

Guide to the John R. Williams Papers

MS 1398



compiled by Diane E. Kaplan

June 1985

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Collection Overview

REPOSITORY: Manuscripts and Archives
Yale University Library
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CALL NUMBER: MS 1398

CREATOR: Williams, John R.

TITLE: John R. Williams papers

DATES: 1966-1977

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION: 14 linear feet (34 boxes)

LANGUAGE: English

SUMMARY: The papers consist of photocopies of correspondence, memoranda, clippings, printed material, transcripts of telephone conversations, and other declassified material from the national headquarters and New Haven, Connecticut office of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, pertaining to the New Haven Chapter of the Black Panther Party. The papers document the investigation of the 1969 murder of Alex Rackley, the subsequent arrests of Bobby Seale and other party members, the surveillance of various demonstrations and protests, particularly those relating to May Day, 1970, and the 1971 trials of Seale and Erika Huggins.

ONLINE FINDING AID: To cite or bookmark this finding aid, please use the following link: <https://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/mssa.ms.1398>

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.ms.1398>.

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

Conditions Governing Access

The materials are open for research.

Conditions Governing Use

Copyright status for collection materials is unknown. Transmission or reproduction of materials protected by U.S. Copyright Law (Title 17, U.S.C.) beyond that allowed by fair use requires the written permission of the copyright owners. Works not in the public domain cannot be commercially exploited without permission of the copyright owners. Responsibility for any use rests exclusively with the user.

Preferred Citation

John R. Williams Papers (MS 1398). Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

Biographical / Historical

John R. Williams is an attorney who started his legal career in 1967 as a lobbyist for Aetna Life & Casualty in Hartford, Connecticut. Disillusioned by his time working in corporate law, Williams left Aetna in 1969 and joined the Hill Neighborhood Law Office of the New Haven Legal Assistance Association as its chief criminal attorney. His first major case was as one of the defense attorneys in the New Haven Black Panther murder trials. Following the acquittal of the so-called "New Haven Nine" in 1971, Williams joined Catherine Roraback and Michael Avery, two other Black Panther Party lawyers, to form New Haven's first public interest law firm. That firm still exists today as John R. Williams and Associates, LLC. Throughout his career, Williams has been best known for his work in the areas of police misconduct litigation, criminal defense, and jury selection reform.

Scope and Contents

The John R. Williams Papers consist of photocopies of Federal Bureau of Investigation (F.B.I.) files concerning the activities of the Black Panther Party in New Haven, Connecticut. The photocopied materials include correspondence, memoranda, informants' reports, transcripts of phone conversations, clippings, photographs, printed material, and other papers from Black Panther Party files at the F.B.I. headquarters in Washington, D.C. and the New Haven, Connecticut office of the bureau. Williams, an attorney for several New Haven area Black Panther Party members, learned that his phone conversations with clients were recorded by the F.B.I. during the late 1960s and early 1970s. He obtained declassified material from these files in 1981 and donated the material to Yale University Library in 1984.

Prior to their release, the files were sanitized to remove information the Justice Department deemed sensitive, including the names of individuals involved in the F.B.I. investigation. These files contain background information beginning in 1966, although the bulk of material follows from the May, 1969 murder of New Haven Black Panther Party member Alex Rackley and the subsequent arrest of party members, including Bobby Seale, the national chairman to the party, on charges of murder and conspiracy to commit murder.

The files document many developments of the trial and the activities of party members. Although Warren Kimbro pleaded guilty to the second degree murder of Alex Rackley in January, 1970, the legal case against a group known as the "New Haven 9" continued. The files detail the surveillance of party members and their counsel, and include reports on movements and activities, party publications, and other documents. The threat of a violent May Day rally in 1970, and the roles of Doug Miranda, captain of the New Haven

Black Panthers, and the Yale faculty, administration, and students in maintaining civil order are also documented.

The August, 1970 conviction of Lonnie McLucas, on charges of conspiracy to commit murder, and the trials of Bobby Seale and Erika Huggins in November, 1970 are documented through press and media reports. The activities of defense attorney Charles R. Garry and the court proceedings are also detailed. The trial of Seale and Huggins ended in May, 1971 when the jury was unable to reach a verdict. The F.B.I. maintained active files on the New Haven Black Panther Party through 1977.

The John R. Williams Papers are arranged in two series.

SERIES I, F.B.I. HEADQUARTERS FILES, 1966-1977, consists of photocopied material from the national headquarters of the F.B.I. in Washington, D.C. These files are identified by the number "105-165706-2" and are subdivided into sections. The sections are arranged in numerical order, with each section containing a chronological accumulation of material. One file, labelled "sub A" and arranged at the end of the series, documents press coverage of the Black Panther Party. Files for "June" which consist of logs of telephone conversations, documents defending the use of telephone surveillance, and papers seeking the continuance of wire-tapping through 1972, are also arranged at the end of the series.

SERIES II, NEW HAVEN OFFICE FILES, 1966-1977, consists of photocopied material from the New Haven F.B.I. office. These files are identified by the number "NH100-19186" and are arranged in numerical sections. Each section contains a chronological run of material. Files relating to press coverage are found in files "sub 4" and an alphabetical sequence of files "sub A - sub X" contain copies of evidence seized in raids on party offices following the Alex Rackley murder. A group of files labelled "NH157-1601", arranged at the end of the series, contains information relating to demonstrations, speeches, and rallies.

Arrangement

Arranged in two series: I. F.B.I. Headquarters Files, 1966-1977. II. F.B.I. New Haven Office Files, 1966-1977.

Collection Contents

Series I: F.B.I. Headquarters Files, 1966-1977

5 linear feet (11 boxes)

This series contains material arranged by section number. Material from miscellaneous sections is arranged at the end of the series.

| File 105-165706-32 | | |
|--------------------|-------|------------------------------------|
| Sections | | |
| b. 1, f. 1-8 | 1-4 | 1968-1969 September |
| b. 2, f. 9-16 | 4-8 | 1969 September-1969 November |
| b. 3, f. 17-24 | 9-13 | 1969 November-1970 March |
| b. 4, f. 25-31 | 14-18 | 1970 March-1970 April |
| b. 5, f. 32-37 | 18-21 | 1970 April-1970 May |
| b. 6, f. 38-44 | 22-26 | 1970 May-1970 July |
| b. 7, f. 45-51 | 27-31 | 1970 July-1970 October |
| b. 8, f. 52-58 | 31-34 | 1970 October-1971 January |
| b. 9, f. 59-65 | 35-38 | 1971 January-1971 June |
| b. 10, f. 66-70 | 39-42 | 1971 June-1975 January |
| b. 10, f. 71 | Sub A | 1969 March-1971 June |
| b. 10, f. 72 | June | 1969 March-1969 November |
| b. 11, f. 73-74 | June | 1969 March-1972 March |

Series II: F.B.I. New Haven Office Files, 1966-1977*9 linear feet (23 boxes)*

This series contains material arranged by file number and then by section number or letter.

| File NH100-19186 | | |
|-------------------|-------|-----------------------------------|
| Sections | | |
| b. 12, f. 75-81 | 1-6 | 1969 February-1969 May |
| b. 13, f. 82-88 | 7-12 | 1968 September-1969 June |
| b. 14, f. 89-95 | 13-17 | 1969 June-1969 August |
| b. 15, f. 96-102 | 18-27 | 1969 August-1969 November |
| b. 16, f. 103-108 | 28-32 | 1969 November-1969 December |
| b. 17, f. 109-116 | 33-38 | 1969 December-1970 January |
| b. 18, f. 117-123 | 39-44 | 1970 February-1970 March |
| b. 19, f. 124-129 | 44-49 | 1969 November-1970 April |
| b. 20, f. 130-137 | 50-54 | 1970 April-1970 May |
| b. 21, f. 138-145 | 55-60 | 1970 May-1970 June |
| b. 22, f. 146-153 | 60-64 | 1970 June-1970 July |
| b. 23, f. 154-159 | 65-69 | 1970 May-1970 August |
| b. 24, f. 160-167 | 70-75 | 1970 July-1970 August |
| b. 25, f. 168-174 | 76-81 | 1970 October-1971 January |

File NH100-19186 > Sections (continued)

| | | |
|-------------------|------------|---------------------------------|
| b. 26, f. 175-180 | 82-87 | 1971 January-1971 March |
| b. 27, f. 181-187 | 88-94 | 1971 March-1971 June |
| b. 28, f. 188-192 | 94-98 | 1971 July-1971 December |
| b. 29, f. 193-198 | 99-103 | 1972 January-1973 April |
| b. 30, f. 199-201 | 104-105 | 1973 April-1977 October |
| b. 31, f. 202-207 | sub 4: 1-3 | 1967 October-1970 July |
| b. 32, f. 208-213 | sub 4: 4-8 | 1970 April-1973 June |
| b. 33, f. 214-229 | sub A-P | 1969 May-1970 August |
| b. 34, f. 230-237 | sub Q-X | 1970 October-1972 January |
| File NH157-1601 | | |
| Sections | | |
| b. 34, f. 238-240 | 1-3 | 1970 January-1977 January |

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

African Americans -- Civil rights
African Americans -- Politics and suffrage
Attorney and client -- United States
Black militant organizations -- United States
Law enforcement -- United States
Lawyers
May Day (Labor holiday)
Privacy, Right of -- United States
Race relations -- United States
Radicals
Trials (Murder) -- Connecticut -- New Haven
Wiretapping -- Connecticut -- New Haven

Geographic Names

Connecticut -- Race relations
New Haven (Conn.) -- Race relations
United States -- Social conditions -- 1960-1980

Names

Garry, Charles, 1909-1991
Huggins, Ericka
Kimbrow, Warren
McLucas, Lonnie Cleveland, 1945-
Miranda, Doug
Rackley, Alex, d. 1969
Seale, Bobby, 1936-
Williams, John R.

Corporate Bodies

Black Panther Party
United States. Federal Bureau of Investigation
Yale University -- Employees -- Political activity
Yale University -- Students -- Political activity