James R. Forman Library Collection (1872-2005)

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2010-2013
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Summary

Title
James Forman Library

Creator
Forman, James (1928-2005)

Dates

Size
170 linear feet in 57 boxes (23 cartons, 33 manuscript boxes and 1 small flat box)

Provenance
Donated by Chaka Forman and James Forman, Jr., with the support of Kathie Sarachild, the original acquisition consisted of approximately 80 boxes.

Abstract
James Forman was an organizer, writer and activist. As Executive Secretary for the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, which sought to register disenganchised black voters in the Deep South, Forman raised money, made speeches, and dispatched volunteers. Forman wrote a memoir, The Making of Black Revolutionaries, and voiced his political ideas and organizational acumen as founding president of the Unemployment and Poverty Action Committee. The James Forman Library includes approximately 6,000 books and printed matter, and 36 boxes of FBI files, personal papers, and media materials.

Access
Collection is open for research. Staff may restrict access at its discretion on the basis of physical condition. Some electronic legacy format materials may not be supportable because of limited media devices.

Processing Note
The collection was first processed in Fall, 2010, by Queens College GSLIS Fellow David Gary, who drafted a detailed survey report of approximately 50 boxes. 30 additional boxes of books were severely water-damaged and determined a health hazard. Before the contents were disposed of at the discretion of QC Head of Special Colletions, a number of FBI files and media materials were salvaged. In Spring, 2011, QC Fellow Andy McCarthy processed 21 boxes of FBI files. In Spring, 2012, 19 boxes of printed matter were processed and an item list drafted by Fellow Jessica Fisher. These projects were implemented by Special Collections Project Manager Annie Tummino. Fellow McCarthy completed processing the James Forman Library in Fall, 2012.

Preferred Citation
Item, date (if known), box, folder, James Forman Library, Department of Special Collections and Archives, Queens College, City University of New York.
Copyright
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Languages
Bulk English; French, Spanish, German, Russian.

Related Collections
The James Forman Papers are located at the Library of Congress, and include 100.2 linear feet of material.

Mark Levy Collection, Department of Special Collections and Archives, Queens College, City University of New York.

Elliot Linzer Collection, Department of Special Collections and Archives, Queens College, City University of New York.

Robert Masters Collection, Department of Special Collections and Archives, Queens College, City University of New York.

Controlled Access Terms
African Americans-Civil rights-Alabama.
African Americans-Civil rights-Georgia.
African Americans-Civil rights-Wash. (D.C.).
Audio-visual materials.
Books and reading.
Civil rights-Illinois-Chicago.
Civil rights movements-Mississippi-History-20th century.
Civil rights--Periodicals.
Civil rights--United States.
Forman, James, 1928-2005
Mafia--United States.
Organized crime investigation--United States.
Pamphlets in American history. Civil liberties
Race relations--United States.
Radical history.
Reading interests--United States.
Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (U.S.)
Unemployment and Poverty Action Committee.
Voter registration--United States.
Biographical Note

As Executive Secretary for the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, which sought to register disengranchised black voters in the Deep South, James Forman raised money, dispatched volunteers, and voiced the work of SNCC in speeches, press communications and marches. In 1972, Forman wrote a memoir, *The Making of Black Revolutionaries*, noted as a seminal text in radical literature and civil rights history. As president of the Unemployment and Poverty Action Committee (UPAC), Forman applied his ideas and administrative acumen to such issues as voter rights, pro-choice awareness, government secrecy, commemoration of civil rights history, and D.C. rent control.

Born to a poor sharecropper family in 1928, Forman was raised on his grandmother’s Mississippi farm and as an adolescent moved to Chicago with his mother. Graduating in 1946 from Englewood High School, Forman matriculated at Wilson Junior College for a semester and joined the United States Air Force in 1947. Spending much of his four-year tour in the Pacific, Forman was discharged in September 1951, after which he enrolled in the University of Southern California.

In early 1953, Forman suffered what he called a “breakdown” after a wrongful arrest and physical and psychological abuse by the Los Angeles Police Department. The experience caused Forman to briefly enter a California state mental hospital. In March 1954 Forman returned to Chicago and enrolled in Roosevelt University, where he graduated in January 1957.

In the early 1960s Forman was active in Fayette County, NC, working under Robert Williams, a local chairman for the NAACP and “open advocate for armed self-defense.” A shrewd orator, Williams survived an attack by the KKK after attempts to integrate a local swimming pool, and in the 1960s liaised in Cuba.

Forman published press releases in the *Chicago Defender* for his work with the Emergency Relief Committee of the Congress for Racial Equality (CORE), and supported the United Packinghouse Workers of America in Tennessee to break a boycott by the Whites Citizen Council, who opposed the increased registration of black voters and refused to sell gasoline to black workers to fuel their tractors.

In 1961, after a six weeks program at Middlebury College in French, “where only that language was permitted day and night,” according to a UPAC newsletter, Forman returned to Chicago to teach elementary school. Forman was soon contacted by Paul Brooks, who protested with Forman in Monroe, NC during the Freedom Rides. Brooks invited Forman to attend a meeting of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), in McComb, Mississippi.

Forman left Chicago to join SNCC, recognizing an opportunity to inspire mass change in black voter registration with a young, detemined, maverick
organization. First arriving at the Atlanta office, Forman described finding an empty and “grubby room.”

Forman acted as Executive Secretary of SNCC until 1966, stumping for funds, managing field worker activity, and arranging transportation, food, and housing for volunteers. After the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, which sought delegates at the 1964 Democratic Convention in Atlantic City, NJ, SNCC began to split over ideology and administration. Forman pushed for a lateral group leadership, and though suspect of the enlistment of white college students, believed in the communications advantages of employing all available resources. Forman’s resistance to the cult of personality, which would alienate the most critical voter education in local rural black populations, was soon disfavored as SNCC leaders Stokely Carmichael and H. Rap Brown moved to change the group’s name, replacing the sentiment of “Nonviolence” with “National.” In the late 1960s, Forman served as International Affairs Director, traveling to Africa and writing two books.

In 1969, Forman delivered the “Black Manifesto” at Riverside Church in New York City, which called for $500 million from religious groups as payback for slavery, that “America has exploited our resources, our minds, our bodies, our labor.” Originally a platform for the Black Economic Development Conference (BEDC), in Detroit, Michigan, Forman’s actions as a revolutionary and fundraiser were investigated by the FBI as crimes of racketeering and extortion.

In his memoir, *The Making of Black Revolutionaries*, Forman layers the narrative of his own story with oral histories, prison journals, sworn affidavits taken on paper towels in a Georgia jail, KKK propaganda, and unpublished manuscripts of fellow actors on both sides of the movement. Forman founded UPAC, a nonprofit social action organization which spearheaded the majority of Forman’s work after 1974.

In 1980, Forman studied Electronic Journalism at Howard University, and was a founding member of Sigma Delta Chi, the Society of Professional Journalists. Forman received a Master’s Degree in African and African American Studies from Cornell University, and in 1982 earned a Ph.D. in Philosophy from the Union of Experimental Colleges and Universities in Cincinnati, Ohio.

“Boston Tea Party,” where bags of tea were tossed into Boston Harbor to protest the lack of representation for the District.

Forman was a provocative writer and book collector, advocated self-education and questioning of authority, and sought the enforcement of words to action. “My best skills,” writes Forman, are “agitating, field organizing, and writing.”

Forman died in January 2005 of colon cancer at the age of 76.

Select Bibliography


“Liberation Will Come from a Black Thing.” Chicago: Students for a Democratic Society, 1968; in “Text of keynote speech delivered by Brother James Forman at the Western Regional Black Youth Conference held in Los Angeles, California on November 23, 1967.”


Arrangement Note

The James Forman Library is organized into five series.

Series I: Books
Series II: Printed Matter
Series III: FBI Files
Series IV: Papers
Series V: Media

Scope & Content Note

The James Forman Library was acquired in 2010 by the Queens College Special Collections & Archives, after having spent several years in a storage unit in Washington D.C. The collection includes approximately 6,000 books and printed matter, and 36 boxes of FBI files, personal papers, and media materials. Approximately 15% of the books show evidence of Forman's reading and reference behavior.
Series Descriptions & Container List


Arrangement Note

The James Forman Library collection totals 1,940 bound books, loosely catalogued on 36 shelves.

Scope and Content Note

Forman owned books in a number of categories: black history, political biography, novels, science textbooks, health fads, communications manuals, secret societies, post-WWII psychology, counterculture, language, espionage, Senate Intelligence Committee reports and reference texts.

The bulk of the library seems to have been collected by Forman beginning in the late 1960s, many books acquired second hand at library sales and used bookshops. Receipts, labels and stamps indicate Strand Bookstore in Greenwich Village; Liberation Book Store in Harlem; Smedley’s Bookshop in Ithaca, NY; Idle Time Books, Savile Book Shop and Militant Bookstore in Washington, D.C.; and Mak-Taba Bookshop in Detroit.

Reading evidence is comprised of marginalia, underlining, hash marks, vertical lines next to passages, and asterisks. Several items include tipped-in scrap notes, receipts, business cards, and bookmarks using index cards, paper towels and unopened band-aids.

Some volumes include inscriptions by noted authors to both Forman and former owners. A number of books are gift copies. A bound 16-page edition published by the Society for Ethical Culture in New York City was presented in honor of Queens College student Andrew Goodman, one of the three civil rights workers murdered during the 1964 Mississippi Freedom Summer. The volume is inscribed by Goodman’s parents: “Jim dear – / May the words / spoken here be an / inspiration for others to carry on. / Bob & Carolyn Goodman”.

30 boxes of books were water-damaged prior to acquisition, and were not retained for processing. A review of the disposed books included Nazi history; third-world revolutionary writings, women’s issues; U.S. government reports and publications, works by Leon Trotsky and V.I. Lenin’s, and self-defense/martial arts.

Arrangement Note

Pamphlets Box 1-8

The pamphlets are arranged according to geographical subjects. Bulk material relates to United States subjects, which are alphabetized by author and where no author is listed by title. Some bulk pamphlets are arranged by publisher, as in Foreign Language Press, and Revolution.

United States Box 1-4
Russia & Soviet Union Box 5
Western Europe Box 6
Arab/Middle East/Muslim Box 6
Reference Box 6
Judaica/Israel Box 7
Mexico & Latin America Box 7
Africa Box 8
Far East Box 8

Periodicals Box 9-21

The periodicals are arranged alphabetically by title, and include one folder of newspapers in Box 21.

Scope and Content

This series includes all additional printed materials in the Forman Library, bound and unbound, amounting to approximately 4,000 pamphlets, periodicals, newspapers, leaflets, handouts, government series reports, conference literature and technical manuals.


Forman collected long runs of periodicals including The Black Scholar, Political Affairs, Black World, Mainstream, CounterSpy, Covert Action, and a 1920-30s run of The Communist. The newspapers feature issues from News From Ukraine, South Vietnam in Struggle, and Sister.
Series III: FBI Files (1946-1988) 10.5 linear feet. Box 22-42

Arrangement Note

The FBI files are organized by subject in five subseries:

Subseries 1: James Forman
Subseries 2: Black Manifesto
Subseries 3: COINTELPRO
Subseries 4: Organized Crime
Subseries 5: Radical Jewish Subjects and Papers

Scope & Content Note

In the summer of 1961, when Forman joined SNCC, the FBI opened an investigation of Forman which continued through the 1970s. In 1976, Forman initiated a series of Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests with U.S. government agencies to actively pursue obtaining files on himself and other organizations and figures.

Forman filed FOIA requests with the FBI, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and the Air Force. The materials include FBI files on James Forman, Forman's involvement with the “Black Manifesto,” and several files on 20th century organized crime leaders.
Series III: FBI Files (1946-1988) 10.5 linear feet.  Box 22-42

Subseries 1:  James Forman (1961-1976)  Box 22-25

Arrangement Note

The files appear to have been independently organized into two “sets,” each “set” marked in pencil, with each individual “file” assigned a number 1-15. In addition, each page is numbered in pencil in the lower right corner.

Scope and Content Note

These FBI files involve direct investigations of James Forman, and include a handwritten summary of the report marking instances and facts, file and page numbers. According to the summary, which is written in third person, the FBI released the redacted James Forman files in 1978, covering the years 1961 to 1976, “when the subject’s activities were no longer considered to be a threat to the internal security to the United States.”

Subseries 2:  Black Manifesto (circa 1969)  Box 26-27

Arrangement Note

Each bound file follows original order.

Scope and Content Note

In 1969, Forman aligned with the National Black Economic Development Conference (BEDC), and issued the “Black Manifesto,” which demanded $500 million dollars from Christian and Jewish groups in the United States as reparations for the slave trade. The FBI opened investigations against Forman and BEDC under offense codes for extortion, racketeering and civil unrest.

Subseries 3:  COINTELPRO (1967-1968)  Box 28

Arrangement Note

Each bound file follows original order, arranged in 3 folders.

Scope and Content Note

By cover letter dated November 16, 1979, civil rights historian Clayborne Carson forwarded copies of FBI reports to James Forman at Forman’s request. The files are unbound and personally ink-stamped by Carson, indicating the files’ origin. The files are related to the Bureau’s “COINTELPRO” investigations into “Black Nationalist – Hate Groups / Internal
Security,” which include information on the activities of SNCC. The files reference numerous FBI attempts to undermine the credibility of the black power movement through fabricated propaganda, “a counterintelligence maneuver aimed at exploiting the factionalism existing in the Black Panther Party (BPP).”

**Subseries 4: Organized Crime (1946-1977) Box 29-41**

*Arrangement Note*

Each bound FBI file is arranged according to original FBI file number.

*Scope and Content Note*

The subseries consists of FBI files on organized crime figures Charles “Lucky” Luciano, Meyer Lansky, and Santo Trafficante, Jr.

Luciano, Charles “Lucky” (1946-1967) Box 29
  FBI file number 62-8768

Lansky, Meyer (1952-1977) Box 30-32
  FBI file numbers 62-97928 and 92-2831

Trafficante, Jr., Santo (1959-1977) Box 33-41
  FBI file numbers 87-66742 and 92-278118

**Subseries 5: Radical Jewish Subjects and Papers (1947-1988) Box 42**

*Arrangement Note*

Each file is arranged according to original FBI file number.

*Scope and Content Note*

The FBI subjects include Irgun Zvai Leumi, a right-wing underground paramilitary group in post-war Israel, and the Jewish Defense League.

The papers include an FOIA cover sheet prepared by the Bureau with a “serial description” of “deleted page information; an FBI report dated 1967 on SNCC; and FOIA correspondence between Forman, Forman’s lawyers, and government agencies.
Series IV: Papers (1945-2005) 3.2 linear feet. Box 43-46

Arrangement Note

The series includes 2 cartons, 1 manuscript box and a portion of 1 small flat box.

Scope and Content Note

Much of the series is devoted to materials related to UPAC (1978-2005), including fundraiser materials, letters to Oprah Winfrey and Bill Clinton; a checkbook used by UPAC with the Industrial Bank of Washington; non-profit filings and bank statements for the UPAC Legal Defense, Education & Research Fund, Inc. (1985-1990); and medical papers related to Forman’s cancer treatment, for which bills Forman raised money by UPAC mass mailings.

Also included are copies of Forman’s diary dispatches to supporters, a journal and scrapbook (1979-1980), loose typescripts, handwritten notes, and newscloppings related to Forman and his family.


Evidence of Forman’s reference and reading materials includes copies of articles, legal documents related to a 1977 SNCC Complaint, political flyers, files relating to a Small Business Administration Accounting course, a memorial invitation for A. Phillip Randolph; and a 1985 hotel room surveillance transcript of D.C. Mayor and ex-SNCC leader Marion Barry smoking cocaine with a lady friend.
Series V: Media (1918-2004)  5.5 linear feet      Box 47-57

Arrangement Note

The series is organized in three subseries.

Subseries 1:  Video Recordings
Subseries 2:  Audio Cassette Tapes
Subseries 3:  Additional Media Formats

Scope & Content Note

Forman often documented his activity using video and audio recordings, and kept broadcast quality copies of programs in which he was involved. Forman collected video of lectures, seminars, radio interviews and TV shows, and recorded his attendance at conferences, talks and reunions. Forman habitually recorded personal audio dictation based on readings, news broadcasts, and research projects.
### Series V: Media (1918-2004)  
5.5 linear feet  
Box 47-57

#### Subseries 1: Video Recordings (1965-2004)  
Box 47-54

**Arrangement Note**

The video recordings are grouped by Forman’s personal involvement in the VHS content; reference VHS tapes which Forman collected; and recordings in legacy video formats.

Each group is arranged in chronological order, where undated materials follow dated materials.

**Scope & Content Note**

**James Forman VHS (1986-2000)  
Box 47-50**

These tapes include Forman interviews, lectures, seminars and events organized by UPAC or produced by Forman, and a home video of Forman’s 70th birthday. A copy of “Conversations with Pete Seeger” is inscribed by Forman to Tony Bennett.

**Reference VHS (1965-2004)  
Box 51-52**

These VHS tapes include newsreels, National Archives recordings, church events, TV programs, documentaries, and daytime soap operas featuring Forman’s son Chaka Forman as an actor.

**Legacy Formats (1984-1995)  
Box 53-54**

These legacy video formats include broadcast quality tapes, Scotch L-500, Maxell U-matic and Betacam.

Box 55-56

**Arrangement Note**

This subseries is organized by materials labeled in chronological order, followed by undated materials.

**Scope and Content Note**

A total of 103 items includes lectures, interviews and events in which Forman participated or attended, dictation and analysis on numerous subjects, oral histories and home recordings, and 1970s El Salvadoran pop music.
Subseries 3: Additional Media Formats (1910-1986)  

Arrangement Note

The materials are grouped by individual media format.

Scope and Content Note

The formats consist of microfilm, color slides, microform National Archives records and 5¼ computer floppy disks. The microfilm includes a copy of Self-Determination - The Salvation of the Race, by James H.A. Brazelton, in 1918, published by “The Educator.”