



# Missionary Capitalist: Nelson Rockefeller in Venezuela

*Darlene Rivas*

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The first work to draw on Nelson A. Rockefeller's newly available personal papers as well as research in Latin American archives, *Missionary Capitalist* details Rockefeller's efforts to promote economic development in Latin America, particularly Venezuela, from the late 1930s through the 1950s.

Rockefeller's involvement in the region began in 1936 with his investment in Creole Petroleum, the Venezuelan subsidiary of Standard Oil. Almost immediately, he began trying to influence North Americans' individual, corporate, and government relationships with Latin Americans. Through his work developing technical assistance programs for the Roosevelt administration during World War II, his business ventures (primarily agricultural production and food retailing), and his postwar founding of the nonprofit American International Association, Rockefeller hoped to demonstrate how U.S. capitalists could nurture entrepreneurial spirit and work successfully with government agencies in Latin America to encourage economic development and improve U.S.-Latin American relations. Ultimately, however, he overestimated the ability of the United States, through public or private endeavors, to promote Latin American economic, political, and social change.

This objective account paints a portrait of Rockefeller not as the rapacious, exploitative figure of stereotype, but as a man fueled by idealism and humanitarian concern as well as ambition.

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