



August 4, 2010

- [Home](#)
- [Our Stories](#)
- [Local](#)
- [State](#)
- [Staff Blogs](#)
 - [Murphy's Law](#)
 - [Pressroom Buzz](#)
 - [The Sports Nut](#)
- [Guest Blogs](#)
- [Cartoons](#)
- [Photos](#)
- [Login](#)
- [About](#)
- [Daily E-mail](#)

[Home](#) » [Our Stories](#) » **Currently Reading:**

[The quiet foundation](#)

August 4, 2010 [Our Stories](#) No Comments  [E-mail This Post](#)
By *Bruce Murphy*

In its first 16 years, the Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation often courted controversy under the provocative leadership of its now deceased president Michael Joyce. But ever since Michael Grebe took over the job in 2002, the foundation – the preeminent funder of conservative intellectuals and think tanks in the nation – has become much more diplomatic in its news releases and comments. Barely a hint of controversy has touched the group in the past decade.

Joyce took over the leadership of the foundation in 1985, arriving with a national reputation as a kind of liberal slayer who had helped promote the policies that made the conservative triumphs of President Ronald Reagan possible. Joyce was named by the *Atlantic Monthly* as one of the three people most responsible for the conservative intellectual movement in the United States.

Milwaukee News Buzz welcomes your News Releases and Story Tips - [E-mail](#) them to our [Online Editor](#)



(photo by adrian palomo)

His tenure almost exactly overlapped that of Republican Wisconsin governor Tommy Thompson, and Joyce set up workshops and funded research laying the groundwork for W-2, Thompson's program of welfare reform. The Bradley Foundation also spent some \$20 million on school choice: from paying for students' tuition to bankrolling the hiring of Kenneth Starr to successfully defend Thompson and the State of Wisconsin from a legal suit against religious school choice.

Joyce actively sought opportunities to wage ideological combat, but he made a mistake that came back to haunt him, funding the research of Charles Murray and his book "The Bell Curve," which argued that intelligence is determined by genetic factors such as race. Murray's intentions in writing the book were clear enough to the conservative Manhattan Institute, which dropped Murray as a scholar. But Joyce and the Bradley Foundation stood by Murray and were pummeled in the media about this. "It was an indelible imprint on us," Joyce once lamented to *Milwaukee Magazine*.

Grebe came to the foundation after decades working in the silky smooth style of Foley & Lardner, the state's largest law firm, whose attorneys quietly advise powerful people in private companies and non-profits. His style is anything but hell-raising.

"It is quiet compared to Mike," Grebe concedes of his approach. "But I think that's consistent with the direction I get from the foundation's board of directors."

In short, the foundation made a deliberate decision to move away from the combative style of the man who essentially created the foundation's entire intellectual framework. "I don't think we're any less conservative in what we do," Grebe says. "So I don't think the change is substantive; it's more stylistic."

The foundation has a *lot* of money to spend on that agenda: As of 2007, the most recent year analyzed in a report by the Donors Forum of Wisconsin, Bradley had assets of \$815 million, making it the state's largest foundation and the 83rd largest in the nation.

Milwaukee News Buzz is proudly powered by
[Milwaukee Magazine](#)
[Terms of Use](#) | [Privacy Policy](#) | [Entries \(RSS\)](#)
| [Comments \(RSS\)](#)



michael grebe

The foundation still gives much of its money (about \$40 million in grants in 2007) to many of the same conservative groups it did under Joyce: In 2009, it gave \$1 million to the Institute for American Values, \$1.2 million to the Federalist Society, which seeks to recruit conservative lawyers and judges, and \$1.5 million to the Wisconsin Policy Research Institute, which Joyce created and has for decades done research that's intended to move the state Legislature and state policy to the right. The foundation gave \$325,000 to the American Enterprise Institute, \$275,000 to the Hoover Foundation, \$200,000 to the Cato Institute and \$178,500 to the Heritage Foundation, four think tanks that tend to bury the media and D.C. politicians with right-wing research.

Under Joyce, the foundation gave millions to research and strategy groups promoting a strong defense. The foundation spent freely on anti-communist research even after the waning of the Cold War. Today, Grebe notes, the foundation remains just as interested in a strong defense, "but we tend to be focused these days on radical Islam."

In 2007, for instance, the foundation gave some \$3 million to projects to "defend and advance freedom," an analysis by the Institute for Policy Studies concluded.

Probably the most controversial thing touching the foundation in recent years was its funding of a show that, ironically, aired on the Public Broadcasting System, which conservatives have long criticized as having a liberal bias. In July, PBS aired a controversial, three-hour documentary on George Shultz, a former Secretary of State during the Reagan-era. Some reviews complained the documentary put a halo on Shultz. "There is no mention that Mr. Shultz was a cheerleader for the 2003 invasion of Iraq while still on the board of Bechtel, a construction and engineering firm that won huge contracts that were later criticized by the special inspector general for Iraq reconstruction," noted Alessandra Stanley in her review for *The New York Times*.

Viewers sent several hundred emails to PBS ombudsman Michael Getler complaining about the show. Said one: "The tone of the piece seemed more like one of those infomercials they play at political conventions when they're trying to white-wash a candidate to sound like a hero."

The group, Fairness & Accuracy in Reporting, questioned whether the show's funding betrayed a conflict of interest. The special was produced by "Free to Choose Media," which

in turn was funded by the Bradley Foundation, the Stephen Bechtel Fund and Charles Schwab. Shultz was a board member of the last two, presenting the largest controversy.

“If the charges are accurate,” charged Peter Sussman, a member of the Ethics Committee of the Society of Professional Journalists, “the funders literally got what they appear to have paid for, in editorial content.”

Certainly, Grebe was satisfied with the documentary. “I thought it was well done,” he says.

Under Grebe, the foundation has created a kind of conservative counterpart to the MacArthur fellowship or “genius grant” with its annual Bradley Prizes, which give \$25,000 each to several honorees that have had an impact on spreading conservative ideas.

Four people were awarded the 2010 Bradley Prize: Michael Barone, senior political analyst for *The Washington Examiner* and resident fellow at the American Enterprise Institute; Paul Gigot, editorial-page editor of *The Wall Street Journal* and winner of the 2000 Pulitzer Prize for commentary; Bradley Smith, a law professor at Capital University and former member of the Federal Election Commission; and John Taylor, an economics professor at Stanford University and senior fellow in economics at the Hoover Institution.

Paul Gigot grew up in De Pere, Wis. “Gigot produces the most-influential and widely read editorial page supporting free markets, liberty and strong national security,” the Bradley Foundation noted in giving him his award.

These awards seem another way of making Wisconsin’s top foundation the focus of good news rather than heated controversy. But Grebe has complained that the awards haven’t gotten more attention. “It has been frustrating, even remarkable, how the establishment media has chosen to comment on similar prizes given by Theresa Heinz Kerry but not by the Bradley Foundation,” Grebe told *The Washington Times* in 2006.

Grebe is a little less frustrated these days. “It’s beginning to get more attention every year,” he says.

Tomorrow: The future of the foundation.

Additional reporting and research for this story done by Sarah Worthman.

You must be [logged in](#) to post a comment.