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Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture,  
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Guide to the

**Will Herzfeld papers**

1964-1990

Sc MG 323

Processed by Amal A. Muhammad.

## Summary

**Creator:** Herzfeld, Will Lawrence, 1937-

**Title:** Will Herzfeld papers

**Date:** 1964-1990

**Source:** SCM 90-8. Gift of Will Herzfeld, 1990.

**Abstract:** The Will Herzfeld Papers are divided into Personal Papers, Correspondence, and materials related to Herzfeld's clerical as well as secular professional activities. Personal Papers includes schedules, invitations, press releases and news clippings by and about Reverend Herzfeld, information about the Tuscaloosa boycott, and three speeches, 1964-1989. The bulk of correspondence is administrative and business in nature, and primarily between Herzfeld and Lutheran bodies, 1967-1984. The material in the series Professional Activities--Clerical, consists of memorial and anniversary journals of Bethlehem Lutheran Church, church programs and bulletins of forums in which Herzfeld participated and material regarding the 1988 merger of the three Lutheran churches. The contents of the series, Professional Activities--Secular, encompass programs of secular forums in which he took part, as well as a final communique, press statement, draft appeal, schedule, and report on the meeting of youth and students from the International Conference-Dialogue for Disarmament and Detente.

**Access:** Advance notice required.

**Preferred citation:** Will Herzfeld papers, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library

**Language of the Material:** English

**Processing note:** Processed by Amal A. Muhammad; Machine-readable finding aid created by Apex Data Services; revised by Terry Catapano.

## Creator History

Will Lawrence Herzfeld was born on June 9, 1937 in Mobile, Alabama. He was enrolled in elementary Lutheran schools there and was a member of the Faith Lutheran Church. He attended the Alabama Lutheran Academy in Selma and graduated with an Associate of Arts degree in 1957 from Immanuel

Lutheran College of the Missouri synod in Greensboro, North Carolina. He further pursued his education to obtain a Masters of Divinity in 1961 at Immanuel Lutheran Seminary in Greensboro and did some post-graduate work at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Missouri. Almost twenty years later, while combining duties as pastor, professor, and social activist, he found time to obtain a doctorate of divinity from the Center for Urban Black Studies at Berkeley in 1981 and another doctorate from Christ Seminary-Seminex in St. Louis in 1984. Herzfeld's clerical career began in the Southern District of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod (LCMS) during the Civil Rights era. He was a pastor at the Christ Lutheran Church in Tuscaloosa, Alabama from 1960-1965. He also participated in organizing the Tuscaloosa chapter of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) and was its first president in 1963. The following year he became president of the Alabama State SCLC. His involvement in this organization led to his close association with the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. While pastoring, he was a member of the Southern Districts's Stewardship Committee for three years, and chairperson of the Family Life Committee for two years. Moreover, from 1964 to 1966 he acted as vice-president of the Lutheran Human Relations Association of America, and throughout the decade of the 1960s he was trustee of the Walther League, a youth organization of the LCMS. Rev. Herzfeld's clerical career shifted from the South to the West after he moved to Oakland, California in 1965. From 1965 to 1973 he served as urban minister in the California-Nevada-Hawaii District of the LCMS. During this time he also performed duties as regional mission executive of the Lutheran Council in the United States and was the first African American on the executive staff there. In 1969, he was the first African American to be elected to the Board of Mission Services of the Lutheran Council in the USA, resigning in 1973. Never one to abandon his political activism, Herzfeld joined the "Soledad Brothers Defense Committee" in 1971, to the displeasure of some of his superiors who frowned on his political involvement. While living in Oakland, California, Herzfeld assumed the pastorate of the Bethlehem Lutheran Church there in 1973. This predominantly African-American congregation, founded in 1929, was a member of the Missouri Synod until 1975. The following year it was one of the first to break away from the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod and join the Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches (AELC). Herzfeld remained pastor of Bethlehem Lutheran Church until December 30, 1992 whereupon he left to become Director for Global Community and Overseas Operations of the Division for Global Mission/Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, located in Chicago, Illinois. In 1976 Herzfeld assumed the post of vice president of AELC as the first African American to be elected to the presidium of a Lutheran churchbody in the United States. In addition he was, and remains, adjunct professor of urban ministry at Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary in Berkeley, California. Rev. Herzfeld's career during the 1970s and 1980s illustrates a dedication to Lutheran affairs, church-related concerns (local, national, global and African-American), and a capacity to expand his activities to include educational, civic, and humanitarian matters. In addition to teaching, Herzfeld was also secretary-treasurer of the Center for Urban Black Studies--Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley from 1979 to 1989. In the African-American clerical community he was vice president of Alamo Black Clergy from 1970 to 1989, on the board of directors of the National Conference of Black Churchmen for almost the entire decade of the 1970s, sat on the board of directors of the Black Theology Project in 1978 to 1979, and chaired the Martin Luther King Committee of the San Francisco Bay Area from 1981 to 1982. In 1979 to 1982 he served on the World Community Commission of the formerly USA National Committee of the Lutheran World Federation and was a member of the board of the Center for Participation in Democracy from 1982 to 1984. Moreover, he participated in the Second Vienna Dialogue International Conference--Dialogue for Disarmament and Detente in 1983. He sat on the Council for Christian Medical Work from 1970 to 1972, was a board member of Evangelical Lutherans in Mission from 1978 to 1983, and was a member of the Committee on Lutheran Unity in 1981. In addition to his involvement in educational, global, clerical and denominational concerns, Herzfeld showed an interest in the welfare of his home base as a member of the board of directors of the Oakland Citizens Committee for Urban Renewal from 1973 to 1975, treasurer of the Oakland Urban Renaissance Society, a minority development corporation, in 1981, and chairperson of a subcommittee of the Mayor's Blue Ribbon Commission on Crime in Oakland in 1986 to 1987. He maintained an already strong record of humanitarian concern

when he became county commissioner for Alameda County Human Relations Commission from 1970 to 1972 and a member of the California Attorney General's Commission on Racial, Ethnic, Religious and Minority Violence in 1987. As a community-oriented person he had a seat from 1974 to 1978 on the board of directors and executive committee of the Wheat Ridge Foundation which funds church-related community organizing efforts. Combining religion and his interest in sport, he was named chaplain for the Golden State Warriors professional basketball team from 1984 and remained in that position until 1991. In 1984, Rev. Herzfeld made history when he became the first African-American bishop to head a Lutheran denomination in the United States. He succeeded Rev. Dr. William Kohn, bishop of the AELC to become this church body's first African-American bishop. Simultaneously, Herzfeld was a member of the Commission for a New Lutheran Church which worked toward merging the AELC, the Lutheran Church in America (LCA) and the American Lutheran Church (ALC) to form the Evangelical Lutheran Churches in America (ELCA) in 1988. He played a key role in the merger. Included in Herzfeld's full career was extensive travelling. In 1969 he went to India to represent Rev. J.A.O. Preus during the 75th anniversary of the LCMS's India Mission at its seventh biennial convention in Nagercoil, India. Twenty years later he returned to India as vice president of Lutheran World Relief. In 1973 he travelled to Dar Es-Salaam, Tanzania, where he attended the Lutheran World Federation Assembly. He visited Haiti in 1975 and, as a result of this trip and his efforts there, Bethlehem Lutheran Church sponsored sixteen Haitian refugees. In 1986, he journeyed to Harare, Zimbabwe where he attended the World Council of Churches emergency meeting to discuss the South African situation. At the end of the meeting he signed the *Harare Declaration* which called for the resignation of the South African government as the only viable way to achieve peace and bring about constructive change. It also urged churches of the Western world to support sanctions against South Africa and aid Africa liberation movements. Rev. Herzfeld visited the Bahamas in 1988 where he was an official guest at an independence celebration. In 1989 he was part of the first group of visitors from the United States (a delegation of four clergy) to legally enter the Democratic People's Republic of Korea since the Korean War. Other countries he visited include China, Germany, Ghana, Ethiopia, France, Hong Kong, Japan, Kenya, Korea, and Nigeria; all places where he served in his capacity as an international clergyman. Rev. Herzfeld has received numerous honors and awards, supplementing his professional attainments. Aside from several city and state awards, individual groups have acknowledged the energies he invested as a citizen, humanitarian, and clergyperson. From 1961 to 1966 he was honored for Outstanding Citizen by the Tuscaloosa Businessmen's League and received three Service to Youth awards from the Benjamin Barnes branch of the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) in Tuscaloosa, Alabama. In 1976 The Mother's for Equal Education chose him as Man of the Year. Merritt College and United East Oakland Clergy paid tribute to him in 1986 by honoring him with an award symbolizing recognition of the power for positive change in communities which churches and church leaders represent.

## **Scope and Content Note**

The Will Herzfeld Papers are divided into Personal Papers, Correspondence, and materials related to Herzfeld's clerical as well as secular professional activities.

**Arrangement:** Organized into four series: I. Personal Papers; II. Correspondence; III. Professional Activities--Clerical; IV. Professional Activities--Secular

## **Key Terms**

### **Subjects**

African American churches  
African American clergy  
African American Lutherans

African Americans -- Civil rights

**Titles**

Preservation of the Black Religious Heritage Project funded by the Lilly Endowment

**Names**

Herzfeld, Will Lawrence, 1937-

Herzfeld, Will Lawrence

Bethlehem Lutheran Church (Oakland, Calif.)

## Container List

### b. 1 Personal Papers

Herzfeld's *PERSONAL PAPERS*, 1964-1989, n.d. series includes a miscellanea of items, such as schedules, invitations, and lists. It also contains press releases and newspaper clippings by and about the Rev. Will Herzfeld spanning from 1967 to 1989, minutes of a Tuscaloosa Citizens for Action Committee in 1964, photocopies of pages from a photograph album (which has been transferred to the Prints and Photographs Division) containing photographs and typewritten text pertaining to the Tuscaloosa boycott of white-owned businesses in downtown Tuscaloosa in June 1964. The series also contains three hand-written and type-written speeches from 1983, 1986, n.d.

- b. 1 f. 1 Miscellaneous--Personal
- b. 1 f. 2 Printed Matter Re Will Herzfeld 1967-1989
- b. 1 f. 3 Tuscaloosa Story June 1964
- b. 1 f. 4 Speeches 1983, 1986, n.d

### Correspondence

Herzfeld's *CORRESPONDENCE* is scattered throughout the period, 1967 to 1984, n.d., and includes letters, memos, and telegrams. The bulk of the letters are administrative and business in nature, primarily between Herzfeld and other Lutheran bodies. In 1984 he received numerous letters congratulating him on his appointment as bishop of the Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches. These were removed from a photograph album and arranged chronologically with the other correspondence. Only a few of the letters of this series are of a personal nature.

- b. 1 f. 5 (Scattered) 1967-1984
- b. 1 f. 6 1985
- b. 1 f. 7 1986-1990
- b. 1 f. 8 n.d

### Professional Activities--Clerical

The materials in the series, *PROFESSIONAL ACTIVITIES--CLERICAL*, 1967-1989, n.d. consists of memorial and anniversary journals of Bethlehem Lutheran Church, 1989, n.d., church programs and bulletins of forums in which Herzfeld participated from 1967 to 1989, minutes of a board meeting of the Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches in 1987 during Herzfeld's term as bishop, and a broadside of Gospel Concert and Worship Service commemorating the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. on January 15 (no year) [filed under *Martin Luther King, Jr.* in Broadside Collection]. In addition, the series contains souvenir journals and periodicals regarding the merging of the three main Lutheran churches in 1988 and the *Report & Recommendations of the Commission for a New Lutheran Church*. Also in the series are papers regarding the Lutheran-Roman Catholic dialogue, 1985.

- b. 1 f. 9 Bethlehem Lutheran Church 1989, n.d.
- b. 1 f. 10 Association Of Evangelical Lutheran Churches 1987
- b. 1 f. 11 Church Programs And Bulletins, (Scattered) 1967-1989
- b. 1 f. 12 Reunification--Lutheran Church 1986
- b. 1 f. 13 Reunification--Lutheran Church 1986-1988
- b. 1 f. 14 Lutheran-Roman Catholic Dialogue 1985

b. 2 Professional Activities--Secular

The contents of the last series, *PROFESSIONAL ACTIVITIES--SECULAR*, 1971-1990 encompass programs of secular forums in which he took part as well as a final communique, press statement, draft appeal, schedule, and report on the meeting of youth and students from the International Conference-Dialogue for Disarmament and Detente. Also in the series is a broadside of The Second Annual Black Odyssey Festival, May 16-23, 1971 in which appears a photograph of Herzfeld [filed under *Black Odyssey Festival* in Broadsides Collection]. Finally, a publication produced in 1987 by the California Attorney General's Commission on Racial, Ethnic, Religious and Minority Violence, of which Herzfeld was a member, is included in this series.

b. 2 f. 1 Non-Church Programs, (Scattered) 1971-1989

b. 2 f. 2 Second Vienna Dialogue 1983

b. 2 f. 3 Attorney General's Commission On Racial, Ethnic, Religious And Minority Violence 1987