**CITATION: FRANKLIN AUGUSTINE THOMAS**

Franklin A Thomas, President of the Ford Foundation from 1979 – 1996, is widely recognised as having uniquely contributed to transformation in America, South Africa and, indeed, throughout the world.

Franklin Thomas was born on 27 May, 1934 in Brooklyn, New York. He studied at Columbia University, where he became the first African American to captain an Ivy League basketball team and was twice voted the league's most valuable player. After graduating with a BA degree in 1956, Mr. Thomas served as a navigator in the United States Air Force Strategic Air Command from 1956 -1960. He then returned to Columbia University where he graduated with an LLB in 1963.

Thomas was then appointed to a series of influential government positions. He worked as an attorney for the Federal Housing and Home Finance Agency, was admitted to the New York State Bar the following year, served as an assistant U.S. Attorney in New York, and then worked for three years as the Deputy Police Commissioner of New York City in charge of legal matters.

From 1967-77, Mr. Thomas served as President and CEO of the Bedford-Stuyvesant Restoration Corporation, one of the USA’s first public/private partnerships aimed at the comprehensive development of one of the largest distressed urban communities in the U.S. During his ten-year presidency, Thomas led “Bed-Stuy” into becoming a model for hundreds of similarly focused community-based local economic development corporations throughout the country.

Mr. Thomas became the first African-American president of the Ford Foundation in 1979. Under Thomas’ leadership, the Ford Foundation contributed millions of dollars in philanthropic support to social justice, cultural, educational and economic development efforts throughout the world.

Thomas has been a champion of engaged social justice in South Africa. When he was appointed to the Ford presidency Thomas was also chair of the Rockefeller Foundation-funded Study Commission on US Policy toward South Africa. The Commission undertook a detailed study of the ‘South African problem’ and published an exhaustive and powerful case for wider American action against apartheid in its 1981 report entitled *South Africa: Time Running Out*. He later served as a member of the U.S. Secretary of State’s Advisory Committee on South Africa from 1985 to 1987.

At the highest level, then, throughout the 1980s, Thomas was personally able to champion Ford’s programme in South Africa. While the programme in South Africa could have been viewed as a technical violation of the worldwide calls for political, cultural, scientific and economic boycotts against South Africa, under Thomas’s leadership Ford’s programme was seen by the most important actors – such as the then banned and exiled ANC – as a desirable exception. Indeed, Thomas’s role and actions towards South Africa underscored the link between racial justice in the U.S. and the struggle against apartheid. In this way, he strengthened American support for Ford’s grant making programme.

During his presidency, the Ford Foundation began a strategy of supporting public interest legal centres in their fight against apartheid. At the time, this was a route full of risks and faced considerable opposition. Nonetheless, Thomas endorsed the Foundation’s clear view that apartheid could be opposed by legal means within South Africa. The Foundation thus supported the establishment and operation of the Centre for Applied Legal Studies (CALS) at Wits University. The Foundation also supported the establishment of the Legal Resources Centre (LRC) in 1978. Thomas subsequently explained this support by saying: “We were helping to reinforce black South Africans’ notion that they had rights, that they could go to court, and that they could get a favorable court ruling enforced. That’s no small thing in a country that tells you you’re a non-person.”

Under Mr. Thomas’s leadership, the Ford Foundation established a number of scholarship and internship programmes aimed at increasing the number of black South African university and advanced-degree graduates. The rationale behind this grant making was the recognition that, under apartheid, the vast majority of black South Africans had been denied the opportunity to obtain higher education but there would be a need for large numbers of educated and trained blacks once majority rule was won. Such programs, focusing on economics, sociology, and history were established at Wits University (amongst others).

The Ford Foundation, again under Thomas’s leadership, was a key supporter of the Institute of International Education (IIE) which provided scholarships for black South Africans to study in the USA in partnership with the Educational Opportunities Council (EOC) in South Africa. This scholarship program ran from the mid-1980s and into the early 1990s. Dozens of black South Africans and Namibians came to the US and obtained degrees through this programme and have gone on to make substantial contributions to these now free nations.

Franklin Thomas is currently Head of the TFF Study Group a not-for-profit development assistance group focusing on Southern Africa. He is also a director of a number of charitable and business corporations. Mr. Thomas has received honorary degrees from Yale University (1970), Columbia University (1979), and Pace University (1977). He has also received the Lyndon B. Johnson Foundation Award for contribution to the betterment of urban life, 1974 and it is therefore befitting that the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg awards an Honorary Doctorate degree to Franklin Thomas.