



# Smithsonian

*National Museum of Natural History*

## Guide to the Francis P. Conant films of Kenya and Nigeria, circa 1960-1969

Human Studies Film Archives  
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## Collection Overview

<b>Repository:</b>	Human Studies Film Archives
<b>Title:</b>	Francis P. Conant films of Kenya and Nigeria
<b>Identifier:</b>	HSFA.2013.04
<b>Date:</b>	circa 1960-1969
<b>Creator:</b>	Conant, Francis P.
<b>Extent:</b>	57 Film reels (color silent; black-and-white silent; 32,000 feet; 16mm)
<b>Language:</b>	No linguistic content; Not applicable .

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## Administrative Information

### Acquisition Information

Received from the National Anthropological Archives in 2013.

### Provenance

These films were donated to the National Anthropological Archives with the Francis P. Conant papers, accession number 2012-15, in 2012.

### Related Materials

The Francis P. Conant Papers, including sound recordings and photographs, are located at the National Anthropological Archives. Artifacts and film collected during the Bernheim-Conant Expedition are at the American Museum of Natural History.

### Preferred Citation

Francis P. Conant films of Kenya and Nigeria, Human Studies Film Archives, Smithsonian Institution

### Restrictions

The collection is open for research. Please contact the archives for information on availability of access copies of audiovisual recordings. Original audiovisual material in the Human Studies Film Archives may not be played.

### Conditions Governing Use

Contact the repository for terms of use.

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## Biographical / Historical

Francis Paine Conant (1926-2011) was a cultural anthropologist who pioneered the use of satellite data in anthropology. He conducted fieldwork in Nigeria and Kenya, and his research interests spanned cultural ecology, AIDS, malaria, and sex and gender studies. He was also Professor Emeritus of Anthropology at Hunter College, where he taught from 1962 to 1995.

After graduating from Cornell in 1950, Conant attended University of Iowa's graduate writing program for a short time. Dissatisfied with the program, he worked briefly for the Carnegie Endowment, during which time he occasionally served as a personal driver for Alger Hiss. In 1951, he returned to Finland to pursue a career in journalism.

In 1953 to 1954, Conant traveled throughout Africa as part of the Bernheim-Conant Expedition for the American Museum of Natural History (AMNH). The expedition was led by Charles Bernheim, the father of his first wife, Miriam. They traveled 16,000 miles through Northern Central and Eastern Africa, collecting film footage and material culture for the museum. Conant served as the writer and photographer for the expedition.

He returned to Africa in 1957 as a doctoral student at Columbia University, where he earned his PhD in Anthropology in 1960. He carried out his fieldwork in Dass Independent District, Bauchi Province in Nigeria as a Fellow of the Ford Foundation. Working among the Barawa that live in the mountains of Dass, he focused on their religion and its impact on the technology, social and political organization, and structure of their society. His dissertation was titled, "Dodo of Dass: A Study of a Pagan Religion of Northern Nigeria". During his fieldwork, he also collected data on rock gongs, which were first identified and written about by Bernard Fagg in 1955.

In 1961 to 1962, Conant was a research associate for Walter Goldschmidt's Culture and Ecology in East Africa Project. The purpose of the project was to conduct a controlled comparison of four different East African societies and the farmers and pastoralists within each tribe. Conant was assigned to conduct ethnographic research among the Pokot in West Pokot District in Kenya. This research would form the basis of his remote sensing work in the same area more than a decade later.

Conant was first introduced to remote sensing data in 1974 when his colleague Priscilla Reining showed him Landsat imagery of one his former fieldwork sites. He was inspired by the potential applications of satellite data to study cultural and ecological relationships. In 1975, he and Reining organized a workshop on "Satellite Potentials for Anthropological Studies of Subsistence Activities and Population Change." He incorporated remote sensing tools in his 1977 to 1980 study of the changing cultivation patterns and management of livestock in West Pokot District. His research combined traditional fieldwork (which included data he had collected in the 1960s), LANDSAT data, and geospatial data collected from the ground.

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## Scope and Contents

Various film materials created by Francis P. Conant in conjunction with his research in Kenya and Nigeria. Film is from the National Anthropological Archives Francis P. Conant Papers, accession number 2012-15.

Please note that the contents of the collection and the language and terminology used reflect the context and culture of the time of its creation. As an historical document, its contents may be at odds with contemporary views and terminology and considered offensive today. The information within this collection does not reflect the views of the Smithsonian Institution or Anthropology Archives, but is available in its original form to facilitate research.

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## Local Numbers

HSFA 2013.4

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## Names and Subject Terms

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

Subjects:

Human ecology

Types of Materials:

silent films

Places:

Africa  
Kenya  
Nigeria