



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

Guide to the

**Thomas Russell Jones papers**

1935-2000

Sc MG 818

## Summary

**Creator:** Jones, Thomas R., 1913-2006

**Title:** Thomas Russell Jones papers

**Date:** 1935-2000

**Size:** 18.0 linear feet (18 boxes)

**Source:** Gift of David Jones, 2014.

**Revision History:** Finding aid updated by Lauren Stark.

**Abstract:** Born and raised in Brooklyn, by middle-class parents from Barbados, Thomas Russell Jones graduated from St. Johns University Law School in 1937. A first lieutenant during World War II, he led companies of Black troops during the Allied invasion of Normandy, and participated in the liberation of the Alsace province of France. His professional activities included a law practice as a young Black lawyer during the 1950s; his leadership role in the founding of the Unity Democratic Club in Brooklyn in 1960, and of the Bedford Stuyvesant Restoration Corporation, together with Senator Robert Kennedy, in 1966; and a prestigious public service career, first in the New York State Assembly for the 17th District in 1962, as a delegate to New York State's Constitutional Convention in 1966, and then, in 1968, as a Justice of the New York State Supreme Court. He retired from the bench in 1978, and redirected his energy into advocacy for children, public speaking, and community activism in general. The Thomas Russell Jones papers document the personal life and the professional career of Thomas Russell Jones, a retired Supreme Court Judge for the State of New York, and an early leader in the struggle for the political and economic empowerment of Brooklyn's Black community.

**Preferred citation:** [Item], Thomas Russell Jones papers, Sc MG 818, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, The New York Public Library

**Language of the Material:** English

**Separated Materials:**

To be transferred to the Moving Image and Recorded Sound Division: one box of audio and moving image materials.

To be transferred to the Photographs and Prints Division: photographs.

## **Creator History**

Born and raised in Brooklyn, by middle-class parents from Barbados, Thomas Russell Jones graduated from St. Johns University Law School in 1937. A first lieutenant during World War II, he led companies of Black troops during the Allied invasion of Normandy, and participated in the liberation of the Alsace province of France. His professional activities included a law practice as a young Black lawyer during the 1950s; his leadership role in the founding of the Unity Democratic Club in Brooklyn in 1960, and of the Bedford Stuyvesant Restoration Corporation, together with Senator Robert Kennedy, in 1966; and a prestigious public service career, first in the New York State Assembly for the 17th District in 1962, as a delegate to New York State's Constitutional Convention in 1966, and then, in 1968, as a Justice of the New York State Supreme Court. He retired from the bench in 1978, and redirected his energy into advocacy for children, public speaking, and community activism in general.

## **Scope and Content Note**

The Thomas Russell Jones papers document the personal life and the professional career of Thomas Russell Jones, a retired Supreme Court Judge for the State of New York, and an early leader in the struggle for the political and economic empowerment of Brooklyn's Black community.

**Arrangement:** Arranged into 10 series: I. Personal; II. Early life and career; III. The Unity Democratic Club; IV. New York State Assembly; V. Bedford Stuyvesant Restoration Corporation; VI. Judicial; VII. Child advocacy; VIII. General correspondence; IX. Speeches; and X. Diaries.

## **Key Terms**

### **Subjects**

African American judges  
African American lawyers -- New York (State) -- New York  
African American lawyers -- Political activity  
African American politicians -- New York (State) -- New York  
Community activists -- New York (State) -- New York  
Judges -- New York (State)  
World War, 1939-1945 -- Participation, African American

### **Names**

Jones, Thomas R., 1913-2006  
Kennedy, Robert F., 1925-1968  
Bedford-Stuyvesant Restoration Corporation  
Democratic Party (N.Y.)  
New York (State). Legislature. Assembly.

## Container List

### Personal 1935-1994

This series begins with biographical and autobiographical material, articles written by and about Judge Jones, and transcripts of an oral history interview with the LaGuardia and Wagner Archives. Family papers include material by and about his father, Thomas Sylvester Jones, and his mother, Mabel Ward Jones, of the illustrious Ward family in Barbados; selected material about his wife, born Bertha Kanter, and her family; correspondence with his two children, Margaret "Peggy" Jones DeLaCour and David Russell Jones, and other relatives. This first series also encompasses the Barbados files, and material related to the Jones's travels abroad, including their historic trip to China in 1980 on an official invitation from Hsu Te Chien of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, to lecture at the Chinese Law Institute in Shanghai and Beijing on "The American Judicial System Under the Rule of Law."

Arranged into 4 subseries: (1) Biographical; (2) Family; (3) Barbados; and (4) China trip.

#### Biographical

- b. 1 f. 1 Biographical and autobiographical sketches
- b. 1 f. 2 Curriculum vitae
- b. 1 f. 3 Articles by and about Jones
- b. 1 f. 4 Opinions and notes
- b. 1 f. 5 Certificates and awards
- b. 1 f. 6 Oral history interview with LaGuardia and Wagner Archives
- b. 1 f. 7 Miscellaneous

#### Family

- b. 1 f. 8 Jones, Thomas Sylvester and Mabel Ward Jones (parents)
- b. 1 f. 9-10 Jones, Thomas Sylvester 1951-1955  
Includes footnotes, newsletter, articles, and notes.
- b. 1 f. 11-12 Jones, Bertha Kanter (wife) 1935  
Includes her high school graduation book.
- b. 1 f. 13 DeLaCour, Margaret Jones (daughter)
- b. 1 f. 14 Jones, David Russell (son)
- b. 1 f. 15 Other relatives

#### Barbados

The Barbados files include genealogical data on the Ward family; correspondence with Darnley Ward, CEO of the Mount Gay family distilleries; a small group of papers related to Erskine Ward, the progressive Barbadian statesman and leader of the West Indian Federation movement; correspondence with other relatives, including Prime-Minister Deighton Ward; correspondence and other material relating to the Thomas Sylvester Jones Memorial Fund instituted by Justice Jones; and correspondence regarding a dinner dance held by the Barbados Nurses Association of America in honor of Justice Jones in 1994. Also included are notes, research material and printed matter about Barbados.

- b. 1 f. 16 Genealogy of Robert Ward and family memorabilia
- b. 1 f. 17 Ward, Darnley
- b. 1 f. 18 Ward, Erskine
- b. 1 f. 19 Correspondence
- b. 1 f. 20 Thomas Sylvester Jones Memorial Fund
- b. 1 f. 21 Barbados Nurses Association Dinner Dance 1994
- b. 1 f. 22-23 Travel diaries 1989-1990

Personal (cont.)  
Barbados (cont.)

- b. 1 f. 24 Notes and research material
- b. 1 f. 25 Printed matter

China trip

The China files consist of photographs; Judge Jones's correspondence with Chinese and U.S. officials, his personal friend Wen Hwa Cheng, and China scholars; a diary of the trip complete with photographs and mounted memorabilia; notes and personal memoranda on the people the couple met and the sites they visited; and typescripts of the addresses the judge delivered in China. The latter include "The Black Experience under the Constitution and the Laws of the United States", "The Rule of Law in the United States", and "The Role of Lawyers in American Society." Also included are research material and drafts of articles he submitted for publication after his return from China to the *New York Amsterdam News*, *The New York Times*, and the *New York Law Journal*. Additional correspondence about the trip to the China appears in general correspondence.

- b. 1 f. 26 Correspondence
- b. 1 f. 27 Diary
- b. 1 f. 28 Notes and personal memoranda
- b. 1 f. 29 "The Rule of Law in the United States"
- b. 1 f. 30 "The Role of Lawyers in American Society"
- b. 1 f. 31 "The Black Experience under the Constitution and the Laws of the United States"

Jones articles

- b. 1 f. 32 Prison reform in China
- b. 1 f. 33 "Record of a Public Trial"
- b. 1 f. 34 Notes and research material for article on Chinese law
- b. 1 f. 35 Photographs
- b. 1 f. 36 Reading material
- b. 1 f. 37 Tourist brochures
- b. 1 f. 38 Other travel diaries 1959-1986

Early life and career 1939-1959

This series encompasses Judge Jones's early days as Chairman of the New York Youth Congress in 1939; his distinguished service during World War II; his campaign for City Court Justice under the banner of the American Labor Party in 1948; his struggling legal practice in the early 1950s; his legal defense of the Chinese laundry workers during the McCarthy era; his early efforts at political organizing in Bedford Stuyvesant; and his role as a founder of the African Historical Research Society. The Chinese laundry workers were put on trial for allegedly "trading with the enemy" (i.e. sending small remittances to family members in China). Judge Jones challenged the Grand Jury for indicting them. They were found guilty and sentenced to six months in detention.

- b. 2 f. 1 American Youth Congress 1939
- b. 2 f. 2 World War II
- b. 2 f. 3 Legal practice 1950-1953
- b. 2 f. 4 Chinese laundry workers' case 1954
- b. 2 f. 5 Chen, Amy. "McCarthyism in Chinatown"
- b. 2 f. 6-8 "U.S. vs. China Daily News", parts 1-3
- b. 2 f. 9 Stuyvesant Community Center 1954
- b. 2 f. 10 Bedford Stuyvesant Political League 1954
- b. 2 f. 11 Scrapbook 1956
- b. 2 f. 12 African Historical Research Society 1958-1959

## The Unity Democratic Club

Thomas Russell Jones launched the Unity Democratic Club (UDC) in 1959, in the Crown Heights and Bedford Stuyvesant section of Brooklyn, with a dynamic group of interracial and community activists. Bertha Jones, Grace and John O. Killens, Ruth Goring, Mary Woods, Ruth and George Brooks, Andrew Cooper, and Ernest Crishlow were some of the key participants. UDC reached out to the low income tenants of the housing projects, but also to middle-class and professional African Americans, churches, block associations, and parent groups. It called for an end to discrimination in the labor movement, and under the slogan "Buy Where You Can Work", campaigned for equal opportunity employment for Black residents in the businesses and factories along Fulton and Nostrand Avenues. UDC organized aggressive voter registration campaigns and worked hard to bring disenfranchised residents back into the political process. It organized workshops to educate Black and Latino Brooklyn residents about the election process: the importance of primaries, the selection of delegates and candidates, and the role of district leaders. In 1960, the group began fielding candidates for state and city elections, and thus played a leading role in chipping away at the hegemony of white candidates in majority Black and Latino communities. During the 1962 primaries, Thomas Russell Jones and Ruth Goring defeated the Democratic Party regulars, Samuel Berman and Carrie Lark, for the leadership of Brooklyn's 17th District. During the general elections for that year, Mr. Jones also won a seat in the New York State Assembly as a representative of that district.

The UDC files document the activities of a pioneering organization in the struggle for Black empowerment among Brooklyn residents. Materials range from 1960-1964, and include correspondence, newsletters, campaign material, souvenir journals, and two very informative scrapbooks.

- b. 2 f. 13 Constitution
- b. 2 f. 14 1960
- b. 2 f. 15-16 Campaign and primary for the New York State Assembly 1960
- b. 2 f. 17 Correspondence 1960-1964
- b. 2 f. 18 New York State Assembly primary 1962
- b. 2 f. 19 Correspondence and printed matter 1962-1964
- b. 2 f. 20 1963
- b. 2 f. 21-23 1964
  - Includes elections and cocktail reception.
- b. 2 f. 24 Unity Art Fair
- b. 2 f. 25 Chisholm, Shirley
- b. 2 f. 26 "The Unity Democrat" newsletter
- b. 2 f. 27-28 Souvenir journals 1961-1964
- b. 2 f. 29 Campaign material
- b. 2 f. 30 Scrapbook 1962
- b. 2 f. 31 Financial 1962-1966
- b. 2 f. 32 Printed matter
- b. 2 f. 33 Gerson, Jeffrey. "Building the Brooklyn Machine: Irish, Jewish and Black Political Succession in Central Brooklyn, 1919-1964"

### New York State Assembly 1963-1964

This series consists primarily of correspondence organized alphabetically and chronologically. There are also some campaign materials and his reports to the community.

#### Correspondence

1963

- b. 3 f. 1 A-D
- b. 3 f. 2 E-L

New York State Assembly (cont.)  
Correspondence (cont.)  
1963 (cont.)

- b. 3 f. 3 M-Z
- b. 3 f. 4 Unsorted
- 1964
- b. 3 f. 5 A-D
- b. 3 f. 6 E-J
- b. 3 f. 7 K-M
- b. 3 f. 8 S-Z
- b. 3 f. 9 January-June
- b. 3 f. 10 July-December
- b. 3 f. 11-12 Reports 1963-1964
- b. 3 f. 13 Memorandum to Speaker Joseph Carlino on youth employment 1964 January
- b. 3 f. 14 Miscellaneous

Bedford Stuyvesant Restoration Corporation (BSRC) 1966-1972

Robert F. Kennedy envisioned the Bedford Stuyvesant Restoration Corporation project (BSRC) as "an alliance of private business and community leaders, assisted by government, to develop the full physical and human potential of the Bedford Stuyvesant community." Kennedy had campaigned earlier with Judge Jones on the Democratic ticket and learned to appreciate his leadership and blunt honesty. He called upon him to lead this unprecedented effort at community renewal. The two men developed a strong working relationship, which lasted until Kennedy's death in 1968.

This series is organized into seven subseries. The "Vision of Robert Kennedy" subseries, thus labeled by Judge Jones himself, chronicles Kennedy's direct involvement with the project, and how the project was allowed to deviate from that vision, after Kennedy's assassination. The Active years files consist of minutes of board meetings; architects' proposals for the Super Block program, the Sheffield Farms Community Center, and the Atlantic-Nostrand Community Core; financial and statistical reports; and material of the Coalition on Educational Needs and Services, which played a leading role in the development of Medgar Evers College. Notes, interviews, and speeches include several oral history interviews, and notes from meetings with Benno C. Schmidt and a panel of experts.

Arranged into 7 subseries: (1) The Vision of Robert F. Kennedy; (2) Active years; (3) Correspondence; (4) Notes, interviews, and speeches; (5) Reports; (6) Economic history of Bedford Stuyvesant; and (7) Post-1972.

Vision of Robert F. Kennedy

- b. 3 f. 15 Statement on Mission of BSRC
- b. 3 f. 16 RFK and BSRC
- b. 3 f. 17 Statements by and about RFK
- b. 3 f. 18 Kennedy's assassination
- b. 3 f. 19 BSRC in the beginning
- b. 3 f. 20 Memo to Roderick Mitchell 1998
- b. 3 f. 21 Board meeting 1969
- b. 3 f. 22 Financial statement 1968
- b. 3 f. 23 Request for proposals
- b. 3 f. 24 Housing and Urban Development Act 1968
- b. 3 f. 25 Linear City proposal 1968
- b. 3 f. 26 Rehabilitation proposal for Bed-Stuy

Active years 1966-1972

Bedford Stuyvesant Restoration Corporation (BSRC) (cont.)  
Active years (cont.)

- b. 3 f. 27 By-laws
- b. 3 f. 28 Bedford Stuyvesant mediation report
- b. 3 f. 29-35 Board meetings 1967-1972  
Includes D and S meeting, 1971.
- b. 4 f. 1 Special impact program
- b. 4 f. 2 D & S picture portfolio 1968
- b. 4 f. 3-6 Architects' memo and proposal 1967  
Proposal includes 3 parts: I. The Atlantic-Nostrand Core; II. The Super Block Program; and III. Sheffield Farms Center.
- b. 4 f. 7 Statistical reports
- b. 4 f. 8 Proposal for a daily newspaper
- b. 4 f. 9 Ex-offender project
- b. 4 f. 10 Outline of work programs
- b. 4 f. 11 Input tour 1967 December
- b. 4 f. 12 Coalition on Educational Needs and Services
- b. 4 f. 13 Medgar Evers College
- b. 4 f. 14 Pat Carter criticism of Jones 1967
- b. 4 f. 15 Clippings
- b. 4 f. 16 Restoration newsletter
- b. 4 f. 17 Jones resignation 1973 January
- b. 4 f. 18 Miscellaneous
- Correspondence
- b. 4 f. 19-21 1967
- b. 4 f. 22-23 1968
- b. 4 f. 24 1969
- b. 4 f. 25-26 1970
- b. 4 f. 27 1971
- b. 5 f. 1
- b. 5 f. 2 1972
- b. 5 f. 3 1975
- Notes, interviews, and speeches
- b. 5 f. 4-7 Oral history with Roberta Greene 1971-1972
- b. 5 f. 8 Oral history interview with EOC 1972  
Presumably the Emergency Operations Center (EOC), U.S. Department of Labor.
- b. 5 f. 9 Oral history with JFK Library 1971-1972
- b. 5 f. 10 Oral history with CDC and James Murray
- b. 5 f. 11 Oral history with Neal Goodwin 1999
- b. 5 f. 12 WGBH documentary on R. F. Kennedy 1991
- b. 5 f. 13 Notebook 1966 September
- b. 5 f. 14 Meeting with Benno C. Schmidt 1972
- b. 5 f. 15 Meeting with a panel of experts 1967
- b. 5 f. 16 Speech on receiving BSRC Award 1998
- b. 5 f. 17 "Bedford Stuyvesant in the Year 2000"

Bedford Stuyvesant Restoration Corporation (BSRC) (cont.)

- b. 6 Reports
- b. 7-8 Economic history of Bedford Stuyvesant
- b. 8 Post-1972
- b. 8 Judicial

This series consists of correspondence and campaign material for the 1964 elections and Judge Jones's election to the New York State Constitutional Convention in 1966; and selected articles and opinions written by Judge Jones during his tenure in the New York State Supreme Court. Also included are materials of the Committee to Draft Judge Thomas Russell Jones for Congress (1968).

- b. 8 Child advocacy

This material includes selected documents of the Bedford Stuyvesant Committee for the Children from 1963-1977, and records of The Children's Times Inc., a nonprofit effort led by Judge Jones and Mrs. Jones.

- b. 9 General correspondence 1965-1980

Includes correspondence with Willie Jones and Claude Stephane Collins.

- b. 9 Speeches and notes

This series includes several important speeches given by Judge Jones after his retirement from the bench, and the Judge's private notes and research material on several contemporary Black leaders.

Diaries 1947-1998

- b. 10 1947-1963
- b. 11 1964-1968
- b. 12 1968-1973
- b. 13 1974-1977
- b. 14 1978-1983
- b. 15 1983-1987
- b. 16 1988-1991
- b. 17 1991-1995
- b. 18 1996-1998
- b. 18 Travel diaries 1958-1986