

The Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial, the Rockefeller Foundation, and Inter-War International Relations (IR) Scholarship, 1925– 1939¹

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From 1925 until well into the Second World War, the Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial (LSRM) and the Rockefeller Foundation (RF) were some of the principle benefactors of institutions and individuals involved in the study of International Relations (IR). Their commitment included grants to research institutions, universities and university departments, libraries, conferences as well as individual scholars and academic refugees. In 1935 alone, budget tables indicate that the RF spent some \$500,000 on IR activities in the United States and Europe.² This interest in IR formed part of the RF's larger program in the social sciences, developed in the 1930s, and it documents their strategy to complement research in medicine and natural sciences with a better understanding of human interaction across borders. As long-time officer and sometime president of the RF Raymond B. Fosdick put it in his memoirs: "the missing factor [was] knowledge of human relationships."³ What is more, the RF articulated (at least in internal documents) an interest in having a practical impact on international relations, not simply the academic study thereof. In this regard, philanthropy in the field of IR mirrored the general tendency of inter-war IR to blend academia and diplomacy.

In my doctoral dissertation I examine the intellectual and institutional origins of IR from about 1914 to 1939, with a focus on international networks and non-academic actors. I argue that, contrary to traditional historiography, the discipline evolved not along neat theoretical schools, i.e. 'idealism' vs. 'realism', but was subject to a complex network of professors, diplomats, politicians, philanthropists, and writers who sought, for various reasons, to advance the study of what became known as IR. This history begins during the First World War when various study and pressure groups in Europe devised public education courses on the causes of war and peace. The first professorship was installed in 1919 at Aberystwyth, Wales. And the first research institutions were the Royal Institute of International Affairs (RIIA) in London, the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR) in New York, the Foreign Policy Association (FPA) in New York, the Institut für Auswärtige Politik (IAP) in Hamburg, the Deutsche Hochschule für Politik (DHfP) in Berlin, the Centre d'Etudes des Affaires Etrangères (CEAE)

in Paris, and the Graduate Institute of International Studies (GIIS) in Geneva—all of which received funding from the RF or the LSRM.

One of the key goals of my research project is therefore to explore these networks of academic and quasi-diplomatic activities and to understand their respective motivations for engaging in this young discipline. The most important explanations were: 1) the horrors of the Great War and the profound interest to prevent more conflicts of this kind from occurring again; 2) the training and education of future diplomatic elites in the context of supra-national governance; 3) the purely intellectual interest to develop an analytical structure for inter-state relations within political science; 4) the democratic control of foreign policy—a goal in itself—required adequate education of the general public in international affairs; and 5) the creation of spheres of political discourse parallel to, and intertwined with, official bodies of international politics, such as the League of Nations. Except for mass education, the Rockefeller philanthropies played a significant role in all of these regards.

In 1925, the LSRM began to provide an annual grant of \$25,000 to the DHfP in Berlin, the same year that the Hamburg IAP received a one-off grant of over \$4,000 with the chance of renewal.⁴ Both institutions continued to benefit from repeated grants, either as general appropriations or as grants-in-aid for specific projects, such as book publications. When the LSRM was merged with the RF in 1929, a more comprehensive program was drawn up for social sciences in general, and for IR in particular.⁵ Over the course of the 1930s, the RF gave financial assistance to virtually every major centre for the study or research of IR. In the US, the universities with major programs in international studies, such as at Harvard and Yale, received grants. In Britain, both the RIIA as well as the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) were among the recipients. In Germany, besides the two specialised IR institutes, IAP and DHfP, the universities at Kiel and Heidelberg received funds to support their departments for world economics and international law respectively. The list goes on.⁶

From 1932, the RF became the most important non-governmental sponsor of the International Studies Conference (ISC), the first academic conference in the field of IR. The ISC was organised under the auspices of the League of Nations' International Institute of Intellectual Cooperation (IIIC) in Paris, who received RF funding for administrative support and for paying a rapporteur.⁷ Originally intended as a small gathering for professors to discuss university related questions, the ISC turned into a quasi-diplomatic platform from about 1931, discussing key questions of international politics and inviting a range of controversial figures, including Italian Fascists and Nazi-sympathising German scholars. It was during this time that the RF took an even greater interest in the ISC. It gave generous support to both the ISC itself—a \$30,000 grant during 1935-6 and another \$100,000 for 1938-9—as well as to a range of national delegations to the ISC, including those from Britain, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Sweden, Switzerland, and Yugoslavia.⁸ The point of the ISC was to test ideas and policies among a group of foreign policy experts and to build a bridge to the policy world. As Selskar M. Gunn, the RF's assistant director for social sciences in Europe, noted: "This, of course, is *not* research".⁹

Inter-war philanthropy in the field of IR was shaped by the tension between a commitment to objective scholarship—the RF by and large refrained from giving money in cases where censorship or political pressure were likely—on the one hand, and the underlying objective to have an impact in 'real world' affairs on the other. The latter is clearly reflected in internal documents between officers of the RF and the trustees. For example, it was not without a certain satisfaction that LSRM director Beardsley Ruml reported about the Geneva GIIS: "There has been some tendency for foreign governments to ask members of the Institute faculty to represent them on various League Commissions."¹⁰ Clearly, the rationale for Rockefeller philanthropies to fund IR initiatives was not exclusively academic but, as the early history of the discipline itself, much more entangled in practical

diplomacy and politics. This is also revealed in the trustee's bulletin, the RF's *Confidential Monthly Report*. The March 1938 issue, for instance, boasted that a League of Nations officer had contacted the RF in order to recruit candidates for vacancies in the League Secretariat: "he and his associates agreed that the best material for staff positions ought to be found among former fellows of the Rockefeller Foundation. He was provided with a selected list of former fellows."¹¹

These documents help to support my hypothesis of the non-academic dimension of early IR scholarship and further complicate the history of an emerging social science, the intellectual substance of which has long been oversimplified. The LSRM and RF documents also underscore the distinctly international setup of the inter-war IR scholarship, disproving the traditional focus on Anglo-American individuals and institutions. Finally, the documents confirm the unusually high dependence of the young discipline on non-governmental funding, such as the RF or the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. In fact, so my PhD dissertation argues, these aspects were essential for the formation of IR as an academic discipline and shaped theoretical discussions to the extent that they existed in the first place. While it is hard to measure the impact of the LSRM's and RF's philanthropic commitment—a problem which they acknowledged themselves—there is no doubt that their programs played a major role during the formative period of this discipline which continues to occupy scholars all over the world, sometimes on very similar questions as in the 1920s and 30s.

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² Budget Table, 1935, Folder 60, Box 7, Series 910, RG 3, Program and Policy, Rockefeller Foundation records (RF), Rockefeller Archive Center.

³ Raymond B. Fosdick, *The Story of the Rockefeller Foundation* (New Brunswick/Oxford, 1989), p. 192.

⁴ Grant Report, RF 32130, 13 April 1932, Folder 177, Box 19, Series 717, RG 1.1, RF, Rockefeller Archive Center. Beardsley Rummler to Albrecht Mendelssohn Bartholdy, 16 November 1925, Folder 561, Box 52, Series 3.06, Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial (LSRM), Rockefeller Archive Center.

⁵ See The Rockefeller Foundation, *The Rockefeller Foundation Annual Report for 1929* (New York, 1929), p. 251.

⁶ The Rockefeller Foundation, *The Rockefeller Foundation Annual Report for 1933* (New York, 1933), pp. 6-13.

⁷ Grant Report, RF 33009, Folder 952, Box 105, Series 100.S, RG 1.1, RF, Rockefeller Archive Center.

⁸ See Folders 998-1030, Boxes 110-2, Series 100.S, RG 1.1, RF, Rockefeller Archive Center.

⁹ Selskar M. Gunn to Edmund E. Day, 31 December 1931, Folder 60, Box 7, Series 910, RG 3, RF, Rockefeller Archive Center.

¹⁰ Beardsley Rummler to Edmund E. Day, 24 July 1931, Folder 917, Box 101, Series 100.S, RG 1.1, RF, Rockefeller Archive Center.

¹¹ The Rockefeller Foundation, *Confidential Monthly Report* No. 11 (March, 1938), p. 2.