

Guide to the Office of the President, Yale University, Records Concerning the May Day Rally

RU 16



compiled by Mark Bailey

February 1996

Yale University Library
P.O. Box 208240
New Haven, CT 06520-8240
(203) 432-1735
(203) 432-7441

beinecke.library@yale.edu

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Table of Contents

| | |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| Collection Overview | 3 |
| Requesting Instructions | 3 |
| Administrative Information | 4 |
| Immediate Source of Acquisition | 4 |
| Conditions Governing Access | 4 |
| Preferred Citation | 4 |
| Biographical / Historical | 4 |
| Biographical / Historical | 4 |
| Scope and Contents | 5 |
| General note | 5 |
| Arrangement | 5 |
| Collection Contents | 6 |
| Series I: Records | 6 |
| Selected Search Terms | 8 |

Collection Overview

REPOSITORY: Manuscripts and Archives
Yale University Library
P.O. Box 208240
New Haven, CT 06520-8240
(203) 432-1735
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<http://www.library.yale.edu/mssa/>

CALL NUMBER: RU 16

CREATOR: Yale University. President's Office

TITLE: Office of the President, Yale University, records concerning the May Day rally

DATES: 1970-1976

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION: 7.76 linear feet (11 boxes, 1 audiocassette)

LANGUAGE: English

SUMMARY: The records include background materials on the Black Panther party, information on the trial, and a series of Strike Newspapers issued by Dwight Hall. Also included are materials documenting Yale's approach and efforts toward organizing peaceful co-existence during the weekend events, as well as published information chronicling each day and summarizing media coverage. Other materials describe the faculty meeting held to address the issue of suspending academic activities during the trial, as well reaction to President Kingman Brewster, Jr.'s, famous speech before that assembly. A significant number of letters detailing positive and negative feedback from Yale alumni and those unrelated to Yale comprise the correspondence files. May Day weekend took place 1-3 May 1970 as a rally to protest the Black Panther murder trial of party chairman Bobby Seale and seven other party members. Normal academic activities were suspended so that Yale students, faculty, and staff could assist in planning and organizing cautionary measures. Yale University opened its doors to demonstrators by offering shelter, food, day care, and first aid throughout the weekend. Approximately 15,000 people attended the first day of rallies without significant disruption or disorder. Fewer remained the following days, and academic activities resumed around campus by Monday 4 May.

ONLINE FINDING AID: To cite or bookmark this finding aid, please use the following link: <https://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/mssa.ru.0016>

Requesting Instructions

To request items from this collection for use in the Manuscripts and Archives reading room, please use the request links in the HTML version of this finding aid, available at <https://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/mssa.ru.0016>.

To order reproductions from this collection, please go to http://www.library.yale.edu/mssa/ifr_copy_order.html. The information you will need to submit an order includes: the collection call number, collection title, series or accession number, box number, and folder number or name.

Key to the container abbreviations used in the PDF finding aid:

- b. box
- f. folder

Administrative Information

Immediate Source of Acquisition

The records were transferred from the Office of the President, 1973

Conditions Governing Access

The materials are open for research.

Original audiovisual materials, as well as preservation and duplicating masters, may not be played. Researchers must consult use copies, or if none exist must pay for a use copy, which is retained by the repository. Researchers wishing to obtain an additional copy for their personal use should consult Copying Services information on the Manuscripts and Archives web site.

Preferred Citation

Office of the President, Yale University, Records Concerning the May Day Rally (RU 16). Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

Biographical / Historical

May Day weekend took place May 1-3, 1970 as a rally to protest the murder trial of Black Panther party chairman Bobby Seale and seven other party members. Normal academic activities were suspended so that Yale students, faculty, and staff could assist in preparing the campus for the rally. Yale University opened its doors to demonstrators by offering shelter, food, day care, and first aid throughout the weekend. Approximately 15,000 people attended the first day of rallies without significant disruption or disorder. Fewer remained the following days, and academic activities resumed by Monday May 4.

Biographical / Historical

May Day weekend took place Friday 1 May to Sunday 3 May 1970. It was a rally on the New Haven Green to protest perceived unfairness in the trial of Black Panther Chairman Bobby Seale and seven other party members. Seale was charged in the murder of former Black Panther Alex Rackley, who was found dead on 21 May 1969. The trial and the protest became a primary concern of Yale University students, faculty, and staff. Mass meetings took place around campus, and publications such as the Dwight Hall *Strike Newspaper* were distributed to inform and update the community on Black Panther issues, as well as on other areas of national interest and unrest, including the Vietnam Conflict.

The issue of suspending normal academic activities indefinitely for the duration of the trial was brought before the Yale faculty on 23 April 1970 and, with some modifications, approved. Kurt Schmoke '71, who later became Baltimore mayor in 1987 and a member of the Yale Corporation in 1989, was the first student in Yale history to address the faculty on behalf of the student body. Yale President Kingman Brewster, Jr., also addressed the assembly. During his remarks, he stated, "...I am appalled and ashamed that things should have come to pass that I am skeptical of the ability of Black revolutionaries to achieve a fair trial anywhere in the United States." Brewster's statement drew sharp criticism from Vice President Spiro T. Agnew, who in a speech delivered on 28 April 1970 in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida, called on Yale alumni to

demand Brewster's resignation. The alumni, however, supported Brewster nearly four to one, based on written and telephone feedback. Brewster also received comprehensive support throughout the immediate Yale community.

Various sources predicted that 50,000 demonstrators would arrive in New Haven for the May Day rally. The Brewster administration decided to open Yale University for shelter, food, day care, and first aid throughout the weekend. Students hosted demonstrators in designated residential college rooms, and many faculty, staff, and students were assigned special duties to help maintain order. Fearing vulnerability to the large numbers predicted to attend, the Connecticut state government, against the wishes of Brewster, put federal forces into place in case of violent eruptions. Actual attendance, however, was lower than expected at approximately 15,000. The events of Friday 1 May, including speeches given at various Yale sites by prominent protest leaders such as Abbie Hoffman and Jerry Rubin, occurred peacefully. Throughout the night, there were sporadic incidents managed by local police. On Saturday 2 May fewer numbers gathered for rallies on the New Haven Green with no significant eruptions, in essence bringing to a close the events of May Day weekend. By Sunday 3 May all demonstrators had left the rally and campus activities resumed the following day. Students who elected to postpone final exams and projects were offered a number of options to fulfill their academic obligations without penalty.

Scope and Contents

The records include background materials on the Black Panther party, information on the trial, and a series of Strike Newspapers issued by Dwight Hall. Also included are materials documenting Yale's approach and efforts toward organizing peaceful co-existence during the weekend events, as well as published information chronicling each day and summarizing media coverage. Other materials describe the faculty meeting held to address the issue of suspending academic activities during the trial, as well reaction to President Kingman Brewster, Jr.'s, famous speech before that assembly. A significant number of letters detailing positive and negative feedback from Yale alumni and those unrelated to Yale comprise the correspondence files. May Day weekend took place 1-3 May 1970 as a rally to protest the Black Panther murder trial of party chairman Bobby Seale and seven other party members. Normal academic activities were suspended so that Yale students, faculty, and staff could assist in planning and organizing cautionary measures. Yale University opened its doors to demonstrators by offering shelter, food, day care, and first aid throughout the weekend. Approximately 15,000 people attended the first day of rallies without significant disruption or disorder. Fewer remained the following days, and academic activities resumed around campus by Monday 4 May.

General note

Forms part of Yale Record Group 2-A (YRG 2-A), Records of the President.

Arrangement

The records are arranged alphabetically by subject and material type.

Collection Contents

Series I: Records

| | Correspondence files | 1970 |
|----------------|---|------------|
| b. 1, f. 1-9 | A-CI | |
| b. 2, f. 10-18 | Co-F | |
| b. 3, f. 19-26 | G-Ke | |
| b. 4, f. 27-37 | Ki-M | |
| b. 5, f. 38-49 | N-Sla | |
| b. 6, f. 50-58 | Slo-W | |
| | Subject files | |
| b. 7, f. 59-62 | 1970 | |
| b. 7, f. 63 | Accounting [includes: tallies of letters, telegrams and telephone calls, receipts and charges] | 1970 |
| b. 7, f. 64 | Anonymous and unidentified correspondence and articles, 1970-1972 | |
| | Black Panther Party | |
| b. 7, f. 65-69 | 1970 | |
| b. 8, f. 70 | Correspondence A copy of this material is available in digital form from Manuscripts and Archives. Contact Manuscripts and Archives at beinecke.library@yale.edu to request access to the digital copy. | 1970 |
| b. 12, f. 1 | Committee to Defend the (Black) Panthers: <i>Street Wall Journal</i> | 1970 April |
| | Trial | |
| b. 8, f. 71 | Media documentation, 1970-1971 | |
| b. 8, f. 72 | Regarding Kingman Brewster, Jr.'s statement, 1970-1972 | |
| b. 8, f. 73-74 | Student petition in support of Kingman Brewster, Jr. | 1970 |
| b. 8, f. 75 | "Black Power" and the Courts, 1970 | |
| b. 8, f. 76 | Crisis telephone calls: messages for Kingman Brewster, Jr. received May Day weekend | 1970 |
| | Demands | |
| b. 8, f. 77 | Day care | 1970 |
| b. 8, f. 78 | Financial | 1970 |

Subject files > Demands (continued)

| | | |
|--------------|--|---------|
| b. 8, f. 79 | Responses by Kingman Brewster, Jr. A copy of this material is available in digital form from Manuscripts and Archives. Contact Manuscripts and Archives at beinecke.library@yale.edu to request access to the digital copy. | 1970 |
| b. 8, f. 80 | Social Sciences | 1970 |
| b. 8, f. 81 | Information file [includes: strike newspapers] | 1970 |
| b. 8, f. 83 | May Day packet, 1970-1976 | |
| b. 9, f. 84 | New York City area letters | 1970 |
| b. 9, f. 85 | Published materials [includes: ex post facto letters and event information] | 1970 |
| b. 9, f. 86 | Responses to May Day assessment by faculty | 1970 |
| b. 9, f. 87 | Statement by Kingman Brewster, Jr. at Yale College faculty meeting (Apr 23) | 1970 |
| b. 10, f. 88 | Oversize: Survey and letters received during Spring 1970: log | 1970 |
| b. 11 | Brewster/May Day <i>1 Audiocassette 0:34:05 Duration (HH:MM:SS.mmm)</i> [Aviary] ru0016s01b011a.u.mp3 As a preservation measure, original materials, as well as preservation and duplicating masters, may not be used. Digital access copies must be provided for use. Contact Manuscripts and Archives at beinecke.library@yale.edu to request access. A copy of this material is available in digital form from Manuscripts and Archives. | undated |

Selected Search Terms

The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the Library's online catalog. They are grouped by name of person or organization, by subject or location, and by occupation and listed alphabetically therein.

Subjects

Student movements
Student protesters
Students -- Political activity

Corporate Bodies

Black Panther Party
Yale University. President's Office
Yale University -- History -- 20th Century
Yale University -- Students -- Political activity