RESEARCH REPORT

Analyzing a Localized Giving Culture

The Case of Washington, DC

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Analyzing a Localized Giving Culture

For the past several decades, the *Chronicle of Philanthropy* has published periodic reports examining charitable giving trends in different regions of the United States. In the latest of these reports, *How America Gives*, the *Chronicle* sorted through giving data at the state, county, and metropolitan level and introduced some striking comparative elements. The report's main instrument of analysis was the giving ratio, defined as "the total of a locality's charitable contributions as a share of its total adjusted gross income." By dividing givers into four income groups and then determining the average giving ratio nationwide within each group, the report established benchmarks that were then used to project a metro area's "giving opportunity," or how much that locale would donate to charity if its income groups were giving at the benchmark level.[1]

The analysis produced some illuminating results for Washington, DC. Its residents' giving ratios exceeded the national average—except among those who made more than $200,000 a year. These givers fell significantly short, leading to a giving opportunity of $548 million (the seventh highest in the nation and fifth highest for that income category). In fact, of the 10 cities in the *Chronicle*'s report with the highest giving opportunity, Washington, DC, was the only one to have the shortfall concentrated entirely among its upper-income givers. The city's closest peer in giving ratio and (missed) opportunity was Los Angeles. But the report revealed that other cities with comparable population profiles, such as Atlanta and Miami-Fort Lauderdale, gave at much higher rates; these cities lacked any giving opportunity as defined by the *Chronicle* because they exceeded the nationwide averages. In Atlanta, for instance, givers making more than $200,000 outpaced the benchmark by an impressive 62 percent. (In general, the Northeast fell short of the national benchmark and the South outperformed it.)[2]

As with past *Chronicle* geographic surveys, we are left wondering what to make of such comparisons. What do they suggest about the relationship between giving and place? Do the rankings and differences in giving patterns between cities simply reflect the vagaries of mercurial demographic shifts, the ordering of a deck of cards routinely shuffled by broader socioeconomic trends? Or do regional and metropolitan variations point to deeper and more enduring structural and cultural factors that shape giving practices? Put another way, how do the results of such surveys highlight localized and entrenched cultures of giving that actively, if subtly, shape charitable practice? And if such cultures of giving can be identified, what do they suggest about charitable activity in the Washington metropolitan region?

The Significance of a Local, Place-Based Lens in the Analysis of Charitable Giving Patterns

Such placed-based inquiries have stood at the margins of scholarship on charitable giving in the United States for more than a century. Scholars have long noted regional variations in charitable giving patterns, often drawing attention to regions that could claim exceptional levels of generosity or indicting laggard locales. But those observations have rarely led to more sustained analysis about the causal factors behind these differentials or to a deeper exploration of the nature of local giving ecologies.

In fact, researchers have faced strong pressures to consider philanthropy from a national perspective. As the historian John C. Schneider has written, "The tradition of voluntarism in the United States…seems to fold comfortably into the idea of an identifiable national character" (Schneider 1996). All regions have laid claim to the nation's Tocquevillian legacy of exceptional voluntarism, an identity bolstered by the rise of comparative research on charitable giving from a global perspective. It is the United States as an undifferentiated whole that has cultivated a reputation for unparalleled private generosity.[3]

Schneider also notes that the professionalization of the nonprofit and fundraising fields in the past half century has encouraged a standardization of theory and practice that has reinforced this national perspective. More generally, technological advances, economic shifts, changing patterns of media consumption, and the relentless pressures of commercialism have often boosted a national culture at the expense of regional ones. In recent decades, these developments have created communities, including those built around charitable giving, tethered to a shared identity or common purpose less than to specific locales (Barman 2006; Hammack 2018; Schneider 1996, 191).

Which is not to say that the composition of local cultures of giving has been entirely ignored. Counterdevelopments emerging in the past few decades have pushed against nationalizing pressures and opened space for research into regional and local variations in giving. The most prominent of these have occurred in the realm of political economy. The geographer Julian Wolpert, for instance, began the most comprehensive examination of such variations in charitable giving in the late 1980s. He became convinced that place and context matter in donor behavior. "Places themselves," he wrote, "have distinctive and enduring cultures of giving, differences in levels of need and distress, patterns of taste and demand for nonprofit and public sector services, and an idiosyncratic evolution of nonprofit institutions" (Wolpert 1995). His research interest in these differences was sparked in part by his concerns with Reagan-era devolution, defederalization, and budget cutting. Given that Americans "are not uniformly generous but vary significantly from place-to-place," he wondered whether "greater decentralization (from the federal government to states and localities) of responsibility for supporting cultural, health, educational and social services [would] result in wider regional disparities in well-being and quality of life" (Wolpert 1989). Or as Wolpert once quipped at a conference, "If I were homeless these days, I would not want it to be in Houston." (Though it should be pointed out that Houston now does relatively well in the *Chronicle*'s *How America Gives* reports, exceeding the giving ratio baselines.) Additionally, the culture wars of the 1990s and 2000s, cartographically translated into depictions of red and blue states, encouraged journalism and scholarship into regional disparities of all sorts, including those within the realm of charitable practice (Brooks 2006; Wolpert 1989, 1993; Schneider 1996, 194).[4]

Today, federal policies of devolution and fiscal retrenchment are once again fraying the safety net, placing more pressure on states and localities and on the nonprofit institutions and local charitable communities that support them. This would seem another opportune moment for inquiries into local cultures of giving. This research is now supported by an expanding institutional infrastructure of regional associations of grantmakers that has developed in the past few decades. It has also been boosted by a current push within the nonprofit sector to promote more local, place-based giving from elite donors and institutions. Finally, whereas up until a few decades ago, major living donors were largely clustered in a few cities in the Northeast, the recent explosion of concentrated wealth has disseminated multimillionaires and billionaires throughout the nation, creating a widely diffused corps of actively engaged living donors, "super-citizens" dedicated to using their private fortunes for the public good, in nearly every major city (Abramson and McCarthy 2012; Callahan 2017).

Conceptualizing a Localized Culture of Giving: Definitions and Preliminary Questions

There are three ways to conceptualize a localized culture of giving. The first is purely descriptive. A culture of giving can serve as a catchall term to encompass various means of measuring and assessing charitable practice within a community in the context of a range of demographic, socioeconomic, or political factors. A culture of giving can also refer to the ways a community legitimizes and gives meaning to that practice. For instance, in the final decades of the 19th century, at a moment when industrial fortunes were fueling large-scale philanthropy in the United States, Catholic leaders relied primarily on the small-scale contributions of parishioners rather than larger contributions from a few wealthy industrialists. Church leaders made a virtue of such giving and of the participatory, democratic ethic that it reflected (Oates 1995).

A localized culture of giving can have an even stronger meaning, connoting the active shaping of charitable practice within a geographically based community through the generation of norms, models, traditions, and opportunities that stem from its material, socioeconomic, and political reality. In this meaning, the culture itself takes on causal significance. And so we can speak about the relative strength of a local giving culture in ways that do not necessarily correlate with higher rates or amounts of giving; a strong giving culture could just as easily explain relatively low rates of giving within a metropolitan area. A culture of giving could also shape styles of giving or where giving is directed. This report focuses on this particular "robust" understanding of a localized culture of giving.

A culture of giving can form at various geographic levels, the more granular "nesting" within broader regions. Scholars have also suggested that smaller towns might reflect distinctive regional cultures of giving more strongly than metropolitan areas, which might be shaped more forcefully by a national culture (Bielefeld, Rooney, and Steinberg 2005; Wolpert 1995).

To be historically intelligible, a localized culture of giving must exhibit some degree of continuity and persistence. Of course, it must also exhibit dynamism and adaptiveness while possessing some staying power. What the threshold duration should be, however, is a question open to debate. Can we speak of a local culture of giving that exists for only a decade? For only a few years?

Finally, a culture of giving might only shape a subset of a larger community, and we might need to speak of several cultures of giving that have taken root in a single metropolitan area. Elites in an area might have a different culture of giving than other residents, and various ethnic, racial, or religious communities might each have their own culture as well. A key question is how (or whether) these cultures interact and shape each other within a particular geographic boundary. Do traditions of mass giving shape those of elite giving in cities? How do giving cultures of various minority populations impact that of the majority, however construed, and vice versa? These are among the many questions about local cultures of giving that require additional scholarly attention.

American Regionalism, Origins Stories, and Charitable Practice: Exploring the Historical Roots of Localized Cultures of Giving

What dynamics help form a localized culture of giving? Scholars have focused on a range of factors, among them the ethnic and religious identities of a locale's residents (especially its elites), the character of its primary industries, and the nature of its system of governance and political economy. Historians, perhaps unsurprisingly, have placed a particular emphasis on a community's founders and early years of settlement and civic coalescence, assuming that early patterns of voluntary action and charitable giving wore grooves into which subsequent giving in later generations fit. There is, however, considerable disagreement over how much of a charitable "legacy" is passed on to future generations.

An emphasis on the primal institutional arrangements that define subsequent charitable activity has, for instance, characterized the study of the development of distinctive regional approaches to voluntary action. The historian Peter Dobkin Hall, who addressed this subject most comprehensively, identified different "cultures of trusteeship" that emerged in different regions during the nation's first 150 years based on initial patterns of settlement and, following the tracks of settler migration, spread throughout the United States. In the "civic-privatist" tradition centered in New England (and particularly in Boston), the region's wealthiest private citizens took responsibility for the moral stewardship of their communities and of the nation more broadly, forming a self-conscious aristocracy of birth and talent that directed wealth to the support of largely private institutions such as universities and philanthropic foundations. In Boston, because of the relative homogeneity of the city's population and the cohesiveness of its ruling class, private institutions like Harvard University and Massachusetts General Hospital dominated the civic landscape, encouraging significant charitable donations and bequests. Variations of this model of nonprofit trusteeship, Hall argued, spread to New York and Philadelphia as well.

The culture of trusteeship that prevailed in much of the Midwest, on the other hand, promoted close collaboration between private interests and governmental bodies to serve the public good, establishing "institutional hybrids" that combined public and private funding and governance models (such as the community foundation). This model was often more solicitous of mass giving and directed private charity more toward public institutions such as public universities, which were largely oriented toward regional interests, than to private institutions (Dobkin Hall 1992).

Other scholars of philanthropy have adapted some of the most prominent research on American regionalism to the study of American charitable practice. In the 1970s, political scientist Daniel Elazar identified three distinct political cultures—the moralistic, the individualistic, and the traditionalistic (or in another formulation, the communitarian, the individualistic, and the hierarchical)—which stemmed from original settlers' ethnic and religious values and could be mapped onto three distinct colonial regions: New England, the mid-Atlantic, and the South. Elazar argued that settler migration extended these values to various parts of the country and that their influence persisted into the present day (Schneider 1996).

Scholars of charitable regionalism have employed Elazar's categories and applied them to the establishment of regional cultures of giving and voluntarism. According to Schneider, the moralistic or communitarian culture that Puritans and their Yankee descendants established in New England and exported into northern New York, the Great Lakes area, the upper Mississippi Valley, and the Pacific Northwest, among other regions, encouraged "strong convictions about the public interest rooted in a commitment to make of secular arrangements the same consensual commonwealth that defined their religiosity" (Schneider 1996, 201). Moralistic principles, he argued, encouraged a communitarian culture of philanthropy in which private giving, often directed toward the reduction of inequities in socioeconomic and political structures, was considered "a shared trait reflective of community mores."

According to Schneider, the Quakers who settled along the mid-Atlantic coast and in parts of the backcountry established an individualistic political culture that was pluralistic and more focused on personal well-being than on the communal good and which spread westward through Ohio and Missouri into the Central and High Plains. Individualistic values, he contended, created an even more powerful culture of philanthropy that was especially favorable to "organizations that supplement or obviate government" and that values efficiency, innovation, and practicality in philanthropy (Schneider 1996, 204).

In the South (and later in the Southwest), a more traditional, hierarchical culture emerged that shared some of the individualism of the mid-Atlantic culture but was channeled in more conservative directions through plantation agriculture and the slave labor system. This society provided less opportunity for individuals to pursue social reform and thus generated a weaker tradition of philanthropic giving, one in which philanthropy is not regarded as an instrument of social transformation.

Like Elazar, Schneider asserted that these rough categorizations, stemming from divergent patterns of settlement, continued to shape regional differentials in giving practice.[5] A similar and possibly bolder version of such an argument, focused on cities rather than regions, was made three decades ago by sociologist E. Digby Baltzell. He compared the ruling elite of early Massachusetts and Pennsylvania, focusing on Boston and Philadelphia, with Puritanism as the presiding religious orthodoxy of the former and Quakerism as that of the latter. Baltzell (1979) argued that in Boston, Puritanism's "hierarchical and authoritarian principles," as well as its strong religious imperative to pursue a "calling," led to the emergence of a cohesive ruling class comfortable with its position atop the social hierarchy and committed to "the right use of riches and systematic philanthropy." The saturation of Puritan principles among the elite led to a commitment to strong local and national leadership and encouraged the creation of a host of well-endowed philanthropic institutions. In Philadelphia, on the other hand, "the egalitarian and anti-authoritarian principles of Quakerism" discouraged the emergence of a strong ruling elite and dampened philanthropic ambitions (Baltzell associated the Quaker elite's giving with small-scale "spontaneous charity").

Baltzell clearly meant for his comparison to be an indictment of the Philadelphia elite's approach to political leadership and philanthropy, but note that, from the perspective of Philadelphia's Quakers, they actually promoted a legitimate philanthropic counterethic, one in which personal service and reformist zeal (manifested, for instance, in a commitment to the antislavery and prison reform movements) counted for more than large-scale benefactions. They remained ambivalent about massive benefactions or bequests, which many Quakers worried exacerbated class distinctions (in the process, they gained a reputation in some quarters for stinginess). Writing in her diary in 1901, Anna Wharton Morris, daughter of noted Quaker and Philadelphia industrialist Joseph Wharton, remarked, "Why can't these patronizing, self-conscious philanthropists realize this, that it is sincerity that counts, not patronage of those they consider their inferiors, but who are often their superiors?" Perhaps unsurprisingly, when Joseph Wharton died several years later, he left the bulk of his $25 million estate to his family (Baltzell 1979; Rzeznik 2013).[6]

Baltzell maintained that Philadelphia's Quaker roots continued to shape its political culture for much of the 20th century, even as the city and its elite became much more religiously heterogeneous, with Quakers now amounting to less than 1 percent of the population. A writer for *Philadelphia* magazine recently suggested a tradition of "Quaker modesty" could be partially responsible for Philadelphia's current "crisis of philanthropy" reflected in the city's low ranking in the *Chronicle*'s "How America Gives" report (it had the third-highest total giving opportunity of all American cities). This tradition might have diminished the city's "taste for flashy, billionaire-worthy galas and balls," he suggested.[7]

We should be wary of neat narratives claiming the power of some monolithic primal tradition to shape contemporary life; Baltzell was himself critiqued for precisely such an analytic overstep. But it would also be a mistake to dismiss entirely the power of priority and path dependency—that is, the ways in which early actors can shape institutional landscapes in lasting ways. Moreover, the manner in which religious identity has affected community-wide cultures of giving in the past can help us understand how it does so in the present. Here, the case of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints is instructive. The church places a strong religious imperative on tithing, and areas in the country with high proportions of Mormons are often those with the highest rates of charitable participation, volunteering, and giving ratios; Utah, for instance, routinely ranks as the most charitable state in the nation. One recent survey found that nearly 80 percent of Mormons said they tithed; the national average is less than 4 percent. Although the tithe must be directed to the church, the survey also found that nearly half of Mormon respondents reported engaging in secular giving as well. Charitable giving in the Mormon church serves less as a mark of individual distinction or as a means of expressing personal priorities than as a bond of community. Yet we know little about how such a powerful understanding of charitable responsibility shapes a broader localized culture of giving, one that includes those outside the church as well (Cnaan, Evans, and Curtis 2012).[8]

Besides its religious and ethnic identity, the cohesiveness of the local elite and the role its members play within broader civic power structures can also contribute to the definition of a localized culture of giving. Atlanta's long tradition of homegrown corporate leadership steadfastly devoted to boosting the city's national and international status likely shaped its residents' charitable practice. In the postwar decades, the "power structure," as it became known (led by Coca-Cola's indomitable Robert Woodruff, whose portrait hung in the mayor's private office), worked in close collaboration with the city's political leaders, blurring the line between public and private modes of governance. These corporate leaders supported many of the city's leading institutions and amenities to accelerate Atlanta's emergence as a major metropolis. Woodruff, for instance, provided much of the initial funding for the city's arts center and was Emory University's leading benefactor, "underwr[iting] the expenses of the medical school out of his own pocket" and, along with his brother George, gifting $105 million to the school in 1979, the largest private donation to an American college or university at the time (Allen 1996, 41). Individual philanthropy and especially corporate philanthropy was regarded as a key instrument (and register) of civic boosterism, creating charitable norms and public expectations for its leading citizens. As a *Newsweek* reporter quipped in 1969, Atlanta was "the kind of town in which it would be unthinkable not to fill its United Appeal goal," speaking of the city's federated charity campaign (Allen 1996, 157).

A subsequent generation of corporate leaders and philanthropists largely inherited this tradition of philanthropic boosterism, with a few exceptions and adaptations. The founders of Home Depot, Arthur Blank and Bernard Marcus, are "carpetbaggers" who have, however, assumed significant public roles in directing their personal fortunes toward the city's development. Ted Turner, on the other hand, has deeper roots in the city (though not native ones) and has directed much of his philanthropy beyond Atlanta. The city's black political and business elite have also largely followed this tradition of civic boosterism, which has tended to bypass the city's most progressive grassroots-oriented nonprofits. Yet the relationship between this corporate, elite culture of giving and the equally robust culture of smaller-scale giving among the city's broader African American population, who give at a similar rate as Atlanta's white residents and direct more than half their giving toward local religious causes, is an important subject that requires additional attention (Allen 1996; Schlegel and Peng 2018; The Community Foundation for Greater Atlanta 2005).[9]

The Character of Dominant Industries and the Role of Charitable Infrastructure: The Giving Cultures of Silicon Valley and Cleveland

Besides cohesiveness, the character of a dominant industry within a locale is key in shaping a culture of giving. In recent decades, one of the most prominent examples of this dynamic can be found in Silicon Valley. The region has experienced several waves of philanthropy, tracking key periods of technological innovation and entrepreneurship.

The first wave, which arrived a half century ago, was associated with the region's tech pioneers, William Hewlett and David Packard, who established what would become massive foundations but did not pour the bulk of their fortunes into them until late in life. A second wave came in the late 1990s and 2000s, fueled by the boom in personal computing; though not based in Silicon Valley, Bill Gates served as the exemplar here. We are in the midst of a third wave, which has witnessed the emergence of enormous new fortunes, such as those derived from Facebook, and torrents of philanthropy. According to one recent report, between 2008 and 2013, total Silicon Valley–based giving from individuals rose from $1.9 billion to $4.8 billion, and the ratio of amount given to total assets increased by 114 percent (Callahan 2017; Cortés Culwell and McLeod Grant 2016).

Many of the entrepreneurs responsible for these donations have self-consciously embraced an approach to giving that reflects their tech milieu. The culture of philanthropy that has taken root there is now marked by youthful donors with enormous resources, by the embrace of risk-taking (and even the courting of a certain degree of failure as a mark of entrepreneurial commitment), by a disinclination to limit philanthropy to the traditional institutions—hospitals, museums, universities—favored by philanthropists of the past, by a desire to "disrupt" many of those institutions, and by a technocratic faith in the power of data and digital technology to affect transformative change. In the last few years, there has also been a push, made most strenuously by Salesforce.com founder Marc Benioff, to engage more deeply with nonprofits and institutions in the area.[10]

It is tempting to assume that this strong giving culture emerged automatically from the concentration of high-tech and internet start-ups in the region. Yet the culture required active cultivation. This suggests another significant factor in creating a strong culture of giving: the development of local philanthropic infrastructure and the emergence of philanthropic intermediaries and facilitators. These institutions and intermediaries are often drawn to certain elements of the culture and are in some sense a product of it while also helping to clarify and amplify it.

The active intervention of the Silicon Valley's community foundation, led by Peter deCourcy Hero, proved crucial to the development of a distinctive localized culture of giving. As *Fortune* magazine noted in a 2000 profile, Hero helped transform the region from "the land of the 'cyber-stingy'" to one featuring strong norms regarding active engagement with philanthropy. This is not to suggest that the region did not have any past models of engagement; as mentioned above, its founding generation of entrepreneurs showed a commitment to philanthropy, and the Bay Area more generally is home to several families with strong and enduring philanthropic legacies.

But those models had lost some of their normative appeal to a rising generation of tech entrepreneurs. As one Menlo Park venture capitalist explained to a *Fortune* reporter, "We had no history and no role models for doing philanthropic giving."[11] Hero helped to provide such a model by translating the culture of Silicon Valley into a culture of giving that was "demanding, ambitious, self-conscious, creative, even risky" and grounded less in moral imperatives or traditional notions of stewardship than in a drive to achieve an appropriately high rate of return on the giver's philanthropic investment. In 1997, as *Fortune* noted, Hero changed the name of the institution he headed from the Community Foundation of Santa Clara County to Community Foundation Silicon Valley in a clear sign of allegiance to the tech ethos. He transformed the community foundation "into a one-stop service center for new donors—precisely what was needed to involve the area's young tech tycoons." Each donor was provided with a staffer to shepherd the giver through the deliberative process of determining how much and where to give. Hero also promoted an approach to philanthropy that borrowed from venture capitalism, in which the donor applies close scrutiny to the nonprofit assisted, offering his or her own expertise, and insists upon strict, metrics-based benchmarks to measure investment "returns." Hero also embedded giving counselors at some of the major tech firms in the area and provided back-office and logistical services to facilitate corporate philanthropy.

Under Hero's leadership and the leadership of his successor, Emmett Carson, the foundation experienced tremendous growth. In 2006, it merged with another local community foundation to become the Silicon Valley Community Foundation, now the largest community foundation in the nation and the third-largest foundation overall, with an endowment of approximately $13.5 billion. In recent years, Salesforce.com's Benioff has taken up the role as evangel (and sometime scold) of Silicon Valley's philanthropic responsibility, pushing a model of corporate philanthropy in which tech firms commit early in their growth to pledge 1 percent of equity, of employee time, and of company products or profits to philanthropy.[12]

Cleveland at the turn of the previous century presents another model of a city in which the construction of a particularly robust system of philanthropic infrastructure fueled and was fueled by the development of a strong local giving culture. The institutions created were championed by the city's business elite but directed giving well beyond its bounds. Business leaders pushed for a more professionalized and less sectarian charitable system, one that allowed for more central organization of charitable giving, encouraged mass giving, and sought to dismantle the institutional barriers that sequestered such giving from elite philanthropy.

The system depended on the business community's cohesiveness and its dedication to and experience with public-private partnerships to pursue social reform. It encouraged a culture of giving that established three innovative philanthropic institutions that soon spread throughout the nation: the charity federation, the community chest (the forerunner to the United Way), and the community foundation. The community chest, for instance, was created by the city's chamber of commerce based on concerns that the wealthy were shouldering an unhealthily heavy philanthropic burden to support the city's nonprofit institutions. The concerns were sparked by a survey that showed that the city's richest 1 percent were contributing 96 percent of funds collected for its social welfare agencies (a finding that highlights the importance of a commitment to research in the shaping of a culture of giving).

Similarly, Cleveland lawyer Frederick Goff devised the nation's first community foundation as a means of extending the giving opportunities available to the city's financial elite down to its middle-class and modestly wealthy residents. These institutions helped stoke a participatory charitable ethic that significantly broadened Cleveland's giving base in the citywide federated campaigns to nearly half its inhabitants and boosted the number of contributions received by the city's leading nonprofit institutions over the subsequent decades (Dobkin Hall 1992; Zunz 2012).[13]

Assessing Washington, DC's Culture of Giving: Modest Roots with Signs of Growing Strength

These examples by no means exhaust the various determinants of a place-based culture of giving; for instance, a locale's social capital and tradition of civic activism, as well as its ethnic and racial diversity, likely play important roles as well. But can they shed light on the Washington, DC, metropolitan region's culture of giving? Or on its varied cultures of giving? There is need for much more research and analysis on this topic, but what follows are some preliminary thoughts.

For much of the 20th century, the city did not exhibit a strong culture of giving, or at least not one that actively shaped charitable practice (although there are signs that this has begun to change in recent decades). The nature of Washington's culture of giving seemed indistinct and ill-defined, largely the product of informal social networks and ad hoc personal funding requests. The city could claim few key people whose giving was so prominent that they served as undisputed philanthropic exemplars, and it harbored few institutions that could help cultivate or clarify standards or norms. The region's multijurisdictional nature, consisting of two states and the District of Columbia, made it difficult for a unified giving community to coalesce. Indeed, Washington, DC, established its community foundation, the institution that has often taken a leading role in nurturing a localized giving culture and whose establishment often reflects the commitment of a community's financial elite to do so, late in its life relative to cities of comparable wealth. The Community Foundation for the National Capital Region (now the Greater Washington Community Foundation) was not established until 1973 and did not begin operation until 1976; Atlanta's community foundation, by comparison, was founded more than two decades earlier (The Community Foundation for the National Capital Region 2008).

Additionally, the Washington, DC, metro area's foundation sector is decidedly "modest" according to two leading philanthropy scholars, Alan Abramson and Stefan Toepler. In a chapter in a recently published book on regional differences within America's philanthropic sector, they note that the city lacks a single foundation within the ranks of the nation's 50 largest and has only 2 in the top 100. "While Washington ranked second among twenty-five large areas in per-capita income in 2009," the authors write, "it ranked only fifteenth among twenty-five large areas in foundation assets per capita and thirteenth in foundation-giving per capita." As of 2009, foundation assets represent 2.9 percent of the Washington region's overall GDP, which ranked 21 out of 25 metropolitan areas. We do not know enough about how the presence of institutional philanthropy within an area affects the giving of individual donors (and those distinctions are blurring with the growth of donor-advised funds), but it is possible that the absence of a mega-foundation in the region has led to a diminished status granted to private philanthropy in the public sphere (Abramson and Toepler 2018).

There are several possible explanations for Washington, DC's historical lack of a strong culture of giving. One is the social and residential fluidity of its leading citizens. Writing about the first half of the past century, one keen observer of the city's social life and power structure remarked, "With the continual infusion of socially connected people from the nation's political tides, two or three generations' residence made a family an antique" (Solomon 2004). This created a society "without a traditional hierarchy," and one whose elite (nicknamed the "cave dwellers") distinguished themselves more by their insularity than by their public-spiritedness. It is even possible that the dedication to social entertainment—the elaborate parties and gatherings orchestrated by leading hostesses that were one of the hallmarks of the Washington elite—might have channeled energies and resources away from charitable commitments.[14]

The city's muted culture of giving was also likely a product of its distinctive economic profile. Because the city lacked large-scale industry or manufacturing, it did not produce those massive fortunes that fed the first generation of major modern American philanthropists. For at least the past four decades, however, it has ranked as one of the wealthiest metropolitan areas in the nation. Much of this wealth has flowed from the fount of the federal government. Starting with the New Deal and accelerating through the Great Society, the defense spending bonanza of the Reagan years, and the selective governmental bounties of the current day, the expansion of the powers and prerogatives of the federal government produced a corresponding explosion in the size of the federal workforce as well as in the private sector adjuncts that pooled around it, including lawyers, lobbyists, consultants, and journalists. These opportunities produced some significant if not spectacular personal fortunes (Myers Asch and Musgrove 2017; Lewis 2015).[15]

Outside the federal government (though certainly benefiting from its growth), the dominant industry in the city for much of its history has been real estate. "Real estate developers are to Washington what oil men are to Texas," the *Washingtonian* declared in a 1987 article, estimating that more than half the city's biggest fortunes derived "whole or in large part" from that profession.[16]

Real estate magnates and developers have certainly shown a commitment to philanthropy. Morris Cafritz, for decades the city's wealthiest developer, accumulated a fortune that reached $25 million at the time of his death. In 1948, Cafritz established a foundation that was at one time Washington's largest; he also helped found a hospital in Anacostia. Charles E. Smith, for his part, focused much of his giving on supporting the metro area's Jewish institutions. Nearly all the city's universities bear tribute to the past generosity of developers (The George Washington University's Gelman Library, for instance, or the Kogod School of Business at American University).[17]

Yet none dominated the city in their role as a *philanthropist*. This is perhaps because of the resources at their disposal, which were limited, at least when compared with some of the industrialists and financiers who transformed other American cities. It is also possible that the very nature of their professions contributed to the partial eclipse of this element of their identity. Those engaged in extractive industries—the "oil men" of Texas, for instance—often established a bright line separating the enterprises of capitalist accumulation from that of philanthropic redistribution. For Washington's leading real estate developers, on the other hand, those lines could blur. Development itself—investing in new communities and helping grow areas of the city—was often portrayed as an act of civic largesse, even if it produced healthy profits. Such characterizations established amorphous boundaries around Washington's culture of philanthropy and the enterprise of moneymaking, which might have hampered the emergence of a discrete tradition of exemplary public philanthropy.[18]

Take, for instance, the *Washington Post*'s announcement of a major investment by developer Abe Pollin in 1995 to create a sports arena in Chinatown. The paper seemed to both herald the deal as an admirable philanthropic act and disassociate it from any tradition of private giving for the public good in the city. "It would be different if this were Detroit, where the Ford family has hurled millions into urban development for decades, or New York, eminently blessed with the philanthropic landmarks of Andrew Carnegie, John D. Rockefeller and other captains of industry. But this is not any other city," remarked editor Elizabeth Spayd. "It is Washington, and for far too long it has lacked the kind of wealthy benefactors that undergird most other municipalities."[19]

Spayd proposed one main explanation for what she considered the city's disappointing philanthropic record: "Those who are in a position to help view the District as the responsibility of the federal government. When they give, it is usually to a theater or arts group, or to a favorite charity, but rarely with the force and vision that would help to reverse Washington's sagging fortunes." Although Spayd did not make this argument explicitly, her point could be extended to suggest that the status of the federal government as the major local benefactor deprived Washington's wealthy of a model on which to pattern their own identities as major givers.[20]

Spayd was correct in asserting that the federal government has provided much of the funding for parks, cultural institutions, and other amenities in DC that had been provided by private benefactors in other cities. (As a George Mason University professor of public affairs more recently told the *New York Times*, "the federal government was the sugar daddy.")[21] She was also right to assume that the outsized presence of the federal government is key to understanding Washington's culture of giving more generally. Yet the relationship is more complex than she outlines. There is an extensive, if ultimately inconclusive, scholarly literature on whether governmental spending crowds out private philanthropy. Geographer Julian Wolpert, for instance, has found a modest crowding out effect in federal spending but an opposite effect in state and municipal government spending; local public spending, he noted, appears to move in tandem with private charitable contributions (Wolpert 1989). Others have found that higher per capita state expenditures lead to a lower probability of making a donation to a non-religious cause. And yet if it is true that the federal government's spending in the region depresses the charitable impulses of Washington's residents, it is also true that it is the indirect source of a considerable amount of those residents' charitable resources. So within the city's culture of giving, the federal government giveth and the federal government taketh away (Bielefeld, Rooney, and Steinberg 2005).[22]

Yet there are several other ways to understand the federal government's crowding out effect on Washington's giving culture. On one hand, it is possible that the scale of the government's spending power so dramatically dwarfs the capacities of private givers that it has led to more critical appraisals of

Washington's native philanthropists, as exemplified by Spayd's comments, such that modest contributions that would have been acceptable in other cities are deemed inadequate.

It is also an open question how the District's tortuous relationship with Congress (e.g., its struggles to achieve home rule and its lack of full political representation) has shaped Washington's culture of giving. Has it subtly diminished residents' sense of individual causal agency, depressing voluntaristic commitments? Or does electoral disempowerment stoke philanthropic engagement as a substitute?

Finally, we must also ask how the gravitational pull of the federal city, meaning not just its governmental institutions but those that represent national and international interests as well, crowds out the interests of what might be called the "other DC." For many decades, this Washington was synonymous with an African American majority (the city became majority African American in the late 1950s and remained so until 2015) that had its own distinct culture of giving. It likely still does; according to a 2012 report from the *Chronicle of Philanthropy*, Prince George's County, which has the highest proportion of African American residents of any county in the Washington region, also had the highest proportion of its adults giving to charity, with an estimated 90 percent of giving directed to houses of worship.[23]

How this culture of giving interacts with others in the metro area deserves additional research and analysis; my colleagues at the Urban Institute have made an important start with a breakdown of giving patterns among high-income residents in the Washington region by zip code and county (Ovalle et al. 2018). In many ways, the divides of race and socioeconomic status that define the Washington region are also reflected in its patterns of charitable giving. There is some indication that within the past several decades, a higher proportion of Washington, DC's philanthropic dollars have stayed within the metro area, which might signal the emergence of a more cohesive philanthropic community. Yet, with some exceptions, the region's wealthiest citizens have rarely directed the bulk of their giving to the areas in most dire need of assistance, which are largely those with the highest percentages of African American and Latino residents. When the city's wealthiest have given locally, it is most often to institutions that are nationally or internationally oriented. There is evidence that this is also true of the city's foundations. A decade ago, "the first study of foundation philanthropy to examine the proportion of local foundation giving to locally-focused organizations anywhere in the US" was conducted in Washington, DC, commissioned by the Meyer Foundation (Foundation Center 2009). It found that locally focused organizations in the metro area (as opposed to organizations based in the area that did not direct their services locally) received a third of the grant dollars awarded by area foundations.[24]

It is not clear how this ratio compares to giving patterns in other major metropolitan areas. But what does seem to make Washington, DC, distinctive is the considerable disjuncture between the unmet needs of its locally focused nonprofits and the fundraising success of its major nationally and internationally oriented organizations and institutions in gaining support from both local and out-of-district donors. In fact, as Abramson and Toepler point out, Washington brings in more philanthropic dollars than it gives out. In 2005, 10 percent of total foundation grantmaking nationwide was directed to institutions in the city (Abramson and Toepler 2018).

Indeed, that many of the largest philanthropic gifts have come from donors who lived outside the metro area might have contributed to a sense that mega-philanthropy was itself a foreign import. Take, for instance, the reaction to the torrent of philanthropy Catherine Reynolds, who made her fortune in the Washington, DC-based financial services industry, directed to several local cultural institutions in the early 2000s. The $100 million she gave to the Kennedy Center matched a then-recent donation made by a California real estate developer to the Smithsonian as the largest cash gift to the Washington area. There was considerable celebration of the gifts in the press, but the philanthropic surge, and the publicity it received, was met with wariness in some quarters. “Washington is the capital, but we do things here in a more gentle way,” the chairwoman of the Washington Opera Women's Committee told the *Washington Post*. “If somebody comes in and just gives huge amounts of money, it raises some questions as to the motives behind this.”[25]

Some of those questions might be answered—and new ones raised—as the Washington, DC, region now seems to be developing a stronger local culture of giving.

This is largely the product of another wave of high-wealth individuals that have flooded the region in recent years, a consequence of the continued profitability of consulting, law, and lobbying as well as the emergence of new sources of wealth in the tech, biotech, and finance industries. A “billionaire census” conducted in 2017 by the global intelligence firm Wealth-X counted 17 billionaires in the Washington region, ranking it 25th in the world and 6th in the US (Wealth-X 2017, 20). Wealth-X has also identified 2,049 residents in the area worth $30 million or more. These figures represent substantial increases from just a few decades ago. According to some observers, the prevalence and prominence of such wealth has subtly altered the measure of social status within the city’s social elite so that wealth itself, as opposed to political power, is now often granted pride of place within its ranks. With the rising status accorded to private wealth, philanthropy itself has gained a greater prominence. The region boasts five signatories of the Giving Pledge (Robert and Arlene Kogod, Jean and Steve Case, Vicki and Roger Sant, David Rubenstein, and Richard Edwin and Nancy Marriott), who have made a public commitment to devote more than half their wealth toward charitable causes. (For point of comparison, Atlanta can claim four.)[26]

If a larger pool of people with both the resources and inclination to engage in high-profile, large-scale philanthropy has emerged within the Washington region in the past decade, no distinctive regional style has developed. Take, for instance, the three founders of Washington, DC-based global private equity firm The Carlyle Group, William Conway Jr., Daniel D'Aniello, and David Rubenstein. Each has taken a distinctive, active, and personal approach to his philanthropy and engaged with different institutional sectors of the city. Rubenstein has pioneered a "patriotic giving" that supplements the federal government in supporting cultural and historical institutions and programs with a symbolic, national significance (e.g., paying half of the repair costs for the Washington Monument after it was damaged in an earthquake and purchasing the Magna Carta to loan permanently to the National Archives). Conway has pledged $1 billion to support job training and education programs that help the area's low-income residents. D'Aniello has made major contributions to the American Enterprise Institute, one of Washington's leading conservative think tanks.[27]

Much like the thriving high-end consumer market that has developed to meet the city's surge of new wealth, sprouting Tesla showrooms and boutique real estate agencies throughout the city, new means of support and guidance for Washington's philanthropic community have also emerged, bolstering the area's underdeveloped philanthropic infrastructure. In 2000, entrepreneurs Mario Morino, Raul Fernandez, and Mark Warner established Venture Philanthropy Partners, a firm that sought to apply the principles of venture philanthropy to the Washington region and transform its nonprofit sector. In 2003, the Harman Family Foundation began publishing a "Catalogue for Philanthropy" highlighting the range of small local nonprofits in need of funding in an effort to boost individual giving in the Washington region. The staff of the Meyer Foundation, one of the city's oldest and largest philanthropic institutions, have provided guidance and financial advising for individual donors in the Washington metro area; its mission statement includes among its aims "serv[ing] as a resource to other donors who want to make effective charitable investments in the region" (Bernholz 2004). The Case Foundation has taken the lead in supporting local social enterprise and impact investing campaigns. Giving circles like Black Benefactors have developed in the city as well, providing a community for givers and helping to guide their gifts.[28]

The growth of such a support system was triggered by a keen sense that Washington, DC, was not living up to its giving potential and that the city was not immune to the vast and troubling disparities of wealth and opportunity that had become a focus of the nation's politics. Whereas in the past, the city's lack of a prominent corps of philanthropists had played a significant role in public discourse, that lack had often been taken as a sort of civic fact of nature or mark of Washington exceptionalism. It no longer is. The past two decades have seen a sustained commitment to developing a strong culture of giving in Washington commensurate with its wealth and status.

That culture is not yet fully defined and will no doubt continue to adapt in the years to come. This is especially the case considering how millennials have driven Washington's recent population surge. As a recent Urban Institute analysis notes, "The country is aging, but DC is getting younger. From 2000 to 2010, the city's 18- to 34-year old population grew by roughly 37,000, and now makes up 35 percent of the population. (Millennials make up only 23 percent of the US population as a whole.)"[29] Abramson and Toepler (2018) also point out that the city's wealthiest residents, those with a net worth of over $20 million, are seven years younger than in the United States overall.

In other words, many of Washington's wealthiest residents likely have not yet reached their peak giving years. The city's culture of giving—or perhaps its *cultures* of giving—will grow and adapt with them. These givers will need to strike a balance between national and local responsibilities and grapple with how philanthropic support works alongside federal and municipal funding. Surging philanthropic resources will also have to contend with the region's high costs of living, which shows little sign of weakening.[30] Finally, this developing culture makes clear the need for more research into the relationship between philanthropy and place, work that delves beyond national trends to explore the complex ecologies that shape local communities of individual givers.

Notes

[1] Drew Lindsay, "How The Chronicle Compiled the Data for How America Gives," *Chronicle of Philanthropy*, October 3, 2017, https://www.philanthropy.com/article/How-The-Chronicle-Compiled-the/241347.

[2] Tyler Davis, Drew Lindsay, and Brian O'Leary, "How America Gives Data: Leaders and Laggards, Giving Opportunities, and More," *Chronicle of Philanthropy*, October 2, 2017, https://www.philanthropy.com/interactives/how-america-gives.

[3] See, for instance, Curti (1958). For an example of a comparison of giving trends from a global perspective that highlights the United States' exceptionalism, see the Charities Aid Foundation's annual World Giving Index at "CAF World Giving Index 2017," Charities Aid Foundation, accessed April 16, 2018, https://www.cafonline.org/about-us/publications/2017-publications/caf-world-giving-index-2017.

[4] As Wolpert (1995) wrote, "Americans are reactivating the tradition of greater state and local control over the provision of service and welfare policy, and the impacts are being felt in our strongly decentralized and fragmented nonprofit sector."

[5] Recent research has offered a modest confirmation of this claim. Nonprofit scholars Wolfgang Bielefeld, Patrick Rooney, and Kathy Steinberg (2005) have determined that regions of the United States associated with a strong moralistic political culture exhibit higher donation levels while those with a strong individualistic political culture show lower giving levels.

[6] While alive, Wharton did make significant contributions to the University of Pennsylvania and toward the establishment of Swarthmore College.

[7] Malcolm Burnley, "Only You Can Fix Philadelphia's Philanthropy Crisis," *Philadelphia*, November 25, 2017, https://www.phillymag.com/news/2017/11/25/philanthropy-crisis-philadelphia/. For figures on Quakers in the Philadelphia metropolitan area, see data from the US Religion Census at "American Religious Data: 1952-2010," US Religion Census, accessed April 16, 2018, http://www.usreligioncensus.org/compare.php.

[8] Ben Gose, "Wealthiest Don't Rate High on Giving Measure," *Chronicle of Philanthropy*, August 19, 2012.

[9] In a 1994 report on giving patterns within the nation's largest cities, the *Chronicle of Philanthropy* highlighted the persistence of this high-level corporate engagement with philanthropy: "In Atlanta, involvement with charity is practically a prerequisite to becoming a powerful figure in the business life of the city, donors and charity officials say." Elizabeth Greene, Bruce Millar, and Jennifer Moore, "The Midwest's Charitable Advantage," *Chronicle of Philanthropy*, February 22, 1994. Kevin Stack, "Looking Beyond Atlanta, Turner's Charity Blind Spot," *New York Times*, September 28, 1997; Kevin Stack, "Charity of Relative Newcomers Rivals Gifts to Atlanta From Old-Timers," *New York Times*, December 16, 2001.

[10] Vundu Goel, "Philanthropy in Silicon Valley: Big Bets on Big Ideas," *New York Times*, November 4, 2016; Alessandra Stanley, "Silicon Valley's New Philanthropy," *New York Times*, October 31, 2015.

[11] Peter Elkind, "The Man Who Sold Silicon Valley on Giving," *Fortune*, November 27, 2000, http://fortune.com/2016/08/24/peter-hero-silicon-valley-giving/.

[12] Elkind, "The Man who Sold Silicon Valley on Giving"; Alex Daniels, "Silicon Valley Community Foundation's Assets Outpace Ford Foundation," *Chronicle of Philanthropy*, February 8, 2018, https://www.philanthropy.com/article/With-135-Billion-in-Assets/242479; Brad Stone, "Marc Benioff's Philanthropic Mission: San Francisco," *Bloomberg*, December 23, 2014, https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2014-12-23/marc-benioff-to-tech-industry-give-back-to-san-francisco.

[13] David Hammack, "Philanthropy," *Encyclopedia of Cleveland History*, accessed April 16, 2018, https://case.edu/ech/articles/p/philanthropy/.

[14] Sally Quinn, "The Party's Over," *Washington Post*, December 13, 1987.

[15] Abramson and Toepler (2018) cite a study that points out that despite Washington's status as one of the wealthiest cities in the nation, the percentage of its residents with a net worth of over $20 million sits at the national average.

[16] Larry Van Dyne, "The Making of Washington." *Washingtonian*, November 1987.

[17] Van Dyne, "The Making of Washington."

[18] Van Dyne, "The Making of Washington."

[19] Liz Spayd, "The Search for More Abe Pollins," *Washington Post*, January 22, 1995.

[20] Spayd, "The Search for More Abe Pollins."

[21] Jennifer Steinhauer, "A Billionaire Philanthropist in Washington Who's Big on 'Patriotic Giving,'" *New York Times*, February 20, 2014

[22] Spayd, "The Search for More Abe Pollins."

[23] Michael Anft, "Faith Drives Donations in D.C. Region," C*hronicle of Philanthropy*, August 19, 2012. For more data on Washington's socioeconomic disparities, see "Population Trends," District of Columbia Office of Planning, April 26, 2016, https://dme.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/dme/publication/attachments/Office%20of%20Planning%20Presentation%20for%20CSCTF%204%2026%2016.pdf.

[24] The Washington Regional Association of Grantmakers (2007) notes that the proportion of its member institutions' grantmaking dollars that stayed within the region increased from 46 percent in 1992 to 63 percent.

[25] David Montgomery, "D.C. Philanthropists Catherine and Wayne Reynolds Pledge Millions," *Washington Post*, April 9, 2002; Jacqueline Trescott and Roxanne Roberts, "Record Gift for Kennedy Center," *Washington Post*, December 7, 2002.

[26] For information on Giving Pledge signatories, see https://glasspockets.org/philanthropy-in-focus/eye-on-the-giving-pledge. Robert Frank, "Washington Welcomes the Wealthiest," *New York Times*, May 12, 2017; Roxanne Roberts, "How Money Muscled Out Power on Washington's A-List," *Washington Post Magazine*, December 8, 2016.

[27] Steinhauer, "A Billionaire Philanthropist in Washington Who's Big on 'Patriotic Giving'"; Robert McCartney, "Bill Conway Decides How to Donate $1 Billion," *Washington Post*, September 26, 2012; Mike Scutari, "With a Big Campus Gift for Veterans, a Billionaire's Giving Comes into Sharper Focus," *Inside Philanthropy*, March 1, 2018, https://www.insidephilanthropy.com/home/2018/3/1/daniel-daniello-philanthropy-syracuse-veterans.

[28] Frank, "Washington Welcomes the Wealthiest"; Jacqueline Salmon, "The Charities' Case," *Washington Post*, October 26, 2003.

[29] "Washington, DC: Our Changing City", Urban Institute, accessed April 16, 2018, http://apps.urban.org/features/OurChangingCity/demographics/index.html#index.

[30] See "The Real Per Capita Personal Income and Cost of Living in the Washington Region," The Stephen S. Fuller Institute for Research on the Washington Region's Economic Future, accessed August 29, 2018, http://sfullerinstitute.gmu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/SFI_Personal_Income_and_Cost_of_Living_062317.pdf.

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