

Exploring History Through Government Documents

The Civil Rights Movement

Ani Karagianis

Collection Statement: This collection is a starting point for deeper exploration into the Civil Rights Movement of the 20th century using government documents and websites. These documents are just a sample of the many documents available to learn about the historical context, key events, and people important to the movement. The goal of this collection is to provide a series of documents that can work together to provide some history of the Civil Rights Movement. This reference collection spans from 1948-2015, with the bulk of the documents in the 1960s, which mirrors the heyday of the Civil Rights Movement and the notable leaders of the movement (Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, Jr.). It is broken up into three main categories: historical context, key events/documents, and notable people/organizations. These were selected due to the differences in the government sources and provides a range of information about voting, the civil rights commission, and the actions of the leaders of the movement. The key events/documents are arranged chronologically so researchers can see the evolution of some Civil Rights documents and legislation. The historical context and key figures/organizations are organized alphabetically by content (which is why “Honoring the NAACP” will go after Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, since the content is about the NAACP). Some documents will have related items with it to add context or another angle of research.

Audience/Patron Focus: Historians/students using records (both historical and current) to research social justice issues, in this case, Civil Rights movements in the 20th century. These documents are intended to act as an entry point for using government documents in historical research. These are not all inclusive of what is available about civil rights.

Historical Context

JFK Library, The Modern Civil Rights Movement and the Kennedy Administration

Common title: Civil Rights Movement

Official title: The Modern Civil Rights Movement and the Kennedy Administration

SuDoc stem: Associated with the National Archives (AE)

Issuing agency: This is associated the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library, which is linked to the National Archives.

Publication history—print and online: This is online on the website and available on the National Archives webpages.

Key finding aids / indexes / tools for working with the item: This particular page about civil rights is in the JFK in History page on his Presidential website. There is an inclusive list of the pages on the JFK Presidential Library website available through the National Archives.

Source: It is not available in print.

Purpose/Key Use: The presidential libraries include key government documents associated with the presidents, including personal and official papers. These documents were available to the public around six years after the end of John F. Kennedy’s term. This page also includes personal papers of people associated with the president.

Link: <https://www.jfklibrary.org/learn/about-jfk/jfk-in-history/civil-rights-movement>

Summary and Notes

This site provides context about the Civil Rights Movement and the Kennedy Administration, providing a timeline about the movement from 1960 through to the Civil Rights Act of 1964. This would be best used for the context surrounding the

later documents about the Civil Rights Movement and specifically, the Civil Rights Act in 1964. All of this information is limited to President Kennedy's term, so the information within this section does end with the Civil Rights Act (which was spearheaded by Kennedy). There is a pro-Kennedy sentiment due to the location of the information, and the more negative aspects of the Civil Rights movement at the time (for example, the violence of the Freedom rides) is glossed over. This could be best used as the context for the timeframe and the leadership when key events occurred.

Related Content

This content will provide further context about Presidents and their roles in the Civil Rights Movement: Harry S. Truman, Lyndon B. Johnson

Library of Congress, Civil Rights History Project

Common title: Civil Rights History Project

Official title: Civil Rights History Project

SuDoc stem: LC (Library of Congress).

Issuing agency: The Library of Congress, with support from The Civil Rights History Project Act of 2009 (PL 111-19), passed by Congress.

Publication history—print and online: Some of these interviews from the project are available online, which allows for users to filter by year and format. Since these are oral histories, they are available online and have full text transcripts (online, rather than in a print format).

Key finding aids / indexes / tools for working with the item: There is a specific finding aid for this collection, located through the Library of Congress. It notes a summary, the extent of the collection, and a link to the online resources. There are related collections found on the Library of Congress American Folklife Center page, which provides information about the survey database that is associated with the interviews, information about the interviews, and information about the act itself.

Source: These are archival records, so they are limited to their home online through the Library of Congress.

Purpose / key use: This document would be used to provide archival information about civil rights in the United States through people that were involved in the movement. These interviews are housed through the Library of Congress and are associated with a specific act to gain information through oral histories.

Link: <https://www.loc.gov/collections/civil-rights-history-project/about-this-collection/>

Summary and Notes

These interviews, conducted in 2010 after the passage of the 2009 act, show oral histories of various civil rights activists. These oral histories help provide a background to the Civil Rights movement at large and show another side of the actions taken to aid in the Civil Rights causes from the 1950s through the 1960s. A document like this one could be used for specific anecdotes and more hands-on testimonies about the civil rights movement rather than generalized information about the movement. It's a little bit more personal, so there is an opportunity for bias or misremembering information. However, there are interesting stories to be told and information to be gleaned from this document.

Key Events/Documents

Civil rights program. Message from the President of the United States transmitting his recommendations for civil rights program. February 2, 1948.—Referred to the Committee of the Whole House on the State of the Union and ordered to be printed.

Common title: Message from the President of the United States transmitting his recommendations for civil rights program

Official title: Civil rights program. Message from the President of the United States transmitting his recommendations for civil rights program. February 2, 1948.—Referred to the Committee of the Whole House on the State of the Union and ordered to be printed.

SuDoc stem/class number: This is a house document, so Y1.1/8: This is a serial set document, so Y1.1/2.

Issuing agency: Documents like this one are from the Congressional Serial Set, which is published by Congress.

Publication history—print and online: The Congressional Serial Set is available online at Readex, HeinOnline, Proquest, the Library of Congress' American Memory, and Govinfo. The Serial Set is also available for sale on the Government Publishing Office website. Not all of these sites have every serial set document. This is also available through the American Presidency project here: <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/special-message-the-congress-civil-rights-1>.

Key finding aids / indexes / tools for working with the item: Govinfo, Readex, and HeinOnline are searchable for Congressional Serial Set documents like this one. Readex does have a good amount of indexing already done, often by topic. HeinOnline also has created a Libguide for

searching various Congressional documents like the Serial Set.

Source: Govinfo has the serial set from the 82nd, 69th, and earlier Congresses. As this is the 80th Congress, 2nd Session, it is not available on GovInfo. However, HeinOnline has the 15th Congress through the 114th Congress. The full available versions are on Readex and Proquest but may be limited to users with certain affiliations (for example, university libraries). Some libraries have print versions, but many opted to stop receiving the print versions due to costs and many updates.

Purpose / key use: The Congressional Serial Set provides historical resources about Congress and the special reports created by Congress. This document looks at how President Truman reacted to the issues of race after World War II, and this document has the recommendation to create the Civil Rights Program.

Summary and Notes

This document is a speech given by President Truman after World War II and extends upon his State of the Union speech from January 7, 1948, in which he outlines his goals to strengthen democracy and to promote welfare of the people. President Truman uses the ideals in the Declaration of Independence of all men being created equal to support his recommendation to create a Civil Rights program. He does not explicitly say civil rights program in this document, but he does emphasize the diversity that created the United States as it was and the rights of all people to be treated equally under the law. This document marks the start of the civil rights movement after the turmoil of World War II and should provide a good bit of context for the 1950s and eventually, the movement's growth in the 1960s.

Search Notes

This document was found on the Readex version of the Congressional Serial Set by looking at the "Social Issues" under Subjects by Category and then navigating to "Civil Rights Movements." Note: The Readex version requires a library sign in, and the HeinOnline may require a library sign-in and may be limited to institutions with log-in credentials.

This document, and documents like this one can also be found by going to HeinOnline and looking at their Congressional Serial Set. Here, you can browse by Congress, and look at guides and indexes. For documents concerning the Civil Rights Movement, I searched Civil Rights in the serial set, which populated many relevant results. For the sake of this

reference collection, I limited this search to 1940-1970 as a starting point. Serial set documents prior to 1976 are not on the catalog of U.S. government publications.

Extending the Commission on Civil Rights and its duties. August 18, 1961.—Committed to the Committee of the Whole House on the State of the Union and ordered to be printed.

Common title: Extending the Commission on Civil Rights and its duties

Official title: Extending the Commission on Civil Rights and its duties. August 18, 1961.—Committed to the Committee of the Whole House on the State of the Union and ordered to be printed.

SuDoc stem: This is a house document, so Y 1.1/8: The serial set document has the SuDoc number Y1.1/2.

Issuing agency: Documents like this one are from the Congressional Serial Set, which is published by Congress. The committee that created the document was the Committee on the Judiciary.

Publication history—print and online: The Congressional Serial Set is available online at Readex, HeinOnline, Proquest, the Library of Congress' American Memory, and Govinfo. The Serial Set is also available for sale on the Government Publishing Office website.

Key finding aids / indexes / tools for working with the item: Govinfo, Readex, and HeinOnline are searchable for Congressional Serial Set documents like this one. Readex does have a good amount of indexing already done, often by topic. HeinOnline also has created a libguide for searching various Congressional documents like the Serial Set.

Source: Govinfo has the serial set from the 82nd, 69th, and earlier Congresses. HeinOnline has the 15th Congress through the 114th Congress. The full available versions are on Readex and Proquest but may be limited to users with certain affiliations (for example, university libraries). Some libraries have print versions, but many opted to stop receiving the print versions due to costs and many updates.

Purpose / key use: The Congressional Serial Set provides historical resources about Congress and the special reports created by Congress. This particular document looks at the Civil Rights Commission in the early 1960s during the time of the Civil Rights movement, providing information about exactly what Congress was doing during this time.

Summary and Notes

This document proposes amendments to the bill to make the Commission on Civil Rights a permanent agency in the executive branch. The recommended amendments include adding in an extended portion of Section 104(a) of the Civil Rights Act of 1957 to investigate allegations that people were being denied the right to vote or to have their vote counted. This is a timely document and predicts what was to come in 1965 with the Voting Rights Act. This provides an early time stamp that focuses on the issues surrounding voting and Civil Rights.

Search Notes

Like the previous document, this document was found on the Readex version of the Congressional Serial Set by looking at “Social Issues” under Subjects by Category and then navigating to “Civil Rights Movements.” Note: The Readex version requires a library sign in, and the HeinOnline may require a library sign-in and may be limited to institutions with log-in credentials.

This document, and documents like this one can also be found by going to HeinOnline and looking at their Congressional Serial Set. Here, you can browse by Congress, and look at guides and indexes. For documents concerning the Civil Rights Movement, I searched Civil Rights Movement in the serial set, which populated many relevant results. For the sake of this reference collection, I limited this search to 1940-1970 as a starting point. After doing different searches, including “Civil Rights,” “Civil Rights Movements,” and “Commission on Civil Rights,” I found this document, among other similar and relevant documents about Civil Rights in the 20th century, specifically the 1960s. HeinOnline is searchable by Congress, year, and volume, if looking for a specific document.

1961 United States Commission on Civil Rights Report 1: Voting

Common title: 1961 United States Commission on Civil Rights Report 1: Voting

Official title: 1961 United States Commission on Civil Rights Report 1: Voting

SuDoc stem/class number: CR 1.1:961/

Issuing agency: This agency that issued this report was the United States Commission on Civil Rights. This commission was created by the Civil Rights Act of 1957. The members can either be appointed by the President or by Congress. There are eight total members of the commission.

Publication history—print and online: This document was found on the commission website under historical

publications through the Thurgood Marshall Law Library. This document is fully digitized and there are many other documents associated with the commission online at the Thurgood Marshall Library. According to the stamp on the digitized document, it was available through the Government Publishing Office, however, it is not available now on the site.

Key finding aids / indexes / tools for working with the item: The website associated with this document (the online library) has an index for all subjects associated with the commission, and for this document, voting.

Source: The online library is the best way to get an open access version of this document. It is also available through google books and HathiTrust, but the most straightforward and easiest to find version is through the commission page.

Purpose / key use: This document was created by a government commission and provides information about voting rights in 1961. This document also breaks down general voting information, civil rights information, and information on the state level, which was very pertinent for the voting rights issue (and Civil Rights in the 1960s).

Link: <https://www2.law.umaryland.edu/marshall/usccr/documents/cr11961bk1.pdf>

Summary and Notes

This document shows an early version of the Civil Rights Commission and how they viewed voting rights and the link to states. This early document could be used to pinpoint the early days of the Civil Rights movement and exactly how the government planned to get involved with the movement. What is particularly interesting is the statistics on registration and Civil Rights in Black Belt counties, where African Americans outnumber whites. While this whole document is a good source for the early days of the Civil Rights Commission and voting, chapter four provides information about African American rights, including information on education, libraries, housing, the administration of justice, employment, public accommodations, and the military. This particular chapter could be used as a basis for comparison to today.

Civil Rights Act of 1964

Common title: Civil Rights Act of 1964

Official title: The Civil Rights Act of 1964

SuDoc stem/class number: GS 4.110:88-352

Issuing agency: Statutes at Large, which is part of the Office of the Federal Register and the National Archives and Records Administration.

Publication history—print and online: This was published by the Government Publishing Agency and is available online on Govinfo. The United State Statutes at Large is available on Govinfo.

Key finding aids / indexes / tools for working with the item: There is the Statutes at Large index which makes this act findable. Congress.gov has the option to browse by Congress, which is one of the easier ways to find/work with this item.

Source: It can also be found on the Congress site in a PDF version and on the Statutes at Large site on govinfo. This law is available in print at many law libraries and other depositories, but Statutes at Large and the Congress site have made it so that this law and others like it are readily available online.

Purpose / key use: This is a piece of legislation that outlines voting rights and the desegregation of public spaces. This is a public law that was enacted by Congress and supported by President Johnson in 1964.

Link: <https://www.govinfo.gov/features/civil-rights-act>

Summary and Notes

This act prohibits segregation in many different settings. This act outlines voting rights, including denying registration, enforcing literacy tests, among others. Beyond the voting rights, this act also limits segregation in public spaces and that all persons were entitled to “full and equal enjoyment of goods” regardless of race. Later in the document, it does specify desegregation in public spaces, education, and information on the Commission of Civil Rights, complementing the document listed above. This would be used to have the exact language of the civil rights act and the actions taken by the government in the 1960s.

Key People and Organizations

National Archives, Civil Rights Accomplishments, Office Files of Lee C. White, 1963-1966

Common title: Civil Rights Accomplishments—LBJ

Official title: Civil Rights Accomplishments—LBJ

SuDoc stem: The archives SuDoc stem is AE.

Issuing agency: These files come from the National Archives and are also associated with the Lyndon B. Johnson Presidential Library.

Publication history—print and online: This collection is unpublished, as they are archival records. These specific files are available on the National Archives site, as they are digitized pdfs. However, not everything in the Office Files of Lee C. White is digitized and some may be restricted.

Key finding aids / indexes / tools for working with the item: There is a finding aid on the National Archives site for

the Office Files of Lee C. White collection, which provides information about the series within the collection and the overall scope of the collection. Within this finding aid, you can “search within this collection” and filter by “available online” and “web pages” to find digitized content. Among those available online, the Civil Rights accomplishment folder is available as well as files on specific states.

Source: There is no commercial version of these files due to their archival status.

Purpose / key use: These archival records include correspondence and key highlights of President Johnson’s work concerning Civil Rights.

Link: <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/183523712>

Summary and Notes

Lee C. White was an advisor for President Kennedy and President Johnson, who primarily focused on Civil Rights issues. These scanned papers cover the key highlights of President Johnson’s work with Civil Rights in 1964, including voluntary actions surrounding civil rights issues, a campaign fact sheet about civil rights and notes on Civil Rights activities during President Johnson’s first 100 days in office. These documents provide a snapshot of the early work done for the Civil Rights movement that predates (or is around the time of) the Civil Rights Act of 1964. They provide a good amount of context for the actions taken in the 1960s. However, I should note that this file is called “Civil Rights Accomplishments” which only shows one half of the story concerning civil rights era legislation and should be viewed with the potential bias associated with it.

FBI Records, Malcolm Little (Malcolm X)

Common title: Malcolm Little (Malcolm X)

Official title: FBI Records, Malcolm Little (Malcolm X)

SuDoc stem/class number: The FBI Vault SuDoc number is J 1.14/34. Malcom X’s FBI file from 1999 has the SuDoc number J 1.14/2:M 29.

Issuing agency: The issuing agency for these files is the Federal Bureau of Investigation. Part of their mission is to protect civil rights, combat crime, and to combat terrorism.

Publication history—print and online: These files are available online on the FBI vault due to their popular status. Other files that are available online are agency policy statements, administrative staff manuals and instructions, frequently requested records, and proactive disclosures.

Key finding aids / indexes / tools for working with the item: Through the FBI vault website, you can browse the vault alphabetically and by subject area to find similar items.

This specific document is completely viewable (except 1 page) online without any special finding aids.

Source: Since this is an FBI file, there are no commercial versions or reprints, as the entire file is available through the FBI site.

Purpose / key use: FBI records are a branch of the government and could be used to gain further information about various people that were on the FBI list. Malcolm X was a controversial figure with a lengthy FBI file due to his radical beliefs and the need for the government to keep tabs on him.

Link: <https://vault.fbi.gov/malcolm-little-malcolm-x>

Summary and Notes

This document provides information about Malcolm X's actions starting in 1953, showing that the FBI had tagged him as worthy of having a file. Malcolm X was labeled as being a subject of the Communist Index Card, noting his tendencies even prior to the Civil Rights heyday. This provides good contextual information about a key civil rights movement leader and his work with the Muslim Cult of Islam to help further the movement. This needs to be viewed with a critical eye for bias because it was created by the FBI and labels Malcolm X as potentially antagonistic to the state. Based on this bias, these documents should be supplemented with a different document to provide a full perspective.

Related Files

These files are related to Malcolm X due to their link to Communism, his personal life, or his identity (Nation of Islam): NAACP, Black Panther Party, Bayard Rustin, Betty Shabazz (Betty X), Nation of Islam

FBI Records, Martin Luther King Jr.

Common title: Martin Luther King, Jr.

Official title: Freedom of Information and Privacy Acts Subject: Martin Luther King Jr.

SuDoc stem/class number: The FBI Vault SuDoc number is J 1.14/34:. His FBI file from 2004 has the SuDoc number J 1.14/2:M 36/3.

Issuing agency: The issuing agency for these files is the Federal Bureau of Investigation. Part of their mission is to protect civil rights, combat crime, and to combat terrorism.

Publication history—print and online: These files are available online on the FBI vault due to their popular status. Other files that are available online are agency policy statements, administrative staff manuals and instructions, frequently requested records, and proactive disclosures.

Key finding aids / indexes / tools for working with the item:

Through the FBI vault website, you can browse the vault alphabetically and by subject area to find similar items.

Source: Since this is an FBI file, there are no commercial versions or reprints, as the entire file is available through the FBI site. The FBI files are not commercial, as they are either available online or available through FOIA requests.

Purpose / key use: FBI records are a branch of the government and could be used to gain further information about various people that were on the FBI list. This is a shorter document of Martin Luther King, Jr. that was requested through FOIA/P and is an excised version of his FBI file.

Link: <https://vault.fbi.gov/Martin%20Luther%20King%2C%20Jr>

Summary and Notes

This file is an excised report from 1977 about Martin Luther King, Jr. that focuses on his assassination in 1968. This provides a different perspective on the FBI records of MLK Jr. by looking at the assassination investigation and the conspiracies associated with it. What is interesting to note is that early on in this document, within the introduction, the FBI does say that Martin Luther King, Jr. was noted as being targeted because of his actions in the Civil Rights movement. This file is incredibly biased because it's the FBI essentially investigating itself and a key figure that they focused on, which means that the subjectivity of this report may be compromised.

Related Files

These files are related through people and events associated with Martin Luther King Jr.: Coretta Scott King, 16th Street Church Bombing, Southern Christian Leadership Conference

Congressional Record, Honoring the NAACP

Common title: Honoring the NAACP

Official title: Honoring the NAACP

SuDoc stem/class number: X 1.1/A:

Issuing agency: This document was issued by the Congressional Record, which is created by Congress.

Publication history—print and online: This record (a speech) is fully available online through GovInfo. This document is the Congressional Record Volume 161, Issue 24 from February 12, 2015. Copies of the Congressional Record are also available on Congress.gov. Print copies of the Congressional Record are available through the Government Publishing Office bookstore.

Key finding aids / indexes / tools for working with the item: This item doesn't have any specific finding aids/tools to

work with it, but the Congressional Record itself is browsable on GovInfo and on Congress.gov. Both the govinfo site and the congress.gov site breaks down items by Senate, House of Representatives, extension of remarks, and Daily digest and includes page numbers for easier browsing. In this case, the govinfo site gave the page numbers as H1022-1025 (house pages 1022-1025). Both sites have a table of content for each section.

Source: The Congressional Records have been fully digitized online with some print copies. It is also available on HeinOnline.

Purpose / key use: The Congressional Record outlines what is done in Congress on a specific day, including proceedings, measures taken, reports, meetings, and updates. This particular document outlines a speech given by Representative Al Green of Texas who wanted to memorialize the NAACP.

Govinfo link: <https://www.govinfo.gov/app/details/CREC-2015-02-12/CREC-2015-02-12-pt1-PgH1022/summary>

Congress.gov link: <https://www.congress.gov/congressional-record/2015/02/12/house-section/article/H1022-1>

Summary and Notes

On February 12, 2015, Representative Al Green of Texas brought to the floor a resolution to honor the NAACP which was previously passed by the House of Representatives in 2006. For 30 minutes on the floor, Representative Green spoke on being a member of the NAACP and the importance of the creation of the NAACP. He turns over the floor to Honorable Charles Rangel and later, Honorable Sheila Jackson Lee, who all spoke on the NAACP being on the right side of history. This document is biased due to the people who made the speech, but it shows a reverence towards the NAACP and its importance in U.S. history.

Ani Karagianis (anisk2@illinois.edu) is a student at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign School of Information Sciences. This paper was written for IS 594 Government Information, Professors Dominique Hallett and Scott Matheson.

References

- Civil Rights History Project. (n.d.). The Library of Congress. Retrieved March 21, 2022. <https://www.loc.gov/collections/civil-rights-history-project/about-this-collection/>.
- Committee of the Whole House on the State of the Union. [Document], Civil Rights Program. message from the president of the United States transmitting his recommendations for Civil Rights Program 1–8 (1948). Washington D.C.; U.S. Congressional Serial Set. Retrieved April 4, 2022. <https://heinonline.org/HOL/P?h=hein.usccsset/usconset22943&i=273>.
- Committee on the Judiciary. [Report], Extending the commission on civil rights and its duties: Report (to accompany H.R. 6496) 1–10 (1961). Washington, D.C.; U.S. G.P.O. Retrieved April 4, 2022. <https://heinonline.org/HOL/P?h=hein.usccsset/usconset22346&i=253>.
- FBI. (2011, March 29). Malcolm Little (Malcolm X). FBI. Retrieved April 4, 2022. <https://vault.fbi.gov/malcolm-little-malcolm-x>.
- FBI. (2010, December 6). Martin Luther King, Jr.. FBI. Retrieved April 4, 2022. <https://vault.fbi.gov/Martin%20Luther%20King%2C%20Jr>.
- The Modern Civil Rights Movement and the Kennedy Administration. The Modern Civil Rights Movement and the Kennedy Administration | JFK Library. (n.d.). Retrieved March 9, 2022. <https://www.jfklibrary.org/learn/about-jfk/jfk-in-history/civil-rights-movement>.
- U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, Hannah, J. A., Storey, R. G., Griswold, E. W., Hesburgh, T. M., Rankin, R. S., & Robinson, S. W., Voting: 1961 Commission on Civil Rights Report I-250 (1961). U.S. Government Printing Office. Retrieved April 4, 2022. <https://www2.law.umaryland.edu/marshall/usccr/documents/cr11961bk1.pdf>.
- U.S. Government Printing Office. [Bill], Civil Rights Act of 1964: PL 88-352 (HR 7152) 78 stat 241241–268 (1964). Retrieved April 4, 2022. <https://www.congress.gov/88/statute/STATUTE-78/STATUTE-78-Pg241.pdf>.
- U.S. Government Publishing Office. [Document], 161 Congressional Record H1022–H1025 (2015). Washington D.C. Retrieved April 4, 2022, from <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CREC-2015-02-12/pdf/CREC-2015-02-12-pt1-PgH1022.pdf>.
- White, L. C. (n.d.). Civil Rights Accomplishments—LBJ. National Archives and Records Administration. Retrieved March 7, 2022. <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/183523712>.