

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., 1933-2022--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

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 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 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 CL 1

Classified, 1978

A National Security Council memorandum.

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

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Personal File, circa 1900-1991

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Speeches and Writings, 1948-1991

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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)