Eugene M. Lang

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Founder, "I Have a Dream" Foundation and Project Pericles

Born of Hungarian parents in 1919, Eugene M. Lang grew up in New York City, attending public school in East Harlem during the Great Depression. He was admitted to Swarthmore College at age 15 as a scholarship student. In parallel with his studies, Lang's talents as both a business and social entrepreneur became apparent—he established successful dry-cleaning and college pennant manufacturing businesses while also organizing and leading an inner city youth club at a Philadelphia settlement house.

After receiving Swarthmore's bachelor's degree in economics in 1938, Lang was employed by a financial publication while earning an MBA at Columbia University. In 1943, he became Director of Planning and eventually part owner of the Heli-Coil Corporation, manufacturer of industrial fasteners and tools, now a division of Black & Decker. In 1951, he organized REFAC Technology Development Corporation to establish and develop Heli-Coil and other high-tech products in world markets by creating overseas manufacturing licenses and joint ventures. REFAC's success became widely recognized and, as consultant to our State and Commerce Departments, Lang served on official trade and investment missions to Australia, Burma, Japan, France, India, New Zealand and the Philippines.

In 1963, Lang established the Eugene M. Lang Foundation to devote himself increasingly to philanthropy. Focusing on education, in 1981, he created the "I Have a Dream" Program with all graduating sixth graders of P.S. 121 in East Harlem. Now nationwide, the program provides sustained, caring, personal guidance and support to many thousands of disadvantaged children, called "Dreamers," throughout their K–12 years, plus an assured college opportunity. Under the oversight of the National "I Have a Dream" Foundation in New York, the program has inspired federal and state legislation that now benefits millions of underprivileged children.

In 2001, Lang established Project Pericles, an organization that engages colleges and universities, as Pericleans, to encourage and facilitate the effective participation of American youth in the responsibilities of citizenship. Qualification as a Periclean begins with the institution's formal commitment, as part of its educational program, to prepare students for thoughtful social and civic engagement. Pace University is among the original group of 10 Pericleans. Now 22 colleges and universities are developing and testing programs that educationally and experientially involve the classroom, campus, and community. Lang also continues to endow and otherwise support facilities, scholarships, academic projects, and student initiatives, such as a student/faculty research program at Pace.

Lang is chair emeritus of Swarthmore College, and founder and chair emeritus of the National "I Have a Dream" Foundation and the Conference of Board Chairs of Independent Liberal Arts Colleges. Among many honors for his contributions to education, President George H. W. Bush designated him a "Point of Light" and President Bill Clinton awarded him the Presidential Medal of Freedom, this nation's highest civilian award. He and his wife Theresa, married in 1946, have three children, eight grandchildren, and five great-grandchildren. He claims his biggest success has been his marriage and the strong sense of family in an environment of love, respect, interaction, achievement, and social responsibility.

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