

The Role of International Aid in Creating Ties between Haiti and the United States, 1934-1957

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A one-month research visit at the Rockefeller Archive Center (RAC) allowed me to examine records which document how the association of the Rockefeller Foundation (RF) and Nelson A. Rockefeller (NAR) with development projects in Haiti contributed to the process of Haitians identifying the United States, its citizens and institutions as viable resources for achieving both national and personal development goals. Records from the medical and humanities divisions of the RF, educational and economic development activities of NAR as Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs, and general correspondence between Haitians, NAR's office, and RF officers provide supporting evidence for a dissertation on how the study of international aid practices can teach us about the linkages between international relations and transnational behavior.

Documents from the RF and NAR collections affirmed that new missions opened doors for additional petitions on behalf of Haiti and Haitians, as the institutions and historical actors involved in cooperation increased the visibility of the U.S. as a viable resource for: improving health conditions in Haitian society; providing professional training for Haiti's leaders and general education for the Haitian majority; encouraging the arts industry as a cultural and economic development strategy; and finally, fulfilling personal desires outside of Haiti, whether that be through short-term travel or an indefinite period of exile. These findings assist me in documenting that the prominence of the United States, since the mid-1970s, as a destination and a resource for Haitians seeking to fulfill personal and national goals is a product of public and private programs of cooperation during the years following the U.S. occupation of Haiti (1915-34) and preceding the Duvalier dictatorship (1957-1986). Studies of Haiti-U.S. relations commonly focus on these two periods. I intend to show the importance of the traditionally neglected intermediate period as an era during which 1) the United States reinforced its cultural

influence in Haiti (a highly-contested goal of the occupation) via cooperative missions and 2) Haitians established contacts with the U.S. that would prove useful as they sought refuge from the oppressive conditions under Duvalier and subsequently struggled to “rebuild” Haiti.

“Cooperation” between Haiti and the United States during the U.S. occupation established institutional linkages that the two nations would continue to share and further reinforce during the post-occupation period. Between 1915 and 1934, American officials “responsible” for Haiti spoke of “cooperation” based on their efforts to maintain a Haitian presence in their missions. The structure of these missions was, however, typically initiated by Americans and directed by American “experts” with the subordinate assistance of Haitians. Following the occupation, ideas of unity among the 21 American Republics (Pan-Americanism) promoted the use of the term “inter-American cooperation”. During this period, it is possible to point to the presence of Haitians in the foreground (i.e., petitioning for Haiti-U.S. collaboration) as a distinct character of this era of “cooperation.” Among the various institutions that would be central to this evolution in Haiti-U.S. cooperation was the Rockefeller Foundation (RF), whose missions began during the occupation and continued as late as 1949. The RF’s visibility in Haiti was initiated by philanthropic missions carried out by its International Health Division, Division of Medical Sciences and Division of Medical Education.

The RF missions to Haiti contributed to creating one of the most prominent legacies of the U.S. occupation of Haiti and a central component of the mid-twentieth century inter-American campaign: the improvement of public health conditions. Annual reports and RF “Projects” (grant) files document that beginning in 1923, the International Health Board responded to requests for assistance in addressing sanitary concerns from the American High Commissioner’s Officer by conducting a hookworm infection survey in Haiti. This led to a hookworm survey and malaria study in 1925 and control efforts from 1929-1933. These activities initiated the practice of creating linkages between U.S. medical professionals and

Haitians affiliated with the National School of Medicine and Pharmacy or the National Service for Public Health, who would work together pursuing their respective interests.

The training of Haitians by American professionals was another highly visible form of assistance from the Rockefeller Foundation. This was accompanied by investments in the infrastructure of Haiti's National School of Medicine and Pharmacy. This assistance was intended to complement disease control efforts and ultimately improve the quality of public health services. The RF's Division of Medical Education and Medical Sciences granted funds for the purchase of teaching equipment, fellowships, and travel grants to 22 faculty and administrators for study primarily at U.S., Canadian, and French medical institutions. This form of aid was the result of studies and surveys by Dr. Richard Pearce on the state of medical education in Haiti. Investigative studies were conducted from 1924 through 1926, actual aid was extended during the years 1927 through 1929, and in 1931, assistance was provided to ensure that the National Service of Public Health was administered by Haitians (aka "Haitianizing" public services after the U.S. occupation). Correspondence from this mission and fellowship recorder cards provide evidence that training Haitians and placing them in key positions within Haitian institutions was considered an effective way of ensuring that Haiti would continue to benefit from the "expertise" of Americans.

Based on the RF's success in the area of disease control, Haitians continued to petition for assistance with malaria control; and, sporadically until 1943, the RF extended its mission outside the capital city of Port-au-Prince into the Southern provinces of Jacmel and Petit-Goave. In 1935 the RF conducted another malaria survey, and it began control work in 1939, continuing in 1940, 1942 and 1943. The reasoning behind the chronological gaps is not immediately evident; however, the records do show an RF officer's favorable response to a Haitian official's request as "an ideal way of recommencing ... cooperation." Thus, public health missions were considered by Haitian and American health professionals as a well-needed and viable point of interaction.

Haitian medical professionals had several factors in their favor with regards to the continued interest of the Rockefeller Foundation in cooperation with disease control. First of all, public health missions were a priority project for the RF and therefore resources for such work were more readily available. Second, additional resources and interest in ameliorating Haitian society was boosted by the cooperation of the U.S. federal Office of the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs which was involved during 1942 and 1943, and international agencies such as the World Health Organization and the Pan-American Sanitary Bureau after 1945. A final factor that Haitians may not have accepted or articulated themselves, was that ongoing interest in disease control was likely the result of the perpetual stigma of Haitian culture with illness in the view of North Americans.

Such resources and enthusiasm were not extended to the medical education project during the post-occupation period, thereby reducing the RF-funded opportunities for study abroad and improving Haitian medical facilities after 1934. Correspondence during the years 1944-1950 demonstrates that, thirteen years after the original RF mission, Haitians sought to revive their ties with the RF. During this six year period, the heads of the Ministry of Public Health, and the National School of Medicine and Pharmacy, or former fellows otherwise affiliated with these institutions petitioned the RF for fellowship funding to train faculty and staff, as well as assistance with improving the conditions of the school, supplies, and equipment. These petitions must be considered in light of information on fellowship recorder cards that earlier beneficiaries faced the challenge of surviving racial segregation and discriminatory biases about the intellectual capacity of Haitians. Unfortunately, RF officers refrained from resuming the medical education mission in Haiti based on conclusions from a follow-up investigation that the National School of Medicine and Pharmacy failed to achieve developments and initiative beyond the scope of the RF contributions during the “renovation era of 1926-28.” The RF’s reluctance to resume the medical education mission persisted even in 1956, when petitions sponsored by the Pan-American Sanitary Board attempted to include the

RF in their “new” cooperative efforts with Haiti’s medical professionals. It is not evident from the documents whether anyone investigated the reasons why further developments did not succeed the medical education missions.

In spite of the fact that RF withdrew its practical support of medical education in Haiti, its efforts during the occupation opened the door for Haitians to study and practice medicine in North America. During the post-occupation period, Haitians benefited from medical education opportunities via other institutions; for example, the Institute for International Education placed Haitians in various U.S. medical studies programs. This openness for Haitians to obtain educational training by North Americans was a significant choice that, given further investigation, may assist us in understanding the prominence of Haitian medical professionals residing in the Diaspora during the late twentieth century. Moreover, the combination of the RF medical mission in Haiti, educational preparation of Haitians in the U.S. or elsewhere based on U.S. funding, gave the United States medical profession currency in Haiti. These RF sponsored experiences were central to the process of Haitians associating medical well-being and expertise with the United States. Individual and institutional contacts led the way to destinations where Haitians could attain professional training and medical treatment. Whether or not the RF continued to pursue its mission, Haitians and those championing their causes would not give up theirs.

Humanities work in Haiti

The humanities was another area in which the Rockefeller name and American institutions gained familiarity in Haitian society during the post-occupation period. Humanities missions included general education, linguistic, and arts projects. Nelson A. Rockefeller and the federal agency he headed between 1940 and 1946, the Office of Inter-American Affairs (OIAA), were associated with general educational and cultural cooperation between Haiti and the United States prior to The Rockefeller Foundation. NAR’s records on the Inter-American Educational Foundation (IAEF), a corporation co-sponsored by the OIAA and other American republics, offer

the most insights on his agency's work in Haiti. The documents report the importance of addressing Haiti's need for general education, based on an 85% illiteracy rate in 1942; and, they point to the relative attention given to Haiti in comparison to other Latin American republics in the first few years of IAEF's mission. Haiti was one of the first countries to benefit from IAEF. A median amount of investment was made in Haiti, with total expenses through 1949 reaching \$184, 500, in comparison to totals in other countries of between \$55,000 (Panama) and \$570,000 (Brazil). However, by 1949 total expenses towards Haiti were at \$0. The funds flew American educators in to work in areas across Haiti and incorporated the assistance of Haitian educational institutions, such as the Normal School for Girls. Unfortunately, the records do not elaborate on the background of the Inter-American Educational Foundation mission's staff.

Educational missions in Haiti also introduced Haitians to distinctly "American" institutions. Part of the inter-American educational cooperation strategy was to establish the "American Schools Program in Other American Republics." The purpose of such institutions was to take abroad the best that American schools had to offer. In Haiti, the Union School was formed. Organizers of the "American Schools Program in Other American Republics" viewed existing "independent American-sponsored schools" as "usually better staffed, better equipped, and more progressive" than the nationally-funded public schools ("fiscal schools"), which also benefited from U.S. donations. Both forms of international aid faced congressional debate. However, arguments in favor of the America Schools program emphasized that these institutions "would provide permanent bridge-heads between the cultures of the United States and the host nations; be immediately useful in overcoming the influence of Axis-oriented schools in the Other American Republics; support the development of national fiscal schools through demonstration, materials and personnel assistance, along with the introduction of valuable innovations such as the laboratory technique and extra-curricular activities."

The potential was lauded; however, more challenging implications were overlooked. In terms of funding: in 1952 in response to petitions for funding to assist the Union School, NAR's

office decided upon a “general policy” of avoiding assistance to “the needs of individual schools” based on the nearly “unlimited” number of schools that could possibly use help. Moreover, proposal standards indicated that American Schools Programs would incorporate a curriculum that met the legal requirements of the host nation and United States college entrance requirements. Is it possible that by establishing separate institutions with “American”-brand names and characteristics, Haitians began socializing themselves away from “Haitian” institutions? Given a Haitian student instructed at an “American” school, did it follow that the appeal of a “Haitian” university became limited? These are important questions to consider, particularly given that the audience for such programs (Haiti’s elite) would be the first to send their children abroad for post-secondary school studies and ultimately contribute to the first steady wave of immigrants to the United States during the Duvalier Regime.

Alternative educational missions to the American Schools Programs targeted Haiti’s poorer majority. The Rockefeller Foundation’s Division of Humanities was an active player in a mission led by the United Nations Educational, Social, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in 1948 that interestingly enough, looked to the Inter-American Educational Foundation and the Office of Inter-American Affairs as models for establishing its project. The centrality of American institutions and “experts” in UNESCO’s international development project reinforced the United States’ affiliation with resources and expertise that could improve conditions in Haiti. This time the U.S. gained its visibility amongst Haiti’s provincial residents.

The location and the goals of the UNESCO Pilot Project in Fundamental Education broadened the scope of interactions between Haitians and Americans interested in development issues. The pilot project, directed by Alfred Metraux, was situated in the remote Southeastern Marbial Valley. Working proposals for the project indicated that the local population of approximately 30,000 persons of “African stock” lived “widely scattered over the mountains in individual shacks with their own small holdings.” Major “problems” observed at the site included: over-population, poverty, superstition, tropical diseases, improvident agriculture, and erosion.

These demographic characteristics and social conditions qualified the community as an “ideal” site for pursuing this “experiment” in “proving the effectiveness of multilateral co-operation between international and national agencies” seeking to “help men and women...live fuller and happier lives in adjustment with their changing environment, to *develop the best elements in their own culture*, and to achieve the social and economic progress which will *enable them to take their place* in the modern world.” [italics mine] Teacher training, rural primary schools, an agricultural school, rural clinics, a health education clinic, a rudimentary library, and adult education were a few of the initial activities proposed for the project.

The project’s goals entailed collaboration between foreign experts, some of whom were Americans already working with OIAA missions in Port-au-Prince, Haitian experts and local community residents. Together, their efforts worked toward creating a project whose influence “would spread outwards over the whole Republic of Haiti by filtering into other areas personnel trained in the Project and educational materials and new methods and techniques of Fundamental Education and social improvement developed within it.” In this way, educational cooperation began to penetrate various parts of Haitian society.

Placing value on intrinsically Haitian culture was another means of grasping the attention and securing the involvement of the Haitian majority. One significant stride in the Marbial Valley pilot project was increasing the prominence of American experts in the development of materials and methods promoting the use of Haitian Creole in the Haitian classroom. The Rockefeller Foundation facilitated this process by granting \$10,000 for the literacy arm of the project directed by Miss Yvonne Odon, a Frenchwoman and RF fellow who previously studied library techniques in the U.S. Moreover, RF Humanities Officer John Marshall worked to secure linguists affiliated with the Language Committee of the American Council of Learned Societies. The fact that Marbial Valley project was led by UNESCO was an important factor in this process of using American resources and Americans to promote the value of Haitian Creole. The affiliation of the language project with UNESCO, an “international” organization, enabled both

Haitians and foreigners a means of challenging critics who saw the development of Haitian Creole orthography and teaching methods as an American imperialist project (a sensitive issue raised by upper-class Haitians, and discussed between RF and UNESCO staff).

The UNESCO project also helped to further stimulate the nascent of Haiti's international recognition on the Arts scene by encouraging the development of Haiti's talented artists. These efforts went beyond supporting creative forms of expression by also contributing to educational efforts. For example, the Creole language project employed the Haitian painter and co-founder of the American-sponsored Centre d'Art, George Remponeau, who prepared illustrations for adult primers. In addition to targeting literacy, the rural education project used the development of ceramics industries to promote better hygiene with the use of glazed eating utensils. The efforts were timely, given the mounting wave of support extended to the Arts Industry (e.g., painting, sculpture, dance, music, and manual industries) during the mid-to-late 1940s, particularly in conjunction with the International Bicentennial Exposition organized by the Durmarsais Estimé administration.

Prior to the UNESCO pilot project, Americans and American institutions were active players in the blossoming of the Haitian Arts industry during the 1940s. The ceramics expert working on the UNESCO project, Glen Lukens, was a Professor at the University of Southern California. As with other arms of the UNESCO project, Lukens' assistance was an extension of his 1945 assignment with the Inter-American Educational Foundation mission to develop manual skills in Haiti. During the 1946-1948 interval in which Lukens left Haiti, he used his networks to arrange two scholarships in ceramics for young Haitians and to generate the "Friends of Haiti," a small group from Los Angeles that raised funds to send glaze material to Haiti. His contact with and dedication to interested Haitians led him to go beyond his circle of "Friends" and successfully secure a \$300 donation from NAR in 1948. These funds supplied salaries for three local project staff members who were instrumental in starting up three ceramic centers, building a kiln and other needed equipment.

These ceramic centers had a more prominent counterpart, the Centre d'Art in Port-au-Prince, to which the RF made minor contributions to in 1948 and 1949, providing funds for the purchase of library materials and sponsoring artists and administrators from the Centre to study abroad. Three fellows traveled across the United States and Europe; proposals were made to send one artist to Mexico. Such travels were intended to further expose the artists to various techniques; it also enabled them to share their work in expositions. Dewitt Peters, Director of the Centre, emphasized the international "prestige" which art, and particularly the Centre d'Art's achievements, brought to Haiti. He proposed that "A country celebrated for its art is...known abroad as a civilized country," he proclaimed. In Peters' opinion, "the best known and most valued export of Haiti ... [was] its art." Such prestige, Peters argued, was a successful means of developing local cultural tastes, enticing visits from international artists, and nurturing Haiti's tourist population.

Overall, Peters' efforts were to promote the educational, social, and entrepreneurial possibilities of developing visual arts in Haiti. He informed John Marshall of his plans to market his ideas to "the Rockefeller Brothers". The potential flowing out of the site was exponential. As Marshall described it, "The Centre is one of the most admirable institutions of its kind...and a first rate demonstration of the extent to which the arts provide a meeting ground for people of sharply different backgrounds." Since he recognized that the RF would not dedicate additional funds for Haitian painters, Marshall suggested that Peters solicit Americans visiting Haiti, such as Mrs. Henry Ford III, and Mr. and Mrs. Chauncey Hamlin. Moreover, his diary entries show that whenever the topic emerged he passionately promoted the value of Haitian artists to his American and international contacts. By being receptive to assistance from abroad, Haitian artists generated an audience, clientele, and pool of potential resources for their future projects.

These experiences demonstrate that the possibilities for collaboration between Haitians and U.S. institutions thrived via networks. Further evidence comes from sixty-six (66) petitions during the years 1944-1971 to the RF and NAR for assistance beyond the scope of original

mission goals. Twenty-three (23) related to projects addressing “the Haitian nation” or its institutions. During his 1948 visit to Haiti for the UNESCO Pilot Project in Marbial, RF officer John Marshall was put into contact with others who felt they might benefit from RF funding. In addition to the Centre d’Art, Marshall met with affiliates of the Ecole Normale Superieure, who expressed the need for training in American History; the Director of the Bibliotheque Nationale, who sought assistance with professional and project development; and, Father Smith, an American leading an English-language training program at the prominent Petit Seminaire College Saint-Martial, interested in securing teaching materials. This evidence was found in Marshall’s diaries and the RF General Correspondence files. NAR’s “Countries” and “Activities” files include petitions from and on behalf of Haitians during the years 1946-1971. These requests for assistance followed NAR’s 1944 visit to Haiti as Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs. The correspondence generally evoked NAR’s symbolic role as a “friend” of Haiti as petitioners (some who met directly with NAR, others who simply were familiar with his activities) sought assistance for hurricane relief; community based projects promoting labor and industrial development; nurturing the Haitian cultural arts and tourist industry (in Haiti and in New York City); and developing schools, churches, and social services (particularly child and health care). These sources illustrate how a series of conversations (in-person and via correspondence) began to unfold and how the Rockefeller name became affiliated with hope for developing the Haitian nation.

The significance of these networks becomes further evident when considering the fact that the majority (38) of the petitions document that Haitians made use of their familiarity with the Rockefeller name and institution to pursue personal goals. Letters were written and meetings were sought to gain access to medical treatment, educational institutions, employment, fellowships and professional training outside of Haiti for individual Haitians, family members or other personal contacts. The majority of petitions (whether with a goal of national development or a goal of personal development) were “regretfully declined.” Yet, petitioners

(particularly those persistently following-up) often gained a potentially fruitful point of reference who might have responded more favorably to the requests.

Finally, it is important to note that among the sixty-six (66) non-mission-related petitions reviewed, five (5) discussed the desire to leave Haiti. As early as 1947, NAR's office corresponded with Elizabeth Moffat White, wife of former ambassador to Haiti, John Campbell White, regarding Dr. Martial Bourand (who benefited from RF funding to study in France in 1927 and 1929) and his desire to leave Haiti given the political climate. The records of Haitians expressing discontent and intentions of migrating to the United States generally raised the issue of politics as a challenge to livelihood. However, the desire to depart was not always a wish for exile; it could also be the need for short-term refuge. In 1957, Marshall noted in his diary that former RF fellow and painter Luce Turnier Carpi indicated that things were well in Haiti but that she and her Italian husband (also an artist) both felt "that every so often they must get away from the Island and its meagre [sic] intellectual and artistic atmosphere." These petitions reinforce the reality that historical experiences inform the process of exile. Where national, local, institutional or personal connections occur, destinations in moments of flight are likely to emerge. The examples given here demonstrate that brief and permanent migrations (the decision to do so and the process of reaching final destinations) could be shaped by the contacts gained via programs of cooperation between Haiti and the United States.

Findings from the RAC's collections make it possible to trace the nature of encounters between Haitians and Americans. By reviewing correspondence to the RF and NAR, it is possible to learn what an American family name and institution represented for petitioners tied to Haiti. The significance of Haiti for the United States becomes evident through what the mission records tell us about each mission's goals, how they were set, and the ways in which individuals assigned to projects carried out their duties. Each of these key factors shaped the implications of a mission, as well as its significance as a model for subsequent efforts to work with Haiti. Finally, further insights can be gained through closer study of oral interview

transcripts of NAR and John Marshall that document the perceived importance of Latin America in general, and sometimes Haiti, specifically, for the Rockefeller Foundation and the United States' foreign relations. The nature of NAR's institutional focus implied the unavoidable importance of Latin America; however, Haiti's significance is not heavily emphasized. By contrast, Marshall, who had an extremely brief assignment to Haiti-related projects (1948-1949), identified Latin America as being of marginal importance to the Humanities work of the Rockefeller Foundation and Haiti as an interesting peculiarity (i.e., a backwards culture to improve and an exotic culture to study). Collaboration in the fields of health, education, and the arts remain a prominent element of today's relations between Haiti and the United States. Studying the mid-twentieth century experience is a critical way of understanding elements leading to the present-day experience and guiding us into tomorrow.

Thus far, the insights from these papers document that consistent with the mid-twentieth century ideals of cooperation between the American republics, the efforts of the Rockefeller Foundation and Nelson A. Rockefeller as Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs promoted a culture of regional alliance between Haiti and the United States; facilitated travel between the two countries; and, stimulated interactions among the countries' citizens. The records held at the RAC confirm that these encounters contributed to building a foundation for profound population movements and transnational ties beyond those originally envisioned by the Haitian or U.S. program coordinators. Therefore, the role of international aid in creating ties between nations is an aspect of international relations and transnational studies that scholars should continue to explore.