Miami Institute for the Social Sciences  
**Funding the Revolution in the Academy**  
June 10, 2021   
"The History and Present of Funding in the Social Sciences"  
 Panel 2

"The Ups and Downs of Foundation Support for the Social Sciences:   
Looking back for a stable future"  
Patricia Rosenfield, PhD   
[Slide 1]

Thank you, Maribel. The rationale and theme for this inaugural summer workshop of the Miami Institute for Social Sciences (MISS) resonate not only for contemporary social scientists seeking support for independent, theoretically grounded, action-oriented, and locally responsive research. They also echo similar challenges confronted by researchers since the beginning of philanthropic funding for the social sciences more than one hundred years ago. This morning my intent is to share some reflections drawing on both this history and my experiences as background for the discussions on mutual aid and cooperative funding approaches for the social sciences. [Note: Throughout this written version of the presentation, I refer to the now-attached power point slides that I talked from for the oral presentation. At the end, I have appended a bibliography of publications that might be of interest to those who want to delve further into the history.]

A snapshot of my background: I come to this meeting as an American who has lived and worked in several other countries, a white older (not old!) woman, and a beneficiary of affirmative action, having been accepted into graduate school and hired for my first job because in the 1970s the Ford Foundation began to require that its grantees increase the number of women in their programs or institutions. I also bring to these discussions a lifetime of commitment to the social sciences through: my own interdisciplinary research linking economics, human behavior, water resources and public health; my privileged position as funder of scholars and practitioners conducting, inter alia, interdisciplinary social science, health, and development research at WHO and Carnegie Corporation of NY; and my more recent work as historian of philanthropy and interdisciplinary research based at the Rockefeller Archive Center and working independently.

I know you all are convinced about the importance of history. When I talk with those less convinced, that is, contemporary philanthropists, about why history matters, especially for support of the social sciences, I like to paraphrase the American baseball player Lou Gehrig: "If we don't know where we've been and we don't know where we're going, we might wind up someplace else." [Slide 2]

My focus today is primarily on American foundations, the ones I know best. At another session, it would be informative to analyze support for social sciences in the increasing number of grantmaking foundations that exist outside of the United States and whose program strategies might be usefully shaped by local conditions and local scholars.

InSlide 3, I sketch an historical arc with a periodicity that I find helpful in considering support for the social sciences amongst American foundations: Pre/Post-World War I to World War II; Post-World War II to end of Cold War; and Fall of Berlin Wall/Collapse of the Soviet Union to 9/11. I have not ventured beyond the year 2001 in my tracking of support for social sciences, although given the turmoil of the past twenty years and especially the last year, such support is as important as it has been historically in order to make sustainable inroads into resolving the deep structural challenges confronting our society and those around the world.

The rationale for modern American philanthropy took hold in the mid-1800s with George Peabody and his focus on tackling the root causes of social problems, further elaborated on by Andrew Carnegie in his 1889 treatise, *The Gospel of Wealth* (originally published in *The North American Review,* June 1889 and December 1989, reprinted in 2017 and available from Carnegie Corporation of New York.)

As indicated in Slide 4, early foundation funding for the social sciences centered on social welfare and hygiene, starting with the Milbank Memorial Fund and Russell Sage Foundation.But soon foundations began to support research on independent economic policies, human behavior,interdisciplinary social science approaches, and, “social control” or social policies as a complement to their science and medicine programs.

In 1923, the Laura Spellman Rockefeller Memorial (LSRM) with its indomitable champions for the social sciences, President Beardsley Ruml and research associate Sydnor Walker, backed an historically significant game changer:

They enthusiastically endorsed a request from the heads of the major social science associations to support a new association that would bring them all together with a focus on their intersecting scholarship [Slides 5 and 6]. The intent was to create a "science of society" and develop the concept of the "interdiscipline." From 1923 to 1928, as shown on Slide 7, the LSRM provided $25,200,000 for the promotion of the social sciences. Ruml indicated in his 1929 speech at the University of Chicago that other foundations also were supportive [Slide 8].

Ruml, however, was more than a champion, he was a visionary [Slide 9].

In his speech, he explained why the social sciences mattered not only for the United States but also globally: Global social science research provided,   
"an important antidote for prejudice and irrationality in the relations among the people occupying the various political divisions of the world." He clearly understood the benefits of global knowledge production and exchange. If only the foundations then had endorsed Ruml's prescient insights.

But soon another game changer set the stage for our discussion at this Workshop: the historically grounded challenge social scientists have faced in receiving backing for research that focuses on social science theory and concepts, and then seeks to build on that knowledge to shape policies and actions.

What happened? In 1929, LSRM, along with most of the Rockefeller-funded entities merged under the umbrella of the Rockefeller Foundation [Slide 10]. The Foundation created a Division of Social Sciences that maintained and expanded LSRM funding for projects, fellowships, exchanges, associations, universities in the U.S. and selected countries in Europe and elsewhere.

Then, by 1933, Rockefeller Foundation (RF) trustees and leadership were concerned about program breadth and the increasingly dire domestic and global conditions. They wanted to focus on applied problem solving. By 1935, the RF's Social Sciences Division responded. As described on Slide 10, they ended “support to the general development of the social sciences” and recommended support for “development of programs in international relations, economic security, public administration“possibly including “public finance and taxation, housing, and criminology…after a study of the financial implications…” (Rockefeller Foundation Review, 27)

Other foundations followed the lead of the RF [Slide 11]. Two exceptional foundations bucked the trend. Since its founding in 1925, the John Simon Foundation has remained a stalwart champion of the social sciences qua social sciences through its individual fellowships. Established in 1941, the Wenner-Gren Foundation soon became the major foundation, and one of the few, supporting research, fellowships, and eventually institutional support for multiple facets of anthropology. The Foundation's mission remains intact in 2021.

The post-World War II era ushered in a golden age of support for social sciences, especially with the enlargement in 1950 of the Ford Foundation. All of its programs, as indicated on Slide 12, drew on the social sciences. For a few early years, from 1951-1957, one of its main program areas was devoted to human behavior and human relations. A new president, Henry Heald, drawn from the domains of science and technology, soon brought that focus to a close (see Magat, 1979 and Rockefeller Archive Center, Ford Foundation History Project, 2015).

The two caveats mentioned on Slide 12 were quantification and application. The war years had reinforced another game changing trend that took permanent hold in support for and conduct of the social sciences: the unquestioning embrace of quantitative and experimental approaches. At last, the social sciences would resemble the real sciences, the physical and mathematical ones, especially. The Alfred P. Sloan and Russell Sage Foundations, for example, centered their social science funding on the new field of behavioral economics (of course, economics theory was always grounded in assumptions about human behavior but that discussion is for another time). They set out to make economics a laboratory science drawing on experimental psychology.

The second caveat, echoing the 1930s decisions of the RF, was support for applying the social sciences to problem solving in a particular field, such as population, agriculture, education, crime, urban planning, environment, human development, and regional area studies. These applications did enhance the development of interdisciplinary social science but with a catch: the other field defined the "interdiscipline" and the method of application.

This was the beginning of the instrumentalization of the social sciences. It is not an entirely negative progression that most social science research supported since the 1930s is applied. Certainly, it should enhance results if medical doctors, public health specialists, agriculturalists, and others work with social scientists that have the relevant training in theory and methods. Much of that training, however, became possible primarily in the context of agricultural sociology, medical sociology, medical anthropology, health economics, and social demography. Support for transdisciplinary research grounded in social science theory and methods remains elusive (see, for example, Rosenfield, Patricia L. 1992. "The potential of transdisciplinary research for sustaining and extending linkages between the health and social sciences." *Soc.Sci. Med*. Vol.35, No.11, 1343-1357).

Certainly in this golden age of support for (applied) social science research and training , from the end of World War II to the end of the Cold War, a few foundations, including the RF, did support the social sciences as individual and interdiscipline [slides 13 and 14]. A personal comment: When I joined Carnegie Corporation in 1987, I soon met Francis (Frank) X. Sutton, one of the original champions for the social sciences at the Ford Foundation (he had been part of Ford's short-lived human behavior program). Sutton had just stepped down as interim president of the Social Science Research Council. When I asked him about the possibility of joining forces in support of social scientists to conduct social science research and lead the way in developing new theories and methods. He said, "It is not possible these days. The only support is for social sciences applied to other fields," (personal communication, Fall, 1987, at Carnegie Corporation of New York).

William Sewell's words of caution about this golden age assessing the situation for interdisciplinary social psychology foreshadow the premise for MISS and this workshop [see Slide 15]. In particular, I want to emphasize his reasons for the early end of the Golden Age: "...The lack of adequate and appropriate funding from either university or federal sources. The lack of a major breakthrough in social and psychological theory; [and the fact that] advancement in research methods did not produce a greatly increased understanding of social psychological phenomena," (Sewell, 1989). This assessment could prompt a future MISS meeting to consider theoretical and methodological breakthroughs over time across all the social sciences.

The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the collapse of the Soviet Union by the end of 1991 led many Americans, including American foundation leaders and staff, to imagine a world transformed into one of global understanding and cooperation, a Pax Globana. Drawing on the experiences that I know best, the 1990s saw extensive foundation collaboration at least in the New York-based foundations because the leaders all reinforced the focus on social sciences, but with caveat #2 still operative, through their application to other fields of endeavor [Slide 16]. Nonetheless, the Rockefeller Foundation commitment to the social sciences remained strong, the Ford Foundation continued support for social sciences particularly for women's health and reproductive health area, and at Carnegie Corporation, and the Developing Countries Program was encouraged to strengthen the social sciences in relation to health, especially through support of networks (see Rosenfield, 2014, 361-368).

One global example: Linking with the International Development Research Center in Canada, these three foundations supported a network of social and health scientists around the world through the International Forum on Health and Social Sciences, with a global base in Thailand, and regional chapters across the developed and developed countries, all headed by local social scientists (see Tudor Silva and Ramos-Jimenez, 1996 and Higginbotham, Briceno-Leon, and Johnson, 2001, for two examples resulting from this collaboration).

It was a moment when social scientists or supportive other-than-social scientists were running or involved in these programs. They were able to continue the golden era until 2001, when following the dot.com and genetics revolution, compounded by counterterrorism investments following 9/11, science and technology, ever prominent in the United States, became the dominant focus of foundation endeavors. Unless involved in one of the areas, the social sciences were not central to this moment, with the notable exception of the Ford Foundation that increasingly focused on poverty and community based organizations, especially with its significant support for the International Fellowship Program [see Slide 16].

While it might be helpful to review the different networks foundation supported in the 1990s to identify lessons learned for this era, one initiative has never received the attention it warranted. In 1993 the Portugal-based Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation supported a Commission on Restructuring the Social Sciences. The intellectually provocative Immanuel Wallerstein served as chair; Commission members included social scientists, natural scientists, and humanists from around the world [Slide 18]. The Commission's report, *Open the Social Sciences: Report of the Gulbenkian Commission on Restructuring the Social Sciences,* received some attention from social science communities, mainly outside of the U.S., but not from other foundations. Perhaps some of the participants in this workshop might be interested in revisiting the Commission's report and recommendations to consider if, twenty-five years since its publication, the insights could be useful for restructuring the social sciences for our era.

I want to close with reflections from a mentor of mine, Stephen Graubard, the longtime editor of *Daedalus*. With his deep intellect and cosmopolitan mind, Graubard in his timely piece on *Public Scholarship* echoes Beardsley Ruml's conclusions that global social science research would provide important antidotes to global prejudice and irrationality in the 1920s [Slide 19].

As Graubard envisions, and I quote:

A strenuous effort must be made to engage a larger company of scholars across the world to investigate national, ethnic, religious, social, cultural, political, economic and intellectual diversity, to take account of myths that circulate today, those that have their origin in the United States no less than those spawned elsewhere. Social Science and the Modern World may be the appropriate title for an inquiry that acknowledges what is being achieved...by the plethora of institutions that exist to advance learning, while emphasizing the need for more deliberate and imaginative wandering. (Graubard, *Public Scholarship*, 44-45).

Looking forward to our lively imaginative wanderings during the discussion!

Thank you!