

L'Année PhiLanthropique The PhiLanthropic Year

Volume 2 | Hiver / Winter 2020



THE CIRCLE LE CERCLE

ON PHILANTHROPY AND ABORIGINAL PEOPLES IN CANADA
SUR LA PHILANTHROPIE ET LES PEUPLES AUTOCHTONES AU CANADA



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and Aboriginal Peoples in
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Prochaine publication Next publication

Automne 2021 / Fall 2021

ISSN: 2563-3058
Dépôt légal - Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec,
Décembre 2020.
Dépôt légal - Bibliothèque et Archives Canada, Décembre 2020.

À propos du PhiLab | About PhiLab

Le Réseau canadien de recherche partenariale sur la philanthropie (PhiLab), anciennement Laboratoire montréalais de recherche sur la philanthropie canadienne, a été pensé en 2014 dans le cadre de la conception de la demande de financement du projet développement de partenariat CRSH intitulé “Innovation sociale, changement sociétal et Fondations subventionnaires canadiennes”. Ce financement a été reconduit en 2018 sous le nom “Evaluation du rôle et des actions de fondations subventionnaires canadiennes en réponse à l’enjeu des inégalités sociales et des défis environnementaux”. Depuis ses débuts, le Réseau constitue un lieu de recherche, de partage d’information et de mobilisation des connaissances des fondations canadiennes. Des recherches conduites en partenariat permettent la coproduction de nouvelles connaissances dédiées à une diversité d’acteurs : des représentants gouvernementaux, des chercheurs universitaires, des représentants du secteur philanthropique et leurs organisations affiliées ou partenaires.

Le Réseau regroupe des chercheurs, des décideurs et des membres de la communauté philanthropique à travers le monde afin de partager des informations, des ressources et des idées.

The Canadian network of partnership-oriented research on philanthropy (PhiLab), previously called the Montreal Research Laboratory on Canadian philanthropy, was thought up in 2014 as part of the conception of a funding request by the NRCC partnership development project called “Social innovation, social change, and Canadian Grantmaking Foundations”. From its beginning, the Network was a place for research, information exchange and mobilization of Canadian foundations’ knowledge. Research conducted in partnership allows for the co-production of new knowledge dedicated to a diversity of actors: government representatives, university researchers, representatives of the philanthropic sector and their affiliate organizations or partners.

The Network brings together researchers, decision-makers and members of the philanthropic community from around the world in order to share information, resources, and ideas.



Social Sciences and Humanities
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COMPTES-RENDUS DE LECTURE | BOOK REVIEWS



Deux comptes-rendus de lecture vous sont présentés sur les deux ouvrages suivants: *Winners take all* par Anand Giridharadas et *La Solidarité en crise* par Taïeb Hafsî.

We present to you two book reviews on the following publications: *Winners take all* by Anand Giridharadas and *La Solidarité en crise* by Taïeb Hafsî.

Image: Racial Equity & Justice in Philanthropy Funders' Summit, Colouring Pages

Artists: Yaimel López Zaldívar & katia hernández velasco

COMPTES-RENDUS DE LECTURE | BOOK REVIEWS

Winners take all: The elite charade of changing the world

Par | By: Adam Saifer

Researcher for PhiLab's
Quebec Hub



Adam Saifer obtained his Ph.D in Cultural Studies in 2018. Since then, he has worked as a Postdoctoral Fellow at the Centre for Social Impact at Queen's University, and as Assistant Adjunct Professor in the Department of Global Development Studies. At PhiLab, he is a postdoctoral researcher and is exploring the barriers and challenges faced by equity-focused grantees in their relationship with philanthropic actors.

In *Winners Take All: The Elite Charade of Changing the World*, former New York Times columnist Anand Giridharadas provides an important contribution to critical debates around social and economic inequality, as well as its root causes. Specifically, he focuses on a target that, to this point, has been limited to academia and the rare leftist publication: “elite-led, market-friendly, winner-safe” (p. 11) approaches to social change. In this way, Giridharadas’ critical ire isn’t directed at the typical enemy of the mainstream left. You will not find a chapter attacking the oil executive bankrolling the Heritage Foundation, Fraser Institute, or some other right-wing think tank. His critique, instead, is aimed at liberal (read: neoliberal) elites at the forefront of a social change industry, culture, and “state-of-mind,” that he calls, MarketWorld.

WINNERS TAKE ALL

The **ELITE CHARADE** of
CHANGING the **WORLD**



ANAND GIRIDHARADAS

MarketWorld is inhabited by impact investors, philanthro-capitalists, social entrepreneurs, TED Talk celebrities, McKinsey & Company management consultants, Silicon Valley political donors, and liberal political elites, among others, who are driven by a desire to “do well” (financially) while “doing good” (socially). The MarketWorld approach to social change is grounded in a few key beliefs:

1. Social change should be pursued primarily through the free market and voluntary action, rather than through government-led means, and legal and systemic reforms;
2. Social change processes should be initiated and supervised by elites and their allies; and
3. Social change should not be antagonistic to the needs (and lifestyles) of elites.

In the opening pages of the book's prologue, Giridharadas previews his critical approach by citing the Irish poet, playwright, and avowed socialist, Oscar Wilde (p. 8):

“Just as the worst slave-owners were those who were kind to their slaves, and so prevented the horror of the system being realised by those who suffered from it, and understood by those who contemplated it, [...] the people who do most harm are the people who try to do most good.”

Following Wilde, Giridharadas is not evaluating the efficacy and efficiency of particular approaches to societal change. Rather, his project focuses on uncovering and deconstructing the myths and assumptions that guide the MarketWorld approach, in order to demonstrate how elite-led social change maintains the status quo, entrenches extreme power imbalances, and perpetuates growing social and economic inequality.

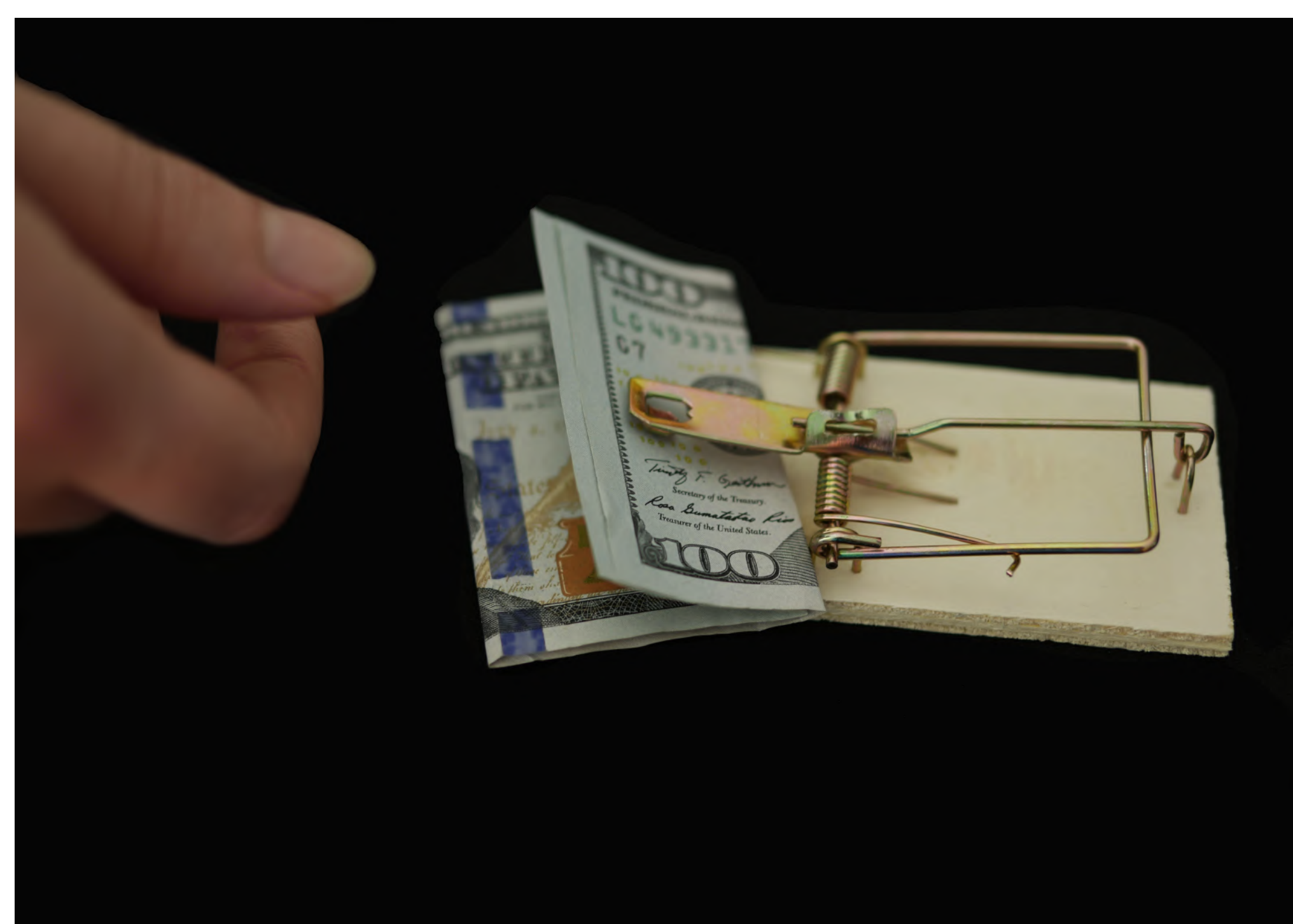
Winners Take All is organized into a prologue, seven chapters, and an epilogue. Each chapter's title refers to a specific MarketWorld myth that the ensuing chapter will critique. For example, “Chapter 1: How is the World Changed?”, details the philosophy of MarketWorld's market-driven, private sector-led, non-antagonistic approach to social change, while “Chapter 6: Generosity and Justice,” explores what happens when we decouple the destructive and exploitative practices involved in wealth accumulation from the charitable uses of that wealth to solve social problems.

A major strength of Giridharadas' writing is his ability to cycle between individual case studies and the broader structural features of society that he is describing/critiquing. These case studies include Amy Cuddy, a Harvard Business School Professor; Darren Walker, president of the Ford Foundation; Laurie Tisch, a prominent philanthropist and daughter of billionaire Preston Robert Tisch; the Sackler Family; and former US President Bill Clinton, among others. In each instance, Giridharadas skillfully captures the complicated relationship that these individuals have with the core tenets and approaches

of MarketWorld's elite-led approach to social change. In doing so, he is able to present the broader structural features of the MarketWorld moment, while underscoring the mechanisms by which the MarketWorld philosophy has tempted such a varied range of actors.

While many of Giridharadas' arguments are fairly established in critical writings on the political economy of philanthropy, the author does develop some poignant critiques that are specific to the MarketWorld context. For example, in “Chapter 2: Win-Win,” he examines the process through which politics—the realm of contrasting ideas, opinions, ideologies, and approaches—are removed from social change processes. The result is the “win-win” myth, which asserts that solutions to social, economic, and ecological problems should be mutually beneficial and satisfying to all stakeholders in the issues. “But there will always be situations in which people's preferences and needs do not overlap, and in fact conflict,” warns Giridharadas. “And what happens to the losers then? Who is to protect their interests” (p. 51)?

MarketWorld rejects the notion that there are different social classes with different interests who must fight for their needs and rights in the political arena. It rejects the idea that the solutions that satisfy elites might not be the best solutions for those most affected by the problems being addressed. It rejects the ways in which wealth accumulation is relational—necessarily creating social, economic, and ecological disparities in the process—and, instead, presumes that it occurs on a level playing field. MarketWorld provides a frightening ultimatum: the winners of capitalism will participate in making the world a better place, but only if these laudable goals are pursued in a way that exonerates, celebrates, and depends on them.



Another interesting chapter, particularly for researchers in the philanthropic sector is, “Chapter 4: The Critic and the Thought Leader.” Here, Giridharadas distinguishes between what he identifies as the traditional “critic/public intellectual” and what he calls the “thought leader”: a fundamental force in MarketWorld’s elite-led approach to social change. He argues that thought leaders focus on victims of injustice rather than its perpetrators, and further frame social and economic problems as personal and individualized, rather than political and systemic. Giridharadas notes that many prominent thought leaders began as serious critics/public intellectuals, only to be seduced by the “MarketWorld elites who are their patrons and impassioned base” (p. 115). As a result, thought leaders reflect the values of those elites:

“*Their love of the easy idea that goes down like gelato, an idea that gives hope while challenging nothing. Their susceptibility to scientific authority, no matter how thin or disputed. Their need for ideas to be useful, results-oriented, profitable in order to receive their support.*”

Likewise, solutions are individualized. It is no surprise, then, that thought leaders receive lucrative support from MarketWorld—their solutions to social, economic, and ecological problems won’t actually affect business-as-usual.

Throughout *Winners Take All*, Giridharadas introduces the reader to a range of other concepts key to the MarketWorld approach. He describes the increased role of multi-sectoral partnerships in elite-led social change, and the reimagining of “government” as merely one actor among many in the social change arena. He writes about the key role played by management training programmes in business schools and universities, as well as the instrumental part played by McKinsey and Company in shaping MarketWorld actors and practitioners. He details how promising university graduates interested in making the world a better place are funnelled into elite consulting firms, where they are provided training regarding the proper (i.e., market-oriented) approach to effect social change. As a result, Giridha-

radas argues, the people and approaches that create and exacerbate social and economic problems are tasked with solving those problems.

Winners Take All is a compelling and necessary book that offers an important set of critical tools for those studying contemporary approaches to social change, whether in the private, nonprofit, or public sector. Giridharadas integrates critical theoretical insights typically found in academic texts into an accessible and enjoyable read. While the examples in this book are US-specific, the lessons and critiques contained within are relevant to the Canadian context as well. Look around: we have our own humanitarian heroes working at foundations, businesses, and social enterprises. Most Canadian universities have programs focused on creating a “social impact,” which teach wide-eyed students how to become social entrepreneurs or impact investors in the mould of MarketWorld. We have institutes and labs focused on social innovations and market-based solutions to social problems like the MARS Discovery District and Social Innovation Generation. In this way, the MarketWorld story that Giridharadas tells is a global one.

Giridharadas, A. (2018). *Winners take all: The elite charade of changing the world*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.

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partenariale sur la philanthropie

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