

Survey of Race Relations on the Pacific Coast, 1923-1925

By Sarah M. Griffith

Ph.D. Candidate, Department of History
University of California, Santa Barbara
357 NE Bryant Street
Portland, Oregon 97211

sarahgriffith@umail.ucsb.edu

© 2009 by Sarah M. Griffith

Editor's Note: This research report is presented here with the author's permission but should not be cited or quoted without the author's consent.

Rockefeller Archive Center Research Reports Online is a periodic publication of the Rockefeller Archive Center. Edited by Ken Rose and Erwin Levold. Research Reports Online is intended to foster the network of scholarship in the history of philanthropy and to highlight the diverse range of materials and subjects covered in the collections at the Rockefeller Archive Center. The reports are drawn from essays submitted by researchers who have visited the Archive Center, many of whom have received grants from the Archive Center to support their research.

The ideas and opinions expressed in this report are those of the author and are not intended to represent the Rockefeller Archive Center.

The grant-in-aid that I received from the Rockefeller Archives Center in the spring 2008 facilitated greatly research for my dissertation on the Survey of Race Relations on the Pacific Coast, 1923-1925. My dissertation examines the formation of the Survey of Race Relations (SRR) and the influence religious reformers and philanthropists, and especially John D. Rockefeller, Jr., had in its formation. More broadly, I focus on the religious reform movements of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century and the ways in which they fused Social Gospel reform agendas with a new internationalist and anti-racist social agenda.

The "Rockefeller Family Papers" at the Rockefeller Archive Center include a great deal of information on the role John D. Rockefeller, Jr. (JDR Jr.) played in establishing, first, the Interchurch World Movement (IWM), and second, the IWM's successor, the Institute of Social and Religious Research (ISRR). The IWM began as an

organization oriented toward removing denominational barriers between churches so they could better serve communities in the United States. The IWM was particularly concerned with better serving the religious needs of industrial workers and immigrant communities. More specifically, the IWM sought to unify denominations and put them to work on surveying these communities, especially in the Midwest, east, and southeast portions of the United States. Specifically, the IWM sought to determine how the church could help assimilate immigrant communities to American religious and social life. The IWM saw an early demise (it lasted from 1918-1919) as infighting tore apart JDR Jr.'s vision for interdenominational unity.

The Rockefeller Family Papers helped me trace the IWM to its next phase. Still not defeated and committed to surveying immigrant and industrial communities, Rockefeller launched the ISRR in 1921. The ISRR went on to fund hundreds of studies of immigrant and industrial communities in the United States (again, primarily in the Midwest, East, and Southeast). In addition, they funded one of the few surveys of Asian American-white race relations on the West coast. The connection between the SRR and East Coast philanthropists is all but unknown. The archives I studied at the Rockefeller Archives Center help me make a direct link between this West Coast study, its goals, and its connection to JDR Jr.'s earlier attempts to achieve interdenominational unity among ethnic communities and the Christian church. Although JDR Jr. demanded that his name be kept off the SRR books, his money and his vision for assimilating immigrants through the Christian church remained a central theme in the SRR once it was implemented on the ground.

JDR Jr. and the organizations he started, such as the IWM and ISRR, are seminal in understanding the SRR. That this link has gone unnoted by historians has left a gap in our understanding of this unique and compelling study of Asian-white race relations in the western United States. Having the chance to study the Rockefeller Family Archives has enhanced greatly my understanding of the significance of philanthropic organizations in the church, as well as their role in the study of minority immigrant groups in the pre-World War I and interwar eras.