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The Inside Story of MacKenzie Scott, the Mysterious 60-Billion-Dollar Woman

Amazon's first employee, Jeff Bezos's ex-wife, and one of the world's richest women is rewriting the philanthropy playbook

 Stephanie Clifford 5 days ago · 22 min read ★



Illustration: [Nicole Rifkin](#)

While Jeff Bezos was building Amazon from a garage into one of the most powerful companies on earth and becoming the richest businessmen of this age, the world knew very little about his wife, MacKenzie, a novelist and a mother of four who helped start Amazon from that garage. Even after their divorce last year, accompanied by a [public affair](#) and scandal, thrust MacKenzie Scott (the name she took after the split) into the spotlight, she remained a private and elusive figure. Now,

Scott, one of the richest women in the world, a billionaire tens times over, announced in July that she was giving away \$1.7 billion to a wide swath of nonprofits, from historically Black colleges to a crisis text line. The gift was stunning in scale and in approach: Scott was making a mark as a new kind of philanthropist.

With a gift of that size, Scott could've built a cancer center, had a museum wing named after her, made a college rededicate itself in her name. Or, like virtually every other person who's made significant amounts of money from tech, she could've created an organization to dole out grants based on her notions about how best to fix social issues. She chose another route.

Scott gave 116 grants, all at once, with very few strings attached, to mostly small organizations. They didn't have to hit metrics she named; they didn't have to create programs she favored. She even refused thank you notes when nonprofits asked how they could show their gratitude. And she specifically chose organizations led by people with "lived experience," as Scott put it: women leading women's groups, people of color leading racial equity groups.

With that, Scott far outpaced her ex-husband in the giving realm, and rewrote the typical playbook for high-profile tech philanthropists — who often operate as if they know best not just in business, but in solving societal problems, too. "Their engineering or technocratic orientation to their business, their wealth creation, transfers over to their philanthropic practices," says Rob Reich, a Stanford political science professor, referring to tech superstars like Mark Zuckerberg or Bill Gates. "To put it really crudely, technocratic philanthropy is philanthropy that is done to people rather than with people."

At the same time, Scott has drawn some criticism for the opaque nature of her giving and for the source of her great wealth: Amazon, which has grown during the pandemic to a nearly \$1.6 trillion market cap in early October, and has become notorious for paying relatively little in corporate taxes.

Bill Gates Enters His Third Act: Ruthless Nerd Savior

After going from relentless competitor to sweater-wearing do-gooder, he's becoming the merciless samaritan we need

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Although Scott could not be reached for an interview (requests were made through multiple representatives, including her book agent, her divorce lawyer, and her former employees), interviews with friends, schoolmates, instructors, associates, and former co-workers of Scott's, along with

previously unreported public documents, reveal her complicated relationship with money, tracing back to the financial upheaval her family experienced while she was a teenager. The quiet, literary, 50-year-old billionaire, who overnight became one of the most influential philanthropists in the world, and who set a new bar for giving, has learned from experience what money can accomplish — and what it can't.

At age six, Scott got permission from her teacher to take home a stack of cheap pulp paper from school, and wrote 142 pages titled *The Bookworm*. A couple years later, she read *Watership Down* and noticed it was filled with the names of plants. “I hopped on my Schwinn and rode to the library to hunt down a botanical encyclopedia, and for the next year, all my stories were stuffed with extraneous mentions of trees and flowers,” Scott wrote in an addendum to her first novel.

Other than her writing, she's offered few details about her early life. A rare 2013 [Vogue interview](#) described Scott's mother as someone “who cheerfully stayed home to cook meals and decorate the house” and her father as a “financial planner.”

The reality was much more nuanced. Scott grew up wealthy, with one house in a tony Marin County, California town and a sprawling mansion in San Francisco's Pacific Heights, according to government and property records. Her father, Jason Baker Tuttle, ran a San Francisco investment firm, while her mother, Holiday, was active in the philanthropy scene — a [report](#) in the 1970s from the prestigious Fine Arts Museum of San Francisco mentions her mom chaired a fundraising group that organized a nine-course dinner to raise money for the museum.

In high school, Scott went to Hotchkiss, an elite Connecticut boarding school with a nine-hole golf course and lake on campus. Though there was a haute-preppy set at Hotchkiss, Scott wasn't in it, remembers Elizabeth Meyer, who was a year behind Scott there; her friends were more the hardworking, brainy sorts. At the school, Scott has said, she became even more enthralled with fiction. She even asked to swap out sports requirements for writing projects. Her hope was to go to Princeton and study writing with Toni Morrison.

But in 1987, as she finished up her junior year, her family's financial security crumbled. A year earlier, the Securities and Exchange Commission had [begun investigating](#) her father and his investment firm after a complaint. In March of 1987, her parents filed for bankruptcy, and so did her father's investment firm, according to an administrative law judge's

description of the problems in SEC documents; that firm, and its short-lived successor, both closed, the judge wrote.

The family moved from California to Florida, and although Scott's father applied to start another investment firm, an administrative judge denied the application. In 1990, that judge barred Tuttle, who'd worked in the securities industry for almost 25 years, from advising on investments again. "His lavish spending was the reason the firm was unable to refund much of the funds it owed to clients," the judge wrote. It's unclear what Scott's father went on to do, work-wise; by 1990, Scott's mother was managing a small clothing store in Palm Beach. (The Tuttle, these days, are regularly photographed on the Palm Beach fundraising circuit, and Scott dedicated her second book to them. They did not respond to detailed requests for comment.)

The End of the Booming Mask Economy Is Near

From Gap to Vistaprint, companies are betting on masks to save them. But what happens when the bubble pops?

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The family's financial troubles reverberated in Scott's life. At Princeton, she had to "work a variety of jobs to put myself through school," she told Charlie Rose in 2013. "Maybe 30 hours a week on top of my course load. And I got into Princeton and I remember thinking wow, this is a huge opportunity for me," she said, and was "worrying, thinking how, I hope that I can juggle these jobs, and still get the most out of my education."

Still, she wanted to be a writer. During her senior year, Scott, like all Princeton seniors, was required to do an independent project — in her case, a 173-page thesis — and was able to land Morrison as her adviser. Getting a high-profile or famous professor to advise a thesis required ambition, says classmate Kari Kohl; students took classes with certain professors, attended office hours, and got to know them before popping the thesis question.

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Hearing "that giant laugh" of his, she has said, she
became intrigued. His name was Jeff Bezos.**

After graduation, Scott moved to New York, but found "I was having a lot of trouble making ends meet," she later told Rose. Though she still hoped to be a novelist, she needed steady money and got a job at D.E. Shaw, a quantitative hedge fund. She was given an office next to a young executive.

Hearing “that giant laugh” of his, she has said, she became intrigued. His name was Jeff Bezos. Three months after meeting at Shaw, Bezos and Scott got engaged. (She later told *Vogue* that she pursued him.) They married in September 1993, when she was only 23.

While at Shaw, recognizing the furious rate of growth of internet usage, Bezos decided he had to get involved in online sales — and made his pitch to Scott. “I told my wife MacKenzie that I wanted to quit my job and go do this crazy thing that probably wouldn’t work since most startups don’t, and I wasn’t sure what would happen after that,” Bezos said in a 2010 speech. Though she could’ve chosen financial stability and predictability after all the upheaval she had been through, Scott instead embraced the risk. She “told me I should go for it,” Bezos said. “She wanted me to follow my passion.” They both quit D.E. Shaw, and in 1994, with Scott at the wheel and Bezos in the passenger’s seat typing a business plan for an online bookstore, they drove to Seattle.

For Scott, books were art. The young woman who’d wanted to be a writer since she was six delved into Kazuo Ishiguro’s *The Remains of the Day* and Donna Tartt’s *The Secret History*. She loved Nabokov and Dickens and Melville, according to an addendum to her first novel. And she treasured check-ins from Toni Morrison encouraging her to keep writing, as she told Rose.

For her new husband, books were an opportunity. “I picked books as the first, best product to sell online after making a list of, like, 20 different products,” he told an interviewer in 1997. “There are more items in the book category than there are items in any other category by far,” he said, so an online bookstore was “a business plan that made sense in the context of that internet growth.”

Bezos and Scott launched the business in their garage, eventually moving to a rundown office in an industrial section of Seattle. Scott worked as the company’s bookkeeper and administrator: Employees went to her to fix paycheck problems or get help booking travel. “She seemed perfectly content with what she was doing: I never got a sense of, this is beneath me or I wish I was somewhere else,” Jonathan Kochmer, who joined the company in 1996, tells *Marker*.

At the time, Amazon was one of several competitors trying to figure out online bookselling, and it was unclear who would win, if any: Barnes & Noble, Borders, and independent bookstores seemed impenetrable. Then, in May 1996, the *Wall Street Journal* printed a front-page story about Amazon. “We had, at the time, a little bell that would ring every time a book was ordered, so we’d all be working and the bell would ring, and it would go *Ding!* and we’d go, ‘Yay! We sold a book!’” Kochmer recalls.

“When the article came out, the buzzer just went nuts: We had to disable it. That’s when it was clear that we had risen above the pack of the hundreds of other online bookstores.”

Within books-obsessed Amazon, though, Scott didn’t distinguish herself as a books enthusiast, as a fiction writer, or as much more than the boss’s pleasant wife who handled numbers.

The early work environment celebrated literature and wonkiness. Most of the first crop of Amazon employees were “book nerds,” says Erica Jorgensen, who joined in 1997 as a copy editor. Employees had to provide SAT scores before getting hired, and once they were on staff, competed to throw around big words. They got excited to feature authors like Penelope Fitzgerald and Arundhati Roy on the site, or meet Michael Chabon when he dropped by the office.

Although Bezos had chosen a subject that was his wife’s passion, his interest was clearly around growing the company. “I don’t remember him getting excited about authors coming: He was just focused on the business — he was more into the numbers of how many visitors the website had,” remembers Jorgensen. Kochmer agrees: “Jeff was very much, get big fast, make history.”

Amid all the talk of books, few co-workers knew of Scott’s literary pedigree and ambitions. In those years, Scott was quietly taking a night course at the University of Washington on fiction writing, then a writing workshop, working on a draft of what would become her first novel, according to her writing teacher at the time, Carole Glickfeld. Within books-obsessed Amazon, though, Scott didn’t distinguish herself as a books enthusiast, as a fiction writer, or as much more than the boss’s pleasant wife who handled numbers. She mostly stayed at her desk, which a 1997 office map shows was in a shared office off an interior corridor, just on the other side of the copier room. Years later, Jorgensen was reading *Publishers Weekly* and was surprised to see a review of a novel by Scott. “I don’t think it occurred to me for a long time that she herself was a writer,” Jorgensen says.

Meanwhile, Bezos was working to expand Amazon beyond its bookish roots. It had an IPO in 1997; after that, employees watched the stock price on their computer terminals and “some people wrote little tools to monitor how much they were worth by the minute,” Kochmer says. The site expanded to music, then became a marketplace by allowing third-party vendors. At the end of 1999, Bezos was named *Time*’s Person of the Year,

the “king of cybercommerce.” Amazon employees began to change, too. Very quickly, says Kochmer, the company was filled with “a bunch of people that had gotten their MBAs.”

The bookish employees mostly quit, says Kochmer, who left in 2001. “For Jeff, books were a test case for a grander vision of being an everything store,” he says. “And for me, there was no joy in helping to sell diapers at a lower price.” By then, he recalls, Scott was gone, but neither he nor other employees we spoke with could pinpoint when she left. Meanwhile, Bezos was just getting started. Amazon would go on to upend industries from retail to web hosting, groceries to shipping, making Bezos the richest man in the world in the process. Amazon’s stock, on the day of its 1997 IPO, closed at just under \$2 (after adjusting for stock splits). As of early October, a single share of Amazon hovers above \$3,000.

Around 1998, Stephen Verigin, a Sacramento-based engineer at the California Department of Water Resources got a note from headquarters. “There was a request from a novelist regarding an engineer,” the note read. When Verigin met Scott — who didn’t mention her Amazon connection — in person, she told him she was writing a book about a dam engineer. He found her impressively detail oriented, digging into engineering technicalities and geothermal specifics. “I’m a typical engineer, pretty introverted, and she was someone that I was immediately comfortable talking to,” he says. Over the next several months, he answered her questions. She didn’t talk about her personal life, other than mentioning she was from Seattle and originally from Marin.

In 2005, Scott published the book, *The Testing of Luther Albright*, about an emotionally distant engineer who recounts his work life and complex relationships with his wife and son. She landed the same high-powered literary agent as Toni Morrison, and an imprint of HarperCollins, a renowned publishing house, published the book. The novel garnered mediocre reviews, with the *New York Times* criticizing Scott’s “heavy-handed symbolism” but calling the novel “quietly absorbing.” The book sold tepidly, at fewer than 2,000 copies, according to NPD BookScan.

When Scott gave a reading at the Elliott Bay Book Company in Seattle, Bezos attended and bought a book, recalls Rick Simonson, senior buyer at the store. By then, Amazon’s intentions of edging out traditional bookstores like Elliott Bay was glaring, and “it was a little odd to have him in there,” Simonson says. If anything, Scott seemed eager to distance herself from Amazon. “She seemed pretty modest about it, like she was happy to have her book treated seriously,” Simonson tells *Marker*. She embarked on a traditional book tour at independent bookstores.

Scott seemed comfortable ceding the spotlight to her husband, but it also meant she was often cast as wife-of rather than as her own person.

Years later, reading an in-flight magazine article about Bezos that mentioned Scott, it hit Verigin that the author he'd met was the very rich wife of a prominent businessman. "I'll tell you the strongest reaction I had," he says. "My reaction was, 'Oh, gosh, I hope it doesn't stop her from writing,' because I so much liked the enthusiasm and the obvious love she had for the craft."

In 2013, Scott published her second book, *Traps*. For *Traps*, again Scott did serious research, spending a week on a movie set and working at a dog shelter. It's far different from *Luther*, with four women's lives intersecting in the dry Nevada landscape over four days. This time, she promoted the book with high-profile interviews with *Vogue* and *Charlie Rose*. Many of the interview questions centered around her husband. "Jeff is the opposite of me," she told *Vogue*. "He likes to meet people. He's a very social guy. Cocktail parties for me can be nerve-racking." She, on the other hand, preferred being in her own head: "I like to endlessly analyze conversations and think about words and tinker with words," she told Rose. The extra publicity didn't lift book sales much; *Traps* sold about the same as *Luther*.

By that year, 2013, the Bezos were worth around \$25 billion, and they had four children, ages seven to twelve. As Bezos's profile grew, Scott kept her life private. "Opposites attract," she told Rose. "There are things that people enjoy, preferences — a lot of time alone was one of mine." Though in Amazon's early days, Seattleites spotted the couple at events like book readings or gallery openings, by 2013, Bezos often appeared solo at high-profile events. In the *Traps* interviews, Scott, who friends and acquaintances say dresses in an understated manner and avoids flashy security, cars, or clothing, emphasized that she drove a Honda minivan to take their kids to school and to soccer practice.

Scott seemed comfortable ceding the spotlight to her husband, but it also meant she was often cast as wife-of rather than as her own person. In his 2010 Princeton baccalaureate speech, Bezos, also a Princeton graduate, gave the Amazon origin story and mentioned Scott's early support: "MacKenzie, also a Princeton grad and sitting here in the second row," he said. The camera stayed on Jeff, and didn't pan to Scott — a published novelist, at her alma mater, watching her husband from the second row.

This dynamic is common, says Meg Cadoux Hirshberg, founder of the Anticancer Lifestyle Program, and author of *For Better or For Work*.

Hirshberg has long written about balancing family life and an entrepreneurial venture — and has experienced that firsthand, as the spouse of Stonyfield Farms' founder Gary Hirshberg. “Entrepreneurs, they and their stories suck up all the oxygen — in a family, in a gathering, with friends, in any kind of setting,” she says. As the spouse, “it takes a lot of self-confidence to be able to understand that you are an important player in your own right, no matter what it is you’re doing, no matter what is your economic contribution.”

She gave him 75% of their Amazon stock and voting control of her shares, which left her a 4% stake in Amazon worth \$38 billion or so at the time.

In January 2019, Bezos announced in a [Twitter post](#) that he and Scott were divorcing after a trial separation, to “continue our shared life as friends.” Just after that, the [National Enquirer revealed](#) Bezos had been having an affair with TV host Lauren Sánchez, and ran excerpts of their racy texts. Bezos responded with a [Medium post](#) saying he had been extorted by the *National Enquirer*'s publisher, and vowing to find out who had leaked the texts to the *Enquirer*. (A *Wall Street Journal* report [pinpointed](#) Sanchez's brother, who it said sold the texts for \$200,000.)

With a lot of divorcing couples, this would've been fodder for ugly fights playing out in the press and in court. Yet quickly, and quietly, Bezos and Scott agreed to terms. In April 2019, Scott [posted her first ever tweet](#) to lay out terms of their divorce affecting shareholders. She gave him 75% of their Amazon stock and voting control of her shares, which left her a 4% stake in Amazon worth [\\$38 billion](#) or so at the time (as of early October, her net worth is [more than \\$60 billion](#)). Overnight, she became one of the richest women in the world. And almost immediately she started working to give the money away, and in a way that could change philanthropy.

Once they've made money, tech entrepreneurs and their families tend to give it away in a particular fashion. They often create foundations or limited liability corporations focused on fixing specific problems with the entrepreneur's answer. “Famously, this involves having a theory of change or a strategy that exists in the heads of the donor, and then you select the nonprofits that receive the funds on the basis of executing your theory of change — so the nonprofits become subcontractors for your own vision. You're not identifying people who have great ideas and giving them money,” says Reich, the author of *Just Giving*. Consider Bill and Melinda

Gates' highly specific grants in areas like leadership development for malaria control workers in Africa; Mark Zuckerberg and Priscilla Chan's targeted grants addressing science and education goals; and Laurene Powell Jobs' Emerson Collective funding Jobs' approach to solving Chicago street violence.

While that approach might work for some problems, like finding a treatment for a tropical disease, more entrenched issues like poverty or racism don't have such straightforward answers and controllable outcomes. "The technocratic orientation tries to engineer good outcomes rather than to involve people on the ground, with local knowledge, working on the front lines, often the beneficiaries or local nonprofit leaders," Reich says.

By contrast, philanthropists who make their money in more traditional fields tend to give big gifts involving naming rights. A review of the biggest individual donors of 2019, according to Forbes, illustrates this tendency: a couple with a fruit-and-nut fortune pledged \$750 million to Caltech to fund a climate change research center named after them; Chicago's Museum of Science and Industry now bears the name of a hedge fund founder who made a \$125 million donation.

Skeptics questioned why Bezos was giving money to combat homelessness while also fighting a proposed Seattle tax that would've funded programs to help the homeless but hit Amazon hard.

Despite their billions, Scott and Bezos didn't make much of an effort in either technocratic or traditional philanthropy prior to this year. This stood out particularly in Seattle, where the corporate culture, shaped by hometown companies Nordstrom, Microsoft, Costco, Starbucks, and others, was of giving back. Leaders from those companies, and their spouses, tended to sit on nonprofit boards and donate generously, while the companies themselves also made major contributions. Amazon, and Bezos and Scott, had barely participated. The *Seattle Times* described Amazon in 2012 as being a "virtual no-show in hometown philanthropy." It also has long been criticized for paying so little in corporate taxes.

Recently, the company has done more giving. The former couple has, too: In 2018, Bezos and Scott, still married, announced a "Day One Fund" committing \$2 billion toward homelessness and preschools. But skeptics questioned why Bezos was giving money to combat homelessness while also fighting a proposed Seattle tax that would've funded programs to help the homeless but hit Amazon hard. As Reich puts it, "Jeff Bezos' own

philanthropy has been an embarrassing hodgepodge of announcements with no evidence of follow-through, and conducted almost entirely on Twitter.” For instance, Bezos this year announced he was giving \$10 billion to a Bezos Earth Fund, but gave next to no details; as of yet there’s no public-facing fund nor website for the effort.

As for Scott, once the divorce was final, she signed the Giving Pledge, saying she’d give away most of her fortune, joining people including Larry Ellison, Pierre and Pam Omidyar, and Bill and Melinda Gates — though her ex, notably, has not signed the pledge. After that, she was, as usual, out of the public eye, and the philanthropic world wondered whether she would be all pledge, no action.

This spring hadn’t been a great one for Jorge Valencia. The nonprofit he runs, Point Foundation, offers scholarships and mentoring to LGBTQ students. When campuses shut down due to coronavirus, he and his staff scrambled to find students a safe place to stay, meals, and even Wi-Fi to connect to remote learning. When the George Floyd protests gathered strength, the organization announced new scholarships for LGBTQ students of color. Valencia worried about shifting to online fundraising from in-person events, and about whether donors would be generous when many of them were losing jobs. When an article in a prominent philanthropy publication detailed how nonprofits led by non-whites receive less grant money and receive more scrutiny than others, Valencia, a first-generation Mexican American, fretted about his own future. “You can imagine, when that article was sent to me, the questions that come into one’s mind: Are they going to let me go, because if they were to hire someone who wasn’t of color, the organization might get more money?” he says.

Then, in early July, Valencia got a weird email from someone claiming to work for an unnamed philanthropist, requesting a call. “For a fairly small organization like ours — we have 15 employees — you become a little suspicious,” he says. “Is this one of those send-money-to-whatever” scams?

The bigger concern, some critics say, is the very source of Scott’s money, and what she owes the public as a result.

Valencia called from his North Hollywood bedroom, where he’d been running the organization since shutdown, pacing with his headphones on. Then he sat down, hard. The caller told him Point Foundation was getting a

major gift — one of the largest it had ever received, Valencia says — from MacKenzie Scott. (He declined to cite the specific amount.)

“I cried,” Valencia says. “What can I say? It’s the truth. It was really humbling.” She had given a huge, unrestricted contribution. That was “almost unheard of,” he says. “When somebody says it’s unrestricted, they’re saying to you as an organization, ‘I trust the way you are running the organization.’”

In July, via a [Medium post](#), Scott announced she’d given away \$1.7 billion of her money to 116 organizations, including Point Foundation. “A civilization this imbalanced is not only unjust, but also unstable,” she wrote, as she laid out the areas she’d contributed to, from “empathy and bridging divides” to “functional democracy.” Scott worked with the consulting firm Bridgespan Group to vet nonprofits, and wrote that she tried to choose groups led by people of color, women, or LGBTQ people where possible. Among the groups she funded were [Facing History and Ourselves](#), which provides resources to teachers on complex historical topics involving bigotry or hate, and [Oweesta](#), a [group](#) focused on economic opportunities for Native people. Five historically black colleges and universities received gifts, too, with several saying it was the biggest they’d ever received. While not every group publicized the amount of her gift, the general range from those that did was about \$3 million to \$40 million.

That she gave mostly unrestricted gifts to existing groups meant huge flexibility for the nonprofits: no grants to apply for, no multiyear metrics to hit, no pet projects of hers the groups would need to pursue. That draws accolades from nonprofit experts. It was “a huge shift in how philanthropy is done,” says Elizabeth J. Dale, an assistant professor of nonprofit leadership at Seattle University. “As a donor, by doing this, she acknowledged that she doesn’t have the answers.”

This is an important moment, says Dale. “When you see donors trust the nonprofit experts, the people in the communities that have the highest needs, that’s a shift of power, right? In American society, wealth often equals power, so a very wealthy donor can have tremendous influence over an organization unless they’re taking these very intentional steps not to,” she says.

When Valencia asked Scott’s representatives how he could thank Scott, “while they were very gracious,” he says, “the response was, ‘You know, Ms. Scott really just wants to be able to provide you the support and then step back and let you do what you do best,’” he says.

Scott publicized the gifts, she said in her [post](#), because “my own reflection after recent events revealed a dividend of privilege I’d been overlooking: the

attention I can call to organizations and leaders driving change.”

By Friday, the value of Scott’s shares in Amazon had gone up so much that it more than replaced what she had given away.

Yet, other than the recipient groups, categories, and broad amounts, she didn’t reveal much about how she gave the money away or how she may give in the future, which concerns some critics. “MacKenzie Scott, by virtue of the amount of money she has, has an obligation to be more transparent about the structure she set up for her philanthropies and her future intentions,” Reich says. The “announcement is an announcement of her power, and power, wherever it is wielded in a democratic society, deserves scrutiny.” An undisclosed detail — whether she gave directly, through a foundation, or through an LLC — translates into important tax advantage distinctions, different disclosure requirements, and other specifics like whether or not she can support political causes. Plus, the speed with which she reviewed the nonprofits and gave the money, with little tracking, raises some concern that the groups won’t use it well — although it also means money gets where it’s needed faster (and perhaps indicates that the slow, deliberate grantmaking that philanthropists often do isn’t necessary).

But the bigger concern, some critics say, is the very source of Scott’s money, and what she owes the public as a result. “That money, as she very well knows, was made through tax avoidance, by wage theft, by union busting, by driving workers into the ground at every turn,” says Anand Giridharadas, author of *Winners Take All*. “She now has this classic modern dilemma: she is a serious person who wants to give the money back in ways that actually advance justice.” Notably absent on the list of groups she supported, he says, were nonprofits focused on workers or labor rights. “The most important thing she could do is make sure she’s pushing for the kind of structural, systemic changes that would make it impossible for a fortune like hers to arise ever again,” he says.

Scott announced the \$1.7 billion gift on a Tuesday. On Wednesday, her ex-husband, Bezos, testified before Congress for the first time, speaking at a House antitrust hearing. By Friday, the value of Scott’s shares in Amazon had gone up so much that it more than replaced what she had given away. The company’s sales had skyrocketed during the pandemic, as physical stores shut and consumers stayed home. Despite scrutiny about whether Amazon was taking proper safety precautions for its warehouse

workers, senators questioning whether it had fired whistleblowers for raising questions about working conditions, the House antitrust investigation, and growing concern that Amazon and Bezos held far too much power and money, Amazon stock rose; so, as a result, did Scott's fortune. The wealth she didn't seek, which she was starting to give away, kept coming in, bigger and bigger waves crashing against the shore.

There's a scene in Scott's novel *Traps* where a movie star, who's become reclusive after her father sells her out to tabloids, thinks about the security apparatus it takes to make her life possible. The actress, trying to feel like a regular person, drives herself around, but this creates more work for the guards who have to protect her than just chauffeuring her would.

She "is grateful every day for the protection they provide from the shadows her job has cast on her family — the predatory photographers, the stalkers, the few famous kidnappings of children of stars, but the truth is she does not go whole days or even whole hours at home without wondering what these kind people think of her," Scott wrote. "Secretly she finds herself feeling insecure and self-conscious even in her own yard, where from behind a shuttered window she knows good people can see her. She has made her world so small trying to escape the judgments of strangers... She will not work to project what she wants others to see (Kind! Down-to-earth! Humble! Normal!)."

It is hard not to picture Scott in her car, eyes flicking at the rearview mirror, security guards ready to protect and to pounce, questioning interactions, avoiding public inquiries, thinking about how to give away a near oppressive amount of money to correct an unjust society that her wealth helped shape, about to leave her mansion and go pick up her kids as she tries to create for herself and them a thing money can't buy: a normal life.

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