

# Built to Last

**Andrew Carnegie's peace project was ambitious, audacious, visionary. The work was — is — difficult, often stymied, never-ending. But what is the alternative?**

When Andrew Carnegie agreed to fund the construction of the Peace Palace at The Hague in the Netherlands, he was, as usual, building for the *longue durée*. The Hague was no ordinary location. As Carnegie knew very well, the city was strongly linked to the history of international law. Settling in The Hague in 1599, the Dutch scholar, jurist, and diplomat Hugo Grotius (1583–1645) would go a long way to define the legal frameworks and foundations for peaceful cooperation between nations. Grotius had to battle a great deal of resistance in his quest. And centuries later, so did Andrew Carnegie, whose passionate commitment to ending war was considered unrealistic if not downright dangerous. “Refusal to arbitrate,” he boldly asserted, “makes war, even for a good cause, unholy.” Neither man surrendered. Today, the great edifice of international law stands as a tribute to the visionary labors of each man. Like the magnificent Peace Palace, it is built to last.



An avid reader from a young age and a keen student of history throughout his life, Andrew Carnegie knew that history taught a simple lesson: conflict is inevitable. The reasons varied — dynastic ambitions, or land hunger, or simply a desire to avenge an actual or perceived wrong. But the resulting wars were always depressingly the same, as armies poured across borders, cities were plundered, and civilians paid the heaviest price of all. Even in times of relatively advanced intellectual achievement — the Enlightenment, for example — ideals and theories rarely became reality. The more ardently reformers promised that a New World was beginning — witness the French Revolution — the greater the likelihood that another war was about to begin.

But the work of peace advanced all the same, strengthened by a growing conviction that, at heart, human beings were



**No name is entitled to rank with his.** For 19th-century peace activists, including Andrew Carnegie, the Dutch philosopher and jurist Hugo Grotius (1583–1645) was a towering figure, widely hailed as the “Father of International Law.” Grotius’s epoch-making treatise, *The Rights of War and Peace* (1625), is a key document, as Carnegie put it, “in the progress of man from war, lawless and savage, to war restricted and obedient to International Law.” In the Peace of Westphalia (1648), which brought an end to the Thirty Years’ War, Carnegie saw the direct imprint of Grotius’s “advanced ideas,” founded as they are “upon his doctrine of the essential independence and equality of all Sovereign States, and the laws of justice and mercy.” PHOTO: RIJKSMUSEUM, AMSTERDAM

rational creatures. No one did more to advance this premise than Hugo Grotius. With his faith in legal standards, the eminent jurist laid the groundwork for the concept of an international order based on the rule of law.

In his treatise *The Rights of War and Peace* (1625; *De jure belli ac pacis*), Grotius maintained that nations are bound by natural law, which derives its authority from two fundamental human needs: self-preservation and community. His theories were severely tested by the Thirty Years’

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War (1618–48), but finally helped to pave the way for the Peace of Westphalia, which ended the war, restoring peace between the Catholic and Protestant powers. But Grotius’s ideas were not codified into a functioning international system, and, over the course of the centuries that followed, religious conflicts gave way to wars sparked by nationalism and authoritarianism.

Even as the 20th century was dawning, with its seemingly limitless potential, war remained an uncomfortably realistic possibility. That was simply unacceptable to Andrew Carnegie, who believed that a better world was not only possible, but necessary. He believed in the call that President Lincoln issued in a now famous address at Cooper Union in New York City, on February 27, 1860. Lincoln closed: “Let us have faith that right makes might, and in that faith, let us, to the end, dare to do our duty as we understand it.” As his biographer David Nasaw has written, Carnegie became a “fool for peace.” Carnegie understood his duty.

“Right makes might” is a dramatic phrase, but there was nothing “foolish” about the seriousness of Carnegie’s purpose. He admired Grotius, and believed it was possible to strengthen the foundation of international law. By establishing a network of legal instruments and institutions, the nations of the world could reduce the inevitability of war and establish peaceful ways to adjudicate their various disputes and claims.

Unfortunately, at the dawn of the 20th century most of the world showed little interest in preventing armed conflict. President Theodore Roosevelt considered Carnegie naive, and even called some of his ideas “twisted.” But Roosevelt failed to grasp how much thought Carnegie had put into the project of peace, or how stubborn he could be. As history would prove, it was even more naive to think that civilization could survive the kinds of wars that were coming. In fact, Carnegie’s vision of the future was more realistic than Roosevelt’s. Although Roosevelt had done

important work toward peace earlier in his career, earning the Nobel Peace Prize in 1906 for helping to end the Russo-Japanese War, his strident rhetoric was a contributing factor to the rise in tensions as he pursued his quixotic political goals in the aftermath of his presidency.

In those same years, armaments continued to multiply and tensions grew between sprawling empires. With confidence, vision, and a vast fortune, Carnegie began to transform his dream into a reality, built from bricks and mortar. In 1903 Carnegie agreed to donate the \$1.5 million (\$43 million today, adjusted for inflation) needed for construction of the Peace Palace, which would serve as home to the Permanent Court of Arbitration, as well as housing a library of international law. At last, the edifice of international law would be grounded in an actual edifice.

With the cornerstone laid in the summer of 1907 midway through the Second International Peace Conference, the Palace opened to the public, with much fanfare, six years later. The Palace soon housed other international bodies, including the Permanent Court of International Justice, the official court of the League of Nations. In the words of American diplomat Andrew Dickson White, the friend who helped convince Carnegie to invest in the initial venture, the Peace Palace would serve as a “temple of peace where the doors are open, in contrast to the Janus-temple, in times of peace and closed in cases of war.” Finally, after many long centuries, a court “has thrown open its doors for the peaceful settlement of differences between peoples.”

There were grounds to believe that White’s lofty sentiments would prove true. It is a notable paradox of history that international cooperation was deepening in the years preceding the outbreak of World War I. Many countries — including Germany, Austria-Hungary, the United States, France, Great Britain and Ireland, China, Japan, Persia, Russia, and Turkey — joined the peace conferences of 1899 and 1907 at The Hague, resulting in some genuine



**Bountiful Hope** The opening of the Peace Palace in August 1913 aligned fortuitously with the centennial celebrations of Dutch independence later that year. (In November 1813 William I returned to the Netherlands, marking the restoration of the House of Orange-Nassau and the end of French rule.) This poster announcing celebratory exhibitions in 30 Dutch towns uses the new Palace as its focus. A horn of plenty and a fleet of merchant ships (in the background at left) represent Dutch prosperity. The image, by Arie Martinus Luyt (1879–1951), suggests that there is new hope for a peaceful world. PHOTO: © CARNEGIE FOUNDATION – PEACE PALACE

breakthroughs. But unfortunately, the international system was not yet mature. Carnegie was devastated when war engulfed the great powers in 1914, less than a year after the Peace Palace opened its doors. In a way, the outbreak of war proved how necessary his palace was; but it was a sobering setback all the same. Withdrawing from public life, Carnegie seemed to be nursing a broken heart. Yet he never entirely abandoned the project of peace, late in life telling an interviewer for the *New York Times* that the barbarities of the Great War might well shock human nature back into the “realms of reason.” And to quote Carnegie, “the realms of reason are the realms of peace.”

For a time, it was fashionable to deride the League of Nations as a failure, and in many ways it was. President Woodrow Wilson, its foremost champion, could not even persuade his own citizens to join, and the outbreak of World War II only confirmed that the league had failed in its principal object of preventing global conflict. But at the same time, the war demonstrated that ever-stronger institutions were needed to make sure war on such a scale never happened again.

Carnegie would have been proud to see the role played by the Peace Palace following the First World War in the development of new frameworks for the international order. After the disbanding of the League of Nations and the founding of the United Nations, the International Court of Justice (ICJ), the principal judicial body of the UN, was established in that great edifice, Carnegie’s “Temple of Peace” in The Hague. Together with the Permanent Court of Arbitration, the ICJ (commonly referred to as the World Court) continues to work to advance Carnegie’s vision of settling disputes between states through arbitration, mediation, and adjudication — rather than contending parties resorting to war.



It is easy to lose faith in an age where peace still seems like an evanescent dream. Still, we should not underestimate the achievement of seven decades of relative peace in Europe since 1945. Armed conflict in Western Europe has been largely unthinkable. For that, we have many people to thank, including of course two who helped lay the foundation: Hugo Grotius and Andrew Carnegie. In the hundred years since the christening of the Peace Palace, peace *has* spread in much of the world, due in no small part to the hard work of such “fools for peace.” International agreements are not perfect, but, in general, they work. Trust can exist between nations. The Marshall Plan channeled \$13 billion (nearly \$100 billion in 2018 dollars) in economic and technical aid to 16 European countries, in a spirit of generosity that Carnegie would certainly have recognized. Since its creation in 1993, the European Union (EU) has brought about unprecedented stability for most of its member nations, largely because economies have been intertwined and systems are set in place to resolve conflicts without resorting to bloodshed.

Yet, as the poet W. H. Auden reminds us in “The Cave of Making,”

More than ever  
life-out-there is goodly, miraculous, loveable,  
but we shan’t, not since Stalin and Hitler,  
trust ourselves ever again: we know that, subjectively,  
all is possible.

All is possible indeed, in a world that is increasingly indifferent to the structures Carnegie left to posterity. But knowing the scale of depravity and horror to which we can sink, is it not also imperative to work toward and trust in the promise of peace? Shall we strengthen the edifice or simply walk away from it?

Carnegie knew the answer. Seeking to prevent deadly conflict is both idealistic and realistic. The danger of nuclear weapons has not receded, while the threat posed by biological and chemical weapons has increased. In such a world we have no choice but to try to build better structures, beginning with bridges of trust, finding long-term common interests that transcend political and ethnic divisions. It is only through building these bridges that reason will ultimately prevail.

Just as the bricklayers were erecting the Peace Palace, Carnegie was constructing the institutional edifices that represent some of his most enduring legacies. In addition to his work in The Hague, Carnegie established and endowed four U.S.-based foundations dedicated to the cause of peace, including the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (CEIP), working with partners to sponsor the reconstruction of various cultural landmarks in Europe destroyed in World War I.

Carnegie put his final “structure” in place in 1911, endowing the philanthropic Carnegie Corporation of New York with an astonishing \$135 million (nearly \$3.6 billion in 2018 dollars) — at that time the largest permanent philanthropic trust ever recorded. The Corporation’s mission is clear: “To promote the advancement and diffusion of knowledge and understanding.” And it has always remained true to that mission. For more than a century, we have been proud to continue the work of Andrew Carnegie.

The Corporation’s work in peace and diplomacy has embraced initiatives connected to the Balkans, Russia, North Korea, and Kashmir, as well as efforts to resolve all kinds of international conflicts. Since the 1920s the Corporation has also been active in Africa, operating under the belief that education is the key to providing new leaders for the continent and its institutions, including the development of a new generation of African peacebuilding scholars and practitioners. In Carnegie’s view, it was the responsibility of the wealthy nations of the world to establish a network of legal instruments and institutions to codify man’s natural impulse toward war — and thus enable the new century to be free from the scourge of war.



Throughout its history, one constant theme in the Corporation’s grantmaking has been the need to integrate deep knowledge and scholarship of the highest quality into the development of policies and programs aimed at advancing global peace and security. In August 2019 we mark the centennial of Andrew Carnegie’s death, and in concert with that occasion, the Carnegie family of institutions is organizing a series of programs, under the title Forging the Future, to celebrate Carnegie’s philanthropic legacy of “doing real and permanent good in this world,” while addressing the many national and international challenges that lie ahead.

As part of Forging the Future, the Corporation joined with the Netherlands-based Carnegie Foundation—Peace Palace and its partners for three days in September 2018, convening the Carnegie PeaceBuilding Conversations, an international conference in The Hague that connected people from various backgrounds and generations around conflict-related themes. Some 300 participants — government officials; public and community figures and leaders; activists directly involved in conflicts; experts from civil society, science, politics, business, and philanthropy; and students and teachers working in conflict resolution — heard from a number of our grantees, sister institutions, and partners worldwide, focusing on ways to deal with the causes, not just the symptoms, of our greatest challenges, including advancing world peace.

In furtherance of this pacific and hopeful world view, we were proud to support the Carnegie PeaceBuilding Conversations. When treaties and compromise are disparaged, from the South China Sea to the Rio Grande, it becomes all the more important to defend the mission embodied by the Peace Palace. For what is the alternative? Without international law and justice, the world is at risk of reverting to an anarchic, Hobbesian state of nature — a permanent state of “war of all against all.” Carnegie had a deep faith in the utility of due process for managing relations among the great powers, but he also believed in providing face-saving alternatives for smaller powers buffeted by forces beyond their control. Carnegie’s Enlightenment-inspired commitment to reason remains an affirming antidote to the darker trends in our troubled world. The conference built on Carnegie’s peacebuilding legacy while underscoring the relevance of his belief in the ability of states to find solutions to their disputes through cooperation, dialogue, negotiation, and understanding.

In such an iconic setting as The Hague, comparisons between the present moment and the years when Carnegie supported the construction of the Peace Palace were hard to avoid. His was a time of unbridled nationalism, and for him a central challenge was creating a framework in which powerful countries could resolve their conflicting claims. As one conference participant pointed out, while we are witnessing a resurgence of nationalism across the globe, it is a nationalism based largely on nostalgia, far removed from the conquering spirit of the early 1900s. Citizens of many countries compare their current status unfavorably to a romanticized earlier era. Compounding this view, a common theme of the PeaceBuilding Conversations was the fragility of human communities, not only in the so-called Global South, but even in the most developed countries of the world. A variety of factors conspire to create this fragility: the increased mobility of people, capital, ideas, and weapons, abetted by the spread of new and disruptive technologies; the complexity and interconnectedness of global challenges; and the ongoing deficiencies of governance at multiple levels. In this context, the rules-based “liberal international order” — which some have argued was never as liberal, international, or orderly as was claimed, but which nevertheless has helped avert war by the major powers — appears to be breaking down, with no clear replacement in sight. Given the internal weakness of many societies, the task of building a new international order seems especially daunting when the bricks themselves are crumbling.

But despite the apprehension provoked by these developments, a spirit of Carnegiean optimism prevailed at the Peace Palace. Many in attendance would have rallied to Carnegie’s own words, delivered in a 1905 address to the students of the University of St. Andrews in Scotland: “I ask your attention for a few minutes to many bright rays, piercing the dark cloud, which encourage us.” The voices of younger participants, in particular, reminded those

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gathered in The Hague that, while there was much work to be done to repair the world and build sustainable peace, there are many talented people committed to the task — a sentiment echoed by peace activists and officials alike.

It can be easy to doubt idealism and hope in the face of a world that at the moment does not seem to value either. But becoming a “fool for peace” does not mean acting foolishly. It means standing up for reason, self-control, and the hard work of international understanding. It means affirming the value of justice, reciprocity, and the rule of law. It means affirming our solidarity as fellow inhabitants of a small planet in a vast universe. It is essential that we reject cynicism and despair. Andrew Carnegie formed Carnegie Corporation of New York because he understood that peacemaking and knowledge are interdependent. He understood that genuine enlightenment — steeped in history and constantly enriched by current and changing events — provides a sturdy foundation for building understanding between societies, cultures, religious beliefs, and political systems. Understanding can be a bridge to peace and, ultimately, is powerful enough to help man triumph over war — in Rousseau’s words, “the foulest fiend ever vomited forth from the mouth of Hell.” But Andrew Carnegie was an optimist. A realistic optimist, but an optimist nonetheless. As he instructed his “young constituents” at St. Andrews that day in 1905:

You are busily preparing to play your parts in the drama of life, resolved, I trust, to oppose and attack what is evil, to defend and strengthen what is good, and, if possible, to leave your part of the world a little better than you found it. ■

#### Vartan Gregorian

President, Carnegie Corporation of New York



**More Than Matter** The marble floors of the great entrance hall in the Peace Palace were designed by the distinguished Dutch architect, designer, and typographer Hendrik Wijdeveld (1885–1987). Perhaps best known as the conceiver and editor in chief of *Wendingen* (1918–32), the influential avant-garde architectural journal, Wijdeveld said of the Peace Palace that it was more than a building, more than a form of matter — it was “an expression of spirit: a call to peace.” The Latin motto “*Sol Justitiae Illustra Nos*” (The Light of Justice Shines Upon Us), the thematic heart of Wijdeveld’s elegant design, is only partially visible in this photograph, taken on September 24, 2018, the opening day of the Carnegie PeaceBuilding Conversations. PHOTO: © CARNEGIE FOUNDATION – PEACE PALACE