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Summary

Title: Debby Yaffe Collection


Extent: 1 box

Creator: Yaffe, Deborah

Language: English

Abstract: As a Queens College student, Debby Yaffe volunteered with the Student Help Project, an initiative that provided free tutoring services to under-served children. During the summer of 1963, sixteen members of the project, including Yaffe, travelled to Prince Edward County, Virginia, to provide instruction to African-American children who had been denied formal public education since 1959, when the county defunded and closed its schools rather than comply with federally-ordered racial integration. She served as the project’s librarian. The collection is comprised of printed materials including newspaper articles, a complete issue of Time magazine, excerpts of contemporary government reports, a flyer, a code of conduct for the volunteers, and a retrospective essay about the situation in Prince Edward County and efforts to resolve it.

Source: Donated by Debby Yaffe in 2010.

Access: Collection is open for research. Staff may restrict access at its discretion on the basis of physical condition.

Copyright: The Debby Yaffe Collection is physically owned by the Queens College Libraries. Literary rights, including copyright, belong to the authors or their legal heirs and assignees. The collection is subject to all copyright laws. Queens College assumes no responsibility for the infringement of copyrights held by the original authors, creators, or producers of materials.
Preferred Citation: Item, date (if known), box, folder, Debby Yaffe Collection, Department of Special Collections and Archives, Queens College, City University of New York.

Related Collections: Rosalind (Silverman) Andrews Collection, Queens College, NY

Phyllis Padow-Sederbaum Collection, Queens College, NY

Stan Shaw Collection, Queens College, NY

Michael Wenger Collection, Queens College, NY

Controlled Access Terms

People: Yaffe, Deborah

Places: Prince Edward County (V.A.) - - History

Subjects: Civil rights movements - - Virginia - - Prince Edward County
     Segregation in education - - Virginia - - Prince Edward County
Historical Note

In 1954, the United States Supreme Court ruled in *Brown v. Board of Education* that state laws permitting racial segregation in public schools were unconstitutional. The court ordered the immediate integration of all public schools, ending the nearly sixty-year old practice of providing “separate but equal” facilities for students of different races.

In some areas of the country, however, court-ordered school integration was met with strong resistance at the state and local government levels (as well as elements of the white population); the process of desegregating public schools was neither swift nor universal.

To circumvent complying with the new law, Virginia adopted a policy known as “Massive Resistance,” under which the state legislature passed a series of laws that permitted the outright closure of its public schools. Among the provisions were measures that abolished mandatory school attendance for students and established a system of state-funded tuition grants allowing white families to send their children to new segregated private schools.

In 1959, the officials of Prince Edward County, Virginia, stopped all funding for public education, effectively closing the public schools rather than desegregate them. The schools remained closed until 1964. While families of many white students were able to send their children to the new private “segregation academies,” the 1,700 children of African-American and less affluent white families had few options for formal schooling.

The Virginia Student Help Project was founded in 1963 by students and faculty at Queens College as an offshoot of the established Jamaica Student Help Project, which provided tutoring services to students in Jamaica, New York. Under the direction of faculty members Dr. Rachel Weddington and Dr. Sidney Simon, sixteen Queens College students spent six weeks in Farmville, the Prince Edward County seat, providing instruction to all children denied access to public education.
Biographical Note

Debby Yaffe was born in 1945 and grew up in Brooklyn, NY. She entered Queens College in the fall of 1962 at the age of sixteen and soon volunteered with the Student Help Project, tutoring children in Jamaica, Queens. At age seventeen she was one of the youngest students to travel to Farmville, Virginia, where she served as the Project’s librarian. Before the volunteers’ departure, publishers donated two truckloads of books which Yaffe divided into several balanced collections in New York. Upon arrival in Farmville, however, the books were disorganized and Yaffe, functioning as a “circuit librarian,” again sorted them to ensure each tutoring location was adequately supplied with books on all subjects. She helped deliver them by pickup truck.

After her experience in Farmville, Yaffe remained active in causes relating to civil rights and social justice, becoming involved with the Students for a Democratic Society; continuing to work with students in Jamaica; and attending rallies and marches. She combined her college career with her work in book publishing, graduating from Queens College in 1969 with a B.A. in English and Minor in Education. Following graduation, Yaffe worked in children’s book publishing. In 1985 she earned her Master’s in Library Science from St. John’s University and subsequently became a research librarian. After retiring, she returned to tutoring in 2010, working in an adult literacy program.

Scope & Content Note

The Debby Yaffe Collection is comprised of printed materials that document the Student Help Project and the broader story of the Prince Edward County public school closures. It includes newspaper and magazine articles from student, local, and national publications; a flyer for a benefit concert; the code of conduct for Project volunteers; excerpts from contemporary government reports; and a retrospective essay that details the role that Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., then Attorney General of the United States, played in reopening the County’s school system.
Arrangement Note

Folders are arranged alphabetically by type of material.

Container List

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<thead>
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<th>Box</th>
<th>Folder</th>
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<td>Student Help Project: Grievances and Discipline</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Student Help Project: Group Good and Welfare</td>
<td>1963</td>
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