



The New York Public Library
Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture,
Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division

Guide to the

Nathan Wright papers and additions

1936-2005 [bulk ca. 1950-1990]

Sc MG 754

Summary

Creator: Wright, Nathan

Title: Nathan Wright papers and additions

Date: 1936-2005 [bulk ca. 1950-1990]

Size: 6.04 linear feet (8 boxes)

Source: Gift of the Wright Family, June 2005 and September 2009.

Accruals: Although physically arranged in separate boxes (7-8), additions have been organized into their appropriate series in this finding aid.

Abstract: The Rev. Dr. Nathan Wright, Jr., an Episcopal minister and scholar, was an early and prominent advocate of Black power. The Nathan Wright papers reflect his numerous interests and endeavors in the fields of religion, Black power, education, and race relations.

Preferred citation: [Item], Nathan Wright papers and additions, Sc MG 754, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, The New York Public Library

Language of the Material: English

Processing note: Accessioned by Janice Quinter in October 2006 and January 2010.

Separated Materials:

Transferred to the Moving Image and Recorded Sound Division: audio and moving image materials. For more information, please contact the division at schomburgaudiovisual@nypl.org or 212-491-2270.

Transferred to the Photographs and Prints Division: photographs

Creator History

The Rev. Dr. Nathan Wright, Jr., an Episcopal minister and scholar, was an early and prominent

advocate of black power. Born in 1923 in Louisiana, and raised in Cincinnati, he earned five college degrees, including a bachelor's degree from the University of Cincinnati, a master's degree from the Episcopal Theological School, and a doctorate of education from Harvard University. Having been ordained a deacon and priest in 1950, he served the Episcopal Church in a variety of roles in Boston, Newark, and Harlem, among other locations. He was also the director of "Greater Things" Ministries.

An early civil rights advocate, Wright participated in one of the first Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) freedom rides in 1947. Wright's most influential role in black politics, however, came in 1967, as chairman of the National Conference on Black Power in Newark. This conference symbolized a major shift in black politics.

Wright authored eighteen books, many dealing with race in America, among them *Black Power and Urban Unrest: Creative Possibilities*, *Let's Face Racism*, *Let's Work Together*, *Race, Circumstance and Higher Education*, *Ready to Riot*, and *Urban Issues Facing the Churches*. He also wrote poetry, and published a book of sermons and a volume on Christian philosophy. Several of his book-length manuscripts remain unpublished. As a theologian, he wrote scores of articles published in theological and popular journals. In addition, Wright was a columnist for the *Star-Ledger*, a newspaper in Newark; his articles were syndicated in one hundred newspapers around the country.

An urbanist and educator, Wright served as professor of urban affairs at the State University of New York at Albany from 1969-1981, and was the founding chairman of its Department of African and Afro-American Studies. He became the communications director at Passaic County Community College in Paterson, New Jersey, in 1981. Wright maintained a busy schedule of lecturing at colleges, universities, and other venues throughout the nation. The recipient of a number of honorary degrees and awards, Wright died in 2005, at the age of 81.

Scope and Content Note

The Nathan Wright papers reflect his numerous interests and endeavors in the fields of religion, Black power, education, and race relations. Materials include personal papers; professional files related to the ministry and social issues; speeches and papers delivered at conferences; and writing, both published and unpublished. Additions mostly include professional files and writing.

Arrangement: Arranged into 4 series: (1) Personal papers; (2) Religious and professional activities; (3) Speeches, addresses, and papers; and (4) Writing.

Key Terms

Subjects

African American civil rights workers
African American clergy
African American educators
African American families
African American intellectuals
African American political activists
African American scholars
Authors, Black
Black power -- United States
Racism -- United States

Geographic Names

Newark (N.J.)

United States -- Race relations

Names

Bell, Bernard Iddings, 1886-1958

Wright, Nathan

Container List

Personal papers

The Personal papers series includes Wright's lengthy CVs; printed information about him; a dissertation written about Wright's ideas about black education (1973); and papers regarding his ordination in 1950. Files pertaining to his education include papers he wrote as a college student, most concerning religious issues, as well as his 1964 Ph.D. dissertation entitled "The Life and Educational Thought of Bernard Iddings Bell (1886-1958)". Also contained in this series are genealogical files, his obituaries, papers regarding his funeral service, and biographical information written by Wright's children.

- b. 1 f. 1 Autobiographical
- b. 1 f. 2 Biographical
- b. 1 f. 3-7 Family
- b. 1 f. 8 Genealogical
- b. 1 f. 9 Diplomas and awards
- b. 1 f. 10 Passport
- b. 1 f. 11 War Department ID
- b. 1 f. 12 Rejection
- b. 1 f. 13 Promotional
- b. 1 f. 14 Correspondence
- b. 1 f. 15 Ordination
- b. 1 f. 16 "Dr. Nathan Wright: A Short Story Concerning His Varied Professional Resources and Chiefly His Award-Winning Social and Public Policy Perspectives" (2 versions)
- b. 1 f. 17 Reference
- b. 1 f. 18-19 About Wright
- b. 1 f. 20 "You Don't Have to Ride Jim Crow!"
- b. 1 f. 21 *Jet Magazine*
Walnut Hill High School yearbook, "Remembrance"
- b. 1 f. 22 1937
- b. 1 f. 23-24 1941
Includes 2 copies.
- b. 1 f. 25 Course papers 1949-1962
- b. 1 f. 26 Lewinson, Barbara. "Three Conceptions of Black Education: A Study of the Educational Ideas of Benjamin Elijah Mays, Booker T. Washington, and Nathan Wright" 1973
- b. 1 f. 27 Student papers about Wright 1978-2001
- b. 1 f. 28 Legal 1923-1996
Includes marriage certificates and divorce papers.
- b. 2 f. 1 "The Life and Educational Thought of Bernard Iddings Bell (1886-1958)", PhD dissertation 1964
Includes letter.
- b. 2 f. 2 Retirement ceremony guestbook 1985
- b. 2 f. 3-4 Obituaries and funeral service 2005

Religious and professional activities 1950-1995

The Religious and professional activities series contains many of Wright's sermons; information regarding his stewardships; and materials on his ministry, which he called the "Greater Things Ministries". There are also files regarding the "Assault-on-Illiteracy-Program" (1981-1982) of which Wright served as national chairman. This program strove to rectify the devastating effects of a "functional illiteracy" rate of 44% among Black youth nationwide. Included in this series are statements Wright prepared for a 1969 Senate investigation, particularly concerning economic and other changes that affected Black people.

Additions are located in box 7.

- b. 2 f. 5 **Church** ca. 1995
- b. 7 f. 1 Includes correspondence with St. Philip's Church, ca. 1995.
- b. 2 f. 6-8 **Stewardship**
- b. 7 f. 3 Includes writings.
- b. 2 f. 9-10 **Greater Things Ministries**
- b. 7 f. 2
- b. 2 f. 11-19 **Sermons** 1950-1995
- b. 7 f. 4-14 Includes handwritten and typed sermons.
- b. 2 f. 20 **Assault-on-Illiteracy-Program (AOIP)** 1981-1982
- b. 2 f. 21 **Senate investigation** 1967-1984
- Includes copy of Wright's statement, hearing transcript, and *Congressional Record* excerpt.
- b. 2 f. 22-25 **Speeches, addresses, and papers** 1995
- b. 7 f. 15
- This series covers drafts and final versions of papers which Wright presented, some of which express his views on Black power and race relations. Includes "Racism, Marginality and Educational Renewal Today", 1995.

Additions are located in box 7.

Writing 1937-1995

Wright's drafts for published articles, many concerning Black power, are in this series. Included are semi-monthly summaries; legislative alerts; articles regarding Black empowerment; his column "Peace and Power"; and papers which were published in such journals as *Laity Exchange Magazine* and *Media Review and Viewpoint*. Also included are his newspaper columns "Black Empowerment" and "Toward Empowerment".

A significant part of the collection is the Unpublished subseries. There are numerous drafts of Wright's autobiography, "Patrician Poor - Reflections on a Black Upbringing"; what appears to be a complete version of his manuscript "God's History and Other Verse"; "Semitic Wisdom: Judaic Insights for Human Liberation"; and "Let Zion Sing! Poetic Reflections on the Psalms". There are also manuscripts for "Urban Issues Facing the Churches" and "We've All Been Tricked (A Study of Black Power and Family Planning)".

Additions are located in box 8.

Arranged into two subseries: (1) Published and (2) Unpublished.

Published

- b. 3 f. 1 **Speeches**
- b. 3 f. 2 **Assault-on-Illiteracy-Program (AOIP)**
- b. 3 f. 3 *The Riddle of Life and Other Sermons*
- b. 3 f. 8-10 **"Black Empowerment"**
- b. 3 f. 11 **Senate investigation**
- b. 3 f. 12 **"Toward Empowerment"**
- b. 3 f. 13-17 **Semi-monthly summaries and legislative alerts**

Writing (cont.)

Published (cont.)

- b. 3 f. 18 *Articles for the Monitor*
- b. 5 f. 3-4 "Peace and Power"
- b. 5 f. 6 *Urban Issues Facing the Churches*
- b. 5 f. 9 "The Microscope"
- b. 5 f. 10 "Common Goals and Public Policy" drafts
- b. 5 f. 11 *Media Review*
- b. 5 f. 12 *Laity Exchange Magazine submissions* 1986
- b. 8 f. 1
- b. 5 f. 13 *Viewpoint*
- b. 5 f. 14 Article for Delta Sigma Theta

b. 5 Publications 1968-1987

Includes "Report of the First National Congress of Black Professionals in Higher Education"; *Reality in Black And White*; *Lincoln Review* (summer 1981-fall 1987); *Context Journal of the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago* (Spring/Summer, 1968); *The University and the Politics of Racism* (2 copies); *Black Americans: Images in Conflict, Prospects for World Peace*; and *Footwork '85*.

Unpublished

- b. 3 f. 4-5 "God's History and Other Verse" 1994
- b. 8 f. 2
- b. 3 f. 6-7 "Let Zion Sing! Poetic Reflections on the Psalms" 1985
- b. 8 f. 4 Includes version with slightly different title, "Let Zion Sing! Lessons from the Ancient People: Reflections on Selected Psalms".
- b. 4 "Patrician Poor: Reflections on a Black Upbringing" drafts
- b. 5 f. 1 Black power writings
- b. 5 f. 2 "An Approach to Urban Work through the Theology of Transfiguration"
- b. 5 f. 5 "Semitic Wisdom: Judaic Insights for Human Liberation"
- b. 5 f. 7 "We've All Been Tricked (A Study of Black Power and Family Planning)", co-authored with Carolyn E. Wright
- b. 5 f. 8 Various
- b. 5 f. 15-18 Poetry 1994-1995
- b. 8 f. 3 Includes "Black poetry" and "Words of Life Prayer".
- b. 6 f. 1 Short story
- b. 6 f. 2-7 Various drafts, notes, and fragments
- b. 6 f. 8 Newark Committee for Better Public Schools
- b. 8 f. 5 "More Than Enough: The Stewardship of Church Resources"
- b. 8 f. 6 "Stewardship Development: How? What? And Why?"
- b. 8 f. 7 "Stewardship, Faith and Money"