University Development of American Foundations in British Africa

by Dongkyung Shin
King’s College London
© 2020 by Dongkyung Shin
Abstract

This paper discusses Rockefeller and Ford Foundations’ participation in the development of new universities in former British Africa in the post-war era. By utilising sources from the Rockefeller Archive Center, it suggests that while American foundations’ engagement with African universities has been merely described as "generous" in the context of British imperial histories, the Rockefeller and Ford Foundations had also projected their own philanthropical and diplomatic agendas for African universities. This report focuses specifically on initiatives of the Rockefeller and Ford Foundations and their perspectives on British-style development of African universities in Ghana and Nigeria. I argue that vigorous engagements of American foundations had an energising effect on the growth of African universities. Through analysis of the ways in which American foundations participated in and dominated the development of African universities, this report shows a more balanced picture of both Anglo-American cooperation and competition for new universities from the 1950s to 1970s. This research comes out of my doctoral research on British strategies for new universities at the end of the British Empire, focusing on the activities of the Inter-University Council for Higher Education in the Colonies (later renamed the Inter-University Council for Higher Education Overseas).
University Development of American Foundations in British Africa

In 1958, the Rockefeller Foundation (RF), the Ford Foundation (FF), and the Carnegie Corporation of New York (CC) participated in a three-day conference in New York, invited by the British Inter-University Council for Higher Education Overseas (hereafter, IUC) with seven vice-chancellors and principals of new university institutions in British Africa and the Caribbean. These new universities were established in the context of the post-war policy of the British Empire and were partly financed by the Colonial Development and Welfare funds. In the era of decolonisation and growing independence movements, especially after the independence of Ghana in 1957, the IUC was seeking to link these new universities and American foundations under its own umbrella, in the preparations for British withdrawal. From the perspective of the American foundations, they sensed that their grant-giving experience naturally presented them with the ability to constructively engage in this post-colonial environment. As John Gardiner, the President of the Carnegie Corporation, reflected in correspondence with the Ford Foundation:

American participation could, I think, be a most valuable one for there is every evidence that our British friends are becoming increasingly receptive to the ideas which the American experience can contribute... to some of the difficult problems of technical and higher education, particularly in Africa, and it is clear that we in this country will be called on to play a significant role in this area.¹

Gardiner's account can be seen as encapsulating the American foundations' reflection on British attitudes and policies for African universities and he expressed the philanthropies' confidence in taking actions for the development of African higher education.

This report suggests that the 1958 conference symbolized a turning point for American foundations in revealing their own philanthropic and diplomatic agendas. Rather than helping the development of African universities according to British designs, the Rockefeller and Ford Foundations were planning to project
their own university development programs for newly independent countries. In this context, I argue that vigorous engagements of both the Rockefeller and Ford Foundations had an energising effect on the growth of African universities and undermined Britain’s post-colonial plans. Through an analysis of the ways in which the American foundations went to the forefront of the development of African universities, this report shows a more balanced picture of both Anglo-American cooperation and competition for new universities from the 1950s to 1970s.

American Foundations for (British) African Education

American foundations’ endowment and missions were deeply involved in the educational policy of the British Colonial Office. More accurately, it can be said that Americans started first and then prompted the British Government to take on a more active role in forming colonial education in Africa. As scholars have argued, the Phelps-Stokes Fund’s report, "Education in Africa: A Study of West, South, and Equatorial Africa" (New York, 1922) influenced the British Colonial Office to launch the Advisory Committee on Native Education in Tropical Africa in 1923. Although the Fund’s Commission consulted with the Colonial Office for its knowledge and expertise, the first attempt of Western society’s report on African education was made by a American foundation’s mission. It helped change British colonial policy, a matter that needs to gain more attention from British imperial historians. The Fund’s activities, however, mainly endowed international African students for study in the United States, and focused on schooling and industrial education in Africa, rather than higher education.

In the context of British imperial histories, the American foundations’ involvement in the development of African universities has been known for their "generous" endowment. Although recent works by Tamson Pietsch and Tim Livsey show American encroachment into university development, scholarly approaches to the historical analysis of the development of new universities barely
reveals the American initiatives and the extent to which they were cooperative or competitive processes of Anglo-American activities. These new universities in Africa were initially guided by the IUC and the University of London to upgrade their academic standards, and were regarded as British universities or colleges of the University of London. However, they received educational, administrative, and financial assistance from American philanthropies during and after the overlapping period of the activities of the IUC from 1946 to 1981. These initiatives must be included in a history of British development and in institutional histories of the universities. On the one hand, the status of new universities’ fragile identities and financial limitations could have very well been a reason why the American foundations provided financial support and how they embarked on the British colonial projects. On the other hand, looking at other works on American foundations, as David Hammack and Helmut Anheier have argued, "large grant-making foundations are important not just for their wealth but also because they are notable institutions." So, they can present ideas and practices in a regular, routine, almost solid way. American foundations did not only donate to the others’ work but had their own philosophy on international engagement and were also related to the American government’s foreign policy, as well.

Of the American foundations, the contribution of the Carnegie Corporation of New York has been quite well-known for its long historical bond and attachments to the British Empire. The International Program of the Carnegie Corporation of New York was initially known as the Special Fund in 1912 with Andrew Carnegie’s second "gifts for libraries and church organs, ... in Canada and in the United Kingdom and British Colonies." The program title was later updated through the changed status of the colonial and independent territories: the British Dominions and Colonies (BDC) Fund, the BDC Program, the British Commonwealth Program in 1959, and now called the International Program from 1979.

Within the historiography of American foundations’ involvement in educational projects for the developing countries, we can find a common generalisation of each institution’s diverse activities. In some projects, the Carnegie Corporation and the Rockefeller Foundation (and, later, the Ford Foundation) joined together and supported the same program for new universities by sharing financial distributions and political and international responsibilities through their inter-
institutional correspondence.⁶ In comparison with the Carnegie Corporation’s mutually reinforcing activities with the IUC and British institutions, the Rockefeller and the Ford Foundations pursued their own ways of giving direct assistance to African universities without the gateway of a British authority, especially from 1960.

The Rockefeller Foundation was chartered in 1913 and started to launch the field of modern public health and medical education. Following its reorganisation in 1928, the RF geared its endeavours toward "the advancement of knowledge," focusing on natural science, social science, the humanities, public health, and medical education.⁷ Its emphasis on scientific knowledge for the well-being of humanity was quite matched with the need and demand of newly emergent countries. The Rockefeller Foundation’s mission was distinctly "international" which naturally covered the colonial territories, not only in the British colonies, but also in most of the dependent or newly independent countries around the world.⁸ Thus, unlike Carnegie, for the RF, there was not a specific bond with the British Empire.

The next American foundation to participate in the post-war development of new universities was the Ford Foundation. The FF was established in 1936 and later newly declared the purpose to “advance human welfare” in 1949.⁹ After selling its investment holdings in the Ford Motor Company in 1951, the foundation no longer had direct connections with the company. In this context, Ford Foundation’s program and policy would be more likely influenced by changes in national and international climate rather than the programs of the Carnegie and Rockefeller Foundations, due to the separation with the founding family and company. In this respect, Francis Sutton, one of the longest serving staff members of the FF from 1954 to 1983, revealed that the vast funds of the Ford Foundation were "under pressure from the US Treasury to show that it was a genuine philanthropic organization by spending promptly the millions of dollars of its income."¹⁰ The Ford Foundation’s action for international development started from 1950, while the Carnegie Corporation and the Rockefeller Foundation were already involved in British Empire, Commonwealth, and international projects from the 1920s, and especially for post-war reconstruction.¹¹
Anglo-American Activities for New Universities

In order to support post-war development of Africa, Asia, and the Caribbean, American philanthropic organisations fairly valued the power of London as a capital city of the British Empire and a hub of colonial expertise. Depending on the level of each foundation’s diplomatic closeness with the British government or with the Colonial Office, the approach to dealing with British colonial policy for higher education was different. Nonetheless, American officials’ viewed that London was the most influential place where they could acquire and share administrative advice and local knowledge on Africa, Asia, and the Caribbean areas. John Logan, a staff member in the RF's Division of Medicine and Public Health, presented his impression of London in 1951:

London is, of course, a very stimulating and exciting place to be. There are probably, within the limits of Greater London, more trained brains, and therefore more ideas, than in any other area of equal size in the world. To a much greater extent than New York, London is its country’s scientific centre and the majority of the research work being done in the United Kingdom is within an hour or so from this office.¹²

Logan stayed in London; he attended some colonial conferences in Britain and had meetings with colonial officials and British experts to gain information on British colonial policies and local expertise on Africa and other areas.¹³ Melvin Fox, who worked at the Ford Foundation for 26 years as a program officer especially regarding African development and later became deputy director, provided clear answers when responding to an interviewer's questions on the ties to the British imperial system: “Was there ever any discussion about reservations about getting so closely tied to the British imperial system?” Fox recalled, "despite the fact that when we started in 55-56 to plan for our trip all of the assistance flowing to Africa came out of the Colonial Office, actually, and the first contracts we had, therefore, when we went to talk to people about Africa in London, were people in the Colonial Office ... the first counsellors whose advice we sought."¹⁴
The American foundations desired to maintain close ties with the British government and departments for their international programs. Considering political and legal contexts, the American foundations’ overseas development initiatives in British Africa were unable to ignore the fact that the grant-recipient countries were under British colonial rule and were treated as its territories. With the incomparable function of colonial expertise, the politically juristic authority of London was very important as not to be neglected for American donors. In June 1952, John Logan had a chance to listen to a session held at the University of Oxford on the colonial university project from Walter Adams, Secretary of the IUC, and Thomas Taylor, Principal of the University College of the West Indies. From his official diary, we can see an American official’s reaction to the activities of the IUC. He was quite impressed by the British experts’ awareness: “They are interested in colonial development and general education and are aware of many of the problems which exist.” Such sessions were also a way for Rockefeller Foundation staff members to communicate with British officials and academics as well as to collect information about new British policies regarding colonial or international issues.

Yet the coalition constructed for the Anglo-American project for colonial education was not harmonious. Although the American foundations endowed an upgrade of (British-designed) African universities, they had their own American ethos and followed American foreign policy relationships. The key figures of the big American foundations, such as members of the boards of trustees, were fairly linked to their positions to the United States government, especially the State and Defense Departments, as well as to Wall Street’s law firms and financial institutions. It is hard to find a trustee who was not involved in governmental practice or international organisations, and mostly had wartime experience in foreign policies. For example, President of the Rockefeller Foundation from 1950 to 1961, Dean Rusk became the Secretary of State. As Ernest Lindley assesses, Rusk kept in touch with international affairs throughout his careers. John J. McCloy, the President of the World Bank from 1947 to 1949, was a trustee of the Rockefeller Foundation from 1946 to 1949 and from 1953 to 1958, and became chairman of the Ford Foundation from 1958 to 1965, and also served in advisory
capacities to Presidents Kennedy, Johnson, Nixon, Carter and Reagan. Likewise, the intertwined personnel and sharing American ideology among American foundations and the US government or international organisations implies that initiative of American foundations’ policies were closely linked to US foreign policy, as well.

**Rockefeller and Ford Foundations’ Own Actions**

Moving back to the 1958 conference in New York, both sides of Anglo-American participants worried about "when the British Government withdrew" - the colonial universities were in danger due to "the loneliness of the African intellectual and the inadequacy for the country’s needs for the number of people being trained at high level" for academic localisation. Dean Rusk from the Rockefeller Foundation described "the role of the Foundations in relation to African university development" in order "to intensify efforts in non-Western parts of the world where it was appreciated that larger prospects might require special approaches." John Howard, on a behalf of the Ford Foundation, explained that financing several projects aimed "at strengthening educational institutions in Africa or at ensuring that the United States was properly equipped to help there." The conference therefore asked for America’s expertise for African-American education as "the period of cultural assimilation in Africa would be much shorter than in America, but America’s experience of assimilation was relevant to Africa." Perhaps, American experience with African American education and the foundations’ capability for generous grant-making were an American asset for the development of new universities during and after Africa’s independence period. Although the 1958 conference was not a trigger for the American participants to focus more on African universities, but it certainly represented the changed perspective of British experts on Americans’ participation in "their" colonial development, as well as the vigorous initiative of American foundations for expanding their international programs.
Yet, from 1960, both the Rockefeller and Ford Foundations expanded their activities for African programs not through a gateway of the IUC, but instead by a path that led to more direct influence of Americanisation in African universities. Indeed, both foundations’ programs were not directly involved in the British project for colonial universities but directly contacted African institutions and governments. Following their scope of its grant-giving philosophy, the Rockefeller Foundation paid particular attention to selected studies at African universities such as medical education, public health, social science research, and African studies. By 1963, the Rockefeller Foundation already created a $1 million endowment for the University of Ibadan. Not only providing funding for a certain institution or policy at a new university, the Ford Foundation also started to give grants for the general university and faculty development at the University of Ibadan. As Nigeria was the most populated country in Africa and the University of Ibadan was its first university with a faculty of medicine, the Rockefeller and Ford Foundations’ focus was naturally directed towards it regarding the efficiency of their grant-making scheme and for the best outcome for their philanthropic support. On the other hand, the University of Ghana (before, the Gold Coast) was founded in the same year (1948) as Ibadan, under the similar standard of the IUC and the University of London. However, as Ghana had a smaller population than Nigeria and also the University of Ghana did not have a medical faculty in the early years, the University of Ibadan was treated better than the University of Ghana as a representative university in West Africa, in the context of the American foundational activities.

In 1960, the Rockefeller Foundation designed a new grant-giving initiative, the University Development Program (UDP), for universities in less developed countries. While their previous grant-making was helping specific departments to support universities’ planned programs, the RF staff members through the UDP program actively participated in a selected university’s broad expansion project, and engaged in teaching and research relevant to new national and regional needs. This long-term planning project selected only five universities in the world in its initial effort and later expanded it to cover fifteen universities. The RF spent $125 million on the UDP for two decades from 1963 to 1983 and other financial support for general funding programs in both selected and non-selected
universities was continued, as well. Among new universities in the former British colonies, the University of Ibadan and the Universities of East Africa in Uganda were fortunately selected, along with three other universities in Valle (Colombia), Philippines, and Thailand. As there was no special treatment for the British Commonwealth universities, the Rockefeller Foundation’s international policy followed the regional interest for gaining the best outcome of the UDP program. The selected universities were expected to become regional centres to disseminate its effects to other neighbouring areas. In doing so, by receiving a huge amount of financial and academic assistance from the Rockefeller Foundation, Nigeria’s premier University of Ibadan was specially "destined to play a key role in providing African scholars for new universities in Nigeria as well as elsewhere in English-speaking West Africa."25

For leading their programs, the Ford and Rockefeller Foundations posted their American staff and directly involved them in decision-making, teaching, and research at a local university. The Rockefeller Foundation in 1964 received an observation report for “Nigerianizing, De-Anglicizing and Americanizing” written by Charles Patterson, who was the RF’s visiting researcher at the University of Ibadan. It started with the observation that "The de-Anglicizing and Nigerianization of the University of Ibadan includes a certain amount of Americanization" and left such detailed illustrations of his experiences and observations of the changing nature of the University of Ibadan after the end of the tutelage from the UoL and with the American foundations’ participation.26 The American foundations’ fund for the majority of expenses of Ibadan’s expansion led to "Nigerian delight and British caution." Moreover, the American money noticeably influenced the growing size of the American population at Ibadan as Illustrated below:
**Table 1 The Overall three-year growth of the academic staff at the University of Ibadan**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nigerian</td>
<td>77 (31.1%)</td>
<td>74 (28.1%)</td>
<td>122 (35.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>British</td>
<td>148 (59.9%)</td>
<td>147 (55%)</td>
<td>143 (41.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American</td>
<td>6 (2.4%)</td>
<td>17 (6.4%)</td>
<td>39 (11.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>16 (6.6%)</td>
<td>26 (9.8%)</td>
<td>42 (12.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>247</td>
<td>264</td>
<td>346</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From the table, given that during the second year of 1962-63 four other universities were being founded in Nigeria and some of Ibadan staff left for them, the increased trend of Nigerianisation for the three years was noticeable. Nevertheless, British staff remained the majority of Ibadan’s staff. However, the proportion of American staff had the most dramatic growth from the table. While the American staff hired by the university was paid from the funds allocated by the federal government, the majority of them, especially in 1962-63, were academic staff from American foundations and universities.

With the visible American presence at the University of Ibadan, British staff revealed quite mixed reactions to young Americans. L Lewis, a professor at the University of London and at the Institute of Education in the Colonial Department, commented, in a retrospective work, on the situation. He spoke of a project carried out by American researchers in connection with an American foundation, "seemed to be of great significance may well appear," but "somewhat remote from the more immediate needs." Also, he mentioned that American staff’s "addition of gratuitous criticism of colonialism and imperialism, and undiluted adulation of the local politicians or the traditional 'culture,' arouses chauvinism in representatives of the former colonial power and irritates scholar and administrator alike." At the same time, American staff also felt that "the British academics resent American intrusion into what was once their private colonial preserve; that they are jealous of ... the affluent character of American research grants..." Patterson and Lewis conceded that some potential conflicts
between British and American staff continued but that willingness for the modification of the British tradition was obvious. The fact that increasing numbers of British-trained Nigerians were visiting American universities for research and networking funded by American sources also reinforced this Americanisation process for the University of Ibadan.  

**Conclusion**

The American foundations’ involvement in the development of African universities started from the groundwork that Britain had conducted, as the first universities in the former British Africa were founded under the IUC’s pastoral activities. The international programs of the American foundations clearly benefitted from London’s superior position through its colonial experience and expertise. While the IUC attempted to facilitate American philanthropies in making grants in their associated universities in the British territories, the Rockefeller and Ford Foundations designed their own university policies for new countries, not directly linked with the IUC. With African countries’ political independence, the Rockefeller and Ford Foundations’ actions for overseas developments were expanded to assist these newly emergent independent countries and institutions. Among the British-founded universities in Africa, the University of Ibadan in Nigeria received the greatest assistance from both American foundations. For a short period, the university was more Americanised than a British-style university, although both sides of Anglo-American relationship formally aimed at Nigerianisation. Through this analysis, we have seen the American foundations’ encroachment and how the development of African universities shifted from the former imperial power to domination from American philanthropies. Following Sarah Stockwell’s argument, the paternalistic activity of the IUC for the new universities was a way of exporting Britishness and maintaining its imperial power in the former colonies. Equally, these American foundations’ investigation and assistance for African universities were also another story of exporting American identity and expanding its political and cultural hegemony in the post-colonial era with its Cold War politics. Ultimately, the vigorous American foundations’ involvement in the African
universities undermined Britain’s post-colonial ambition to maintain its soft power through its university connections.

This report focuses on archival materials from the Rockefeller Archive Center, mainly dealing with the activities of the Rockefeller and Ford Foundations in West African universities. I have also conducted other archival research in Ghana, Nigeria, Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, Barbados and the United Kingdom to cover more local perspectives and voices in my doctoral thesis. Putting all these various sources together, the British and American engagement of the development of new universities as a "University Development Era" will be explored with the activities of the IUC from 1952 to 1981.

---


6 For example, for meeting by the vice-chancellors of the Association of Universities of the British Commonwealth, the Carnegie and Ford suggested to split the bill three ways with the Rockefeller Foundation and it was confirmed "their interest in a three-way split"; Dean Rusk’s Official Diary 1952 – 1960, June 27, 1957, Box 417, RG 12, FA393, Rockefeller Foundation Records, RAC.


12 John A Logan’s Diary, August-October 1951, Box 271, RG 12, Officers’ Diaries, FA392, Rockefeller Foundation Records, RAC.

13 John A Logan’s Diary, August 24 - September 5, 1951, Box 271, RG 12, Officers’ Diaries, FA392, Rockefeller Foundation Records, RAC.

14 Fox, Melvin J. interviewed by Ronald J. Grele, October, November and December 1972, Box 34, Series IV, Oral History Project, FA618, Ford Foundation Records, RAC, 180.

15 John Logan’s Diary, June 24, 1952, Box 271, RG 12, Officers’ Diaries, FA392, Rockefeller Foundation Records, RAC.


18 ‘Meeting Between American Visitors and Vice-Chancellors and Principals of Overseas University Institutions’, August 22, 1958, Carnegie – Gould House Conference file, Box 4, Series 1, Ford Foundation Overseas Development, Series 1, Box 4, FA608, Ford Foundation Records, RAC.

19 Ibid.


26 Charles Patterson, ‘Nigerianizing, De-Anglicizing and Americanizing’, February 25, 1964, Series 497, SG 1.3, Projects, FA388, Rockefeller Foundation Records, RAC; Patterson was an African-American scholar at Ibadan funded by the Rockefeller Foundation, and research the development of African elites in London and African countries through Western schools.

27 Ibid, 2.

28 Ibid, 4.


30 Patterson, ‘Nigerianizing’, 6.

31 Ibid, 9.