“Changing the world is not easy. When I started Acumen, it was with a commitment to do what’s right, not what’s easy.”

Jacqueline Novogratz, Impact Investor & Philanthropist

“In the end, my goal is to do as much good as I can for the world.”

Sam Bankman-Fried, FTX Founder & Effective Altruist

“The secret to successful hiring is this: Look for the people who want to change the world.”

Marc Benioff, Salesforce Founder & Philanthropist

“First they think you’re crazy, then they fight you, then all of a sudden you change the world.”

Elizabeth Holmes, Theranos Founder

“One voice can change a room, and if one voice can change a room, then it can change a city, and if it can change a city, it can change a state, and if it can change a state, it can change a nation, and if it can change a nation, it can change the world. Your voice can change the world.”

President Barack Obama

Course Description: There seem to be endless ways to change the world these days. You can go into politics, start a nonprofit or foundation, become a social activist, join a global tech company, or pick up a pint of Ben & Jerry’s “Change the Whirled” ice cream at the grocery store. But who should lead social change? What tools should they use? Who should primarily benefit? And how do you know if, or when, the world has actually changed?

This course introduces students to significant debates on the proper role of wealthy and well-educated Americans in leading social change from the 1890s through the present. We will use historical methods to interrogate the ideas, institutions, and arguments that philanthropists – and their critics – have developed in answering these questions. Through these debates, we will seek to better understand the nature, possibilities, and limits of social change in American democracy.

Course Objectives:

1. We will analyze, contextualize, and interpret the arguments in historical sources. We will seek to understand why individuals arrived at the conclusions they did given the problems they faced and ideas available at the time. But we will not surrender our own privileged historical positions. Instead, we will evaluate ideas and actions with the knowledge of how things ultimately turned out and the alternative paths that individuals may not have chosen, or may not have recognized.
2. We will develop novel historical arguments and select and interpret evidence that supports our claims in several writing assignments. This is a writing-intensive course and is designed to help students become stronger, more confident researchers and writers. We will also practice writing as a tool for persuading people in the ‘real world’ beyond the bounds of our classroom.

3. We will become participants in live debates in the worlds of philanthropy and social change – listening to and building on our classmates’ ideas in class conversations, using historical ideas and arguments as methods of persuasion, and discussing challenging ideas across differences of background, perspective, experiences, and academic discipline.

**Grading**
30% Class Participation  
5% First Paper Thesis & Outline  
15% First Paper, 5-7 pp.  
5% Reflection Assignment, 1 p.  
5% Final Paper Partial Draft  
25% Final Paper, 10-12 pp.

**Assignments**
*First Paper.* The first paper will be 5-7 pp. in length and will draw entirely on assigned readings. Students may choose from a provided list of questions, or propose a question of their own to be approved by the course instructor. Each question may be answered using only course readings (no outside research required), but students will be expected to draw on several readings in their essays. An outline of this paper will be due on Wednesday, February 15 to be discussed in a one-on-one meeting with the instructor. A final draft will be due on Monday, February 27.

*Op-Ed Paper.* Students will write an 600-800-word op-ed or Substack-style newsletter on a topic of their choosing. They will be expected to develop an argument, anticipate counterclaims, and identify the broader stakes of their position. This paper will be due on Wednesday, March 15.

*Reflection.* Students will write a brief reflection (300 – 400 words) that addresses an unanswered question from the first part of the course and a question they wish to further explore during the second half of the semester. This response will be due on Friday, March 31.

*Final Paper.* The final paper will be 10-12 pp. in length and address a major historical question approved by the instructor. Students will be expected to draw on assigned readings and research conducted outside of class. Topics must be submitted by Wednesday, April 5. A partial draft will be due on Wednesday, April 19. The final paper will be due on Friday, April 28.

All assignments must be submitted by 3:00 PM ET on the deadline date. Papers not submitted by that time will be marked down a third of a letter grade for each day late (so, a grade of a B+ will become a B if one day late, a B- if two days late, and so on).
Class Participation and Attendance
This is a participation-intensive course. Consistent and thoughtful engagement during seminar is essential to earning a high grade for class participation. It is expected that you will attend each class section and contribute to our weekly conversations. The quality of your contributions is far more important than the quantity. Students who score highest in class participation will not only meet all expectations, but will go above-and-beyond in their engagement this semester.

I expect that you will make an effort to contribute thoughtfully to our discussion each class. You can expect that I will regularly ask students to pose and/or answer questions. Being placed “on-the-spot” often makes us uncomfortable, but navigating new questions and ideas will be essential to our discussion and will build important skills for the future. It is okay to let me know if you do not know an answer or need additional time to gather your thoughts, but not to opt out of trying. If this expectation causes you serious concern, please let me know and we can meet during office hours to brainstorm alternative ways of contributing to class discussion.

I expect that all contributions will be thoughtful, respectful, and supportive of all members of our classroom community.

Required Texts
All required readings for this course will be available online or on electronic reserve.

Academic Integrity
The strength of the university depends on academic and personal integrity. In this course, you must be honest and truthful. Ethical violations include cheating on exams, plagiarism, reuse of assignments, improper use of the Internet and electronic devices, unauthorized collaboration, alteration of graded assignments, forgery and falsification, lying, facilitating academic dishonesty, and unfair competition. Please report any violations you witness to the instructor. You may consult the associate dean of student conduct by calling the Office of the Dean of Students at 410.516.8208 or via email at integrity@jhu.edu.

For more information, see the Homewood Student Affairs site on academic ethics: https://studentaffairs.jhu.edu/student-life/student-conduct/academic-ethics-undergraduates

Accommodations
All students with disabilities who require accommodations for this course should contact the course instructor at their earliest opportunity to discuss their specific needs. It is preferable that students request their accommodations at the start of the semester and share their eligibility letter with their instructor. Students submitting their letter later in the semester are still eligible to receive approved accommodations, but there could be a delay in accommodations being implemented. Students with a disability who are requesting accommodations must be registered with the Homewood office of Student Disability Services (101 Shaffer Hall; 410-516-4720; studentdisabilityservices@jhu.edu) to receive accommodations.
Part I: Philanthropy in the Twentieth Century

Week 1 (1/23 – 1/25): Philanthropy in a Democratic Society

Monday: Why study the history of philanthropy?

Wednesday: Should private wealth be used to advance the public good?

Week 2 (1/30 – 2/1): Defining Progress in a Progressive Era

Monday: Is altruism ever truly disinterested?
* Paul Friedmann, “The Genesis of Disinterested Benevolence,” Mind (1878) [7 pp]

Wednesday: Can charity spark social change?
* Josephine Shaw Lowell, Public Relief and Private Charity (1884) preface, 88-100. [13 pp]

Week 3 (2/6 – 2/8): Social Change in Jim Crow America

Monday: What role can or should philanthropists play in securing justice for marginalized groups or individuals?
* Mary Church Terrell, “What the Julius Rosenwald Fund is Doing” (1935). [3 pp]

Wednesday: What are the possibilities and limits of change initiated at the margins?
* W. E. B. Du Bois, “The Talented Tenth” (1903), 33-75. [equiv. 20 pp]
* Marcus Garvey, “Motive of the NAACP Exposed” (1923), in African American Political Thought, 224-229. [5 pp]
**Week 4 (2/13 – 2/15): Building an Empire of Knowledge**

**Monday:** Who does foundation-funded knowledge of society most benefit?
- Frederick Keppel, introduction and “Place of the Foundation in the General Picture of Progress” in *The Foundation* (1930), xix-xxii, 3-15. [15 pp]

**Wednesday:** Who should lead, and who should participate in, public health interventions?
- Frantz Fanon, “Medicine and Colonialism,” *A Dying Colonialism* (1959), 121-145. [14 pp]

**First Paper Thesis & Outline Due**

**Week 5 (2/20 – 2/22): Foundations of the American Century**

**Monday:** Are private foundations and nonprofit institutions uniquely capable of innovation?

**Wednesday:** What role can or should foundations play in global economic development?

**Week 6 (2/27 – 3/1): Philanthropy, Politics, and the Public Good**

**Monday:** Is foundation support for the public good ever non-political?
- Staff of the Joint Committee on Internal Revenue Taxation, “General explanation of the Tax reform act of 1969” (1970), Sections 1, 6, 8. [10 pp]

**First Paper Due**

**Wednesday:** Should private wealth create and sustain networks of political activists?
- Vanguard Public Foundation, *Robin Hood was Right: A guide to giving your money for social change* (1977), 4-9, 15-21, 36-43. [20 pp]
Week 7 (3/6 – 3/8): Rethinking Community in the 1960s & 1990s
Monday: Should local communities lead, control, or participate in social change?

Wednesday: Does a vital civil society require private, voluntary associations?

Monday: When should the tools used in creating wealth be used in giving it away?

Wednesday: Does social entrepreneurship resolve, or reproduce, the problems it identifies in past philanthropic practices?

Op-Ed Paper Due
Part II: Debates in Contemporary Philanthropy

Spring Break (3/18 – 3/26)

Week 9 (3/27 – 3/29): No Class
Reflection Assignment Due Friday, March 31

Week 10 (4/3 – 4/5): Who Benefits from Elite Philanthropy?
Monday: Do the potential benefits of philanthropic giving outweigh the potential costs?

Wednesday: To what extent can or should elites benefit from engaging in philanthropy?
* Anand Giridharadas, Winners Take All: The Elite Charade of Changing the World (Knopf, 2018), 3-34, 35-59. [56 pp]

Final Paper Topic Due

Week 11 (4/10 – 4/12): Is Elite-Led Change More Effective or Impactful?
Monday: Is giving more effectively the best way to give (and live) more ethically?
* Responses to Effective Altruism, Boston Review (1 July 2015). [23 pp]

Wednesday: Should philanthropists prioritize change over the short-term or long-term?

Week 12 (4/17 – 4/19): Do the Ends Justify the Means?
Monday: Is profit an essential or inappropriate tool for sparking social change?

* Davis Smith, “How Davis Smith founded Cotopaxi and built one of the most recognizable outdoor brands,” *Utah Business* (12 August 2021). [8 pp]


Wednesday: Does the source of philanthropic wealth matter?


**Final Paper Partial Draft Due**

**Week 13 (4/24 – 4/26): The Future of Social Change**

Monday: Should elite foundations be diversified or decentered?


Wednesday: How should the world be changed?


**Final Essay Due Friday, April 28 at 3:00 PM**