



## U.S. Steel's paternalism left lasting legacy

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Early 20th century U.S. Steel was a holding company. It only owned the properties on which its mills sat. However, the actual everyday running of any individual mill fell to independent entities. Judge Elbert H. Gary and the board did not directly influence decisions made at any given mill under their jurisdiction. Instead, the culture and philosophy of Gary Works got influenced by the people placed in charge of its operations.

Gary Works' first president was William P. Gleason. His name may sound familiar. Gleason was a ruthless real estate developer on the side and was responsible for building up Gary's municipal park system. In 1913, Gleason opened the W.P. Gleason Welfare Center and Clinic, a three-story building at the southeast corner of Fifteenth & Connecticut Street. The facility was right down the street from Stewart House.

According to "From Mill Gates To Magic City: U.S. Steel And Welfare Capitalism In Gary, Indiana by Carol D. Griskavich," ... the center stood as the city's physical manifestation of U.S. Steel's social welfare program."

Despite initially not wanting to be involved with Gary's civil affairs, the company constantly found ways to inject corporate paternalism inside of Gary's culture and society. However, some would welcome paternalism.

For example, religious leadership in Gary and elsewhere constantly solicited donations of land and influence from U.S. Steel's executives. These efforts led to Gary City Methodist Church, the Gary YMCA, Gary-Alerding House and other facilities. These endeavors were realized by promising that services would run toward Americanizing immigrants and placating poor people of color.

There was no conspiracy. The powerful did not have to sneak and pitty-pat around the issue. Instead, Gleason, Judge Gary, and others found a contrast between successful Americanization and the prospect of social chaos due to socialist ideals from Europe and elsewhere. The latter was a direct threat to the steel industry's profits, and most importantly, the system of American capitalism itself.

The bad part about all of this is that the powers that be were immigrants themselves — or came from immigrant families. Thus, they were considered “old immigrants.” Old immigrants were whites who came to America from Northern Europe. They held court over “new immigrants”: those from Southern and Eastern Europe and elsewhere during the end of the 19th century.

According to "The Failure of the Americanization Movement" by Alex Nowrasteh for Cato Institute, “The perception among many Americans at this time was that these old immigrants were quick to assimilate and adopt the values of longer-settled Americans because of their religious, cultural, and racial similarities with native-born Americans.”

New immigrants got perceived as being slow to adapt to American ideals because of their heritage, religions, political views and occupational backgrounds. As a result, each needed to get patched to successfully integrate into American society and achieve the chance to enter the middle class.

However, Gary’s particular version of Americanization had significant flaws. The most glaring flaw was the segregation of ethnic groups, especially when it came to religion. Gary City Methodist Church tried to fix this issue by holding a mixed-race congregation. Unfortunately, this attempt at racial harmony through God did not last.

Additionally, with ethnic segregation came “ethnic cancellation.” Immigrant groups were learning to forgo their culture and replace it with America’s. With the country’s obsession with segregation, these teachings led the first generation of children raised in the city to have a general lack of consciousness about ethnic and cultural diversity. Nevertheless, somehow, this flawed way of life thrived within Gary for decades.

Gary constantly touted its “melting pot” image as a positive. Even a melting pot emblem is pouring liquid steel on the globe inside the city’s civic image. However, it was — and still is in many ways — a mirage.

The company instilled its version of paternalism upon the citizenry. Then, when it was finished, it completely recoiled from Gary’s civic affairs and took no accountability for the adverse effects after that.

The consequences of U.S. Steel’s 20th century socioeconomic philosophies continue to propagate throughout the Region. It is especially true when it comes to the matter of racial relations. Everybody has a story told from their point of view. However, we all see the racial dividing lines inside of Lake County, Indiana. It is interesting to learn where they came from and why they exist.