



The New York Public Library  
Photographs and Prints Division. Schomburg Center for  
Research in Black Culture

Guide to the

**Barbara Mae Watson photographs**

1921-1983 [bulk 1968-1981]

SCP 186089

Processed by Em Longan in 2022.

## Summary

**Creator:** Watson, Barbara Mae, 1918-1983

**Title:** Barbara Mae Watson photographs

**Date:** 1921-1983 [bulk 1968-1981]

**Size:** 3.42 linear feet (9 boxes)

**Source:** Donated by the Watson family, 1991-1992.

**Abstract:** Barbara Mae Watson (1918-1983) was a lawyer, United States diplomat, and the first female and the first Black Assistant Secretary of State, serving under Presidents Johnson, Nixon, Ford, and Carter. Watson also co-founded one of the first Black modeling agencies in 1946, served as Executive Director of the New York City Commission to the United Nations from 1964 to 1966, and was Ambassador to Malaysia from 1980 to 1981. Watson's photographs, dated from 1921 to 1983, depict her professional and personal life through prints, negatives, and illustrations.

**Preferred citation:** Barbara Mae Watson photographs, Photographs and Prints Division. Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library

**Language of the Material:** English

**Processing note:** Processed by Em Longan in 2022.

**Separated Materials:**

Photographs transferred from Barbara Mae Watson papers in Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books, Schomburg Center.

One poster transferred to the Art and Artifacts Division, Schomburg Center

## Creator History

Barbara Mae Watson was born in New York City on November 5, 1918 to James S. Watson, the first Black elected judge in New York, and Violet Lopez Watson, one of the founders of the National Council

of Negro Women. Barbara was the eldest sibling of Grace Elizabeth Watson, James Lopez Watson, and Douglas C. Watson. The family frequently vacationed in Spanish Town and Kingston, Jamaica, where both Violet and James S. had grown up. Barbara obtained a Bachelor of Arts degree in 1939 from Barnard College, and a law degree in 1962 from New York Law School. She began her professional life as an interviewer with the United Seamen's Service of New York from 1943 to 1946.

In 1946, along with commercial artist Edward Brandford and stylist Mary Louise Yabro, Watson co-founded Brandford Models, one of the first Black modeling agencies. Watson also taught etiquette and charm school courses at the agency's modeling school. Edward Brandford also founded an advertising agency marketed towards companies that wished to appeal to Black consumers in 1948. Watson ran the modeling agency after 1949, when Brandford's attention had become more divided. She had renamed the agency Barbara Watson Models by 1954, and continued to serve as Director until 1956, when she closed both the agency and its affiliated modeling school.

After obtaining her law degree in 1962, Watson was appointed as an assistant attorney with the Corporation Counsel of New York City from 1963 to 1964. She then served as the Executive Director of the New York City Commission to the United Nations from 1964 until 1966, when her Department of State career began. She served in the Johnson, Nixon, Ford, and Carter administrations. Watson joined the Department in 1966 as special assistant to the Deputy Under Secretary of State for Administration and was soon promoted. From 1966 to 1968, she was Acting Administrator of the Bureau of Security and Consular Affairs.

In July 1968, Watson was nominated by President Lyndon B. Johnson to be Assistant Secretary of State for the Bureau of Security and Consular Affairs. The United States Senate confirmed her appointment, and she held this position until November 1974. Her brother, Judge James L. Watson, administered the oath of office during her swearing-in ceremony. Watson was both the first Black Assistant Secretary of State and the first woman to serve in this role. She was an active participant in international Consular Conferences throughout the 1970s.

Beginning in March of 1974, the Nixon administration attempted multiple times to oust Watson in order to replace her with Leonard F. Walentynowicz, a Republican lawyer from Buffalo, New York. The Ford administration blocked attempts from Nixon appointees in late August and early September before demanding her resignation in November. Watson remained in Washington, D.C., where she took a job with Walter Annenberg's Triangle Publications as a legal consultant in 1975. She also lectured at several colleges and universities during this interim.

In January 1977, President Jimmy Carter asked Watson to return to the role of Assistant Secretary of State for Security and Consular Affairs. She was appointed Ambassador to Malaysia by President Carter three years later in 1980, and presented her credentials in September. During her term, she supervised the transfer of 75,000 Vietnamese refugees of the Cambodian-Vietnamese War to the United States; encouraged American trade investments in Malaysia; and facilitated negotiations of the sixth International Tin Agreement. President Ronald Reagan accepted her letter of resignation in February 1981. She returned to private law practice with two Washington-based firms, specializing in international law, business development, and trade.

Watson received honorary doctorates from the University of Maryland and Mount St. Mary's College. She was a member of the American Bar Association, the District of Columbia Bar Association, the Bar of the State of New York, and the Bar of the District of Columbia. In addition to receiving the Luther I. Replogle Award for Outstanding Management in Foreign Affairs in 1974, Watson was the recipient of seventeen other awards from varied organizations, and was decorated as a Commander of the National Order of the Republic of the Ivory Coast.

Watson was a member of the boards of Fordham University; Barnard College; the Georgetown University School of Foreign Service; the Georgetown Center for Strategic and International Studies; Radio Liberty/Radio Free Europe; and the Wolf Trap Foundation for the Performing Arts.

Barbara Mae Watson died of pneumonia at George Washington University Hospital in Washington, D.C. on February 17, 1983.

## Scope and Content Note

The Barbara Mae Watson photographs, dating from 1921 to 1983, depict Watson's professional and personal life through prints, illustrations, and negatives. The collection is arranged into the following groupings: United States Department of State; Conferences; Brandford Models; and Personal. Materials in each group are arranged chronologically.

The bulk of the collection focuses on Watson's career in the United States Department of State and is dated 1966 to 1983. These images depict such events as her swearing-in ceremonies, political receptions, charity events, state dinners, formal luncheons, staff parties, diplomatic meetings, and the Ambassador's residence in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Photographs of Presidents Carter and Johnson are present, as are images of Rosalyn Carter, Secretary of State David Dean Rusk, Congressman John Rooney, Jamaican Prime Minister Sir Donald B. Sangster, President of the Philippines Ferdinand Marcos, and First Lady of the Philippines Imelda Marcos. Official Department of State photographs are frequently captioned with the event, date, and subject information. Some non-photographic material, such as correspondence, is interfiled to provide context for unlabeled images.

Watson frequently traveled for lectures and conferences, not only during her time with the Department of State, but also during the interim of 1975 to 1977. Images of Watson's lectures and conference attendance are therefore separated from the Department of State photographs, given that they overlap with non-Department employment and interests.

The Brandford Models materials contain model portfolio sheets; photoshoots featuring Brandford models, including a photograph used for the cover of Chester B. Himes' *If He Hollers Let Him Go* (1945); and agency promotional material, which includes an illustrated candidate board of former Brandford models for the 1963 Miss Beaux Arts pageant. Watson is featured in some of the images as the agency's charm and etiquette coach and Director.

Watson's family, with whom she was very close, features prominently in the collection. Her parents, Violet and James S., are present, as are her siblings Grace, Douglas, and James L. These personal photographs depict Spanish Town and Kingston, Jamaica; childhood vacations with family friends; Watson's time at Barnard College, and her tenure as an interviewer with the United Seamen's Service.

**Arrangement:** The Barbara Mae Watson photographs are arranged into the following groupings: United States Department of State; Conferences; Brandford Models; and Personal. Each grouping is arranged chronologically.

## Key Terms

### Subjects

African American government executives  
African American models  
African American women diplomats  
Ambassadors -- United States  
Diplomatic and consular service  
Modeling agencies

**Occupations**

Government employees.

**Geographic Names**

Malaysia -- History -- 20th century  
Philippines -- History

**Genre/Physical Characteristic**

Photographs

**Names**

Carter, Jimmy, 1924-  
Carter, Rosalynn  
German, Milagros A.  
Himes, Chester B., 1909-1984  
Marcos, Ferdinand E. (Ferdinand Edralin), 1917-1989  
Marcos, Imelda Romualdez, 1929-  
Sangster, Donald, Sir, 1911-1967  
Watson, Barbara Mae, 1918-1983  
Watson, James S., 1882-1952  
Brandford Models, Inc. (New York, N.Y.)  
HIAS (Agency)  
United Nations  
United Seamen's Service  
United States. Department of State

## Container List

### United States Department of State

- b. 1 f. 1-9 1966-1983
- b. 2 f. 1-10 Contains some memorabilia, images of unidentified Department of State events, and
- b. 3 f. 1-10 professional headshots of Watson throughout her Department of State career.
- b. 4 f. 1 Acting Administrator for the Bureau of Security and Consular Affairs  
Swearing-in Ceremony 1966
- b. 4 f. 2 Prime Minister Donald Sangster United Nations Visit 1966
- b. 4 f. 3-5 Assistant Secretary of State Swearing-in Ceremony 1968
- b. 4 f. 6 Manila, Philippines Visit 1969
- b. 9 f. 1 Tokyo, Yokohama, Japan Visit 1970
- b. 4 f. 7 United Seamen's Service Award 1970
- b. 4 f. 8 Tokyo, Japan Visit 1971
- b. 4 f. 9 Luther I. Replogle Award 1974
- b. 4 f. 10 Assistant Secretary of State Swearing-in Ceremony 1977
- b. 4 f. 11 Wolf Trapper Party 1977
- b. 5 f. 1-3 Manila, Philippines 1978
- b. 9 f. 2-3 Contains images of Watson's official visit, an ambassador luncheon, and a dinner hosted by  
President Ferdinand Marcos and First Lady Imelda Marcos.
- b. 9 f. 4 Judge Milagros A. German Swearing-in Ceremony 1979
- b. 5 f. 4-6 Ambassadorship to Malaysia 1980-1981
- b. 9 f. 5 Contains images of the ambassador's residence in Kuala Lumpur and press releases about  
Watson's tenure as Ambassador.
- b. 5 f. 7 Ambassador Watson's Departure from the State Department 1981  
Contains press clippings.

### Conferences

- b. 6 f. 1 1970s  
Contains unidentified International Consular Conferences and Association of American Foreign  
Service Women images.
- b. 6 f. 2 Rome, Italy Consular Conference 1967
- b. 6 f. 3 International Council of Voluntary Agencies Conference 1967
- b. 6 f. 4 United HIAS Service 1968-1980
- b. 6 f. 5 Principal Officers' Conference 1969-1973
- b. 6 f. 6 Far East Consular Conference 1971
- b. 6 f. 7 Vienna, Italy Consular Conference 1971, 1977
- b. 6 f. 8 Canada Consular Conference 1972
- b. 6 f. 9 American Immigration and Citizenship Conference 1973
- b. 6 f. 10 Accra, Ghana Consular Conference 1973
- b. 6 f. 11 Ankara, Türkiye Consular Conference 1973
- b. 8 f. 8 Ghana Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children 1974
- b. 6 f. 12 Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago Consular Conference 1977
- b. 6 f. 13 European Consular Conference 1978
- b. 6 f. 14 West and Central African Consular Conference 1978
- b. 6 f. 15 Tunis, Tunisia Consular Conference 1979 March

Conferences (cont.)

- b. 6 f. 16 Reception for Black College Presidents 1979 November
- b. 6 f. 17-18 Brandford Models 1945-1963
- b. 8 f. 3-5 Contains portrait of Thelma Porter and cover of Chester B. Himes' *If He Hollers Let Him Go* (1945).

Personal Photographs

- b. 6 f. 19-22 Watson Family 1918-1977
- b. 7 f. 1-3 Contains photographs of Barbara Watson as a child, the family home in Harlem, and professional portraits of every member of the family.
- b. 8 f. 1-2
- b. 7 f. 4 Family Vacations 1921-1941
- Contains photographs and illustrations of Spanish Town and Kingston, Jamaica.
- b. 7 f. 5 Family Friends 1930s-1941
- b. 7 f. 6-7 Barnard College 1935-1939
- b. 7 f. 8 Lisle Fellowship 1942
- b. 7 f. 9 United Seamen's Service 1943-1969
- b. 7 f. 10 Friends and Colleagues 1948-1976
- b. 8 f. 2 Contains a signed photograph from basketball player Julius Erving and a photograph of a dinner given in honor of Reverend William Lloyd Imes, D.D.
- b. 7 f. 11 United Nations 1960-1965