Guide to the John R. Williams Papers

MS 1398

compiled by Diane E. Kaplan

June 1985
Revised: March 2014

New Haven, Connecticut
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Paging Instructions

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Overview

REPOSITORY: Manuscripts and Archives
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Email: mssa.assist@yale.edu
Phone: (203) 432-1735
Fax: (203) 432-7441

CALL NUMBER: MS 1398

CREATOR: Williams, John R.

TITLE: John R. Williams papers

DATES: 1966-1977

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION: 14 linear feet (34 boxes)

LANGUAGE(S): The materials are in 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.

FINDING AID LINK: To cite or bookmark this finding aid, use the following address: http://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/mssa.ms.1398.

Administrative Information

Information about Access

The collection is open for research.
Cite As
John R. Williams Papers (MS 1398). Manuscripts and Archives, Yale University Library.

Biographical/Historical note

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.

Description of the Papers

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**

Collection Contents

Series I. F.B.I. Headquarters Files

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Box</th>
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<td>4-8</td>
<td>1969 Sep-1969 Nov</td>
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<td>31-34</td>
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<td>73-74</td>
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File 105-165706-32

Sections

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

Series I. F.B.I. Headquarters Files

5 linear feet (11 boxes)

1966-1977
### Series II. F.B.I. New Haven Office Files

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Access Terms

Black Panther Party.
Garry, Charles R., 1909-
Huggins, Ericka.
Kimbro, Warren.
McLucas, Lonnie, 1945-
Miranda, Doug.
Rackley, Alex, d. 1969.
Seale, Bobby, 1936-
Williams, John R.
Yale University. Employees. Political activity.
Yale University. Students. Political activity.
African Americans--Civil rights.
African Americans--Politics and suffrage.
Attorney and client--United States.
Black militant organizations--United States.
Connecticut--Race relations.
Law enforcement--United States.
Lawyers.
May Day (Labor holiday)
New Haven (Conn.)--Race relations.
Privacy, Right of--United States.
Race relations--United States.
Radicals.
Trials (Murder)--Connecticut--New Haven.
United States--Social conditions--1960-