

Ethel L. Payne Papers
A Finding Aid to the Collection in the Library of Congress



Manuscript Division, Library of Congress
Washington, D.C.
2010

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Prepared by Manuscript Division staff

Finding aid encoded by Library of Congress Manuscript Division, 2011
Revised 2022 October

Collection Summary

Title: Ethel L. Payne Papers

Inclusive Dates: 1857-1991

Bulk Dates: 1973-1991

ID No.: MSS81191

Creator: Payne, Ethel L.

Extent: 15,500 items

Extent: 45 containers plus 1 classified

Extent: 18 linear feet

Language: Collection material in English

Location: Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

LC Catalog record: <https://lcn.loc.gov/mm95081191>

Summary: Journalist and social activist. Correspondence, articles, syndicated columns, transcripts of radio broadcasts, speeches, reports, notes, biographical subject file, printed material, clippings, photographs, and other papers relating chiefly to Payne's career as a foreign correspondent, syndicated columnist for two African-American newspaper chains, Afro-American Newspapers and Sengstacke Enterprises, and commentator with the Columbia Broadcasting System, inc., (later CBS Inc.) Spectrum radio program.

Selected Search Terms

The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the LC Catalog. They are grouped by name of person or organization, by subject or location, and by occupation and listed alphabetically.

People

Alexander, Clifford L., Jr., 1933- --Correspondence.

Austin family.

Berry, Faith--Correspondence.

Bookbinder, Hyman Harry, 1916-2011--Correspondence.

Boswell family.

Brutus, Dennis, 1924-2009--Correspondence.

Dukes, Ofield, 1932-2011--Correspondence.

Dumas, Joseph C. (Joseph Cardozo)--Correspondence.

Gray, Thelma E. (Thelma Elizabeth), 1905-1987--Correspondence.

Hicks, John H., 1928- --Correspondence.

Johnson, Avis Ruth, 1918- --Correspondence.

Johnson, James A. (James Avery), 1944- --Correspondence.

Johnson, Mal, 1924- --Correspondence.

Mandela, Winnie--Correspondence.

Meer, Fatima--Correspondence.

Nixon, Richard M. (Richard Milhous), 1913-1994--Correspondence.

Payne family.

Payne, Ethel L.

Randolph, A. Philip (Asa Philip), 1889-1979--Correspondence.

Sadler, Charles R.--Correspondence.

Whitfield, Mal, 1924-2015--Correspondence.

Young, Aurelia Norris--Correspondence.

Organizations

African American Newspapers.

Africare (Organization)

Asian-African Conference.

CBS Inc.

Columbia Broadcasting System, inc.

Democratic Party (U.S.)

Fisk University--Faculty.
Metropolitan Women's Democratic Club.
Sengstacke Enterprises.

Subjects

African American newspapers.
Congresses and conventions--Indonesia--Bandung.
Foreign correspondents--Africa, Southern.
Foreign correspondents--Developing countries.
Social problems--Africa, Southern.
Social problems--Developing countries.
Vietnam War, 1961-1975--Journalists.

Titles

Spectrum (Radio program)

Occupations

Journalists.
Social activists.

Acquisition Information

The papers of Ethel L. Payne, journalist and social activist, were given to the Library of Congress by her sister, Avis Ruth Johnson, in 1991.

Processing History

The Payne Papers were processed in 1995 by Joseph K. Brooks with the assistance of Susie H. Moody. The finding aid was revised in 2010.

Transfers

Items have been transferred from the Manuscript Division to other custodial divisions of the Library. Audiotapes and videotapes have been transferred to the Motion Picture, Broadcasting and Recorded Sound Division. Some photographs and posters have been transferred to the Prints and Photographs Division. All transfers are identified in these divisions as part of the Ethel L. Payne Papers.

Other Repositories

The Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University, Washington, D.C. and the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York, N.Y., also have collections of Payne papers.

Copyright Status

Copyright in the unpublished writings of Ethel L. Payne in these papers and in other collections of papers in the custody of the Library of Congress has been dedicated to the public.

Access and Restrictions

The papers of Ethel L. Payne are open to research. Researchers are advised to contact the Manuscript Reading Room prior to visiting. Many collections are stored off-site and advance notice is needed to retrieve these items for research use.

Security Classified Documents

Government regulations control the use of security classified items in this collection. Manuscript Division staff can furnish information concerning access to and use of classified material.

Preferred Citation

Researchers wishing to cite this collection should include the following information: Container number, Ethel L. Payne Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

Biographical Note

Date	Event
1911, Aug. 14	Born, Chicago, Ill.
1928-circa 1931	Attended Crane Junior College, Chicago, Ill. and Garrett Institute, Evanston, Ill.
1939-1947	Library assistant, Chicago Public Library, Chicago, Ill.
1940-1942	Attended Medill School of Journalism, Northwestern University, Chicago, Ill.
1948-1951	Director, United States Army service club, quartermaster depot, Tokyo, Japan
1951-1978	Associate editor and reporter, Sengstacke Newspapers
1953-1973	Washington correspondent, Sengstacke Newspapers
1955	Covered Asian-African Conference, Bandung, Indonesia
1957	Accompanied Vice President Richard Nixon to independence ceremonies, Accra, Ghana
1957-1989	Wrote syndicated columns "So This Is Washington," "From Where I Sit," and "Behind the Scenes"
1966-1967	Reported on Afro-American soldiers in Vietnam
1969	Covered civil war in Nigeria
1972-1982	Commentator, "Spectrum," CBS Radio Network
1976	Accompanied Secretary of State Henry Kissinger tour of Africa
1979	Published <i>America's Black Colleges: Roots, Rewards, Renewals</i> . Washington, D.C.: Delta Sigma Theta
1981	Writer-in-residence, Jackson State University, Jackson, Miss.
1982	Visited and reported on refugee camps in Somalia, Sudan, Zambia, and Zimbabwe for AfriCare
1982-1983	Visiting professor, Ida B. Wells Distinguished Journalism Chair, Fisk University, Nashville, Tenn.
1985-1991	Board of directors, Africare
1991, May 28	Died, Washington, D.C.

Scope and Content Note

The papers of Ethel Lois Payne (1911-1991) span the years 1857-1991, with the bulk of the material concentrated in the period 1973-1991. The papers mainly document the later part of her career as a commentator with the Columbia Broadcasting System's *Spectrum* radio program and as a syndicated columnist with the Sengstacke and *Afro-American* newspaper chains. The collection also includes substantial material on her earlier career, especially as a foreign correspondent in the 1950s. The papers are organized into [Personal File](#), [Subject File](#), [Speeches and Writings](#), and [Classified](#) series.

Major elements of the [Personal File](#) include correspondence and family papers. The correspondence spans 1942-1991, with the bulk of the letters concentrated in the period 1968-1991. Correspondence with family members, colleagues, friends, and news sources are interfiled. The pre-1968 material includes early correspondence with A. Philip Randolph related to Payne's leadership of the planning committee of the Chicago division of Randolph's "March-On-Washington Movement" for fair employment practices and her attempts in 1944 to overcome discrimination and obtain a position in the Justice Department library. Also in the correspondence is a letter from Richard M. Nixon after his attendance at a party Payne

gave for participants in the vice presidential mission to Ghana for independence celebrations in 1958. Other correspondents include Clifford L. Alexander, Faith Berry, Hyman Harry Bookbinder, Dennis Brutus, Ofield Dukes, Joseph C. Dumas, John H. Hicks, Mal Johnson, Fatima Meer, Charles R. Sadler, Mal Whitfield, and Aurelia Norris Young. Commencing in 1967, when she covered the war in Vietnam, Payne wrote yearly letters to family members and friends in which she summarized her activities and voiced concerns about social and political issues. She corresponded regularly with family members, especially with her sisters Thelma E. Gray and Avis Ruth Johnson, and her nephew James A. Johnson, a physician who, when a teenager in 1959, integrated the Congressional page staff. Files on these and other family members, and on the Payne, Austin, and Boswell families, are included in the family papers file of the [Personal](#) series.

The [Subject File](#), the largest series in the papers, documents Payne's involvement in African and Third World causes as a journalist and activist, including the 1955 Asian-African Conference in Bandung, Indonesia, her first assignment as a foreign correspondent; Southern Africa; and Africare, the service organization on whose board she served from 1985 to 1991. The biographical file contains material on Payne and on persons both prominent and lesser known, from Jesse Jackson to Colin Moyano, a South African student whom Payne sponsored in the United States. The biographical file is a rich source of information on Payne correspondents.

The archives, museums, historical societies, and exhibition file contains correspondence and inventories related to Payne material in other archives. Payne worked with her sorority, Delta Sigma Theta, to aid South African activist Winnie Mandela during the years of Mandela's official banning. Correspondence related to this effort, including letters from Mandela, are included in the Delta Sigma Theta file of the [Subject File](#) series.

Payne's year as a visiting professor at Fisk University, 1982-1983, in Nashville, Tenn., is documented in the educational institutions file of the [Subject File](#). Her activities as a Democratic party official are especially well represented in a file related to the Metropolitan Women's Democratic Club of Washington, D.C., an organization she helped found.

Of special note in the [Speeches and Writings](#) series are transcripts of interviews of Payne in 1987 by the Washington Press Foundation oral history project which cover her family background, her work before she became a reporter, and her journalism career. Files related to the "Spectrum" radio program contain transcripts of Payne's broadcasts during 1972-1977, as well as correspondence from the public responding to the broadcasts.

Arrangement of the Papers

The collection is arranged in four series:

- [Personal File, circa 1900-1991](#)
- [Subject File, 1857-1991](#)
- [Speeches and Writings, 1948-1991](#)
- [Classified, 1978](#)

Description of Series

Container	Series
BOX 1-9	<p><u>Personal File, circa 1900-1991</u></p> <p>Correspondence, address books, circulars, programs, calendars, business cards, topical files, obituaries, photographs, printed matter, and miscellaneous material.</p> <p>Arranged alphabetically by type of material and thereunder chronologically, with the exception of the family papers, which are arranged alphabetically by personal or geographical name and thereunder chronologically.</p>
BOX 9-39	<p><u>Subject File, 1857-1991</u></p> <p>Clippings, newspapers, reports, resumes, obituaries, biographical sketches, correspondence, writings, photographs, printed matter, and miscellaneous material.</p> <p>Arranged alphabetically by subject and thereunder chronologically.</p>
BOX 39-45	<p><u>Speeches and Writings, 1948-1991</u></p> <p>Transcribed radio broadcasts, articles, syndicated columns, notes, correspondence, speeches, and miscellaneous material.</p> <p>Arranged alphabetically by type of material and thereunder alphabetically by personal name or title of book, column, or program, and then chronologically.</p>
BOX CL 1	<p><u>Classified, 1978</u></p> <p>A National Security Council memorandum.</p> <p>Arranged and described according to the series, container, and folder from which it was removed.</p>

Container List

Container	Contents
BOX 1-9	Personal File, circa 1900-1991 Correspondence, address books, circulars, programs, calendars, business cards, topical files, obituaries, photographs, printed matter, and miscellaneous material. Arranged alphabetically by type of material and thereunder chronologically, with the exception of the family papers, which are arranged alphabetically by personal or geographical name and thereunder chronologically.
BOX 1	Address books, 1985, undated Announcements, circulars, programs, and news releases 1943-1990 (4 folders)
BOX 2	1991, undated Awards, honors, and celebrations <i>Dollars and Sense Magazine's</i> salute to international business and professional women, 1987 Fisk University testimonial dinner, Washington, D.C., 1982 Miscellaneous, 1930, 1955-1991, undated (2 folders) Payne exhibit opening, Anacostia Library, Washington, D.C., 1991 Seventy-ninth birthday celebration, circa 1991
BOX 3	Business cards and Rolodex files, undated Calendars 1950, 1970-1971 (3 folders)
BOX 4	1986-1991 Correspondence General 1942-1982 (5 folders)
BOX 5	1983-1988 (8 folders)
BOX 6	1989-1991, undated (6 folders)
BOX 7	Printed invitations, 1958-1991, undated (3 folders) Family papers Austin and Boswell families, 1980-1990, undated (2 folders) Englewood neighborhood, Chicago, Ill., 1972-1988 Gray, Thelma E. (sister) Death and funeral, 1987-1988 Miscellaneous, 1973-1987
BOX 8	Payne and Austin family history material

Personal File, circa 1900-1991

Container

Contents

	1933-1970, 1980-1991, undated (2 folders)
	Johnson, Avis Ruth (sister), and James A. Johnson (nephew), 1959-1991
	Payne, William and Bessie (parents), 1969-1971
	Photographs, circa 1900-1991, undated (3 folders)
BOX 9	Guest books, 1973, 1981-1989 Mailing and guest lists, 1984-1991 Miscellaneous, 1956-1982, undated Photographs of Payne, circa 1912-1988, undated Property and gift lists, 1953, undated
BOX 9-39	Subject File, 1857-1991 Clippings, newspapers, reports, resumes, obituaries, biographical sketches, correspondence, writings, photographs, printed matter, and miscellaneous material. Arranged alphabetically by subject and thereunder chronologically.
BOX 9	Affirmative action and intelligence controversies Bakke case, 1976-1978 Miscellaneous, 1980-1991 Africa Liberia, 1985-1991, undated (3 folders) Nigeria, 1983-1991
BOX 10	Southern Africa Angola, trial of mercenary soldiers and other material, 1976-1987 Kissinger, Henry, and United States foreign policy, 1976 Namibia Church Information and Monitoring Service, 1989-1990 Commission on Independence for Namibia, 1989 Development and health care projects, 1987-1989 Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights under Law, 1989-1990 <i>Namibian Independence and Cuban Troop Withdrawal</i> , Department of Foreign Affairs, Republic of South Africa, 1989 Newspapers, 1989 (2 folders)
BOX 11	Political parties and electoral politics Democratic Turnhalle Alliance (DTA), 1989 Miscellaneous, 1989 Southwest Africa People's Organization (SWAPO), 1989, undated Press and background material, 1982-1990, undated Republic of South Africa Church and labor relations, 1989 Commonwealth Group of Eminent Persons, report, 1986 De Klerk, F. W., 1990
BOX 12	Lawyer's Committee for Civil Rights under Law, 1988-1991 Medical centers and medical programs, 1989-1991

Subject File, 1857-1991

Container

Contents

	Miscellaneous, 1985-1990, undated (2 folders)
	Printed matter
	Miscellaneous, 1990, undated
	Newspapers and magazines, 1988-1990
	Rustin, Bayard, "South Africa: Is Peaceful Change Possible?" with cover letter from Rustin to Aurelia Norris Young, 1985, undated
	Sanctions
	Miscellaneous
	1973-1986
BOX 13	1987-1989
	Royal Dutch Shell Oil Co.
	Miscellaneous, 1974-1990
	Pagan, Rafael D., "Shell U.S.-South Africa Strategy," 1986 (2 folders)
	Sullivan, Leon and the Sullivan principles, 1980-1987, undated
	Women's organizations and causes
	African National Congress (ANC) women's section, 1988-1989
	Black Sash, 1975-1990 (2 folders)
	Senti sa Sechaba Publishers, 1988-1990
BOX 14	South African Council of Churches, women's ministries, 1987-1990
	<i>Speak</i> Collective, 1989-1990
	Zambia, 1978-1989
	Zimbabwe
	Clippings, 1973-1984, undated
	Miscellaneous, 1973-1989
	Wilson, Wendy and Asmaron Legesse, <i>Nomads' Dialogue, Development Instead of Relief</i> , African Development Foundation, 1990
	Africare
	Africare House, headquarters, Washington, D.C., 1988, undated
	Board of directors
	Meetings
	1988 (2 folders)
BOX 15	1989-1990 (5 folders)
	Members, 1987-1990
	Constituency for Africa, meeting, 1991
	Correspondence and memoranda, 1985-1991
	"Focus on Africa, a report on refugee camps and settlements in Somalia, Sudan, Zambia, Zimbabwe," report by Payne, 1982
	Fund-raising, 1991
	Grants and internship programs, 1990-1991
BOX 16	Miscellaneous, 1983-1991, undated
	Retreat, photographs, undated
	Afro-American-African business, cultural, and political relations

Subject File, 1857-1991

Container

Contents

- African--African-American Summit, Abidjan, Ivory Coast, 1991
Miscellaneous, 1978-1991, undated *See also Classified*
(2 folders)
- Afro-American national conferences and conventions
- Black National Convention, Gary, Ind.
Miscellaneous, 1972
Newspapers and clippings
(2 folders)
Mar. 9, 1969, Mar. 7-13 1972
- BOX 17** Mar. 14-24 1972, undated
Miscellaneous, 1974-1989, undated
- Afro-American press
Miscellaneous, 1954, 1972-1991, undated
National Alliance of Third World Journalists, 1989-1990
National Association of Black Journalists, 1988-1990
World War II, 1945, 1986
- Archives, museums, historical societies, and exhibitions
- American Federation of the Arts traveling exhibits, 1988-1989
Arthur and Elizabeth Schlesinger Library on the History of Women in America, Radcliffe College, Cambridge, Mass., 1985-1987
- BOX 18** Bethune Museum and Archives, Washington, D.C., 1982-1990, undated
Indiana Historical Bureau, *Bury Me in a Free Land*, exhibit, 1986
Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, civil rights symposium, Austin, Tex., 1972
Miscellaneous, 1857-1991, undated
Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University, Washington, D.C., 1977-1991
Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York, N.Y., 1987-1991
Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.
Miscellaneous, 1986-1990
"Symposium on Afro-Americans and the Evolution of a Living Constitution," 1988
- Art controversies, Chicago, Ill., 1989, undated
- Asian-African conference, Bandung, Indonesia
Articles by Payne, 1955-1956
Bulletins, 1955
Clippings
Miscellaneous, 1955, 1965, undated
Times of Indonesia, 1955
- BOX 19** Correspondence and material re grants for study of Bandung conference, 1984
Miscellaneous, 1955-1975, undated
(2 folders)
- Biographical file
Payne, 1953, 1985-1991, undated
- Others
Abiola, Bashorum M. K. O., 1989-1990
Afro-American journalists
Cooke, Janet, 1981
Dunnigan, Alice A., 1982-1990, undated
Martin, Louis, 1978-1990, undated

Subject File, 1857-1991

Container

Contents

	Miller Brewing Co., calendar project
	Correspondence and miscellaneous, 1986-1988
	Photographs, 1987
	Miscellaneous, 1977-1990
	Photographs, 1962-1991, undated
	Robinson, Max, 1978-1989, undated
	Sengstacke, John H., 1973
BOX 20	Afro-American women
	<i>Distinguished Black Women</i> , Black Women in Sisterhood for Action, 1985
	Lanker, Brian, <i>I Dream a World</i> , 1989
	Bates, Daisy, and the Little Rock, Ark., Nine
	Brown, Lee, and the Atlanta child murders, 1980-1990
	Carter, W. Beverly, 1975
	Chirwa, Orton and Vera, 1983
	<i>Anna J. Cooper; a Voice from the South</i> , Louise Daniel Hutchinson, 1981
	Galiber, Yetta, and the Moyaya family, 1987-1990
	Hani, Christopher, and the African National Congress, 1990-1991
	Harris, Ruth Bates, <i>Harlem Princess: The Story of Harry Delaney's Daughter</i> and other material, 1974, 1989
	Jackson, Jesse
	Articles and clippings
	1970-1986
BOX 21	1987-1990, undated
	Interviews, speeches, statements, and miscellaneous material, 1983-1988, undated
	Photographs, 1991, undated
	Jones, Nathaniel, 1985-1989
	King, Martin Luther, Jr., and King family, 1983-1990, undated
	Kuria, Gibson Kumau, and Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights Award, 1988-1989
	Mandela, Nelson and Winnie, 1980-1991, undated
	(2 folders)
	Marshall, Thurgood
	Documentary projects, 1985, undated
BOX 22	Miscellaneous, 1953-1989
	(2 folders)
	Notes, 1988-1989, undated
	Mazique, Edward C., 1980-1990
	McFerson, Hazel M., 1989
	Miscellaneous
	Obituaries, resumes, and other data, 1975-1991
	(3 folders)
BOX 23	Obituaries, resumes, and other data, 1975-1991
	(1 folder)
	Photographs, 1949-1991, undated
	(2 folders)
	Mitchell, Clarence M., and Mitchell family, 1955-1989, undated
	Moss, Annie Lee, 1942-1954, 1989
	Perkins, Edward J., 1986-1990, undated

Subject File, 1857-1991

Container

Contents

	Robertson, William B., and United States Jaycees, 1988-1989
	Sadat, Anwar, state visit to United States, 1975
	Small-Rougeau, Shirley A., 1973-1989
	Tambo, Oliver, 1987
	Thomas, Charles W. and Shirley W., 1988-1991
BOX 24	Walker, John T., 1986-1990, undated
	Washington, Harold, 1983-1985
	Wells, Elizabeth A., 1990-1991 (3 folders)
	Williams, Curtis Hayes, 1988
	Writers
	Berry, Faith, 1983-1985
	Brutus, Dennis, 1975-1978
	Fisher, Marian, 1973-1975 (2 folders)
BOX 25	Fisher, Marian, 1973-1975 (2 folders)
	McCormick, Loretta, 1977
	Miller Brewing Co., "Black Author's Calendar," 1990
	Walker, Margaret, 1985-1988
	Young, Andrew
	Clippings, 1977-1979
	Miscellaneous, 1977-1979
	Breton Woods Committee, conference on Africa's finance and development crisis, Washington, D. C., 1990
	Children's Defense Fund, 1988-1989
BOX 26	China trip
	Photographs, 1973
	Miscellaneous, 1973-1975
	Christic Institute, 1984-1988, undated
	Citizens' Commission on Civil Rights, "Lost Opportunities: The Civil Rights Record of the Bush Administration Mid-Term," 1991
	Civil Rights Documentation Project interviews
	List of interviews, 1972
	Bevel, James, 1968
	Martin, Louis, 1970
	Morrow, E. Frederick, 1970
	Randolph, A. Philip, 1969
	Weaver, Robert C., 1969
BOX 27	Wilkins, Roy, 1970
	Young, Whitney M., 1970
	Congressional Black Caucus, 1971-1991, undated
	Cuba, 1976-1981
	Delta Sigma Theta sorority
	Mandela, Winnie, project
	Correspondence, 1986-1990
	Miscellaneous, 1985-1990, undated

Subject File, 1857-1991

Container

Contents

	Miscellaneous, 1974-1991
BOX 28	Education and educational institutions and programs Experiment in International Living, School for International Training, 1983-1990 Fisk University, Nashville, Tenn. Great issues of today course Criminal justice seminar, 1982-1983 (2 folders) Foreign policy seminar, 1983 Miscellaneous, 1983 Miscellaneous, 1981-1988, undated Stieglitz-O'Keefe collection, 1978-1984
BOX 29	Harbor General Hospital/UCLA nurse practitioner training program, 1987-1988 Highlander Folk School, Monteagle, Tenn., and Highlander Research and Education Center, New Market, Tenn. Clippings, 1966-1980 Correspondence, 1956-1983, undated <i>Highlander Reports</i> and other printed matter, 1957, 1972-1989 Miscellaneous, 1960-1991, undated Reports, speeches, and statements, 1957-1967, undated Howard University, Washington, D.C. Clippings and newsletters, 1981-1991 "Investing for Excellence: Strategically Repositioning Howard University to Face the Challenges of the Twenty-First Century," report and related information packet, 1981-1990 Miscellaneous, 1981-1990 Twenty-first century fellows program, proposal by Payne, 1986
BOX 30	Lincoln University of Pennsylvania and its president, Niara Sudarkasa, 1987-1990, undated Methodist colleges Bennett College, Greensboro, N.C., 1988-1989, undated (2 folders) Miscellaneous, 1982 Miscellaneous, 1973-1990 University of Mississippi, Oxford, Miss., 1989 Enterprise Foundation, 1988 Humor, 1991, undated Hunger Project, 1988-1990 Iran hostage crisis, 1979-1981
BOX 31	Japanese racism, 1986-1990 Joint Center for Political Studies conference, "The Civil Rights Act: Two Decades Later," 1984 "Kerner Report Twenty Years Later," 1988 March on Washington and Twentieth Anniversary Mobilization for Jobs, Peace, and Freedom, 1963-1988 Moynihan, Daniel Patrick, "The Negro Family: The Case for National Action," 1963-1988 NAACP Daniel, A. Mercer, 1915-1929 Miscellaneous, 1968-1989, undated Nation of Islam

Subject File, 1857-1991

Container

Contents

	Farrakhan, Louis
	Africa trip, 1986
	Clippings, 1975-1990, undated
	Miscellaneous, 1986-1989, undated
BOX 32	Newspapers
	<i>City Sun</i> , New York, N.Y., 1988-1989
	<i>Final Call</i> , 1979-1988
	(4 folders)
	<i>Hilltop</i> , Howard University, Washington, D.C., 1984
	Other printed matter, 1984-1989
BOX 33	Speeches and statements, 1974-1990, undated
	Federal Bureau of Investigation counterintelligence program, 1969, 1978
	(3 folders)
	Miscellaneous, 1975-1990
	Muhammad, Elijah, Sultan, and Wallace D., 1975-1990
	National Minority Advisory Council on Criminal Justice "Inequality Of Justice" report, 1982
	(2 folders)
BOX 34	National Minority Advisory Council on Criminal Justice "Inequality Of Justice" report, 1982
	(4 folders)
	Miscellaneous, 1976-1980
	National Urban Coalition, 1984-1989
	Nixon, Richard M., party hosted by Payne after vice presidential trip to Ghana, 1958
	Pan-African-USA International Track Meet, 1971
BOX 35	Political parties
	Democratic Party
	National conventions
	1972-1976
	(6 folders)
BOX 36	1980-1988
	(5 folders)
	Photographs, undated
	White House events
	Lincoln Day reception
	Clippings, 1963
	Photographs, 1963
	(2 folders)
	Miscellaneous photographs, circa 1961-1964, undated
BOX 37	Women's organizations
	Emily's List, 1990-1991
	Metropolitan Women's Democratic Club, Washington, D.C.
	Correspondence, 1963-1968
	Fashion show benefit luncheon, 1966
	Miscellaneous, 1963-1982, undated
	Printed matter
	Clippings and newsletters, 1964-1967
	Miscellaneous, 1964-1970, 1972-1983
	(2 folders)

Subject File, 1857-1991

Container

Contents

	Photographs, undated
BOX 38	Republican party Afro-American Republicans Miscellaneous, 1964-1989, undated Pierce, Samuel, and the Department of Housing and Urban Development, 1981-1989, undated (2 folders) National conventions, 1972-1980 TransAfrica, 1981-1991 United States Bureau of the Census, 1982-1990
BOX 39	Women's conferences Miscellaneous, 1977-1989, undated "United Nations Decade for Women," conferences, 1973-1985, undated "Women's Strategies for the Twenty-First Century," meeting, 1991 World Assembly for Peace and Life Against Nuclear War, Prague, Czechoslovakia, 1983 World Council of Churches, 1975-1983
BOX 39-45	Speeches and Writings, 1948-1991 Transcribed radio broadcasts, articles, syndicated columns, notes, correspondence, speeches, and miscellaneous material. Arranged alphabetically by type of material and thereunder alphabetically by personal name or title of book, column, or program, and then chronologically.
BOX 39	Articles and commentary About Payne, 1959-1991, undated (2 folders) By Payne 1957-1981 (2 folders)
BOX 40	1982-1991, undated (3 folders) Books and book projects <i>America's Black Colleges: Roots, Rewards, Renewals</i> and "Black Colleges: Can They Survive? Challenges and Changes," 1978-1979 "A Piece of Furniture, The Robert Parker Story" Jackson, Samuel C., 1948-1965, undated Miscellaneous, 1966-1986, undated Text, notes, and related material Holographic material, 1981, undated Typed material, 1981, undated (2 folders)
BOX 41	"The Surplus Society," 1981, undated "A View of Four Presidents from a Black Perspective," 1975-1988, undated Interviews and press conferences By Payne Carter, Jimmy Background material, 1974-1977, undated Interviews, 1976-1987, undated

Speeches and Writings, 1948-1991

Container

Contents

	Eisenhower, Dwight D., 1954
	Lee-Miller, Stephanie, 1980
	Llewellyn, J. Bruce, undated
	Mandela, Nelson and Winnie, 1990
	Robinson, Randall, 1985
	Of Payne
	Muhammad, Askia, 1981, 1986
	<i>USA Today</i> , 1989
	Washington Press Club Foundation, oral history project
	Interviews, Aug.-Nov. 1987
	(7 folders)
	Miscellaneous, 1987-1988
BOX 42	Notes, 1951-1990
	(4 folders)
	Radio and television programs
	"Africa-U.S.A.: The Connection," 1991
	"Cliff Alexander--Black on White," WMAL television, 1972-1973
	"Ethel Payne Report," WHMM television, 1980-1988, undated
	"Matters of Opinion," WBBM-CBS radio, 1978-1982
	"Nightline," ABC television and South Africa, 1985, 1990
	"Spectrum," CBS Radio Network and CBS News (television)
	Correspondence
	1972-1974
BOX 43	1975-1978, undated
	(6 folders)
	Highlight quotes, 1975-1976
	Miscellaneous, 1973-1977, undated
	Radio broadcasts
	1972-1974
	(3 folders)
BOX 44	1975-1978
	(4 folders)
	Television broadcasts, 1972-1974
	"Touch Me Tenderly," WNET television, 1980
	Speeches and statements
	By Payne
	1958, 1974-1987
	(4 folders)
BOX 45	1990, undated
	By others
	Miscellaneous, 1978-1989, undated
	<i>Vital Issues: The Journal of African American Speeches</i> (inaugural edition), 1991
	Syndicated columns
	"Behind the Scenes," 1979-1989, undated
	(5 folders)
	"From Where I Sit," 1973-1978, undated

Speeches and Writings, 1948-1991

Container

Contents

"So This Is Washington," 1957-1973

BOX CL 1

Classified, 1978

A National Security Council memorandum.

Arranged and described according to the series, container, and folder from which it was removed.

BOX CL 1

Subject File, 1857-1991, undated

Afro-American-African business, cultural, and political relations

Miscellaneous, 1978-1991, undated

National Security Council memorandum 46, 17 Mar. 1978 (Container 16)