

Ford Foundation Presidents, 1936-2007

Edsel Ford (Founder) 1936-1943

Created the foundation in 1936 to “receive and administer funds for scientific, educational and charitable purposes, all for the public welfare.” Died less than seven years later at age 49.

Henry Ford II 1943-1950

With the bequests of his father and grandfather, led the transformation of the foundation into the world’s largest philanthropy. Appointed a blue-ribbon panel to recommend enlarged programs for the foundation, commensurate with its resources. The resulting “Gaither Report” set out the fundamental ambitions and mission that still guide the foundation today. In 1950 Henry II became chairman of the board.

Paul G. Hoffman 1950-1953

An executive of the Studebaker auto company who played a role in implementing the Marshall Plan in the late 1940s. During his presidency, Ford began its commitment to public media, launched its first fellowship programs, and opened its first international office in Delhi, India. Hoffman later went on to head UNDP.

H. Rowan Gaither 1953-1956

A respected California attorney who led the study committee that transformed the foundation under Henry II. Gaither expanded the foundation’s international programs (Indonesia, South Africa, Israel) and began work in higher education in the United States. He became chair of the board in 1956.

Henry T. Heald 1956-1965

Resigned as president of New York University to join the foundation. Greatly expanded investment in higher education, including teacher training, distance learning, and improved facilities. He also led investment in Europe, Africa, and Latin America. During his presidency the foundation made major contributions in agriculture (the Green Revolution), legal aid for the poor, and fellowships for the arts and humanities.

McGeorge Bundy 1966-1979

A former National Security Advisor, Bundy led the foundation during a period of enormous social change. Major initiatives under his leadership included broad support to civil rights organizations, urban redevelopment efforts, the creation of PBS, minority fellowships, U.S. energy policy, women’s organizations, and the launch of microfinance.

Franklin Thomas 1979-1996

Thomas joined the foundation from the Bedford-Stuyvesant Restoration Corporation, where he was CEO. He led anti-apartheid initiatives, the renewal of the foundation’s work on urban poverty, major investment in human rights organizations, innovations in government, and the establishment of foundation programs in Russia, China and Vietnam.

Susan V. Berresford 1996-2007

Berresford led the foundation to expand its work on HIV/AIDS, launched a groundbreaking international fellowships program, invested in higher education in Africa, founded a global center on post-conflict reconciliation, created major arts programs, supported research and rights in the field of human sexuality, broke ground on affordable mortgages for low-income families, and emphasized excellence in the craft and governance of philanthropy.

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