



Smithsonian

Anacostia Community Museum

Finding Aid to the Ethel Payne papers,
circa 1960s-1980s, in the Anacostia
Community Museum Archives

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Table of Contents

Collection Overview	
Administrative Information	1
Biographical Note	2
Scope and Contents	2
Arrangement	3
Names and Subjects	
Container Listing	
Series 1: Biographical, 1949 - 1990	4
Series 2: Correspondence, undated	5
Series 3: Travel, 1966 - 1987	6
Series 4: Photographs, undated	7
Series 5: Poster, undated	8

Collection Overview

Repository:	Anacostia Community Museum Archives
Title:	Ethel Payne papers
Date:	circa 1960s-1980s
Identifier:	ACMA.06-011
Creator:	Payne, Ethel L.
Extent:	0.5 Linear feet (2 boxes)
Language:	English .
Summary:	The Ethel Payne papers, which date from circa 1960s to 1980s and measure .50 linear feet, document the career of journalist Ethel Payne. The collection is comprised of passports, badges, photographs, press credentials, awards and ephemera.

Administrative Information

Provenance

The Ethel Payne papers were donated to the Anacostia Community Museum in 1991 by Avis R. Johnson.

Related Materials

This collection contains [artifacts](#) catalogued in the ACM Objects collection.

Processing Informaiton

The records were processed in June 2014 by volunteer Bremacha La Guerre with the assistance of archivist Jennifer Morris.

Preferred Citation

Ethel Payne papers, Anacostia Community Museum Archives, Smithsonian Institution, gift of Avis R. Johnson.

Restrictions

Use of the materials requires an appointment. Please contact the archivist to make an appointment: ACMarchives@si.edu.

Conditions Governing Use

Ethel Payne papers are the physical property of the Anacostia Community Museum. Literary and copyright belong to the author/creator or their legal heirs and assigns. Rights to work produced during the normal course of Museum business resides with the Anacostia Community Museum. For further information, and to obtain permission to publish or reproduce, contact the Museum Archives.

Biographical Note

Ethel Payne, born August 14, 1911 was a freelance journalist and the first African American woman to become an international news correspondent. She covered issues pertaining to the political advancement and the social inequality among Blacks in America. An early crusader for African American civil rights, she remained a constant and vigorous political spokesperson in the fight to end racial discrimination. In her thirst for knowledge, and in her desire to share valuable information with the public, Payne, who would later receive international recognition for her endeavors, was dubbed the "First Lady of the Black Press" by the Washington Press Corps, of which she later became president in 1970.

While covering U.S involvement in the Vietnam War, Payne focused on the plight of the Black soldier and how issues, such as racial segregation and discrimination, remained relevant to life back home. In documenting the conditions of these soldiers, her aim was to "fully concentrate on the Negro effort," and to "paint an adequate picture of why they were in Vietnam." Later however, as a writer for the *Chicago Defender*, she remarked on her experience in covering the war as a failed attempt at reporting the overall immorality of it.

The daughter of a Pullman porter and a stay at home mother of 6, Payne, who desired to become a civil rights leader but was denied entrance into law school on account of her race, discovered her niche in journalism after being jailed for witnessing and questioning the brutal acts performed by a police officer on an African American man. After threatening to report the brutality to the press, she refused her approval for release, remained in jail and advocated for the liberation of the other detainees.

Her break into journalism came when she began organizing recreation and entertainment for African American troops stationed in Japan. In her diary, Payne transcribed accounts of the failed efforts of the U.S military during the war, which had later been published in the *Chicago Defender*. Despite the discrimination she encountered from high ranking officials in the U.S government, Payne was offered and accepted a full-time position with the Defender in 1951.

Along with her work as a Vietnam War correspondent, Payne became involved in various endeavors to move her career in journalism. During her time as White House correspondent from 1962-1966, Payne led the fight to end the segregation of interstate travel, immigration quotas, and discrimination in federal housing . Ethel was also the first African American woman to host network news by becoming a political commentator for the CBS aired program "Spectrum" in 1972. Persistently involved in international politics, Payne in 1970 completed a 10-nation tour of Africa with Secretary of State William P. Rogers, and a 6-nation tour with Secretary of State Henry Kissinger six years later. She covered several Democratic National conventions, and witnessed President Lyndon B. Johnson's signing of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

Over her lifetime, she has received dozens of awards and honorable mentions for her political involvement and activism for African Americans, and her legacy continues to live on today. In 2002 the United States Postal Service honored Ethel Payne by issuing her a 37-cent stamp, and each year aspiring journalists wishing to gain experience on international reporting in Africa are awarded the Ethel Payne Fellowship.

On May 28, 1991 Ethel Payne died of a heart attack in her home in Washington, D.C. She is survived by close relatives, as she forfeited marriage and children for the sake of her work. She was commemorated as one of the 100 most influential correspondents by the National Association of Black Journalists, and remained, until her death, a longtime advocate in the struggle to bring about change, and to correct the inequalities and racial injustices in the world.

Scope and Contents

This small collection documents the career of Ethel Payne from circa 1960s - 1980s through passports, badges, photographs, press credentials, awards and ephemera.

Arrangement

The Ethel Payne papers are arranged into five series:

Series 1: Biographical Series 2: Correspondence Series 3: Travel Series 4: Photographs Series 5: Posters

Names and Subject Terms

This collection is indexed in the online catalog of the Smithsonian Institution under the following terms:

Subjects:

- African American journalists
- African American women
- Politicians -- United States

Types of Materials:

- Awards
- Ephemera
- Passports
- Photographic prints
- Photographs

Names:

- Carter, Jimmy, 1924-
- Johnson, Lyndon B. (Lyndon Baines), 1908-1973
- Kennedy, John F. (John Fitzgerald), 1917-1963
- Kissinger, Henry, 1923-
- Payne, Ethel L.
- Stokes, Louis, 1925-

Container Listing

Series 1: Biographical, 1949 - 1990

0.19 Linear feet

Language: English.
 Scope and Contents: This series comprises of materials relating to the life of Ethel Payne and her time as a free-lance journalist, an international political activist, and a news correspondent for the Sengstacke Newspapers and the *Chicago Defender*. This biographical series dated from 1940 to 1990 contains certificates of merit from various organizations celebrating Paynes research and community involvement, and printed materials from her covering numerous national conventions, civic forums and inaugural ceremonies.

Box 1, Folder 1	Awards, 1955 - 1988
Box 1, Folder 2	Press/ Media, 1940 - 1970
Box 1, Folder 3	Press/ Media, 1980-1980; undated
Box 2	United States Department of Justice Award [Oversize], 1980
Box 2	Howard University Moreland Spingarn Research Award [Oversize], 1975
Box 2	World Understanding Award [Oversize], 1955
Map-case 1, Drawer 6	BISA Distinguished Black Women Award, 1982
Map-case 1, Drawer 6	Washington Post Style Interview, 1982
Map-case 1, Drawer 6	State of Georgia Lieutenant Colonel Appointment, 1987

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Series 2: Correspondence, undated

0.1 Linear feet ()

Language: English.

Scope and Contents: This series contains a signed card from President Lyndon B. Johnson to Ethel Payne, as well as professional stationery and envelopes belonging to Ethel Payne.

Box 1, Folder 4 Correspondence; Stationary, undated

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Series 3: Travel, 1966 - 1987

0.25 Linear feet

Language: English.

Scope and Contents: This series holds the documents of Payne's extensive travel throughout Latin America, Africa and Asia, as well as passports and vaccination reports.

Box 1, Folder 5 Passports/ Vaccinations, 1966 - 1987

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Series 4: Photographs, undated

0.2 Linear feet

Language: English.

Scope and Contents: This collection contains photographs of Ethel Payne with various dignitaries including Presidents Lyndon B. Johnson, John F. Kennedy, and political activist Louis Stokes. Also contained are personal photographs of Payne among contemporaries and colleagues.

Box 1, Folder 6 Photographs, undated

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

Series 5: Poster, undated

0.3 Linear feet

Language: English.

Scope and Contents: This series contains a signed copy of Romare Bearden's "Morning of the Rooster" poster.

Contents:

Map-case 1, Drawer 6 Autographed Romare Bearden poster, undated

[Return to Table of Contents](#)