



The New York Public Library  
Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture,  
Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division

Guide to the

**Rudolph James Thomas collection**

1895-1986 [bulk 1942-1971]

Sc MG 425

Home to Harlem Project, funded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation

## Summary

**Creator:** Thomas, Rudolph J., 1904-1990

**Title:** Rudolph James Thomas collection

**Date:** 1895-1986 [bulk 1942-1971]

**Size:** 0.71 linear feet (3 boxes)

**Revision History:** This finding aid was updated by Allison Hughes.

**Abstract:** Collection of newspaper clippings, programs, and some correspondence documenting Rudolph J. Thomas' career (1920-1965) at the Harlem Branch of the Young Men's Christian Association at 135th Street in New York City. Also included are certificates, honors, and a scrapbook.

**Preferred citation:** [Item], Rudolph James Thomas collection, Sc MG 425, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, The New York Public Library

**Language of the Material:** English

## Creator History

Rudolph James Thomas (1904?-1990), executive director of the New York City Harlem Branch of the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) at 135th Street from 1947-1965, was born in Orlando, Florida. Thomas moved with his family to New York City where he attended public schools, and in 1920 he began his career at the YMCA as an elevator operator and desk clerk. Upon graduation from Wilberforce University (Wilberforce, Ohio) in 1926 he held various positions at the YMCA, including acting membership secretary (1923); relief secretary (1927); membership secretary and employment director (1931) and business manager (1942). In 1947 he became the executive director of the Harlem Branch of the YMCA until his retirement in 1965.

Thomas was well known for fundraising and his ability to bring well known political, sports and show business figures to Harlem in support of the YMCA. During his tenure Thomas hired baseball players Jackie Robinson and Roy Campanella to help with the YMCA youth programs. Later, Robinson and Campanella contributed their efforts towards fundraising for the YMCA. Among those supporting

Thomas' work were Nelson and Winthrop Rockefeller, Perry Como, Duke Ellington, Cab Calloway, Joe Louis, Humphrey Bogart, Harry Belafonte, Nat King Cole, Ralph Bunche and Hubert Humphrey. President Dwight Eisenhower, then president of Columbia University, attended ceremonies at the Harlem YMCA. Thomas also secured Fred Waring and his Pennsylvanians for a YMCA benefit concert at Lewishon Stadium. New York State Governors Harriman and Rockefeller and New York City Mayors Impelliteri and Wagner participated in the activities of the Harlem Branch of the YMCA. Thomas served on numerous boards and commissions including the Draft Board during World War II. He received a special citation from President Harry S. Truman for his outstanding volunteer services. After his retirement from the YMCA, Thomas spent fifteen years as personnel director at Harlem Teams for Self Help.

## **Scope and Content Note**

Collection of newspaper clippings, programs, and some correspondence documenting Rudolph J. Thomas' career (1920-1965) at the Harlem Branch of the Young Men's Christian Association at 135th Street in New York City. Also included are certificates, honors, and a scrapbook.

## **Key Terms**

### **Subjects**

African American businesspeople  
African American executives  
African Americans -- New York (State) -- New York  
Associations, institutions, etc -- United States  
Fund raisers (Persons) -- New York (State) -- New York  
Sports general managers  
Young Men's Christian associations -- Administration  
Young Men's Christian associations -- New York (State) -- New York

### **Genre/Physical Characteristic**

Scrapbooks

### **Names**

Thomas, Rudolph J., 1904-1990  
Harlem Branch YMCA

## Container List

- b. 1 f. 1 Personal Papers 1964-1970
- b. 1 f. 2 Correspondence 1895-1971 [bulk 1947-1971]
- b. 1 f. 3 Minutes
- b. 1 f. 4 Brochures
- b. 1 f. 5 Programs
- b. 1 f. 6-8 Newspaper Clippings 1942-1959
  - b. 2 Certificates and Honors
  - b. 3 Scrapbook