

State & Local

Prof: Philanthropy has made U.S. rich, powerful

Founders' biblical values engendered social justice ideals

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The longstanding American tradition of altruism has been a major factor in making the United States a world leader and an international financial powerhouse, according to an expert on the history and economics of American philanthropy.

Dr. Claire Gaudiani, director of the graduate program in philanthropic studies at New York University, made the assertion "that Americans are not generous because we are rich, but rich because we are generous" in an Oct. 26 program, "How American Philanthropy can Save Capitalism," at Anshe Emeth Memorial Temple in New Brunswick.

Gaudiani said the belief that "we are all in this together" — as laid out in the Declaration of Independence and as propagated by religious traditions that mandate caring for

the less fortunate — has made education available to the poor, built museums, and has given rise to the inspiration and funding for scientific and medical advances and the ingenuity that has driven business and industry.

"How many of you know that the airline industry was founded by philanthropy?" Gaudiani asked and went on to explain how early aviation researchers were completely funded by private individuals.

That "desire to invest in each other" has made its way into the value system and culture of America, said Gaudiani, the author of the recently published *The Greater Good: How Philanthropy Drives the American Economy and Can Save Capitalism*, and of *Generosity Rules! A Guidebook to Giving*, a handbook for personal generosity.

This belief system states, "I live in a country where the operative culture says that I will watch out for you and you watch out for me and mine," said Gaudiani.

A director of the Henry Luce Foundation and a former president of Connecticut College in New London, Gaudiani cited numerous instances of business leaders who rose to power as the result of generosity of others, members of a previous generation who had undertaken charitable endeavors. The



Dr. Claire Gaudiani discusses how philanthropy has helped make the United States an industrial giant and world leader in an Oct. 26 talk at Anshe Emeth Memorial Temple in New Brunswick.

Photo by Debra Rubin

next generation, in turn, has continued to purvey that tradition of generosity while using its skills and financial resources to benefit American society as a whole.

Pursue justice

This American tradition of philanthropy, said Gaudiani, is rooted in the biblical com-

mandments to "love the Lord thy God" and "to love thy neighbor as thyself" and in *Deuteronomy*, where it is commanded, "Justice, justice you shall pursue, that you may live and inherit the land which the Lord your God gave you."

"That's very complicated — that generosity toward your neighbor is justice so that you may thrive in the land," said Gaudiani. "The notion that through these actions we have the opportunity to do *tikun olam* [repairing the world], to make it whole. That is the other side of us as Americans. We live in a world grounded by scripture."

Moreover, by "signing up" as a member of this society and its First Amendment ideals of freedom of speech and religion, Gaudiani said, fellow Americans "are willing to die for your right to practice Judaism, just as you would do for me as a Roman Catholic."

The founding fathers, although limited by the reality of the 18th century and its disregard for the rights of blacks and women, were influenced by those biblical teachings and crafted the Declaration of Independence to create "a culture of mutuality."

"It is not so different from the beautiful commitment this synagogue has made to the city of New Brunswick," said Gaudiani, pointing out that the congregation's *tzedaka* programs of aiding the poor and homeless are a living example of this blending of societal and religious traditions.

In this framework, the previously unheard of idea of setting up scholarships so that the sons of the "blacksmith or baker" could attend elite institutions of higher learning quickly took hold in America.

And it was the women — although excluded from voting and other rights afforded to men — who were given the responsibility by the founding fathers for transmitting the morals and virtues of society.

That moral imperative led women to fund "cent societies" through which they would contribute a penny to help "widows, orphans, and prostitutes," set up schools to teach slave children to read, and walk door to door, pushing baby strollers, to raise funding for polio research.

This spirit of generosity has seen the United States through tough times in the past, and Gaudiani predicted it would be the force that would enable the country to survive the current economic crisis.

"It is even more important that you be generous now," she said.

Justice and prosperity

DR. CLAIRE GAUDIANI said one of her favorite examples of the commingling of business ingenuity and philanthropy to advance American society is that of Julius Rosenwald, founder of Sears Roebuck & Co.

As Rosenwald was looking to expand his chain of stores beyond Chicago, he was confronted with a problem in the South, where the rate of illiteracy was high, especially among blacks, and salaries were too low to develop a clientele to support a Sears.

However, Gaudiani said, Rosenwald had been heavily influenced by his rabbi, Emil Hirsch, and his emphasis on Maimonides' eight steps of *tzedaka*. He decided rather than abandon the South, he would fund schools to educate African-American children.

Understanding that people needed to be invested in their own future, he agreed to match any money contributed by the

African-American community.

"This was the 1880s, and former slaves gave everything they had to the next generation — they came with their entire life savings," said Gaudiani. "Do you know how many Rosenwald schools were built across the South? — 5,357. Julius Rosenwald's approach was that you had to respect the dignity of these people by allowing them to give."

This "transformative" move created both "justice and prosperity," which allowed Sears to thrive while educating generations of children. The effort still resonates today, said Gaudiani.

She recalled recently telling Rosenwald's story to a group of educators in New Orleans, when an African-American woman in the first row began to cry. When Gaudiani asked what had moved her to tears, the woman said she herself had

attended a Rosenwald school. When Gaudiani asked if anyone else there had also attended a Rosenwald school, 12 people stood up.

"Julius Rosenwald changed the point of

'You had to respect the dignity of people by allowing them to give.'

view of what it is to be an American," Gaudiani said.

"His generosity created prosperity. More than 100 years later, America is still reaping the benefits of Julius Rosenwald's generosity." — DEBRA RUBIN

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