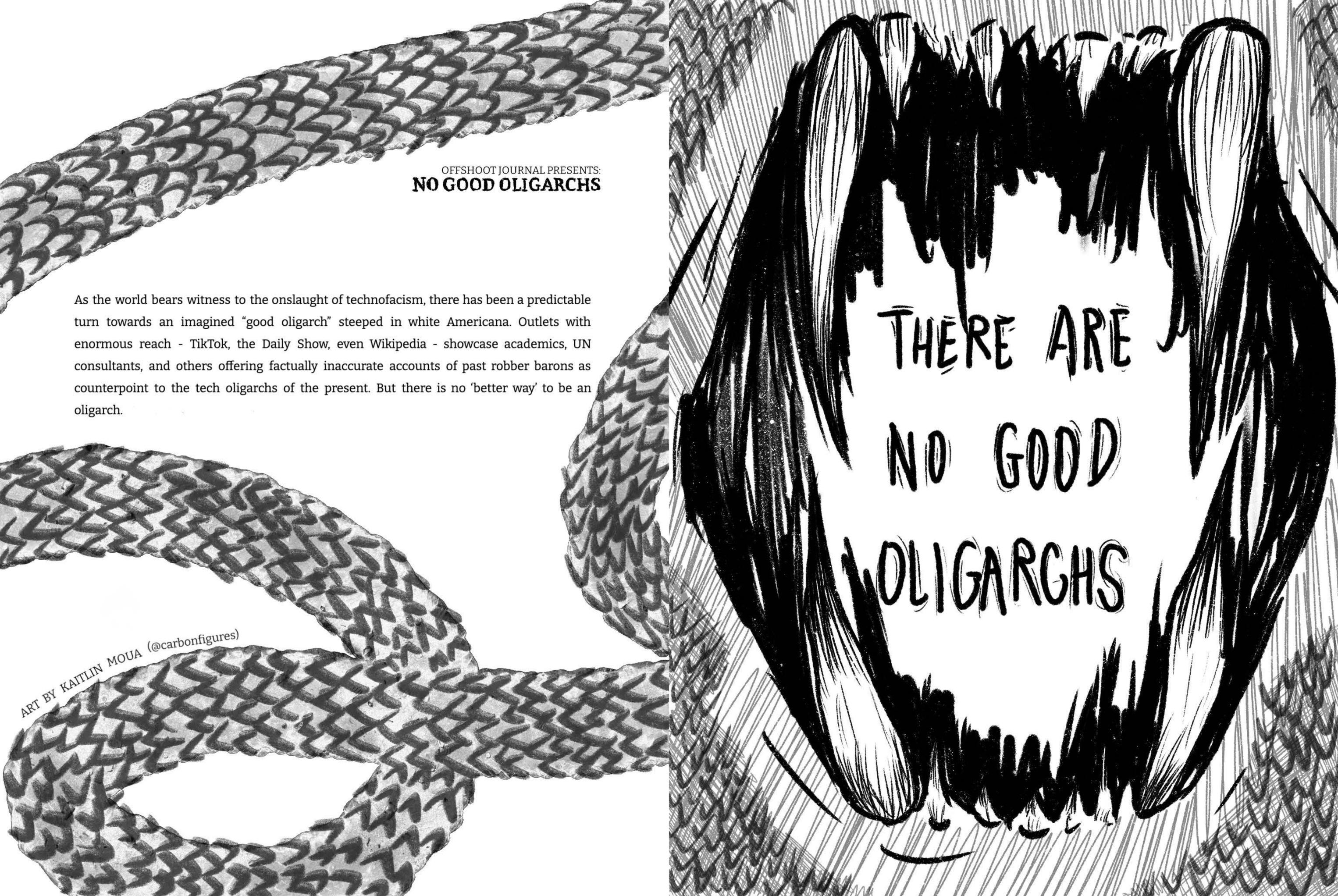


GOOD OLIGARCHS
NO GOOD OLIGARCHS
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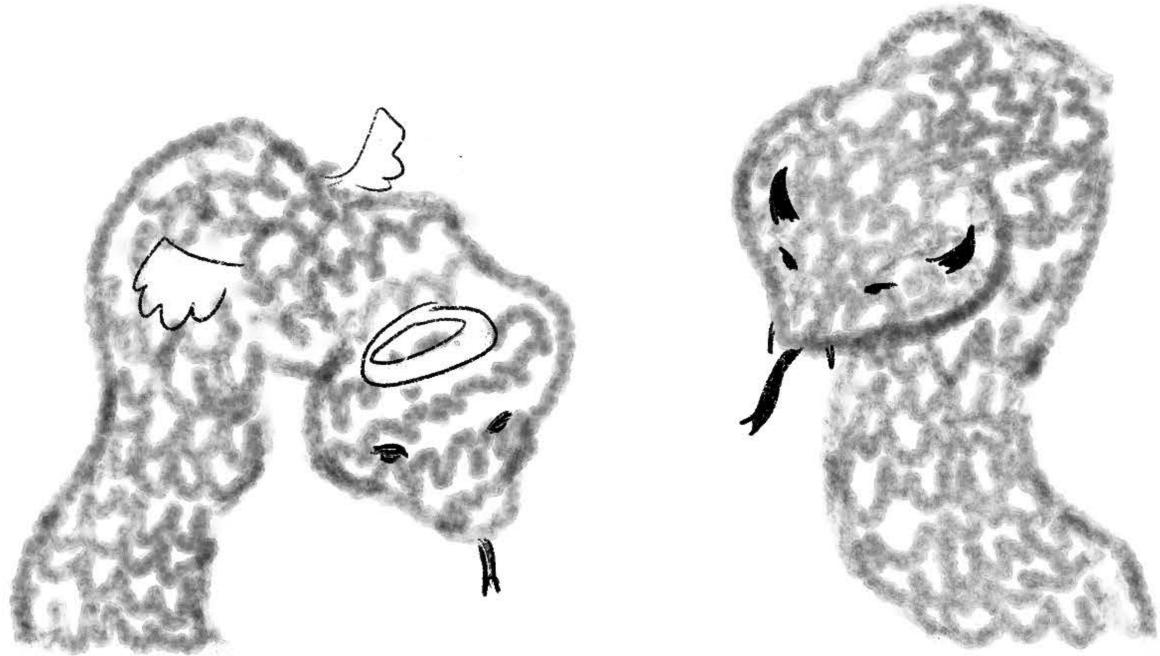


OFFSHOOT JOURNAL PRESENTS:
NO GOOD OLIGARCHS

As the world bears witness to the onslaught of technofacism, there has been a predictable turn towards an imagined “good oligarch” steeped in white Americana. Outlets with enormous reach - TikTok, the Daily Show, even Wikipedia - showcase academics, UN consultants, and others offering factually inaccurate accounts of past robber barons as counterpoint to the tech oligarchs of the present. But there is no ‘better way’ to be an oligarch.

ART BY KAITLIN MOUA (@carbonfigures)

THERE ARE
NO GOOD
OLIGARCHS

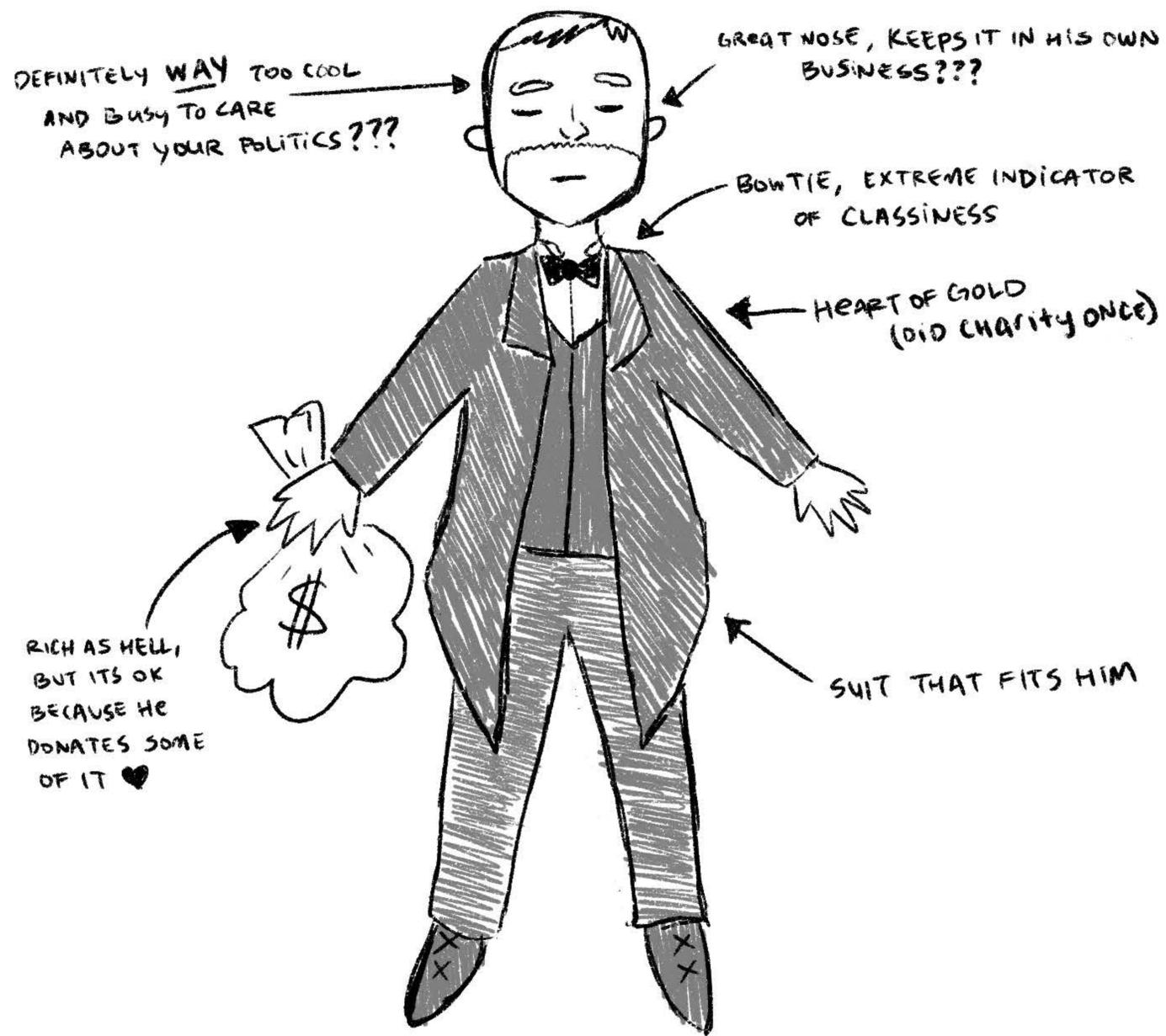


In a recent interview with Jon Stewart, Brooke Harrington, Professor of Economic Sociology at Dartmouth, instructs the audience of the Daily Show on the differences between the brologarchs (Elon Musk, Peter Thiel, etc) and the oligarchs of the past: Carnegie and Rockefeller “just wanted to get rich and stuck to their own business. The brologarchs have an explicit political agenda that is essentially anti-democratic, and almost monarchical.”

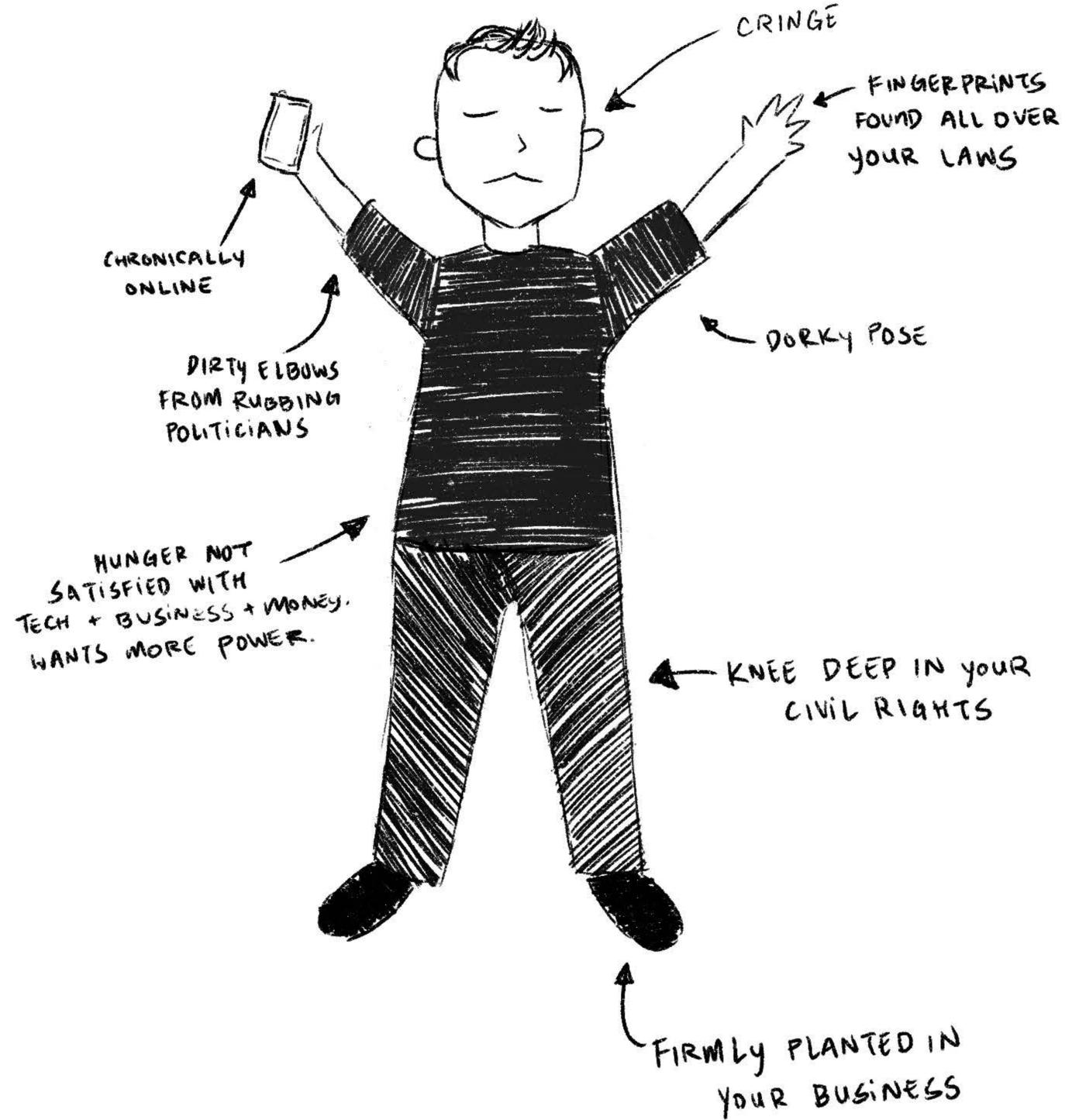
A large, solid black silhouette of a human head in profile, facing left. The head is filled with white text. The background consists of vertical, wavy lines representing rain. Below the head, there are several coins falling, some with dollar signs on them. The overall style is a mix of hand-drawn and digital elements.

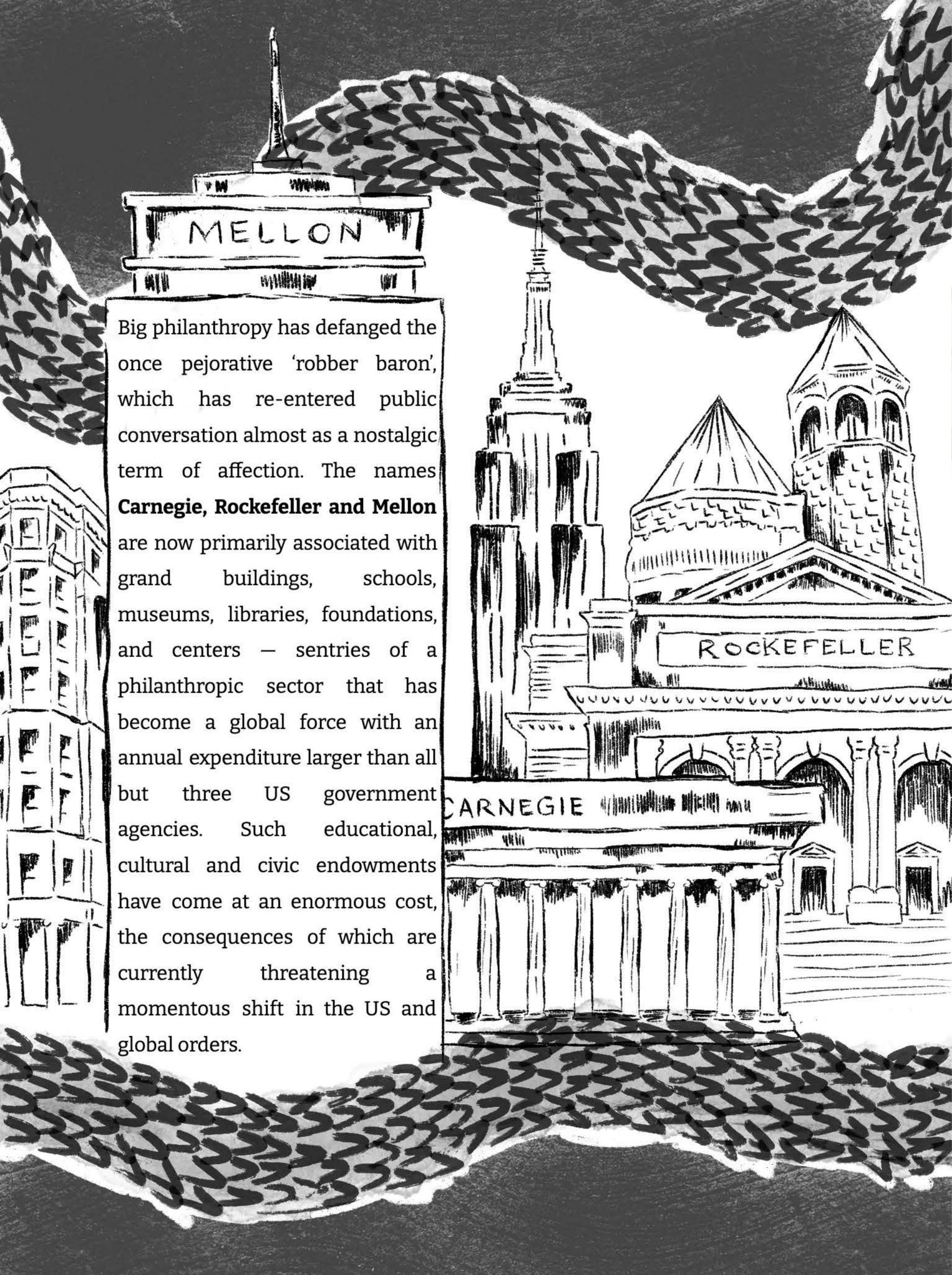
It is patently false that Carnegie and Rockefeller “just wanted to get rich and stuck to their own business.” They also had explicitly autocratic political agendas. Historical accounts and US records from the robber baron years reveal the corruption, corporate influence on government policy and tax code, and use of philanthropy as social control by Andrew Carnegie, John D. Rockefeller and Andrew W. Mellon, which drew sustained scorn from a diverse public — from steel workers to the President of the United States. One hundred years later, most of the public seems to have forgotten. This was by design.

ANATOMY OF A "GOOD OLIGARCH"



ANATOMY OF A "BAD OLIGARCH"



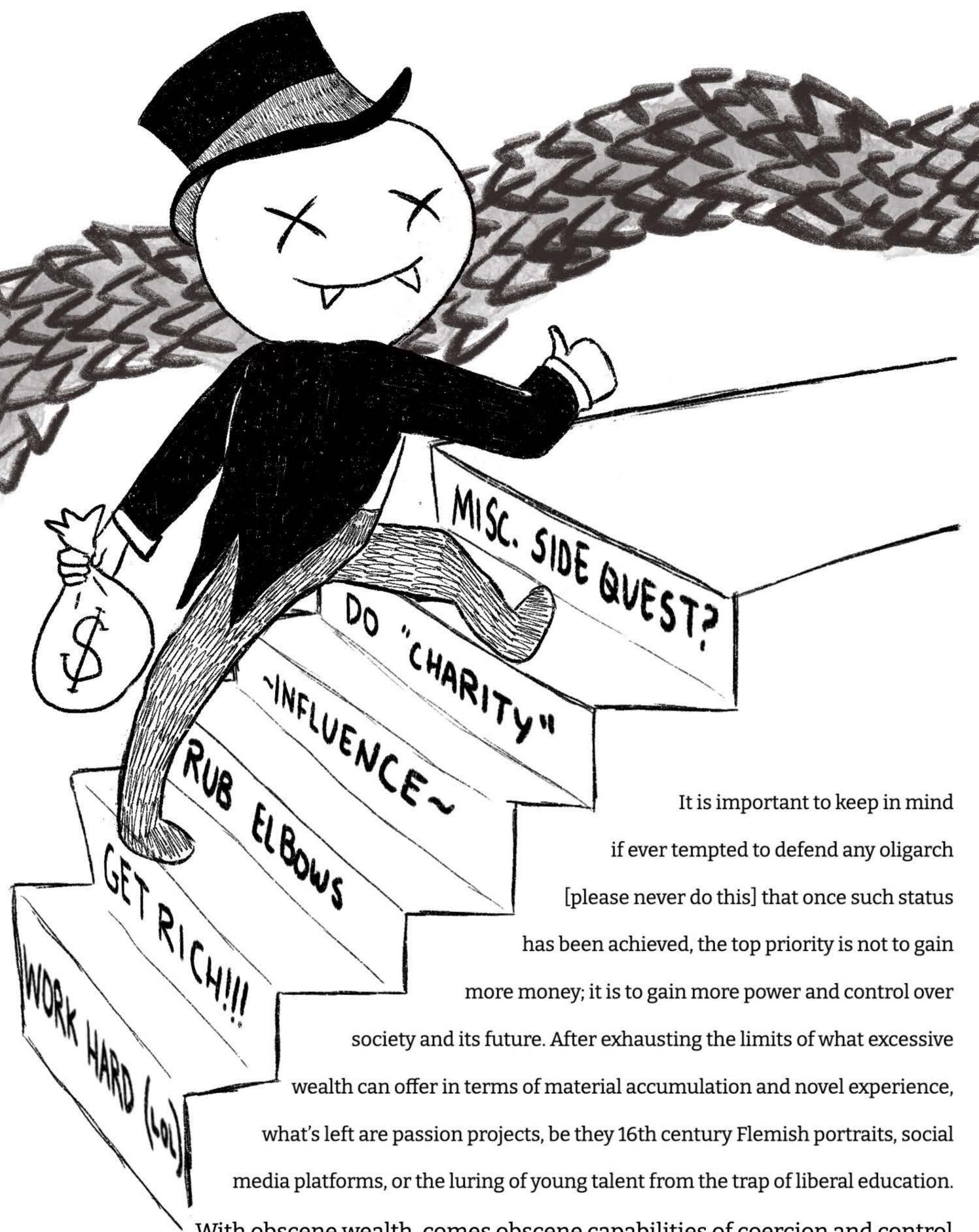


MELLON

Big philanthropy has defanged the once pejorative 'robber baron', which has re-entered public conversation almost as a nostalgic term of affection. The names **Carnegie, Rockefeller and Mellon** are now primarily associated with grand buildings, schools, museums, libraries, foundations, and centers — sentries of a philanthropic sector that has become a global force with an annual expenditure larger than all but three US government agencies. Such educational, cultural and civic endowments have come at an enormous cost, the consequences of which are currently threatening a momentous shift in the US and global orders.

ROCKEFELLER

CARNEGIE



It is important to keep in mind if ever tempted to defend any oligarch [please never do this] that once such status has been achieved, the top priority is not to gain more money; it is to gain more power and control over society and its future. After exhausting the limits of what excessive wealth can offer in terms of material accumulation and novel experience, what's left are passion projects, be they 16th century Flemish portraits, social media platforms, or the luring of young talent from the trap of liberal education. With obscene wealth, comes obscene capabilities of coercion and control.

IN FACT, THE INSTALLATION OF OLIGARCHS AND THEIR SPECIFIC INTERESTS INTO THE HALLS AND WORKINGS OF U.S. GOVERNMENT IS FAR FROM PRECEDENTED...

The propertied, slave-owning 'founders' drew up a constitution that enshrined, first and foremost, the freedom of wealthy white men.



So we should not be surprised that Philander Knox, counsel for Carnegie Steel, was first appointed attorney general under McKinley (1901-1904)...



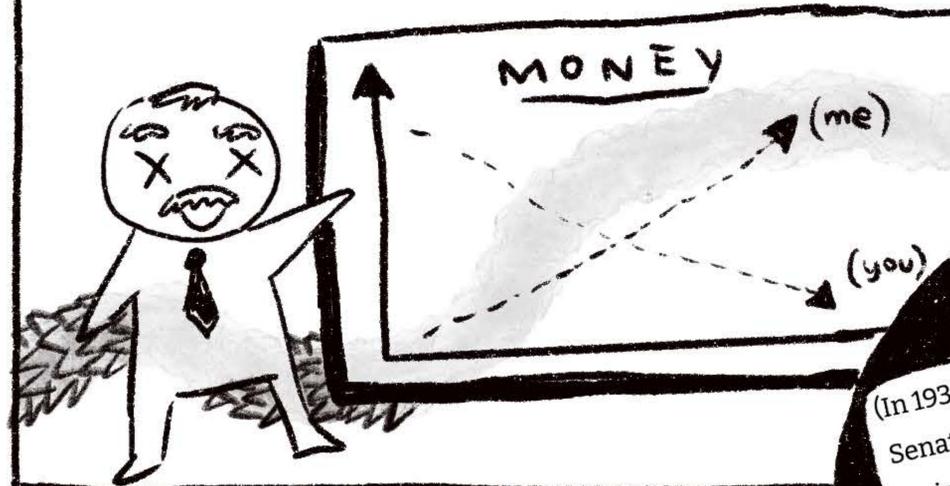
...and then Secretary of State and architect of "dollar diplomacy" under Taft (1909-1913)...



...or when Andrew W. Mellon, banker and industrialist, was appointed Secretary of the Treasury (1921-1932) with the mission to overhaul the tax code for the benefit of industrial interests.



Mellon ultimately achieved a 67% reduction in income tax for the wealthiest, a reduction in estate tax, the abolition of gift tax, and a scheme of deductions that enabled the rich to drastically reduce their taxable income, for some even to zero.



(In 1933, JP Morgan would admit to the Senate Banking Committee that he paid no income taxes in 1931 and 1932.)



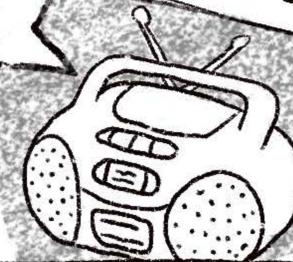
In order to counter the strong public resistance to a tax plan that centered corporate capitalism and the wealthy being 'unburdened' from significant taxation and oversight, Mellon's Treasury Department orchestrated an unprecedented propaganda campaign between 1923-1926 to bring about the broad support for his tax plan, as well as for modern industrial capitalism.

spend a dollar, save a Billionaire!

BREAKING NEWS!

TAXES ARE GOOD FOR YOU!

WE NEED YOU!!!
to unburden our poor elite!!
get taxed today!!!



HAVE YOU CONSIDERED THE EFFECTS OF YOUR ACTIONS ON THE WEALTHY CLASS TAKE ACTION NOW! BE A HERO!!!!

THIS CAMPAIGN WAS AN EARLY DEMONSTRATION OF THE POWER OF BIG MONEY TO SWAY PUBLIC OPINION AND GOVERNMENT POLICY.



Mellon's heirs have carried on this birth-right through their conservative passion projects.

The Washington Post in 1999 reported that from 1963-1998, Mellon heir Richard Scaife and his family foundations had donated the equivalent of \$620 million to conservative causes and institutions, making him “the most generous donor to conservative causes in American history.”

Upon his death, Scaife left \$369 million to his family foundation, which notably kept afloat the Heritage Foundation in its early years and has continued to sustain it.

Mellon's grandson Timothy was the largest single donor of the 2024 election, giving \$172 million, mostly to MAGA, Inc.

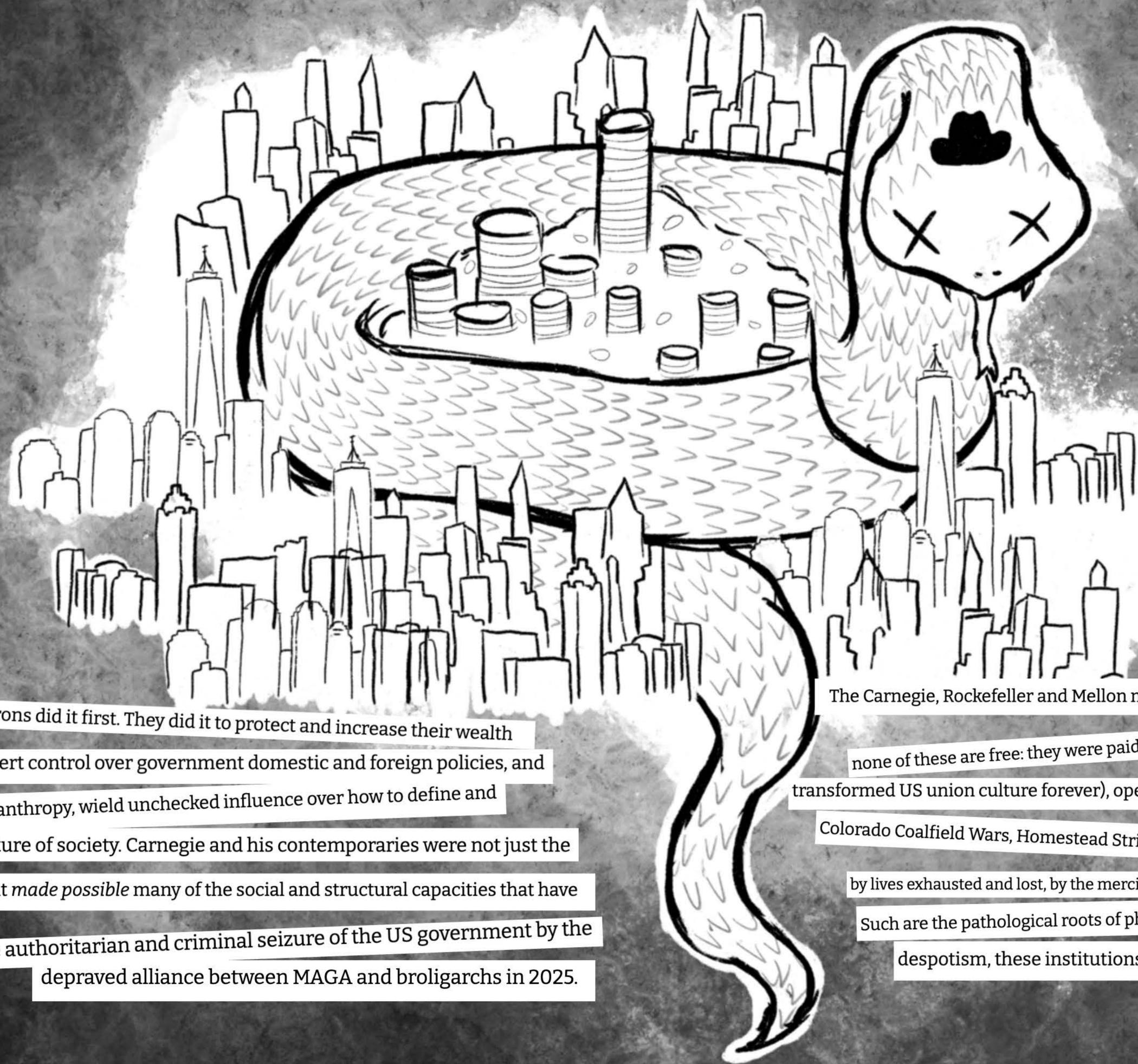
Oligarchs have maintained the upperhand in taxation, preserving generational wealth by using philanthropy to shield it as well as champion their causes.

Propublica reports that Elon Musk paid no income tax in 2018; George Soros paid zero federal income taxes three years running; and Jeff Bezos paid no income tax in 2007 and 2011, even qualifying for the child tax credit in the latter instance (fun fact: his wealth increased by \$127 billion between 2006 to 2018).



While its narrative pushes ideas of generosity and social betterment aimed to elicit blind public gratitude, big philanthropy is a massive scam: it has always been part of a tacit agreement in which the government offloads the responsibility of certain social sectors to the wealthy in lieu of taxes. In this compact, “responsibility” means broad and nearly unchecked power to define what constitutes the common good: some telling examples include Nazi science, eugenics, and anti-vax advocacy.

With the long game of the Heritage Foundation coming to fruition in Project 2025—sustained by a nervous system of nonprofits consolidating billionaire power—the common good is apparently oppression of the many for the benefit of the supremely rich. Philanthropy lays bare the fascist roots of “American freedom.”



The robber barons did it first. They did it to protect and increase their wealth in order to assert control over government domestic and foreign policies, and through philanthropy, wield unchecked influence over how to define and determine the future of society. Carnegie and his contemporaries were not just the model for, but *made possible* many of the social and structural capacities that have enabled the authoritarian and criminal seizure of the US government by the depraved alliance between MAGA and brologarchs in 2025.

The Carnegie, Rockefeller and Mellon museums, libraries and foundations — none of these are free: they were paid for and built by breaking unions (which transformed US union culture forever), open-firing on striking workers (see Colorado Coalfield Wars, Homestead Strike of 1892, and more); they were paid for by lives exhausted and lost, by the merciless devastation of the environment itself. Such are the pathological roots of philanthropy. Monuments to avarice and despotism, these institutions were never gifts. They were bribes.

**THESE INSTITUTIONS WERE
NEVER GIFTS**



**THEY WERE
BRIBES**

