

The Programa Interamericano para la Juventud Rural (Inter-American Rural Youth Program) and Rural Modernization in Cold War Latin America

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This article explores the 4-H agricultural youth clubs that flourished in Latin America between 1960 and 1975. It places those clubs within the broader context of the internationalization of American agricultural extension and economic hegemony in the Global South during the decades following World War II. In the three decades before World War II, fifteen million rural American youth and several hundred thousand adult volunteers participated in 4-H agricultural and homemaking clubs administered by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). Organized by experts from land grant colleges and the USDA and partially funded by agricultural and financial firms, 4-H clubs educated rural youth on a host of topics: the labor and technology of “modern” agricultural and home making, the appropriate divisions of gendered labor in “farm families,” the cultivation of healthy bodies, and the meanings of “citizenship” in democratic societies.¹ After World War II, the USDA developed similar clubs around the globe in coordination with the United States military and NGOs like the 4-H Foundation and Nelson A. Rockefeller’s American International Association for Economic and Social Development (AIA). This article focuses on 4-H programs in Latin America administered by the AIA-financed *Programa Interamericano para la Juventud Rural* (PIJR), or “Inter-

American Rural Youth Program.”

Following World War II, the USDA exported systems of agricultural extension abroad to both reconstruct war-torn landscapes and to create a global class of rural “democratic” citizens. To help create functional agricultural extension networks abroad, the USDA maintained a training school for foreign extension workers in Beltsville, Maryland. Initially, the program was jointly administered by the USDA and the State Department's Institute of Inter-American Affairs and it was designed to promote “the improvement of farming efficiency, living standards, and health of rural people” in Central and South America only. The initial class of seventy-eight trainees from twelve Latin American nations received intensive instruction in extension methods, with many living and working with county agents in rural communities in what the program referred to as “in-service” training.² In 1944, the USDA took exclusive responsibility for the program, made it available to extension workers from all over the world, and renamed it the Foreign Training Division. Before 1950, over six-hundred foreign nationals graduated from the program and returned to their native countries to establish or expand extension systems.³ By 1960, FTD graduates numbered six-thousand from over one-hundred countries on every inhabited continent. Between 1950 and 1970, FTD-trained extension workers labored in nearly every one of the battlefields of the Global Cold War: Korea, Cuba, Taiwan, Colombia, El Salvador, the Philippines, and scores of others.⁴

In each location, FTD-trained workers also organized 4-H organizations, frequently with the assistance of the U.S. military apparatus. 4-H organizations sprouted across Asia and the Pacific Rim in every nation with a sustained American military presence, including Korea, Vietnam, Japan, and the Philippines. In Korea, Colonel Charles Anderson, the military governor of Kyunggi Province, first established 4-H clubs in 1947 before turning the organization over to

Korean extension workers. Korean 4-H expanded “at a remarkable rate” using “American resources and Korean initiative,” historian Gregg Brazinsky explains. The United States Operations Mission to Korea directed financial and technical support to the clubs. By 1967, 760,000 Korean youth enrolled and recited the official creed: “I believe in my country, my province and my community and in my responsibility for their development.”⁵ In Central and South America, FTD graduates founded 4-H organizations (usually called 4-S, 4-F or 4-C clubs) in nearly every nation. Through the 1950s, however, most of these organizations were haphazard affairs, enrolling only a few thousand members and culling support almost exclusively from respective national Ministries of Agriculture. By the early 1960s, the USDA claimed, “There are 76 countries with 4-H or 4-H-type organizations,” enrolling over 6.3 million youth worldwide, including more than 4 million youth outside of the U.S..⁶

Howard Law, an American international development technician working in Venezuela, identified the paucity of support for youth club work as a major obstacle for successful rural development throughout Latin America. Law, a former rural credit supervisor in the New Deal USDA, spent most of the 1950s directing the Consejo de Bienestar Rural, a Venezuelan rural development agency financed by the AIA.⁷ In Venezuela, the Ministry of Agriculture had been running agricultural youth clubs since the late 1930s, called 5-V clubs, modeled after American 4-H clubs. FTD graduates had expanded the program in the 1950s, but budget problems and a lack of attention to rural development in general had stymied Venezuelan club-work.⁸ Through his related rural development work, Law became increasingly familiar with 5-V and convinced of its potential. Echoing Wilson's conception of youth as agents of a development “from within,” Law wrote that young Venezuelans involved in 5-V clubs carried “new ideas into the home – a transmission that is often possible in no other way.”⁹ However, Law worried that 5-V's over-

reliance on government agencies limited its growth and departed too substantially from American 4-H's tested model of public-private hybridity. With ample private corporate and philanthropic support, Law maintained that 5-V clubs could more successfully train "the individual in modern agricultural practices, in homemaking, in the fundamental credit and sound business practices and, perhaps most heartening of all, in the orderly democratic process of solving group problems."¹⁰ To that end, Law lobbied the AIA for funds to establish an independent National 5-V Foundation, which would gather financial support from the domestic and international business community, including "General Motors, Ford, several tractor companies, General Electric, Westinghouse, Sears, fertilizer companies, oil companies, tire companies and many others."¹¹

With AIA support, Law scaled upward from Venezuela. In 1960, Law received funding from the AIA and the Inter-American Institute of Agricultural Sciences to create an umbrella organization for Latin American 4-H clubs.¹² Based in the Costa Rican offices of the Institute, the PIJR soon opened additional regional offices in Brazil and Venezuela run by extension specialists Santiago Apodaca and Edgar Matta. From those offices, the PIJR sought to knit the inchoate and underfunded Latin American rural youth clubs into an efficient, well-funded, transnational movement. To accomplish this goal, the PIJR launched a series of initiatives. First, in each nation, the PIJR lobbied for legislation and gathered supporters for a private foundation that could raise funds and supplement the activities of the Ministries of Agriculture. Second, the PIJR also raised funds for member organizations directly and assisted with grant applications. Third, the PIJR ran training workshops for extension staff and volunteer youth club leaders. Lastly, the PIJR organized international 4-H competitions and exchanges designed to award outstanding club work and to garner positive attention for the member organizations. The sum of

these activities paid rapid dividends. Club work in South and Central America grew from fewer than 50,000 members in 1960 to more than 250,000 by 1967.¹³

The PIJR promoted a particular brand of “grassroots” rural development that connected rural youth to international sources of capital and technology. They designed this method to bypass both resistant rural adults and fickle Ministries of Agriculture. Law explained how this process worked in practice by describing an experimental youth club program in rural Uruguay. Extension specialists affiliated with the PIJR and Inter-American Institute of Agricultural Sciences selected a small “pilot zone” south of Montevideo where the “soil was fair to poor” and “the people had a reputation of resisting change.” The specialists then assumed control of an existing but dysfunctional youth club in the community, *Movimiento de la Juventud Agraria*. They retained the teachers who led it but gave them special training in “democratic” leadership that would “guide them away from being autocratic.” In addition, they introduced the members to a hybrid corn project and provided them with access to hybrid seed and fertilizer. The winning contestants produced an astounding yield of over 5000 kilograms per hectare. “This had its effect on the farmers,” explained Law. “It was...the 'softening up' of the resistance, the entrance to the farmers...The youth with the highest yield had parents that were completely against the use of hybrid seed. His success convinced them to his side.” In addition to introducing hybrid corn to the region, Law maintained that the project also had a salutary effect on the community's politics. Rather than blaming industrialists, landowners, and middlemen for their poverty, “the farmers and homemakers have already begun to take responsibility for solving their own problems.” Indeed, Law continued, “from inside the home (the youth of the family in club work) it has been possible to overcome prejudices that the agent couldn't combat directly.”¹⁴

Although PIJR technicians described this sort of development as “free from political

overtones,” their ambitions to produce robust “rural citizenship” implicitly criticized revolutionary programs that threatened property rights and foreign investment.¹⁵ The AIA maintained that political instability was a “strong deterrent” for economic growth and blamed the “history of political strife” in many Latin American countries for the absence of both foreign and domestic investment.¹⁶ Ironically, it also ascribed poverty in rural communities to ignorance, complacent farming techniques, and a nebulous “resistance to change.”¹⁷ It was suggested, then, that the problems of Latin America were paradoxically rooted in both too much and too little stability. Although the PIJR tended to replicate those somewhat contradictory assumptions, it also suggested that the “pliability of youth” offered international development agencies a middle-way between political radicalism and stagnant agriculture.¹⁸ As Law explained, the cultivation of future rural “leaders and citizens” could solve a host of problems, from “poor health” to “primitive agricultural practices.”¹⁹ “Leaders and citizens,” unlike radicals and revolutionaries, found ways to spur economic growth and solve community problems that were constructive – rather than destructive – and amenable to private property and commercial exchange. The club literature created by the PIJR presented citizenship as a fundamental goal of club work and argued that the uniquely deliberative, cooperative model of the clubs would enable members to be “*utiles a la sociedad y perpetuar la democracia*” (“useful to society and to perpetuate democracy”).²⁰ Law and the other PIJR technicians explicitly contrasted this approach to development with expensive brick-and-mortar infrastructure projects and they claimed that only human investment could provide the “citizens” necessary for continued “economic and social improvement. “Great sums of money have been spent in capital outlay for ‘things,’” complained a 1964 PIJR Report. “Are we dedicating a proportionate share of investment capital in rural people?”²¹

However, Law and the other specialists at the PIJR also reasoned that creating direct relationships between international capital and rural youth fostered concrete support for their favored model of commercial agribusiness above and beyond what anti-communist indoctrination could accomplish. For this reason, the PIJR concentrated intently on expanding credit facilities for club members. The PIJR solicited funds from various international sources, but left the loans to be jointly administered by the national club foundations and the various extension services. Participating entities were a diverse lot, but they shared a commitment to U.S. hegemony and commercial agribusiness development. Major American banks including Bank of America and Chase Manhattan offered loans, as did national banks and the Inter-American Development Bank. The following large multinational corporations, seeking new customers in Latin America, contributed funds and therefore provided significant support: Sears, Eli Lilly, Purina, Esso, Ford, General Mills, and International Harvester. The charitable foundations of those corporations – the Sears Foundation, the Ford Foundation, and the Johnson Foundation – also contributed monies. Finally, the U.S. government channeled support directly through USAID and indirectly through the thicket of development agencies it subsidized. In addition, by the mid-1960s, the PIJR also worked with several national governments and the U.S. State Department to establish “4-H Peace Corps Projects” throughout Latin America. 4-H Peace Corps projects placed U.S. nationals with experience in club work in rural Latin American communities where they would organize and supervise youth credit projects funded by USAID and U.S. based corporations.²² Of course, these credit projects gave rural youth first-hand experience with agribusiness financial instruments. But by focusing on rural youth, such projects also provided conceptual and practical terrain to coordinate and intertwine the host of private and public international actors. In this sense, the rural youth became the fulcrum about

which a vast array of developers pivoted.

Similarly, although support from Latin American Ministries of Agriculture was precarious and inconstant, the PIJR drew public support and applause from a number of prominent center-left Latin American politicians. Such nationalist social democrats occupied a precarious middle-ground between the anti-democratic right and the anti-capitalist left. This middle ground often entailed ambitious modernization programs, opening economies to foreign investment, and expanded social spending – all policies which were designed to both alleviate the poverty that fed communist insurgencies, while protecting property rights and capital investment. As such, figures like Juscelino Kubitschek, Rómulo Betancourt, Jose Figueres, and Galo Lasso traded support with both the United States government and the same multinational corporations that invested in rural youth through the PIJR. This dynamic was especially evident in Brazilian 4-S clubs. 4-S clubs originated first in the Brazilian state of Minas Gerais in 1952 as one of the schemes of a rural credit organization funded by the AIA. When Minas Gerais governor Kubitschek ascended to the Brazilian presidency in 1956, he nationalized the credit organization, renamed it the Associacao Brasileira de Credito e Assistencia Rural (ABCAR), and placed the now-national 4-S clubs under its control.²³ In December of 1961, Kubitschek, then the ex-president, accepted a position on the PIJR Executive Committee, along with Nelson Rockefeller, Figueres, ABCAR president Joao Napoleao de Andrades, Betancourt's Secretary of Health and Social Assistance, Arnaldo Gabaldon, and U.S. Secretary of Agriculture, Orville Freeman.²⁴

Although Latin American 4-H achieved steadily increasing enrollments and high visibility over the course of the 1960s, the PIJR could not survive the AIA's dissolution in 1968. In December of 1967, the AIA transferred administrative responsibility of the PIJR to the U.S. based National 4-H Foundation. Under the new arrangement, the AIA would also phase out

funds to the PIJR with the expectation that the National 4-H Foundation and external grants would more than compensate for the lost monies. Initially, this arrangement permitted the PIJR to continue to operate. In 1970, Howard Law stepped down as the PIJR director, and turned the reins of the organization over to Theodore Hutchcroft, another American development specialist. In the same year, the PIJR won four-year grants from the W. K. Kellogg Foundation and the Rockefeller Brothers Fund (RBF). When they expired, both Kellogg and the RBF declined to renew the grants. Hutchcroft desperately tried to secure new funding, but, in 1975, the PIJR closed its doors. Without the PIJR's fundraising and coordinating work, the various Latin American 4-H organizations slowly fell into disarray and dissolved.²⁵

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ENDNOTES:

¹ See Gabriel N. Rosenberg, "Breeding the Future: The American 4-H Movement and the Roots of the Modern Rural World, 1914-1948." Ph.D. dissertation, Brown University, Providence, Rhode Island, 2011.

² "Training Program in Extension Methods For Latin Americans," September 1944, p. 1, Box 12, "International 4-H Programs, Volume 1," 4-H Series, Records of the Cooperative Extension Service, Record Group (RG) 33, National Archives, College Park, Maryland, (hereafter NACP1).

³ "Quadrennial," *Trainee Trails*, November 7, 1949, p.1, "International 4-H Programs, Volume 1," Box 12, NACP1.

⁴ "Trainees Worldwide," *Trainee Trails*, April 1958, p. 1, "International 4-H Programs, Volume 1," Box 12, NACP1.

⁵ Gregg Brazinsky, *Nation Building in South Korea: Koreans, Americans and the Making of a Democracy*. Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 2009, pp. 209-217.

⁶ "The 4-H Idea Around the World," circa 1960, p. 6, "International 4-H Programs, Volume 1," Box 12, NACP1.

⁷ "Announcement," March 2, 1970, Folder 199, Box 25, Series B, RG 4, Rockefeller Family Archives, Rockefeller Archive Center, Sleepy Hollow, New York (hereafter, RFA-RAC). For this history of the AIA see Darlene Rivas, *Missionary Capitalist: Nelson Rockefeller in Venezuela*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002.

⁸ See also "Organizacion, Funcionamiento y Actividades de la Sociedad Civil Pro-Clubes 5-V de Venezuela," *PIJR October/December 1962 Quarterly Report*, 1962, Folder 270, Box 35, AIA-RAC.

⁹ Howard Law, "A Venezuelan 5-V Foundation," December 1957, p. 1, Folder 100, Box 10, RG 4, Series B, RFA-RAC.

¹⁰ Law, "A Venezuelan 5-V Foundation," p. 1.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

¹² *PIJR January/March Quarterly Report 1960*, 1960, pp. 1- 3, Folder 255, Box 33, AIA-RAC.

¹³ For a useful breakdown see "The 1964 Report of Rural Youth Club Programs in the Americas: Part I of the Proceedings of the 1964 Inter-American Rural Youth Leaders' Conference," 1964, p. 4, Folder 101, Box 10, Series B, RG 4, RFA-RAC.

¹⁴ Howard Law, "Talk Given by Howard E. Law at South American Extension Conference, Bogota, Colombia July 2 to 15, 1961," *PIJR July/September Quarterly Report 1961*, 1961, Folder 259, Box 33, AIA-RAC.

¹⁵ Law, "A Venezuelan 5-V Foundation," p. 2.

¹⁶ "American International Association for Economic and Social Development: Proposal for Future Support of Rural Development in Latin America," December, 1963, p. 36, Folder 288, Box 30, Series B, RG 4, RFA-RAC.

¹⁷ "The 1964 Report of the Rural Youth Club Programs in the Americas," p. 2.

¹⁸ Law, "Talk Given by Howard E. Law at South American Extension Conference, Bogota, Colombia July 2 to 15, 1961," p. 3.

¹⁹ Howard Law, "Talk on the Present Situation and the Potential for the Rural Youth Work in Latin America," *PIJR October/December Quarterly Report 1960*, 1960, pp. 2-9, Folder 255, Box 33, AIA-RAC.

²⁰ "Los Clubes 4-S y la Democracia," *La Carreta* in Exhibits of *PIJR January/March Quarterly Report*, 1964, p.1, Folder 280, Box 37, AIA-RAC.

²¹ "The 1964 Report of the Rural Youth Club Program in the Americas," p. 1.

²² See "Proposed Brazil 4-S Club Peace Corps Project," *PIJR April/June Quarterly Report 1961*, 1961, Folder 258, Box 33, AIA-RAC.

²³ For more on AIA, ABCAR, and Kubitschek, see Margaret B. Boardman, "The Man, The Girl and the Jeep AIA: Nelson Rockefeller's Precursor Non-Profit Model for Private U.S. Foreign Aid," *Mexico and the World* 6: 1 (Winter 2001) and Elizabeth Ann Cobbs, *The Rich Neighbor Policy: Rockefeller and Kaiser in Brazil*. New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1992.

²⁴ OAS Press Release, December 22, 1961, Folder 885, Box 93, Series L, RG 4, RFA-RAC.

²⁵ See *PIJR Quarterly Report October/December 1967*, p. 1, Folder 303, Box 40, AIA-RAC; "Rockefeller Brothers Fund, Minutes of Meeting of the Executive Committee," October 19, 1970, Folder 3481, Box 579, RG 3.1, Rockefeller Brothers Fund Archive, Rockefeller Archive Center, Sleepy Hollow, New York (hereafter RFB-RAC); Theodore Hutchcroft, letter to Moody, October 28, 1975, Folder 3490, Box 579, RG 3.1, RFB-RAC.