

2019

Davis, Griffith (photographs)

Meaghan Alston

Follow this and additional works at: https://dh.howard.edu/finaid_pnp

Recommended Citation

Alston, Meaghan, "Davis, Griffith (photographs)" (2019). *Prints and Photographs Department. 2.*
https://dh.howard.edu/finaid_pnp/2

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Finding Aids at Digital Howard @ Howard University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Prints and Photographs Department by an authorized administrator of Digital Howard @ Howard University. For more information, please contact lopez.matthews@howard.edu.



ArchivesSpace
a community served by ✦ LYRASIS

Griffith Davis Photograph Collection

Collection P100

This finding aid was produced using ArchivesSpace on April 16, 2019.

Moorland-Spangarn Research Center

500 Howard Place NW

Washington, DC 20059

URL: <http://dh.howard.edu/msrc/>

Table of Contents

| | |
|--|---|
| Summary Information | 3 |
| Biographical / Historical | 3 |
| Scope and Contents | 4 |
| Arrangement | 4 |
| Administrative Information | 6 |
| Collection Inventory | 6 |
| Series A: Correspondence | 6 |
| Series B: Writings | 7 |
| Series C: Editorial Negatives | 7 |
| Series D: People of the Congo | 8 |
| Series E: General Liberian Photographs | 8 |
| Series F: Liberia Trip I | 9 |
| Series G: Liberia Trip II | 9 |
| Series H: Liberia Trip III | 9 |

Summary Information

| | |
|----------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Repository: | Moorland-Spingarn Research Center |
| Title: | Griffith Davis Photograph Collection |
| ID: | Coll. P100 |
| Date [inclusive]: | 1949-1981 |
| Date [bulk]: | 1949-1952 |
| Physical Description: | 3.5 Cubic Feet |
| Language of the Material: | English |

[^ Return to Table of Contents](#)

Biographical / Historical

Griffith "Griff" Davis (1923-1993) was a photojournalist and diplomat. Davis was born on April 18th, 1923 in Atlanta, Georgia on the campus of Morehouse College. He became interested in photography while attending high school at the Atlanta University Laboratory School.

Davis put his educational ambitions on hold to join the armed forces in WWII and fought with the 92nd Infantry Division in Italy from 1944 to 1946.

After his tour, Davis returned to his birthplace and enrolled at Morehouse College where he befriended classmate and future civil rights activist, Martin Luther King, Jr. While a student, he photographed for several publications including *Time*, *Ebony*, and *The Atlanta Daily World*. His accomplishments attracted the attention of esteemed Morehouse College president, Dr. Benjamin Mays, who became a mentor to him, providing professional and personal guidance. In 1947, Davis graduated from Morehouse, receiving a Bachelor of Arts in photography.

Davis was hired as a freelance photojournalist for *Ebony*, the first person to hold such a position at the magazine. In 1948, after one year with the magazine, he decided to continue his studies and enrolled in Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism, renting a room at Langston Hughes' brownstone in Harlem. He completed his studies in 1949, receiving a Master of Arts in journalism.

Davis was hired by the Black Star Publishing Company as a roving photographer, which provided him the freedom to write and photograph articles of his own interest. The struggle for independence taking place in several African nations garnered his attention and in 1949, he sojourned to Liberia, West

Africa to witness the impending changes. This was the first of several trips by Davis to Liberia and other African countries.

In 1952 Davis joined a branch of the U.S. Foreign Service that would later become the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). Through his service to USAID, Davis traveled to 25 countries in Africa between 1949 and 1974, writing and photographing extensively on each. The countries included Liberia, Nigeria, and Tunisia, among others. In 1977 he was appointed Advisor on International Affairs to the mayor of Atlanta, Maynard Jackson, the first African-American to serve as mayor of a major southern city. Griffith retired from USAID in 1985 after 35 years of service.

[^ Return to Table of Contents](#)

Scope and Contents

In 1981 Griffith Davis donated to the Moorland-Spingarn Research Center 7,000 photos and negatives taken in Liberia. It was the largest pictorial donation given to the Center. The collection dates between 1949 and 1974 but the bulk of the collection covers 1949 through 1952—the years of his travels to Liberia. The photographs are comprised of a rich variety of individuals including, Emperor Haile Selassie, Ghanaian President Kwame Nkrumah, Liberian President, William V.S. Tubman, missionaries Dr. Albert Schweitzer and Dr. George Harley, Howard University President Mordecai Wyatt Johnson and general shots of Liberia documenting the country's social and economic change.

[^ Return to Table of Contents](#)

Arrangement

The collection is arranged into the following series:

Series A: Correspondence

Box P100-1

This series contains a small collection of personal and professional correspondence primarily between 1947 and 1948.

Series B: Writings

Box P100-1

This series includes news articles written about Griff Davis and those authored by Davis and published in various magazines and newspapers like Ebony Magazine and the New York Times. The series also

includes a government report written by Davis documenting his time in Liberia under the auspices of the U.S. Department of State.

Series C: Editorial Negatives

Box P100-1

The Editorial Negatives series comprise negatives of photographs taken by Griff Davis for various assignments with Ebony and as a freelance photojournalist with Black Star Publishing Company. Subjects captured in these negatives are artist Aaron Douglas, First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt, and jazz singer Mary Lou Williams, to name a few.

Series D: People of the Congo

Box P100-1 to P100-2

This series documents Griff Davis' travels to the northeast region of the Belgian Congo. The images depict life in a handful of villages along the Congo River. In addition, the series contains several portraits of villagers.

Series E: General Liberian Photographs

Box P100-2

The General Liberian Photographs series contains images most likely taken in Liberia by Davis, but they cannot be attributed to one of his three official State Department trips. Images include formal portraits of Liberian government officials, industry such as the Liberia Mining Company, and news events like the crash of Pan-American Airlines, flight 151 in 1951. Series F: Liberia Trip I

Box P100-2 to P100-3

This series covers Davis' first trip to Liberia. The images cover the period between November 1949 and March 1950. Photographs in this series document the economic development of Liberia during this era. Davis' images particularly focus on American and European business ventures in the country, primarily in the export/import sector. Considerable attention is also shown to the activities of President William Tubman. Other subjects include traditional lifestyle, activities of the Liberian Mining Company, and images of dancer/choreographer Pearl Primus during her travels in Liberia and Ghana.

Series G: Liberia Trip II

Box P100-3 to Box P100-4

This series covers Griff Davis' second trip to Liberia between late 1950 and early 1951. The photographs in this series document educational sites, social projects, and rural life. Key images include Liberia's first railroad and radio station. Additional highlights include: views of St. Patrick's Catholic Boy's School, the College of West Africa, maritime trading, iron ore production, building of and resistance to the railroad, and the impact of development on villages.

Series H: Liberia Trip III

Box P100-4 to Box P100-6

The series covers Davis' third trip and documents the daily activities of Liberians. Of interest are images of African-American emigrants, missionary activities- including the work of Dr. George Harley at the Ganta Missionary School, a delegation at Howard University, Fanti fishing boats, and ambassadors to name a few.

[^ Return to Table of Contents](#)

Administrative Information

Publication Statement

Moorland-Spingarn Research Center

500 Howard Place NW

Washington, DC 20059

URL: <http://dh.howard.edu/msrc/>

Conditions Governing Access

The collection is open for research use.

Conditions Governing Use

Moorland-Spingarn Research holds physical property rights to the material in this collection;copyright may still reside with the creators.The granting of permission to use material for publication does not absolve the publisher from securing from the copyright owners. It is the user's responsibility to research any copyright questions.

[^ Return to Table of Contents](#)

Collection Inventory

Series A: Correspondence, 1947-1948

| Title/Description | Instances | |
|-------------------------|-----------|----------|
| Personal, 1947-1948 | Box 1 | Folder 1 |
| Professional, 1947-1980 | Box 1 | Folder 2 |

[^ Return to Table of Contents](#)

Series B: Writings, 1947-1951

| Title/Description | Instances | |
|---------------------------------------|-----------|--------------|
| Articles about Griff Davis, 1949-1981 | Box 1 | Folder 3 |
| Domestic , 1948-1951 | Box 1 | Folder 4-7 |
| Europe, 1950 | Box 1 | Folder 8 |
| Ethiopia , 1951 | Box 1 | Folder 9 |
| Liberia, 1950-1952 | Box 1 | Folder 10-12 |
| Nigeria, 1951 | Box 1 | Folder 13 |
| Completion of Tour Report, 1957 | Box 1 | Folder 14 |

[^ Return to Table of Contents](#)

Series C: Editorial Negatives, 1947-1955

| Title/Description | Instances | |
|--|-----------|-----------|
| Braithwaite, William Stanley, 1949 | Box 1 | Folder 15 |
| Clayton, Horace, 1948 | Box 1 | Folder 16 |
| Douglas, Aaron, 1956 | Box 1 | Folder 17 |
| Hall, Juanita, 1949 | Box 1 | Folder 18 |
| Hughes, Langston with Anna Bontemps, 1949 | Box 1 | Folder 19 |
| Jackson, Graham (Atlanta), 1947 | Box 1 | Folder 20 |
| Johnson, Mordecai, nd. | Box 1 | Folder 21 |
| Jones, Richard Lee, 1955 | Box 1 | Folder 22 |
| Roosevelt, Eleanor, nd. | Box 1 | Folder 23 |
| Schuyler, George with Griff Davis, nd. | Box 1 | Folder 24 |
| Scott, C.A. (Atlanta Daily World), 1948-1949 | Box 1 | Folder 25 |
| Shoumatoff, Elizabeth, 1956 | Box 1 | Folder 26 |
| Sipuel, Ada with Thurgood Marshall, 1948 | Box 1 | Folder 27 |
| Taylor, Euclid (Attorney), 1948-1949 | Box 1 | Folder 28 |
| Walcott, Joe vs Ezzard Charles Fight Program, 1949 | Box 1 | Folder 29 |
| Williams, Mary Lou with Eddie and Nicole Barclay, 1949 | Box 1 | Folder 30 |

| | | |
|---|-------|-----------|
| Woodruff, Hale, 1949-1950 | Box 1 | Folder 31 |
| World Series Cover and Lineups (Yankees vs Dodgers), 1949 | Box 1 | Folder 32 |

[^ Return to Table of Contents](#)

Series D: People of the Congo, nd.

| Title/Description | Instances | |
|------------------------------------|-----------|--------------|
| Portraits of Kele People, nd. | Box 1 | Folder 33-35 |
| Ikoko Village, nd. | Box 2 | Folder 1 |
| Libinza Tribe, nd. | Box 2 | Folder 2 |
| Ndembe Village, nd. | Box 2 | Folder 3 |
| Upoto Village, nd. | Box 2 | Folder 4 |
| Yakoje Village, nd. | Box 2 | Folder 5 |
| Yakusu, nd. | Box 2 | Folder 6 |
| Miscellaneous Village Scenes , nd. | Box 2 | Folder 7 |

[^ Return to Table of Contents](#)

Series E: General Liberian Photographs, ca. 1949-1957

| Title/Description | Instances | |
|---|-----------|-----------|
| Brewer, R.A. (Jr. Aide-de-Camp to President of Liberia, ca. 1949-1957 | Box 2 | Folder 8 |
| Cassell, C. Abayomi (Attorney General of Liberia), ca. 1949-1957 | Box 2 | Folder 9 |
| Dennis, Williams E. (Secretary of Treasury of Liberia), ca. 1949-1957 | Box 2 | Folder 10 |
| Person, J.W. (Secretary of Instruction of Liberia), ca. 1949-1957 | Box 2 | Folder 11 |
| Poindexter, Hildrus A. (U.S. Public Health Mission to Liberia), ca. 1949-1957 | Box 2 | Folder 12 |
| Price, Frederick A. (Liberian Consul General), ca. 1949-1957 | Box 2 | Folder 13 |
| Simpson, Clarence L. (Vice President of Liberia), ca. 1949-1957 | Box 2 | Folder 14 |
| American Embassy, ca. 1949-1957 | Box 2 | Folder 15 |
| British Embassy, ca. 1949-1957 | Box 2 | Folder 16 |
| Scenes, ca. 1949-1957 | Box 2 | Folder 17 |
| Ships, ca. 1949-1957 | Box 2 | Folder 18 |
| Liberia Mining Company, 1949-1957 | | |

| | | |
|-------------------------------|-------|--------------|
| | Box 2 | Folder 19-20 |
| Pan-Am Flight 151 Crash, 1951 | Box 2 | Folder 21-23 |
| Fortune Series, nd. | Box 2 | Folder 24 |

[^ Return to Table of Contents](#)

Series F: Liberia Trip I, 1949-1950

| Title/Description | Instances | |
|-------------------------------|-----------|--------------|
| Photo Descriptions, 1949-1950 | Box 2 | Folder 25-36 |
| Contact Sheets, 1949-1950 | Box 2 | Folder 37-38 |
| | Box 3 | Folder 1-10 |
| Negatives, 1949-1950 | Box 3 | Folder 1-12 |

[^ Return to Table of Contents](#)

Series G: Liberia Trip II, 1950-1951

| Title/Description | Instances | |
|-------------------------------|-----------|--------------|
| Photo Descriptions, 1950-1951 | Box 3 | Folder 13-20 |
| Contact Sheets, 1950-1951 | Box 3 | Folder 21-23 |
| | Box 4 | Folder 1-6 |
| Negatives, 1950-1951 | Box 4 | Folder 7-13 |

[^ Return to Table of Contents](#)

Series H: Liberia Trip III, 1952-1953

| Title/Description | Instances | |
|-------------------------------|-----------|--------------|
| Photo Descriptions, 1952-1953 | Box 4 | Folder 15-22 |
| Contact Sheets, 1952-1953 | Box 5 | Folder 1-10 |
| | Box 6 | Folder 1-6 |
| Negatives, 1952-1953 | Box 5 | Folder 11-15 |
| | Box 6 | Folder 1-6 |

[^ Return to Table of Contents](#)