



Ford Foundation records, Office of the President, Office Files of Franklin Thomas

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Summary Information

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| Repository: | Rockefeller Archive Center |
| Creator: | Ford Foundation |
| Title: | Ford Foundation records, Office of the President, Office Files of Franklin Thomas |
| ID: | FA583 |
| Date [inclusive]: | 1968-1995 |
| Physical Description: | 2.4 Cubic Feet |
| Physical Description: | (6 document boxes) |
| Language of the Material: | English |
| Abstract: | <p>Franklin Thomas joined the Ford Foundation in 1979 as the institution's seventh president, becoming the first African-American to head a major philanthropy. During his tenure, he initiated a Foundation-wide review, assessing grant making procedures and priorities, reorganizing Foundation departments and programs, cutting operating costs, and ultimately increasing the endowment to \$5.8 billion. Mr. Thomas resigned in 1996 after seventeen years and was succeeded by Susan Berresford. The Office Files of Franklin Thomas span from 1968 to 1995 and document Mr. Thomas' leadership as president of the Ford Foundation from 1979 to 1996. The collection is arranged into three series: correspondence files, international program files and domestic programs and grant funded initiatives. Correspondence, interoffice memoranda, grant proposals and reports highlight Mr. Thomas' involvement with Foundation employees and grant applicants. Of particular note are the reports and memoranda highlighting the Foundation's response to the Jennifer Harbury human rights case in Guatemala and the 1992 race riots in Los Angeles. Initiatives such as the Los Angeles Task Force formed in response to the riots, the Puerto Rico Community Foundation established in 1984 to funnel support to the island, and the myriad activities sponsored by the Foundation's field offices reveal efforts to eradicate the roots of social injustice by focusing on underrepresented populations and communities.</p> |

Preferred Citation note

Information regarding the Rockefeller Archive Center's preferred elements and forms of citation can be found at <http://www.rockarch.org/research/citations.php>

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Organizational History

The Ford Foundation was formally established in 1936 by Edsel Ford, son of Henry Ford, to support “scientific, educational and charitable purposes, all for the public welfare.” With the deaths of both Henry and Edsel Ford in the 1940s and the inheritance of their Ford Motor Company stock, the Foundation became the largest philanthropic institution in the world. Henry Ford II, the eldest son of Edsel Ford, commissioned H. Rowan Gaither to lead a seven member study to determine how best to operate the Foundation. The report presented to the Board of Directors in 1949 suggested that the Foundation seek to better social welfare across racial, ethnic, and cultural divides, both nationally and internationally.

Following the resignation of Henry Ford II in 1950, the position of president transferred out of the Ford family. The board of directors decided to diversify the foundation's portfolio and gradually divested itself of its substantial Ford Motor Company stock between 1956 and 1974. Through this divestiture, the Ford Motor Company became publically held and the Foundation became independent of Ford and the Ford family.

In 1979, Franklin Thomas was appointed as the seventh president of the Ford Foundation, becoming the first African-American to head a major philanthropy. Mr. Thomas promptly ordered a Foundation-wide review and restructuring of programs and their divisions. By the end of his third year the staff had decreased in size by over one hundred members in an effort to streamline work and cut operating costs. When Mr. Thomas assumed the presidency, the endowment had been steadily declining. By 1990 it had risen to \$5.8 billion.

Mr. Thomas resigned in 1996 and Susan Berresford, a long-standing Foundation employee, was chosen as his successor, making her the organization's first female president. Ms. Berresford was followed by Luis Ubinas in 2008.

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Biographical Note

Franklin Thomas was born on May 27, 1934 to James and Viola Thomas. Raised in the Bedford-Stuyvesant neighborhood of Brooklyn, New York, Mr. Thomas attended Franklin K. Lane High School where he excelled in both academics and athletics. He was offered and rejected several sports scholarships in favor of an academic scholarship at Columbia University. Following his graduation in 1956, Mr. Thomas entered the Air Force. During the next four years he rose to the rank of captain and served as a navigator on missions with the Strategic Air Command.

Mr. Thomas left the Air Force in 1960 and earned an LLB from Columbia University in 1963. He subsequently worked as an attorney for the Federal Housing and Home Finance Agency, the assistant U.S. attorney in New York, and the deputy police commissioner of New York in charge of legal affairs. In 1967, New York state senator Robert Kennedy met with Mr. Thomas to discuss an agency then in development designed to improve the economic and social welfare of the Bedford-Stuyvesant community. In May 1967, Mr. Thomas accepted the presidency of the Bedford-Stuyvesant Restoration Corporation. He remained at the Corporation for ten years, during which time he raised over \$60 million for community development and restoration with assistance from the Ford Foundation. Mr. Thomas' work became a model for later urban renewal programs.

While president of the Bedford-Stuyvesant Restoration Corporation, Mr. Thomas served on the boards of several major corporations and institutions, including CBS, Citicorp/Citibank, AT&T, and the Cummins Engine Company, and as a trustee of the Ford Foundation. In 1976, he declined President-elect Jimmy Carter's offer of an appointment as Secretary of Housing and Urban Development.

Mr. Thomas resigned from the Bedford-Stuyvesant Restoration Corporation to pursue a career in private practice. When the Ford Foundation offered Mr. Thomas the position of president in 1979, he accepted. He reassessed the Foundation's grant-making procedures, reconsidered grant-making priorities, and redefined the areas of social and cultural activity most in need of Foundation attention. Grants offered by the Foundation during Mr. Thomas' tenure emphasized tangible results, rather than theoretical studies of issues. Under him, the Foundation also limited its practice of funding the operating expenses of small community groups and increased financial support for larger programs with wider recipient bases. One such program established by Mr. Thomas was the Local Initiative Support Corporation (LISC), an organization designed to help small community development programs command large scale projects. Mr. Thomas retired from the Ford Foundation in 1996 after seventeen years of leadership. Since his retirement he has served as a consultant for the TFF Study Group (The Ford Foundation), a non-profit aid organization dedicated to South Africa. He has also chaired the September 11th Fund and functioned as a director of Lucent Technologies and PepsiCo.

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Scope and Content Note

The Office Files of Franklin Thomas span from 1968 to 1995 and document Mr. Thomas' tenure as president of the Ford Foundation from 1979 to 1996. Correspondence, interoffice memoranda, grant proposals and reports detail the activities of Ford staff and grant recipients and highlight Mr. Thomas' own close involvement with Foundation employees and grant applicants.

The correspondence series underscores the enormous volume of mail Mr. Thomas received as president, and the attempt his office made to respond. Mr. Thomas' international, domestic and grant-related program files highlight the Ford Foundation's work in the United States and abroad during his time in office. They chart major events and conflicts, from civil war in Guatemala to race riots and political unrest in Los Angeles, and illustrate the Foundation's response to such crises both at the New York headquarters and at its branch offices.

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Arrangement

Arranged into 3 series.

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Administrative Information

Publication Statement

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Immediate Source of Acquisition note

Ford Foundation archive was deposited at RAC in 2011. Ford Foundation records, correspondence, reports, program files and officers papers were transferred to, and accessioned by, RAC beginning in 2011. Accessions continue as necessary.

Conditions Governing Use note

Completion of a use agreement is required prior to providing scholarly access. See RAC Head of Reference (or applicable designee) for details. Ford Foundation holds title, copyright and literary rights in the collection, in so far as it holds them. The Rockefeller Archive Center has authority to grant permission to cite and publish material from the collection for scholarly purposes. Permission to publish extensive excerpts, or material in its entirety, will be referred to the Ford Foundation.

Processing Information Note

This collection was created by merging two related collections of Franklin Thomas office files separately accessioned by the Ford Foundation Archives in 2011. The smaller collection, comprising a cubic foot and accessioned as ACC2011/012, was merged into the larger collection which was two cubic feet in size. The total original volume of three cubic feet was reduced during processing to 2.4 cubic feet and transferred to six Hollinger document boxes.

The original arrangement of Mr. Thomas' office files was preserved. Two large file folders originally labeled "Miscellaneous" have been arranged and added to the Correspondence series as miscellaneous files. Form letters responding to requests for employment or requests for Mr. Thomas to speak at or attend various events have been weeded from the collection. A sampling of the thank you notes has been retained. Reference and background materials provided by grant applicants, as well as duplicates of grant proposals, grantee reports, and memoranda were not retained.

Conditions Governing Access

Records more than 10 years old are open for research with select materials restricted as noted. Brittle or damaged items are available at the discretion of RAC. Researchers interested in accessing digital media (floppy disks, CDs, DVDs, etc.) or audiovisual material (audio cassettes, VHS, etc.) in this collection must use an access surrogate. The original items may not be accessed because of preservation concerns. To request an access surrogate be made, or if you are unsure if there is an access surrogate, please contact an archivist.

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Related Materials

Separated Materials

Appendix A: Reports – Unpublished reports written by Ford Foundation staff and consultants were removed from their original folders, scanned and transferred to the Archives' collection of staff and consultant reports. See Appendix A for a list of these reports and their specific assigned number. The reports are listed in alphabetical order by author. The assigned number may be used to access reports in the online catalog.

Related Collections

Ford Foundation Resource Identifier: ACC1990/001 – Developing Countries Program, Vice President, Office Files of William D. Carmichael, 1968-1989. This collection documents the administration of Foundation field offices and their programs, as well as the New York-based program staff responsible for handling grants in developing countries.

FA549 Ford Foundation records, International Affairs Program, Department Chronological Correspondence Files, 1991-1996. Consult this collection for additional correspondence files of the International Affairs program.

FA604 Ford Foundation records, United States International Affairs Program (USIAP), Office Files of Enid C.B. Schoettle, 1981-1991.

FA548 Ford Foundation records, International Affairs Division, Program Staff Files, 1964-1990. This artificially created collection of records from International Affairs, the International Division, the Developing Countries Program, and the International Training and Research program offers additional insight into the international work of the Ford Foundation from 1964-1990.

FA503 Ford Foundation records, Africa and Middle East Programs (AME), Program Staff Files, 1965-1976, 1987-1994. The correspondence, memoranda, meeting minutes, and reports contained within these office files provide additional information on Foundation work in Africa and the Middle East.

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Collection Inventory

Correspondence, 1979-1995

Scope and Contents

Mr. Thomas' chronological files comprise the bulk of the correspondence. The records contain thank you notes and letters of appreciation to correspondents unaffiliated with the Ford Foundation. These notes record the lectures, conferences, and events to which Mr. Thomas was invited to attend as well as the books, reports, and miscellaneous items he received while president of the Foundation.

Mr. Thomas had also assembled several subject and miscellaneous correspondence files, and his arrangement has been preserved. The subject files are arranged in alphabetical order and address Mr. Thomas' involvement with the Carter Center, the Center for Effective Philanthropy, and the Independent Sector. Two miscellaneous files, arranged in chronological order, contain correspondence from a variety of individuals, institutions, and foundations on topics including grant requests, Foundation initiatives, and matters of national and international import. Among the correspondents in the miscellaneous folders are Fidel Castro, His Royal Highness Bernhard Prince of the Netherlands, former President Gerald Ford, and several other politicians and sovereigns of note.

| Title/Description | Instances | |
|---|------------------|----------|
| Chronological Files, 1979, Jun-Nov 1979 | box 1 | folder 1 |
| Chronological Files, 1980 (1 of 2), Jan-May 1980 | box 1 | folder 2 |
| Chronological Files, 1980 (2 of 2), Jul-Dec 1980 | box 1 | folder 3 |
| Chronological Files, 1981 (1 of 3), Jan-May 1981 | box 1 | folder 4 |
| Chronological Files, 1981 (2 of 3), Jun-Sep 1981 | box 1 | folder 5 |
| Chronological Files, 1981 (3 of 3), Oct-Dec 1981 | box 1 | folder 6 |
| Chronological Files, 1982 (1 of 3), Jan-Feb 1982 | box 1 | folder 7 |
| Chronological Files, 1982 (2 of 3), Mar-Jun 1982 | box 1 | folder 8 |
| Chronological Files, 1982 (3 of 3), Oct-Dec 1982 | box 2 | folder 1 |
| Chronological Files, 1983 (1 of 2), Jan-Jun 1983 | box 2 | folder 2 |
| Chronological Files, 1983 (2 of 2), Aug-Dec 1983 | box 2 | folder 3 |
| Chronological Files, 1984 (1 of 4), Jan-Mar 1984 | box 2 | folder 4 |
| Chronological Files, 1984 (2 of 4), Apr-May 1984 | box 2 | folder 5 |
| Chronological Files, 1984 (3 of 4), Jun-Sep 1984 | box 2 | folder 6 |
| Chronological Files, 1984 (4 of 4), Oct-Dec 1984 | box 2 | folder 7 |
| Chronological Files, 1985 (1 of 2), Jan-Apr 1985 | box 3 | folder 1 |
| Chronological Files, 1985 (1 of 2), May-Jun 1985 | box 3 | folder 2 |
| Chronological Files, 1989 (1 of 2), Jul-Aug 1989 | box 3 | folder 3 |
| Chronological Files, 1989 (2 of 2), Sep-Dec 1989 | box 3 | folder 4 |
| Subject Files -- Carter Center (and Jimmy Carter), 1979-1994 | box 3 | folder 5 |
| Subject Files -- Center for Effective Philanthropy, 1980-1985 | box 3 | folder 6 |
| Subject Files -- Independent Sector, 1981-1985 | box 3 | folder 7 |

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|--|-------|----------|
| Miscellaneous Files Re: Grant Requests, Foundation Initiatives (1 of 2), 1980-1995 | box 3 | folder 8 |
| Miscellaneous Files Re: Grant Requests, Foundation Initiatives (2 of 2), 1980-1995 | box 3 | folder 9 |

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International Program Files, 1968-1995

Scope and Contents

Correspondence, inter-office memoranda, reports, and meeting materials help illustrate the Foundation's work in Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean during Mr. Thomas' tenure and provide a documentary record of the establishment, upkeep, and periodic relocation of overseas field offices. There are also materials pertaining to program directors and officers such as Enid B. Schoettle, Shepard Forman, Peter Geithner, and William Carmichael. Foundation initiatives described in the International Program Files address issues of governance and social policy, disarmament and arms control, economic and educational reform, women's rights, reproductive health and population control, food production, and land and natural resource management. Of particular note is the file containing Jennifer Harbury's communication with the Foundation's Mexico City office. Harbury, an American lawyer and the wife of a Guatemalan revolutionary kidnapped by the Guatemalan government during his country's civil war, demanded answers regarding the whereabouts of her husband and hoped to collaborate with the Ford Foundation on a project to combat human rights abuses.

Arrangement

Arranged alphabetically by program area.

| Title/Description | Instances | |
|---|-----------|----------|
| Africa and Middle East (AME): Eastern and Southern Africa (Nairobi, Harare) -- Correspondence and Report Re: Ford Foundation in Mozambique, 1993-1995 | box 4 | folder 1 |
| Africa and Middle East (AME): West Africa (Dakar, Lagos) -- Correspondence Re: Ford Foundation Work in Nigeria and Senegal, 1980-1995 | box 4 | folder 2 |
| Africa and Middle East (AME): West Africa (Dakar, Lagos) -- Country Agreements with Ford Foundation (and press releases), 1968-1983 | box 4 | folder 3 |
| ASIA: Bangladesh (Dhaka) -- Correspondence and Report Re: Ford Foundation Work in Bangladesh, 1978, 1981 | box 4 | folder 4 |
| ASIA: China (Beijing) -- Correspondence Re: Ford Foundation Work in China, 1987-1995 | box 4 | folder 5 |
| ASIA: India, Nepal and Sri Lanka (New Delhi) -- Correspondence Re: Ford Foundation Work in India, 1982-1995 | box 4 | folder 6 |
| ASIA: India, Nepal and Sri Lanka (New Delhi) -- Reports Re: Ford Foundation Work in India, 1987, 1990 | box 4 | folder 7 |

| | | |
|--|-------|-----------|
| International Affairs (IA) -- Correspondence Re: Ford Foundation Work in Europe (including memoranda/reports from Enid Schoettle), 1984-1994 | box 4 | folder 8 |
| International Affairs (IA) -- European Grant Lists, 1992, 1994 | box 4 | folder 9 |
| International Affairs (IA) -- Report, "The United Nations Association of the United States of America" by Paul Balaran, Stanley J. Heginbotham, Karel Vosskuhler, Enid C.B. Schoettle, and Crauford D. Goodwin, Oct 1989 | box 4 | folder 10 |
| International Affairs (IA) -- Report, "Record of the Foundation's Istanbul Meeting on Muslim Societies" by Mahnaz Ispahani, Nov 1994 | box 4 | folder 11 |
| Latin America and Caribbean (LAC) -- Inter-Office Memoranda and Reports Re: Ford Foundation Work in Central/South America and Caribbean, 1980-1983 | box 4 | folder 12 |
| Latin America and Caribbean (LAC) -- Report, "Multilateralism in the Western Hemisphere: The Organization of American States" by Veronica Clifford, Nov 1990 | box 4 | folder 13 |
| Latin America and Caribbean (LAC) -- Brazil (Rio de Janeiro) -- Correspondence and Grantee Reports, 1992-1993 | box 4 | folder 14 |
| Latin America and Caribbean (LAC) -- Brazil (Rio de Janeiro) -- Brazil Office 30th Anniversary Conference Materials, 1992 | box 4 | folder 15 |
| Latin America and Caribbean (LAC) -- Mexico and Central America (Mexico City) -- Correspondence Re: Jennifer Harbury Case in Guatemala and Mexico City Office, 1981-1994 | box 4 | folder 16 |

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Domestic Programs and Grant-Funded Initiatives, 1983-1995

Scope and Contents

The third and final series of the collection contains correspondence, inter-office memoranda, grant recommendations, reports, meeting and background materials, and additional items pertaining to the Foundation's domestic programs and grant-funded initiatives. This series is arranged alphabetically by program name. Among those documented are the Foundation's Los Angeles Task Force and Scholar in Residence programs, the National Arts Stabilization Fund, the New York City Partnership, and the Puerto Rico Community Foundation. Of particular significance are the records regarding the Foundation's immediate response to the 1992 Los Angeles race riots and the reports produced by the Foundation's L.A. task force emphasizing both the underlying causes of the riots and the possible prevention of future incidents.

| Title/Description | Instances | |
|--|-----------|----------|
| Education Files -- Correspondence, 1991-1995 | box 5 | folder 1 |
| Los Angeles Task Force -- Grant Summary and Recommendation for Urban Poverty Program, 1992 | box 5 | folder 2 |
| Los Angeles Task Force -- Ford Foundation Meeting and Report Re: Grantee Activities, 1993-1994 | box 5 | folder 3 |

| | | |
|--|-------|-----------|
| Los Angeles Task Force -- Ford Foundation Reports Re: Staff Response to L.A. Riots, 1992 | box 5 | folder 4 |
| Los Angeles Task Force--Grantee Reports and Urban Policy Paper, 1992 | box 5 | folder 5 |
| National Arts Stabilization Fund -- Correspondence, Press Releases, Newspaper Articles, 1983-1991 | box 5 | folder 6 |
| National Arts Stabilization Fund -- Reports Re: Creation and Activities of NASF, 1983-1985 | box 5 | folder 7 |
| National Arts Stabilization Fund -- Press Coverage and Newspaper Articles, 1983 | box 5 | folder 8 |
| New York City Partnership -- Correspondence and Related Materials Re: Partnership and David Rockefeller Fellows Program, 1983-1995 | box 5 | folder 9 |
| Puerto Rico Community Foundation -- Correspondence and Inter-Office Memoranda Re: Establishment of Foundation, 1984-1985 | box 5 | folder 10 |
| Puerto Rico Community Foundation -- Planning Meeting Agendas, Materials, and Foundation Proposals, 1984 | box 5 | folder 11 |
| Puerto Rico Community Foundation -- Press Releases, Directors' Statements, Biographies and Photographs, 1984 | box 5 | folder 12 |
| Scholar in Residence -- BBC Radio Documentary Presented by Sir Brian Urquhart (Transcript), 1987 | box 6 | folder 1 |
| Scholar in Residence -- Lecture and Support Papers Re: United Nations, 1986 | box 6 | folder 2 |
| Scholar in Residence -- Meetings Hosted by Sir Brian Urquhart while Scholar in Residence and Accompanying Discussion Papers, 1989-1990 | box 6 | folder 3 |
| Scholar in Residence -- Proposal, Correspondence and Award Recommendations Re: Sir Brian Urquhart as Scholar in Residence, 1985-1988 | box 6 | folder 4 |

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