

## What Money Can Buy



*Walker at the Ford headquarters. "In the sixties, when you came to see the president," he says, "it was meant to be intimidating." Photograph by Andrew Moore for The New Yorker*

The urge to change the world is normally thwarted by a near-insurmountable barricade of obstacles: failure of imagination, failure of courage, bad governments, bad planning, incompetence, corruption, fecklessness, the laws of nations, the laws of physics, the weight of history, inertia of all sorts, psychological unsuitability on the part of the would-be changer, the resistance of people who would lose from the change, the resistance of people who would benefit from it, the seduction of activities other than world-changing, lack of practical knowledge, lack of political skill, and lack of money. Lack of money is a stubborn obstacle, but not as hopelessly unyielding as some of the others, and so would-be world-changers often set out to overcome it. Some try to raise money, but that can be depressing and futile. Others try to make money, but it's hard to make enough. There is a

third, more reliable way to overcome this obstacle, however, and that is to give away money that has already been made by somebody else, and has already been allocated to world-changing purposes. This is the way of the grant-makers of the Ford Foundation.

Ford's grant-makers are employed "for the general purpose of advancing human welfare," so their work requires determining what human welfare consists of and how best to advance it. This being no simple matter, they spend a great deal of time on it and frequently revise their conclusions. Of course, even with money, changing the world is difficult. The grant-makers know that many of their ideas will not work, and that even those which do will only go so far, because of all the other obstacles. Still, compared to others with similar ambitions, they possess a rare and heady blend of power and freedom: they are beholden to no one, neither consumers nor shareholders nor clients nor donors nor voters, and they have half a billion dollars each year to spend on whatever they like.

"Good morning, Ford Foundation, and Happy New Year!" Darren Walker cried, to loud applause. "How great it is to be at the Ford Foundation on January 6th and doing the work we do!"

Walker, the foundation's tenth president, who took over in 2013, stood on a stage in the Ford Foundation building, on East Forty-third Street, in New York City, but his beaming face also appeared on screens thousands of miles away, in Ford offices throughout the world: in Mexico City and Rio and Santiago; in Cairo and Lagos, Nairobi and Johannesburg; in Delhi, Beijing, and Jakarta. The auditorium in which he stood was a relic of Ford's past, still furnished with chocolate tufted-leather seats from 1967, with sliding brass ashtrays under the armrests. To the right of the stage was written a series of words that described Ford's hoped-for future: Justice, Opportunity, Voice, Dignity, Creativity, Change, Visionaries. Walker himself was beloved for his democratic exuberance, manifested both in his vivacious clothing (his jaunty ties, his pocket squares, his pig cufflinks) and in his untiring enthusiasm.

"There is a lot going on at the Ford Foundation," he declared. "So fasten your seat belts!"

Arriving in his office, Walker found that it was filled with Kenyans. A Kenyan delegation was to meet with Michelle Obama there the following day, and an advance party of ten or twelve people had come to inspect the room. The advance party wanted to determine who would sit where: Would Walker sit at the head of the table, as he usually did, or would he sit at the side of the table, facing the First Lady, so that neither took precedence? And,

if the latter, would the chair at the head of the table sit empty, or would it be removed and put somewhere else? The delegation wanted to know how many other chairs there would be around the table and, if more chairs became necessary, whether they would be added to the table, in ambiguous relation to those already there, or placed in an unequivocally secondary tier around the periphery of the room. Being the president of a social-justice foundation, Walker normally considered it his business to disrupt such hierarchical modes of thinking, but he also considered it his business to be sensitive to the differing requirements of other cultures, and, besides, he always liked to be a welcoming host, and so, gently buffeted by these conflicting impulses, he chose the middle path of benevolent passivity and stood, hands clasped, and smiled at the Kenyans as they circled his table.

He had done his best to make his office a place where this sort of hierarchical etiquette was hard to take seriously. He had recently disseminated a short video of himself dancing and leaping about there, with uncommon balletic skill, to the tune of Pharrell Williams's song "Happy." On his bookshelves were a furry red Elmo; a yellow cow; a shiny blue miniature Jeff Koons puppy; a miniature yellow-and-green rickshaw from Delhi; a miniature red rickshaw from Jakarta; a large framed portrait of his English bulldog, Mary Lou; a small framed portrait of his partner, David Beitzel; and a couple of small gold Buddhas, among many other objects that he'd picked up on his nearly constant travels. There were, in addition, things that expressed his deeper commitments: a photograph of Martin Luther King, Jr., marching from Selma to Montgomery, in 1965, but in a quiet moment—King looking off to one side, Ralph Abernathy walking beside him, reading a newspaper. The Ford building was shortly to be renovated, and he had decreed that his splendid presidential suite—which now included a kitchen, a shower, and a conference room that sat forty—should be reduced to half its size. "In the sixties when you came to see the president, it was meant to be intimidating," Walker says. "It was like you were being presented to the emperor. But it's not me. I'm not a white guy from the Harvard class of 1955!"

Ford had recently decided, in fact, that inequality was the problem of the times—more than climate change, for instance, or extremism. The foundation had been accused for years of spreading itself too thin. (The budget for 2015 was five hundred and eighteen million, but it was amazing how fast you could run through half a billion dollars with a world to fix.) So now it was going to do something dramatic: it was going to work on inequality and nothing else. The crucial task, everyone agreed, was to "disrupt the drivers of inequality." In order to do that, it was necessary to ascertain what those drivers were,

so program officers all around the world had been instructed to write reports identifying the chief drivers of inequality in their regions. After those reports were collected, many, many meetings were held in the conference rooms of the New York office.



*"I spy something red."* [Buy the print »](#)

Some big changes that were not negotiable had been made already: the pursuit of "Internet rights" was to be added to Ford's portfolio, and L.G.B.T. rights in the U.S. was to be subtracted, since that issue had achieved such momentum that Ford's money could be better spent elsewhere. But there were still dozens of issues the grant-makers wanted to work on, and it was difficult to decide how to characterize the relationships between them. Should Women's Agency and Racial/Ethnic/Indigenous Justice be grouped under the larger heading of Inclusion? What about Human Rights Architecture and Imagining Inclusive Capitalism? The main category they were working on was "thematic areas," in which Ford would seek to disrupt drivers of inequality by means of strategies. There was to be a minimum of four and a maximum of eight thematic areas, with a minimum budget of twenty million dollars apiece. But should a thematic area be required to disrupt more than one driver of inequality, or was one enough? Did each thematic area lend itself to a race, class, and gender analysis? Did each strategy support the agency and voice of marginalized groups? Besides the thematic areas and strategies, there were also "lines of work," "sets," "challenges," and "lenses," and there was a certain lack of clarity on the

difference between these things. The program officers were practical people, but these negotiations had ensnared them for months.

One person wanted to know why they kept talking about “disrupting,” since it was so negative. Negativity in the meetings was rare. There were some disagreements, but on the whole the tone was one of patient encouragement. (“I want to thank you for putting this so clearly, and so well.” “I feel like I heard a number of helpful building blocks.”) It was important to Ford to model, in its way of working, the kind of society it wanted to produce: less unequal, more inclusive—a safe space with enough room for everyone’s questions and problems. It was felt that this was not only intrinsically good but also insured that everyone felt personally invested in the result. On the other hand, the commitment to niceness had a tendency to muffle aggressive criticism. “The culture of overweening politeness in American philanthropy is leading to our ruin,” Albert Ruesga, the president of the Greater New Orleans Foundation, recently fumed to the *Chronicle of Philanthropy*. “It keeps me from telling you, in the clearest possible terms, that your five-year, \$2-million initiative to end homelessness is well-intentioned magical thinking at best and boneheaded ignorance at worst.”

Besides questions of categorization, the program officers debated questions of tactics. For instance, how much money should be devoted to work that helped people right away, such as encouraging self-determination in girls from traditional societies, and how much to long-term, long-shot prospects for change, such as art? Ford believed in supporting art as a means of disrupting dominant narratives, but art didn’t always do what you wanted it to. Was it better to work on issues that people were currently agitated about, or to draw attention to ones that nobody was addressing? Was it better to be bold and risk failure, or to give money to a project that had a good chance of success? And how soon would success have to happen in order to count—five years? Ten? Was it better to be patient or impatient? On the one hand, social justice wasn’t the sort of thing that happened overnight; on the other hand, there had to be some point at which a program could be declared a failure and cut off, or there would be no accountability at all.

This issue of accountability had become more pressing in the previous decade. In the early days, Ford program officers had spent a lot of time coming up with projects that had the potential to be important, or seeking out urgent problems and solutions that seemed as though they ought to work. But, once the money was spent, they didn’t always assess whether the projects had, in fact, turned out to be important, or whether the solutions

that ought to have worked had solved the urgent problems or not. This was in part because of a rule of thumb at Ford that program officers should stay in their jobs no more than eight years, lest they become complacent. Thus, by the time a project was established enough to be evaluated, its progenitor had moved on, and the replacement was not usually sufficiently interested in his predecessor's enterprises to spend time and money figuring out whether they had succeeded. "The front end is where people spent their time, and the back end they didn't," Lincoln Chen, the president of the China Medical Board, who ran Ford's Delhi office in the nineteen-eighties, says. "Evaluation is very time-demanding and costly. Individual projects were monitored, but they weren't independently or scientifically evaluated. I can tell you what I thought was successful, but in many cases evaluations require a generation, or a decade or more. For instance, the institute of management in Ahmedabad is a great success, but it would have taken a decade or longer to know that. The model villages were less successful, but we didn't know they weren't working for ten or fifteen years."

Some critics had attempted to address these problems in foundation work by promoting what they called "strategic philanthropy." Donors ought to behave more like investors, they argued. A prudent investor would never put his money into a company and just leave it there, hoping for the best: he would track his returns, and if they did not meet his expectations he would withdraw his funds and invest them somewhere else. Donors ought likewise to evaluate their programs with precise metrics in order to make sure of a good return on their charitable dollar. "Outcome-oriented philanthropic buyers look for the best service in their areas of interest for the lowest cost," Paul Brest, the former president of the Hewlett Foundation, wrote in a strategic-philanthropy manifesto. "Philanthropic investors provide risk capital to social entrepreneurs."

The idea that foundations should evaluate their projects more carefully was not particularly controversial, but how they should do that was far from clear. Should a foundation try to guide and steer its grantees, as venture capitalists did with startups? Or should it trust that grantees, who were actually doing the work in the field, knew best what worked and what didn't? Most grantees were not startups, and were liable to become resentful if foundation officers started meddling—though of course they would hide that resentment for fear of losing the grant. And, resentment aside, if a foundation started telling its grantees what to do, would it then become an initiative-crushing central planner, stifling the very grassroots innovation and practical know-how that it purported to encourage? On the other hand, if a foundation took a hands-off approach, was it any



more than a writer of checks?

One way foundations tended to be hands-on was by sponsoring particular projects. Ford had been criticized for years for giving small project grants rather than larger grants for general operating support that would enable an organization to pay its rent and thrive in the long term. The program officers were determined to do better on that front. On the other hand, they knew that if you gave *too* large a grant an organization would expand rapidly to take advantage of it, because if the money wasn't used it wouldn't be replenished; but then you had created a totally new type of organization that was dependent on grants and, if they were withdrawn, would collapse. You could drown an organization with too much money the way you could drown a plant.

In addition to the issue of interference, there were other questions that troubled strategic philanthropy. If donors and nonprofits felt that they had to measure their results, might that not lead them to focus on limited sorts of things that could be measured precisely: administering vaccines, for instance, rather than attempting to improve over-all health; or counting missed days of school rather than evaluating student achievement? And what would happen to things that could not properly be measured at all, such as oppression, or justice? What about initiatives whose success could take decades to become evident, such as social movements or the erosion of cultural norms?



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All these problems were not so bothersome for development foundations. A development foundation, like Gates or Rockefeller, generally had certain concrete things that it wanted to get done, and these things could often be measured. It might want to drill wells, for instance, or disseminate an improved type of seed; it might want to immunize babies in a

given region, or administer deworming medicine. But Ford was not a development foundation: it was a social-justice foundation, and a social-justice foundation was concerned more with amorphous entities such as fairness and exclusion than with material well-being.

There tended to be a slight flaring of the nostrils at Ford at the way some other people used the term "development," which implied that there was only one way for a country to succeed—and that was to become like the developed world, with its cars and its air-conditioning and its secularism and its nuclear power and its shopping malls. It implied that the developed world got that way through "industrialization," a largely benign matter of improving technology. There was no reminder, in the optimistic and apolitical notion of "development," that industrialization had depended upon slavery and colonial plunder in the past, or that it might lead to environmental disaster in the future.

Ford thought of itself as the sort of foundation whose staff did not dictate what its grantees should do but sought out grantees with ideas and methods of their own: that was the social-justice way. But, ironically, this meant that it required far more staff than it would if it came up with its own ideas and hired people to execute them. Coming up with ideas to be executed was the sort of thing that could be done in a meeting at headquarters; but finding small, local N.G.O.s and community leaders and artists and researchers to fund in dozens of countries around the world required offices in those countries, with program staff and administrative staff and maintenance staff and gardeners and drivers, plus money for travel and hosting meetings and all the rest of it. Ford's expenses were enormous: more than a billion dollars in the past decade. In 2013, it spent around eighty million on personnel (both staff and consultants) and twenty million on office space, travel, and meetings. Its budgets weren't out of line with those of other large foundations, and its staff wasn't more lavishly paid, but, still, the numbers were startling. Humility was expensive.

One of the reasons that Walker was an ideal president for the Ford Foundation was that his life was an example of just the sort of social transformation that Ford's programs were intended to produce. He was born in 1959 in a charity hospital in Lafayette, Louisiana. His father had left by that time—the man on his birth certificate was someone else. When he was three or four, his mother moved the family to Ames, Texas, where her Aunt Ida lived, and Aunt Ida babysat the kids while his mother got trained as a nurse's aide in Liberty, the white town next to Ames. At one point, a young woman with a clipboard knocked on the



door looking for poor, rural black children, and asked his mother if she wanted to enroll her son in a new government program called Head Start. She said yes, and he was placed in a preschool in a nearby church, where he learned to read. Sometime later, his mother moved the family again, to Goose Creek, an oil town east of Houston.

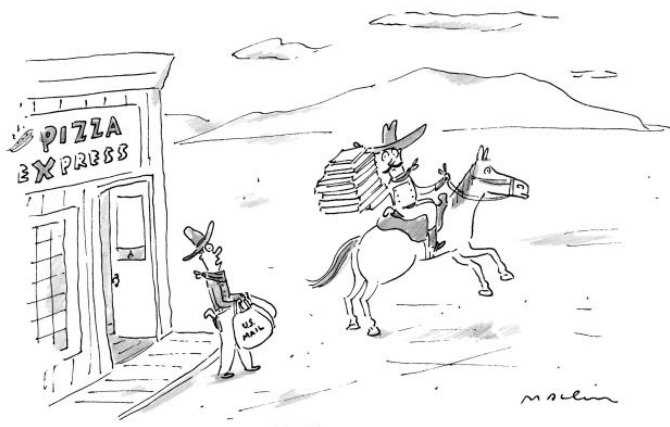
His great-uncle Daddy C, who lived near Goose Creek, saw everything in terms of race. He said that white people would never allow a black person to succeed. Daddy C had grown up in a small Texas town where the schools for black kids went only through third grade; after that, you went to work in the fields. When he married Walker's great-aunt Big, they moved to Houston, and he got a job as a porter and shoeshine at a gas company. Walker's mother never scolded him, rarely even told him what to do, but Daddy C was more old-fashioned and kept him in line. Walker was always asking questions, always talking, always hyperactive and jumping around, and grownups found all this energy hard to take. If he saw someone get hurt, he would start to cry, and grownups didn't like that, either—boys weren't supposed to be so sensitive.

One day when he was in third grade, something happened at school and he got very upset, and was crying and careening around, and his teacher told him to sit down and he didn't. After class, the teacher, Mrs. Majors, called him over. He remembered what she said to him all his life. "She said, 'Darren, you are going to have to come to grips with what you want to be. Because if you continue acting out the way you are acting out, you are not going to amount to anything. You're getting in trouble too much, and little black boys like you who get in trouble a lot are not going to do well in this society. But there is a different road for you, because you are smart, you read well, you have a thirst for learning.' And I had never heard this term, but she told me, 'You need to understand self-control.' And I realized then that I needed an internal mechanism to discipline my natural instincts." He started telling himself inside his head that he had to have self-control, he had to have self-control, and when he felt like talking non-stop in class, or raising his hand for the fourth time, or getting up out of his seat when he wasn't supposed to, he didn't. And as he got older he saw that he was the only black boy in the advanced track at school, and that the black boys who did not get hold of themselves, and did not have self-control, were banished from the school's mainstream and put in special ed and never came back.

He had some cousins who lived in Rayne, Louisiana, the small town where his mother was born, and those cousins' lives turned out very differently from his. He used to visit them in the summer. They lived in the black part of Rayne, which had sewage ditches that ran

along the roads; in the white part, there was regular plumbing. When he was little, he would ask his relatives why it smelled so bad there, and they would tell him to mind his own business. His cousins started shoplifting and were caught, and once they got into the criminal-justice system as teen-agers there were no second chances, and six of them ended up in prison. One cousin hanged himself in the Acadia Parish jail. One morning at breakfast, his mother was crying as she poured his cereal, and he found out that another one of his cousins had been in a robbery and had been shot dead by a policeman.

### LESSER-KNOWN PIVOTAL MOMENTS IN HISTORY



*"I'm a-thinkin', Luke—as long as we're deliverin' pizza, why not deliver the mail."* [Buy the print »](#)

But that wasn't going to happen to him. He had self-control, and he worked hard in school, and he always dressed well, in khakis and Brooks Brothers oxford shirts and V-neck sweaters from Neiman Marcus that were hand-me-downs from a white family his great-aunt Big worked for. He looked so good that his teachers were suspicious. They said to him, Did you steal that? Where did you get those clothes? He saw that nice clothes were important, that they changed people's view of you. If he was going to succeed, he had to suit up, every day. On the other hand, he saw that some richer people resented his dressing the way they did.

He was elected homeroom representative of his sixth-grade class, and that made a big impression on him. He had always felt ambitious; even when he was tiny, he wanted to be in charge of things, and now he knew it could happen. Each time he was elected to one thing, he looked up to the next. In high school, he was elected president of the class. Daddy C was still telling him that a black boy could not succeed in Texas, that white people would never allow it, but now he argued back. He said, *I am succeeding, look at*

me.

All his life, he felt that the world was rooting for him. This was the key to everything. He felt that he was running down the football field of life and at every yard line there was somebody cheering. And it wasn't just his family and his neighbors who supported him, he noticed. There were always other people, white people, who helped him, too: teachers like Mrs. Majors; parents of white friends; people who told him he was smart, who advised him about what he needed to do to get ahead. Even the government was on his side, he believed: it had helped him with Head Start, and then it helped him again with Pell Grants, which paid for college. There were also white people who did not want him to get ahead, of course—parents who didn't want him to be friends with their kids, the Klan chapter in Goose Creek, the people who yelled "nigger" at him from the windows of pickup trucks. But he chose not to think about those people as much as the other kind.

Everything at school was going well for him, but his home was chaotic and violent. There was always swearing, always screaming. There were a couple of stepfathers when he was growing up, both of whom beat his mother. His mother was not good at defending herself, and, working the long hours she did, she needed help running things, so even when he was quite young she didn't feel like a parent to him: he was her partner. He was, in many ways, the man of the house. It was hard not having a father, but it was also liberating. When his mother worked late, he fixed dinner for his two younger sisters, cleaned the kitchen, did the laundry. He held jobs after school and on weekends to bring in money, bagging groceries or working in restaurants. Then one day when he was fifteen he found his stepfather—the father of his sisters—beating up his mother again. He dragged him off her and told his mother that they had to leave, right now, that day.

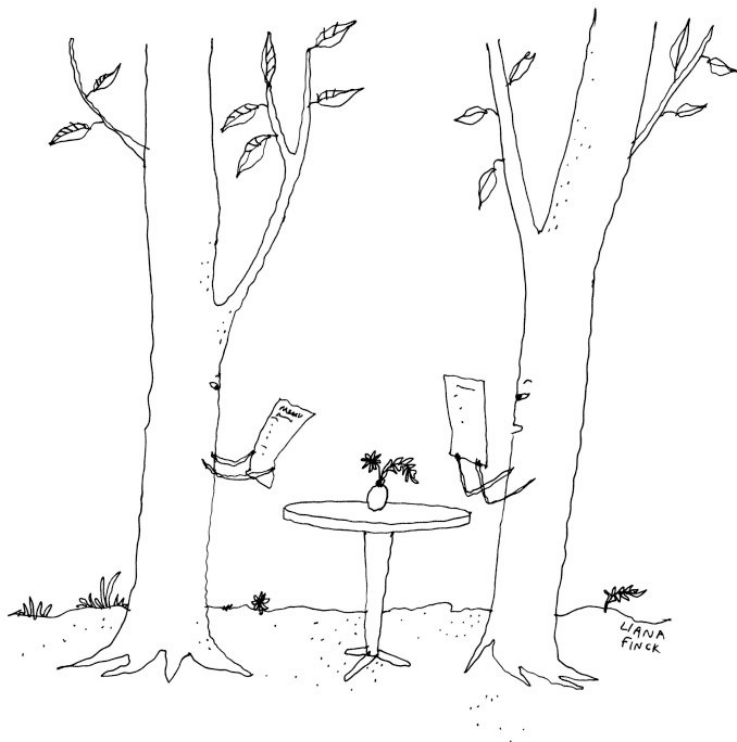
When he was in high school, black adults told him, Don't go to the University of Texas, it's a bad place for black people, but Walker knew that the University of Texas was the best school in the state, it was where prominent Texans went to college, so he wanted to go there, too. He arrived in Austin in the summer of 1978, and for him it was like going to Paris. The wide lawns, the grand plazas, the tower, the fountain, the white buildings, all alike, with the orange tiled roofs! But the dazzling campus was not the half of it. When he talked to teachers in high school about jobs, they told him, You need a trade, you're smart, how about becoming an accountant? But when he talked to his college adviser the adviser said, You don't go to college to get a job—you go to college to get an education! You don't need to learn a trade—you need to read Chaucer! At first, this thought was so

foreign to him that he barely understood it.

He wanted to belong to things, he was a joiner, but he didn't know anybody, so he responded to every flyer he saw. He signed up for the Liberal Arts Council; he joined the Black Student Alliance; he practically lived at the Student Union. He worked at the student-run art gallery, planning shows. He wanted to be part of everything, and he had nothing to lose. He was elected chair of the Student Union and was the first black Abbot of the Friar Society, and he was in the yearbook so much they thought about calling it "The Cactus Yearbook, featuring Darren Walker."

He never came out as gay explicitly, but he never felt that this was a problem. He sensed that his family had always known that he was different and accepted him as such, even though they never talked about it. At college, he felt that people understood that he was gay, and he knew that there had always been a place in Southern culture for gay men, even if they weren't called that. Anyhow, when it came to the barriers he had to leap over just to get out of bed in the morning at the University of Texas, being gay was nothing compared to being black, or being from the kind of place he was from. There were middle-class white people who were gay, but there were no middle-class white people who were black, or poor. No barrier was too high for him, though, because he believed that he could succeed, and when people tried to help him he didn't feel insulted: he was grateful, he wanted to learn.

"I didn't grow up coming to the dinner table," he says. "I remember going home to Dallas with one of my suite-mates for a weekend or a football game or something. His mother had a dinner, and she was a Texan lady, I mean she had the whole dinner setup, and I was mortified—I had no idea there was a salad fork and a regular fork. But they explained it all, and his mother sent me 'Tiffany's Table Manners for Teenagers.' I mean, I had no idea! I had never heard of Emily Post. And I realized, Oh, my God, I have to run out and get this Emily Post book. And I did! Of course I did! Are you kidding? I had to study it, because I didn't know that you were supposed to wear a navy suit to dinner! I had no idea that during the day you could wear a sports jacket! And all of a sudden I was thrust into this place where these rules mattered."



"I'm trying to decide between water and sunlight." [Buy the print »](#)

After college, he enrolled in law school at the University of Texas, because people he admired were lawyers. He knew, too, that when he was done with his education he would need to work for a corporate firm and start earning some serious money, because he had to take care of his mother and he had to send his younger sisters to college. He graduated from law school in 1986 and moved to New York to work at Cleary, Gottlieb, Steen & Hamilton, but he found the hours oppressive, so he went to work on the trading floor at UBS selling mortgage-backed securities. He was a good trader, though not a great one; his genius at the time was for friendships and social connections. He knew everyone. He moved in many circles—gay circles, transplanted-Southerner circles, banking circles, African-American circles. He joined boards and committees. He went to society parties on the Upper East Side and appeared in *Avenue*; he went to parties in Bed-Stuy and Harlem.

When he was in his early thirties, he met David Beitzel. Beitzel was a Wasp from Westchester, but he was not into the uptown life at all. He was an art dealer with a contemporary-art gallery in SoHo; his whole life was south of Fourteenth Street. But they had one mutual friend, and this mutual friend threw a birthday party. Beitzel arrived at the party, and as he opened the door he heard a laugh—a big, loud, roaring Texas guffaw—

coming from somewhere inside, and he thought, Whoever that is, laughing like that, I have to meet him. He made his way to the back of the room and saw that the laughing man had taken over the bar area and was making Texas margaritas for everyone and holding forth to a circle of people gathered around. The man had a kind of indomitable exuberance about him, as though, whatever he was saying, what he was really saying was, Isn't this *fantastic*? Aren't we having the greatest time? There is nowhere on earth I would rather be than right here at this party with you!

They started talking about art, and later they talked about dance and English bulldogs. Beitzel left his loft on Mercer Street, and Walker left his penthouse on West Forty-seventh Street, and they moved into an apartment in Chelsea. Twenty-two years later, they were still together, living with their English bulldog, named Mary Lou, after Beitzel's mother—the successor to their previous English bulldog, who was named Beulah, after Walker's mother. Walker knew that some people found Wasps stiff and reserved, but he loved the reserve of Beitzel's family. After all the chaos and screaming and violence that he grew up with, all that quiet, all that calm, felt like heaven.

In April, 1991, he was walking by the receptionist on the way to his desk at UBS when he saw the cover of that week's *Economist*: a photograph of a young black boy in a baseball cap and the cover line "America's Wasted Blacks." He was shocked by it—it was so raw, almost offensive. He brought the magazine back to his desk and read the article and thought, It is time for me to do something about this. He started volunteering at the Children's Storefront School, in Harlem. He started working for the school more and more, until his boss told him he had to choose between the school and the bank, because he was letting his trading work slide. He had already helped to put his younger sisters through college: he had done his duty to his family. When he was thirty-five, he quit the bank and started volunteering for the school full-time.

A year later, he took a job at the Abyssinian Development Corporation. Even though he was working in a tiny, dark room in the basement of an apartment building on 138th Street, he showed up every day looking as if he were ready to lunch with Mrs. Rockefeller—Hermès tie, pocket square, Belgian loafers. When he started working in Harlem, there were rats everywhere, and most of the brownstones seemed to be either cemented up or taken over as crack houses. The food in the bodegas all seemed to be past its sell-by date. But he was convinced that Harlem could be great again. He saw that the houses were beautiful and the avenues wide, that the major subway lines came through, that it

was easy to get to the airport, that there were parks. The trick was how to rejuvenate without displacing all the people who already lived there.

Every day at Abyssinian, there was an endless list of small problems to solve—people who needed to move from shelters to housing, parents wanting to enroll their kids in Head Start. He campaigned for big things, too, like the Pathmark supermarket that opened on 125th Street in 1999 and changed the neighborhood forever. Harlem, he liked to say, was a place where you could make money; there was no reason there shouldn't be for-profit businesses as well as charities. But, even so, it was hard going, bringing in the big stores: he campaigned for a bookstore, too, and the representatives of national chains told him that they wouldn't open a bookstore in Harlem because black people didn't read.

In between the big things and the small things, he raised lots and lots of money. Raising money from foundations could be humiliating—once, he had to wait forty-five minutes for a program officer to show up, and when she finally arrived she didn't even apologize for being late. He resolved never to behave like that to someone who needed his help. A lot of the time, when foundation people came to see the work he was doing, he felt like a guide for poverty tourists. A program officer told him he wanted to bring his board uptown, and Walker said, Great, let's meet at 138th Street and walk around the neighborhood, and the program officer said he didn't think the board would feel comfortable walking in Harlem—couldn't they just rent a bus and drive around? He had seen buses like that, visitors from downtown staring out the windows as if they were on safari.

But raising money from individuals was easy; he had so many rich friends, and he had no trouble asking them. He knew that people loved to be part of something exciting, and he was good at making Abyssinian sound like the most exciting thing around. Soon, he had quintupled Abyssinian's budget. For a long time, he was so gripped by his work in Harlem that he didn't want to do anything else, but in 2002 he was offered a job at the Rockefeller Foundation, heading up the national urban program, and he left.





AN UBER CAR NAMED DESIRE

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The first thing he noticed when he arrived at Rockefeller was a strange sense of calm. There was a slow deliberateness to the way things moved that he wasn't used to—there was no sense of urgency. There was no sense of urgency, he gradually realized, because the people at Rockefeller had no one to answer to. On Wall Street, he always had clients breathing down his neck, and at Abyssinian there were always people lining up in the office who needed his help that very minute. But at Rockefeller the people who needed help were far away—distant supplicants who communicated through applications and waited months for an answer. The supplicants had no right to demand anything—they took what they could get and were grateful for it. Once, he noticed that a person who reported to him was about to go on vacation leaving a stack of grant files on his desk—files that represented more than a million dollars that couldn't be disbursed to the nonprofits waiting for them until they were processed. He asked how the person could think of going on vacation before the files were dealt with, and the person said that it wasn't a problem, he would take care of them when he got back.

He was determined not to become an arrogant grant-maker who believed that people were deferential toward him and invited him to things and laughed at his jokes solely because of his own charm and intelligence. When he took over at Ford, he was

determined to remember that even though he had half a billion dollars a year at his disposal, and his grantees were compelled to beg him for some, and he could say no to any one of them and that would be the end of it, still, it was those grantees and their work that gave his work meaning. It was a strange and uncomfortable thing to be a social-justice person in a social-justice foundation committed to ending inequality and yet to find yourself every day in relations that could scarcely be less equal.

All week, every week, people pitched ideas at him, and he said yes or no. He knew that he could make mistakes, and that worried him. He liked to remind himself of a letter to Maya Angelou someone had found in the archives, telling her in a very perfunctory way that she could forget about a grant since she had no talent worthy of the Ford Foundation. Of course, he also liked to remember that Ford had been among the first to fund Gloria Steinem and Muhammad Yunus, the microfinance pioneer, and that James Baldwin wrote "Another Country" on a Ford grant. But, no matter how often he checked himself, he knew that in the end it was almost impossible for a grant-maker to be sure that he was doing his job well, because there was no one to tell him the truth: his grantees had to stay on his good side, and his colleagues didn't know any better than he did. He was perched on the top of a mountain of money so high that he could barely see the bottom.

In 1973, Henry Ford II spoke bitterly and at length to Charles T. Morrissey, an interviewer for the Ford Foundation archives.

Ford: I made a lot of mistakes, but the biggest mistake I ever made was to give up control of the Ford Foundation. It was a horrendous error. I never should have done it.

Morrissey: Why? Why do you feel that way?

Ford: Because I think the Foundation's been a fiasco from my point of view from day one. And it got out of control and it got in the control of a lot of liberals. . . . I've tried to break up the Foundation several times and have been unsuccessful. . . . I didn't have enough confidence in myself at that stage to push and scream and yell and tell them to go fuck themselves, you know, which I should have done.

The foundation was established by Henry Ford II's father, Edsel Ford, the son of Henry Ford, in Michigan in 1936, with a gift of twenty-five thousand dollars. At first, it was a small, local foundation funding mostly small, local things. But, after Edsel Ford died, in 1943, and Henry Ford died, in 1947, and willed to the foundation a large chunk of the

nonvoting stock of the Ford Motor Company, it became clear that the foundation was going to become, overnight, the largest philanthropic organization in the world. It was not exactly generosity that inspired the gift: if the stock had gone to the Ford children, they would have owed so much in taxes—more than three hundred million dollars—that, in order to pay, they would have had to sell stock in such quantities as to lose control of the company to the public. In addition, Henry and Edsel Ford instructed in their wills that all inheritance taxes—around forty million dollars—be paid by the foundation. Motives notwithstanding, it was a source of bemusement to conservatives ever after that the money made by the arch-conservative Henry Ford, the publisher of “The Protocols of the Elders of Zion,” in a system and spirit of unfettered capitalism, should have fallen into the hands of liberals. When John Olin, the founder of the conservative Olin Foundation, died, in 1982, he decreed that his foundation should not exist in perpetuity, lest it be taken over by the kind of lefty forces that had taken over Ford.

Ford: It got all mixed up at going off in all directions, getting into all kinds of nutty liberal causes. . . . I mean, you know, Mike [Mitchell] Sviridoff; Christ! he’s off doing nutty things with [Cesar] Chavez and all. We got into a lot of trouble back in the old days in the South where the Ford dealers were bitching like hell about all the things we were doing down South. And when you’re in the consumer business and you’ve also got the Foundation around your neck, you’re in trouble almost day and night because they’re always doing something that irritates somebody and why irritate somebody that’s going to buy your product. . . . You know, we only exist because we’re smart enough to sell something for a profit and we can get thrown out or we can go broke; but those people, they’ve got nobody to answer to.

Relations between the Fords and the foundation grew worse and worse, until, finally, in 1977, Henry Ford II resigned as a trustee of the foundation and severed its ties to the family.

Morrissey: Has it been hard to maintain this Detroit connection?

Ford: Yes, very hard. Very hard all the way along. Ridiculously hard. These people always forget where the money came from and I don’t ever forgive them for that.

For nearly forty years, the Ford family and the Ford Foundation had little to do with one another. The foundation, with its fancy building in Manhattan and its global outlook, did not pay much attention to the foundering Midwestern city from which it had come. But

Walker hated the idea of all that bad feeling, so when he became president he wrote a letter to Mrs. William Clay Ford, Sr., the former Martha Firestone, of Firestone Tire and Rubber, the widow of Edsel Ford's son, and, since her husband's death, the owner of the Detroit Lions. And last year the foundation committed a hundred and twenty-five million dollars to the "grand bargain," which rescued Detroit from bankruptcy and saved the Detroit Institute of Art.



*"Do we even have a garbage disposal?"* [Buy the print »](#)

The grand bargain was instigated by Gerald E. Rosen, a judge who had been appointed chief mediator in the city's bankruptcy case. Rosen called a meeting with the heads of some of the richest foundations in the country and asked them to bail out Detroit and the Detroit Institute of Art, so the D.I.A. didn't have to sell its paintings to pay its debt. It was an unprecedented request: foundations had never bailed out a city before; it wasn't what they did. But Rosen was persistent, and he found, in Walker, a person who liked to salve old wounds, and who did not find Detroit provincial or insignificant but was moved by the desperation of a formerly great American city. In the early stages of the grand-bargain negotiations, it was said that it was the D.I.A. against the pensioners—rich white art lovers against elderly black city workers—but Walker refused to think in those terms. In his mind, the bargain would be a win for both: the D.I.A. was good for Detroit. It was necessary, perhaps, for the president of the Ford Foundation, which had always given money to both art and social justice, to refuse to see funding one as a decision to deprive the other. In

the end, some pensioners took cuts of a few percentage points, and the D.I.A. didn't sell anything at all. And in June Mrs. William Clay Ford, Sr., hosted a dinner for the Ford Foundation board with several dozen Fords in attendance. It was the first time the board had met in Detroit in sixty years.

In the early days after Henry Ford's death, the foundation's chief problem was how to spend its money fast enough, as it gushed into its bank accounts in eye-popping quantities. It was suspected in certain quarters, most notably at the I.R.S., that foundations might be little more than tax-avoidance schemes, and the Revenue Act of 1950 forbade unreasonable amassing of foundation income, so the stuff had to be spent. At the time Ford's will was executed, it was thought that the yearly expenditure would be around twenty million dollars, but, three years later, it leaped to thirty-eight million, then, a few years after that, sixty-eight million. The problem of how to give so much money away, with no obligations whatsoever, was more troublesome than it sounded. "The first thing you have to do every year is get rid of most of your income in a few very big operations," a Ford vice-president told Dwight Macdonald in this magazine, in 1955. "Then you're down to Rockefeller size—around twenty million a year—and you can begin to act like a foundation instead of like the United States Treasury." The splash made by the foundation was such that shoots of hope sprang up all over the world. Ford received proposals for irrigating the Sahara, for planting a three-mile-wide strip of flowers along the U.S.-Canadian border, and for forcibly melting the ice cap at the South Pole.

It was clear that the newly vast foundation needed to expand its mission far outside Detroit, so Henry Ford II appointed a committee to determine what that mission should be. For more than a year, members of the committee flew all over the place, seeking advice from the great and the good, and in 1949 they produced a lengthy report. The committee's ambitions were limitless. "At one time the gifts of individuals and benevolent organizations were intended largely to relieve the suffering of 'the weak, the poor and the unfortunate,' " the report noted. "With the establishment of the modern foundation a much greater concept came into being. The aim is no longer merely to treat symptoms . . . but rather to eradicate the causes of suffering. Nor is the modern foundation content to concern itself only with man's obvious physical needs; it seeks rather to help man achieve his entire well-being—to satisfy his mental, emotional, and spiritual needs as well."

In order to achieve these grand aims, the committee concluded, it was necessary above all to attain a better understanding of man himself—"what he needs and wants, what

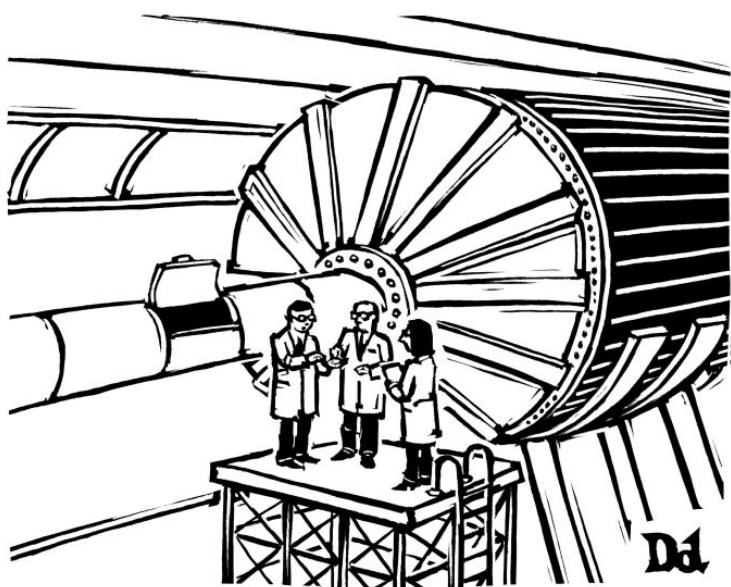
incentives are necessary to his productive and socially useful life, what factors influence his development and behavior, how he learns and communicates with other persons, and, finally, what prevents him from living at peace with himself and his fellow men." The committee had a deep faith that research by top people was the key: if only there were more objective data, it was felt, then many disputes that appeared to be politically intractable would be resolved.

For its first president in this new era, the foundation selected Paul Hoffman, the chairman of Studebaker-Packard and freshly glorious from his successful administration of the Marshall Plan, and began opening offices on several continents. It commissioned and moved into its splendid pink granite-and-steel headquarters, designed in the International Style, on East Forty-third Street, near the U.N. The building contained a garden: a third of an acre, twelve stories high, air-conditioned, and planted with magnolia trees and eucalyptus trees and evergreen pear trees, in addition to dozens of bushes, vines, and flowering plants that would vary with the seasons. The clear glass that made up the south façade both enabled the foliage to flourish and gave the building what the architect felt was a moral structure.

Ford saw itself as the "research and development arm of society," funding projects that were still too experimental or politically dubious to be taken on by governments, but which, if they proved successful, might be more widely adopted. In its first decades, it was attacked by both the left and the right. The left thought that it was propping up the status quo, and was probably a front for the C.I.A. to boot (and, in fact, the C.I.A. was using other foundations for covert funding). The right was convinced that it was staffed by a bunch of dangerous Communists who were out to annihilate the free-enterprise system. "We will have to start watching these outfits in this strange new development in our affairs lest they use the power of enormous tax-free pools of money to destroy the liberties of the American people," the anti-New Deal columnist Westbrook Pegler declared in 1952. Some said that if you bought a Ford car you were contributing to the Communists. The rumors of Communist conspiracy got so bad that in the nineteen-fifties there were two congressional investigations of foundations and their purported dedication to undermining the American way of life.

Partly because of this suspicion, and partly because the founders were as conservative as their critics, most foundations' grants in the early days were not particularly controversial. Rockefeller eliminated hookworm from the rural American South and revolutionized

American medical education. Ford gave enormous sums to America's universities and later funded Head Start. But, starting in the mid-fifties, Ford grew bold. It funded the N.A.A.C.P.'s work on *Brown v. Board of Education*. It was a time in which "urban renewal" and Robert Moses-style projects were pushing low-income people out of their homes, and black people from the South were moving into white neighborhoods in Northern cities; Ford moved into inner cities, financing community-based organizations that provided social services, and tried to improve local schools. To the left, it now looked like Ford was trying to put a conciliatory face on what was still basically the same urban-renewal program, fostering the interests of developers and excluding activists, particularly black activists, from participation in decision-making. To the right, it looked like Ford was fomenting urban rebellion.



*"The atoms are burned on the outside but still ice-cold in the middle."* [Buy the print »](#)

When McGeorge Bundy, who had been the national-security adviser to Presidents Kennedy and Johnson, was appointed president of the foundation, in 1966, he took even bolder steps, financing trade unions and neighborhood activism. Ford gave millions of dollars to civil-rights groups, and funded the Congress of Racial Equality. Most controversial of all, it funded activists who wanted to take control of their school district, in Brooklyn, in order to be able to fire tenured, unionized teachers. This, too, was largely a racial issue, setting mostly black parents and leaders from the Black Power movement against mostly white teachers. The conflict launched the city's largest-ever teachers' strike; police barricades and helicopters kept the teachers apart from the activists, some



of whom were armed. Once again, this intervention managed to alienate people of all political stripes: liberals and conservatives decried the racial hostility created by the strike—hostility that poisoned the city for decades. The left, having previously accused Ford of excluding activists from its grants, now accused it of trying to co-opt and deradicalize activists by giving them cash.

Ford did not have another president as confrontational as Bundy. But, even so, it was peculiar how, in the decades that followed the New York City teachers' strike, resistance to foundations, for the most part, melted away. By the time Walker arrived at Ford, the dispensing of money for charitable purposes, even very large sums of money, was generally thought to be at best a generous and at worst an innocuous activity. This was not because foundations had stopped funding big, controversial projects. The Gates Foundation, which had displaced Ford as the largest foundation in the world—its endowment was forty billion dollars to Ford's twelve—spent around two billion dollars over eight years in an effort to break up big public high schools and form smaller ones—an effort that resulted in around twenty-five hundred schools in forty-five states. (It later decided that the small schools made little difference and dropped the program.) It spent millions more on creating charter schools. The education scholar Diane Ravitch, outraged by what she saw as a serious undermining of the public-school system, called Gates the nation's unelected school superintendent.

Because foundations tended to fund liberal causes, conservatives were still a little suspicious of them, but outright opposition had been rare since fears of Communism died down—perhaps because conservatives tended to believe that a person ought to be able to spend his money as he chose, and if he chose to spend it on charity rather than on yachts, well, who was to fault him for it? Because foundations tended to fund liberal causes, they were regarded benignly by most liberals, when they were regarded at all. But this liberal approval was odd, because, as Rob Reich, a political scientist at Stanford, pointed out in the *Boston Review*, foundations were undeniably plutocratic: they were vehicles for the rich to mold society into the shape they thought it ought to be. In this, foundations resembled super PACs: in both cases, money gave rich people the means to exercise an outsized and undemocratic influence on American life. Although foundations were not allowed to fund overtly political activity (which prevented them from addressing the root causes of the conditions they were permitted to alleviate), it was difficult to see why attempting to change American society by lobbying was political while doing the same by funding activists was not. "Why are we . . . hypersensitive to the dangers of big

money in politics . . . but blind, it seems, to the dangers of big philanthropy in the public sphere?" Gara LaMarche, formerly of George Soros's Open Society Institute, wondered in an article in *Democracy*.

But there was a significant difference between foundations and super PACs: the money that endowed foundations was exempt from taxation, so when foundations attempted to mold society they were doing so at the expense of the taxpayer. When a rich person endowed a foundation, he received, in effect, something like a forty-per-cent subsidy from the government, and in 2012 U.S. foundation assets amounted to more than seven hundred billion dollars. (Of course, the same could be said of any charitable donation given by a person who itemized his tax deductions: in 2013, tax revenue forgone owing to charitable giving amounted to nearly forty billion dollars.) Even the conservative legal theorist Judge Richard Posner could not understand why foundation assets should be tax-exempt. "A perpetual charitable foundation . . . is a completely irresponsible institution, answerable to nobody," he wrote. "Unlike a hereditary monarch whom such a foundation otherwise resembles, it is subject to no political controls either. . . . The puzzle for economics is why these foundations are not total scandals."

In fact, a hundred years ago, at the dawn of the foundation era, they *were* total scandals. When John D. Rockefeller tried to obtain a federal charter to establish his foundation, in 1910, Congress rejected him. In 1915, a Commission on Industrial Relations recommended that the Rockefeller Foundation be regulated by the government, or be shut down altogether by Congress, and its funds distributed to the unemployed, since presumably the reason it had all that surplus money was that the Rockefellers had been too cheap in paying their workers. "The domination by men in whose hands the final control of a large part of American industry rests is not limited to their employees, but is being rapidly extended to control the education and 'social service' of the nation," the commission warned. The puzzle for history was why the scandal went away.

Walker took a night flight from Newark to Delhi, fourteen hours. He took Ambien on the plane and slept. After he got to his hotel, at ten o'clock at night Delhi time but early morning in New York, he had a late dinner in a kind of bizarre disco bar he discovered off the hotel lobby—he realized that probably it wasn't quite as bizarre as it seemed to him then, in his twilight state—and sat up e-mailing the office until two in the morning. He knew that, because he was president, if he got behind on his e-mails then many people would be held up in their work, waiting for him. On the other hand, he had learned from

his executive coach that it was also possible to get too far ahead on his e-mails, as he had done when he first got the job, firing off dozens of enthusiastic queries and thoughts and suggestions on Saturday afternoons and Sunday mornings, when other people were trying to enjoy their weekends.

He himself was uninterested in leisure. He worked every weekend, and he was out every night attending two, three, four, five events—panel discussions, parties, talks, dinners, galas—leaving one with an apology and a smile, leaping into a taxi, on to the next. But he had discovered that his staff needed time off from work, and became distressed and resentful when this time off was denied them, and that when he sent them an e-mail about something on his mind they felt obliged to respond quickly, and this was interfering with their ability to get properly rested before the new week began. Early on, he had talked excitedly in a meeting about some idea that had occurred to him, and then had been startled to find, a week or so later, a detailed report on his desk exploring the idea from several angles—a report that had undoubtedly taken someone, perhaps several someones, many days to produce. He realized then that his employees wished to please him and anticipate his wants, and that therefore a president should not be too spontaneous or promiscuous in his enthusiasms.



November 8, 2010 [Buy the print »](#)

The most important thing he had to do on this trip to India was pay his respects to a

representative of the new Narendra Modi administration. It was particularly important now to establish friendly relations, because Indian politicians had been frustrated by N.G.O. activism for some time, and, since many N.G.O.s received foreign funding, including from Ford, the politicians objected to what looked like foreign interference in domestic affairs. Efforts to build a nuclear power plant in South India, for instance, had been delayed for years by protests, for which the government blamed foreign-funded activists and Christians. It was suspected that safety concerns about the plant were merely window dressing to disguise the real motive behind the protests, which was to insure that India remained dependent on foreign investment. India was a nuclear power and a middle-income country that should rightly be an aid donor, the government felt—not a recipient.

In April, the government froze the bank accounts of Greenpeace India, and in the same month cancelled the registration of nearly nine thousand N.G.O.s that received money from abroad. Then, in May, it announced that, in the interests of national security, Ford would henceforth be required to seek government permission for all of its grants. Since Ford was already required to seek government permission for all of its grants, the message was clear: Ford must be more careful or be shut down like Greenpeace. It was widely supposed that this was payback for Ford's support, some years earlier, for Gujarat activists who had brought charges against Narendra Modi—then Gujarat's Hindu-nationalist chief minister—for "enabling" ethnic riots in 2002 that killed around a thousand people, mostly Muslims.

Walker spent a long time talking with government officials, trying to dispel their suspicion. But, he realized, it certainly was a delicate question, what Ford thought it was doing, funding attempts to undermine centuries-old customs in foreign countries. What if some foreign country tried to do that in America? Walker hoped to persuade Indian philanthropists to take an interest in governance and human-rights groups, but, since such groups were often run by people who were given to proclaiming their hatred and contempt for corporate India, it was difficult to persuade corporate India to fund them.

This strained relationship between the foundation and India's government was relatively new. Ford had been invited to set up shop in the country by India's first post-independence Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, in 1952. Nehru gave Ford an extraordinary site to build on, in the Lodi Gardens, right in the center of New Delhi, amid trees and lawns, and mosques and tombs from before the Mughal period. Ford built a grand campus and moved in in style: in the sixties, there were several hundred employees

in the Delhi office. In addition to the staff, foreign experts were always arriving to serve as consultants, and a guest house was built to accommodate them, next to the swimming pool. The office kept two jet airplanes on hand to transport staff, and Douglas Ensminger, the head of the office, used to drive around town in a horse-drawn carriage, like a viceroy.

Ensminger was close to Nehru, and in the early days Ford funded mostly government projects. It financed grand institutes of management, of public administration, and of design. It trained hundreds of workers who ventured out to hundreds of villages all over the country to teach modern agricultural methods, public health, and techniques of political organization. Along with the Rockefeller Foundation, it financed the Green Revolution, which, by introducing new seeds, fertilizers, pesticides, and methods, enormously increased India's agricultural production at a time of terrible food shortages—India doubled its rice output in six years. Not everything worked so well: responding to government concerns about overpopulation, Ford funded research that led indirectly to a forced-sterilization program in the mid-seventies that unintentionally killed close to two thousand people owing to botched surgeries. Even the Green Revolution had unintended side effects, bankrupting small farmers and reducing biodiversity.

Then, in the eighties, Ford began to shift its focus from academic institutes and economic development to social justice, and from financing government programs to funding N.G.O.s. This was not just a shift in the Delhi office: in 1979, a new Ford president, Franklin Thomas, had taken over in New York. Thomas had come out of community development and poverty work in Brooklyn, and he was less interested in the sort of magisterial institution building that Ford had been doing in India and more interested in civil society.

Many on the Indian left who ran those N.G.O.s had long been suspicious of Ford. It suspected that the foundation was a front for the C.I.A., using civil-society groups to mold India according to an imperialist American agenda. But, more recently, some had come around. They saw that Ford had financed activists, in India and elsewhere, with unimpeachably antiestablishment politics. And they saw that there were genuine activists even among Ford's staff.

In addition to meetings with activists and grantees in Delhi, Walker was scheduled to visit some village projects that Ford had been funding. He and a delegation from the Delhi office flew to Ranchi, the capital of the state of Jharkhand. Jharkhand was part of the "tribal belt" in the east of the country. Tribals were outsiders in India: they weren't even traditionally Hindus; they existed outside the caste system altogether. In recent years,

they had won some control over their land, but the tribal population was still one of the poorest in the country.

The first day in Jharkhand, Walker and the delegation were driven in a convoy far out of Ranchi to a village, accompanied by workers from Pradan, a Ford-funded N.G.O. Before Pradan arrived, seventeen years earlier, life in the village had been very difficult. Each year for five or six months, there was nothing to eat, because the crops were all gone; the villagers managed to buy a little food only by foraging firewood and walking for miles to sell it in the town. Armed Maoists roamed about. Pradan taught the villagers how to conserve water and irrigate through a network of pipes so they could grow two crops each year rather than one. It taught them to plant a diversity of crops—wheat, lentils, vegetables—and yields improved. It suggested investing in mango trees, and the mangoes sold for a lot of money. It informed the villagers what government schemes they were entitled to, and helped them to collect what they were owed. The local Maoists disagreed about N.G.O.s like Pradan: some felt that they were doing good work for the people; others felt that by ameliorating conditions in a superficial manner they were delaying the revolution.

Pradan had been co-founded thirty years before by Deep Joshi, who was then a program officer at Ford's Delhi office with an engineering degree from M.I.T. In the mid-nineteen-seventies, Joshi had come across a couple of Johns Hopkins-trained doctors who'd set up a clinic in a remote village. They had educated local workers in sanitation, hygiene, and hydration, and had raised health standards in the village to levels that wouldn't be seen in most of India for decades. He thought, If only more professionals—engineers, doctors, agricultural experts, plant biologists—could be persuaded to work in rural areas, then India would really change. Most people thought this was a crazy notion: what engineer or doctor was going to move to the middle of nowhere on a tiny salary when he could be living a comfortable life in the city? And what Indian parent would permit his expensively educated child to commit such folly? But Ford gave Joshi a grant to try out his idea, and now Pradan recruited graduates from top universities, just as corporations did, albeit not quite as many.



*"Don't look. It's the people we steal Wi-Fi from."* October 12, 2009 [Buy the print »](#)

Because Joshi and his co-founder were engineers, at first they were focussed on hardware—irrigation pipes, agricultural equipment. But gradually they realized that persuading people to collaborate with one another was equally crucial to prosperity. Organizing women into groups enabled them to apply for proper credit without becoming slaves to moneylenders, and also emboldened them to take action against local malefactors—schoolteachers who didn't show up, fathers who didn't allow daughters to inherit land, husbands who beat their wives.

The convoy stopped at the edge of the village, and Walker emerged from the car's air-conditioning into the sun. There, waiting to greet him, was a large crowd—practically the entire village. There was a group of women in matching red-and-white saris with white flowers in their hair, and more flowers in metal pots on their heads. Somebody hung an extraordinary garland, a kind of lei constructed entirely of vegetables, around Walker's neck, which was a little scratchy but smelled deliciously planty and fresh. The sun on his face dimmed, and, looking up, he saw that a woman had come up behind him to hold over his head a giant sunshade of draped blue-and-silver cloth, like those used by maharajas riding on elephants. He was told to process downhill the few dozen yards from the car to the community center, where a presentation would take place.

A man headed the procession, beating time on a drum, leading the crowd along a path through the center of the village, while to Walker's left and to his right the women in the



matching saris formed two lines and started to dance to the rhythm of the drumbeats, waving leafy branches and singing for him. The woman carrying the sunshade walked behind him; in front of him, a photographer walked backward, snapping his photograph. It was a little embarrassing, this maharaja treatment, but what was he to do? It was the nature of the situation. The president of the Ford Foundation had come for a visit! Besides, it was only a little bit embarrassing; it was also fun. His job was to look happy and appreciative, and he did; he turned from side to side, beaming, putting his palms together in a gesture of greeting and thanks. Suddenly a large goat appeared, darted toward him, and snatched a couple of beans out of his garland in its teeth before it was shooed away; he was startled but then delighted—it was all part of the fun, and an excellent addition to the story he would tell later.

The procession came to a halt facing the village's prized amenity: two brand-new public toilets, housed in a hut painted yellow and green. The drummer stopped, the singers fell silent. Walker was asked to officially open the toilets, which he did, improvising a gesture, joyful but not overly demonstrative—how did one open a toilet? This was the sort of thing the president of the Ford Foundation must be able to do without briefing. His gesture was a success: everyone applauded. The drumbeats resumed, the singing started up again, and the procession carried on. ♦

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