

Demography and Population Politics

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This is a report of research conducted at the Rockefeller Archive Center (RAC) during August 2012 for my dissertation, “Prediction and Control: Global Population, Population Science, and Population Policy in the Twentieth Century.”¹ The records housed at the RAC are integral to my dissertation, which is a history of global demography, beginning in 1920, and of the relationship between demography, population change, and population politics. It focuses on population projections—estimates of future population size and structure—as a key interface between these three dimensions. Since I have not yet had a chance to fully analyze the material I found, this report will simply discuss what those materials are and how I plan to use them in my dissertation. The dissertation is comprised of three sections, and material from the RAC will be important to each.

The first section discusses the development of methods of population projection in the interwar period, and lays out a simultaneous institutional history of demography. A key moment in this history is the 1928 establishment of the International Union for the Scientific Investigation of Population Problems (IUSIPP). Raymond Pearl, the founder of the organization, initially sought sponsorship for it from the Milbank Memorial Fund and the Rockefeller Foundation (RF). The RF refused to support the IUSIPP directly, but agreed to do so through grants to the National Research Council (NRC) and the Social Science Research Council (SSRC).² Together, the NRC

and the SSRC would form the American Committee of the IUSIPP, which was organized as an association of national committees rather than individual members, and supply the committee's dues for the IUSIPP. Things did not go according to plan, however. Then-president of the SSRC, Edwin Wilson, a colleague and enemy of Pearl's, refused to commit SSRC members and funds to the IUSIPP.³ Together, the papers of Raymond Pearl at the American Philosophical Society and the records of the SSRC population committee at RAC will allow me to untangle the interactions between the IUSIPP and the SSRC from both sides and to fully document this event in the institutional history of demography.⁴

Another key moment is the 1931 founding of the Population Association of America. Following its organization, the PAA undertook a census of the field, attempting to locate scientists conducting research on population and to inventory their projects. The SSRC had carried out a similar survey in 1928, and though I have been unable to locate the results of the PAA survey, those of the SSRC survey, archived at the RAC, have allowed me to assess the status of the field in 1928. In that year, the SSRC identified three hundred seventy population-oriented research projects underway in the United States. Of those, about twenty-five percent were on morbidity and mortality; twenty-four percent on qualitative aspects of population (racial composition, heredity, and mental characteristics); nineteen percent on population in relation to resources and other economic aspects of population; fourteen percent on fertility, family, and population growth; fourteen percent on migration and urban/rural issues; and four percent on surveys and institutional populations. The majority of these studies (nearly seventy percent) "were subsidized by foundations, by fellowships or were carried on by research institutions or government bureaus."

The first graduate training program in demography in the U.S. was established as the Office of Population Research (OPR) at Princeton University in 1936, under the initiative of Frederick Osborn and with financial support from the Milbank Memorial Fund. In 1945, the RF became the OPR's main sponsor with a ten-year grant of \$200,000 for general operating costs.⁵ The RF also funded specific projects at OPR and, in 1955, increased its annual support to \$50,000.⁶ The OPR archives have been destroyed, but records of the RF's relationship with the OPR from 1944 through 1979 will provide me with valuable information about the OPR during this critical period in the history of demography and global population politics.⁷

The second section of the dissertation describes a dual crisis that emerged in the mid-twentieth century. The first part was a crisis of demography: increasingly, U.S. demographers were being asked for analyses and projections of global population or the population of various foreign countries and regions, but the data they required to perform those analyses was either unavailable or unreliable, and the theory that drove population projection—demographic transition theory—had been challenged by the unexpected rise in fertility in North America and Western Europe (the baby boom) and by rapid population growth in agrarian societies elsewhere in the world. RF funding for the OPR was intended, in part, to sponsor the collection of better international population data.⁸ In 1948, Marshall Balfour and Roger Evans of the RF took Frank Notestein and Irene Taeuber of the OPR to East Asia, to witness population dynamics there first hand.⁹

The second part of the crisis was a demographic dilemma: dramatic reductions in mortality brought about by medical and public health initiatives of the World Health Organization and other nongovernmental and philanthropic organizations, including the RF, were beginning to cause rapid population growth in the global south. John D. Rockefeller 3rd

(JDR 3rd) was particularly concerned about this population growth, and in 1952 organized and chaired a meeting under the aegis of the National Academy of Sciences at Colonial Williamsburg in order to discuss the causes and consequences of population growth with scientists of various kinds, including demographers. The John D. Rockefeller 3rd Papers at the RAC contain considerable documentation from this meeting, including briefings, reports, and a complete transcript.¹⁰ This meeting helped to set the agenda for the Population Council (PC), which JDR 3rd established in the following year in order to promote demographic and contraceptive research and, later, technical assistance to family planning programs in the U.S. and abroad. In addition to the complete archives of the PC, also housed at the RAC, the John D. Rockefeller 3rd Papers include reports for the first few years and minutes of board meetings for nearly the first full decade of the PC's existence.¹¹

In the decades after World War II, the growth of population worldwide became a topic of popular concern, in part due to the work of the Population Reference Bureau, which transformed the population data and analyses produced by statistical bureaus and demographers into news stories ready for the media. Records of correspondence between the PC and the Population Reference Bureau indicate that, although the two organizations maintained a strict separation in their personnel and boards of directors, the PC exercised considerable influence over the stories produced and circulated by the Population Reference Bureau, and provided financial support to the Bureau.¹²

Maintaining control over the media portrayal of both world population growth and measures being taken to stem it was very important to the PC, in order that its work be seen as helping people attain an extant desire for smaller families rather than imposing small families in other parts of the world.¹³ In shaping public discourse about world population growth, the PC

collaborated and competed with the various organizations established or supported by businessman Hugh Moore, whose strategy was to foment popular anxiety (particularly within the business community) about world population growth and its potential to lead to the spread of Communism, and to encourage the public to press the U.S. government for policies aimed at slowing that growth. Moore also worked with the Population Reference Bureau as a member of its board of directors.¹⁴ However, while the leadership of the PC agreed with Moore's concern about rapid population growth in the global south producing vulnerability to the Communist revolution, it also feared that drawing public attention to that concern, particularly in the global south, would hurt rather than help the cause of population control.¹⁵ Nonetheless, Hugh Moore's pamphlet, "The Population Bomb," widely circulated in several editions over the 1950s, was highly influential and inspired Paul Ehrlich's 1968 book of the same title. Correspondence about this work is included in the PC records.¹⁶

Beginning in 1970, JDR 3rd chaired President Nixon's commission on Population Growth and the American Future, which assessed the causes and potential consequences of U.S. and global population growth and, in 1972 issued a report recommending such solutions as the legalization of abortion, the development of policies to reduce fertility in the U.S., and the further support of family planning programs abroad. Correspondence about and other documentation of this study is contained in the John D. Rockefeller 3rd Papers.¹⁷

The PC figures prominently in the last section of my dissertation, which deals with solutions to the crisis of demography and the demographic crisis. Solutions to the crisis of demography were found in the development of demography as a science. Over the second half of the twentieth century, the PC funded important demographic studies, such as the Princeton European Fertility Study and the work that led to the publication of *The Demography of Tropical*

Africa.¹⁸ Records of correspondence with and grants to population research centers at U.S. universities will be critical to writing this section of the dissertation.¹⁹ The PC, in conjunction with the U.N., also sponsored the establishment of population research centers in countries in the global south, many directed by demographers from those countries who had been trained in the U.S. under PC fellowships.²⁰ The PC was also involved in the U.N. World Population Conferences of 1954 and 1965, both of which were dedicated to the advancement of population science.²¹

Another important component of the history of demography is fertility surveys, of which the PC was a major sponsor. It funded surveys of fertility behavior in the United States carried out by demographers at Princeton University and the University of Michigan beginning in 1955, and in the 1960s sponsored fertility and contraception surveys in the developing world known as Knowledge, Attitudes, and Practice (KAP).²² Some of these surveys, such as those in Taiwan, included an experimental family planning intervention component, laying the foundation for the technical assistance work the PC would officially begin in 1964.²³

Technical assistance to family planning programs in the global south would be a critical part of the solution to the postwar demographic crisis. The principles guiding this and other work of the PC were discussed in the meetings of the Ad Hoc Philosophy Committee.²⁴ Though the work of family planning programs in the global south will only be a small portion of my dissertation, the records of the PC will provide valuable information about it. Much of this work was funded, through the PC, by the Ford Foundation (FF), the RF, the U.S. Agency for International Development (AID), and some was carried out in conjunction with the U.N. Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA). Correspondence between the PC and these organizations will be critical sources for this part of my dissertation.²⁵

In 1974, the U.N. invited official delegates from member states to its Bucharest World Population Conference, in contrast to the World Population Conferences of 1954 and 1965, which had been limited to population experts. The PC participated with other nongovernmental organizations in a parallel “Population Tribunal,” held simultaneously with the official meeting, also in Bucharest.²⁶ At both the Conference and the Tribunal, delegates from the global south began to push back against the family planning programs that had been established in their countries by the PC, AID, and UNFPA. In the language of demographic transition theory, they argued that direct aid for economic development and an alteration of the terms of global trade would do more to reduce fertility worldwide than family planning programs would.²⁷

At the Tribunal, JDR 3rd made a speech stating that family planning would only succeed in a broader context of economic development.²⁸ Although the statement was consistent with the official policy of the PC, it was understood by Council leadership—president Bernard Berelson and former president Frank Notestein—as a capitulation to the anti-contraception and anti-abortion forces of the world and an abandonment by JDR 3rd of his previous support for contraception and abortion as solutions to the world demographic crisis.²⁹ In the wake of Bucharest, the PC appointed a new president, George Zeidenstein, who in 1976 urged that the PC broaden its outlook from population and include development more generally in its mission.³⁰

In addition to providing information about the PC itself, the records of the PC will also serve as sources for the other organizations and institutions that played important roles in the history of demography. In addition to those already mentioned, these include the Milbank Memorial Fund, the American Eugenics Society, the Population Association of America, the Population Investigation Committee, the Population Crisis Committee, and the U.N. Population

Division.³¹ Overall, my month at the Rockefeller Archive Center was very productive, and I am looking forward to delving more deeply into the documents I collected there.

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Rockefeller Archive Center Research Reports Online is a periodic publication of the Rockefeller Archive Center. Edited by 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.

ENDNOTES:

¹ I am grateful for the Grant-in-Aid that made this research possible, and for the invaluable archival assistance of Tom Rosenbaum and Bethany Antos.

² Letter from Raymond Pearl to Edward M. East, 1929, Box 7, "E.M. East #8," Raymond Pearl Papers, American Philosophical Society, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania (APS).

³ Letters from Wilson to Pearl, 7/11/1930 and 8/18/1930, Box 14, "IUSIPP #6" and Box 25, Social Science Research Council (SSRC) #5," Raymond Pearl Papers, APS.

⁴ Folder 1134, Box 191, Sub-series 19, Series 1, Record Group (RG) 1, SSRC, Rockefeller Archive Center (RAC), Sleepy Hollow, New York.

⁵ Frank Notestein to Harold Dodds, 6/28/1948, Folder 21, Box 15, Wilson School Archives, Princeton University Library.

⁶ "Princeton University Population Research 1964," Box R1885, Series 200S, RG A82, RF, RAC.

⁷ "Princeton University Population Research," Box R1885, Series 200S, RG A82, RF, RAC.

⁸ "Princeton University Population Research 1943-1945," Box R1885, Series 200S, RG A82, RF, RAC. For a discussion of data limitations in mid-twentieth century demography, see Simon Kuznets to Joseph Willits, 12/6/1944.

⁹ The report of the trip to East Asia was published as Marshall C. Balfour, Roger F. Evans, Frank W. Notestein, and Irene B. Taeuber, *Public Health and Demography in the Far East: Report of a Survey Trip, September 13-December 13 1948* (The Rockefeller Foundation, 1950).

¹⁰ Folder 667, Box 80, Sub-series 5, Series 1, RG 5, John D. Rockefeller 3rd Papers, RAC; Folders 720-723, Box 85, Sub-series 5, Series 1, RG 5, John D. Rockefeller 3rd Papers, RAC.

¹¹ Folder 677, Box 81, Sub-series 5, Series 1, RG 5, John D. Rockefeller 3rd Papers, RAC; Folders 683-703, Box 82-83, Sub-series 5, Series 1, RG 5, John D. Rockefeller 3rd Papers, RAC.

¹² Folders 381-385, Box 25-26, RG IV3B4.2, Population Council Archives (PC), RAC; Folders 206-207, Box 13, RG IV3B4.2, PC, RAC.

¹³ See, for example, Ronald Freedman, *Observing Taiwan's Demographic Transition: A Memoir* Taichung: Taiwan Provincial Institute of Family Planning, 1998.

¹⁴ Folders 336 and 344, Box 22, RG IV3B4.2, PC, RAC.

¹⁵ See H.J. Muller to Bruce Barton, Will Clayton, and Hugh Moore, 1/31/1957, Folder 344, Box 22, RG IV3B4.2, PC, RAC.

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- ¹⁶ Folder 344, Box 22, RG IV3B4.2, PC, RAC.
- ¹⁷ Folders 456-472, Box 68-71, Sub-series 4, Series 3, RG 5, John D. Rockefeller 3rd Papers, RAC.
- ¹⁸ William Brass et al., *The Demography of Tropical Africa*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1968. For a summary of the Princeton European Fertility Project, see Ansley Coale and Susan Cotts Watkins, editors, *The Decline of Fertility in Europe: The Revised Proceedings of a Conference on the Princeton European Fertility Project*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1986.
- ¹⁹ See, for example, Folders 387-389, Box 26, RG IV3B4.2, PC, RAC; Folders 2011-2015, Box 109, RG IV3B4.5, PC, RAC.
- ²⁰ Folders 2058-2060, Box 111, RG IV3B4.5, PC, RAC.
- ²¹ For the 1954 conference, see Folders 615-617, Box 43, and Folders 623-626, Box 44, RG IV3B4.2, PC, RAC; for the 1965 conference, see Folders 2089-2092, Box 113, RG IV3B4.5, PC, RAC.
- ²² For the Growth of American Families survey, see Folders 294-296, Box 18, RG IV3B4.2, PC, RAC; for KAP surveys, see accession 2, foreign correspondence, PC, RAC.
- ²³ For the establishment of the technical assistance division, see Folder 49, Box 4, RG IV3B4.2, PC, RAC.
- ²⁴ Folders 3-17, Box 1-2, RG IV3B4.2, PC, RAC.
- ²⁵ For correspondence with the RF see Folder 2019-2021, Box 109, RG IV3B4.5 and Folders 400-408, Box 27, RG IV3B4.2, PC, RAC; for correspondence with USAID, see Folders 2093-2103, Box 113-114, RG IV3B4.5, PC, RAC; for correspondence with the U.N. Fund for Population Activities, see Folders 250-252, Box 35, RG IV3B4.7, PC, RAC; for correspondence with the Ford Foundation (FF), see Folders 97-99, Box 8, RG IV3B4.2, PC, RAC.
- ²⁶ Box AD 24, accession 2, PC, RAC.
- ²⁷ See, for example, Box AD24 and Box AD30, accession 2, PC, RAC.
- ²⁸ Folder 134, Box 22, RG IV3B4.7, PC, RAC.
- ²⁹ Letter from Frank Notestein to Bernard Berelson, Box AD24, accession 2, PC, RAC.
- ³⁰ "Future Directions of the Population Council," Folder 477, Box 71, Sub-series 4, Series 3, RG 5, John D. Rockefeller 3rd Papers, RAC.
- ³¹ For correspondence with the Milbank Memorial Fund, see Folders 340-343, Box 22, RG IV3B4.2, PC, RAC; for correspondence with the American Eugenics Society, see Folder 128, Box 10, RG IV3B4.2, PC, RAC; for correspondence with the Population Association of America, see Folders 371-378, Box 25, RG IV3B4.2, PC, RAC; for correspondence with the Population Investigation Committee, see Folders 379-380, Box 25, RG IV3B4.2, PC, RAC; for correspondence with the Population Crisis Committee, see Folder 2006, Box 108, RG IV3B4.5, PC, RAC; for correspondence with the U.N. Population Division see Folders 2080-2083, Box 112, RG IV3B4.5, PC, RAC.