

Books

American Foundations: An investigative history Mark Dowie MIT Press \$29.95

Elan Garonzik and
Alejandro Amezcu

is a bit like asking turkeys what they think of Christmas dinner. This is particularly true as concerns one of Dowie's three key recommendations, the 'Philanthropic Antitrust Act', which would break up large foundations so that none would have assets over \$1 billion. However, although Dowie is frequently critical and sometimes deeply cynical, he is clearly in favour of the institution and has praise for many foundations and foundation leaders.

Dowie's book attempts to examine how 'large scale philanthropy has affected the fields of human endeavor they have supported over the last century'. To wit, he explores fields that foundations have targeted and asks how they have fared. The bulk of the book comprises eight chapters – on public education, science, health, environment, agriculture, energy, art and civility (his term for civil society). Dowie's second chapter, 'Knowledge', for example, focuses on publicly funded elementary and

Having staff of a large foundation review this book

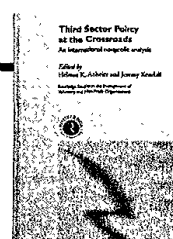
secondary education. Here, he explores the history of several grantmaking initiatives. He also remarks on reasons why, despite significant philanthropic investment, he believes efforts to strengthen America's public school system have largely failed. An opening section covers the history of America's foundation community, while closing chapters praise a number of funders and include his recommendations for the field.

Interspersed throughout the book are short vignettes as well as quotes from a broad range of leaders and scholars in the field. He uses these devices to explain the language and practices of foundations, so readers may understand some of the culture of foundation work. For example, he defines such terms as 'accountability' and 'plutocracy', and includes extended discussions of terms like 'leverage' and 'risk'.

For the record, Dowie's other key recommendations include requiring that private foundations expand

their boards beyond family members, friends and close professional advisers, and making it mandatory for publicly elected officials to appoint 33 per cent of any foundation's board members. This last appears to conflict with one of Dowie's earlier notions, that excess wealth could be put to work 'de-corrupting government'. If Dowie believes government is corrupt, it cannot be logical to recommend that government appoint foundation board members.

On reading the volume, several times the reviewers wrote in the margin, 'Not true' or 'This is wrong, how dare he!' But, to return to the opening analogy, when Christmas approaches the turkeys must be saying the same sort of thing. *American Foundations* has been widely reviewed, and *Alliance* readers can seek out reviews that offer a variety of perspectives. James K Galbraith's review in the *New York Times* of 12 August 2001 is one, and it is available on the Internet.



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Third Sector Policy at the Crossroads: An international non-profit analysis Helmut K Anheier and Jeremy Kendall (eds) Routledge £60

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emerging third sector policy issues in a broad international context. Introduction and conclusion apart, five of the chapters focus on the US; five on Western Europe (EU, Germany, Netherlands, UK); two each on Central Europe (Hungary, Poland) and Asia (Japan, Philippines); and one each on Africa and Latin America (South Africa, Mexico).

Mostly based on an earlier VOLUNTAS symposium, this volume explores

At the heart of the volume lies an analysis of the crossroads that the American non-profit sector is currently facing. Chapter 2 details four overarching challenges in the US – interrelated fiscal, economic, legitimacy and effectiveness crises – and suggests a renewal strategy to overcome them. Most chapters take the US position more or less closely as the starting point and organizing frame for the discussion of local policy developments. Given the widespread sentiment – particularly in Western Europe – that US-based and informed non-profit research is of limited relevance in understanding

institutional realities elsewhere, and given the general lack of integration of non-profit and development (ie NGO) research, this seems like a brazen undertaking. Nevertheless, it works on two levels.

First, some authors take issue with the suggestion that sectoral renewal should bring the American non-profit sector back into the centre. They argue, on the one hand, that the sector will be better off in the long run at the margins rather than at the heart of the social policy mainstream, and, on the other, that the unavoidable partnership development that would come with re-centring the sector

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