NEW JERSEY STATE ARCHIVES

NEW JERSEY STATE ARCHIVES COLLECTION GUIDE

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Institutional History

During the 1930s and 1940s Afro-Americans migrated en masse from the rural south to northern cities, giving rise to racial discrimination and the segregation of blacks in urban ghettos. In 1938, the New Jersey State Legislature created the Commission on the Condition of the Urban Colored Population (P.L. 1938, c. 393) as a temporary body to investigate racial discrimination in New Jersey, and to recommend remedial legislation.

On the heels of this commission's findings, the Urban Colored Population Commission was created in 1941 by P.L. 1941 c. 192, for the purpose of investigating the problems facing urban blacks and to enforce existing civil rights legislation. The commission acted as both a study group, as well as an investigatory body. It was given the power of a legislative committee, including the right to subpoena witnesses and records. In the course of investigating an alleged civil rights violation, the commission would first attempt to resolve the problem out of court. Failing that, legal action was taken based on existing civil rights legislation, such as P.L. 1884 c. 219, P.L. 1921 c. 174, and P.L. 1935 c. 247.

The responsibilities of the Urban Colored Population Commission were largely taken over in 1945 by the state's Division of Civil Rights, as created by the Law Against Discrimination (P.L. 1945 c. 169). The commission continued to exist on paper until 1979, but ceased functioning in practice after 1947. The 1941 law that created the commission was officially repealed in 1979 (P.L. 1979 c. 341) as part of Governor Brendan Byrne's general program to eradicate ombudsman-type statutes.

Content Note

This collection consists mostly of the files compiled as a result of the commission's investigations, which were initiated in response to the filing of a complaint. Investigative case files generally contain handwritten notes by the complainant, newspaper clippings, the investigator's report(s), and sometimes even photographs.

The bulk of the investigation files are labeled individually, and are arranged alphabetically by the name of the complainant, or the location of the alleged civil rights violation. Cases investigated range in variety from cross burnings, to basic civil rights violations such as refusal of a diner employee to serve blacks. In addition to individual investigative files, other presumably less important cases are arranged collectively under the categories, "aid cases," "unemployment compensation cases", "employment" and "public accomodations." Aid cases and unemployment compensation cases consist of requests by black citizens to the commission for assistance in obtaining relief from state and local agenices. The other two categories are self-explanatory. General reports including statistical information, as well proposals on health, housing and employment, can be found under "race relations -- general reports".

The commission also served as an informal employment agency for the state's Afro-American residents. The file, "employment cases," contains resumes from job applicants, as well as letters of referral sent by the commission to prospective employers.

The remainder of the commission's records are largely administrative in nature. Of particular importance are the annual reports, which include research data compiled by commission investigators on current problems facing New Jersey's urban black population, and suggestions for legislative reform. The correspondence files pertain largely to budget and personnel requests, and general staff directives. Finally, a small number of personnel files have been retained because they illustrate contemporary procedures in the state's civil service system.

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Box 1

Investigative Files

- Employment Cases (A-Z)
- Investigations -- Individual Cases:
  - Aqueduct Alley Riot
  - Atlantic City Cross Burning
  - Bacote, Mr. and Mrs. Patrick
  - Bloomfield Teacher's Request
  - Carter, Isabelle -- Montclair State Teachers College
  - Cranberry Poultry Farm
  - Essex County Isolation Hospital
  - Far Eastern Diner
  - Fultz, James H. -- Police Civil Service Examinations
  - Hamilton Township High School
  - Lee, Wilfred R.
  - Levitian Diner
  - Lewis, Maurice A.
  - Manitou Park Public School
  - Passaic Racial Incident
  - Perth Amboy -- Crystal Lunch Case
  - Platto, Lucy
  - Powell, Herman vs. State of Georgia
  - Public Service Coordinated Transport Co.
  - Randolph, Oliver
  - Robinson -- Eighth Avenue Cleaners
  - Smith, James R.
  - Vaux Hall School -- Obie Mccullom
  - Wall Township -- Cross Burning
- Investigations -- Collective Files:
  - Aid Cases
  - Employment Cases

Housing

Public Accommodations

Unemployment Compensation Cases

Box 2

Investigative Files [cont'd]

Investigators' Assignments

Investigators' Reports:

Hightower, Walker and Malloy

Roger, W. Tucker

Walker, O.G.

Wright, L.D.

Investigations -- General Reports on Race Relations

Administrative Files

Administrative Correspondence:

General

Commission Members

Governor's Circular Correspondence

Joseph A. Clarke, Assistant Director

Annual Reports, 1944-1947

Budget and Finance

Minutes and Agendas, 1942, 1943, 1944, 1947

Monthly Financial Statements, 1946-1947

Personnel:

Action Requests

Certification of Eligibles for Appointment

Circular Letters of Civil Service Commission

Employee Merit Ratings

Job Descriptions

Proof of Payroll, July 1, 1946 - December 31, 1947

Salary Adjustment Commission

State Employee's Retirement System of New Jersey

Box 3

Unprocessed Material

Box 4

Unprocessed Material

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