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Cynthia Shepard Perry Papers

1946-2010

8 boxes (10.5 linear ft.)

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Read collection overview

An educator, diplomat, and expert on Africa, Cynthia Shepard Perry was the first recipient of a Ed.D. from of the Program in International Education at UMass Amherst (1972). Born in Burnett, Indiana, in 1928, Perry was raising a family when she set a twenty-five year goal of earning a doctorate and entering international service. One year after earning a bachelor's degree at Indiana State University in 1967, she arranged for her first trip to Africa, leading a secretarial training project at the University of Nairobi, and over succeeding decades, her connections to the continent deepened dramatically. On faculty at Texas Southern University (1971-1982), Perry served as Associate Director of the university's Peace Corps Program, which resulted in her leading educational projects in Sierra Leone, Ghana, Nigeria, Liberia, and Kenya. In demand for her expertise, she worked as a consultant to the United States Information Service in Kenya, Nigeria, and Zambia and as Staff Development Officer at the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa in Addis Ababa. Having become a full professor and Dean of International Affairs, she left TSU in 1982 to take her first diplomatic post as an officer of the Africa Bureau of the United States Agency for International Development, followed by successive appointments as Ambassador to Sierra Leone (1986-1989) and Burundi (1989-1993), as Honorary Consul General of Rwanda, and finally an appointment as United States Executive Director of the African Development Bank (1996-2001). Although officially retired, Perry remains active in supporting education and development in Africa from her home in Houston. Among many other awards she has received, Perry was the recipient of an honorary doctorate from UMass for her international work and was recognized by the Salute to Service Award.

A record of a life in international service in Africa, the Perry Papers include materials from Perry's time as head of the African Development Bank and her two ambassadorial appointments, including speeches, some correspondence, and a handful of publications. The collection also includes a series of awards and plaques, some family photographs, and memorabilia.

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Background on Cynthia Shepard Perry

Ambassador Cynthia Shepard Perry was born in Lost Creek, Indiana, outside of Terre Haute, Indiana, on November 11, 1928 as the fifth of nine children. In 1946, she graduated from Otter Creek High School as one of only two black students in her class. At the age of 16 and while raising her family, Perry decided that she wanted to be an ambassador. With the help of her family and her high school principal, Perry devised a twenty-five year plan to complete her goals. This journey included a degree in political science from Indiana State University in 1968; her doctorate in International Education from the University of Massachusetts Amherst in 1972, as the first recipient of a Ed.D. from the program of International Education; working at an international corporation; five years working in Africa; and completing five years of research.

Perry began her career in 1952 in Terre Haute, Indiana working at the Nichols Investment Corporation, and then moved to the IBM Corporation to work as an educational representative. She later served as the Director of the National Teacher Corps at the University of Massachusetts Amherst while she earned her doctorate. Following her time at the UMass, Perry joined the faculty of Texas Southern University as an associate professor and Associate Director of Teacher Corps/Peace Corps. She later became a full professor and Dean of International Affairs from 1978-1982.

Perry first went to Africa in 1969, as a part of the Operation Crossroads Africa project, a secretarial training program at the



University of Nairobi. In 1973, Perry and her second husband, James O. Perry, returned to Nairobi for three years as her husband had taken a position with UNESCO at the University of Nairobi. During this time, she trained Peace Corps paramedical

Cynthia Shepard Perry, ca.1986

volunteers, lectured at the University, and served as a consultant to the IUnited States Information Service in Kenya, Nigeria, and Zambia. In 1974, Perry was a member of diplomatic delegations to Sierra Leone, Ghana, Nigeria, and Liberia. In 1976, she was appointed to the position of Staff Development Officer at the UN Economic Commission for Africa in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

Perry's diplomatic journey began in 1982, with her appointment to the position of Chief of the Education and Human Resources Division in the Africa Bureau of the Agency of International Development (A.I.D.) by President Ronald Reagan. She held this position until she was appointed Ambassador to Sierra Leone, where she served as Ambassador from 1986-1989. In 1989, she was appointed Ambassador to Burundi by the new President George H. Bush, and served in Burundi for the entirety of the Bush administration from 1989-1993. In addition to her diplomatic work as an ambassador, Perry also served as Honorary Consul General for Senegal and currently serves as Honorary Consul General for Rwanda.

In 1996, President George W. Bush appointed her Regent of Texas Woman's University during his time as governor of Texas. Perry served there until 2001, when President George W. Bush appointed her U.S. Executive Director of the African Development Bank in Abidjan, Ivory Coast and later, Tunis, Tunisia. She held this position until her retirement in 2007. Shortly afterward, the Ambassador returned to Houston, where she remains active in supporting education and development in Africa. Among many other awards she has received, Perry was the recipient of an honorary doctorate from UMass Amherst for her international work and was recognized by the Salute to Service Award.

Scope of collection

Ambassador Cynthia Shepard Perry spent her life in international service to both the United States and to Africa as an American ambassador, the head of the U.S. branch of the African Development Bank, and as an active supporter of education and development in Africa. The Cynthia Shepard Perry Papers document the Ambassador's career in foreign relations between the United States and Africa. The collection focuses on her time abroad in Sierra Leone and Burundi as an Ambassador and serving as the U.S. Executive Director of the African Development Bank, as well as her work in the United States regarding Africa as an educator at Texas Southern University, the University of Massachusetts, and with the Peace Corps.

The Cynthia Shepard Perry Papers consist of various documents, correspondence, photographs, and memorabilia from her international service abroad and at home in the United States. Also included in the papers are documents, manuscripts, and photographs from her 2001 autobiography, *All Things Being Equal: One Woman's Journey*

The collection is organized into five series:

Series 1. Professional

Series 2. Autobiography

Series 3. Speeches

Series 4. Photographs and Videos

Series 5. Plaques

Series descriptions

Series 1. Professional

1946-2009

5 boxes

Series 1 is divided into six subseries: Abroad, African Development Bank, United States, Teacher/Peace Corps, Texas Southern University, and University of Massachusetts Amherst.

This series documents the Ambassador's career in both the United States and abroad as well as her involvement with the African Development Bank and the Teacher Corps.

Subseries 1: Abroad, 1969-2008 - This section of the series contains documents, photos, publications, and correspondence concerning the Ambassador's time and professional work abroad. This includes publications from the government concerning her ambassadorial role, her spouse's role, and background information on Sierra Leone. Also included in this subseries are documents relating to schooling for her family, her time in Burundi, her ambassador training, and her work with women.

Subseries 2: African Development Bank, 2001-2008 - This subseries is made up of records documenting the Ambassador's life while working at the African Development Bank (ADB). Coverage includes the time of her appointment to the position of United States Executive Director of the African Development Bank in 2001 to shortly after her retirement from the position in 2008. The subseries contains administrative paperwork, correspondence, reports, and resumes of various ADB employees. Also included are personal documents of the Ambassador's involving her moves to Abidjan and Tunis, Tunisia; her homes; and photographs.

Subseries 3: United States, 1946-2009 - This part of the series documents the portions of the Ambassador's career based in the United States. Included are the Ambassador's degrees, professional correspondence, documents about her involvement as Honorary Consul for Rwanda and Senegal, and materials relating to social engagements. Also included are a United States flag and the flag of the Ambassadors of the United States and their decorative ornaments.

Subseries 4: Teacher/Peace Corps, 1971-1983 - This subseries documents the Teacher Corps and its degree possibilities for TSU and UMass students and interns. Also included are two seminars on western Africa that were given at Texas Southern University by Perry.

Subseries 5: Texas Southern University, 1971-2001 - This part of the series contains documents from the Ambassador's time as a member of Texas Southern University's faculty from 1971-1982. The Nigerian Trade Mission of 1979 that was led by Perry, including photos of the mission, is included in this part of the series.

Subseries 6: University of Massachusetts Amherst, 1970-2003 - Perry served as Director of the National Teacher Corps at the University of Massachusetts Amherst from 1968-1971, and received her Doctorate in International Education at University of Massachusetts in 1972 as the first Ed.D. recipient of the program. This part of the series contains correspondence and some paperwork from her time at UMass-Amherst as well as her interactions with the school as an alumna.

Series 2. Autobiography

1994-2000

.5 box

This series documents the publication of the Ambassador's autobiography, *All Things Being Equal: One Woman's Journey*, which was published in 2001. Contained in the series is paperwork concerning the publication of the memoirs, articles about the book, and photographs and sections that were included in the final publication. The series also contains two versions of the memoir, one from 1997 and printed proofs from 1998.

Series 3. Speeches

1971-2009

.5 box

This series contains the speeches and documents relating to the speeches of Ambassador Cynthia Shepard Perry throughout her career. Included are speeches given in both the United States and abroad, as well as two speeches by her husband James Perry. Common topics include U.S.-African relations, women, and African economic development.

Series 4. Photographs and Videos

1934-2014

1.5 boxes

This series contains photographs that temporally encompass the majority of the Ambassador's life, as well as VHS tapes relating to her career and politics. Included in this series are photos of Perry and her family, photos from her time in Sierra Leone and other parts of Africa, and the Teacher Corps.

Series 5. Plaques

1985-2001

1 box

This series contains plaques that celebrate the Ambassador and her husband, James O. Perry, for their work. The plaques range from plaques from junior high schools to plaques from the NAACP and several colleges and universities.

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Terre Haute, Indiana Recognition

undated

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Trip to Bahamas to Visit Another Ambassador from Cohort

undated Box 5: 10

Upcountry Visits - Sierra Leone

1987d

Box 5: 11

Various Unnamed Photographs

undated Box 5: 12

Visiting First Peace Corps Graduates in Sierra Leone

1986-1989

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Yande Conference - Cameroon

1984

Box 5: 14

VHS: Embassy Gardens Buju

1990

Box 5

VHS: Ambassadorial Swearing-In Department of State Washington D.C.

1990 Jan 9

Box 5

VHS: Bush Announcement + Republican Presidential Debate + Perry Reception

undated

Box 5

Series 5. Plaques

1985-2001

1 box

James D. Ryan Junior High Black History Month

1978 Feb

Box 7

James O. Perry Distinguished Service Award

1985 May 6

Box 7

A Person Who Makes Things Happen Award - Central Houston Pachyderm Club

1999 Jul 19

Box 7

Black Women - National Council of Negro Women

1983 Jun 4

Box 7

USS Harlan County

1989 Jul-Aug

Box 7

Booker J. Whatley Award

1985 Dec 5

Box 7

Fleet Visit to Sierra Leone

1988

Box 7

Paul Wuinn College Distinguished Service Award

1997 Jan 31

Box 7

Texas Woman's University Third Annual Women Students' Leadership Conference Keynote Speaker

2000 Feb 25

Box 7

NAACP Presidents Award

1987 May 2

Box 7

Prairie View A and M University College of Agriculture Certificate of Appreciation

1984 May 12

Box 7

James O. Perry School of Education Recognition of Dedicated Service

1974-01

Box 7

James O. Perry Award of Gratitude

1986 Jun 30

Box 7

James O. Perry Recognition of Effort and Contributions

undated

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National Association of Black Geologists and Geophysicists

2001 Jun

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Recognition of Service as United States Ambassador to Sierra Leone - Otter Creek Junior High School

1987 May 12

Box 7

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