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Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division

Guide to the

Ralph Bunche letters

1959-1963

Sc MG 461

Compiled by Diana Lachatanere and Janice Quinter, 2009.

Summary

Creator: Bunche, Ralph J. (Ralph Johnson), 1904-1971

Title: Ralph Bunche letters

Date: 1959-1963

Size: .1 linear feet (1 folder)

Source: Donated by Polly Middleton, 1992.

Abstract: Ralph Bunche was an American political scientist, academic, and diplomat. The Ralph Bunche letters contain correspondence between Bunche and Conyers Read, a friend and organizer of the British Empire division in the Research and Analysis branch of the Office of Strategic Services during World War II.

Access: Advance notice required.

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Preferred citation: [Item], Ralph Bunche letters, Sc MG 461, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, The New York Public Library

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Creator History

Ralph Bunche was an American political scientist, academic, and diplomat who received the 1950 Nobel Peace Prize for his late-1940s mediation in Israel. He was also involved in the formation and administration of the United Nations, and in 1963 he was awarded the Medal of Freedom by President

John F. Kennedy. Bunche served as chair of the Department of Political Science at Howard University (1928-1950), as a member of the Board of Overseers of his alma mater, Harvard University (1960-1965), as a member of the board of the Institute of International Education, and as a trustee of Oberlin College, Lincoln University, and New Lincoln School.

Born in 1904 to working class parents in Detroit, Ralph Bunche graduated from the University of California, Los Angeles in 1927 and Harvard Graduate School in 1928. Bunche taught in the Department of Political Science at Howard University in Washington, D.C., and worked with the Carnegie Corporation and the Department of State before joining the Permanent Secretariat of the United Nations in 1948. Investigations of Bunche's activities were conducted under the Hatch Act in 1940-1942 and the Loyalty Act in 1953-1954. During the 1930s and 1940s, he was associated with various organizations on the Attorney General's list of subversive organizations, among them the National Negro Congress (which he co-founded). In 1941 he was designated for custodial detention in the event of a national emergency by the FBI. He was cleared by the International Organizations Employees Loyalty Board in 1954.

Custodial History

The collection was salvaged from a dumpster after subject's death.

Scope and Content Note

The Ralph Bunche letters contain correspondence between Bunche and Conyers Read, a friend and organizer of the British Empire division in the Research and Analysis branch of the Office of Strategic Services during World War II. Read hired Bunche in 1941 as a principal social scientist analyst in charge of Africa and other colonial areas.

The 1959 letters relate to an attack made on Bunche by Nathan Pusey, then president of Harvard University, and Archibald Roosevelt (a grandson of Theodore Roosevelt). Apparently Bunche had been nominated to a position of "overseer" of Harvard, and Pusey and Roosevelt were campaigning against him. The offending letter had been sent to Read, as a Harvard alumnus, who in turn wrote letters in defense of Bunche to both men and sent Bunche copies. A letter Read wrote to Pusey is included in the collection.

Two additional letters, 1961 and 1963, concern invitations extended to Bunche by Polly Middleton, Read's stepdaughter.

Key Terms

Genre/Physical Characteristic

Correspondence

Subjects

Statesmen -- United States -- Correspondence

Names

Pusey, Nathan M. (Nathan Marsh), 1907-2001
Read, Conyers, 1881-1959
Roosevelt, Archibald, 1918-1990