

# **Exporting Modernity: U.S. Foundations and Latin American Development, 1950-1980**

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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.

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During the month of August, 2009 I visited the Rockefeller Archive Center with the support of a Grant-in-Aid to conduct research for my dissertation, which examines the philanthropic activities of U.S. private foundations in Latin America during the decades of the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s. My project explores how foundation grants and programs aimed to modernize Latin American economies and accelerate their integration into a global economy and culture. The goal was not only to come away with an understanding of the types of projects the Rockefeller Foundation (RF) was involved with but also to examine the ideological assumptions behind the projects, to identify any limitations of the foundation's vision, and to sketch out how these limitations altered or changed initial assumptions. My first venture into the material available on development projects in Latin America underscores the complex political environment the RF was operating in and reveals how initial assumptions about modernization in

Latin America proved simplistic and lacked an understanding of the interrelatedness of social, economic, and cultural phenomenon.

While I was unable to look at all the relevant record groups on this trip (a testament to the amount of material available and the helpfulness of the staff in pointing out additional material), I did examine Record Group 1.2 (Series 311, 309, 301, 305-project files from Colombia, Brazil, Chile, and Argentina), Record Group 12.1 (Officers' Diaries), Record Group 3.2 (Series 900 - Program and Policy), and Record Group 3.1 (Series 910 – Program and Policy -- Social Sciences). As I will detail below, Record Group 1.2 provided me with information about specific grants in Latin America, from justifications for the project to reports and problems encountered. One of the more illuminating record groups was RG 12.1, though some of the material in these officers' diaries was also interspersed among the country project files. The diaries offer a revealing look (more so than project files) at how RF officers responded to the volatile political atmosphere in various Latin American countries. Through the record groups mentioned, I tried to identify the goals, ideological assumptions, and limitations of RF projects in the areas of agriculture, university reform, and population.

In my previous research at the Ford Foundation and the National Archives I found ample evidence of collaboration between the major foundations and U.S. government agencies, so I came to the Rockefeller Foundation material with the assumption that they shared with these organizations similar goals and outcomes in Latin America. These goals were based broadly on the development paradigm of the day, modernization theory.<sup>1</sup> Material in the Rockefeller Foundation files appears to support this assumption. For example, the RF's university development program sought the "development of institutions engaged in teaching and research to bring about the transition from traditional to modern ways of life, and to enlarge the

opportunities available to enhance human welfare.”<sup>2</sup> This traditional/modern dichotomy was the lens through which the Rockefeller Foundation saw not only its university development programs, but also its agriculture and population programs. It also offers an explanation for why university development, agriculture and population projects were central to the Foundation’s vision of what it wanted to accomplish in Latin America.<sup>3</sup>

### **Agriculture in Colombia and Chile**

The Rockefeller Foundation’s agricultural projects in Colombia sprouted from the successful foray into modernizing Mexican agriculture during the 1940s and 1950s.<sup>4</sup> The RF sought to expand the Green Revolution to Colombia and Chile during the 1950s and 1960s by funding research and agricultural extension programs aimed at increasing food production. According to a 1953 RF report, the farming population in Colombia was “ready and anxious to accept new ideas and put them to practice.”<sup>5</sup> Underlying this interest in Colombia’s agricultural productivity were concerns about how high food prices might lead to instability. Noting this concern in his report on Colombia, Herrell DeGraff remarked, “I found myself wondering how long a situation could continue in which a half-kilo loaf of bread cost a quarter of a day’s wages for an industrial worker before a revolution might grow out of popular disgust and despair.”<sup>6</sup>

Increasing productivity through the introduction of scientific farming methods, new technologies, and the establishment of agricultural research centers was seen as the answer to the agricultural problem in Colombia, and indeed, throughout the underdeveloped world. By the late 1950s, the basic objective of agricultural programs was “the training of local scientists, through participation in research projects on basic food crops as well as by means of scholarships and fellowships, to the point at which selected individuals take increasing responsibility for leadership in agricultural science in their own countries.”<sup>7</sup> This transfer of scientific knowledge

was the initial solution to the highly politicized issue of agriculture and land in Latin America. However, by the 1960s it was clear that merely having the technology and know-how to increase crop yield in areas already being cultivated, while a worthwhile endeavor, had not solved the “agricultural problem” in Colombia or other countries in Latin America. In order to make further gains, the RF would have to find a way to address the issue of unproductive and idle land.<sup>8</sup> Already, the Rockefeller Foundation along with USAID, the United Nations, American universities, the Kellogg Foundation, and the Ford Foundation were cooperating and broadening their approach to the agricultural issue in Colombia and beyond by looking at such things as credit, storage, and price stability.

Increasing productivity through scientific research and the application of that research was an area the Rockefeller Foundation felt very comfortable with, as it fit within broader ideological assumptions about capitalist development and modernization.<sup>9</sup> However, venturing into the issue of land reform would place the Foundation in the middle of a volatile political debate. I found illuminating discussions of land reform and the Foundation’s role in this issue among the Chilean projects files and the trip diaries of Charles Hardin. As land reform in Chile became a much debated political issue in the early 1960s, the Rockefeller Foundation, which already had agricultural programs operating in the country, seemed reluctant to get involved in land reform projects. In 1960 Albert H. Moseman stated in a letter to the agricultural economist William Myers, “The principle interest in Chile at the moment appears to be in land reform. This, of course, is not a field in which we would wish to participate in actively.”<sup>10</sup>

The next year, however, RF officer Charles Hardin met with Solon Barraclough, head of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the U.N., and discussed the impending radical changes in Chilean agriculture. Barraclough suggested that the U.N and other agencies should train

individuals “who will be able more sensibly and intelligently to take hold of the action programs that emerge.”<sup>11</sup> As one possible solution to what Hardin noted as the “rise in tension in Latin America and the probable impending radical changes,” Baraclough and Hardin discussed John D. Black’s approach to land reform which was implemented with some success in Tennessee.<sup>12</sup> Though Black’s method was radical for its place and time, it fit within the ideological parameters of a capitalist system (i.e., it retained the fundamental belief in private property and individualism), and resulted in increased productivity. It also offered a way to address the issue of land reform before radical change became inevitable. Though critical of this approach and its application of it in the United States in 1953, Hardin thought its application in Chile could have positive results.<sup>13</sup>

By 1970, the Rockefeller Foundation appeared to be paying more attention to issues beyond scientific technologies, including being concerned with increasing the income of small farmers (farmer’s income was a central focus of Black’s work), and “assisting them in participating in the market economy.”<sup>14</sup> The RF also came to realize the interconnectedness of the agricultural issue with other social problems. They began to see social science research in the areas of population growth and economic policy as vital “to the process of continually increasing the productivity of the resources- human and other- in developing countries.”<sup>15</sup> This “second phase of agricultural development” appears to be an attempt to address the failure of the Green Revolution to modernize Latin American economies through a primary focus on increased productivity.

While more research is needed, these discussions of productivity and land reform reveal how initial assumptions about capitalist development collided with an important debate waging in Latin American countries about land tenure and social justice. The extent to which the

Rockefeller Foundation was willing to engage these issues was affected at least partially by the leftward drift in politics, especially in Chile, where radical changes to agriculture were a real possibility. With additional research and the synthesis of the RF information with material I found at the Ford Foundation archives, I hope to further flesh out the productivity/land reform dichotomy (perhaps not the dichotomy as it appeared to be in the 1950s) and how foundations operating in Latin America adjusted their programs to address this issue.

### **University Development in the Social Sciences**

The RF's university development program reflected the influence of the modernization paradigm and its focus on training indigenous elites to carry out modernizing reforms in their respective countries. The Rockefeller Foundation would select key institutions of higher learning in several countries and focus on building academic departments in the natural sciences and the social sciences based on the university system in the United States. The goal in the social sciences was to create departments with full-time faculty whose focus was action-oriented research for use in public policy.

This process primarily consisted of funding visiting professors from U.S. universities to teach and train students and the use of fellowships for Latin Americans who wished to study at U.S. universities and return home to apply their knowledge to national problems. Initially, the Rockefeller Foundation relied heavily on visiting professors from U.S. institutions. Over time, however, this practice would meet with increasing resistance from students, as anti-American sentiments engulfed university campuses across Latin America. The Director's Statement on Programs in 1970 reflects one possible response to this resistance:

In the early years of educational aid to developing countries, some experts thought that all that was needed was to transfer knowledge from the developed to the developing countries and to educate a sufficient number of people. Today a

different approach is needed. Indigenous problem-solving centers must be created in the local universities where existing knowledge can be adapted and new knowledge created while at the same time efforts are made to solve local problems and to educate future scientists and leaders.<sup>16</sup>

The material on the RF's support for the development of economics at University of the Andes (Colombia), University of the Valle (Colombia), University of Chile, and Universidad Católica (Chile) provides insight into the dynamics of university development in Latin America. The RF preferred to work with established universities whose scholars could have significant impact on public policy. The goal of university reform was not only to create a university system more like that in the United States, with full-time faculty who conducted research, but also to create a pool of technocrats who could utilize the latest research in the natural and social sciences to guide their countries' development. This strategy dictated that RF resources be directed toward elite institutions that served mostly the upper and middle classes.<sup>17</sup>

One of the more successful attempts at building the social sciences in Latin America was the RF's involvement in the field of economics.<sup>18</sup> Influencing the intellectuals in Latin America was important to RF goals and critical to addressing the growing anti-Americanism present in universities.<sup>19</sup> Anti-American sentiments were particularly troublesome to RF goals of university reform at the University of the Andes and the University of the Valle. RF attempts to build strong departments of economics and political science with the use of visiting professors from the United States were meeting resistance from students. New faculty appointments had to be approved not only by the university staff and administration, but also by the powerful student representatives, who rejected many appointments due to their U.S. training. In 1964 Charles Hardin was receiving reports that Valle was "fairly close to saturation point" in

terms of visiting professors from the United States.<sup>20</sup> By 1966 Hardin warned that adding more Americans to Valle could “invite trouble.”<sup>21</sup>

While RF officials saw their role in building the social sciences in Latin America as an apolitical endeavor, many Latin Americans saw the visiting professors who came on foundation and government grants as part of a larger process of indoctrination by the United States. This would be a constant challenge the Rockefeller Foundation had to face in the polarized political environment of the 1960s. My initial, though incomplete, look at the project files on Brazil indicate similar problems in building research-oriented departments and institutions in the social sciences.<sup>22</sup> Thus, by 1970 the RF’s emphasis (noted earlier) on building indigenous leadership and scholarship appears to be one response to this issue.

### **Population Programs**

Population growth in Latin America seemed to exacerbate many of the problems that RF grants and programs tried to solve, especially in agriculture. Creating a “middle-class revolution” that would benefit the majority of Latin Americans and de-radicalize politics depended heavily on keeping population growth in check. The gains in agricultural productivity and economic growth were being undermined by explosive population growth. While this research trip only allowed a cursory look at the material on this topic, I will comment on the RF’s initial approach to the problem and its realization of the interrelatedness of population growth to other economic and social issues.

The Rockefeller Foundation began a specific program in population in 1963. Initially, the RF’s focus was on the biological aspects of population growth, i.e. scientific research on birth control and fertility. Over the course of the 1960s, the obstacles toward



zero population growth led the RF to look to the social sciences for answers on how to achieve lower birth rates. Medical breakthroughs in limiting fertility did not translate to lower population growth. A 1970 Rockefeller Foundation report on population programs noted “attitudinal factors that limit acceptance by individuals and government leaders of family size and population restrictions” and “methods of communicating information on fertility limitation and population control to masses of poorly educated, economically disadvantaged people” as two major hurdles in RF programs aimed at lowering birth rates.<sup>23</sup> To address the problem of social acceptance, the Rockefeller Foundation began funding local groups to conduct outreach programs on family planning. One such organization, the Colombian Association for the Scientific Study of Population, conducted workshops on family planning in Colombia’s major cities. More research will be needed to determine the changing vision for population control and the extent of acceptance of, or resistance to, the RF’s population programs within Latin American countries.

## **Conclusion**

The primary goal of my initial research trip was to get a broad overview of the Rockefeller Foundation’s programs in Latin America, to begin to identify intellectual and ideological assumptions behind the programs, and to uncover any limitations of the RF’s approach. In agriculture, my tentative thesis posits that the focus on productivity and the reluctance to engage the land reform issue was a product of assumptions about capitalist development and modernization that stemmed less from an understanding about Latin America and its problems than from the dominant paradigm influencing development ideas (modernization theory).

Likewise, the elitist model of social and economic change that underscored the RF's university development program reflected long-standing conceptions about development that had their roots in what Louis Hartz described as "the liberal tradition in America."<sup>24</sup> Further research to document the influence of modernization theory and the "liberal tradition" on RF programs is needed (though I did find references to several prominent modernization theorists in the material I looked at). In addition, the extent to which RF officers were able to break free from their ideological assumptions is yet unclear.

My initial thoughts are that in agriculture radical reform from within Latin American countries was such a real possibility that it forced RF officers to reconsider their simplistic focus on increasing yield and engage the issue of land reform, albeit conservatively. I will need to follow up on the projects in Chile based on John Black's method (mentioned in discussions of land reform) to properly speak to this issue. In the area of university reform, the basic approach to training an elite cadre of researchers and technocrats was never really second guessed, even with growing anti-American sentiments in the universities. Many projects, especially in the field of economics, were thought to be models for university development. The documents I have looked at suggest that preconceived notions of development defined the parameters of the Rockefeller Foundation's programs, but the documents also reveal ways in which the RF adjusted their efforts in response to local environments.

## ENDNOTES:

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<sup>1</sup> Historian Michael Latham argues that four basic assumptions underlay the modernization paradigm. First, there is a clear delineation between modern and traditional societies. Second, social changes, political changes, and economic growth are interrelated. Third, development proceeds from traditional to modern in a relatively linear path. Fourth, contact with modern societies accelerates the development of traditional societies. See Latham, Michael. *Modernization as Ideology: American Social Science and "Nation Building" in the Kennedy Era*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000. Foundation (both Ford and Rockefeller) involvement in the creation and dissemination of modernization theory is briefly dealt with in Gilman, Nils. *Mandarins of the Future: Modernization Theory in Cold War America*. Baltimore, Maryland: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003; and more extensively in my unpublished paper, "The Ford Foundation, Modernization Theory, and Latin American University Reform."

<sup>2</sup> "Director's Statement on Programs", 1970, p. 50, RG 3.2, Series 900, Folder 160, Box 30, Rockefeller Foundation Archives (RFA), Rockefeller Archive Center (RAC), Sleepy Hollow, New York.

<sup>3</sup> In addition to a focus on economic growth through industrialization and increased productivity, modernization theorists posited that building an elite group of academics and technocrats who could lead their countries through the modernization process with scientific research was essential to development.

<sup>4</sup> See Cueto, Marcos, editor. *Missionaries of Science: The Rockefeller Foundation and Latin America*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994.

<sup>5</sup> "Report on Colombia," Herrell DeGraff to Dr. J.G. Harrar, October 15, 1953, RG 1.2, Series 311S, Folder 819, Box 86, RFA, RAC.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> "Operating Program in Agriculture," January 1, 1956, RG 1.2, Series 311, Folder 1, Box 1, RFA, RAC.

<sup>8</sup> "Feasibility of Acceleration of Food Production in Colombia," Report by J. M. Spain to Dr. U. J. Grant, October 10, 1966, RG 1.2, Series 311, Folder 24, Box 5, RFA, RAC.

<sup>9</sup> For a discussion on productivity as a focus of U.S. foreign aid in the post WWII period see Maier, Charles S. "The Politics of Productivity: Foundations of American International Economic Policy after World War II," *International Organization* 31: 4, Between Power and Plenty: Foreign Economic Policies of Advanced Industrial States (Autumn 1977), pp. 607-633.

<sup>10</sup> Excerpt from letter of March 7, 1960 from A. H. Moseman to W. I. Myers, RG 1.2, Series 309, Folder 8, Box 2, RF, RAC.

<sup>11</sup> Charles M. Hardin's interviews with Solon Barraclough, January 10, 1961, RG 12.1, Box 46, 1960-1961, Charles Hardin Diaries, RF, RAC.

<sup>12</sup> Black's model was based on the subdivision of large landholdings into small plots that could be worked individually versus collectively. His model, tried in Tennessee, resulted in increased overall productivity.

<sup>13</sup> Charles M. Hardin Interviews with T. W. Schultz, January 11, 1961, RG 1.2, Series 309S, Folder 287, Box 35, RF, RAC.

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<sup>14</sup> Director's Statement on Programs, 1970, p. 25, RG 3.2, Series 900, Folder 160, Box 30, RF, RAC.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. p. 33.

<sup>16</sup> Director's Statement on Programs, 1970, p. 50, RG 3.2, Series 900, Folder 160, Box 30, RFA, RAC.

<sup>17</sup> This strategy would lead to some criticism in Latin America and charges that the RF was neglecting the majority of workers (who were in need of basic education and technical and vocational training), in favor of those that already had opportunities in the economy (university students). See letter from Alberto Valdès to Charles Hardin, July 12, 1961, RG 1.2, Series 309S, Folder 270, Box 32, RFA, RAC.

<sup>18</sup> For the story of how scholars at the University of Chicago along with U.S. government agencies sought to challenge the dominant statist economic paradigm taught in Latin American economics with the free market paradigm see Valdéz, Juan Gabriel. *Pinochet's Economists: The Chicago School in Chile*. Massachusetts: Cambridge University Press, 1995.

<sup>19</sup> For a discussion on this see Charles Hardin's notes with Joseph Grumwald, May 8-10-12-15, 1961, RG 1.2, Series 309S, Folder 287, Box 35, RFA, RAC.

<sup>20</sup> Interview notes, Charles Hardin, 1/27/64 with Cole Blasier, RG 1.2, Series 311S, Folder 727, Box 76, RFA, RAC.

<sup>21</sup> Letter from Charles Hardin to Cole Blasier, 3/25/66, RG 1.2, Series 311S, Folder 727, Box 76, RFA, RAC.

<sup>22</sup> In Brazil, the RF supported the Getulio Vargas Foundation which was linked to the free-market school of economics, and during the late 1950s to the early 1960s, the government viewed their research with suspicion. See interview notes of Montague Yudelman (MY), October 28, 1958, Rio de Janeiro, RG 1.2, Series 305, Folder 499, Box 60, RFA, RAC.

<sup>23</sup> Director's Statement on Programs, 1970, p. 6, RG 3.2, Series 900, Folder 160, Box 30, RF, RAC.

<sup>24</sup> For a discussion of Louis Hartz's ideas applied to United States foreign aid during the post World War II period see, Packenham, Robert. *Liberal America and the Third World: Political Development Ideas in Foreign Aid and Social Science*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1973.