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# 1st Place Research Paper: Conflicting Definitions of Relief: Life in Refugee Camps after the San Francisco Earthquake of 1906

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# 1st Place Research Paper: Conflicting Definitions of Relief: Life in Refugee Camps after the San Francisco Earthquake of 1906

## **Comments**

This research was presented at the Southern California Conference for Undergraduate Research at Whittier College in the fall of 2013, and an abridged version of the paper was presented at the Phi Alpha Theta Southern California Regional Conference in April 2014, where it won "Best Undergraduate Research Paper" for the United States History division. This paper also won first prize in the 2014 Kevin and Tam Ross Undergraduate Research Prize contest at the Leatherby Libraries, Chapman University.

Conflicting Definitions of Relief:  
Life in Refugee Camps after the San Francisco Earthquake of 1906

Emily Neis

History 498

Professor Slayton

May 6, 2014

On November 3, 1906, a particularly rainy Saturday, a “difference of opinion” between one refugee and San Francisco’s relief administration came to a climax. Mary Kelly, a middle-aged mother from the Irish working class, had been a resident of the Jefferson Square refugee camp ever since a 7.8 magnitude earthquake and fires destroyed her city and her home in April. However, she often protested official relief methods. Because she refused to pay rent on her “earthquake cottage”—one of the many small homes constructed for refugees with the relief funds—Lieutenant Henry T. Scott, the executive officer of the department of camps, led ten policemen to forcibly lift the cottage onto a truck and cart it away to another camp. Mary Kelly refused to abandon her home and stayed inside, while a parade of refugees followed the truck through the rain. She hung a placard outside her window for all to see: “We demand a share of the Relief Fund. We demand a distribution of food and supplies.”<sup>1</sup> This conflict between one brave woman and frustrated leaders of the official relief corporation demonstrated the extent to which people were willing to act to promote their personal definitions of relief. Mary Kelly was willing to be carted across the streets to support a more equitable distribution of the funds, while Henry Scott was willing to forcibly remove her entire house in compliance with the relief corporation’s decisions.

In the aftermath of the San Francisco earthquake, people struggled to bring abstract ideas of disaster relief to reality, specifically traditional ideas, progressivism, and socialism. Refugees did not passively accept the official relief corporation’s discriminatory progressive methods, and there were even upper-class individuals who criticized the relief effort. Nevertheless, the progressive leadership considered their methods successful, without consideration of the

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<sup>1</sup> Andrea Rees Davies, *Saving San Francisco: Relief and Recovery after the 1906 Disaster* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2012), 53, 108-109; Philip L. Fradkin, *The Great Earthquake and Firestorms of 1906*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 215; “Mary Kelly Refuses to Move,” *San Francisco Call*, November 3, 1906; “Mrs. Mary Kelly Defies Relief Corporation and Takes Ride in Cottage to Ingleside,” *San Francisco Call*, November 4, 1906, 31.

“unworthy” poor. Ultimately, conflicting definitions of relief after the 1906 earthquake shaped the way relief efforts were practiced across the United States.

The events leading up to this confrontation began when a 7.8 magnitude earthquake rumbled through San Francisco a little past five in the morning on April 18, 1906, before most people were fully awake. It was followed by fires, which roared through the city for three days. Controlling the flames was a near-impossible task for the firemen because their fire chief Dennis Sullivan died in the earthquake, and there was no water flowing in the distribution lines or hydrants. The disorganized firefighters employed dynamite to try to create firebreaks, but they were untrained in how to use it and inadvertently caused more damage. By April 21, the combined disasters had destroyed most of the city and killed approximately 3,000 people. Out of a population of 400,000, about 250,000 were left homeless.<sup>2</sup> These numbers can help a person try to grasp the enormity of the disaster, but they only provide a first step. Numbers are abstract, while people, such as Dennis Sullivan, are real.

Although the 1906 San Francisco earthquake was one of the most shocking events in American history, it was the human relief efforts that shaped American society, particularly the methods people used to respond to disasters and the ways people treated the poor. However, there was no one clear-cut definition of relief. To understand how conflicting definitions of relief changed over time and influenced each other, they can be sorted into three layered categories: abstract ideals, organizations’ definitions, and individuals’ definitions. Firstly, in the beginning

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<sup>2</sup> Marie Bolton, "Recovery for Whom? Social Conflict After the San Francisco Earthquake and Fire, 1906-1915," (PhD diss., University of California, Davis, 1997), 1; "Casualties and damage after the 1906 earthquake," *United States Geological Survey*, last modified July 23, 2012, <http://earthquake.usgs.gov/regional/nca/1906/18april/casualties.php>; Davies, *Saving San Francisco*, 11, 20, 17-18; Andrea Davies Henderson, "Reconstructing Home: Gender, Disaster Relief, and Social Life After the San Francisco Earthquake and Fire, 1906—1915" (PhD diss., Stanford University, 2005), 12; Joanna Leslie Dyl, "Urban Disaster: An Environmental History of San Francisco After the 1906 Earthquake" (PhD diss., Princeton University, 2006), 13; Gladys Hansen, "San Francisco 1906 Great Earthquake Registrar," The Virtual Museum of the City of San Francisco, Accessed December 2, 2013, [http://www.sfmuseum.org/1906\\_eq\\_quests/eq.htm](http://www.sfmuseum.org/1906_eq_quests/eq.htm).

of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, traditional ideals of relief that reflected 19<sup>th</sup> century values shifted to incorporate new progressive and socialist ideals. Secondly, organizations that tried to implement these abstract ideals, such as the American Red Cross and the United Refugees, necessarily had to adapt their definitions to put abstract ideas into practice. Finally, individuals had even more varied and nuanced definitions of relief based on their personal experiences and needs.

Organizations played the mediating role, both adapting abstract ideals and uniting various individuals.

These different views all came into conflict within San Francisco's refugee camps, which were constructed in the immediate aftermath of the disaster. The 26 official military camps housed as many as 40,000 homeless people during their two-year history from May 9, 1906 to June 30, 1908 when the last camp closed.<sup>3</sup> Eventually, these camps transferred from the military to the Red Cross.<sup>4</sup> The camps also provided a space for refugees to organize among themselves.

San Francisco's disaster catapulted the American Red Cross (ARC) to the forefront of disaster relief work. The ARC had just received the support of the federal government and provided the "official" definition of relief, which was rooted in early 20<sup>th</sup> century progressivism. It is important to note that the Red Cross actually redefined what "relief" meant in America in its efforts to help San Francisco's refugees after the 1906 earthquake. Previously, under the leadership of Red Cross founder Clara Barton, the organization advocated personal involvement and moral evaluation of victims; however, new progressive leaders considered these subjective methods inefficient.<sup>5</sup> At issue is how the refugee camps provided a test center for the Red Cross to experiment with new methods of relief that reflected its Progressive Era values. ARC relief

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<sup>3</sup> Russell Sage Foundation, ed., *San Francisco Relief Survey*, (New York: Survey Associates, 1913), 87-88, 404.

<sup>4</sup> Davies, *Saving San Francisco*, 87.

<sup>5</sup> Marian Moser Jones, *The American Red Cross from Clara Barton to the New Deal*, (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2013), 93-94, 97-98.

officials intended to modernize relief methods by providing assistance primarily to skilled workers, people with property, and people who showed promise of becoming self-sufficient.<sup>6</sup>

While the Red Cross sought to implement new these progressive relief methods, the organization still clung to certain 19<sup>th</sup> century practices; eventually, its discriminatory methods invited massive protests that were socialist in nature. The Red Cross' progressive relief workers believed that they could objectively discriminate between "worthy" and "unworthy" refugees, but ultimately their decisions were still colored by traditional views that the poor were at fault for their own suffering. Furthermore, relief workers' fear of socialism prevented them from wholly sympathizing with the working-class.<sup>7</sup> One example of a refugee organization that challenged the ARC's progressive, discriminatory ideas with more socialist ones was the United Refugees. This group banded together in July 1906 and demanded control over relief funds, but they faced difficulties as relief officials routinely derided group members as "visionary socialists."<sup>8</sup> Ironically, the United Refugees consciously avoided using the word "socialism" in its writings and speeches. Thus, just as the Red Cross modified progressive ideals when it put them into practice, the United Refugees also modified socialist ideals. The Red Cross was ultimately more successful in carrying out its methods than the United Refugees, as it was more powerful.

However, when relief workers and refugees came into contact in the refugee camps from 1906 to 1908, the homeless were able to influence the social workers' ideals. Some relief workers became more sympathetic to the refugees' plight, though others became more prejudiced. Nevertheless, the progressive leadership considered their methods successful, without consideration of the "unworthy" poor. Because of its apparent success, the American

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<sup>6</sup> Davies, *Saving San Francisco*, 6-7.

<sup>7</sup> Davies, *Saving San Francisco*, 7.

<sup>8</sup> "Report to the Massachusetts Assoc. for the Relief of California," written September 27, 1906, The Virtual Museum of the City of San Francisco, <http://www.sfmuseum.org/1906/mass.html>.

Red Cross gained in stature as the national society for disaster relief, and its progressive methods were adopted throughout the states.

To analyze San Franciscans' conflicting definitions of relief, this essay will sort them into three layered categories of abstract ideas, organizations' definitions, and individuals' definitions of relief. The first layer, abstract ideals, compares three intellectual methods of practicing relief: traditional 19<sup>th</sup> century ideas, progressivism, and socialism. The second layer, organizations' definitions, will examine how two organizations, the American Red Cross and the United Refugees, sought to implement progressive ideals and socialist ideals, respectively. In putting their ideals into practice, both organizations had to adapt to their surroundings. Finally, the third layer will investigate how five individuals from different walks of life created their personal definitions and sought to influence them. After drawing this distinction, it becomes clear that organizations formed a link between ideas and individuals, by allowing people to work together and implement their ideas on a grander scale. The American Red Cross was one of the most successful organizations during the San Francisco earthquake, and its progressive relief methods were ultimately triumphant. Those who would challenge the ARC, such as the United Refugees, simply weren't strong enough to compete. Influence from the Red Cross' methods in 1906 is still seen in the way relief is practiced today.

Most of the sources for this research come from the point of view of relief officials, since poor people usually didn't have the means to record their stories. *The San Francisco Relief Survey* remains the only comprehensive source of relief documents; it included forms given to refugees to determine eligibility, numerous lists and statistics, and photographs. The Russell Sage Foundation employed six social workers who had helped rebuild San Francisco to compile their studies for this 608-page book. The purpose of the *Relief Survey* was to offer relief method



guidelines for future emergencies. The six authors were men and women, mostly university professors and leaders of charity committees, who were writing for scholars and charity workers like themselves. Overall, the book favorably presented both the Red Cross and city politicians and hailed the relief efforts as successful. It was clearly influenced by contemporary progressive ideals, and the authors believed that their methods would work in similar disasters.<sup>9</sup>

While the *Relief Survey* is necessary as a source, it was published years afterward in 1913. Contemporary newspapers gave a more immediate sense of what was happening between 1906 and 1908. This paper focuses especially on the city's three major English newspapers: *The San Francisco Examiner*, *The San Francisco Chronicle*, and *The San Francisco Call*. Each newspaper had its own particular slant. William Randolph Hearst owned the *Examiner*, the biggest newspaper in San Francisco. Hearst used his popular paper to promote his political career with sensational stories that often chronicled his personal accomplishments in helping with relief. Meanwhile, M. H. de Young was in charge of the *Chronicle*, the second-biggest newspaper, and his articles often favored the business elite. Finally, Claus Spreckels ran the third-biggest newspaper, the *Call*. Spreckels favored progressive interests, but some of his journalists were also sympathetic to the poor refugees and even criticized relief methods.<sup>10</sup> As useful as these particular sources were, San Francisco was a cosmopolitan city filled with many ethnic groups, and so not everyone could read these English language newspapers. Therefore, they were inherently biased against different language groups, such as the Chinese. Furthermore, immediately after the disaster these newspapers all carried hopeful stories that San Francisco would "rise from the ashes." While San Franciscans probably wanted to read about hope, it is not

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<sup>9</sup> Russell Sage Foundation, *San Francisco Relief Survey*, 1913.

<sup>10</sup> Davies Henderson, "Reconstructing Home," 9.

fair to generalize that all of them felt that way; many were surely despairing, especially since it was impossible for various people to find permanent jobs.<sup>11</sup>

Beyond newspapers, this research also draws heavily from the digital archives of the Bancroft Library and the Virtual Museum of San Francisco. The digital archives highlight important newspaper articles from other states, and they also present government committee documents, correspondence, and writings by the refugees who protested against the government and the Red Cross' methods. These sources demonstrated how the city politicians and the refugees vilified each other as they struggled to control the relief fund.<sup>12</sup> Although the majority of sources available favored the relief officials' perspective, the competing newspapers and the unique records from the digital archives showed how others created their own definitions of relief.

From Wednesday April 18 to Friday April 20, the earthquake and fires destroyed the homes of approximately 250,000 San Franciscans. Many believed that the natural disaster was a social equalizer, leaving both the poor and the rich on the streets. An *Examiner* article titled "Fire Puts Rich and Poor in the Same Plane" reflected this attitude: "The man who worked for fifteen hours a week is no poorer, to-day, than the man who was once able to pay him for his services," and "Every one of the famous residences on Nob Hill is in ruins."<sup>13</sup> Truthfully, although all of San Francisco's social classes felt the earthquake, they did not suffer equally. California historian Andrea Rees Davies pointed out that the wealthy residents of Nob Hill and the Western Additions were protected from the earthquake and had time to prepare for the fire. Furthermore,

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<sup>11</sup> *The San Francisco Call; The San Francisco Chronicle; The San Francisco Examiner.*

<sup>12</sup> Bancroft Library, "The 1906 San Francisco Earthquake and Fire," Accessed December 3, 2013, <http://bancroft.berkeley.edu/collections/earthquakeandfire/index2.html>; Russell Sage Foundation, ed., *San Francisco Relief Survey; The San Francisco Call; The San Francisco Chronicle; The San Francisco Examiner*; The Virtual Museum of the City of San Francisco, "1906 Relief and Recovery Efforts," Accessed December, 3, 2013. <http://www.sfmuseum.org/1906/recovery.html>.

<sup>13</sup> "Fire Puts Rich and Poor in the Same Plane," *San Francisco Examiner*, April 21, 1906, 7.

the upper-class citizens often had a second house outside the city, and even the middle-class had money to find new homes.<sup>14</sup>

Meanwhile, San Francisco's poorer districts were built on top of dangerous "made ground." During the Gold Rush in the 1850s, about 200 acres near the bay were filled in to level the land for construction for San Francisco's commercial and working-class districts. Even though this land had already proved to be vulnerable during the 1868 earthquake, builders would not attempt to make it safer until after World War II. Thus, buildings on the city's "made ground" were swallowed whole in 1906.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, as firefighters struggled to save the city, they abandoned the poorer districts in order to spend more time on the wealthier neighborhoods. Chinatown in particular suffered the most from human decisions rather than natural causes; military officials forced residents to evacuate, so they had no chance to defend their homes and businesses from the firefighters using dynamite or the many looters who ransacked their neighborhood.<sup>16</sup> From the very beginning, the effects of San Francisco's disaster were partially man-made. San Franciscans in power who had chosen to ignore the city's tumultuous history with earthquakes also discriminated against the city's poorer residents. This prejudiced attitude remained strong with city politicians and even relief officials as they later sought to rebuild the city.

In the aftermath of the earthquake, a person's income and associates made a difference in whether he or she would be able to find a new home. Most of the homeless fled the city, especially those with connections elsewhere. San Francisco's neighboring cities, which had also suffered from the earthquake, had to deal with a sudden influx of refugees. Immediately after the

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<sup>14</sup> Davies, *Saving San Francisco*, 30-35.

<sup>15</sup> Dyl, "Urban Disaster," 49-50; Ted Steinberg, *Acts of God: The Unnatural History of Natural Disaster in America*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 18.

<sup>16</sup> Davies, *Saving San Francisco*, 25-27; "Looters Dig Up Valuables in Chinatown," *San Francisco Examiner*, April 28, 1906, 2.

earthquake struck, Oakland officials set up relief stations and cots in various public parks and churches, prompting thousands of San Franciscans to move there.<sup>17</sup> While Oakland was the most supportive neighbor and might have sheltered one fourth of San Francisco's population, other helpful cities included Berkeley, which offered to care for 8000 refugees, and Alameda, which provided space for 3000 refugees. Meanwhile, manufacturing plants along the coast, such as the Pacific Oil Company in Richmond and the California Powder Works in Hercules, also offered space for a few thousand people and employed their carpenters to construct new shelters.<sup>18</sup> The Southern Pacific Railroad Company even offered free transportation to those who could prove that they were destitute, although it was probably humiliating for refugees to claim destitution.<sup>19</sup> The railroads ended the policy of free transportation on May 10, 1906, and the newly formed transportation committee guaranteed to give bargain rates in certain cases until July 2, 1908. Those with "vague plans" to make a living somewhere else were refused transportation benefits.<sup>20</sup>

Not everyone was happy to receive poor refugees. Alice Hutchinson, a young woman from Oakland, captured this sentiment in a letter to her mother: "everything and everybody is upset...because thousands and thousands of homeless, hungry, forlorn people are coming to Oakland."<sup>21</sup> Overall, it was difficult for neighbors to keep their doors open for refugees, and it was easier to simply donate money and supplies. Countries all across the globe contributed to the relief fund. Between the Finance Committee and the American Red Cross, San Francisco

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<sup>17</sup> "Refugees Go to Oakland," *San Francisco Call*, April 19, 1906, 4.

<sup>18</sup> "Examiner Relief Workers Performed Thrilling Service," *Los Angeles Examiner*, May 1, 1906, quoted in Fradkin, *The Great Earthquake*, 184; "Places of Refuge," *San Francisco Call*, April 22, 1906, 8; "Richmond Feeds Thousands," *San Francisco Examiner*, April 23, 1906, 7.

<sup>19</sup> "Free Transportation for the Destitute," *San Francisco Examiner*, April 21, 1906, 7.

<sup>20</sup> Russell Sage Foundation, *San Francisco Relief Survey*, 59-61.

<sup>21</sup> Alice Hutchinson to her mother, undated, and to Helen, May 2, 1906, California Historical Society, quoted in Fradkin, *The Great Earthquake*, 183.

received over nine million dollars in donations by June 1, 1909.<sup>22</sup> After adjusting for inflation and increased costs, this amount remains unprecedented in the United States' disaster relief history.<sup>23</sup> This mixture of great charity and subtle prejudice for the “destitute” continued to influence relief officials' opinions.

Although more than half of the homeless population left, 100,000 remained in San Francisco, either because they couldn't leave or didn't want to give up hope.<sup>24</sup> These refugees took shelter wherever they could—in city parks, in freight cars, or in ruined buildings.<sup>25</sup> By May, there were more than 100 refugee camps, although only 26 were officially designated military camps between 1906 and 1908.<sup>26</sup> By June 1, 1906, the writers of the *San Francisco Relief Survey* estimated that there were approximately 40,000 individuals still living in tents and shacks, although they acknowledged this number was incomplete.<sup>27</sup> Many of the unofficial camps were listed in an *Examiner* article from June 6, 1906. These “temporary camps not under military control” were called by their street names, such as “Fourteenth and Point Lobos Avenues,” which housed 185 people, and “Point Lobos and Masonic Avenues,” which housed 53 people (noteworthy for being “about one-half Japanese”). These unofficial camps ranged in size from one that housed 5 people to one that sheltered 2,000. While the largest unofficial camp listed, Jefferson Square, would eventually be numbered as the sixteenth official military camp, relief workers ignored most of the smaller camps.<sup>28</sup> Instead, displaced residents were encouraged to join the official camps.

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<sup>22</sup> Russell Sage Foundation, ed., *San Francisco Relief Survey*, 34.

<sup>23</sup> Fradkin, *The Great Earthquake*, 187.

<sup>24</sup> Davies, *Saving San Francisco*, 42.

<sup>25</sup> Bolton, “Recovery for Whom?”, 1; Philip L. Fradkin, *The Great Earthquake and Firestorms of 1906*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), xix-xx.

<sup>26</sup> Dyl, *Urban Disaster*, 128; Russell Sage Foundation, *San Francisco Relief Survey*, 404.

<sup>27</sup> Russell Sage Foundation, *San Francisco Relief Survey*, 77.

<sup>28</sup> “60639 Persons Dependent on Charity for their Food,” *San Francisco Examiner*, June 6, 1906.

Between May 9, 1906 and June 8, 1908, relief officials tried to concentrate the refugees within the military camps, and then to help them move out to new homes. In a proclamation to refugees, Mayor Eugene Schmitz stated “all those living in tents are requested and directed to move immediately... [to] one of these large camps supervised by the proper military authorities,” because it would be more “efficient” for refugees to be concentrated in as few camps as possible. It was simply impossible for the military to monitor sanitary conditions in the dozens of smaller camps.<sup>29</sup> As mentioned earlier, there were technically 26 official military camps, but even this number is misleading. In the *San Francisco Relief Survey* list of official camps, they are numbered from 1 to 31, but numbers 11, 12, 14, 27 and 31 were ultimately left as “unofficial.” This confusion in the numbering shows how the line was blurred between “official” and “unofficial” camps in the beginning of the relief effort, as relief officials tried to select which camps among the 100 “unofficial” camps they would support. Furthermore, the first four military camps, which were centered in the Presidio Fort, all closed quickly by June 12, 1906, and the thousands of Presidio refugees were ushered into other military camps. Another unusual official camp was Number 18, Mission Square, which opened on June 5, 1906, and closed the following day. However, Mission Square opened again on November 19, 1906, under a new number, 29, after earthquake cottages had been built there. Other camps included Number 3, Presidio Fort Winfield Scott, which was meant for the Chinese; Number 6, G. G. Park Speedway, which was meant for the aged and infirm; and Number 26, Ingleside Race Track, which was also meant for the aged and infirm. These camps were unique because they were segregated. The longest lasting

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<sup>29</sup> “Mayor Schmitz Issues a Proclamation Ordering Concentration of Tent Dwellers,” *San Francisco Examiner*, May 12, 1906, 1.

camp was Number 9, Lobos Square, which closed on June 30, 1908. Most other camps had closed by the end of 1907.<sup>30</sup>

However, even though the military estimated that there were 40,000 homeless people living in tents and shacks by June of 1906, they recorded only 17,242 refugees living in the official camps in the same month.<sup>31</sup> Clearly, it was difficult to usher all refugees from the unofficial camps to the official camps, since the military controlled less than half of the remaining homeless San Franciscans. Over the next year, the total population of the official military camps (excluding Ingleside) fluctuated from 14,000 to 18,000; Ingleside Camp was excluded from the *Relief Survey*'s records because officials believed that the aged and infirm could not integrate back into society. Then from August 1907 to December 1907, there was a sharp decline in camp population from 15,785 to 3,367.<sup>32</sup> This push came from Rudolph Spreckels, head of the *San Francisco Chronicle* and the Relief Committee's Camps Department, who wanted to close the camps by the end of the year. He asserted that he wanted the remaining shelters and earthquake cottages "all removed from the camps within the next two months if [he] had to have the buildings torn down over the heads of refugees." Many articles in the *Chronicle* continued to spread this anti-refugee sentiment in the spring and fall of 1907.<sup>33</sup> Spreckels' harsh assessment of the refugees actually reflected a common opinion from many upper- and middle-class San Franciscans, who were tired of seeing reminders of the disaster in the refugee camps in their public parks.<sup>34</sup> It was increasingly difficult for the wealthy citizens to sympathize with their poorer neighbors who were still struggling to get back on their feet. Finally, when Lobos Camp

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<sup>30</sup> Russell Sage Foundation, *The San Francisco Relief Survey*, 404.

<sup>31</sup> Russell Sage Foundation, *The San Francisco Relief Survey*, 77, 81.

<sup>32</sup> Russell Sage Foundation, *The San Francisco Relief Survey*, 404.

<sup>33</sup> Katharine C. Felton to Major General George W. Davis, National Red Cross, September 21, 1907, Red Cross Papers, National Archives, quoted in Bolton, "Recovery for Whom?", 70.

<sup>34</sup> Bolton, "Recovery for Whom?", 61.

closed in June of 1908, there were only 703 refugees remaining (excluding the refugees from Ingleside, who had already been transferred to a poor house). Because there was an apparent drop in homeless San Franciscans from 40,000 to 703, the writers of the *San Francisco Relief Survey* considered the refugee camps a great success.<sup>35</sup>

In 1906 there were three dominant ideas of how to practice disaster relief: “traditional” methods, progressivism, and socialism. Disaster relief had long held a special place in American history, beginning with churches. During the Great Awakening in the 1740s, the famous evangelist George Whitefield raised funds from his flock to give to disaster victims. Following the churches’ examples, wealthy philanthropists, cities, schools, businesses, and other clubs also formed temporary committees to provide aid during the 1800s. Americans even organized relief efforts for catastrophes in foreign countries. For example, in 1847 disparate groups including the New York Chamber of Commerce, the Philadelphia Quakers, and the Choctaw Indians raised almost \$600,000 to address the Irish potato famine. Sociomedical scientist Marian Moser Jones wrote that this endeavor was emblematic of antebellum disaster relief; local communities formed committees to raise funds, but these committees competed with one another rather than coordinate their efforts.<sup>36</sup>

Following the Civil War, “traditional methods” refers to the ways in which charities practiced relief in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It was the vaguest of the three ideas because it was not accompanied by a sweeping national philosophical movement. However, the 19<sup>th</sup> century “traditional methods” were significant because they demonstrated the beginning of the transition from local charity dominance to national charity dominance with the American Red Cross. By

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<sup>35</sup> Russell Sage Foundation, *The San Francisco Relief Survey*, 87-88.

<sup>36</sup> Marian Moser Jones, *The American Red Cross from Clara Barton to the New Deal*, (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2013), 31-32.



1906, these traditional methods formed the backbone for disaster relief work, even though organizations were advancing to newer methods.

When Clara Barton founded the American chapter of the Red Cross in 1881 she created something different from antebellum relief, where Americans would be able to effectively make charitable donations to a single national, independent volunteer organization.<sup>37</sup> Initially the Red Cross' main objective was to accompany local charity work. It began as a small, female-led volunteer organization which sought to "supplement" military and local relief committees with caring, individualized attention to disaster victims. This reflected gender ideologies of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>38</sup> Relief was personal, "feminine," and subjective. Because relief was personal, there was inevitably a moral evaluation of disaster victims. Traditional methods of subjectivity and moral evaluations were still influential at the time the earthquake struck. Even though the Red Cross began as a small group, its growing prominence in the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century led to a new emphasis on coordination in relief efforts, rather than competition, since Barton's group worked in tandem with local charities. Eventually, when the Red Cross joined the relief efforts after the San Francisco earthquake, its members had to deal with other charitable groups, such as the military, politicians, wealthy philanthropists, and similar organizations such as Associated Charities and the Salvation Army. Fortunately, experience from "traditional" methods in the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century allowed these disparate groups to overcome their differences and coordinate. On the other hand, that same experience dictated that it was right to morally judge victims.

Coming on the heels of postbellum "traditional methods" were progressive relief methods, the second ideology that influenced relief workers after the 1906 earthquake. The

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<sup>37</sup> Jones, *The American Red Cross*, 31-32.

<sup>38</sup> Jones, *The American Red Cross*, 37.

Progressive movement of the 20<sup>th</sup> century gave social workers new ideas about charity. It was a distinctly American movement and reflected middle-class values. The Progressive Era spanned from 1890 to 1920 and came in response to corruptions caused by industrialization. Although there were many political and social reforms during this time period, it was not a clearly unified movement. Andrea Rees Davies noted that scholars have been unable to provide a precise definition for the term “progressivism” because there were actually many different groups with different agendas. However, all of these groups agreed that some kind of reform was needed to confront unregulated businesses, which caused both terrible working and living conditions.<sup>39</sup> Thus, progressivism was still a more unified movement than the ideas surrounding “traditional methods” of relief in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Furthermore, although there were various strands of progressive groups that scholars struggle to define, historian Robert H. Wiebe’s description of progressivism best matches the particular ideals of the social workers who moved to San Francisco in 1906: “The heart of progressivism was the ambition of the new middle class to fulfill its destiny through bureaucratic means.”<sup>40</sup> In other words, the relief workers in San Francisco were predominantly middle-class individuals who believed that organization and bureaucracy were the keys to solving corruption.

Another important progressive ideal that was common among 1906 relief workers was “positive environmentalism.” During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it was all too common for social workers to want to repress immorality and blame people’s social class on their behavior; this led to moral evaluations. Positive environmentalism was in clear contrast to this perception. Rather, it was based upon the concept that human beings were not morally at fault for their own suffering; instead, poverty was caused by economic forces beyond people’s control. Historian Paul Boyer

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<sup>39</sup> Davies, *Saving San Francisco*, 6.

<sup>40</sup> Robert H. Wiebe, *The Search for Order, 1877-1920* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967), 166.

defined positive environmentalism as a “more subtle and complex process of influencing behavior and molding character through a transformed, consciously planned urban environment.” This means that relief workers still believed that they could influence behavior, but through more indirect means. They would tackle the environmental causes of poverty, crime, and vice instead of enforcing moral standards on poor people. In theory, repressing vices would only be addressing the symptoms. For example, historian Marie Bolton noted that people who opposed prostitution showed a shift from discussing “social purity” to “social hygiene.” Although the progressive reformers still believed that prostitution was immoral, they were increasingly using public health analogies to try to resolve these problems. Thus, bureaucracy and positive environmentalism provided the theoretical backbone for San Francisco’s relief workers.<sup>41</sup>

When translating progressivism to charity, progressive relief work sought to be efficient, “masculine,” and objective, as opposed to Clara Barton’s traditional “feminine,” “subjective” work. The new emphasis was to improve the economy first by giving grants to skilled workers, people with property, and people who showed promise of becoming self-sufficient.<sup>42</sup> Dr. Edward T. Devine, head of the San Francisco Red Cross division, and Katharine Felton, the Associated Charities leader, were two prominent San Francisco progressives who promoted positive environmentalism. They planned to tackle the environmental crimes through efficient bureaucracy, and they hoped to end moral evaluations of poor people’s character. They thought that this would lead to more objectivity in distribution of relief funds.<sup>43</sup> By 1906, most politicians and relief officials viewed progressivism in relief methods as the ideal model.

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<sup>41</sup> Bolton, *Recovery for Whom?*, 53; Paul Boyer, *Urban Masses and Moral Order in America, 1820-1920* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978), 201-202, 221; Davies, *Saving San Francisco*, 6-7.

<sup>42</sup> Davies, *Saving San Francisco*, 54.

<sup>43</sup> Davies, *Saving San Francisco*, 6-7, 43; Jones, *The American Red Cross*, xiv; Bolton, *Recovery for Whom?*, 196-197.

Finally, socialist relief methods were a third ideal. While relief workers in San Francisco were predominantly influenced by traditional and progressive ideals, many refugees and a few social workers embraced socialism. Although 20<sup>th</sup> century socialism also came in response to problems with industrialization, many progressive Americans were terrified of it because it reflected working-class values. Furthermore, while progressivism was distinctly American, socialism had European origins. Like progressivism, socialism can be difficult to define since there have been so many different strands throughout history, but at its heart was a call for the government to enforce a more equitable distribution of wealth. Thus, socialists in disaster relief called for a more equitable distribution of relief funds. This was in clear conflict with progressive relief methods, which emphasized discrimination between refugees in order to rebuild the economy more quickly. In a way, socialists sought even more objectivity than progressives; they believed that working-class refugees should be treated equally to property owners and skilled workers.<sup>44</sup> Ultimately, socialism did influence a few social workers, though it was always more popular with the working class.

Examples of how middle-class Americans felt towards socialism can be found in *Charities in the Commons*, the national journal written by social workers for social workers. Dr. Devine happened to be the Editor-in-Chief of *Charities*, and so its writers were acutely aware of the situation in San Francisco. In the 1907 volume, *Charities* presented both a critique and a defense of socialism in relief efforts. Firstly, it published Attorney General Charles J. Bonaparte's lecture at Carnegie Hall. Bonaparte reflected most middle- and upper-class opinion in his heavy critique of socialism. He wrote that "the root of Socialism is that all men of right ought to be...precisely equal," but this doctrine was "arbitrary" and "justified neither by reason nor by history." He furthermore believed that to pursue a socialist definition of charity was

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<sup>44</sup> Davies, *Saving San Francisco*, 79.

unchristian, since Christians ought to have the liberty to give alms of their own free will. Finally, he closed by saying that there were many unworthy poor people with no self-respect, who would take charity they didn't need.<sup>45</sup> Thus, socialism was altogether immoral and impractical. On the other hand, some social workers were willing to consider the benefits of socialism. In a shorter article from the same volume of *Charities and the Commons*, John Reid wrote that if society was communal, people would work harder to improve society's corruptions.<sup>46</sup> In spite of some acceptance from radical social workers, most politicians and relief officials viewed socialism as dangerous.

When organizations tried to implement these abstract ideals, the lines between these definitions blurred. The American Red Cross was one such organization that struggled to define relief. While it had the special privilege of being the official relief organization, the ARC was in the middle of a dramatic transition period during the San Francisco crisis between 19<sup>th</sup> century traditional methods and 20<sup>th</sup> century progressive methods. This hindered effective, united leadership of relief efforts in San Francisco, and also affected the victims.

Clara Barton had founded the organization on the principles of humanity and neutrality, abstract ideals that essentially meant that the Red Cross would provide aid to anyone who suffered, regardless of background.<sup>47</sup> The Red Cross repeatedly changed its definition of "neutrality" over the years in the face of social controversies. Barton used "neutrality" to advocate for the needs, if not the rights, of disaster victims.<sup>48</sup> However, since Barton's Red Cross was personal and subjective, moral evaluation was still prominent in relief work. Furthermore, Barton's usual approach to disasters was to focus on meeting urgent needs without keeping

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<sup>45</sup> Charles J. Bonaparte, "Socialism and Charity," *Charities and the Commons*, 18 (1907): 148-153.

<sup>46</sup> John Reid, "A Plea of a 'Parlor Socialist,'" *Charities and the Commons*, 18 (1907): 154-155.

<sup>47</sup> Jones, *The American Red Cross*, x.

<sup>48</sup> Jones, *The American Red Cross*, xiii.

balance sheets. After Congress incorporated the Red Cross in 1900, Barton was heavily criticized for her sloppy methods.<sup>49</sup> She was finally ousted in 1904 by progressives who promised to make the organization more efficient.<sup>50</sup>

Mabel Boardman, a Washington socialite, became the new leader, and she sought to “masculinize” the organization by hiring more government officials and businessmen.<sup>51</sup> These new leaders embodied the spirit of the Progressive Era and they promised efficiency and objectivity in relief work. Then in January 1905, Congress repealed the charter of the former “American National Association of Red Cross” and reincorporated the charity under the new semi-official designation “American National Red Cross.” Its new charter gave the society greater influence; it provided for the establishment of branches in every state and territory, which would all be prepared to offer immediate relief in case of disaster. No longer would the Red Cross merely provide supplementary work; it was empowered by the federal government to be the country’s most influential charity.<sup>52</sup>

On the other hand, this also meant that the Red Cross lost its independence, which Clara Barton had always held dear. While the old charter had required the organization to submit an annual report to Congress, the new charter required the Red Cross to provide a “complete, itemized report of receipts and expenditures of whatever kind” to the Secretary of War. William Taft, that cabinet official, even became the Red Cross’ president. Barton had always envisioned the Red Cross as a populist organization. Independence from the federal government allowed it to maintain political neutrality in controversial situations so it could carry out the people’s will. For example, in 1892 Barton insisted on carrying out the American donors’ will to aid starving

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<sup>49</sup> Jones, *The American Red Cross*, 97; Davies, *Saving San Francisco*, 52.

<sup>50</sup> Davies, *Saving San Francisco*, 53

<sup>51</sup> Jones, *The American Red Cross*, xiv.

<sup>52</sup> Davies, *Saving San Francisco*, 53; Harold French, “How the Red Cross Society Systemized Relief Work in San Francisco,” *The Overland Monthly* (48:4, October, 1906), 195.

Cubans, even as American ships blockaded Cuba's harbors. The new charter, which gave the War Department authority over the Red Cross, would surely prevent such populist ideals in the future. However, Barton no longer had any say in the organization, and the charter ensured that no one person would hold absolute power again, as she had before 1900. These changes were designed to make the Red Cross more powerful and efficient. In the October 1906 edition of the *Overland Monthly*, Harold French wrote that it was fortuitous that Congress had recently reorganized it "with special provisions in its charter that prepared it for just such an emergency as this greatest disaster of modern times [the San Francisco earthquake]". Although the Red Cross was prepared in theory, the progressive hires were still new. When the earthquake shook San Francisco in 1906, no administrator had any experience in dealing with disaster relief.<sup>53</sup> This meant that there was naturally an uneven transition between the traditional 19<sup>th</sup> century approaches and progressive 20<sup>th</sup> century approaches.

Further complicating the situation, President Theodore Roosevelt angered San Francisco's politicians when he proclaimed that the Red Cross would be the only authorized organization to receive and distribute relief donations.<sup>54</sup> Roosevelt handpicked Dr. Edward Devine, the young head of the New York Charity Organization Society, to lead the San Francisco division of the Red Cross. On April 19, Taft instructed him to go to California to take charge of the relief funds and the various military and civil relief bodies. When he arrived, city politicians were less than welcoming; they had already organized a group of gentlemen to handle relief funds, called the "Committee of Fifty." According to the *San Francisco Call*, these

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<sup>53</sup> Congressional Research Service, "The Congressional Charter of the American National Red Cross," Report RL33314, March 15, 2006 (<http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/RL33314.pdf>), accessed March 1, 2014, citing U.S. Congress, 58<sup>th</sup> Cong., 3<sup>rd</sup> sess., Dec. 19, 1904, 406; Charter of 1905, 33 Stat. 599-602; Davies, *Saving San Francisco*, 53; French, "How the Red Cross Society," *The Overland Monthly*, 195; Jones, *The American Red Cross*, 113-115.

<sup>54</sup> Fradkin, *The Great Earthquake*, 201.

gentlemen took umbrage with this “new semi-official” organization, because the President seemed to imply that he was “dissatisfied” with their control of the money. The relief leaders quickly put together a meeting, in which Devine affirmed that he “came as a messenger of good will...not to criticize or obstruct.” He also acknowledged that neither he nor the President were aware that San Francisco had already organized an “efficient” relief committee “comprising the best men in the community.” He did not plan for the Red Cross to “monopolize” the work, but rather to coordinate with other charities. To show that he wouldn’t impose on them, he volunteered to telegraph the President immediately that “the work is admirably managed” and to “recommend that its management remain undisturbed.” Devine’s promises soothed the politicians’ egos. Ultimately, the charity organization and the city politicians compromised when the Red Cross and the government Finance Committee joined together to create the San Francisco Relief and Red Cross Funds (SFRRCF). Later, Devine remained positive about this merger, for “every act of [the] committee was in accordance with the ideas of the Red Cross society.” Thus, city politicians and the Red Cross found that since they shared similar progressive ideals, it was easy to coordinate with each other, and the Red Cross was able to retain its powerful status.<sup>55</sup>

In putting their progressive ideals into practice, the Red Cross workers still discriminated between disaster victims, redefining neutrality again. Officials favored refugees who already had businesses and property; their goal was to reestablish pre-disaster social classes.<sup>56</sup> In an interview with the *Call*, Devine affirmed that the Red Cross’ most “important consideration” was “enabling people to get back to work and support themselves.” However, this was specifically

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<sup>55</sup> Davies, *Saving San Francisco*, 53; French, “How the Red Cross Society,” *The Overland Monthly*, 201; “Nation and City Aid Sufferers: Doctor Devine and Citizens’ Relief Committees Will Distribute Millions Together,” *The San Francisco Call*, April 25, 1906, 1-2; “Red Cross Would Assist Citizens to Help Themselves: Says He Admires the Pluck of the People: Dr. Edward T. Devine Reviews the Situation,” *San Francisco Call*, April 28, 1906, 2.

<sup>56</sup> Davies, *Saving San Francisco*, 54.



meant for those refugees who were “deserving,” a word which appeared again and again in articles about San Francisco’s relief. The Red Cross donated more liberally during April, but afterwards they became much more careful in discriminating between refugees. For example, in April the military established “community kitchens” to give meals to poor refugees. On May 9, General Greely issued a proclamation that starting May 12, refugees would need Red Cross tickets to receive food; in order to qualify for a ticket, a person would have to be “extremely destitute.”<sup>57</sup> The Red Cross’ early policies demonstrated that they held high expectations for “deserving” refugees to quickly become self-reliant.

Essentially, the Red Cross had three stages for handling refugees: registration, distribution, and rehabilitation. For the first step, refugees had to register with the official relief corporation to receive any funds. Devine sent out trained investigators to search the city and register all those they believed to be “deserving.” Already, the Red Cross was proving to be more subjective than objective in its treatment of poor people. The need to register people was also one of the main reasons refugees were encouraged to settle into official camps; it was much easier to keep track of them. The primary camps were at the Presidio, Golden Gate Park, Harbor View, and other public parks. For every “deserving” family, the investigators would fill out a card detailing the head of the household, their previous and present address, their religious or fraternal affiliation, and their occupations. The investigator would then fill out a blank order form which read, “Upon proper investigation, I find that Mr. \_\_\_\_ is in need of the following articles...”, and then it would list the number of family members. The Red Cross’ diction in their blank order forms showed that they were primarily interested in helping male breadwinners, rather than women or single people. They were also inherently still moralistic. Afterwards, the

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<sup>57</sup> French, “How the Red Cross Society,” *The Overland Monthly*, 203; “Red Cross Would Assist Citizens to Help Themselves” ; “Red Cross Tickets Necessary for Food,” *San Francisco Examiner*, May 9, 1906, 2.

investigators would send out their card to the Red Cross Chair of their division, and after that the refugees could receive their aid. Although moral evaluations were still implicit, the Red Cross' bureaucratic methods appeared to be more efficient.<sup>58</sup>

By 1907, registration cards for refugees were even stricter. A blank recommendation form from 1907 was no longer aimed at male breadwinners. Rather, these forms were ostensibly only for women, children, and sick men. This change demonstrates that male breadwinners were expected to have become self-reliant by this point. On these forms, refugees had to describe their background, their marital status, their occupation, and their means of support. In case they were unemployed, they would explain their reason for not working. They would also have to note if they had already received aid.<sup>59</sup> Refugees who were not working or had already received aid were viewed as lazy and untrustworthy. Thus, the Red Cross maintained 19<sup>th</sup> century definitions of the “deserving” and “unworthy” poor in their distribution of relief funds.

After registration, the Red Cross would systematically distribute the appropriate “articles” to worthy refugees. As stated before, refugees who proved themselves destitute could receive meal tickets for the community kitchens. By gradually shrinking the community kitchens and shaming the “destitute” refugees, they were able to decrease the number of refugees who were reliant on the food kitchens. On April 30, 313,000 individuals went to the kitchen; by May 10, only 225,000 came. This number dwindled to approximately 20,000 by July 1, and by August the kitchens were discontinued. Starting in May, they also started serving the food only every other day. Beyond food, Red Cross officials also used the recommendation forms to distribute clothing, bedding, and other necessities to refugees. Overall, the refugees had very little say in the distribution of funds. Because the Red Cross' main objective was rehabilitation, relief

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<sup>58</sup> French, “How the San Francisco Society,” *The Overland Monthly*, 203-204.

<sup>59</sup> Russell Sage Foundation, ed., *San Francisco Relief Survey*, 437.

officials believed it would be better if the relief system was shameful to refugees, to better encourage them to become self-reliant.<sup>60</sup>

Finally, to achieve its goal of rehabilitation, the Red Cross established employment bureaus throughout the city. Although work was difficult to come by in the wake of the disaster, there was a sense of impatience in newspaper articles. The *Call* insisted by the end of April that “everyone realizes that San Francisco has no use for idlers,” while the *Examiner* ran the headline “San Francisco Is No Place For Idle Men” on May 1. Unfortunately, the unemployment problem was not easily fixed; even though the city needed to be rebuilt by laborers, most trades were out of a job. Because of this, it was extremely difficult for refugees to become self-reliant again. Unfortunately, over time, citizens from the upper- and middle-class became less patient and less sympathetic to the refugees’ pleas for assistance.<sup>61</sup>

San Francisco’s poorest refugees did not passively accept the Red Cross’ official, discriminatory measures. Many of them used the space within their camps to organize protests. On August 1, 1906, refugee men and women filed incorporation papers to create the United Refugees, the biggest organization to challenge progressive methods. They called for financial control of the relief fund in order to purchase property for homeless refugees. Thus, the United Refugees’ reflected a socialist point of view. However, just as the Red Cross had to modify its progressive definition of relief, the United Refugees had to adapt its socialist ideals to gain traction in a capitalist city. Furthermore, while the Red Cross was a national organization, the United Refugees exemplifies one of the grass roots organizations that was launched to empower

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<sup>60</sup> French, “How the Red Cross Society,” *The Overland Monthly*, 204.

<sup>61</sup> “Red Cross Society Opens a Temporary Employment Office,” *The San Francisco Call*, May 1, 1906, 1; “Red Cross Would Assist Citizens to Help Themselves,” “San Francisco Is No Place for Idle Men,” *San Francisco Examiner*, May 1, 1906, 16.

poor refugees. There were two major events that led to the foundation of the United Refugees: the “Flour Riot” trial and the SFRRRC banquet protest.<sup>62</sup>

Earlier that month, one hundred refugee women who were tired of slow bureaucracy and waiting in line for flour rations stormed the Moulder warehouse and took two thousand pounds of flour. Refugee women were particularly vocal protesters against the official relief corporation because the Red Cross initially favored male breadwinners, and because they felt responsible for providing food and clothing for their families. The *San Francisco Chronicle* was initially skeptical of the protesters in its coverage of the Flour Riot. On July 7, it described them as “excited women” who would not “listen to reason” when the guards insisted they follow regulations. Furthermore, it implied that there were no genuinely “destitute” women among them, and that many of them had tried to cheat the system by coming to the warehouse twice to collect a second ration of flour.<sup>63</sup>

Nevertheless, over the next few days the *Chronicle*’s portrayal of the women became more sympathetic. One of the protesters, Mrs. Maude Brown, filed battery charges against a warehouse guard, Captain Killian. After she showed the police that “her arm was still black and blue from the alleged treatment,” he was swiftly arrested. Over time Mrs. Brown and Captain Killian became “minor players” in the courtroom; it was the progressive relief system that was on trial. On July 18, the *Chronicle* reported that “the cruel army officer” Killian was found guilty. Judge Connin declared that it was Mrs. Brown’s right to ask for the flour because “it was sent for the people,” and Killian had violated her rights by “[ejecting] her from the line.” Ironically, Judge Connin did not specifically mention the battery charges, but rather denounced

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<sup>62</sup> Davies, *Saving San Francisco*, 79; “Refugees Incorporate; Fire Sufferers Organize, Select Name and Announce Relief Plans,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, August 2, 1906, 4.

<sup>63</sup> Davies, *Saving San Francisco*, 75; “Irate Women Mob the Keepers of the Relief Stores,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, July 7, 1906, 8.

the Relief Corporation's bureaucratic methods as unjust. Refugees in the courthouse applauded, and Dr. Devine of the Red Cross called the verdict a "travesty of justice." This time the *Chronicle* sided with Judge Connin, "defender of the people," and characterized the clashing definitions of relief as the "spirit of the West and the spirit of the East." Judge Connin's "free Western method of charity" held that relief should be given to "all people at all times." Meanwhile, New Yorker Dr. Devine's "Eastern" methods were found to be exclusionary and coldhearted. It was the first time refugees scored a victory in the courts, and led many to question who should control the relief funds.<sup>64</sup>

After the Flour Riot, many refugees challenged the SFRRC's methods and demanded direct access to relief funds. The *Chronicle* interviewed one refugee woman in the aftermath who insisted that she didn't want flour; "The papers say the money [relief fund] belongs to the people, and I want mine." Many refugees like her began to organize committees within the refugee camps. Jefferson Square Camp stood out as a hotbed for frustrated poor people, as leaders from the "Committee of the Whole" and the "Committee of Friends of Refugees" lived there. In mid-July, flyers calling for the resignations of relief officials Phelan, Devine, and Pollock were scattered on city streets. The flyer defined the "Red Cross funds" as a "gift of the people of the United States to the refugees and sufferers of the earthquake," and it accused the three officials of squandering the money on "automobiles, large salaries and other needless expenditures." If they didn't resign, the people would be forced to resort to tar and feathers. The flyer was signed by the "Committee of the Whole," but the Committee's secretary Joseph M. Clark denied knowledge of the circular; rather, he insisted that the statements were "too mild" for his organization. This mysterious flyer connected with the Committee of Whole helped redefine

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<sup>64</sup> Davies, *Saving San Francisco*, 75; "Irate Women Mob the Keepers of the Relief Stores," *San Francisco Chronicle*, 8; "Captain J. N. Killian is Found Guilty of Battery," *San Francisco Chronicle*, July 12, 1906, 1.

“relief” for the refugees, but another protesting group, the Committee of Friends of Refugees, was more successful in recruiting followers with its powerful protest against Devine’s farewell banquet. These two early grass roots organizations helped pave the way for the larger United Refugees.<sup>65</sup>

The SFRRRCF banquet honoring Dr. Devine was the second major event that inspired the foundation of the United Refugees. Because the Red Cross leader was retiring from the relief commission on August 1, his peers wanted to honor his hard work with an elaborate feast on July 31. This badly timed celebration came on the heels of the Flour Riot, when refugees were already questioning official policy. The Committee of Friends of Refugees took the opportunity to advertise their cause: “Let the whole world know that while we are starving they are feasting. Such infamy was never known.” Thousands of refugees surrounded the banquet hall “with banners and torchlights” to protest an unfair distribution of food. Mary Kelly was one of the committee leaders who roused the public with her speeches. She later wrote about the event in her pamphlet, *Shame of the Relief*: “the staff of the Relief Corporation were banquetted [sic] to the finest of everything that money could buy...from the very funds which were sent here with which to rehabilitate the sufferers and victims of the great disaster.” Clearly, refugees were appalled by the SFRRRCF’s display of wealth; it created momentum for a larger protest organization, the United Refugees.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> “Refugees Make Queer Demands,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, July 17, 1906; “The three traitors! Devine, Phelan and Pollock,” (San Francisco, [1906]), The Bancroft Library, <http://content.cdlib.org/search?brand=eqf&style=eqf&relation=bancroft.berkeley.edu+collections+earthquakeandfire&subject=Devine%2C+Edward+T.+%28Edward+Thomas%29%2C+1867-1948>; “Quake Victims Make Threats,” *New York Evening Telegram*, July 20, 1906, The Virtual Museum of San Francisco, <http://www.sfmuseum.org/press/clip22.html>, accessed April 6, 2014.

<sup>66</sup> Harold French, “How the Red Cross Society,” *The Overland Monthly*, 206; Committee of Friends of Refugees, “Refugees Attention, July 31, 1906, San Francisco Earthquake and Fire Collection, San Francisco Public Library; “No One Went from the Devine Banquet to Convince the Refugees of Red Cross Sincerity,” unknown newspaper source, August 1, 1906, San Francisco Virtual Museum Archives; Mary Kelly, *Shame of the Relief: Being an Expose*

On the same day that Dr. Devine retired, refugees incorporated the United Refugees, which would become the most vocal grass roots refugee organization. The society's chairman was Alva Udwell, a socialist San Francisco lawyer; he and the other fourteen directors announced that their purpose was to provide "a scientific and charitable organization to protect the rights, privileges, and immunities of its members." Although Udwell brought socialist beliefs to the organization, from the very beginning the group avoided using the word "socialism." Instead, the United Refugees claimed that they also sought "scientific" methods of providing aid to refugees, using similar language to the progressive relief leaders to appear more respectable. They did not say what the "scientific" base of their definition of relief was; it was more important for them to tap into refugees' frustration with the official relief bureaucracy. On the other hand, because they avoided outlining clearly socialist theories in their writings, they were rejecting "top-down" socialist attempts to take over the organization. In other words, the grass roots organization was meant to be as populist and inclusive as possible; descriptions of socialist theories were not as important. To be successful in "protecting its members" from the Red Cross' discriminatory policies, the United Refugees demanded direct control over the millions of dollars in the relief fund. Once the group had control, it ambitiously strove to "carry on and conduct co-operative stores, factories, bakeries, restaurants, commission houses, farms, poultry growing, cattle, sheep and horse raising and any other co-operative enterprise that is desired." Such a brazen challenge from poor refugees to the official relief corporation could hardly hope to succeed, but the members of the United Refugees carried on anyway; their situation was desperate and they were passionate in defending their rights.<sup>67</sup>

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*of the Disgraceful Methods of the Relief Committee During the Dark Days Following San Francisco's Great Disaster* (San Francisco, June 1, 1908), 8.

<sup>67</sup> Davies, *Saving San Francisco*, 79; "Refugees Incorporate; Fire Sufferers Organize, Select Name and Announce Relief Plans."

An examination of the United Refugees' Enrollment Card also gives clues to the organization's definition of relief. The card was more inclusive than the Red Cross' recommendation forms, because it did not ask about the person's job history, and it did not depend on a recommendation from a Red Cross investigator. When a person signed this card, he or she claimed to have a "share in the relief funds;" that person further "[consented] to have my share in said relief funds being used in the building of homes and I demand that my share in said funds be forthwith distributed to" the United Refugees. Thus, with this card, the United Refugees established that every victim had a personal share in the relief fund, and a corporation could only control that person's share with his or her consent. The Red Cross would never have used such an inclusive, democratic method because it would have been inefficient. This contrast highlights the United Refugees' strength as a grass roots organization; because it appealed directly to the people, refugees felt empowered to participate. The Red Cross was unpopular with United Refugees members because it belittled and shamed "destitute" people. While both the Red Cross and the United Refugees sought control over the relief money, the Red Cross achieved its power through presidential recognition and cooperation with the city politicians. The United Refugees could only hope to gain power through appealing directly to the disenfranchised people and through popular support.<sup>68</sup>

In the face of such challenges, the United Refugees logged many defeats, but also achieved some surprising victories. The *Examiner* recorded one of its early failures in September. The Relief Committee had placed \$60,000 donated by the City of Los Angeles in the bank, where it was collecting interest. W. T. Love, one of the organization's managers, wrote to the Relief Committee and asked that the money be forwarded to the refugees, but his request was

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<sup>68</sup> "United Refugee Enrollment Card," 1906, in Marie Louise Bine Rodriguez, *The Earthquake of 1906* (San Francisco: Privately Printed, 1951), 49.



denied. Failures like this were expected, but they did not stop the refugees from organizing committees and sending delegates to the “official” committee. Then in 1907, United Refugees leaders Alva Udwell and Mary Kelly took their complaints to Sacramento, where they lobbied for a bill that would create a “public relief commission.” This commission would consist of five appointed citizens who would have the “power to receive, distribute, and disperse of the real properties and all moneys...given or bequeathed for relief of any sufferers [of any disaster in California].” Clearly, if such a panel were to exist, it would seize control of the funds from the Red Cross, and potentially empower the refugees. Udwell and Kelly came close to success; the bill passed in the State Assembly but failed in the Senate. This was a severe setback for the organization.<sup>69</sup>

Though the organization sometimes garnered sympathy in the press, the progressive Red Cross and politicians refused to take it seriously.<sup>70</sup> In a Report to the Massachusetts Association for the Relief of California, in which relief officials investigated complaints, they wrote that the United Refugees’ position was “unjustifiable” and that the spokespeople were “systematic stirrers-up of discontent.” Although they were “undoubtedly well intentioned,” their plans were “visionary and often socialistic,” and their ideas were “harmful in making others... discontented with their lot.”<sup>71</sup> Although relief officials were not entirely dismissive of the United Refugees, since they acknowledged that the group’s leaders were well intentioned, they still held that the organization did not have any facts to back up its arguments. They maintained that it was truly more harmful than good because it stirred up trouble.

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<sup>69</sup> Davies, *Saving San Francisco*, 81-82; “Declines to Give Money to United Refugees,” *San Francisco Examiner*, September 7, 1906; Kelly, *Shame of the Relief*, 14; Assembly Bill 898, Resolution, February 14, 1907, *Assembly Journal*, 18.

<sup>70</sup> Davies, *Saving San Francisco*, 79.

<sup>71</sup> “Report to the Massachusetts Association for the Relief of California,” San Francisco, California, September 27, 1906; Taken from the Virtual Museum of San Francisco, <http://www.sfmuseum.org/1906/mass.html>.

The United Refugees had a complicated relationship with socialism. They never called themselves socialist in their circulars or speeches, but relief officials still derided them as such.<sup>72</sup> Dr. Rene Bine, a camp commander, attended one of their meetings “to see the fun” and condemned the “socialistic movement” in a letter to his superiors.<sup>73</sup> Although Alva Udell brought socialist ideals to the organization, the United Refugees did not want to be branded as troublemaker socialists; they wanted to be inclusive for all refugees. In putting socialist ideals into practice, they had to hide any mention of socialism, and they also effectively drew upon the city’s working class who had experience protesting for the rights of laborers.<sup>74</sup> Ultimately, though they did not succeed in their primary goal of controlling the relief fund, they still drew attention to class-discrimination in scientific social work.

Beyond the ways in which organizations defined relief when they put abstract ideals into practice, people had even more varied definitions of relief depending on their social class or occupation. Individuals were particularly affected by their experiences within the refugee camps. Those with power, such as politicians or relief officials, sought to shape the camps to promote their views on relief, and those with little power, such as refugees, could use the camps to organize among themselves.

Among the ranks of powerful individuals, James D. Phelan stands out, as events after the earthquake catapulted him to becoming one of San Francisco’s most prominent politicians. Phelan was a wealthy, Catholic, banker-capitalist who regularly corresponded with President Roosevelt and also exerted influence over the military. Although he did not have specific plans

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<sup>72</sup> “United Refugee Enrollment Card,” 1906, in Marie Louise Bine Rodriguez, *The Earthquake of 1906*, 49; “The Three Traitors! Devine, Phelan, and Pollock,” [San Francisco, 1906], from the Bancroft Library Digital Archives, <http://content.cdlib.org/search?brand=eqf&style=eqf&relation=bancroft.berkeley.edu+collections+earthquakeandfire&subject=Devine%2C+Edward+T.+%28Edward+Thomas%29%2C+1867-1948>, accessed April 6, 2014.

<sup>73</sup> Correspondence from Rene Bine to the Adjutant of Permanent Camps, n. d. [July, 1906], printed in Bine Rodriguez, *The Earthquake of 1906*, 48.

<sup>74</sup> Davies, *Saving San Francisco*, 79; Dyl, *Urban Disaster*, 121.

for bringing bureaucracy into relief like Dr. Devine of the Red Cross, Phelan still espoused moralistic progressive views. However, writer Philip L. Fradkin characterized his progressive views as being “two-faced”; while he publicly “personified disinterested reform,” he privately sought political power. His racist attitudes towards ethnic Asians were also apparent in his personal definition of relief, though Fradkin wrote that his beliefs were typical for the time period.<sup>75</sup> Before the earthquake, Phelan had recently lost his mayoral reelection campaign, which made his post-quake ascent to the position of chairman of the Finance Committee remarkable. In his new position, Phelan wielded enormous control over the relief fund. He used his new power to prosecute some of his colleagues for graft and to reinforce racial segregation within the refugee camps.<sup>76</sup> Though Phelan was successful in expanding the city’s relief fund, his personal definition of relief is significant because of his hostility towards the Chinese community; for him, relief work presented an opportunity to restructure San Francisco and permanently remove Chinatown.

As Phelan told the *Boston Herald* in an interview, “California is white man's country, and the two races [white and Asian] cannot live side by side in peace, and inasmuch as we discovered the country first and occupied it, we propose to hold it against either a peaceful or a warlike invasion.”<sup>77</sup> Phelan’s plan was to segregate the Chinese in a camp outside the city limits, and thus prevent them from moving back to Chinatown.<sup>78</sup> After all, Chinatown was prime real estate set between the affluent Nob Hill and the Financial District. The other members of the general committee were receptive to Phelan’s ideas, but they soon clashed over where to relocate the

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<sup>75</sup> Fradkin, *The Great Earthquake*, 25-28.

<sup>76</sup> Fradkin, *The Great Earthquake*, 197-198; James D. Phelan, “The Situation in San Francisco,” *New York Evening Post*, June 1, 1907, from the Virtual Museum of San Francisco, <http://www.sfmuseum.org/conflag/phelan2.html>.

<sup>77</sup> James D. Phelan, “Rejoices at the Fall of Schmitz in 'Frisco,” *The Boston Sunday Herald*, June 16, 1907, from the Virtual Museum of San Francisco, <http://www.sfmuseum.org/conflag/phelan.html>, accessed April 6, 2014.

<sup>78</sup> Davies, *Saving San Francisco*, 93.

Chinese. The Reverend Thomas Filben, chairman of the committee on the housing of the Chinese, suggested moving them to vacant blocks at Van Ness Point. Phelan immediately objected; even though Van Ness Point would have been a temporary camp, Phelan feared that local property owners would find it “an extremely profitable thing to house Chinese.” Thus, the Finance Committee Chairman proposed moving them even farther to Hunter’s Point. Strangely, the *Chronicle* reported that the Chinese had been moved to Van Ness, while the *Examiner* described the new Chinese camp at Hunter’s Point. The reason for this newsprint confusion is likely due to the fact that the Chinese were unceremoniously shuffled from one camp to another over the next few weeks.<sup>79</sup>

The committee’s treatment of the Chinese, inspired by Phelan’s definition of relief, discouraged both Chinese refugees and the Chinese consulate. Nevertheless, Phelan failed to permanently remove them. Historian Ying Zi Pan charted how the Chinese managed to organize relief efforts and take back Chinatown. In spite of the odds, the Chinese community emerged stronger than ever, and they even championed reforms to help protect their settlement.<sup>80</sup> In this instance, the Chinese community’s unified definition of how to pursue relief was ultimately more successful than the politicians’ divided opinions. Similar to the United Refugees, they formed grass roots organizations by appealing directly to their people, though they were more successful than the United Refugees in fulfilling their goal, which was to take back their land. The strength

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<sup>79</sup> Gladys Hansen, “Relocation of Chinatown,” Virtual Museum of San Francisco, June 1, 1996; Daves, *Saving San Francisco*, 93; “Chinese Colony at Foot of Van Ness: The Plan to Remove Celestials to San Mateo County is Opposed,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, April 27, 1906; “Chinese Housed at Presidio – Later they Will Go to Hunter’s Point,” *San Francisco Examiner*, April 27, 1906; “New Chinatown Near Fort Point: Oriental Quarter Removed from Presidio Golf Links at Request of Property Owners,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, April 28, 1906; “Now Fear that the Chinese May Abandon City: Citizens of San Francisco are Now Confronted with Problem in which Trade with the Orient is Involved,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, May 2, 1906; “Want Chinese on the Front: May be Sent East of Telegraph Hill,” *San Francisco Examiner*, May 4, 1906.

<sup>80</sup> Ying Zi Pan, “The Impact of the 1906 Earthquake on San Francisco’s Chinatown,” (PhD diss., Brigham Young University, 1991), 204.

of Phelan's hatred of the Chinese wasn't enough to implement his view. However, Phelan's definition of relief reflected many individuals who were prejudiced against ethnic minorities.

While Phelan was representative of how most of San Francisco's civic leaders defined relief, the city's social workers held a different perspective. It is easy to blame politicians for having ulterior, power hungry methods; sadly, in the year after the earthquake, the city's newspapers were filled with stories of political corruption and finger-pointing. In comparison, a social worker had entirely different connotations of selflessness and charity; and yet San Francisco's news outlets often criticized the relief officials as well. It was widely recognized that politicians and social workers cooperated with each other despite their differences; after all, the government Finance Committee and the San Francisco Red Cross had merged to form the SFRRCF. They seemed to share the same progressive ideals. In the *Overland Monthly*, Dr. Devine related that the merging was a "public-spirited measure," and the joint committee "was able to work as a unit." Remarkably, "every act of this committee was in accord with the ideas of the Red Cross society," and they were free from "petty jealousies." However, in spite of their organizations' similar definitions, politicians and social workers clearly had different responsibilities that shaped their individual views. For example, refugee camps shaped both groups' definitions of relief in different ways; politicians such as Phelan were more indirectly involved with the camps, while social workers directly managed them. With this in mind, relief officials Dr. Edward T. Devine and Dr. René Bine make for a revealing comparison of two powerful social workers; their different experiences with the refugee camps led these men to prioritize different aspects of relief.<sup>81</sup>

Both Dr. Devine and Dr. Bine were young, middle-class, male leaders in the relief corporation. They threw themselves into the relief effort because they were passionate about

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<sup>81</sup> French, "How the Red Cross Society," *Overland Monthly*, 201.

helping people, even though they were accepting arduous jobs. Devine moved across the country from New York to live in California for a few months, and Bine had even contracted typhoid before the earthquake struck.<sup>82</sup> Dr. Devine was the head of the Red Cross division in San Francisco, while Bine was the camp commander of Harbor View Camp, the largest refugee camp.<sup>83</sup> Both Devine and Bine favored progressivism and decried socialism, but Devine was more distant from the refugees because of his position, whereas Bine became more sympathetic to the refugees since he lived in close contact with them.

Dr. Devine was deeply influential in establishing professional training and bureaucratic organization in social work, as opposed to moral evaluation of refugees. Although he received a cold welcome from the local politicians upon his arrival, he was widely regarded as highly qualified. In addition to being a prominent member of the Red Cross, Devine was also president of the National Conference of Charities and Corrections, general secretary of the Charity Organization Society of New York, and he filled the Schiff chair of practical philanthropy at Columbia University. In his spare time, he worked as Editor-in-Chief of *Charities and the Commons*, the national journal for social workers, and he was invited to give lectures about systematic relief work in England. Progressives admired Devine for reducing charitable work to an “exact science.” Once he took charge of the Red Cross in San Francisco, Devine was able to implement his personal definition of relief; he sought to “assist citizens to help themselves,” specifically “deserving” citizens.<sup>84</sup>

Devine’s views on relief work were naturally in line with progressivism, but they were also shaped by his distance from San Francisco’s homeless people. Throughout the Red Cross’

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<sup>82</sup> Bine Rodriguez, *The Earthquake of 1906*, 5; “Red Cross Would Assist Citizens to Help Themselves.”

<sup>83</sup> Bine Rodriguez, *The Earthquake of 1906*, 31; Jones, *The American Red Cross*, 118.

<sup>84</sup> French, “How the Red Cross Society,” *Overland Monthly*, 200-201, 206; “Red Cross Would Assist Citizens to Help Themselves.”

three stages of Registration, Distribution, and Rehabilitation, refugees encountered discrimination every step of the way. Whether a person was “deserving” usually depended on his or her pre-disaster social class. James Motley, one of the authors of the *Relief Survey*, explained that business rehabilitation grants were “confined almost entirely to re-establishing families in a line of business in which they had been engaged as proprietors.” Another section of the *Relief Survey* detailed the “bonus plan,” which offered a maximum of \$500 to property owners who would rebuild in San Francisco. Thus, the Red Cross under Devine clearly favored business- and property owners in its distribution of relief funds. Ultimately, Devine was unfazed by protesting refugees because he believed that his scientific methods were efficient. He blatantly retorted, “We pay them [relief workers] to discriminate,” in response to such charges. While Phelan was unsuccessful in his goal to remove Chinatown, Devine certainly succeeded in his own goal to reestablish pre-disaster social classes. Because of this, he was called a hero by his fellow progressives, and was vilified by poor refugees.<sup>85</sup>

While Dr. René Bine also favored the discriminatory progressive methods promoted by relief leaders and politicians, his proximity to the refugees made him more sympathetic to their plight. In 1906, Bine was a 24-year-old physician who had just started his private practice in San Francisco. After the earthquake struck, Bine was the first person on his block to come out fully dressed. He ordered everyone to turn off their gas meters, and used a pistol to persuade the driver of a passing automobile to take him to the German Hospital. He barely slept over the next few days as he rushed from one place to another to care for injured patients. Although he was not internationally famous like Dr. Devine, he was still an impressive presence in San Francisco; he was already a member of the Executive Committee of the San Francisco County Medical

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<sup>85</sup> Rees Davies, *Saving San Francisco*, 54; James M. Motley, “Housing Rehabilitation,” *San Francisco Relief Survey*, 184; Russell Sage Foundation, *San Francisco Relief Survey*, 242, table 75.

Society. According to his daughter, Dr. Bine “must have enjoyed every minute of his thrilling adventures”; in spite of his illness, he was eager to be a leader. Because of his authoritative personality, the military entrusted him with increasingly difficult projects. Finally, after the military left, they entrusted him to become the first civilian Camp Commander. He was in charge of Harbor View Camp, the largest refugee camp in 1906, from July 2 to November 23. During his tenure, Bine had to deal with rebellious refugees, but his frustrations with them paled in comparison to his aggravating dealings with the SFRRCF leadership, who continually withheld supplies from him.<sup>86</sup>

Dr. Bine’s position required constant contact with the refugees, so even while he favored progressivism, he also learned to empathize with them. Camp Commanders were expected to live in their respective refugee camps, and they were held responsible for any occurrence which might cause newspaper scandal. They were also responsible for registering all refugees and enforcing sanitation rules. Commanders held complete control of their camps; Bine decided who was allowed to enter and where they should live. All applicants had to prove themselves destitute, and refugees within his camp relied on his sponsorship to receive any aid from the SFRRCF. Inevitably, refugees were at the mercy of Bine’s personal prejudices. For example, Bine sought to segregate “moral degenerates” in his camp since he feared that they would become “another white man’s burden” if he ejected them. Furthermore, he was unwilling to support “meddlers,” such as Joanna Dohrman, who belonged to the United Refugees and accused Bine of throwing her to the ground when she asked for a ration of milk; Bine insisted that her story was incorrect and refused to give her any subsequent funding. Davies characterized his

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<sup>86</sup> Bine Rodriguez, *The Earthquake of 1906*, 1-5; “Correspondence from J. A. Gaston to The Commanding Officer,” June 28, 1906, printed in Bine Rodriguez, *The Earthquake of 1906*, 30 ; “Memorandum to Camp Commanders,” November 19, 1906, printed in Bine Rodriguez, *The Earthquake of 1906*, 99; “List of Official Camps,” *The San Francisco Relief Survey*, 1913.



attitude as “paternalistic,” since he insisted that the refugees would be better off if they followed his judgment. An article in the *Call* reported that he was even involved in settling disputes between housewives, and in reprimanding disobedient children. Over time, after seeing “socialist” meetings of the United Refugees in his camps, Bine grew more afraid of rebellious refugees; after July 18, he carried “a cane, a revolver, and a police whistle, which he used frequently” whenever he made his nightly rounds. Clearly, Dr. Bine’s paternalistic definition of relief was overall in line with progressive relief officials.<sup>87</sup>

On the other hand, the doctor also felt a profound sense of empathy for the refugees since they were his neighbors. Though he was nervous of “drunkards” and “moral degenerates” within his camps, they never posed a serious threat to his position. In contrast, his rocky relationship with the SFRRCF leadership prevented him from doing his job. In September, when Bine criticized the camp kitchen meal ticket policies as “impractical and unnecessary,” Rudolf Spreckels promptly fired him for insubordination—although he was almost immediately rehired for his experience. A more pressing matter that kept the physician from caring for the refugees was that relief officials continually withheld supplies from him. Dr. Bine’s letters to his superiors became increasingly terse and blunt. A typical message to the Quartermaster of Permanent Camps on August 7 simply read: “We need oil. We need it for the sterilizers. We need it badly. We need it NOW.” His superiors believed that it was wasteful for Bine to ask for so much and that the refugees should be more independent, while Bine saw that if the refugees just received a little additional help—a new pair of shoes, or extra money to pull them through underemployment—they would be able to make a new start. Additionally, Dr. Bine’s letters demonstrated how difficult life in refugee camps was, since there was a chronic lack of necessary

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<sup>87</sup> Bine Rodriguez, *The Earthquake of 1906*, 31, 49; Davies, *Saving San Francisco*, 96-97, 99-100; Unknown title, *San Francisco Call*, May 12, 1906, cited in Bine Rodriguez, *The Earthquake of 1906*, 21; René Bine, “Recommendation to Relief Headquarters,” July 16, cited in Bine Rodriguez, *The Earthquake of 1906*, 47.

items such as bedding and tents.<sup>88</sup> Looking at Dr. Devine and Dr. Bine, it is clear that one's distance from the refugee camps influenced a relief official's definition of charity. While still progressive in nature, Bine's definition of relief was more sympathetic towards the refugees.

Outside of the groups of social workers, there were several middle-class leaders who still criticized progressive relief work and formed their own definitions of relief. Among these individuals was Mrs. Constance Lawrence Dean, a prominent journalist for *The San Francisco Call*. Seeking a dramatic story, the *Call* sent her to live undercover for a week in a refugee camp under the alias "Margaret Jennings." There, she would study the lives of the city's homeless, and finally relate the "true" story of San Francisco's camps, "exaggerating nothing and minimizing nothing." The experience deeply affected her, and she wrote a long article for the *Call*'s front page on July 16, 1906. While the language of Dean's article was typically sensational, she backed up her arguments with quotes and documents. Ultimately, Dean's story was a heavy denouncement of "scientific social work"; instead of making things more efficient, the SFRRCF's bureaucracy was mismanaged to the point of inhumanity. In her own words, relief had been "snarled by red tape."<sup>89</sup>

Throughout her story, Dean outlined the progressive relief officials' specific wrongdoings and mistakes. She wrote that conditions were appalling, and even though there were "no evident attempts to swindle," there was a "mismanagement so woefully apparent that the least complaining, longest suffering cry out against it." Her portrayal was also noteworthy because she did not characterize the refugees as "lazy loafers." While other journalists were insistent that refugees had no excuse to be unemployed, Dean recognized that these people were

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<sup>88</sup> "Bine Talks Back and Is Ousted," *San Francisco Call*, September 10, 1906; Bine Rodriguez, *The Earthquake of 1906*, 68-69; Correspondence between René Bine and Quartermaster H. S. Johnson and Executive Officer Henry H. Scott, cited in Bine Rodriguez, *The Earthquake of 1906*, 72-73, 76-77.

<sup>89</sup> Constance Lawrence Dean, "The True Story of 'Margaret Jennings, Refugee,'" *The San Francisco Call*, July 16, 1906.

hardly idle, but they were struggling to find “permanent work,” and they suffered from low wages.<sup>90</sup>

In the beginning of her adventure, when her pretend “benefactress” dropped her off at Golden Gate Park, they were greeted by a Red Cross minister, Christopher Ruess, who immediately informed them that “the park is a poor place for a woman to stay.” Her “benefactress” chose to leave the impoverished “Margaret Jennings” there anyway. Ruess took pity on the woman, and she overheard him say that he couldn’t “risk delay by going through red tape,” and so the most efficient way to find her a home would be to walk from tent to tent until they found a group of women who would be willing to take her in for money. Unfortunately, none of the refugees would accept her, even when offered cash. Ultimately, the relief workers gave her a private tent, but she had no bedding for three days; the warehouses were empty. While Dean admired that Mr. Ruess and other officials would have personally helped her, and some were even willing to pay out of their own pocket to assist refugees, she was disgusted that they would have to resort to this when San Francisco had received millions of dollars in donations.<sup>91</sup>

Beyond criticizing the mismanagement of supplies, Dean also explained that she had to complete copious amounts of paperwork, and she had to wait in impossibly long lines to receive aid. Additionally, she wrote that the food kitchens were filled with “distressing odors and half musty food” that “dispelled desire to eat.” Her critique was noteworthy because there were many relief officials, such as Dr. René Bine, who believed that the food kitchens were the safest, most sanitary options for providing meals to refugees. In contrast, Dean thought that the kitchens were revolting. She saw that most refugee women preferred to make their own meals if they could afford to buy the ingredients. Her personal assessment of the food kitchen meals is echoed in *The*

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<sup>90</sup> Dean, “The True Story of ‘Margaret Jennings, Refugee.’”

<sup>91</sup> Dean, “The True Story of ‘Margaret Jennings, Refugee.’”

*Refugee's Cook Book*, a small recipe book compiled by a woman refugee for other women refugees. Besides providing recipes for various soups, salads, entrees, and desserts, the cookbook also described a useful method to clear one's house or tent of flies: by burning cayenne pepper. Overall, *The Refugee's Cook Book* demonstrates the truth of Dean's arguments that life in refugee camps was unbearable; families did not tolerate nauseating kitchen meals, and their homes were covered in flies. More to the point, Dean argued that even as progressive relief officials ostensibly desired refugees to be independent, their actions actually made this goal more difficult. By encouraging poor people to take temporary, low-paying jobs; through failing to provide necessary supplies; and by encouraging communal kitchens, they were making poor people more dependent. Although Dean wasn't a relief worker, the *Call* was one of the city's three major newspapers, so her voice was heard. Dean reflected a middle-class group of people who thought the Red Cross' scientific social work was still inhumane.<sup>92</sup>

Finally, the refugees themselves formed various definitions of relief based on their own experiences in the relief camps. One of the most prominent refugees who criticized progressive relief methods was the Irish working-class mother Mary Kelly. Mary and her husband, William, were both over fifty years old and in poor health, and they had to care for their children. After the family's home was destroyed, they wandered to Jefferson Square. On the first night, Mary Kelly described that they "lay on the hillside...without any covering, the burning sparks falling all about and around us."<sup>93</sup> Because they could not afford the high rental rates after the disaster, the Kellys eventually settled in one of Jefferson Square's tents, where they lived during the summer and fall of 1906. Eventually, they were able to move to an "earthquake cottage" in Mission Park in January 1907, but they lost the cottage when the refugee camps were closed in

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<sup>92</sup> Dean, Constance Lawrence, "The True Story of 'Margaret Jennings, Refugee'; *The Refugees' Cook Book* (San Francisco: Compiled by Hattie O. Bouruau: n.d.), 12, from the Bancroft Library Digital Archives.

<sup>93</sup> Mary Kelly, *Shame of the Relief*, 3.

the fall of 1907, and they could not afford to move it. Although she had never engaged in protest movements before, Mary Kelly's tumultuous experience led her to become an activist for refugees' rights. In her own words, she told the *Call*, "my case is the case of every refugee in San Francisco."<sup>94</sup> Despite her humble origins, Kelly successfully organized protests against relief officials' actions.<sup>95</sup>

Mary Kelly's definition of relief was closest to socialism, because she consistently demanded that the refugees themselves should control the relief fund. She thought that this would lead to a greater distribution to poor people like her family. Indeed, her family's difficulties in finding a home demonstrated that the earthquake was truly more harmful to the working class. If her family had been richer, or if she had better connections, she clearly would have had a better chance at finding an affordable house. Instead, Kelly used her voice to rally her fellow refugees to her cause, and to protest that they deserved better treatment. Kelly never characterized herself as a socialist in her speeches or writings. She was not an intellectual, and abstract ideals were not as important to her. Rather, she was primarily focused on concrete issues that plagued the homeless' daily lives. For example, Kelly was one of the speakers who rallied the refugees outside of Dr. Devine's farewell banquet. She also became the chairwoman of the Grievance Committee of the United Refugees, and she joined Alva Udell in traveling to Sacramento to lobby the state government. However, her most famous exploit involved her personal protest of the Red Cross' policy of rental rates on "earthquake cottages." In November 1906, she made headlines when she refused to move out of her camp cottage or pay rent; she argued that the cottages were donated to disaster victims, and it was a shame for the officials to make a profit by forcing rental rates. Ultimately, her cottage was carted out of the camp while

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<sup>94</sup> "Mrs. Kelly's House is Her Fort," *The San Francisco Call*, November 5, 1906, 9.

<sup>95</sup> Davies, *Saving San Francisco*, 76; Dyl, "Urban Disaster," 99.

she was still inside. Although Mary Kelly continued to struggle to survive, she maintained her belief that she was right, and is an outstanding example of a refugee who created her own definition of how relief efforts should be practiced.<sup>96</sup>

Thus, despite her many setbacks, the working-class mother made a name for herself. Earnest P. Bicknell, Devine's right hand man in the Red Cross division, still remembered her years later as "a constitutional agitator... [who] was violently critical of conditions, no matter what they were. Loud, aggressive in voice and manner." Considering that the odds were stacked against her, Kelly was at least successful in calling attention to the refugees' plight. Today, California historians remember her bravery and her own definition of relief, that the poorest refugees deserved as much consideration as the "worthy" refugees.<sup>97</sup>

This paper has presented a complex, layered view of the three dominant ideas of relief at the time, two organizations that were influenced by these ideas, and a handful of individuals from different walks of life who formed their own definitions of relief from their experiences with San Francisco's refugee camps. Progressivism and socialism are abstract ideologies, and so the organizations that sought to put these ideas into practice had to adjust to their surroundings. Inexperienced Red Cross workers were still heavily influenced by traditional relief methods, and the United Refugees had to be careful to avoid saying "socialism" in a capitalist society. Furthermore, the individuals within these organizations had even more varied definitions of relief based on their personal experiences and needs.

However, this portrayal of relief methods after the San Francisco earthquake is not comprehensive. For instance, there were many other relief organizations besides the Red Cross and the United Refugees. Katharine Felton led the San Francisco Associated Charities, another

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<sup>96</sup> Davies, *Saving San Francisco*, 76-77, 79, 81-82, 108; "Mrs. Kelly's House is Her Fort."

<sup>97</sup> Davies, *Saving San Francisco*, 76; Dyl, *Urban Disaster*, 99-100; Ernest P. Bicknell, *Pioneering with the Red Cross: Recollections of an Old Red Crosser* (New York: Macmillan, 1935), 57-58.

powerful group, which worked in tandem with the SFRRCF. Associated Charities representatives carried out investigations of refugees which were necessary to determine who was “worthy” and who was not. Thus, they upheld progressive methods. However, the Associated Charities’ definition of relief differed from the Red Cross; while Devine argued that relief officials should focus on returning victims to their pre-disaster social status, Felton had larger goals, and believed that they should “permanently and materially” improve the poor refugees’ lives. The relief leaders’ contrasting definitions naturally influenced their organizations. Other unofficial relief societies included local Chinese merchants, middle-class women volunteers, and Catholic nuns. These groups challenged the SFRRCF’s policy of prioritizing aid to white, upper-class citizens, just as the United Refugees had. Nonetheless, the Red Cross’ progressive policies prevailed.<sup>98</sup>

It would also be false to assume that all of the homeless working-class belonged to the United Refugees. Dr. René Bine recorded that many of his refugees from Harbor View Camp would warn him of their “socialistic” meetings, implying that they were grateful to their camp commander and disapproved of the trouble caused by the “chronic kickers.” Again, Bine’s view of socialism was much larger than the protesting refugees, who scarcely mentioned the word. While he saw it as an overreaching, troubling intellectual movement, most refugees were concerned with more concrete issues such as how to get their next meal. Thus, while Bine appreciated those refugees who warned him about “socialistic” meetings, it is likely that the refugees only distanced themselves from socialism because they knew the association would hurt them when applying for aid. In contrast, Bine’s disapproval of socialism was more principled. Furthermore, when Bine attended a United Refugees meeting in his camp, he noted that “full stomachs prevented... my refugees” from complaining about the meal kitchens. While Bine was

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<sup>98</sup> Davies, *Saving San Francisco*, 55, 63; *Associated Charities of San Francisco: Annual Reports, 1904-1910*, 5.

clearly prejudiced, his accounts still suggest that there were many refugees who did not challenge progressive methods. They did not want to risk losing what little aid they received. On the other hand, as reported by Constance Lawrence Dean, life in the refugee camps was unbearably harsh. This prompted some of the “least complaining, longest suffering” to take a stand. Thus, an examination of the United Refugees remains useful, because it was the largest refugee organization with the greatest potential.<sup>99</sup>

Beyond representing organizations’ definitions of relief, this paper could hardly claim to be representative of all individuals’ perspectives on relief methods. While there is a special focus on a politician, James D. Phelan; an intellectual relief leader, Dr. Edward T. Devine; a lower relief official, Dr. René Bine; a sensationalist journalist, Constance Lawrence Dean; and a working-class refugee, Mary Kelly; these five individuals only provide a glimpse of the variety of definitions people created for themselves within the refugee camps. These figures even disagreed with other members of their own social strata on how to define relief. This is exemplified by Phelan’s clash with his fellow committee members over where to move the Chinese camp. Furthermore, the primary reason that these individuals were emphasized was that they left behind easily accessible primary sources. Mary Kelly was particularly outstanding because there were very few refugees who wrote about their experiences; not only were her exploits documented in the major newspapers, but she even published her own pamphlet in 1908, *Shame on the Relief*.<sup>100</sup> Unfortunately, surviving documentation of the experiences of ethnic minorities is rare; even descriptions of individual Chinese refugees are few and far in between. However, this brief sampling of various individuals shows that factors such as social class,

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<sup>99</sup> Bine Rodriguez, *The Earthquake of 1906*, 48; Correspondence from René Bine to the Adjutant of Permanent Camps, n. d. [July 1906], printed in Bine Rodriguez, *The Earthquake of 1906*, 48

<sup>100</sup> Mary Kelly, *Shame of the Relief*, 1908.



occupation, and position within the refugee camps affected the way people developed personal definitions of relief, and how they sought to implement those definitions.

In the aftermath of the San Francisco relief efforts, many poor people were left in neighborhoods that were worse than the ones they inhabited before the earthquake.<sup>101</sup> However, politicians and relief workers across the country lauded the American Red Cross' efforts to save the city. *The San Francisco Relief Survey*, published in 1913 and written by leading social experts, said that the Red Cross' actions should be used as an example for future disasters.<sup>102</sup> Thus, progressive methods influenced national concepts of relief. Indeed, present-day views of the "deserving" and "undeserving" poor haven't changed significantly in a century. A particularly egregious example of San Francisco's long-standing influence was the relief effort after Hurricane Katrina. Marian Moser Jones noted that "*precisely the same* issues that sent New Orleans residents to the picket lines in 2007, provoked San Franciscans to protest the American Red Cross in 1907 [her emphasis]." In both cases, the Red Cross raised a record-breaking amount of funds, but "left the people living in temporary structures, impoverished, and often unable to care for themselves." In response, refugees accused the Red Cross of withholding funds and mistreating the poor.<sup>103</sup> Changing definitions of relief within San Francisco's refugee camps marked a turning point in the United States' history of disaster relief; progressive relief methods became the ideal model, while refugees' voices were silenced.

While the 1906 earthquake was a localized catastrophe, it was shortly followed by the Spanish influenza disaster, which affected the entire country. In her study of the 1918 epidemic, Nancy K. Bristow reflected that "as a culture, the United States has exhibited a profound

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<sup>101</sup> Russell Sage Foundation, *San Francisco Relief Survey*, 233.

<sup>102</sup> Russell Sage Foundation, *San Francisco Relief Survey*, 278.

<sup>103</sup> Marian Moser Jones, "Confronting Calamity: The American Red Cross and the Politics of Disaster Relief, 1881—1939," (PhD diss., Columbia University, 2008), 6.

tendency to evade, misrepresent, or even mythologize those parts of its past that are difficult, that do not fit somehow with their view of themselves.”<sup>104</sup> She was referring to Americans’ erasure of the influenza epidemic as part of the nation’s history, as well as their attempts to rewrite traumatic experiences such as slavery into optimistic, redemptive tales. Her words can also be easily applied to the nation’s response to the San Francisco earthquake.

Almost immediately after the disaster, the press was filled with articles claiming that the city would soon rise from the ashes, “undaunted.”<sup>105</sup> However, the reality of the situation was far more complex; many of the city’s homeless refugees had little hope to rise again, because the SFRRRCF’s relief policies were inherently discriminatory towards them. On the one hand, it seems unfair to criticize San Franciscans for daring to express hope after the earthquake, since hope is necessary for humans to cope with disaster. Conversely, it is equally unfair to erase the experience of San Franciscans who despaired. This erasure of individuals’ despair remains constant even in contemporary accounts of the San Francisco earthquake, which tend to be much more critical of the progressive leadership than the *San Francisco Relief Survey* was. For example, in Andrea Rees Davies’ *Saving San Francisco: Relief and Recovery after the 1906 Disaster*, a comprehensive account of the relief effort published in 2012, the historian chose to end Mary Kelly’s story on a hopeful note; she wrote that in 1911, Kelly was one of the first women in California to register to vote, as a “labor unionist in politics.”<sup>106</sup> However, Davies neglected to mention another tragedy in Kelly’s life; in 1907 a drunken man murdered her two

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<sup>104</sup> Nancy K. Bristow, *American Pandemic: The Lost Worlds of the 1918 Influenza Epidemic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

<sup>105</sup> “Will Rise Again in Splendor,” *San Francisco Call*, April 21, 1906; “Swirl of Fire Ends and Hope Runs High,” *San Francisco Call*, April 22, 1906; “Future is Bright for San Francisco,” *San Francisco Examiner*, April 22, 1906, 1; “San Francisco Will Be More Beautiful and Prosperous than Ever,” *San Francisco Examiner*, April 22, 1906, 3; “Undaunted!” political cartoon, *San Francisco Examiner*, May 3, 1906, 20.

<sup>106</sup> Davies, *Saving San Francisco*, 110; “Feminine Traits Enter Politics,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, October 18, 1911.

adult daughters, and then killed himself.<sup>107</sup> Mrs. Kelly had heard of his threats and was not able to warn her daughters in time. Thus, depending on where a historian arbitrarily decided to end Kelly's story, the reader would be left with contrasting impressions. While Davies' chosen ending would cause the reader to admire Kelly's resilience, the second would cause the reader to lament that her family suffered from so many disasters. When placed together, they exemplify how it is dangerous for historians to make either happy endings or sad endings a norm. The San Franciscans' lives in the refugee camps were filled with both hope and loss. Their hope manifested in each individual's ability to create and implement his or her own definition of relief, while their despair came from their inability to create a new life for themselves.

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<sup>107</sup> "Murderer Threatened that He Would Kill Entire Family of Wife," *San Francisco Call*, January 7, 1907, 1, 3.