



Ford Foundation records, National Affairs Division, Vice President, Office Files of Mitchell Sviridoff

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Rockefeller Archive Center

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Summary Information

Repository:	Rockefeller Archive Center
Creator - aut:	Sviridoff, Mitchell
Creator:	Ford Foundation
Title:	Ford Foundation records, National Affairs Division, Vice President, Office Files of Mitchell Sviridoff
ID:	FA577
Date [inclusive]:	1966-1980
Physical Description:	14.06 Cubic Feet 37 Hollinger document boxes
Language of the Material:	English .
Abstract:	<p>Mitchell Sviridoff served as Vice President for National Affairs from 1967 to 1980. As Vice President, he supported the establishment of programs intended to address the problems of American cities – including poverty, substandard government services, and racial and economic inequality in the justice system. His tenure spanned an important era of social change in American history that included the Civil Rights Movement, the women's rights movement, and the economic downturn of the 1970s. His files illuminate the Foundation's role in forwarding the social and economic justice goals of these movements as well as its actions and responses to national economic crisis. The Office Files of Mitchell Sviridoff consists of subject files and chronological files. There are subject files for the House Ways and Means Committee and the Tax Reform Act of 1969, the New York City Financial Crisis (1975-1976), the Energy Policy Project (1972-1973), the Welfare Policy Project (1975-1977), the Task Force on Women (1972-1974), the Race and Ethnicity Task Force (1972-1974); Supported Work Programs (1973-1978), and Hispanic Immigration (1979-1980). The chronological files largely pertain to grant activities.</p>

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Biographical / Historical

The Foundation's work in urban poverty began with the establishment of the Public Affairs Program in 1952. One of the goals of the new program was to push for greater equality of opportunity for minority groups. In 1965, a National Affairs Division was created to focus on some of the deep-rooted problems facing American society. The program areas under this new National Affairs Division included Social Development, and Urban and Metropolitan Development. The United States and International Affairs Program (USIAP) replaced the National Affairs Division in 1981 after a Foundation-wide reorganization.

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Biographical / Historical

Mitchell Sviridoff was born in New Haven, Connecticut on November 4, 1918. After graduating high school and vocational school, Mr. Sviridoff worked at an aircraft parts assembly plant in Stratford, Connecticut. He held various positions in the labor movement and eventually rose to become President of the Connecticut AFL-CIO. Between 1962 and 1966, he served as Executive Director of Community Progress Inc. (CPI) based in New Haven, Connecticut. CPI, an antipoverty organization founded through a Ford Foundation seed grant, funded grassroots programs in education, employment, housing, youth development, and social services. It quickly became a national model for its human-centered, community-based approach to urban renewal, which focused on providing disadvantaged individuals with the resources, education and employment opportunities they needed for advancement.

In 1966, he became the first Administrator of the New York City Human Resources Administration and was charged with consolidating the City's numerous assistance programs serving low-income communities. During his nine-month tenure, problems developed with staff over intolerable working conditions and he became disenchanted with the agency's unwieldy bureaucratic structure and inertia. He left in 1967 to accept the position of Vice President for National Affairs at the Ford Foundation.

As Vice President for National Affairs, Mr. Sviridoff established a number of programs intended to address the problems of American cities – including poverty, poor quality and delivery of government services, and racial and economic inequality in the justice system. Several of these programs later became separate, free-standing non-profit organizations such as the Vera Institute for Criminal Justice, the Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation, and the Police Foundation.

In addition to his oversight over the Foundation's work with urban renewal, Mr. Sviridoff served as a contact and facilitator between the Foundation and various city, state and the federal governments. These contacts led to his service as a policy advisor to the Nixon Administration on job creation and energy policy during the crises of the 1970s.

In 1980, Mr. Sviridoff left the Ford Foundation to accept a position as the first President of the Local Initiatives Support Corporation, a non-profit organization established by the Foundation to fund

grassroots community development efforts. He left Local Initiatives in 1985 to teach at the New School for Social Research. There, he also directed the Kaplan Center for New York City Affairs at the Milano Graduate School, and founded the School's Community Development Research Center. Mr. Sviridoff died on October 21, 2000, at age 81.

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Scope and Contents

The Office Files of Mitchell Sviridoff document his work as Vice President of the National Affairs Program from 1967 to 1980. His tenure spanned an important era of social change in American history that included the Civil Rights Movement, the women's rights movement, and the economic downturn of the 1970s. Mr. Sviridoff's files reveal the Foundation's role in forwarding the social and economic justice goals of these movements, and its actions and responses to national economic crisis.

The largest group of Mr. Sviridoff's subject files pertains to the House Ways and Means Committee and the Tax Reform Act of 1969. The Tax Reform Act of 1969 sought to curb perceived abuses by wealthy private individuals seeking to shelter their taxable assets by taking advantage of federal tax breaks for charitable institutions. The law impacted the way in which many foundations operated, requiring them to pay out annually in awarded grants a minimum of 5% of their total assets.

Provisions in the law which limited the discretionary autonomy of private foundations in directly awarding grants to individuals and to further political causes were of particular concern to the Ford Foundation. Representatives of the Foundation were called before the House Ways and Means Committee to testify about the proposed reform, which the Foundation opposed because of accusations that it awarded funds for political rather than philanthropic purposes. Perceived to be at stake was the Foundation's work in the Civil Rights Movement and particularly its support for voter registration drives and organizations such as the North Carolina Foundation (1969). The Foundation's awarding of individual study and travel grants to several of Senator Robert F. Kennedy's legislative aides also were questioned.

Documents relating to the Tax Reform Act include correspondence between the Foundation and grantees inquiring whether they had 501(c)(3) status and testimony by Ford President McGeorge Bundy before the House Ways and Means Committee (1969). They also include internal memoranda and reports about the potential impact and possible responses to the Act, statistics from each program listing all grants affected and why, and clippings with references to the Foundation's position and views.

Another set of files details the Foundation's response to the national economic crisis, particularly as it affected New York City from 1975 to 1976. The economic downturn and resulting cuts in municipal funds for social services programs led the Foundation to collaborate with the City and other private foundations to seek ways to help to meet the increased need. The files contain documents and materials from meetings of the multi-foundation Task Force on the New York City Crisis (1976).

Information about the Foundation's response to the energy crisis of the 1970s can also be found in the files. The rise in energy costs precipitated the Foundation's support for the Energy Policy Project

(1972-1973), which was funded as a Delegated Authority Project (DAP). Mr. Sviridoff also served as a member of the Nixon Administration's Energy Policy Advisory Committee (1972-1973).

Mr. Sviridoff's subject files also document the Foundation's increasing support for work related to advancing women's rights. Many of these files pertain to the Foundation's Task Force on Women (1972-1974) and the establishment of a women's program in National Affairs. The files contain reports and papers about the changing attitudes toward women and their role in American society and memoranda describe the recruitment of women within the Foundation and among other philanthropic organizations. There are also proposals from organizations requesting seed grants for projects, including Gloria Steinem's Ms. Foundation (1978-1980).

Additional subjects addressed in the files include job creation strategies developed in partnership with the Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation (1974-1980) including programs for "supported work" (1973-1978); Hispanic immigration to the United States (1979-1980); and the establishment of a Police Foundation to encourage alternative and more effective strategies for policing and interacting with communities (1970-1980).

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Arrangement

The records are arranged into two series.

Collection arrangement is as follows:

Series I. Administrative Subject Files, 1966-1980

Series II. Chronological Correspondence Files, 1975-1978

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Administrative Information

Publication Statement

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URL: <http://www.rockarch.org>

Immediate Source of Acquisition

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 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.

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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.

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Collection Inventory

Administrative Subject Files, 1966-1980

Scope and Contents

This series consists of subject files. Mr. Sviridoff kept files on grantees and grant projects; the work of his program officers; Ford Foundation policy, program areas and task forces; and external projects, task forces and committees on which he worked. There are also files pertaining to his interests and work and individuals within and without the Foundation with whom he corresponded. Mr. Sviridoff's subject files include the House Ways and Means Committee and the Tax Reform Act of 1969, the New York City Financial Crisis (1975-1976), the Energy Policy Project (1972-1973), the Welfare Policy Project (1975-1977), the Task Force on Women (1972-1974), the Race and Ethnicity Task Force (1972-1974), Supported Work Programs (1973-1978), and Hispanic Immigration (1979-1980).

Arrangement

Arranged alphabetically.

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Chronological Correspondence Files, 1975-1978

Scope and Contents

This series consists of Mr. Sviridoff's chronological files. While the majority of correspondence is between Mr. Sviridoff and then-current, former or potential grant recipients, the files also contain memoranda between Foundation staff concerning grant modifications, reports on grantees by program officers, and accounts of telephone conversations and meetings, among other subjects. Some correspondence describes broader Foundation policies. For example, one letter, dated October 22, 1975, contains an overview of the policy guiding the Foundation's funding of work in women's rights in order to explain the reasons for rejecting a request from Equal Rights Advocates, Inc. to eliminate the matching funds requirement.

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