The Ford Foundation
Constant Themes, Historical Variations

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The Ford Foundation: Themes, 1936-2001

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Introduction

The Ford Foundation was a hometown enterprise for the first fifteen years after its founding in Detroit in 1936. By 1950, thanks to almost unimaginably vast assets and an equally vast ambition—to achieve world peace—it had skyrocketed to global prominence. Throughout its history, especially after 1950, the Foundation has blended an underlying continuity of purpose with flexibility in response to changing world problems. Ford’s simply stated mission, to “advance human welfare,” has motivated programs as distinct from each other as international security and cultural expression. At times, the Foundation’s capacity to make enormous grants enabled it to make a significant impact, as in the case of its education and agriculture work. At other times, the Foundation’s strength lay in its creativity—its ability to develop new tools such as program-related investments and micro-lending programs. In endeavors of any size, the Foundation has tended to display a brash confidence and a willingness to take risks, especially in its support for ethnic diversity and civil rights and its insistence on gender parity both within its own ranks and in the areas of society it has touched.

The Foundation’s confidence did not come without certain dangers. The Foundation’s support for civil liberties—as well as the outspoken personalities of its leadership—at times drew fire from Ford automobile dealers, the public, members of Congress, and even the chairman of its own Board. Particularly challenging moments in Ford’s history included a failed attempt at school decentralization in New York City in 1967, the restrictive 1969 Tax Reform Act, the decline of its financial assets in the early 1970s, and the Ford family’s departure from the Board in December 1976. Facing these and other moments, Ford’s trustees and staff regularly reevaluated grantmaking activities and shifted course according to changing needs, challenges, and opportunities.

This narrative sketches the broad strokes of those shifts in the Ford Foundation’s history, identifying the main inflection points in its evolution from 1936 to 2001. While the chapter tells the stories of some of the Ford’s most significant successes and failures, it is by no means comprehensive. The narrative focus is on the illustrative, often pivotal, leadership decisions made in response to external forces, such as geopolitical events and financial challenges. While the topics range widely, what this research
makes clear is that the Foundation’s strategic directions, organizational infrastructure, and grantmaking choices have been determined by the interplay of presidential convictions, Board of Trustees directives, staff initiative, and changing socio-political contexts. Other themes might arguably be traced over time, and different dividing lines could be chosen to periodize Ford Foundation history. There are certainly more stories of specific programs than could ever be told in a single report. But the leadership of presidents and trustees has been exceptionally and explicitly formative to this foundation, and it provides an essential framework for understanding the Foundation’s evolution, the dynamics of its institutional personality, and its fields of activity.

Origins, 1936-1949

The Ford family created the Foundation in 1936 as a vehicle to carry out the family’s charitable activities—a tradition that Henry Ford and his son Edsel had begun in 1915 by establishing the Henry Ford Hospital. With Edsel Ford at the helm and working primarily in the fields of medicine, science, historic preservation, the arts, and community self-help, the family-led Foundation of the 1930s and 1940s worked in the interest of public welfare by supporting the Edison Institute, the Detroit Symphony Orchestra, the New York-based Museum of Modern Art, and war-related charities, among others.

From these modest beginnings, the Foundation underwent an historic transformation in the 1940s with the passing of the first two Ford patriarchs. When Edsel Ford died unexpectedly in 1943, Foundation leadership passed to his twenty-five-year-old son, Henry Ford II, who expanded the Board to include academic leaders. Then, following the death of the elder Henry Ford in 1947, the Foundation massively expanded its scope and reach. Henry and Edsel Ford’s estates left to the Foundation nearly ninety percent of the Ford Motor Company stock—over three million non-voting shares valued at $135 each. By 1948, the Foundation had given away only $15 million. By 1950, its estimated half-billion dollars in assets dwarfed those of the Rockefeller Foundation, Ford’s closest rival. Seemingly overnight, the Ford Foundation had become the largest foundation the nation had seen.
Foundation president Henry Ford II and other family members were acutely aware that with great wealth came great public responsibility. In 1948, Ford commissioned H. Rowan Gaither to lead a far-reaching, year-long planning process, known as the Study on Policy and Program. Gaither had established a reputation as an accomplished San Francisco attorney and co-founder of the RAND Corporation, a postwar policy think tank focusing on national security. The Gaither Commission, as it came to be called, sought out “the best thought available” in government, business, education, health, natural sciences, and other fields to identify national and world problems to which the Foundation could respond with a large and well-defined program.¹ Rather than embarking on an academic exercise studying stacks of written data, the committee drew its

¹ Henry Ford to H. Rowan Gaither, November 22, 1948. Papers of the Study for the Ford Foundation on Policy and Program (Gaither Commission) FA709. Box 2, Folder 23, Rockefeller Archive Center.
conclusions from over one thousand interviews with notable figures as diverse as Walt Disney, Dwight D. Eisenhower, and Eleanor Roosevelt.

The Gaither Commission submitted its recommendations to the Foundation’s Board of Trustees in 1949. The Report of the Study for the Ford Foundation on Policy and Program, or Gaither Report, proposed five fields of Foundation activity, in order of priority: peace, democracy, economics, education, and behavioral sciences. These areas would loosely shape Ford programs for at least a decade. More lasting than this programmatic structure, however, was the Report’s definition of human welfare with democracy at the core. Democracy rested, it held, on the “belief in human dignity; in personal freedom; in equality of rights, justice, and opportunity; in freedom of speech, religion, and association; and in self-government as the best form of government.” Although contexts have radically changed since the start of the Cold War, these principles continue to guide the Ford Foundation’s philanthropic endeavor.

Experimentation and Expansion, 1950-1965

The Foundation’s sizable assets in 1950 were matched only by its leaders’ optimism. In the shadow of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and the nuclear-armed stalemate of the Cold War, achieving world peace was Ford’s top priority, and Foundation leaders saw the organization as a means of continuing postwar reconstruction and reconciliation. They hoped to further the effort by advancing democratic ideals and economic development. As postwar euphoria waned and Cold War competition gathered steam, the Foundation developed programs that would contribute to disarmament, individual freedom, and intercultural understanding. By the early 1950s, other massive world challenges—population, environmental conservation, interracial relations, rule of law, urbanization—were already in Ford’s purview. As decolonization spread

2 The Ford Foundation’s 1949 Gaither Report is not to be confused with the other “Gaither Report,” the 1957 report of the Security Resources Panel of the President’s Science Advisory Committee, also chaired by H. Rowan Gaither. This report was officially titled “Deterrence and Survival in the Nuclear Age.”

from Asia to Africa, country programs in this period centered on leadership training and technical assistance in agriculture, management, economics, and urban planning in the newly-independent states.

The Foundation’s first non-family president, Paul Hoffman (1951–1953)—a self-made automotive executive who had implemented the Marshall Plan in Europe as the head of the US Economic Cooperation Administration—moved the Foundation’s headquarters to Pasadena, California and brought in new associates of high rank and experience. His primary collaborator, Robert Hutchins, was a University of Chicago president famous for controversial curriculum reforms and an uncompromising commitment to academic freedom. Associate Director Milton Katz had served as director of the Economic Cooperation Administration in Europe and believed strongly in the power of international institutions such as the United Nations to prevent the outbreak of another war. For his part, Hoffman saw the path to peace paved by economic prosperity and democracy in developing countries. Establishing a strategic presence first in India—the world’s largest democracy—Ford staff would open over twenty overseas offices between 1952 and 1965.

Taking the helm in January 1951, Hoffman immediately announced that a third of the Foundation’s grantmaking would fund overseas activities. Borrowing from his Marshall Plan strategy, Hoffman sought to build relationships with governmental leaders and civil servants to plan and carry out development projects. India’s Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru was perhaps his closest overseas ally, but Hoffman also established governmental ties in Beirut, Berlin, Hong Kong, and Tokyo. In keeping with the Cold War development paradigm of the era, Ford’s work overseas aimed to achieve peace by building and strengthening democratic nations. The strategy was to invest in countries’ economic and social plans, particularly in agriculture, population, and community development.

A mere half-dozen Foundation officers in Pasadena were jointly responsible for all fields of activity during Hoffman’s tenure—a loose organizational arrangement that had come to greatly worry Henry Ford II by 1952. This structure would keep salary costs low and was built on the concept that much of the Foundation’s work would be carried out by independent “Funds” created by the Foundation. These “Funds” were essentially re-granting entities, each with its own staff and governing board. Collaboration and communication with Ford leaders varied greatly
from Fund to Fund. The majority of education programs were delegated to the Fund for the Advancement of Education (TFAE, 1951) and Fund for Adult Education (FAE, 1951), both conceived by Robert Hutchins. Among other activities, TFAE underwrote the important 1954 *Ashmore Report* on education in the South. The *Ashmore Report* contributed to the Supreme Court’s *Brown v. Board of Education* decision that year, which held that “separate but equal” segregation was unconstitutional. The FAE, meanwhile, supported early forays into using television in the classroom. The East European Fund (1951) was a bold initiative to support scholarly exchange between Eastern Europe and the West. Under the leadership of Cold War containment theorist George Kennan, the East European Fund also supported the publication of Russian literary works for Soviet émigrés. Along similar lines, Intercultural Publications (1952) produced American content for worldwide distribution and distributed local overseas content in the United States. Another fund, Resources for the Future (1952), was the Foundation’s earliest grantmaking vehicle to address environmental concerns.

Perhaps the most controversial of Ford’s activities in the 1950s was the creation of the Fund for the Republic (FFR). Authorized in 1951 and launched in 1953 to promote civil liberties, the FFR worked to establish a balance between national security and individual freedom. Aiming to avoid entanglement with the FFR’s risky endeavor, Chairman Henry Ford II and the trustees launched the Fund as a completely independent organization funded by a single $15 million grant. The FFR supported studies on communism, religion in primary schools, blacklisting, housing discrimination, and from 1954 gave grants to the Southern Regional Council, a civil rights group. In the context of McCarthyism and before the passage of the Civil Right Act, these activities were far from mainstream.

The larger Overseas Development program—which primarily carried out projects in technical assistance—was treated financially as a separate fund, but administered by Foundation staff. The primacy of this program is reflected in the fact that it made some of the largest grants of the Hoffman period—those supporting rural development in India and technical training in Pakistan, for example.

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4 Kennan conceived “containment” as a Cold War strategy through which the Soviet political threat to Eastern Europe and Asia would be prevented from expanding. Containment was one rationale for creating the North Atlantic Treaty Alliance (NATO).
The early structure of the Foundation mirrored the priorities laid out in the *Gaither Report*, with the Foundation’s direct operations and those of the funds arranged under the five broad program areas, but intermingled operationally. Educational activities, for example, totaled over $22 million in 1952, of which nearly $17 million was allocated to TFAE and FAE. The Foundation directly operated the large-scale (and costly) TV-Radio Workshop, an initiative whose *Omnibus* series brought American history, the performing arts, and science to American living rooms. Leonard Bernstein made his television debut on the program.

The fund model proved problematic almost from the start. With separate staff and independent governing boards, the funds were outside the reach of Ford governance yet largely financially dependent on the Foundation and often confused with the latter’s work. By 1952, the Ford Foundation was already facing a barrage of public criticism, culminating in that year’s Congressional investigation of tax-exempt organizations led by Congressman Edward Cox. Meanwhile, criticism of the civil liberties activities of the Fund for the Republic continued to grow, and the Fund’s independence did not prevent this criticism from focusing on the Ford Foundation itself, as the Foundation began to receive daily letters from the public accusing the FFR—and by extension, the Foundation—of communist sympathies.

In 1954, a subsequent congressional investigation led by B. Carroll Reece, once again put Ford and other foundations’ activities under suspicion and trustees on edge. Well before the start of Reece Commission’s hearings, however, Henry Ford II and Hoffman agreed that it would be politically wise to cut Hoffman’s term short. Hoffman was succeeded by H. Rowan Gaither (1953–1956), author of the eponymous 1949 *Report*. Gaither was tasked with resolving the organizational problems and public controversies born in the early era. With economists and more business-minded staff in his orbit, Gaither began to carry out the trustees’ directive to reabsorb or regain control of the independent funds and to institute an organizational structure with more defined hierarchies and field divisions.

Gaither created a new division called Public Affairs, charged with strengthening domestic democratic institutions. Perhaps as a nod to public concerns that Ford was spending too much money overseas, the domestically-oriented Public Affairs and Education programs in 1953 each had larger budget allocations than the International program, which in the
Hoffman period had received the most funding. Notable activities included the national reform of business school curricula, the creation of the National Merit Scholarships, and major support for the United Negro College Fund.

Many of these domestic activities nonetheless continued to have an international scope. Starting in 1952, for example, Ford funded the Foreign Study and Research Fellowship program to increase American understanding of non-Western societies. Later administered by the Social Science Research Council and the American Council of Learned Societies, the program would award more than two thousand fellowships over the next two decades. In 1955, Ford gave $7 million to enable seven universities to set up international legal studies programs. Following in the footsteps of the Rockefeller Foundation and Carnegie Corporation, Ford also renewed area studies programs and institutions worldwide with a massive infusion of resources, especially through the $300-million
International Training and Research program, which ran from 1952 to 1966, with tie-off grants into the mid-1970s.

The Gaither period ended on the heels of the largest financial windfall since 1950. To diversify its investments, the Foundation began to sell off its Ford Motor Company stock in 1956, the company’s first public offering. With larger resources in hand, Foundation trustees and staff were concerned they could not spend the money fast enough. This enormous injection of cash created an opportunity to fund what became a widely praised program to distribute $500 million to private hospitals and universities in the U.S.

That same year, Gaither stepped down, citing health problems. For the third time in six years, the trustees were obliged to search for a new
president. This time, they lured Henry Heald from his post as president of New York University to run what by this point was about to become the nation’s first billion-dollar foundation. The Heald era (1956–1965) began with a financial situation that cemented in trustees and staff a feeling of confidence that would last a decade. By 1960, the Foundation had invaded capital by $525 million. By 1964, its annual cash outlays were 140% of investment income.

Ford’s immense financial resources allowed the institution to further diversify its fields of activity. A prime example was the creation of a new program for the arts. Though not explicitly identified in the *Gaither Report*, the arts would nonetheless become one of Ford’s renowned areas of philanthropic contribution. To be sure, cultural grantmaking at Ford goes back to the 1940s and had been a part of programs designed to promote peace through the spread of free thought since 1950. The independent funds had supported literary production, and the TV-Radio workshop had sought to bring “higher” culture to the American masses. But it was not until 1957 that the Foundation formed a separate program exclusively focused on grantmaking in these fields, splitting the Humanities and Arts program off from the Education division. Those cultural fields, Program Director W. McNeil Lowry argued, offered society “some of its most essential wisdom.”

The arts program’s early phase comprised both pilot institutional grants to arts organizations and individual grants to notable writers such as James Baldwin and Saul Bellow. While significant in the authors’ and artists’ careers, Ford’s more important contribution to the field was to create a funding mechanism to support the professionalization of theater, dance, and classical music, and to mitigate the chronic financial problems that plagued cultural organizations. The major mid-century resurgence of regional theater, for one, was largely a Ford story. Beginning in 1959 with a matching grant program, regional theaters were able to professionalize their staffs by paying full-season salaries and by providing training in administration and technical production. The revitalization took off in 1962 with notable large grants to over a dozen groups, including the Alley Theatre, Arena Stage, and the Guthrie Theatre Foundation. In 1961, to link the regional theaters into a network and to establish professional standards, the Ford Foundation established the Theatre Communications Group, still today’s leading professional theater network. Lowry’s close involvement with grantees and his dynamic leadership as program
director and then vice president enabled the new program to professionalize dozens of performing arts organizations. Major grants to Lincoln Center ($25 million in 1957) and the Kennedy Center ($5 million, 1963) also merit mention, yet these spectacular extra-program gifts did not have the transformative impact on the structure of the arts field that other, lesser-known programs did. One clear measure of success is that Ford’s Humanities and Arts program provided a model for grant programs when the US government’s National Endowments were created in 1965.

New Orleans Jazz Archives, Grant #05800143 to Tulane University for the collection of historical records related to early American jazz. Ford Foundation Records, Photographs (FA738), Box 15, Folder 223, Rockefeller Archive Center.

Effective leadership was likewise key to the Foundation’s urban community renewal programs of the same period. Education and Public Affairs programs had carried out a few urban-related projects in the United States in the early 1950s, primarily in the form of research on education and school improvement programs. When they decided to make a more significant investment in urban issues, Ford staff learned that grantmaking strategies did not always translate from place to place or from program to program. They quickly abandoned an early attempt to
apply the successful strategy of agricultural extension to “urban extension” through land-grant universities. More successful was the Foundation’s 1955 support for the housing program of ACTION-Pittsburgh, a local development corporation that sowed the seeds of the flourishing community development corporation movement in the 1970s. Ford made significant contributions to building up urban planning as a field concerned with both people and place. The most notable such project was the 1958 establishment of the MIT-Harvard Joint Center for Urban Studies, which set the stage for a fruitful American-Yugoslav Project in Urban and Regional Planning several years later. That same year, Ford carried out its first overseas urban planning experiment in New Delhi, a pilot project unfortunately rendered unsuccessful by a lack of effective leadership and local ownership. Ford’s involvement in the Calcutta Metropolitan Planning Organization, beginning in 1961, was much more successful because Foundation staff and local government officials were able to build effective coalitions based on local capacity.

Because urban issues touch so many parts of society (housing, education, governance), coalition-building was also crucial to the program’s grantmaking in the United States. Public Affairs Program Director Paul Ylvisaker (1955–1971) was most instrumental in bringing together diverse stakeholders and devising new strategies to address urban issues. Ylvisaker’s lasting contribution was the Gray Areas program of the early 1960s. Through demonstration projects in six locations, Gray Areas aimed to reform education, provide jobs and housing, and facilitate access to services in areas at risk of becoming slums. These projects were located in economically depressed neighborhoods that had experienced significant in-migration from Appalachia, the South, and Puerto Rico. Like the Joint Center, the Gray Areas program sought to address the bricks-and-mortar and human aspects of poverty. The program emphasized communication and public accountability from the beginning: Ylvisaker was able to gather school administrators, city officials, and community activists into one room. From 1960 to 1967, the Foundation spent $27 million on the Gray Areas program. Despite mixed results and a hesitation to tackle the important racial dimensions of urban problems, the program proved a sound investment at the time. Most notably, the program’s community action activities were spun off into aspects of the Elementary and

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5 Demonstration sites were located in Boston, New Haven, Oakland, Philadelphia, Washington, D.C., and the state of North Carolina.

The causal relationship between Ford Foundation grantmaking and federal legislation could also work in the other direction. The 1964 Civil Rights Act and 1965 Voter Registration Act opened up new strategic opportunities for Foundation involvement to promote racial equality. A $1.8 million grant to Howard University’s law school, for example, provided a broad tool kit that enabled civil rights litigation, public interest law, and legal advocacy. The Foundation put its strategy of providing
minority access to the law into practice in its own hiring: in 1963, Ford asked lawyer Christopher Edley, Sr. to join the National Affairs division, making him the Foundation’s first African-American program officer. Edley would go on to author one of the Foundation’s most important internal documents on its civil rights grantmaking strategy, *The Negro Movement for Equal Opportunity*. In it, Edley argued that the Foundation should adopt “color conscious” practices in support of litigation, voter registration, housing, employment, and economic development. By 1965, the Foundation had shifted its domestic strategy toward legal work and community development.

The Shift to Social Justice, 1966-1979

The presidency of McGeorge Bundy (1966–1979) stands out as a distinct era in Ford Foundation history, a time when the Foundation transformed many of its goals and strategies. On the program side, Ford initiated a major commitment to civil rights in the United States and then expanded this agenda into an international human rights program. On the administrative side, the trustees mandated a realignment of investment income and cash outlays, beginning in 1966. Financial pressures intensified with the oil crisis of 1973 and stagflation in the middle of the decade. By the mid-1970s, the country was in the midst of a major economic recession – the nation’s worst, at that point, since the Great Depression. Ford’s asset base took a major hit; payout dropped from about $200 million in 1970 to only $119 million by 1979. Ford staff, like those at many other foundations, debated the institution’s economic viability. Some officers considered whether Ford might better fulfill its mission by spending down its endowment. Many Foundation employees lost their jobs as staff was gradually cut in half over the period 1974–1978. The Tax Reform Act of 1969 had embroiled Ford in a fiery debate about the role of foundations in American society, and Chairman Henry Ford II’s resignation in 1976 rekindled conservative suspicion that the Foundation was driven by an anti-capitalist agenda. Cool heads shepherded the Foundation through these programmatic changes and controversies, and creative staff redeployed resources to support public interest law, cash stabilization programs for nonprofits, community development corporations, program-related investments, and partnerships—to carry on its work in this tumultuous period.
Taking up the civil rights commitment first, Bundy went public with the Foundation’s new agenda in an August 1966 speech to the Urban League entitled “Action for Equal Opportunity.” Bundy’s tone was urgent, explaining that more active support to achieve equal access to justice was “required” because it was fundamental to the Foundation’s mission. To work towards justice first at home and then abroad, the Foundation’s grantmaking in this period focused especially on supporting legal aid and litigation. Because one case could affect a large population, litigation soon proved to be the most cost-effective use of Foundation funds to achieve its new social justice goals. It was a logical shift programmatically and financially, because many of the resource-intensive domestic programs of the Heald era (arts, poverty) had been taken up by the federal government.

By 1970, forty percent of the Foundation’s grantmaking dollars were committed to civil rights, making it by far the largest foundation working in the field. Between 1966 and 1979, the Foundation granted over $10 million to the NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund. Ford’s legal support also extended to other populations with the establishment of the Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund (MALDEF), the

Native American Right Fund, Tribal Court in Concho, Oklahoma. 1991. Ford Foundation Records, Photographs (FA738), Box 52, Folder 800, Rockefeller Archive Center.
Native American Rights Fund, the Women’s Law Fund, and the Puerto Rican Legal Defense and Education Fund.

Experimentation characterized Ford’s approach to many programmatic fields, and in the Bundy era funding mechanisms were increasingly creative. To support the economic base for urban communities, the Foundation promoted a new mechanism, the community development corporation (CDC). CDC support built on Foundation experience both in the Gray Areas program and with Local Development Funds, early partnerships with the private sector. Many of these corporations focused on housing preservation and tenant management rather than expensive new construction. Building on the initiative of New York Mayor John V. Lindsay and New York Senator Robert F. Kennedy, in 1966 the Ford Foundation began to support the nation’s first CDC, the Bedford Stuyvesant Restoration Corporation. The business and nonprofit collaboration that director Paul Ylvisaker had championed led to the creation and support of CDCs nationwide. By 1980, the Foundation had dispensed almost $90 million to twenty-five CDCs across the country.

Following the proposals in Christopher Edley’s 1965 report, the Foundation shifted towards action programs to foster “color-conscious” economic development and community ownership. In 1967, Ford funds enabled civil rights leader Leon Sullivan to build a nonprofit shopping center for minority-owned businesses. The grant also funded an entrepreneurial training program, one of the first Ford-funded training programs to be housed outside of an educational institution. In 1969, $3.5 million from Ford helped create the Center for Community Change, an organization providing services and training for community groups. To encourage tenant ownership, the National Housing Services of America, working with the Ford Foundation as guarantor, leveraged private funds to create a secondary loan market.

Community control did not transfer easily to other sectors, however. In 1967, the Foundation believed decentralization would be an empowering tool for school improvement in New York City. The program soon proved disastrous. In cooperation with Mayor Lindsay, Bundy proposed a set of three demonstration projects to test the idea. But the firing of several teachers by a newly-elected Ocean Hill-Brownsville community school board resulted in a strike lasting months. The controversy pitted labor unions against minority communities, and the Ford Foundation quickly
abandoned the experiment. Although Ford had spent only $44,000 on the project, a tiny fraction of its education expenditures of nearly $65 million that year, the failure attracted outsized press coverage, coming up in the 1969 congressional tax reform hearings when Bundy took the stand.

Other educational programs were larger and more lasting. The Foundation had established National Educational Television in 1954; in 1970 it negotiated its transformation into the Public Broadcasting Service, still a staple of television today. A large program of institutional development at historically black colleges and universities from 1966–1977 amounted to over $50 million and also proved successful.

One of the riskiest of the Bundy era’s funding innovations also produced the most extensive economic benefits: the Program-Related Investment (PRI), the earliest form of impact investing. In the mid-1960s, Public Affairs Associate Director Lou Winnick (1963–1984) had proposed the idea of using the Foundation’s investment portfolio to promote its grantmaking mission by creating a continuum of funding mechanisms, with grants on one side and market-driven investments on the other. Board Chair John McCloy dismissed the idea at the time. By 1968, however, Winnick had become the Foundation’s National Affairs Deputy Vice President and, with the Foundation facing major budget cuts, a new Board Chair, Julius Stratton, took up Winnick’s proposal. The PRI strategy enabled the Foundation to increase the number and diversity of effective partners, especially in the urban field. The National Affairs division used PRIs to support mortgage loans, loan guarantees, and business investments. The Inner-City Business Improvement Forum in Detroit, for one, promoted minority business development thanks to $1.15 million in Ford investments between 1969 and 1975.

Financial discipline and creative funding approaches were also important for domestic programs in the arts. The Foundation had achieved only mixed results from the massive, $85 million symphony endowment program it undertook at the tail end of the Heald era. Some orchestras were unable to develop successful fundraising strategies to meet the matching-funds requirement, while others had to use their endowments to pay staff and bills as production costs rose. In 1971, the Humanities and Arts program adopted a new strategy, the Cash Reserve and Stabilization Fund. Rather than make contributions to an arts group’s endowment, the new program provided a cushion to cover annual operating costs. The
program also offered training in financial management and incentives for keeping a positive balance sheet. This strategy established a more active working relationship between Foundation staff and over forty grantee organizations. Many of the groups, such as the Dance Theater of Harlem, were minority-run, which contributed to what the Foundation called “social development” grantmaking, a strategy to address racial inequality. The Cash Stabilization program led to a Ford, Mellon, and Rockefeller Foundation partnership in 1983 to set up the National Arts Stabilization Fund, run by longtime Ford program officer Marcia Thompson.

Grantmaking experiments to address community challenges could also be innovative. After a period of civil unrest in many US cities, in 1971 the Foundation entered the field of police management, devoting $30 million to create the Police Foundation. This institution conducted research on the use of preventive patrol techniques, set guidelines for the use of force, and developed a protocol of responses to different law enforcement situations. The Police Foundation would continue to receive considerable support over the next forty years.

These new domestic priorities and strategies did not come at the cost of international and overseas programs. On the contrary, having arrived at the Foundation following his tenure as national security advisor to Presidents Kennedy and Johnson, Bundy brought an international vision to his leadership. He restructured the Foundation to resemble government departments rather than academic ones, and took seriously the recommendations of a 1966 Overseas Development self-study to reaffirm the Foundation’s commitment to emerging nations. Still, charged by the Board to cut annual spending by $100 million, Bundy would consolidate or close over a dozen country offices and modify overseas grantmaking. Yet cost-cutting could be productive. A reduction in the technical assistance and training programs of the earlier period freed up resources for more institution-building opportunities, bringing developing countries to the field of international relations, for example. Bundy brought new voices to Board meetings as well, appointing Professor Soedjatmoko from Indonesia in 1972 as the first Ford Foundation trustee from a developing country.
To make program cuts less painful, Bundy closed down long-term programs that were reaching their conclusion. The International Training and Research (ITR) program, for one, had reached a logical end by 1966, when federal legislation was passed to create a similar program. When Congress failed to fund it, however, the program closure unintentionally left a vacuum. In response, Foundation staff reinstituted international support for individuals in 1968 by helping to create the International Research and Exchanges Board (IREX) with a modest grant to the American Council of Learned Societies. With support from several other foundations and ACLS management, IREX was much less of a financial and administrative burden than ITR had been. IREX alumni rose to leadership positions in their countries, and provided an important Foundation resource when the Eastern bloc opened up two decades later. In the country offices, Ford shifted focus from economic development—which was highly reliant on government partnerships and large grants—to building up independent research centers and networks. In Sri Lanka, for instance, it helped create the Marga Institute, a center for development studies.
In these ways, under Bundy, the Ford Foundation redirected rather than expanded overseas and international programs to include new fields of activity as staff continued to evaluate world developments and identify emerging problems. In the context of one Foundation-wide self-study, for example, Ford funded an exploratory research project on international urban issues between 1970 and 1972. The resulting proposal for a new, extremely resource-intensive international Foundation program in urban affairs would not, however, find its way into the 1970s agenda because of financial constraints.

Rather than create expensive new programs, Bundy chose to revive and strengthen a targeted program in international security and arms control, fields with which he had extensive experience. Launched in 1973, the program sought to build up nongovernmental competence in foreign policy and international affairs to provide apolitical criticism of government policy. The program contributed to the Trilateral Commission, a think tank bringing together leaders in the Atlantic community and Japan. Ford also supported policy research at established think tanks such as RAND, Brookings, and the Woodrow Wilson Center, and at arms control seminars and new centers at Stanford, Harvard, and other elite universities. To address the specific issues of nuclear arms and nuclear energy, Ford supported the Nuclear Energy Policy Study Group in 1976. Many of the institutions that received support were run by known quantities—experts whom Bundy knew from his time as US national security advisor.

By 1979, the Ford Foundation was the biggest private funder of arms control as a field, both in the US and overseas. Program officer Enid Schoettle estimated that between 1958 and 1981 Ford had spent more than $20 million for institutional support in international peace, security, and arms control. This work provided the basis for other foundations when they entered the field, more than twenty years after the Ford Foundation began its initial support for disarmament. One measure of impact, Schoettle noted in 1982, was the fact that other funders drew upon high numbers of graduates of Ford-supported centers.

In the South Africa program of the same period, Foundation program staff described the risks of working in that contested regime. In a 1972 memo to McGeorge Bundy, Middle East and Africa program director J. Wayne Fredericks saw in South Africa dire problems of institutionalized racism.
To work towards justice within the legal framework, Ford again used the litigation strategy it had been developing in the US. In 1973, despite the hesitation of some staff members because of the risks involved, the Foundation agreed to support a conference on legal aid at the University of Natal. Bringing together legal experts from the United States and Great Britain, other countries in Southern Africa, and a fairly wide spectrum in South Africa itself, including a prominent Nationalist party judge, the meeting succeeded in shining a light on how poor South African legal aid was compared to other countries. For one Ford Foundation legal grantee, the U.S.-based DC Lawyers’ Committee, which was to represent and report to the Foundation, it was an opportunity to build a network of South African lawyers and experts who could be called upon as the Foundation’s law-related work intensified. To monitor the legal work, Foundation leaders made the unusual choice of sending associate general counsel Sheila McLean – from the operational side of the Foundation – to advise on the program. The Soweto riots of 1976 had resulted in the deaths of children, prompting McLean to write a report called “Children leading a revolution,” which strengthened the resolve of the Foundation’s leadership to continue programs there.

The grantmaking in South Africa and earlier experience in Latin America led to a turn toward international human rights by the end of Bundy’s term. The program grew out of the Foundation’s response to Latin American coups of the late 1960s and early 1970s. Ford offered fellowships to relocate ousted scholars in Argentina in 1966. In Brazil in 1969, Ford staff under the leadership of Representative William Carmichael established the social science think tank CEBRAP (Center for Brazilian Analysis and Planning) to do the same. The approach innovated by keeping the scholars in the region rather than exiling them to far-off, albeit safer locales. By the time of the 1973 coup in Chile, the Foundation was constantly reevaluating its activities in contested environments and assessing the viability of continued operations. While the Foundation chose to stay involved in Brazil, Pinochet’s brutal regime in Chile presented too much of a risk to keep the Ford office open.

Human rights abuses in Latin America, combined with continuing concerns about the egregious treatment of populations—including of intellectuals in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union—led the International Affairs program to hold a meeting in September 1975 to consider ways to address these conditions. After reviewing a
groundbreaking report on human rights, which program officer David Heaps and deputy vice president Francis Sutton prepared for that meeting, Ford trustees allocated $500,000 that year and then $1 million in 1976, for an exploratory program in human rights. By 1978, among other accomplishments, Ford had funded the establishment of Helsinki Watch, which would evolve into Human Rights Watch. The Foundation’s broader international activities also became increasingly infused with human rights concerns.

The Foundation’s bold new strategies during the Bundy era, however, came at a serious cost. Congressional investigations of foundations were a recurring twentieth-century phenomenon, but the 1969 hearings—in which Bundy testified—were particularly detrimental to Ford’s reputation. Two days before Bundy was to take the stand, National Affairs Vice President Mitchell Sviridoff completed a notebook of material on the Foundation’s controversial or potentially controversial activities. Among the nineteen programs listed were grants to the Cleveland Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) and the Southern Regional Council for voter registration activities, the notorious travel and study awards to Robert Kennedy’s staff following his assassination, and support for the Yale Law School’s League for Environmental Law. The House Ways and Means Committee, chaired by Representative Wilbur Mills, saw a political bias in some of these activities and the final version of the Tax Act limited foundation involvement in political processes. The Kennedy awards were especially difficult to justify and resulted in new sector-wide restrictions on grants to individuals. Many have argued that, more important than the substance influencing these charges—explained in exhaustive detail in the “Sviridoff Notebook”—was Bundy’s “arrogant” demeanor during the hearings. The Foundation president himself admitted as much in his 1972 oral history. Foundation practitioners at the time blamed Bundy for the sweeping changes that still regulate foundations. No public expression of bitterness ensued from Bundy, whose presidential essays went so far as to praise the new foundation law for promoting transparency and accountability.

Controversy would return, however, when Henry Ford II resigned from the Board of Trustees in December 1976, after thirty-three years of service. For the first time in forty years, the Ford family was completely separated from the governance of the foundation that bore its name. When the news went public in January 1977, a Ford Foundation press release quoted
Henry Ford II praising his fellow trustees, saying the Foundation was “in capable hands.” But in one widely-publicized paragraph of his resignation letter, Ford criticized the Foundation for attacking the capitalist economic system that had created it. These comments seemed to confirm long-held suspicions on the right that the Ford Foundation was a hotbed of liberalism. The four-page letter offered much more insight than the simple condemnation some have drawn from it. Ford strongly advised the Foundation to “strengthen and improve” the economic system—a goal that would emerge as the 1980s brought new financial challenges and partnership opportunities. Ultimately, the Bundy period of creative risk-taking resulted in enduring institutions that provided the basis for the cross-sectoral activities at the century’s end. Many continue to serve as partners with the Foundation in tackling concerns for financial equity, civil rights, human rights, and community governance in urban and rural settings.

Refining Strategies for One Foundation, 1979-2001

When the Foundation turned to its next president, Franklin Thomas, in 1979, few could have imagined the dramatic national and international transformations that would take place over the next decade. But Thomas’ first challenge was to rebuild the Foundation’s financial assets to enable it to respond to new challenges. Despite massive spending cuts during the Bundy period, the financial crises of the 1970s had drastically diminished Ford’s asset base. Payout had dropped from about $200 million in 1970 to only $119 million by 1979. Thomas turned to an external portfolio manager to further diversify asset allocations in hopes of a financial rebound. His hopes were realized as the economy recovered in the 1980s: the Foundation’s assets ballooned, tripling by 1995, when spending would reach $420 million. To ensure flexibility in the Foundation’s response to special issues and unexpected opportunities, Thomas also created a reserve fund. Grantmaking thus expanded into new areas, supporting CDC financing, microlending, and the promotion of philanthropy worldwide. These measures, coupled with more explicit partnerships with other foundations and private-sector partners, positioned the Foundation to once again expand its reach in the 1980s.
Franklin Thomas’s presidency, lasting until his retirement in 1995, was defined by a commitment to connect the Foundation’s US and international activities around a few key themes. These themes encompassed efforts to create private sector partnerships, enhanced support for local community groups, and enlarged initiatives to promote human rights, with special attention to women’s rights. The “Reagan Revolution” of the 1980s curtailed the foundation policy expectation of government partnership, forcing the nonprofit sector to rethink its funding models. Foundation pilot projects were unlikely to lead to policy changes or new federal initiatives (for instance, as Gray Areas had in the 1960s). The government also seemed to expect nonprofit organizations to bolster the social safety net that the federal government had been weaving since the 1930s.

Facing government cutbacks and lingering financial challenges from the stagflation of the 1970s, Ford staff helped create new domestic financing structures such as the Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC). Overseas, the Foundation sought to build local financial capital through microfinance. These new funding mechanisms allowed the Foundation to continue to engage in fields it would otherwise have had to abandon, such as a new concern with empowering women and marginalized populations. Throughout Thomas’s tenure, Ford staff reinforced his special commitment to bolstering marginalized communities and broadening access to the law and educational opportunity.

Thomas’s presidency was in many ways an outgrowth of his previous experience leading the Bedford-Stuyvesant Restoration Corporation and his involvement in South Africa. Although Thomas had been a grantee and then a trustee of the Foundation, many longtime staff members viewed him as an outsider. Appointed with a trustee mandate to match the Foundation’s spending to its income, Thomas spent a full nine months in 1979 reviewing Foundation programs and internal operations. To carry out the Board’s directive, he reorganized the Foundation as a global institution in 1980. This meant that the Foundation would have a single program division – divided into U.S. and International Affairs and the Developing Countries – that would work under six themes for all grantmaking, domestic and international: Urban Poverty and the Disadvantaged, Rural Poverty and Resources, Human Rights and Social Justice, Education, International Political and Economic Issues, and Governance and Public Policy. To supervise the reorganized Foundation, Thomas named two vice
presidents, Susan Berresford, who would lead the US and International Programs, and William Carmichael, who would lead the Developing Countries Program. This new structure meant letting go, seemingly out of the blue in May 1981, twenty senior program officers. The fallout from this abrupt “Mother’s Day Massacre” has been a cautionary tale among officers ever since.

Thomas was also charged by the Board to increase the diversity of grantees, especially to favor populations “most affected” by the problems at hand. The Foundation therefore built on earlier efforts and sharpened its focus on women’s issues throughout the world. In bringing its work on population to a close, Thomas emphasized the link between previous work on reproductive health rights and the expanding Foundation agenda devoted to women’s educational and economic opportunities. He underscored the fact that these opportunities would increase both the demand for and use of family planning services.

After another Foundation review in 1987, Thomas made a significant institutional change to realize a new aim of “One Foundation.” In 1989, he merged the Foundation’s two program divisions under a single vice president, Susan Berresford, who would oversee all domestic and overseas grantmaking activities. Shortly thereafter, the Foundation revised its mission statement for the first time since 1949. The Foundation reorganized its work around four areas: “democratic values,” “poverty and injustice,” “international cooperation,” and “human achievement.”

Because of his Bedford-Stuyvesant experience, Thomas approached partnership with the private sector as a comfortable and natural collaboration. To increase the financial sustainability of community development corporations, Thomas wanted to move beyond corporate philanthropy and encourage capital investment at the local level. One result was the creation in 1980 of LISC, which grew out of a paper commissioned by the Foundation the previous year. Taking resources from the Foundation’s reserve fund, Ford joined the Mott Foundation and six major US corporations to create LISC’s initial capital pool. By providing technical support to CDCs and identifying new sources of private capital for investing in local communities, LISC was able to leverage loans and

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6 At the same time, William Carmichael left to run a new program on Soviet and Eastern European Affairs at the Institute of International Education.
direct support to ensure financial sustainability for these new community organizations. The Ford Foundation later supported LISC as it developed statewide demonstration projects and extended its work to rural communities. The initial investment in LISC in 1980 has since attracted nearly $15 billion in investment—a major validation of this model of partnership with the corporate sector.

Domestic programs remained primarily urban throughout this period. Programs focused on drug abuse, child health services, and the increasing prevalence of HIV/AIDS. With the exception of drug abuse, which was the subject of Ford-funded research in the Bundy period, these health-oriented fields were new to Ford and often involved partnerships that aimed to take new initiatives to scale. In 1987, for example, Ford started the National Community AIDS Partnership, which provided an umbrella association for donors and service organizations. It thrives today as AIDS United. In 1989, the Foundation supported the RAND Corporation when it established the Drug Policy Research Center; it has since become a major research center on topics ranging from addiction to drug decriminalization and legalization. Prompted by concerns about women’s reproductive health, the Foundation shaped a transnational program related to the health of infants and young children in marginalized communities, both in the United States and around the world. Through this program, Child Survival/Fair Start, the Ford Foundation became a significant partner in efforts to provide family support for high-risk children and to contribute to global reductions in child morbidity and mortality.

Overseas, the Foundation embarked on another experiment, to test the viability of providing small loans to marginalized women in rural Bangladesh. The Grameen Bank ultimately emerged from an initial partnership of the Ford Foundation, the Bangladesh Central Bank, and the International Fund for Agricultural Development. Beginning in 1980, Ford funded the Latin America-based microfinance network, ACCION. In 1987 the Foundation became involved in a new enterprise called Women’s World Banking (WWB) and has been a consistent supporter of the program through the WWB office in the United States, with grants of slightly over $3 million between 1992 and 2006. This model of lending to marginalized women has been adapted and replicated around the world. Not only has it provided support for women living in the direst conditions, it has also spawned the growing microfinance field, with institutions and
networks around the globe now an important feature of development finance.

The results of these financing endeavors were shared at worldwide meetings. During those meetings, Ford staff in the country offices and in New York were encouraged to work as “one foundation,” pursuing all six of the areas that had been defined in the early 1980s. Some staff in the country offices complained that a template emerging from New York was not always easily adaptable to local concerns. The country programs, for example, experimented with various poverty reduction programs, sometimes a mix of urban community development projects, housing programs, and income-generating activities. Despite the conversations at worldwide meetings about urban issues and a unified foundation program, anti-poverty funding remained primarily rural in the developing countries and urban in the United States.

Familiar Cold War worries continued to shape some of Ford's major programs in the first years of Thomas’ regime. By 1981, the Foundation had spent over $20 million on international security and arms control. In the mid-1980s, however, Mikhail Gorbachev initiated a dramatic shift with the reforms that came to be known as glasnost (“openness”) and perestroika (“restructuring”). In Poland, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia, reformers were also opening a space for democratic reforms in Eastern Europe. In 1988, Human Rights and Governance director Shepard Forman created a Soviet and East European study group, drawing on Foundation staff from several programs and at different staff levels. The aim of the group was to identify ways to integrate the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe into the international system. With the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, one of the group's tasks was to find ways of working with those from the region who had been trained through Foundation-supported exchanges. These fellows were now in leadership positions and provided a ready network of colleagues with whom the Foundation could work. The study group’s networks enabled Ford to quickly create a new training program for parliamentarians from Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union.

The events in the Soviet Union and in Central and Eastern Europe were not the only changes in the international arena to shift the foundation’s strategic focus. Thomas had joined the Foundation while serving as the chair of the Rockefeller Foundation’s Study Commission on US Policy
toward Southern Africa. As early as the late 1970s, the Foundation had begun to support the Center for Applied Legal Studies and the Legal Resources Centre, which trained large numbers of black lawyers and brought sensitive cases into the South African legal system. Cleverly appealing to the governing party’s deep respect for the rule of law, the Foundation and its grantees in the 1980s were able to help lay the groundwork for a peaceful transformation of South Africa’s apartheid regime. Recognizing the multifaceted nature of discrimination in that society, the Foundation not only advanced the rule of law, but also strengthened civic organizations, women’s groups, and educational institutions. Further, it supported a number of activist organizations in the United States that were energetically advocating US governmental sanctions against South Africa and for private disinvestment. The Foundation also played a role in shaping US policy on apartheid: from 1985 to 1987, Thomas chaired the US Secretary of State’s Advisory Committee on South Africa.

During the 1980s, the Foundation also addressed persistent issues of civil rights, governance, and military rule in Latin America and Asia. In Argentina, for example, it helped establish the Center for Legal and Social Studies. When the deadly civil war in Sri Lanka between the Tamils and Sinhalese broke out early in the decade, the Foundation responded to appeals from Sri Lankan scholars and activists to establish the International Center for Ethnic Studies. Ford also helped to establish the Institute of Security and International Studies at Chulalongkorn University in Thailand and continued support for peace and security institutions in India. As part of their effort to build a greater presence in international peace and security in the developing world, Ford leaders asked former United Nations Undersecretary General Sir Brian Urquhart to become a Foundation adviser.
The Foundation in this period also built up the global and regional human rights architecture. Ford supported the expansion of Helsinki Watch to monitor the human rights situation in other regions of the world. In 1987, Ford consolidated those new institutions to form an umbrella organization, Human Rights Watch. In parallel, Ford supported human rights advocacy through the Washington Office on Latin America, the Lawyers Committee for International Human Rights, and the International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights. Foundation staff likewise undertook complementary efforts to encourage local civil and human rights organizations around the world, which they hoped would be
local partners for the international actors, addressing country-specific concerns.

In this context, Thomas cautioned that the field of arts and culture would be given less prominence, except where it helped to advance other program areas. His expectation was that the arts would be used as a tool for promoting social justice, human rights, and other goals, not as a goal in itself. Despite diminished resources, arts and culture program staff worked diligently to support other foundation initiatives. They began to shift their emphasis from US cultural institutions to those in developing countries. In

South Africa, for example, the foundation provided support for Johannesburg’s Market Theater, which received global recognition for productions such as the play *Serafina*. The West African Museum Programme, which the Foundation funded in 1982, promoted museums and museum leadership throughout West Africa, working with many different local artistic traditions. Ford would continue to fund the project for two decades, until other funders stepped in.
The Asian regional offices had a particular interest in supporting projects related to cultural identity, cultural heritage, and cultural preservation, often through performance art. In the early 1990s, a staff member in the India office, Anmol Vellani, made a persuasive case for establishing an India Foundation for the Arts (IFA). The IFA would focus on new forms of creativity and encourage young artists, in particular. Creating an independent foundation as a funding model, Ford envisioned new opportunities for cultural institution to rely on local resources. Mimicking the Indian effort, the overseas office in Egypt in 1993 provided support for an Arab Arts Foundation.

Despite its diminished focus on the field of the arts as a program division, the Ford Foundation continued its support for media during this period. One of its most memorable projects was support beginning in 1983 for *Eyes on the Prize*, a television documentary about the American Civil Rights Movement, which first aired in 1987. By the end of the decade, the Foundation had created the Media Projects Fund to encourage staff members to promote the use of documentaries and other creative media to achieve broader awareness of such vexing issues as poverty and discrimination. Vice President Susan Berresford oversaw the fund, which became an effective incentive for staff members in New York and overseas offices to think about the uses of new media in their grantmaking.

When Susan Berresford became president in 1996, the mood of the Foundation seemed to have shifted from optimism to considerable uncertainty about the changing global order. Berresford was concerned that people felt disconnected from existing institutions and systems. She consulted widely about program areas and spent her first summer as president away from the office, rethinking Ford’s organizational structure. When she returned, she created three Foundation divisions: Assets would focus on poverty, Peace and Social Justice would address rights issues, and Education, Media, Arts and Culture would be a new umbrella division for its namesake fields. Berresford also introduced an office of communications in order to better reach out across the foundation and to the public on the approaches and work of the Foundation.

Berresford strongly advocated for a greater commitment to affirmative action, an organizational goal that had been initiated in the Bundy era. While the earlier strategy aimed to promote diversity within a field, by the late 1990s affirmative action had become a criterion applied to the
structure of grantee organizations and of the Foundation itself. Women’s issues remained high on Ford’s agenda. At the well-publicized United Nations Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, Berresford (still vice president at that time) had served as the informal leader of American foundation and NGO participation in the conference. As the Ford Foundation’s first female president, Berresford ensured that women and other marginalized voices would continue to be heard.

As globalization became a more prominent issue, Berresford encouraged staff members and grantees to continue to hold joint meetings in order to create a greater sense of partnership and shared purpose. The end of the Cold War allowed the Ford Foundation to open an office in Moscow in 1996 and in China in 1998. The president emphasized the importance of values and fairness as well as the role of philanthropy in the globalizing world. A regional security, peace, and cooperation program in India, for instance, focused on the work of civil society groups as an increasingly prominent regional interest in South Asia.

At the turn of the millennium, American cities were spreading beyond their limits and into suburban areas, creating ever-expanding metropolitan areas and subsuming those “Gray Areas” of an earlier era. In the 1990s, Ford’s domestic urban focus shifted to include suburbs and exurban areas, in response. In the year 2000, the Foundation folded together economic and community-based concerns under its new Sustainable Metropolitan Communities Initiative. Although not explicitly applying the lesson of the multifaceted Gray Areas program, the new initiative echoed its predecessor by attempting to empower communities through political, economic, and social investments. The issue of linking the work in the United States and in developing countries, however, remained a challenge even for this new program. Rural poverty continued to be the central focus of the overseas offices into the twenty-first century, with only limited attention to urban poverty.

In this period, the Foundation gave a renewed prominence to arts and culture in its program structure. By 2000, funding levels for the Education, Media, Arts and Culture division were approaching parity with the other two, Assets and Peace and Justice. The challenge of being a global program persisted, however. Every worldwide meeting explicitly addressed ways to promote cross-program and cross-national collaboration. Staff examined how their work could relate issues of culture
and human rights, cultural preservation, income generation, and building capacity in the arts and arts management. The most persistent question was how to achieve sustainability. Another enduring issue was the recognition that the support for arts and culture in the overseas offices depended on the interest of the particular representative and senior staff.

Working closely with her senior vice president, Barry Gaberman (1973–2006), Berresford created opportunities for Ford to establish new foundations at the local and national levels, particularly in developing countries. The Foundation started the African Philanthropy Initiative in 1998, which led to other national and pan-African philanthropic institutions: the Kenya Community Development Foundation, the Ghana-based African Women’s Development Fund, and the Senegal-based TrustAfrica. The Foundation also launched a major philanthropic networking and advocacy institution, the African Grantmakers Affinity Group, a US-based organization that brought together grantmakers on and in Africa. In a departure from the previous thrust of US grantmaking, Susan Berresford recognized that American poverty was as much a rural issue as it was an urban one. She built on the LISC experience to fund the North Carolina Community Center for Self-Help. In 2000, the Foundation invested $52 million to enable the Center to work with the Federal National Mortgage Association of Banks across the United States to examine ways to increase homeownership among low income and minority families in both rural and urban areas. The Foundation reserved $2 million of that amount for an evaluation of the efforts over ten years.

As the twentieth century came to a close, the traditional agenda of international peace and security gave way to issues of globalization. The economic conditions of the 1970s and 1980s that had resulted in so much debt in the developing world were slowly turning around. Many countries were experiencing economic growth and burgeoning democratic initiatives. Not only was the global economic situation improving but the Foundation’s assets were also growing. To align its grantmaking with this new context, the Foundation made three major international grants that brought a critical mass of attention to long-standing international issues: the International Fellowship Program (IFP), the Partnership for Higher Education in Africa, and the Scholar Rescue Fund.

At $355 million over ten years, the IFP grant was, at the time of this writing, the largest single grant the Foundation has made. It focused on
advanced training for young- to mid-career adults living in marginalized and disadvantaged conditions. The Foundation had learned from previous fellowship programs that a network of fellows and alumni would be essential to the program’s success; from the program’s conception, Ford staff planned an external ten-year evaluation to track the fellows. The Foundation did not manage the program; rather, it was supported through a grant to the Institute of International Education. But senior staff members were actively involved in the international advisory committee in New York and in the regions. An experienced Ford Foundation officer, Joan Dassin, was selected to lead the effort and its staff was drawn from all representative regions. The program came to a close in 2013, but the evaluation will continue over the next decade.

Ford embarked with three other foundations and African university vice chancellors to launch the Partnership for Higher Education in Africa in 2000. Initially funded for five years, all of the partner foundations renewed support, with three new ones joining in 2005. The ten-year effort resulted in $440 million in support, of which the Ford Foundation contributed $90 million. The effort provided direct support to nearly four hundred universities and colleges in nine countries. It also formed an internal cross-foundation working group to undertake cross-national projects to further support the partner universities through enhancing broadband access for improved internet communications, promoting women in higher education, and strengthening postgraduate education.

The horrors of September 11, 2001 prompted the Foundation to provide $11 million in immediate relief to affected local institutions in the United States. More lasting was Ford’s support for an Institute of International Education program on the spread of terrorism and threats to academic freedom and human life. The Foundation agreed to launch the Scholar Rescue Fund with a core grant of $1 million and continued operating support. This, like the other major activities of the early 2000s, drew on the Foundation’s time-tested grantmaking strategies (supporting individuals and new institutions as needed), while concentrating on under-addressed issues and underserved populations. Foundation staff thus explicitly took into account the new global context, increasing opportunities for inclusion. Since contexts continue to change, telling a more complete history of the Berresford presidency and subsequent eras remains a task for future scholars.
Concluding Discussion

In the preceding pages, we have identified major inflection points and shifts in Ford Foundation structure, program and strategy, from the 1930s to the beginning of the twenty-first century. Foundation leaders and staff in each era framed their scope of activity in response to changing external context and available financial resources. Moving from a family foundation in Detroit to a major geopolitical actor within fifteen years of its creation, Ford was fortunate to have leaders and staff members who embraced an expansive view of the Foundation’s ability to act. By the late 1960s, egregious conditions that launched social movements combined with pressures from declining assets resulted in a changed perspective, prompting more focused programs. Yet even with this change in perspective, the Foundation continued to use its freedom of action to develop new funding strategies and to build new fields, such as human rights. After another major political shift and a financial rebound in the 1980s, the Foundation again widened its scope by building new partnerships across sectors.

This was all driven by staff who acted with flexibility. Flexibility, at times, meant closing programs that had achieved their goals (International Training and Research), had attracted other donors (Population), were taken up by public agencies (Gray Areas, TV-Radio Workshop), or were no longer a priority. Program leaders shifted strategy based on grantmaking results—when, for example, the arts program replaced endowment support with cash stabilization—or to respond to volatile political changes, such as the Foundation’s scholar rescue work in Latin America. In their development work, Ford’s leaders shifted focus from national economic planning to human rights and governance.

We have aimed to show how the Foundation responded to changing circumstances in the United States and around the world. Of course, no historical narrative is ever definitive. Interpretations will change as new insights are drawn from the archival record, as new evidence comes to light from oral histories, and as new perspectives on the past emerge with the passage of time. We conclude, then with questions that have emerged from this narrative:
How do philanthropic strategies change in response to new circumstances?

How does a foundation move a tried and true philanthropic strategy from one domain into another?

How do foundations best renew themselves as circumstances change?

How does a foundation bridge the gap between global initiatives and local concerns?

These questions have no single answer, and so we have offered working hypotheses drawn from initial archival research. These questions and preliminary answers invite further inquiry into the history of the Ford Foundation and, indeed, the history of philanthropic institutions more broadly.
About the Archives

The Ford Foundation Archives, acquired by the Rockefeller Archive Center (RAC) in 2012, have been a transformative expansion of the RAC’s collections. The Ford Foundation was the largest U.S. philanthropic foundation of the second half of the 20th century, and therefore its records complement the RAC’s Rockefeller-related holdings, which date to the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The Ford Foundation Archives broaden the scope of materials researchers seek at the RAC related to the study of philanthropy and civil society, as well as materials in specific fields including international development, agriculture, education, humanities and the arts, civil and human rights, peace building, social justice, and democracy and governance.

The Ford Foundation’s grantmaking programs are documented in approximately 45,000 Grant Files dating from 1936 through the early 2000s, which are housed on over 9,000 reels of microfilm. Researchers utilize these records heavily. Each file typically contains grant terms, accepted grantee proposals, internal Foundation memos pertaining to the grant, financial and narrative grantee reports, and correspondence between Ford Foundation program officers and the grantee.

The Ford Foundation’s program and administrative policies are documented in over 20,000 Catalogued Reports dating from the 1950s through the early 2000s. These files contain policy and research reports, program evaluations, meeting agendas, and conference papers, all in various draft and final stages.

The third category of records is the Office Files, also mined heavily by researchers. These files date from the 1950s to the 1990s and comprise over 230 collections of the papers of individuals, including former program officers, other staff members, and administrators at many levels. The Office Files also document the Foundation’s major policy and programming changes in the working papers of Ford Foundation committees and self-studies. Examples include the 1940s Study for the Ford Foundation on Policy and Program (known as the Gaither Report), the 1960s Special Committee for Program and Policy Review, and various extensive, program-wide reviews from the late 1960s and early 1970s.
Also available to researchers are the records of independent operating organizations established by the Ford Foundation in the 1950s, such as the Fund for Adult Education, the Fund for the Advancement of Education, and the East European Fund.

The Ford Foundation Archives include more than 70 audio recordings and transcripts of oral histories. These were conducted in the early 1970s with the first generation of Ford Foundation officers, trustees, and staff as a means of gaining additional insight into the Foundation’s activities and institutional culture.

Finally, the audio-visual collections in the Ford Foundation Archives include approximately 28,000 still images documenting grants, programs, and other activities from the 1950s through the 1990s, as well as photographic portraits of trustees, officers, and staff from the 1950s through the 1980s. Additional materials include grantee-produced films and videos, audio recordings of conferences, and interviews with Ford Foundation officers conducted outside the formal oral history initiative. Ford Foundation publications include books, reports, pamphlets, and press releases from the 1950s through the 1990s, which help to illustrate grant results across a variety of fields.

The RAC continues to receive records from the Foundation and thus the Ford Foundation Archives is expected to grow in both volume and use in years to come.