

Philanthropic Neo-Malthusianism: The Rockefeller Foundation and the Mexico Agricultural Program, 1906-1945

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Abstract: At the turn of the twentieth century, the Rockefeller Foundation took a vested interest in promoting agricultural reform programs in the American South. With the success of these initiatives, the Foundation began looking abroad for similar opportunities, and turned to Mexico to implement a similar agenda for agricultural reform. This project, the Mexico Agricultural Program (MAP), reflected the emergence of transnational ideas relating to overpopulation, food production and land capacity that dominated transnational epistemic communities throughout the early half of the twentieth century. This paper looks at the nexus between the Rockefeller Foundation and the United States government and points to the way private philanthropy was used as a diplomatic arm of the American state. The MAP was seen not only as a way for the Rockefeller Foundation to promote its strategies for modernization, but also as a means to secure the state's geostrategic interests, which were also tied to biopolitical concerns relating to global land and food supplies.

In February 1941, the creator of the Time-Life Magazine empire, Henry Luce, took to his *TIME* publication with an impassioned call for the United States to be at the heart of global leadership in the coming decades. Luce's campaign for the "American Century" revolved around powerful ideas relating to a sense of (global) duty Americans owed to themselves and to the world. Although the United States had not yet entered the Second World War, he believed the conflict augured a watershed moment for reasons not entirely related to the European theatre. Luce was confident that the war in Europe presented the United States with an "opportunity of leadership," but was also wary that it was "enveloped in stupendous difficulties and dangers."¹

¹ Henry Luce, "The American Century," in *The Ambiguous Legacy: U.S. Foreign Relations in the "American Century,"* ed. Michael J. Hogan (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 18.

His now controversial article articulated an eager and hopeful vision that placed the United States as the global hegemon capable of tackling not only the challenges of the present, but undoubtedly those of the future.

Luce claimed in his article that the American Century behoved the United States to assume a leadership role as a matter of both biblical and international calling, writing:

We must undertake now to be the Good Samaritan of the entire world. It is the manifest duty of this country to undertake to feed all of the people of the world who as a result of this worldwide collapse of civilization are hungry and destitute – all of them, that is, whom we can from time to time reach consistently with a very tough attitude toward all hostile government. [...] Every farmer in America should be encouraged to produce all the crops he can, and all that we cannot eat – and perhaps some of us could eat less – should forthwith be dispatched to the four quarters of the globe as a free gift, administered by a humanitarian army of Americans, to every man, woman and child on this earth who is really hungry.²

Luce referenced the “world-environment” in which the United States existed to speak of the country’s obligation to secure not only its own future, but that of the entire world.³ Greater American involvement throughout the globe was consequently understood as the surest way of ensuring a world order most favourable to the United States and to its interests.

Accordingly, the United States’ opportunity for world leadership would arise not only from its participation in ending the war, but also from tackling complex issues like hunger, food, and agriculture.⁴ Pairing together global security and food, his reference to American soil – specifically to its mastery by the American farmer – pointed to a key site from where the United States’ global leadership would grow. His ideas largely reflected the mounting neo-Malthusian concerns of his time, the origins of which can be traced back to the latter half of the nineteenth century. Malthusians from the late nineteenth century referred to themselves as “neo-Malthusians,” thinkers who continuously drew associations from the close relationship between sex and reproduction and matters of population,

² Luce, “The American Century,” 27-28.

³ *Ibid.*, 21.

⁴ *Ibid.*

land and food.⁵ They believed that the strains of overpopulation and population density threatened not only ecological resources, but life itself. They vigorously defended contraception as the means to securing life by controlling the birth rate in order to maintain an equilibrium that did not risk endangering access to land and food.⁶ By the 1920s, fears of food shortages within the United States began surfacing after Americans saw how Europe faced scarcity during the war. These fears amplified neo-Malthusian concerns related to population and food amongst intellectuals, activists and bureaucrats.⁷ The Rockefeller Foundation understood this global mission as early as 1906 when it began promoting technical and scientific agricultural education in the American South, a program that would eventually be reproduced in Mexico in 1943. As the Foundation relied on its domestic model of agricultural assistance as a template to export, it was weaving together a new type of project that involved the use of international philanthropic intervention as an arm of American diplomacy.

Historian Nick Cullather argues that by refocusing “development *as* history, as an artifact of the political and intellectual context of the Cold War,” we begin to glean a more complex and complicated picture of modernization.⁸ Through an historicist lens, economic development during the twentieth century is thus reoriented from a “methodology” and made a “subject.”⁹ The result is an analysis that approaches “development without accepting its clichés.”¹⁰ Similarly, this paper attempts to situate the Rockefeller Foundation’s Mexico Agricultural Program (hereafter, MAP) within an historical framework that evaluates it within the scope of American hegemonic expansion. Edward H. Berman highlights that despite public declarations from private philanthropies that their initiatives at home and abroad were solely motivated by providing humanitarian aid, such declarations are “simply not supported by internal foundation memoranda, letters, policy statements, and reminiscences left by their

⁵ Alison Bashford, *Global Population: History, Geopolitics, and Life on Earth* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 30.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 41.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 197.

⁸ Nick Cullather, “Development? It’s History,” *Diplomatic History* 24, no. 4 (Fall 2000): 642. Emphasis original.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 652.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 642.

officers.”¹¹ Instead, internal communications among those at the Rockefeller Foundation reveal a desire to gain access to Latin America due to increasingly global concerns over food and geopolitical security. By tracing this philanthropic genealogy to the early twentieth century, I hope to show the way this modernization project reflected the neo-Malthusian concerns of room, food and soil.

This paper examines *how* the Rockefeller Foundation emerged as a veritable actor leading agricultural reforms both within and without the United States, paying particular attention to the MAP. With agricultural reforms premised as the keys to societal uplift and progress, the Rockefeller Foundation engaged in policy reform in Mexico by relying on similar strategies of modernization and quality of life it previously applied to the American South. This paper contends that while the Rockefeller Foundation framed the MAP as a project of agricultural modernization, it ultimately reflected geostrategic concerns motivated by neo-Malthusian ideas of population, land and food production. By positioning itself as an authority in agronomy capable of improving techniques and yields, the Rockefeller Foundation used philanthropy as a vehicle for promoting American interests globally. Indeed, the MAP was designed by a private foundation capable of forging an international partnership with a foreign state through its own volition, further extending the reach of the United States’ empire in the region.

Establishing the MAP

When members of the Rockefeller Foundation began surveying Mexico during the mid-1930s, the country was still recovering from a lengthy revolutionary war. Under the political leadership of President Lázaro Cárdenas (1934-1940), Mexico saw a large redistribution of land to the country’s peasantry and rural agrarian communities, along with the nationalization of oil which led to sanctions from the United States, England and affected oil companies.¹² Cárdenas was succeeded by General Ávila Camacho (1940-1946), who began to implement a more conservative agenda that reversed many of the progressive strides taken under his predecessor. Camacho proposed an economic plan in

¹¹ Edward H. Berman, *The Influence of the Carnegie, Ford, and Rockefeller Foundations on American Foreign Policy: The Ideology of Philanthropy* (Albany, NY: State University Press of New York, 1983), 3.

¹² Benjamin Keen and Keith Haynes, *A History of Latin America*, 8th ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2009), 330-332.

favour of private enterprise that involved the “freezing of wages, the repression of strikes, and the use of a new weapon against dissidents.”¹³ Desiring for Mexico’s economy to industrialize, he believed foreign investment could assist in this restructuring.¹⁴ Naomi Klein describes how crises have served as overtures for propelling capitalist agendas forward. According to Klein, liberal capitalist ideology that emerged out of the University of Chicago’s Department of Economics during the 1940s onward and was championed by Milton Friedman has fostered ideas and institutions that have tended to view bewildering moments of despair and devastation as opportunities to seize the economic system as it is and begin the process of rebuilding it to their liking.¹⁵ By advancing a capitalist agenda at home and abroad with the strength and singular determination of an army, corporatists have relied on the “shock doctrine” to implement their visions.¹⁶ Capitalist intervention disguised as rapid response solutions is therefore less a byproduct of a crisis than it is its *sine qua non*. Along these lines, it was under Camacho that Mexico and the Rockefeller Foundation agreed to the MAP in 1943, and the American foundation began in earnest to develop a “scientific infrastructure in a foreign country on basic food crops” – the first of its kind for a private philanthropy.¹⁷

The breadth and the depth of American philanthropic interventions abroad during the early half of the twentieth century expanded even while a fierce national conversation at home contemplated the future of the United States’ growing global hegemony. In the three decades following the end of the United States’ war with Spain in 1898, American intellectual circles engaged in vigorous and often contentious debate over the country’s international role and the Supreme Court struggled to grapple with the constitutional

¹³ Keen and Haynes, *A History of Latin America*, 333.

¹⁴ John H. Perkins, *Geopolitics and the Green Revolution: Wheat, Genes, and the Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 106.

¹⁵ Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2008), 21.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹⁷ “Special Cable to The New York Times: Mexico Accepts Farm Aid,” *New York Times* (21 October 1942) accessed 14 December 2015, <http://search.proquest.com.proxy3.library.mcgill.ca/docview/106376202?accountid=12339>; John H. Perkins, “The Rockefeller Foundation and the Green Revolution, 1941-1956,” *Agriculture and Human Values* 7, no. 3-4 (June 1990): 7.

consequences of an expanding empire.¹⁸ Divisions between expansionists and isolationists, shaped by global challenges like the First World War and the country's subsequent rejection of the League of Nations, waxed and waned due to debate regarding what these kinds of engagements would mean for the country's future.¹⁹ During this time, however, a triumvirate of privately-funded American philanthropic foundations emerged, partnering and building networks across business, academic and government sectors to provide aid and assistance throughout the world.

As global conflict increased in the interwar years (and throughout the Cold War) the American government either backed or partnered with these philanthropic organizations.²⁰ Among them was the Rockefeller Foundation, formally founded in 1913 by Standard Oil baron, John Davidson Rockefeller Sr., the Carnegie Corporation and the Ford Foundation. The Rockefeller Foundation was part of what Inderjeet Parmar calls the "Big 3 Foundations" that would be at the heart of building Luce's vision for the American Century. Together, the Big 3 spurred the "rise and consolidation of American power in international politics in the twentieth century."²¹ Parmar explains that despite outward displays of generosity and charity, the Big 3 Foundations operate within an insidious "subculture" comprised of "religiosity, scientism, racism, and elitism."²² This subculture shaped the Rockefeller Foundation's approach to its agricultural endeavours

¹⁸ See Bartholomew H. Sparrow, *The Insular Cases and the Emergence of American Empire* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2006).

¹⁹ Christopher McKnight Nichols, *Promise and Peril: America at the Dawn of a Global Age* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 2011), 18-20.

²⁰ Both during the interwar years and through the Cold War, philanthropies became an extension of American foreign policy. Cultural diplomacy was a way in which this influence was propagated, as was the creation and promotion of academic disciplines like the Area Studies Program in which foundations worked closely with the CIA to produce information on regions that were deemed geostrategic threats to the United States' security. For more information on these topics, please see: Bruce Cummings, "Biting the Hand That Feeds You: Why the 'Intelligence Function' of American Foundation Support for Area Studies Remains Hidden in Plain Sight," *Global Society* 28, no. 1 (2014), 70-89; and Volker R. Berghahn, "Philanthropy and Diplomacy in the 'American Century,'" *Diplomatic History* 23, no. 3 (1999): 393-419, respectively.

²¹ Inderjeet Parmar and Katharina Rietzler, "American Philanthropy and the Hard, Smart and Soft Power of the United States," *Global Society* 28, no.1 (2014), 4.

²² Inderjeet Parmar, *Foundation of the American Century: the Ford, Carnegie, and Rockefeller Foundations in the rise of American Power* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 59.

both at home and throughout the world at the turn of the twentieth century. Although spirited debates at home have questioned the merits of a larger role for the United States on the international stage, private foundations have long been able to “promote ideas from ‘behind the curtain,’” allowing for their reputations to “remain virtually untarnished after a century of undemocratic leadership in the United States.”²³ Indeed, intellectual, political and corporate elites have been able to wield significant influence over the content and direction of domestic and international public and foreign policy as academics whose work is funded by philanthropic foundations.²⁴ As the Rockefeller Foundation worked to design the MAP, it borrowed from other large corporations already operating in Latin America at the time.

As early as 1938, the Secretary of Agriculture, Henry M. Wallace, began corresponding with Rockefeller Brothers’ economic consultant Stacy May, expressing his worries over the need to secure democracy in the Western Hemisphere. Wallace suggested to May that she contact his technical assistant, Mr. Brestman, who then connected her with Mr. Lee from the Department of Agriculture and Mr. Popenoe from the United Fruit Company, both of whom had extensive experience with the “tropical agriculture” of Latin America. In fact, Wallace explained to May that any future agricultural project the Rockefeller Foundation envisioned in Latin America would be more effective if working in conjunction with his contacts. Such private correspondence between May and Wallace provides a glimpse into how epistemic communities operate. The Rockefeller Foundation’s access to members of the federal government (in this case, high

²³ “Editor’s Introduction The Hidden Hand: How Foundations Shape the Course of History,” *American Journal of Economics and Sociology*, 74, no. 4 (September 2015): 638. The article highlights that while critics from the Left and the Right have assailed the influence of “Wall Street bankers, lawyers, and lobbyists and feared the control of corporate gains over the lives of ordinary citizens,” their criticism has seldom extended to the ties many of these elites have to major foundations.

²⁴ *Ibid.* The lack of transparency regarding the influence philanthropy and academia wield within the United States also extends abroad. In 2015, Johns Hopkins School of Medicine and the Rockefeller Foundation were sued in a class-action lawsuit with 800 plaintiffs from Guatemala alleging both American institutions were responsible for funding scientists and physicians during the 1940s and 1950s who conducted experiments on patients that involved infecting them with sexually transmitted diseases such as syphilis. This program remained secret until it was accidentally discovered by college professor, Susan Reverby (Oliver Laughland, “Guatemalans deliberately infected with STDs sue Johns Hopkins University for \$1bn,” *The Guardian* [2 April 2015] accessed 20 July 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2015/apr/02/johns-hopkins-lawsuit-deliberate-std-infections-guatemala>).

ranking members of the Presidential Cabinet) could be used to direct their next steps in planning their future project, and expand their networking opportunities and their resources. These interpersonal relationships and network building opportunities between private philanthropy, American transnational corporations and the federal government reveal the spaces of influence and power in which private foundations operated.²⁵

Long before the United States government began pushing food policy as a veritable component of its Cold War anti-communist foreign policy agenda, the Rockefeller Foundation had already established technical assistance programs designed for agricultural reform.²⁶ Technical assistance agricultural programs such as those in the American South and Mexico (like the MAP) served as the building blocks that helped propel Luce's call for an American Century into fruition, but these initiatives were also vigorously encouraged due to anxieties regarding overpopulation, food production, resource depletion, "peasant insurgency and communism" that dominated epistemic communities throughout the world during the early half of the twentieth century.²⁷ Philanthropic foundations played a vital role in providing the funding to "population studies centres" to universities throughout the United States during the late 1930s and 1940s.²⁸ These grants helped fund a small group of academics heavily engaged in knowledge creation aimed at tackling population increases.²⁹ Their

²⁵ Stacy May, "Memorandum regarding Secretary Henry Wallace and Latin America," (9 November 1938) *100 Years: The Rockefeller Foundation*, accessed 11 December 2015, https://rockfound.rockarch.org/digital-library-listing/-/asset_publisher/yYxpQfeI4W8N/content/memorandum-regarding-secretary-henry-wallace-and-latin-america.

²⁶ Bashford, *Global Population*, 268. Following the Second World War, neo-Malthusian ideas dovetailed with the United States' anti-communist strategy to contain the spread of communism throughout the world in the face of the burgeoning Cold War. Given these circumstances, hunger and famine posed potential geostrategic threats capable of destabilizing American national security throughout the world. Bashford writes that the geopolitical calculations that dominated the Cold War prompted large investments in "research, laboratory, and field development of agricultural sciences." During this time, food policy became a component in the United States' strategy to stave off the expansion of communism throughout the Third World.

²⁷ David Nally and Stephen Taylor, "The Politics of Self-Help: The Rockefeller Foundation, Philanthropy, and the 'Long' Green Revolution," *Political Geography* 49 (2015): 2.

²⁸ John Sharpless, "World Population Growth, Family Planning, and American Foreign Policy," *Journal of Policy History* 7, no. 1 (January 1995): 80.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

ideas were legitimated over time as they developed “consistency in methodology, analysis, and language” that helped “establish[] the credibility of demography as a policy science.”³⁰ Next to government, privately-funded philanthropic foundations led the way attempting to address growing anxieties related to food and population increase.³¹

(Philanthropic) Neo-Malthusianism, 1920s-1930s

Historian Alison Bashford’s exhaustive work presents twentieth-century neo-Malthusians as the descendants of a multi-generational epistemic community rooted in “Malthusian-Darwinian” ideas on eugenics from the eighteenth century. The conceptualization and evolution of these ideas manifested in different forms, but all were related to the politics surrounding life and death that deeply connected human sustenance to environmental capacity. Thomas Robert Malthus’s 1798 conceptualization of land and population as an ongoing “struggle for room and food” suggested a “spatial limit” of available territory that was later used in the twentieth century as an intellectual guide, shaping geopolitical understandings of land, food and population. In particular, German geographer Friedrich Ratzel theorized the notion of “lebensraum” — or “living room” — during the nineteenth century to explain how islands’ fixed geographic territory meant that their expanding populations were confined to the physical area on which they found themselves. Ratzel explained that because island countries’ bounded spatialities were restricted to their shores, they were often induced into “either population-limiting practices or population-driven expansion.” He was particularly interested in

³⁰ Sharpless, “World Population Growth, Family Planning, and American Foreign Policy,” 80. In 1953, John D. Rockefeller III led academics and “population control activists” in establishing the Population Council. With support from the Ford Foundation and the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, the Council was created with the goal of establishing a “consensus among academic, governmental, and cultural elites” concerning the clear and severe dangers the population growth posed. They were particularly perturbed by the risks it posed to developing countries of the Third World.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 79. Matters of food, famine and overpopulation were always closely related throughout the 1940s, but they grew in importance during the 1950s when it was believed demographic increases throughout the world could deplete agricultural resources. It was during this time that the United States began rethinking its foreign policy to include strategies capable of addressing the world’s rising population as a means of ensuring political stability through food security. As Bashford writes, “Food/political security was the ends for which birth control was the means (Bashford, *Global Population*, 268).

England and Japan. Finding new space in order to recalibrate the “area to population” ratio required expansive solutions in the form of either emigration or colonization. Such practices served as “territorial outlet[s]” to regain this equilibrium.³²

The term “geopolitics” was initially coined by Rudolf Kjellén, a Swedish student of Ratzel’s, who believed the relationships between life, population and land were necessarily matters concerning the survival of the state. Germany’s territorial expansion during the First World War seemed to confirm this nexus, serving as a cautionary reminder of the “dangers of overpopulation,” and the severe measures a country might take to allay the stresses of population density. Economists and biologists who supported neo-Malthusian thought saw the First World War as a cruel and troubling confirmation of their ideas by directly linking population and conflict. To them, Bashford explains, “[p]opulation caused war, because it was about land, and it was about land, because it was about food.” Territorial expansion of the state was thus a means of accommodating overpopulation and staving off scarcity. As such, a state was defined not only by the territory it occupied, but also by the people who “literally grew from it.” This understanding of the state necessarily attributed to it a lifelike character that had to be sustained. As Bashford explains, “lebensraum was not simply ‘living space’ – an area to inhabit – but space that was, itself, living.” Ratzel’s ideas on lebensraum reemerged in the United States through the work of Chicago geographer Ellen Churchill Semple at the beginning of the twentieth century. For neo-Malthusians, concerns regarding overpopulation, agricultural production, land capacity and spatiality, and soil vitality were necessarily intertwined.³³

The American South: Template of Agricultural Modernization at Home and Abroad

Although the MAP began in 1943, the Rockefeller Foundation’s role in providing technical and financial assistance to impoverished rural communities can be traced back to its domestic projects in the American South at the turn of the twentieth century. These projects were overseen by two departments financed by a conglomeration of separate funds collectively known as the Rockefeller boards: one focused on agricultural reform and the other on public health. The

³² Bashford, *Global Population*, 11, 56-57

³³ *Ibid.*, 57, 63.

former, the General Education Board (GEB), received its first grant from the Rockefeller board in 1906 to provide support to farmers in eight southern states to eradicate the boll weevil decimating the region's cotton crops. This effort lasted until 1914, but during this time GEB administrators noticed that farmers in North Carolina were suffering from debilitating health issues beset by an outbreak of hookworm disease. Because public health concerns fell beyond the scope of agricultural reform, administrators at the GEB created a second department in 1909, the Sanitary Commission, which received Rockefeller's financial backing. Accordingly, the MAP was inspired by the Foundation's domestic pilot projects whose global counterparts, the International Education Board (1923) and the International Health Board, combined ideas of fitness and hygiene that necessarily bound agricultural assistance to neo-Malthusian concerns of land, food and quality of life.³⁴

For John A. Ferrell, the supervisor of the public health branch of the Rockefeller Foundation in Mexico, however, extending agricultural assistance and aid to Mexico seemed the most holistically effective way of improving public health in the region. He believed that if agricultural practices could be improved, there was a greater likelihood that both the "quantity and quality of food" would inevitably increase.³⁵ Ferrell was not alone; Josephus Daniels, American ambassador to Mexico, believed agricultural reforms could be at the heart of overall uplift of the Mexican people. Using the American South as their point of reference, Ferrell and Daniels saw significant similarities between both Mexican and American farming populations whose farming techniques relied on "primitive methods."³⁶ As early as 1933 – a decade before the MAP officially began – both Ferrell and Daniels began proposing that the Foundation should extend its agricultural program to Mexico. Their efforts were thrice denied by the Foundation in 1933, in 1935 and in 1936, although Ferrell was

³⁴ William C. Cobb, "The historical backgrounds of the Mexican Agricultural Program (annotated edition)," (1 March 1956) *100 Years: The Rockefeller Foundation*, accessed 10 December 2015, https://rockfound.rockarch.org/digital-library-listing/-/asset_publisher/yYxpQfeI4W8N/content/the-historical-backgrounds-of-the-mexican-agricultural-program-annotated-edition-. The IEB was responsible for technical assistance programs. It was eventually "discontinued as a separate entity" and the Rockefeller Foundation became the main philanthropic institution. By contrast, the IHB grew out of the former Sanitary Commission.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

nevertheless granted permission to conduct an exploratory mission to Mexico in 1935.³⁷

From the 1920s onward, the idea of “world population” was couched within an intellectual framework that was “as much about geopolitics as it was about biopolitics.”³⁸ As the Second World War raged throughout Europe, concerns for the world-environment *necessarily* tied American national security to food production and food supply, and pointed to just how palpable and profound these neo-Malthusian worries were. But in a political climate that had recently undergone land reform which broadened economic opportunity by disassembling the “traditional, semifeudal hacienda and peonage” that previously dominated Mexico, the Rockefeller Foundation likely confronted reluctance from this new land-owning rural population.³⁹ As previously mentioned, the shock doctrine operates upon the assessment that a crisis, by virtue of the turmoil and disorder it creates, generates enough promising momentum otherwise unavailable to industry leaders and policymakers to initiate large scale reforms. It presumes that affected societies are more receptive to recast economic and political systems as a result of their distress and their mourning. But what if the recipient population is deemed “unfit,” “incapable” and lacking the necessary infrastructure of undergoing “modernization” on their own, an assessment Rockefeller Foundation administrators thought true of Mexicans (as they had of Americans in the South)? In a diary entry from 27 March 1941, Rockefeller Foundation officer Harry M. Miller noted that Mexico’s agronomic challenges were due to the country’s politics being riddled with corruption and cronyism, in addition to the daunting prospect of having agriculture “in the hands of the Indian.”⁴⁰ He lamented that the “demonstrations of most agricultural improvements” they tried had “failed,” recalling when the iron plow was introduced to replace the trusted wooden plow.⁴¹

Klein explains that the process of economic rebooting in the wake of trauma means preventing the body politic from salvaging the remains of the disaster it has undergone.⁴² The detritus from these

³⁷ Cobb, “The historical backgrounds of the Mexican Agricultural Program.”

³⁸ Bashford, *Global Population*, 3.

³⁹ Keen and Haynes, *A History of Latin America*, 331.

⁴⁰ Rockefeller Foundation. “Rockefeller Foundation Records, Officers’ Diaries, RG 12, M-R (FA393): January 2-April 1, 1941,” accessed 22 April 2017. Available here: <http://dimes.rockarch.org/ee344903-38b5-4581-a9ac-6ec0556a50f9>.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² Klein, *Shock Doctrine*, 8.

catastrophes is instead repackaged into something new (and often detrimental) as a sign of regeneration replacing what once was. Significantly, “disaster capitalists have no interest in repairing what was.”⁴³ Traditional techniques used by indigenous farmers in Mexico were trivialized by Miller who noted, “if one farmer is given choice seed his ultimate higher yield simply convinces his fellow-villagers that magic has been invoked.”⁴⁴ Miller’s assessment matched the way the GEB had previously identified the American South as an “underdeveloped area” where the rural community “worked the soil at a primitive technological level,” demeaning the communal knowledge of agriculture and land.⁴⁵ With the MAP potentially arriving in Mexico, similar anxieties over Mexicans’ abilities and competence arose amongst Rockefeller Foundation administrators.

Building a Network of (Philanthropic) Knowledge

By the 1920s-1930s, Bashford notes, “symbolically, politically, economically, and literally, *soil* was the substrata of the population problem” (emphasis added).⁴⁶ As indicated above, the MAP was a blend of earlier programs of technical assistance the Rockefeller Foundation had applied domestically to the Southern United States, and in many ways, it reflected similar essentializing assumptions of rural communities and their farming techniques. Both were deemed to be rooted in “backwardness” and in need of “uplift,” all of which were considered corrigible with the Rockefeller Foundation’s philanthropic assistance. Along these lines, assistance was framed not merely as the desperate lifeline rural communities impatiently awaited in order to be lifted from their destitution and rescued from their abject quality of life, but as an *education program wresting farmers from their own lack of knowledge*. William C. Cobb, a former staff member at the Rockefeller Foundation’s Office of Publication, understood the GEB’s Southern program in similar light when he described it as a much-

⁴³ Klein, *Shock Doctrine*, 8. Today, such United States hegemony is expressed in various forms such as soaring profits private military contractors amassed as they entered contracts with the American federal government to wage war in Iraq, and the dismantling of the New Orleans public school system in order to give way to the rise of charter schools (5; 13). Klein points to both examples as *post facto* reforms that followed the devastations of Iraq War and Hurricane Katrina, respectively.

⁴⁴ Rockefeller Foundation. “Rockefeller Foundation Records, Officers’ Diaries, RG 12, M-R (FA393): January 2-April 1, 1941.”

⁴⁵ Nally and Taylor, “The Politics of Self-Help,” 2.

⁴⁶ Bashford, *Global Population*, 181.

needed lifeline for the farmers who “could do little themselves because they lacked technically trained leadership and they lacked funds.”⁴⁷ To Cobb, both Mexicans and their American counterparts in the South, found themselves trapped in a precarious position – one of “poverty and ignorance” – that created a vacuum for assistance that the Rockefeller Foundation could fill.⁴⁸ As a result, the MAP relied heavily on the model of agricultural reform previously applied to Southern states, just as Ferrell and Daniels had hoped. The Rockefeller Foundation and its teams of experts and scientists thus became the purveyors of American promises of modernity, uplift and an enhanced quality of life. By recruiting researchers, committing the financial funding and coordinating collaboration between researchers in the United States and South America, private philanthropies were not only claiming a stake in the region, they were also justifying their presence there.⁴⁹

The stresses of the First World War placed increased focus on the conflict’s impact on food supplies, distribution and hunger, designating the state as responsible for ensuring both “food consumption and production.”⁵⁰ In particular, the calorie became the metric by which to understand the conflict’s potential totality and effectively positioned the United States as the world’s leader of scientific knowledge.⁵¹ Indeed, the discovery of the calorie in the

⁴⁷ Cobb, “The historical backgrounds of the Mexican Agricultural Program.” In lieu of federal funds from the Department of Agriculture, the Rockefeller board funded a grant of one million dollars to the effort in the American South. The GEB’s campaign ended in 1914 when the federal government passed the Smith-Lever Act to institute a cooperative extension program.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ricardo D. Salvatore, “The Enterprise of Knowledge: Representational Machines of Informal Empire,” in *Close Encounters of Empire: Writing the Cultural History of U.S.-Latin American Relations*, eds., Gilbert M. Joseph, Catherine C. LeGrand, and Ricardo D. Salvatore (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998), 82.

⁵⁰ Nick Cullather, “The Foreign Policy of the Calorie,” *The American Historical Review* 112, no. 2 (April 2007): 347.

⁵¹ Ibid. As the United States prepared to enter the war, President Woodrow Wilson implemented a “national food authority” and turned to Herbert Hoover, “a mining engineer and chief organizer of the Belgium relief,” to head the new division. Under Hoover’s leadership, food (scarcity, specifically) came to be seen as a vital component of the war with the potential of unsettling the international order and could eventually compromise American security. Hoover explained to Wilson that the United States’ security framework had to equally consider the untold and unquantifiable consequences if food scarcity were to wreak havoc throughout Europe. He posited starkly, “famine breeds anarchy. Anarchy is infectious, the infections of such a cess-pool will jeopardize France and Britain, [and] will yet

United States during the 1890s and the subsequent reliance upon it as a quantitative measurement of consumption and nutrition transitioned from being a “hygienic necessity” applicable to the domestic sphere, to a national security concern to be overseen by the military as the war threatened to devastate and deplete European food resources.⁵² But in the war’s aftermath, the United States’ prewar application of the calorie as related to hygiene was revived, this time globally, and infused with eugenic ideas of fitness and population.⁵³ Private philanthropies rushed to the fore to propagate these ideas, embarking on what Cullather describes as a “new style of international activism” that saw a rise in projects designed to export the “American standard of living” around the globe.⁵⁴ The Rockefeller Foundation’s push for agricultural reform thus dovetailed with other distant, although similar food-related projects knitting together science and modernization that flourished in the United States during the Progressive Era.

The Foundation’s turn toward Latin America in the 1930s was consistent with the rise of “scientific philanthropy” that saw private foundations participate in what historian Ricardo D. Salvatore has called an “enterprise of knowledge” that shaped the expansion of the United States’ early informal empire abroad. Salvatore explores how the latter relied on various forms of repeated cultural representations of South America that have hardened within the American imaginary over time. He divides these representational efforts into two periods: “*mercantile engagement* (1820-1860)” and “*neo-imperial engagement* (1890-1930).” Each period was marked by American business interests utilizing the technologies of their time to produce field reports assessing foreign regions for readers back home. Salvatore highlights that these “ambassadors of ‘American culture’ in South America” spanned manifold professional circles, and returned to the United States with new evaluations, interpretations and “insights” of the regions and the peoples they encountered. As such, “These representational practices constituted the stuff of empire as much as the activities of North Americans in the economic, military, or diplomatic fields.” Together, they created an anthology of “encounters” that

spread to the United States” (Quoted in Cullather, “The Foreign Policy of the Calorie,” 350).

⁵² Cullather, “The Foreign Policy of the Calorie,” 347.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 354-355.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 356.

captured the way the metropole understood and recreated the other in its own mind.⁵⁵

Permeating the United States' official stance and cultural conceptualizations of Latin America has been a longstanding perception of the region as inferior and in need of assistance and uplift. Within this national imaginary, such perceived inferiority fundamentally buttresses its utility to the United States' grand-strategy in the region by justifying intervention on the basis of protecting assets and interests. Similar ideas were crucial to informing the United States' approach to Mexico since the 1820s, when Americans began settling in Mexican Texas and ultimately disrupted Mexico's efforts at national consolidation following its independence from Spain. As Schoultz writes, "It was not diplomacy but demography that spelled the end to Mexico's sovereignty over Texas." These newcomers used their new residence in Texas as a means to extend their "Anglo culture" and "their slave economy," and reorient the region toward the surrounding American states in the South. Indeed, it has long been common for Americans to treat Mexico as an unofficial, foreign and inferior extension of the United States.⁵⁶

In May 1941, the Rockefeller Foundation Board of Trustees resolved that ten thousand dollars (or as much was required) would be allocated to the Commission to Survey Agriculture in Mexico. The three-man commission was assigned with compiling recommendations to be submitted to the Board before the end of the year. By December 1941, the Commission's report reached the Board of Trustees, and through "unanimous opinion," the small group agreed that the situation in Mexico was in "urgent need for improving agricultural conditions and practices." They considered the MAP worthwhile because "time is propitious" and "there is now enough potential and partially functioning talent to justify the opinion that substantial improvement could be accomplished." As such, the Foundation's intervention in Mexico was considered not only a matter of agricultural necessity, but also for the "amelioration of living and health conditions," knitting together ideas on food, quality of life and modernization.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Salvatore, "The Enterprise of Knowledge: Representational Machines of Informal Empire," 69-70, 72-73, 76-77, 82. Emphasis original.

⁵⁶ Lars Schoultz, *Beneath the United States: A History of U.S. Policy Toward Latin America* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1998), xv-xvi, 21, 35.

⁵⁷ Rockefeller Foundation, "Memorandum on creation of commission to study agriculture in Mexico," (16 May 1941) *100 Years: The Rockefeller Foundation*, accessed 8 November 2015, <https://rockfound.rockarch.org/digital-library-listing/>

Building a Mexican Elite

For the Rockefeller Foundation and the Mexican government, the MAP was less about providing long-term solutions for the farming community as a whole than it was about restructuring the country's political economy. John Perkins explains that neither institution – philanthropic nor governmental – was concerned with “improv[ing] the lives of peasant farmers *in their capacities as peasant farmers*.” At its core, the MAP was the result of an “alliance” between the Mexican government and an American foundation “promot[ing] liberal democratic capitalism” – the same economic system the Mexican government struggled to establish on its own.⁵⁸ As Cotter writes, the Rockefeller Foundation was acutely aware that training the *agrónomos* [Mexican agronomists] in the United States would help to shore up American economic and political interests for the present and the future.⁵⁹

Pivotal to the GEB's technical assistance program in the American South was the education and training component, referred to as the extension program, which was the vessel through which agricultural reforms were implemented. Consisting of “county agents, home demonstration workers as well as boys' and girls' club participants,” the extension program essentially demonstrated to farm workers how to adapt their methods of operating to local contexts.⁶⁰ At the urging of the Board, the extension program was to be racially segregated, with training offered to African American agents who would be responsible for instructing African American farmers.⁶¹ By

[/asset_publisher/yYxpQfeI4W8N/content/memorandum-on-creation-of-commission-to-study-agriculture-in-mexico](#).

⁵⁸ Perkins, *Geopolitics and the Green Revolution*, 115. Emphasis original.

⁵⁹ Joseph Cotter, *Troubled Harvest: Agronomy and Revolution in Mexico, 1880-2002* (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 2003), 210.

⁶⁰ Nally and Taylor, “The Politics of Self-Help,” 4. For many Americans living in the Southern United States, land and agriculture played a significant role in culture, ideology, regional and national politics, among many other factors, that all contributed to the construction of imaginaries and identities. Attachment to the land was understood beyond simply scientific measurements of yields and chemicals – it was “above all a home,” and given this emotional attachment, “[t]o reform the farm was thus to reform the homestead.”

⁶¹ Cobb, “The historical backgrounds of the Mexican Agricultural Program.” Geographer Mona Domosh highlights how these modernizing efforts in the American South were deeply racialized and gendered initiatives that helped inform development practices that would then be applied globally. In particular, the United

undergoing behavioural transformation – a rebooting of agricultural technique – it was believed that American rural farmers from the South could abandon their “traditional agrarian world” in exchange for “a new rural modernity.”⁶² Administrators hoped for similar outcomes in Mexico. The GEB’s domestic efforts during this time would prove to have a lasting impact on American corporations that would use the introduction of their agricultural machinery into the Southern United States as the appropriate springboard for their eventual foray into foreign markets.⁶³ Here, “primitive” farming techniques – at home and overseas – could be banished and modernity attained through economic consumption of technologies prescribed by Northern experts.⁶⁴

The extension program was aimed at social management in order to increase agricultural yields and economic turnovers aligned with market interests. Crucially, however, Mexico lacked the “cohesive and responsive farming population and a sophisticated federal apparatus” already in place in the American South, thus forcing the Office of Special Studies (OSS) to rely on the land-grant system in Midwestern states which privileged affluent commercial farmers to transmit and implement the MAP.⁶⁵ The American administrators’ vision for agricultural reforms in Mexico reflected the one behind the Morrill Land-Grant Act of 1861, which was the land-grant college system that couched its vocational training curriculum as a way to combine the “home-centred values” of farm families with scientific

States Department of Agriculture used its extension program to create the concomitant Home Demonstration Work (HDW) project designed to make more modern “producers and consumers” within the United States among American farm and rural women. Domosh argues that HDW efforts created the conditions in which African American women could be closely monitored and become the “particular targets” of these “development” initiatives. See Mona Domosh, “Practising Development at Home: Race, Gender, and the ‘Development’ of the American South,” *Antipode* 47, no. 4 (2015): 915-941.

⁶² Nally and Taylor, “The Politics of Self-Help,” 6.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁶⁴ Mona Domosh, “International Harvester, the U.S. South, and the makings of international development in the early 20th century,” *Political Geography* 49 (November 2015): 27. Following the GEB’s example, International Harvest, a large corporation from Illinois manufacturing agricultural machinery, saw its development model in the Southern United States as an opportunity that would make their expansion into new foreign markets “inevitable.” As such, international agricultural campaigns equally served as vehicles for promoting the purchase of a corporation’s technologies, advertised as capable of bringing into the fruition the promises of development and modernity.

⁶⁵ Deborah Fitzgerald, “Exporting American Agriculture: The Rockefeller Foundation in Mexico, 1943-1953,” *Social Studies of Science* 16, no. 3 (August 1986): 471.

expertise.⁶⁶ The result was a specialized and technical knowledge of farming that benefited a small affluent community of farmers.⁶⁷ Together, this team of American administrators responsible for implementing the MAP during its first decade became a “land-grant network” informed by their similar educational and training experiences.⁶⁸

During the 1930s, due to a desire to export ideas about development and modernization which were thought to be capable of bringing the American quality of life to foreign populations, private philanthropies designed and implemented various scientific programs abroad. Historian Darlene Rivas explains that this philanthropic thrust matched Americans’ “vision of what they had to offer, such as respect for the dignity of individual workers and farmers, technical expertise (or ‘know-how’), capital, and values of efficiency and rationality, which they believed the people of other nations needed.”⁶⁹ In pursuing agricultural programs, the Rockefeller Foundation targeted regions it believed were hindered by their “primitive” techniques and thus their inability to care for their own land. As such, technical assistance programs were often pursued by recruiting elites who shared the Foundation’s vision for modernization and they relied on social networks predicated on power asymmetries that tended to belie the way philanthropic work was outwardly presented. Much like the agricultural program in the American South, the MAP reflected this desire for modernization, agricultural production and rural uplift. Reflective of this, was the rise in theories examining population issues during the 1920s-1930s which contained palpable remnants of Malthusian social prejudices against the poor.⁷⁰

⁶⁶ Fitzgerald, “Exporting American Agriculture,” 461.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 462. In 1941, when the Rockefeller Foundation’s three-man team was initially assembled, it was composed of Elvin C. Stakman from the University of Minnesota; Richard Bradfield from Cornell University and Paul C. Manglesdorf from the University of Texas A & M, all of whom were the products of the land-grant system (first as students, later as experts) and previously held positions within the USDA at one point (463-464).

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 463-464. Although Stakman had been the Rockefeller Foundation’s first option to lead the MAP in 1943, he declined the offer and instead suggested it be given to his former student, J. George Harrar, a plant pathologist at the University in Pullman, who accepted the position. Like Stakman, Harrar was a product of the land-grant system.

⁶⁹ Darlene Rivas, *Missionary Capitalist: Nelson Rockefeller in Venezuela* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 5.

⁷⁰ Perkins, *Geopolitics and the Green Revolution*, 123.

Mexican elites – officials in “government, the agricultural science community, media, and farmers” – all showed support for the proposed project. The Rockefeller Foundation’s abundant resources – personnel and financial – were seen as being able to fill the vacuum left by the American and Mexican states. As Mexico moved away from the pro-agrarian policies of President Cárdenas to the more conservative President Camacho, there was palpable support for the Rockefeller Foundation’s proposal for the MAP. In the early 1930s the Mexican government hired its own agricultural scientists to conduct research in an effort to study the country’s staple crops. Yet, when domestic critics of land reform reemerged in the late 1930s and early 1940s, the government turned to American scientists to find the answers to their questions on modernization. After years of failed domestic agricultural reforms and a lack of necessary infrastructure to be able to conduct their own scientific research and agronomic technical adjustments, the Rockefeller Foundation’s initiatives for modernization were warmly greeted by Mexican elites who desired to “enhance the image of competence.” If anything, the Foundation’s legitimacy was tied to its ostensible capacity to deliver the resources, training, assistance and eventual prosperity that governments alone could not facilitate or guarantee.⁷¹

Private foundations simultaneously extended their commercial influence and American hegemony through seemingly benign and neutral projects, and occasionally garnered the support and willingness of local private actors and governments who saw these projects as opportunities to develop capitalist economies and to pursue modernization and development on their own terms.⁷² Mexican

⁷¹ Joseph Cotter, “The Rockefeller Foundation’s Mexican Agricultural Project: A Cross-Cultural Encounter, 1943-1949,” in *Missionaries of Science: The Rockefeller Foundation and Latin America*, ed., Marcos Cueto (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1994), 97-98

⁷² Rivas, *Missionary Capitalist*, 7. Rivas’s work looks at Nelson Rockefeller’s efforts in the mid-1930s to marry what he gleaned from his acquaintances in “business, philanthropic, diplomatic, and scholarly communities” in North America with his own ideas to formulate his own vision of what economic development and scientific modernization might look like in Venezuela (Ibid., 6). While he coordinated with willing elites in Venezuela, he was never granted *carte blanche* in the country as his plans were regularly “reject[ed], resist[ed], and accommodate[ed]” by locals (Ibid., 8). See also Steven Palmer, “Central American Encounters with Rockefeller Public Health, 1914-1921,” in *Close Encounters of Empire: Writing the Cultural History of U.S.-Latin American Relations*, eds., Gilbert M. Joseph, Catherine C. LeGrand, and Ricardo D. Salvatore (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998), 311-332.

administrators of the MAP benefitted from their partnership with the Rockefeller Foundation. Trips to New York to attend meetings could be extended to the Midwest and the South to gain access to American elites all over the United States. This access allowed Mexican state officials to traverse powerful American geographies relevant to their own project with the MAP. A trip to Illinois could allow picking up tractors and other agricultural machinery Mexico lacked, while a detour to Chattanooga meant studying the Tennessee Valley Authority to prepare for the introduction of a newly designed corn hybrid developed by Rockefeller technicians and Mexican scientists. These commercial partnerships bound together the financial hub of Manhattan, the agricultural technology of the Midwest and the expertise and experience of the American South, all of which exposed Mexican officials to opportunities to further expand their relationships with American agribusiness.⁷³

By 1947, disgruntlement began to settle in amongst Foundation administrators who believed Mexican farmers demanded too much from the MAP, failing to take responsibility for their own “progress.” The educational component that had been vital to the GEB in the American South helped package agricultural reforms as a form of “self-help” by placing the onus on recipients of aid to be “actively enrolled in the process of securing their own salvation.”⁷⁴ But in Mexico, recipients had high expectations for the MAP that were often irreconcilable with those of Foundation officials. While spending time in Mexico during 9-20 May 1947, Elvin C. Stakman remarked of the “tendency of some of the young Mexicans to expect too much in the way of emoluments and special privileges.”⁷⁵ He again recorded similar thoughts in 1948 when he derided Mexican fellows for their perceived indolence:

Some of them think that when the Foundation gave them a fellowship it also assumed the obligation of an indulgent foster parent. The ‘You gave me a bathing suit, now dig me

⁷³ “Mission Arrives here to Solve Mexico's Corn-Growing Needs,” *New York Times* (27 June 1947) accessed 12 December 2015, <http://search.proquest.com.proxy3.library.mcgill.ca/docview/107755756?accountid=12339>.

⁷⁴ Nally and Taylor, “The Politics of Self-Help,” 2.

⁷⁵ Elvin C. Stakman, “Latin-American agricultural institutions - preliminary report of the trip,” (1947) *100 Years: The Rockefeller Foundation*, accessed 22 July 2017, https://rockfound.rockarch.org/digital-library-listing/-/asset_publisher/yYxpQfeI4W8N/content/latin-american-agricultural-institutions-preliminary-report-of-the-trip.

a lake to swim in' attitude is too prevalent. And when the lake is provided, the temperature of the water must be then statistically controlled.⁷⁶

Stakman's infantilizing rhetoric revealed the power asymmetries between donor and recipient, as captured in Stephen Greenblatt's notion of the "*representational machine*," described as "collections of dispositives or devices (each one with its own logic of representation) organized for the production of cultural difference."⁷⁷ Ultimately, these official Rockefeller Foundation reports presented Mexican recipients as avaricious and disagreeable, and helped perpetuate depictions of the United States as the intervening caregiver called upon to rear Mexico – a neglected (and ungrateful!) child – into maturity and adulthood.

Given that the MAP operated along the American land-grant model, Mexican wheat farmers tended to enjoy greater success precisely because they shared greater similarities with their American counterparts who had adopted hybrid corn than they did with their fellow Mexican farmers. Notably, Mexican wheat farmers were more likely to be affluent, have greater access to resources and show greater interest in adopting experimental practice. Similarities with American hybrid corn farmers created an "effective 'fit'" with the MAP's administrative body, the OSS.⁷⁸ The MAP (much like the plans for agricultural reform in Colombia), point to what William Roseberry has referred to as the "internalization of the external."⁷⁹ The contributions

⁷⁶ "MAP, Report of Stakman for March 10 to April 3, 1948," RFA, R.G. 1.1, Series 323, Box 3, Folder 19, RAC quoted in, Cotter, "The Rockefeller Foundation's Mexican Agricultural Project: A Cross-Cultural Encounter, 1943-1949," 110.

⁷⁷ Salvatore, "The Enterprise of Knowledge," 72-73. Emphasis original. Salvatore relies upon Greenblatt's notion of "representational machine" in his own work.

⁷⁸ Fitzgerald, "Exporting American Agriculture," 469.

⁷⁹ William Roseberry, "Social Fields and Cultural Encounters," in *Close Encounters of Empire: Writing the Cultural History of U.S.-Latin American Relations*, eds., Gilbert M. Joseph, Catherine LeGrand, and Ricardo D. Salvatore (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999), 521. Following the MAP's implementation in Mexico, Colombia became the next country targeted by the Rockefeller Foundation for the export of agricultural reforms. Similarly to Mexico, Colombian officials such as Secretary of Agriculture, Ciro Molina Garcés, and director of the Agriculture Credit Bank, Miguel López Pumarejo, both actively solicited the Rockefeller Foundation for their modernization project. For his part, Molina believed that enhanced agricultural techniques and greater crop diversification could alleviate the Cauca Valley's rural problems (Timothy W. Lorek, "Imagining the Midwest in Latin America: US Advisors and the Envisioning of an Agricultural Middle Class in Colombia's Cauca Valley, 1943-1946," *The Historian* 75, no. 2 (Summer 2013): 293). While Thomas Lynn Smith, a rural sociologist from the University of Louisiana who served as an advisor to the Rockefeller Foundation, and his

and active requests for American philanthropic aid necessarily made these programs transnational agricultural modernization projects, and the extension component of these reforms ultimately helped train and establish the very technocrats upon which both the recipient countries and the Rockefeller Foundation depended to propagate and expand the programs.⁸⁰ By 1947, Stakman, one of the Rockefeller Foundation's initial three-man commission sent to Mexico as part of a preliminary reconnaissance team, noted in a "Latin-America Agricultural Institutions" report compiled between 8 May and 14 July 1947 that "there is a general improvement in tone of virtually all Mexican agricultural agencies that are associated with the Rockefeller Foundation," progress he found "gratifying."⁸¹ Indeed, neo-Malthusian outlooks on land, population, agriculture and modernization shaped not only the way private philanthropy conceptualized aid and assistance, but also the goals and benchmarks states set for their economic development and the *personnel* they recruited to achieve these targets. Much of these determinants hinged on the Rockefeller Foundation's racialized notions that fabricated the Mexican (and Latin American) "other."

Racialized Recruitment for Modernization

The Rockefeller Foundation's role in the MAP was motivated by racialized assumptions of Latin America that produced a hierarchical understanding of the "other" in need of their assistance. But the Foundation's project also reflected the firm belief shared amongst other American philanthropies that science and technology were the gateways to uplift.⁸² The American agricultural scientists behind the MAP were no different. Their convictions were such that their understandings of Mexico, agricultural reforms, "modernization" and the environment were all framed strictly along scientific and technical terms, and they insisted in keeping their independence from the reach

Colombian affiliates contended that a rural Colombian middle class could be fashioned by using the American model (Ibid., 298). Along these lines, Smith believed that with greater impetus and ambition, Colombian peasants could also pick themselves up by their "own bootstraps" (Ibid., 300).

⁸⁰ Perkins, *Geopolitics and the Green Revolution*, 108.

⁸¹ Stakman, "Latin-American agricultural institutions - preliminary report of the trip."

⁸² Mark Dowie, *American Foundations: An Investigative History* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001), 107.

of social sciences.⁸³ Crucially, however, this shared faith in scientific and technical progress was also riddled with racialized understandings of an imagined other that permeated the way development, modernization and population were conceived and constructed. As Jennings writes, although agricultural reform appeared neutral on its face, couched within “objects of knowledge” such as “seed, plants, pathogens and yields among others,” such characterizations allowed “attention to be consistently diverted from social and political phenomena.”⁸⁴ Despite its neutral referents, the MAP was born of hegemonic ideas and discourses on race.

As Perkins highlights, concerns regarding overpopulation were not principal factors motivating the initial MAP of the 1930s and early 1940s, but concerns over *food production and food supply*—anxieties that emerged from discourses on overpopulation between transnational epistemic communities—were important factors.⁸⁵ The Rockefeller Foundation believed that investing in both areas could secure and maintain a standard of living and a quality of life, which are beliefs that were also related to neo-Malthusian concerns. As a result, like in the American South, the MAP was predicated on an education program designed to translate American concepts and practices to the Mexican context. Agricultural reforms and modernization, then, were considered *teachable* only if the recipients were “fit” enough to understand and apply them.

The MAP – and the Rockefeller Foundation in particular – was seen as the product of “cordial cooperation” between private philanthropy and the Mexican government. With contributions coming from the “benevolent foundation and private investors,” the partnership the Rockefeller Foundation formed with the Mexican government gave hope of what the world might become should conflict cease and peace be achieved. Yet, the MAP was predicated on the idea that financial aid and assistance would be disbursed so that it could be used effectively to provide some kind of return on investment to the Rockefeller

⁸³ Dowie, *American Foundations*, 108. The Green Revolution – a descendent of the MAP – has been a point of criticism from academic circles for its devastating social and ecological ramifications. See Peter J. Jacques and Jessica Racine Jacques, “Monocropping Cultures into Ruin: The Loss of Food Varieties and Cultural Diversity,” *Sustainability* 4 (2012): 2970-2997.

⁸⁴ Bruce H. Jennings, *Foundations of International Agricultural Research: Science and Politics in Mexican Agriculture* (Boulder, CO and London: Westview Press, 1988), 27.

⁸⁵ Perkins, *Geopolitics and the Green Revolution*, 138.

Foundation and benefit the interests of the United States. Administrators at the Rockefeller Foundation therefore believed that not all were racially fit or capable of learning the sciences of food, land and life.⁸⁶

In his 2005 article, Chris J. Shepherd reveals that the Rockefeller Foundation's agricultural reforms were built on the construction of Latin America as an "other." Looking at the case of Peru, in particular, Shepherd's work shows how embedded assumptions of Latin America that began with the MAP helped conjure a "social context that was imagined to be replete with contaminants," ranging from "personal, moral, administrative, political and methodological," thus creating a context favourable to American aid and assistance.⁸⁷ Although the Rockefeller Foundation could supply scientists, technology and expertise, it could not account for the "other," which is why amid characterizations of Latin America as seemingly desperate and incompetent there also existed "a sense of optimism" that the region's potential could be achieved with the "right kind" of intervention.⁸⁸ In 1941, Warren Weaver captured this sentiment of faint hope and praise with his relief that "most people have under-estimated the capacity of the better class of Mexicans."⁸⁹ This suggested that the recipients of the MAP's philanthropy were considered by administrators to be the "better class" among a broader group of Mexico's undesirables.⁹⁰ Weaver's assessment was in stark contrast to that of Thomas Lynn Smith who suggested that race could prove to be too insurmountable for Colombians when he wrote, "the fact that most of them are of more or less colored does not aid the prospects of the members of Colombia's lower classes."⁹¹ It is clear that race and class were inextricably linked in the way assistance was

⁸⁶ "Mexico's Private Point Four," *New York Times* (11 October 1952) accessed 14 December 2015, <http://search.proquest.com.proxy3.library.mcgill.ca/docview/112382507?accountid=12339>.

⁸⁷ Chris J. Shepherd, "Imperial Science: The Rockefeller Foundation and Agricultural Science in Peru, 1940-1960," *Science as Culture* 14, no. 2 (June 2005): 113.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 119.

⁸⁹ Staff Conference, 18 February 1941, RFA, R.G. 1.2, Series 300, Box 13, Folder 103, RAC, 1952, quoted in, Shepherd, "Imperial Science," 120.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ T. Lynn Smith, "Observations on the Middle Classes in Colombia," undated, T. Lynn Smith Papers, Box 9, Folder 26, 9 (Center for Southwest Research, University Libraries, University of New Mexico) quoted in Lorek, "Imagining the Midwest in Latin America," 300.

framed and the likelihood of “modernization” was forecast. While the Rockefeller Foundation believed the most pressing issue facing Mexico in 1941 was the need to reform cultivation practices given the country’s “serious erosion and depleted soils,” it is clear that racialized ideas behind philanthropy shaped *where* assistance was sent and aid invested.⁹² These ideas formed the way the Rockefeller Foundation approached and assessed future countries and peoples.

These racialized assumptions were reflected in internal communications between the Foundation and the scientists working on their behalf. For instance, in 1945 Carl O. Sauer, an American geographer from UC Berkley captured these sentiments of racial categorization in a field report prepared for Joseph H. Willits, the Director of the Social Sciences at the Rockefeller Foundation. In what is largely akin to an anthropological study of the “other,” Sauer’s journal broached many concerns that undergirded the MAP. Although Sauer would come to regret the direction the MAP was headed (his doubts grew increasingly conspicuous), he nevertheless relied on racialized dialogue used between Foundation administrators to capture the seeming “need” for modernization through philanthropic intervention.⁹³ His correspondence from his travels to Oaxaca reveals an imperialist gaze rooted in “assessing” a peoples’ “fitness” on the land. Sauer spoke of how demand for American agricultural assistance throughout Latin America was due to the need for field instruments and methods he thought were not only “unsuited to the country [Mexico],” but also to the rest of Latin America – barring Argentina.⁹⁴ The latter, Sauer explained, “is the only country that was *designed* to fit into the North Atlantic pattern of agriculture.”⁹⁵ While Sauer’s observations pointed to the country’s agricultural compatibility, it also touched on peoples, place, soil and foodstuff. Shepherd highlights that other academics working for the Rockefeller Foundation such as Stakman believed Argentina’s racial composition made it an outlying country destined for agricultural success. In 1947, Stakman spoke of

⁹² Jonathan Harwood, “Peasant Friendly Plant Breeding and the Early Years of the Green Revolution in Mexico,” *Agricultural History* 83, no. 3 (Summer 2009): 391.

⁹³ Shepherd, “Imperial Science,” 125.

⁹⁴ Carl Ortwin Sauer, “Letter from Carl O. Sauer to Joseph H. Willits, 1945 February 12,” *100 Years: The Rockefeller Foundation*, accessed 14 December 2015, https://rockfound.rockarch.org/digital-library-listing/-/asset_publisher/yYxpQfeI4W8N/content/letter-from-carl-o-sauer-to-joseph-h-willits-1945-february-12.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.* Emphasis added.

how Argentina's population was of "relatively recent European origin," which made it necessarily unique "from typical Latin American countries. Many of the institutions are modern. Agricultural research is on a modern conceptual basis."⁹⁶ In comparing Mexico to Argentina, Sauer's observations make it clear that the likelihood of achieving modernization was determined by race. While in Oaxaca, he spoke of how the "soil erosion is pretty bad all over south Mexican uplands as it is in Central America and the whole country is bursting at the seams with too many people."⁹⁷ Indeed, his field report assessed Mexico's ecological challenges along twin forces of population and space – otherwise understood as *lebensraum*.

Such discourse also reveals that even before the seminal texts from 1948 such as *Road to Survival* by William Vogt and *Our Plundered Planet* by Fairfield Osborn structured the United States' anti-Communist "population-national security theory" coupling resource exhaustion and hunger, the Rockefeller Foundation had already begun tackling these global concerns on its own.⁹⁸ For those concerned that the Rockefeller Foundation's agricultural assistance program might have promoted unintended consequences in which "better food and health would probably result in further increase in population," Weaver assuaged these doubts, stating that "a higher standard of living in the long run usually results in a reduced birthrate, and improvements in agriculture are among the first essential steps in improvement of the living standards of a country."⁹⁹ Indeed, at a time in which "food insecurity meant political insecurity," seldom were concerns regarding overpopulation and fitness divorced from geopolitical considerations.¹⁰⁰

If food production depended on the ability to properly tend to the land, then the *people* responsible for the land had to be deemed fit and capable. These racialized thoughts surrounding the fitness of recipients in Mexico raised serious apprehensions for Miller when in March 1941 he expressed that the country's indigenous populations might be too unteachable for the MAP to be a success. His assessment of the program's fate was less than optimistic when he wrote that

⁹⁶ Elvin C. Stakman. "Latin American Agricultural Institutions: Preliminary Report of Trip May 8 to July 14, 1947," RFA, R.G. 1.1, Series 300, Box 6, Folder 37, RAC., quoted in Shepherd, "Imperial Science," 118.

⁹⁷ Sauer, "Letter from Carl O. Sauer to Joseph H. Willits, 1945 February 12."

⁹⁸ Perkins, *Geopolitics and the Green Revolution*, 135.

⁹⁹ Sauer, "Letter from Carl O. Sauer to Joseph H. Willits, 1945 February 12."

¹⁰⁰ Bashford, *Global Population*, 198.

“unless he [indigenous populations] can be convinced, or his sons educated or persuaded, the benefits of scientific research in agriculture will be ephemeral.”¹⁰¹ Although the MAP was promoted as a modernizing initiative bringing agricultural transformations to Mexico, it was predicated on neo-Malthusian concerns regarding land and food, both of which were inextricably tied to population. The latter served as the motivating factor that propelled this embryonic agenda of development forward and also helped determine which countries and peoples were deemed more “fit” to receive the Rockefeller Foundation’s scientific and financial aid. Racialized assumptions that essentialized Mexicans not only shaped the MAP, but also helped to articulate and establish an understanding and a template for future agricultural assistance throughout Latin America.

From the MAP to the Green Revolution—Future Hegemonic Uses

Between the years of 1940 to 1965, Mexico underwent a dramatic agricultural transformation that earned it the reputation as a standard-bearer for scientific agronomy known as the Green Revolution. Elements of this agricultural transformation were borne of American philanthropy at the turn of the twentieth century, when neo-Malthusian concerns regarding density, land, overpopulation, food, soil and quality of life emerged in American epistemic communities, articulating global fears over ecological sustainability that tied distant geographies together. During this time, Mexico served as a vessel for a burgeoning American strategy that brought together foreign policy and diplomatic efforts abroad, proving to be a subtle way of forwarding both private and national interests. In 1949 when President Harry Truman presciently promised in his Point IV Program, “We are here embarking on a venture that extends far into the future. We are at the beginning of a rising curve of activity, private, governmental and international, that will continue for many years to come,” he was pointing presciently to the future – and inadvertently to the past – of American diplomacy and development assistance programs.¹⁰²

¹⁰¹ Rockefeller Foundation, “Rockefeller Foundation Records, Officers’ Diaries, RG 12, M-R (FA393): January 2-April 1, 1941.” Miller referred to Mexico’s indigenous peoples as “Indian.”

¹⁰² Committee on Foreign Affairs, “Point Four Background and Program,” July 1949. Retrieved 27 November 2015, http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/Pcaac280.pdf.

However, by 1951 administrators from the Rockefeller Foundation still harboured similar animosities and concerns toward recipients of technical assistance packages, judging countries and peoples on their economy's reliance on agricultural labor. The move away from an agrarian economy suggested a more diversified and technically-oriented people and economy – a sign of progress. In a *communiqué* with Chester I. Barnard, the President of the Rockefeller Foundation, Warren Weaver, the head of the Department of Natural Sciences wrote candidly, “In most of the underdeveloped countries, agriculture is in about the same stage as it was in the more advanced countries 150 years ago. Usually from 60-90 percent of the people is [*sic*] engaged in agriculture.”¹⁰³ This perceived stagnation in economic development was based on a standard of living championed by American elites who now defined agricultural modernization and technical capacity as a move *away* from the land. This quandary reflects what Cullather highlights succinctly of recipients of development projects, “Those on the receiving end of modernization initiatives have long complained that development is a moving target.”¹⁰⁴

The MAP was a collaboration between the Rockefeller Foundation and the United States that highlights the way private philanthropy served as a diplomatic arm of the American state. Through the MAP, the Rockefeller Foundation was not only able to advance its modernizing agenda, it also worked to secure the United States government's geostrategic interests in the region, both of which were related to concerns over global land and food supplies. What began as a domestic philanthropy promoting agricultural reforms in the Southern United States, grew into an international privately-funded responder capable of filling the vacuum left by federal governments at home and abroad. Acting independently from the American government, while also remaining “consistent” with United States

¹⁰³ Rockefeller Foundation, “The world food problem, agriculture, and the Rockefeller Foundation,” (21 June 1951) *100 Years: The Rockefeller Foundation*, accessed 14 December 2015, https://rockfound.rockarch.org/digital-library-listing/-/asset_publisher/yYxpQfeI4W8N/content/the-world-food-problem-agriculture-and-the-rockefeller-foundation.

¹⁰⁴ Cullather, “Development? It's History,” 646.

policy, the Rockefeller Foundation was a reflection of American philanthropy exercising smart power throughout the world.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁵ Perkins, “The Rockefeller Foundation and the Green Revolution, 1941-1956,” 9; Parmar and Rietzler, “American Philanthropy and the Hard, Smart and Soft Power of the United States,” 3.

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