



Record Group: Urban Colored Population Commission
Series: Records, 1944-1947
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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 The 1941 law that created the commission was officially repealed in 1979 (P.L. 1979 c. 341) as part of Governor Brendan Byrne's general program to eradicate ombudsman-type statutes.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 accommodations." Aid cases and unemployment compensation cases consist of requests by black citizens to the commission for assistance in obtaining relief from state and local agencies. 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.

Contents

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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If you have any questions about the information in this collection guide, please contact njarchives@sos.state.nj.us