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Guide to the

Barbara Mae Watson papers

1929-1984

Sc MG 421

Summary

Creator: Watson, Barbara Mae, 1918-1983

Title: Barbara Mae Watson papers

Date: 1929-1984

Size: 17.8 linear feet (50 boxes)

Abstract: The Barbara M. Watson Papers date from 1929-1984 and document Watson's career as a business woman (1946-1955); lawyer (1962-1964, 1981-1983); government official (1966-1974, 1977-1980) and diplomat (1980-1981). In addition to career information, there are personal papers, general and family correspondence, lecture and conference participation data, including typescripts of speeches delivered by Watson, records of her board memberships and professional associations and extensive printed material relating to Watson's professional and personal life.

Access: Advance notice required.

Preferred citation: Barbara Mae Watson papers, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library

Creator History

Barbara Mae Watson (1918-1983) business woman, lawyer, government executive and diplomat. Watson was the first woman and first African-American Assistant Secretary of State, serving under Presidents Johnson, Nixon, Ford and Carter. As Acting Administrator and Administrator, Watson headed the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of [Security and] Consular Affairs from 1966-1974 and 1977-1980. From 1980-1981, she was the U.S. Ambassador to Malaysia.

Born in New York City, Watson was educated at Hunter Model School and High School. She earned degrees from Barnard College and New York Law School. From 1946 to 1955 Watson was the owner and director of the African-American modelling agency and charm school, Brandford Models, Inc. (later changed to Barbara Watson Models). In 1958 until 1959 Watson served as coordinator of Student Activities at Hampton Institute. Upon graduation from law school in 1962 she worked as an attorney with three New York City government agencies; the Board of Statutory Consolidation of the City of New York, the Office of the Corporation Counsel of the City of New York, and as director of the New York City

Commission to the United Nations. Upon retirement from the U.S. State Department she entered private law practice with two Washington based firms specializing in international law and business development and trade. At the time of her death in 1983 she had received an appointment to the U.S. Department of State's Special Selection Board.

Scope and Content Note

The Barbara M. Watson Papers date from 1929-1984 and document Watson's career as a business woman (1946-1955); lawyer (1962-1964, 1981-1983); government official (1966-1974, 1977-1980) and diplomat (1980-1981). In addition to career information, there are personal papers, general and family correspondence, lecture and conference participation data, including typescripts of speeches delivered by Watson, records of her board memberships and professional associations and extensive printed material relating to Watson's professional and personal life. There are papers relating to Watson's career (1946-1955) as owner and director of Brandford Models, the first African-American modeling agency and charm school in the United States; her position as Coordinator of Student Activities at Hampton Institute (1958-1959); her series of positions as an attorney with New York City, as well as her private practice of law and international trade consultancy with the Washington based law firms of Italo H. Ablondi and van Kloberg & Associates after her retirement from the U.S. Department of State. The largest series, United States Department of State is divided into five subseries beginning with the Office of Deputy Under Secretary of State for Administration. This subseries covers her initial three month (1966) appointment with the State Department and consists of personnel records, congratulatory letters regarding her appointment and newspaper clippings. The Bureau of Security and Consular Affairs (later renamed the Bureau of Consular Affairs) subseries documents Watson's duties as Acting Administrator and Administrator, with the rank of Assistant Secretary of State, and consist of what Watson called her "Personal Chronological File" which are letters and carbon copies of her replies that are considered official, yet informal and unclassified. The correspondents are friends and acquaintances who held official positions in consulates and embassies throughout the world, government leaders, executives of corporations, social action, cultural, ethnic, legal, political, educational and other organizations. Also documented is Watson's 1974 ouster, her job related speeches, travel vouchers and appointment calendars indicating the scope and purposes of her extensive travels in the U.S. and abroad, and which provide a framework for her official duties. The U.S. Ambassador to Malaysia subseries reflects Watson's activities in this position. Included is documentation of her official nomination and appointment, background information concerning Malaysia, ambassadorial seminars, commerce and foreign policy briefings, ceremonies, daily schedules, invitations, appointment calendars, speeches Watson delivered at official functions and newspaper clippings covering her tenure.

Arrangement: Organized into thirteen series; I. Personal Papers; II. General Correspondence; III. I'm Your Next Door Neighbor-Radio Program; IV. Brandford Models Inc./ Barbara Watson Models; V. Hampton Institute; VI. Board of Statutory Consolidation of the City of New York; VII. Office of Corporation Counsel of the City of New York; VIII. New York City Commission to the United Nations; IX. United States Department of State; X. Lecturing and Conference Participation; XI. Private Practice of Law and Consulting; XII. Board Memberships and Professional Associations; XIII. Honors, Awards and Decorations

Key Terms

Subjects

African American diplomats
African American executives
African American government executives
African American lawyers
African American orators
African American women executives
African Americans -- Politics and government
African Americans in radio broadcasting
Ambassadors -- United States
Beauty, Personal
Black author
Cabinet officers -- United States
Clothing and dress
Diplomatic and consular service
Diplomatic and consular service -- Malaysia
Diplomatic and consular service, American -- Malaysia
Diplomats -- United States
Embassy buildings -- Malaysia
Government executives -- United States
Lawyers -- United States
Modeling agencies -- United States
Orators -- United States
Passports -- United States
Radio broadcasting -- United States
Visas -- United States
Women diplomats -- United States
Women government executives -- United States
Women in radio broadcasting -- United States
Women lawyers -- United States
Women orators -- United States

Titles

I'm your next door neighbor (Radio Program)

Geographic Names

Malaysia -- Foreign relations -- United States
New York (N.Y.) -- Politics and government
United States -- Foreign relations -- Malaysia
United States -- Officials and employees
United States -- Politics and government

Genre/Physical Characteristic

Speeches

Names

Watson, Barbara Mae, 1918-1983
Annenberg, Walter H., 1908-2002
Barthe_, Richmond, 1901-1989
Carter, Jimmy, 1924-
Cullen, Countee, 1903-1946
German, Milagros A.
Hughes, Langston, 1902-1967
Humphrey, Hubert H. (Hubert Horatio), 1911-1978
Johnson, Lyndon B. (Lyndon Baines), 1908-1973

Knight, Francis G.
McKay, Claude, 1890-1948
Rusk, Dean, 1909-1994
Sangster, Donald B.
Skinner, Arturo, 1923-1975
Suzman, Helen
Watson, James L. (James Lopez), 1922-2001
Watson, Violet L. (Violet Lopez), 1891-1971
Yunkers, Adja, 1900-1983
Barbara Watson Models (New York, N.Y.)
Brandford Models, Inc. (New York, N.Y.)
New York (N.Y.). City Commission for the United Nations and for the Consular Corps
United States. Bureau of Consular Affairs
United States. Bureau of Security and Consular Affairs
United States. Department of State
United States. Visa Office