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### Griffith Davis Photograph Collection

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# Griffith Davis Photograph Collection

## Collection P100

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This finding aid was produced using ArchivesSpace on October 18, 2023.

Description is written in: .

Describing Archives: A Content Standard

Moorland-Spingarn Research Center

500 Howard Place NW

Washington, DC 20059

Business Number: 202-806-7480

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

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## Summary Information

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<b>Repository:</b>	Moorland-Spingarn Research Center
<b>Title:</b>	Griffith Davis Photograph Collection
<b>ID:</b>	P100
<b>ID [aspace_uri]:</b>	/repositories/2/resources/452
<b>Date [inclusive]:</b>	1949-1981
<b>Date [bulk]:</b>	1949-1952
<b>Physical Description:</b>	3.5 Cubic Feet
<b>Language of the Material:</b>	English .

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## Biographical / Historical

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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.

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## Scope and Contents

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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.

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## Arrangement

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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 emigrates, 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.

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## Administrative Information

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### Publication Statement

Moorland-Spingarn Research Center

500 Howard Place NW

Washington, DC 20059

Business Number: 202-806-7480

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

### Conditions Governing Access

The collection is open for research use.

### Conditions Governing Use

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## Controlled Access Headings

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- Davis, Griffith J., 1923-1993
  - Liberia--History
  - Liberia (nation)
  - Tubman, William V. S., 1895-1971.
  - Congo (nation)
  - Democratic Republic of the Congo (nation)
  - Africa (continent)
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## Collection Inventory

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### Series A: Correspondence, 1947-1948

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

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### 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

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**Series C: Editorial Negatives, 1947-1955**

<b>Title/Description</b>	<b>Instances</b>	
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

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**Series D: People of the Congo, nd.**

<b>Title/Description</b>	<b>Instances</b>	
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
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### 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

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### 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 4	Folder 1-12

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### Series G: Liberia Trip II, 1950-1951

Title/Description	Instances	
Photo Descriptions, 1950-1951	Box 4	Folder 13-20
Contact Sheets, 1950-1951	Box 4	Folder 21-23
	Box 5	Folder 1-6
Negatives, 1950-1951	Box 5	Folder 7-13

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### Series H: Liberia Trip III, 1952-1953

Title/Description	Instances	
Photo Descriptions, 1952-1953	Box 5	Folder 15-22
Contact Sheets, 1952-1953	Box 6	Folder 1-10
Negatives, 1952-1953	Box 6	Folder 11-15
	Box 7	Folder 1-6

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