A “How-To” Guide for Queens College Faculty:
The QC Civil Rights Archive & Your Courses

Introducing students to the use of primary sources – on campus and in our own library -- is an important opportunity that we’d like to help facilitate. What better way than connect them to some of their fellow QC students’ activist history?

Founded in 2009, the Civil Rights Archive of the Queens College Libraries Department of Special Collections & Archives offers a range of resources that relate to a number of disciplines, including history, Africana studies, education, political science and sociology. This document serves as an introductory guide to begin thinking about how the archive might be utilized for your classes.

Below is a summary of major materials in the collection and suggestions for: faculty research, class visits to the archive, presentations by archivists, activist/alumni guest speakers, scans and copies, showcases, and online resources.

For more information:
718-997-3650
adolanmescal@qc.cuny.edu
http://archives.qc.cuny.edu/civilrights

**Historical Strengths and Focuses**
Our core collections have been donated by Queens College alumni who were active in the civil rights movement in the early to mid-1960s. Several spent time in Mississippi and Virginia as volunteers; others supported the southern struggle politically and financially while also organizing in their own communities in New York City. It should be noted that our collections are not comprehensive; they offer snapshots of particular time periods, events and organizations. As the Archive grows, our offerings will expand to include additional aspects of the civil rights and other social justice struggles.

Below are some of the current historical strengths of our collections.
Mississippi Freedom Summer, circa 1964
Collections: Mark Levy, Barbara Jones Omolade, Robert Masters

Queens College students that helped organize for and participated in the 1964 Freedom Summer, a massive effort organized by the Council of Federated Organizations to bring northern students to Mississippi to register black voters and teach in freedom schools.

School Desegregation in Virginia, circa 1963
Collections: Mike Wenger, Stan Shaw, Phyllis Padow-Sederbaum, Debbie Yaffe, Rosalind Andrews, Jean Konzal

These Queens College students travelled to Prince Edward County, Virginia during the summer of 1963. In Virginia they tutored 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. The effort was part of the Student Help Project, which also provided free tutoring in Jamaica, Queens.

Local/Campus Civil Rights Activism, early to mid-1960s
Collections: Mark Levy, Elliott Linzer, Barbara Jones Omolade, Mike Wenger, Phyllis Padow-Sederbaum, Art Gatti

Collections contain materials on campus and local chapters of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) and the Student Help Project. Events such as Freedom Week, the Fast for Freedom, protests of the 1964 World’s Fair, and boycotts of local schools and businesses are documented.

James Forman Library

James Forman (1928-2005) was a civil rights leader, writer, and activist-scholar known for his work with the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) from 1961-1969. While his manuscripts are at the Library of Congress, Queens College has inherited his vast personal reference library, including over 1,700 books, 2,000 pamphlets and academic journals, several boxes of multi-media materials, and 10.5 linear feet of FBI files obtained through the Freedom of Information Act. The collection is being processed and made accessible in stages.

Other movements & collecting areas

SDS & Anti-War Movements: Queens College Students for a Democratic Society, free-speech issues, anti-war activism, campus sit-ins, etc. in the mid to late 1960s. The Andrew Berman Collection and Art Gatti collection are currently available; other collections forthcoming.

McCarthyism: The Oscar Shaftel Collection documents the effects of McCarthyism on academic freedom in New York State. In 1953 Shaftel, one of the original faculty members at Queens College, was fired for refusing to testify in front of the Senate Internal Security Subcommittee about Communism in academia. The archive has also digitized an exhibit entitled “McCarthyism at Queens College” available at http://qcmccarthyism.blogspot.com.
Gay Rights and HIV/AIDS advocacy

The Robert Rygor collection (20 boxes) documents his work as a GLBT rights activist, an advocate on HIV/AIDS issues, and his work as a neighborhood activist in the West Village. Rygor was integral in ACT UP, an important direct action group working to end the AIDS crisis.

Collaborative models

Faculty research
In order for faculty to develop ideas regarding how they’d like to utilize the materials, they may want to conduct initial research to understand our collections better. This can be pursued via digital access tools (finding aids and digital galleries) and/or by in-person and phone consultations with the archivist. Faculty may also want to utilize the collections for their own scholarly research.

Class Visits to the Archive
We can accommodate group visits to allow the students to work directly with archival materials. There may be limitations regarding how many students may be accommodated at one time. The archivist would provide an introduction to the materials and instructions for handling the items. To make the visit successful, narrowing down the focus of the research to particular collections ahead of time is preferred.

Archivist Guest Speakers
A staff member could visit your classroom and provide an introduction to archives (“what is an archive?” “why does it matter?”) as well as to the civil rights collections specifically, using a combination of lecture, projection of images and discussion.

Activist Guest Speakers
The archive could help coordinate visits by guest speakers who have donated their materials to the archive. These would be Queens College alumni who participated in the civil rights movement and could speak about their experiences in the 1960s and how it impacted their lives.

Scans or Copies
The archive may be able to provide scans or copies of items to teachers to use in the classroom. Providing such materials may be contingent on staff resources as well as permissions and copyright issues.

Showcases
Queens College may be able to assist in culminating events, exhibits, celebrations, or showcases of student work on civil rights.

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Find Us Online

Digital Archive: http://archives.qc.cuny.edu/civilrights
Go here to see digitized samples from our collections

Go here to download finding aids for all processed collections. A Finding Aid is a tool to assist researchers in gaining access to and understanding archival materials. It provides context for a collection and usually includes historical and biographical information, the scope of the collection (including size, subjects, and media), and an inventory of series, boxes and folders.

Contact Us

Department of Special Collections and Archives
Benjamin Rosenthal Library Room 317 | 718-997-3650 | qc.archives@qc.cuny.edu