

## *Media Reviews*

### **Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation Visitor Center**

The Visitor Center at the new headquarters of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation aims to promote awareness of the Foundation's history, the philanthropic goals of its founders, and its current work in the areas of health, poverty, and education. Located across the street from the Space Needle and other tourist attractions at the sprawling Seattle Center, its interactive exhibits are designed to appeal to tourists and locals, novices and experts, and young and old alike. Although the space without doubt primarily serves a propaganda function for the Foundation and the Gates family, there is much of interest to the historian of medicine. A large portion of the exhibition area, in fact, is devoted to shaping perceptions of the Foundation's past and ongoing work in public health and global health.

The Visitor Center comprises a foyer and four large halls, in which a series of permanent, carefully co-ordinated multimedia exhibits convey the origins of the Foundation and its model of philanthropic work. In doing so, they also portray Bill Gates and Melinda French Gates as benevolent philanthropists who have always been committed to changing the world and improving human well-being. It is up to the visitor, of course, to decide if this is in fact true, but the Visitor Center attempts to make a powerful case. One of the rooms, 'Family and Foundation', features a large, interactive timeline that portrays Bill Gates and Melinda French Gates as heirs to family traditions of giving back, charts the early years of the Foundation's development, and documents more recent projects and events. Rather than acknowledging public pressure to increase his philanthropic activity in the 1980s and early 1990s, Bill Gates is portrayed here as having always wanted a foundation. Moreover, a video presentation describes him having rethought his role as a philanthropist, especially with regard to vaccinations and global health issues, during a 1993 trip to Africa.

The achievements of the Foundation in the areas of health, poverty, and education are conveyed in other rooms by including the voices of supporters and collaborators. The first exhibition hall, for example, houses three clusters of large, free-standing, backlit panels that feature portraits and quotes from individuals who have either worked with the Foundation or benefited from its work. Among those featured here alongside Gates family members are an HIV counsellor from Côte d'Ivoire who describes the impact of antiretroviral medications in Africa, a co-founder of a charity that assists polio survivors in Nigeria, and a fashion model who campaigns for safe childbirth in Ethiopia. In another room, 'Partnerships', visitors may peruse a massive display entitled 'Working Together to Find Innovative Solutions'. Divided into various sections, the display seeks to show that the Foundation extends its impact by collaborating with and providing grants to partner organisations. The section on health includes clusters of images and text describing work under way on family planning; maternal, newborn, and child health; vaccines; malaria; HIV; and tuberculosis. A display called 'Grants' further conveys the Foundation's reach by featuring a large, vertical, moving scroll that lists all grant recipients since 1994.

Other sections seek to portray the Foundation as unique and unprecedented in its philosophy and approach to improving human well-being. They do this, however,

with little reference to the longer history of international philanthropic work or acknowledgement of organisations with similar practices. 'How We Work', for example, features display materials that suggest the Foundation differs from others because it is a private, family foundation and one that uses research to evaluate ongoing projects. These facile claims ignore antecedent organisations like the Rockefeller Foundation and undermine more interesting descriptions of the Foundation's business strategy, its focus on difficult problems, and its emphasis on technologically innovative solutions. Perhaps more instructive are the sections 'Tracking Trends' and 'Charting Changes', which describe the Foundation's reliance on data. Visitors here are invited to manipulate sets of moving charts to understand how data informs strategies for pursuing polio eradication and reducing child mortality through vaccinations, among other things.

The Visitor Center includes a display that makes passing reference to criticisms of the Foundation's approach. Not surprisingly, however, far more emphasis is placed on encouraging visitors to appropriate the neo-liberal Gates model and accept it as the best way to make a difference in the world. A theatre plays short pieces that celebrate the Foundation's efforts, while the section 'Your Foundation' asks visitors to describe what their own foundation would do if they had one. Computer terminals in the final hall provide tools for visitors to invent solutions to problems, create something inspiring, learn about their own strengths, and share knowledge. Notable ideas, tools, and inventions adorn the walls as a means to inspire. These include new HIV prevention campaign strategies, an injectable contraceptive, examples of powdered nutrition supplements, a solar-powered refrigerator, and a rural midwife's birthing kit. In this way, while the Visitor Center seeks to promote a narrow, favourable understanding of the Foundation's efforts, it also provides visitors with valuable exposure to the tools, technologies, and practices of global health work.

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### **Film Review: The First Day**

Did specialised health care for children exist in England prior to the nineteenth century? If so, what was it like, and how would it compare with modern paediatrics? These are the guiding questions at the heart of *The First Day* (2015), a documentary short that reconstructs 'the history of paediatrics before paediatricians' through the lens of the Northampton General Infirmary.

The film's presenter, Will Adams, contextualises the film's topic by pointing out that historians often think of paediatrics as having started in the middle of the nineteenth century with the advent of specialised children's hospitals and formalised professional organisations for paediatric doctors. However, *The First Day* goes beyond this broader institutional approach and investigates the paediatric care offered by the Northampton General Infirmary from the first day it opened in March of 1744. In its first year of operation, over 25% of the infirmary's admitted patients were under the age of 16, and there were a number of formalised procedures for handling children at the hospital. The information in the film is not presented as generalisable knowledge about eighteenth-century paediatrics, but rather as historical fact refuting commonly held understanding.