Guide to the Tansey W. Thomas Papers on the Status of African Americans in the City of Davis and UC Davis D-628

Liz Phillips
University of California, Davis Library, Dept. of Special Collections
2019
1st Floor, Shields Library, University of California
100 North West Quad
Davis, CA 95616-5292
specoll@ucdavis.edu
URL: https://www.library.ucdavis.edu/archives-and-special-collections/
Biography
Tansey Washington Thomas (1931-2017) was a community organizer and political activist in every sense of those words. Throughout her life Tansey devoted her energy and intelligence to advocating for civil rights, women's rights, social and economic justice, and equality and fairness for all people.

Tansey Washington was born on Dec. 3, 1931 in Long Branch, N.J., to Rocksey Gray Adams Washington and Charles Washington. She was the third born of four children. Tansey graduated from Long Branch High School in 1949 and immediately went to work as a nurse assistant. In 1952 she enlisted in the United States Navy WAVES and did her boot camp recruitment training at Naval Station Great Lakes near Chicago. After graduation her first assignment was at the U.S. Naval Air Station, Lakehurst, N.J., followed by billets in San Diego and San Francisco. In December 1953 Tansey attended a specialized training program at the U.S. Naval Training Center in San Diego graduating with the rank of Yeoman Class "A". Tansey was Honorably Discharged from the Navy on Feb. 28, 1958, upon her marriage to Horace Anthony Thomas Jr., a U.S. Marine. They were married on Feb. 11, 1958, in San Francisco.

In 1958 Tansey went to work for the Internal Revenue Service in San Francisco, later transferring to Washington D.C. where her children Tony and Lisa were born. She transferred back with the IRS to California in 1965 after her divorce from Mr. Thomas, settling in Sacramento.

While working in Sacramento and raising Tony and Lisa she began her college education at Sacramento City College, eventually moving to Davis and transferring to UC Davis in 1969. She graduated in 1973 with a BA in Sociology and then began her graduate studies in Sociology. Professors Roland Marchand, Lyn and John Lofland, and Isao Fujimoto, as well as graduate student Dorothy Place, were her advisors providing academic mentoring and friendship to her and her children. Tansey was a longtime member of the United Methodist Church of Davis. She delighted in the civic activism of the congregation under the leadership of the Rev. Darrell Darling and made many friends among the members.

Upon completion of her college education Tansey worked for the State of California as an analyst with several agencies including the DMV, Fish & Game, and Consumer Affairs Board of Sciences, retiring after a 25-year career. Tansey resided in Davis for 48 years and will be most remembered for her civic and political activism and as an effective community organizer both on the UC Davis campus and in the Davis community. At the center of her activism was the belief in treating everyone with fairness, kindness, respect and seeking justice for all.

As a student in 1972 Tansey served as the Regional Campaign Organizer/Coordinator for Rep. Shirley Chisolm's 1972 presidential campaign for the Fourth Congressional District. She was a "founding mother" of the UC Davis Women's Resource and Research Center. She invited Maya Angelou to the campus to speak and Ms. Angelou accepted her invitation. She conceived and organized many symposiums at the university, including a monthlong conference in 1977 titled "Love in America" co-chaired with UC Davis English professor Carl Shapiro, studying the question: "What is love in America?"

In 1989 Tansey was selected to be a delegate with the Uman Davis Sister City Project, traveling with Maynard Skinner, Joan Poulos and Chris Grain to the International Conference of Sister Cities held in Tashkent, Uzbekistan. On this trip the delegation also visited Russia and Ukraine and Tansey often mentioned what a wonderful experience this was for her to help represent the City of Davis.

For many years Tansey served on and chaired the City of Davis Human Relations Commission. In her later years she served on the City of Davis Senior Services Commission. The City of Davis gave Tansey their Thong Hy Huynh Lifetime Achievement Award in 2005 for her "significant human rights efforts improving the quality of life in Davis." She was honored by the Yolo County Concilio in 2005 with their Community Award for building bridges among all peoples and in 2014 she was again honored with their Lifetime Achievement Award.

Tansey served on the Board of Directors of DCTV (now known as Davis Media Access) from 1996 to 1999. She hosted numerous shows and worked with staff to strengthen this local community owned station. One of her most memorable programs was interviewing members of the Davis contingent of the Freedom Marchers (Rev. John Pamperin, Dick Holdstock...
and Terry Turner) who traveled to Alabama in 1965 to walk with the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. on what became known as the famous "Selma to Montgomery Voting Rights Trail."

A lifelong member of the Democratic Party, she was active in the Davis Democratic Club, served on the Yolo County Democratic Central Committee, was a delegate to many California Democratic State Conventions and was active in many local campaigns. In recent years she was a strong supporter of Hillary Clinton's two presidential campaigns and delighted in the election of Barack Obama as president. She was honored by the Davis Democratic Club at their annual holiday event by "Recognizing Tansey Thomas for a Lifetime Achievement Award acknowledging her dedicated commitment to the entire Davis community in Race Relations, Academic Achievement and Social Justice from 1970 to the present, December 8, 2013." At that event she was also honored by Congressman John Garamendi, State Senator Lois Wolk and Assemblywoman Mariko Yamada with Resolutions commending her for a lifetime of community activism working to bring equality to all Americans regardless of their race, creed, ethnicity or sexual orientation.

Tansey ran for the Davis City Council in 1980 and 2000. Her 2000 campaign caught a spark, and with tremendous community support and a lifetime of Davis friends to help, and endorsements from mayors Julie Partanksy and Ken Wagstaff she was nearly elected and placed runner up, losing a council seat by only 370 votes. Her campaign theme was: "Tansey Thomas! for Davis City Council 'Let's Make a Difference.'"

Tansey Thomas died peacefully in her home in Davis on October 19, 2017.

Source:

Scope and Contents
Correspondence, writings, notes, meeting minutes, placards, posters, photographs, and memorabilia related to the life and work of community organizer and activist Tansey Thomas.

Access
This collection has not yet been fully processed. It may contain restricted materials. Please contact Archives and Special Collections in advance to request access.

For more information, please see our Privacy Policy .

Processing Information
Collection is in process.

Acquisition

Preferred Citation
[Identification of item], Tansey W. Thomas Papers on the Status of African Americans in the City of Davis and UC Davis, D-628, Archives and Special Collections, UC Davis Library, University of California, Davis.

Publication Rights
All applicable copyrights for the collection are protected under chapter 17 of the U.S. Copyright Code. Requests for permission to publish or quote from manuscripts must be submitted in writing to the Head of Special Collections. Permission for publication is given on behalf of the Regents of the University of California as the owner of the physical items. It is not intended to include or imply permission of the copyright holder, which must also be obtained by the researcher.

Subjects and Indexing Terms
African American women political activists -- California
Community activists -- Davis (Calif.)
Davis (Calif.) -- Politics and government
Davis (Calif.) -- History
Thomas, Tansey W. -- Archives
Early Life and Family 1932-2014

Physical Description: 0.8 linear feet

Scope and Contents

This series includes biographical and family information on Tansey Thomas, including biographies and resumes, high school and US Naval Training Center yearbooks, awards and commendations, and correspondence related to Tansey Thomas's siblings and their families and to her children. The materials also contain genealogy research materials as well as personal reminder notes and other paper memorabilia.

Box 1, Folder 1  Biographical Information 1960-2010
Box 1, Folder 2  Long Branch (New Jersey) High School Senior Yearbook 1949
Box 1, Folder 3  The Ship's Bell Yearbook (US Naval Training Center, Bainbridge, Maryland, Companies 129 and 130) 1953
Box 1, Folder 4  Awards and Accolades 1988-2013
Box 1, Folder 5  Correspondence 1963-1979
Box 2, Folder 1  Correspondence 1982-1992
Box 2, Folder 2  Correspondence 2002-2014
Box 2, Folder 3-4  Family and Genealogy Research 1932-2010
Box 2, Folder 5  Family: Children 1967-2012
Box 2, Folder 6  Notes and Ephemera 1964-2010 undated