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Guide to the

**Council on African Affairs/Freedom of Information Act collection**

1949-1972 [bulk 1952-1954]

Sc MG 732

## Summary

**Creator:** United States. Federal Bureau of Investigation

**Title:** Council on African Affairs/Freedom of Information Act collection

**Date:** 1949-1972 [bulk 1952-1954]

**Size:** 0.42 linear feet (1 box)

**Source:** Gift of Marika Sherwood, March 2004.

**Abstract:** Founded in 1937 by Max Yergan and Paul Robeson, the Council on African Affairs (CAA) was an independent, non-profit organization "dedicated to serving the interests of the peoples of Africa" and had a self-described unique "full-time and year-round job of providing Americans with the truth about Africa". This was achieved through the monthly "Spotlight on Africa" newsletter and other publications. The Council's other major function was to act as the channel of concrete assistance from Americans to Africans, sending money to aid the South African people's struggle against Malan's apartheid government. The Council on African Affairs/Freedom of Information Act (CAA/FOIA) collection consists of photocopies of the FBI file on the CAA obtained through a FOIA request. The FBI surveilled activities of CAA branches across the United States but the collection most frequently mentions the Los Angeles and Philadelphia branches, monitoring the growth, or lack thereof, of those branches.

**Preferred citation:** [Item], Council on African Affairs/Freedom of Information Act collection, Sc MG 732, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, The New York Public Library

**Language of the Material:** English

**Related Materials:**

Paul Robeson collection (FBI file), Sc Micro R-5956, Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture

## Creator History

Founded in 1937 by Max Yergan and Paul Robeson, the Council on African Affairs (CAA) was an independent, non-profit organization "dedicated to serving the interests of the peoples of Africa" and had a self-described unique "full-time and year-round job of providing Americans with the truth about Africa". This was achieved through the monthly "Spotlight on Africa" newsletter and other publications. The Council's other major function was to act as the channel of concrete assistance from Americans to Africans, sending money to aid the South African people's struggle against Malan's apartheid government.

## **Scope and Content Note**

The Council on African Affairs/Freedom of Information Act (CAA/FOIA) collection consists of photocopies of the FBI file on the CAA obtained through a FOIA request. The FBI surveilled activities of CAA branches across the United States but the collection most frequently mentions the Los Angeles and Philadelphia branches, monitoring the growth, or lack thereof, of those branches.

The collection contains reports; communications from field agents to the FBI directorate about the organization they considered "substantially directed, dominated or controlled by the Communist Party"; and interviews with former members of the CAA being considered as potential witnesses before the Subversive Activities Control Board. Alleging that the Communist Party USA's (CPUSA) support of the CAA was in the form of personnel, the FBI kept a close eye on the officers of the CAA. Included in the files are a summary of Paul Robeson's, W. E. B. DuBois's, and W. Alphaeus Hunton's alleged Communist Party affiliations and a letter regarding DuBois from J. Edgar Hoover to the CIA. There is also a report juxtaposing CPUSA and CAA policies as "evidence of the extent to which the positions taken or advanced by the CAA in matters of policy do not deviate from those of the CPUSA".

The CAA files also contain records of the organization's internal activities as well as extracts from several publications, including the organ's newsletter "Spotlight on Africa" and the CPUSA's National Negro Commission's "Negro Affairs". Subjects covered in these newsletters include colonialism, neo-colonialism in Africa, and critiques of American and European involvement in Africa, particularly in South Africa and Kenya. The material also documents the split that developed between Max Yergan and Paul Robeson and includes communications from Robeson to the membership detailing Yergan's "disruptive activities".

## **Key Terms**

### **Subjects**

African American intellectuals  
African Americans -- Civil rights -- History -- Sources  
African Americans -- Political activity  
African Americans -- Relations with Africans  
Communism -- United States  
Subversive activities -- United States -- History -- 20th century

### **Names**

Du Bois, W. E. B. (William Edward Burghardt), 1868-1963  
Hunton, Alphaeus, 1903-1970  
Robeson, Paul, 1898-1976  
Yergan, Max, 1892-1975

Council on African Affairs  
United States. Federal Bureau of Investigation