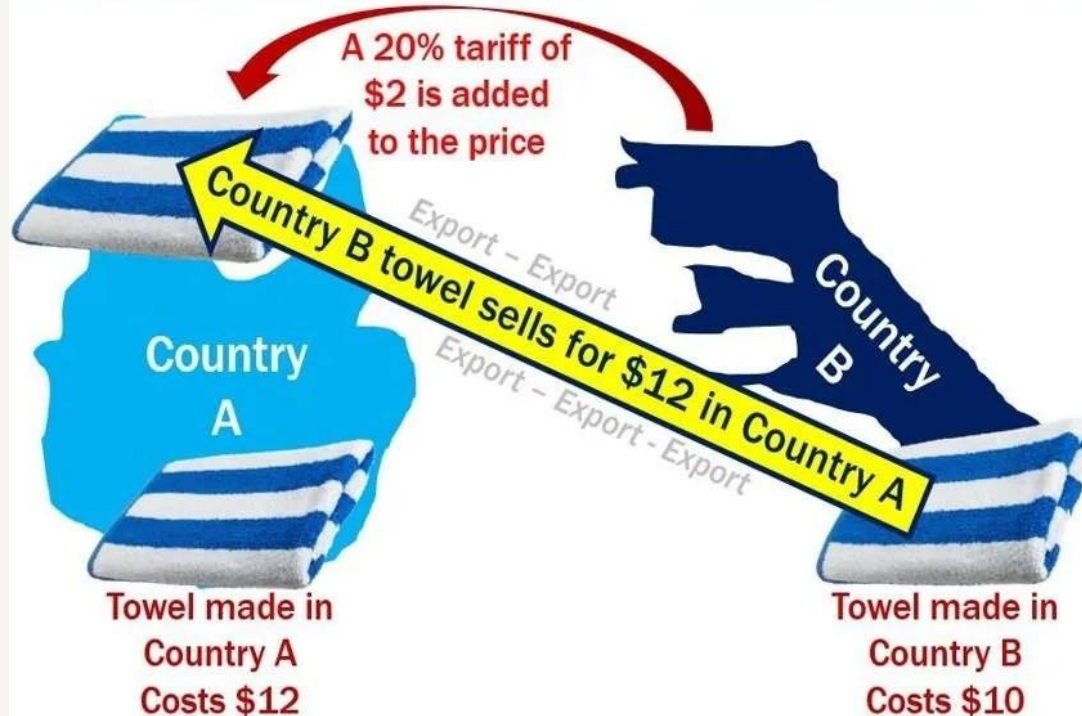
A 20% protective tariff is added at the border, raising the final cost.

Equalized Market in Country A

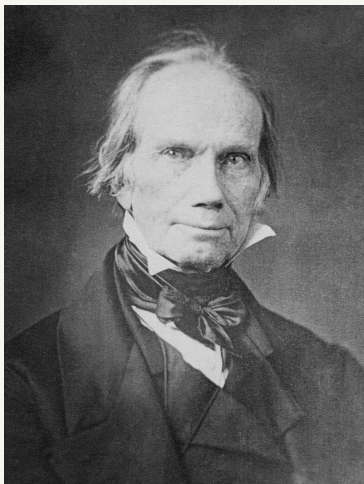


Both options now cost \$12.
This removes the import's price advantage.

How Tariffs Work



American System – Early 1800s



Henry Clay

Sponsor of the System



Protective Tariffs

Helped domestic companies compete with foreign imports. Highly popular in the industrial North, but unpopular in the agricultural South.



National Bank

Continued the charter of Hamilton's bank to create financial security and stability for the national currency and credit.



Infrastructure

Dedicated federal funding toward building essential internal improvements, including networks of roads, canals, and railways.

MARKET NORMS

Norms Of The Relationship



Minimal Taxation

Very low if any
income, corporate,
and sales tax.



Deregulated Market

Very little
government
regulation of
businesses.



Unprotected Labor

Very little
protections for
workers.

American System – Late 1800s



William McKinley
Champion of the New Era



McKinley Tariff

Introduced in 1890 to raise protective import duties to historic levels of nearly 50%, fostering industrial expansion in the North while heavily penalizing foreign competition.



Gold Standard

Defended strict monetary stability based exclusively on gold reserves, pushing back against the free silver movement to safeguard the value of the national currency and boost investor confidence.



Trust & Trade

Facilitated massive domestic consolidation and monopolistic corporate growth while leveraging reciprocal trade treaties to aggressively capture burgeoning international export markets.

MARKET NORMS

Norms Of The Relationship Remain



Minimal Taxation

Very low if any
income, corporate,
and sales tax.



Deregulated Market

Very little
government
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Unprotected Labor

Very little
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workers.

Let's Examine:

Andrew Carnegie's Vision for the Proper Role of Wealth in American Society



Andrew Carnegie: Steel Titan by late 1800s



Andrew Carnegie
Pioneer of American Steel



Vertical Integration

Controlled every single phase of the steelmaking process, from the raw iron ore mines and coal fields to the shipping railroads and manufacturing mills.



Bessemer Process

Adopted the revolutionary Bessemer process early at his Edgar Thomson Steel Works, drastically lowering production costs and outproducing British manufacturers.



Carnegie Steel Co.

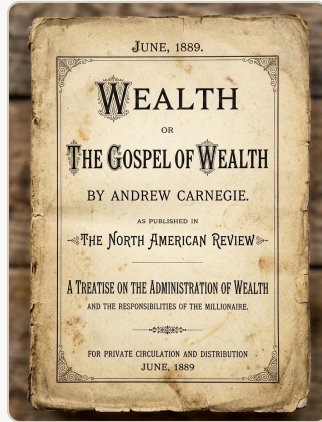
By 1889, his consolidated industrial empire was producing more steel than the entire United Kingdom, laying the infrastructure for modern America.

www.demcapclassroom.org

Origins of the *Gospel of Wealth* (1889)



Andrew Carnegie
The Gilded Age
Titan



"Wealth" Essay
Published June
1889

Extreme Wealth Inequality

Industrialization created a vast, unprecedented chasm between Gilded Age millionaires and struggling factory workers, demanding a new moral framework for extreme wealth.

Social Darwinism & Trusteeship

Rejecting pure charity and socialism, Carnegie sought to justify intense competition while framing the wealthy as responsible "trustees" bound to administer surplus fortunes for the public good.

H.I.P.P. for the *Gospel of Wealth* (1889)

Historical Context

What is going on?

Intended Audience

Who is this written for?

Purpose

Why was this written?

Point of View

What is the bias?

H.I.P.P. for the *Gospel of Wealth* (1889)

Historical Context

What is going on?

During the Gilded Age, rapid industrialization led to unprecedented wealth accumulation and extreme economic inequality. This stark division between industrial titans and struggling laborers demanded a new moral and social framework.

Intended Audience

Who is this written for?

The essay was primarily addressed to fellow wealthy elites and industrialists of the Gilded Age, urging them to act as responsible trustees. It also targeted the general public to justify the competitive capitalist system.

Purpose

Why was this written?

Carnegie wrote this to defend the accumulation of vast wealth through competition while prescribing a duty for the rich to distribute surplus responsibly. He aimed to promote public-minded philanthropy to prevent social unrest and socialism.

Point of View

What is the bias?

The perspective is that of Andrew Carnegie, a highly successful Gilded Age titan who championed capitalism and Social Darwinism. He maintained a paternalistic bias, viewing wealthy elites as uniquely capable 'trustees' to administer fortunes.

Carnegie's *Gospel of Wealth* (1889)

Excerpt #1

The problem of our age is the administration of wealth, so that the ties of brotherhood may still bind together the rich and poor in harmonious relationship. The conditions of human life have not only been changed, but revolutionized, within the past few hundred years. In former days there was little difference between the dwelling, dress, food, and environment of the chief and those of his retainers. . . . The contrast between the palace of the millionaire and the cottage of the laborer with us today measures the change which has come with civilization.

This change, however, is not to be deplored, but welcomed as highly beneficial. It is well, nay, essential for the progress of the race, that the houses of some should be homes for all that is highest and best in literature and the arts, and for all the refinements of civilization, rather than that none should be so. Much better this great irregularity than universal squalor. Without wealth there can be no Maecenas. The "good old times" were not good old times. Neither master nor servant was as well situated then as today. A relapse to old conditions would be disastrous to both-not the least so to him who serves-and would sweep away civilization with it....

In excerpt 1, what does Carnegie like about the inequality that exists in his day?

In excerpt 1, what does Carnegie like about the inequality that exists in his day?

Carnegie welcomes economic inequality as highly beneficial and essential for the progress of the human race.

He argues that concentrated wealth is necessary to cultivate and preserve "all that is highest and best in literature and the arts, and for all the refinements of civilization".

Ultimately, he asserts that this unequal state of "great irregularity" is far better than "universal squalor," raising the standard of living for both master and servant alike.

Carnegie's *Gospel of Wealth* (1889)

Excerpt #2

The price which society pays for the law of competition, like the price it pays for cheap comforts and luxuries, is also great; but the advantages of this law are also greater still, for it is to this law that we owe our wonderful material development, which brings improved conditions in its train. But, whether the law be benign or not, we must say of it, as we say of the change in the conditions of men to which we have referred: It is here; we cannot evade it; no substitutes for it have been found; and 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. We accept and welcome, therefore, as conditions to which we must accommodate ourselves, great inequality of environment, the concentration of business, industrial and commercial, in the hands of a few, and the law of competition between these, as being not only beneficial, but essential for the future progress of the race....

Based on excerpt 2, what is the benefit of competition as Carnegie sees it?

Based on excerpt 2, what is the benefit of competition as Carnegie sees it?

Carnegie argues that the law of competition is highly beneficial because it drives society's "wonderful material development" and overall progress.

He asserts that while competition can be hard on individuals, it is ultimately best for the race because it ensures the survival of the fittest in every department.

By accommodating these natural laws, society experiences continuous advancement and improved conditions for everyone.

Carnegie's *Gospel of Wealth* (1889)

Excerpt #3

This, then, is held to be the duty of the man of Wealth: ... becoming the mere agent and trustee for his poorer brethren, bringing to their service his superior wisdom, experience, and ability to administer, doing for them better than they would or could do for themselves.

Excerpt #4

The laws of accumulation should be left free; the laws of distribution free. Individualism will continue. But the millionaire will be but a trustee for the poor; entrusted for a season with a part of the increased wealth of the community, but administering it for the community far better than it did, or would have done, of itself. The best in minds will thus have reached a stage in the development of the race in which it is clearly seen that there is no mode of disposing of surplus wealth creditable to thoughtful and earnest men into whose hands it flows save by using it year-by-year for the general good. This day already dawns.

Carnegie's *Gospel of Wealth* (1889)

Excerpt #3

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Based on excerpt 3, what does Carnegie believe about the ability of the poor?

Based on excerpt 3, what does Carnegie believe about the ability of the poor?

Carnegie believes that the poor lack the wisdom, experience, and ability required to administer wealth or make optimal decisions for themselves. Consequently, he asserts that wealthy individuals should act as trustees to manage resources on their behalf, doing for them "better than they would or could do for themselves".

Carnegie's *Gospel of Wealth* (1889)

Excerpt #4

The laws of accumulation should be left free; the laws of distribution free. Individualism will continue. But the millionaire will be but a trustee for the poor; entrusted for a season with a part of the increased wealth of the community, but administering it for the community far better than it did, or would have done, of itself. The best in minds will thus have reached a stage in the development of the race in which it is clearly seen that there is no mode of disposing of surplus wealth creditable to thoughtful and earnest men into whose hands it flows save by using it year-by-year for the general good. This day already dawns.

Based on excerpt 4, to what benefit does Carnegie see individualism and the personal accumulation of wealth?

Based on excerpt 4, to what benefit does Carnegie see individualism and the personal accumulation of wealth?

Carnegie argues that free individualism and the personal accumulation of wealth are beneficial because they place resources into the hands of highly capable individuals who can act as "trustees". He believes these wealthy individuals can administer and distribute this accumulated surplus for the general good far more effectively than the community could do for itself.

Your Opinion: Who should care for and ensure security for poor Americans if not the millionaires? Why?

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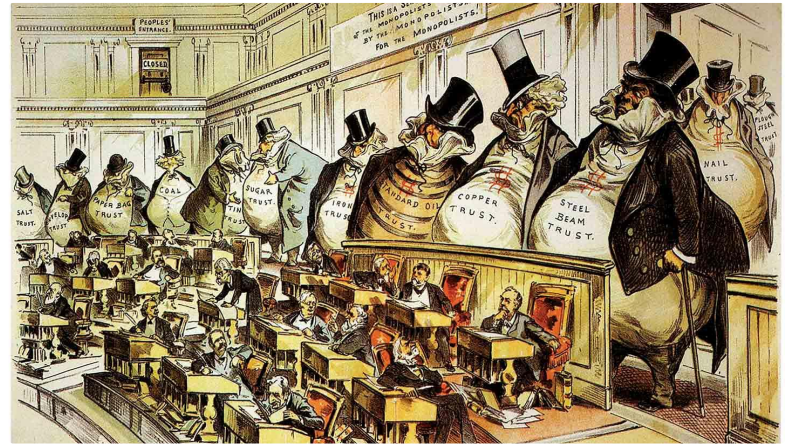
Potential perspectives to consider:

- **The Federal & State Government:** Implementing structured social safety nets, healthcare systems, and welfare programs funded through progressive taxation to ensure systematic support.
- **Local Communities & Mutual Aid:** Relying on grassroots neighborhood networks, cooperative organizations, and community action groups for direct, immediate assistance.
- **Religious Institutions & Non-Profits:** Expanding the role of charities, churches, and private NGOs that specialize in localized humanitarian aid and rehabilitation.
- **The Free Market & Social Enterprises:** Creating robust economic opportunities, fair-wage labor standards, and inclusive business models that inherently minimize poverty.
- **A Shared-Responsibility Model:** Integrating public policy safeguards with private-sector initiative and civic engagement to form a resilient safety net.

Your Turn -

Create A Political Cartoon To Demonstrate Carnegie's Beliefs About Wealth, Rich Vs Poor, And Accumulation Of Wealth.

Provide A Description To Explain What Is.



This Lesson Plan was:

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DCTI 2025 Participant

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DCTI 2024 Participant