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**American Foundations, the Arts, and High Politics, 1898-2018**

**Abstract**  
This lecture begins with the mission of the big American foundation in the early twentieth century and the complex relationship between private philanthropy and the American government through two world wars as well as foundation programs in the fields of education, the social sciences, and the arts during the interwar years. With the escalation of the Cold War after 1945, the big foundations became increasingly involved not merely in the projection of American culture abroad, but also in programs at home. The difficult end to the Vietnam War and the shift to Reaganite economic policies saw the politicization of American philanthropy, as society became more polarized. This evolution was accelerated by the “Citizens United” decision of the Supreme Court in 2010 that the First Amendment on free speech prohibits the government from restricting expenditures by nonprofit corporations and others. While the old foundations continued their work in education, the arts, and the social sciences, new organizations, set up as charities, were allowed openly to support political agendas and politicians seeking (re)election. Since these contributions are, like all philanthropic gifts, tax deductible, the American system has become very peculiar in that government income from taxes to fund public programs is substantially diminished, while people of wealth use their tax deductible resources not merely to fund genuinely philanthropic causes, but also high politics. It is a development that demands urgent critical analysis of its negative consequences on American domestic politics and also on its image abroad.