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Guide to the

**New York Times Company records. Metropolitan Desk records
1954-1983**

MssCol 17794

Forms part of the New York Times Company records

Compiled by Philip Heslip, May 2013

Summary

Creator: New York Times Company

Title: New York Times Company records. Metropolitan Desk records, 1954-1983

Size: 1.89 linear feet (5 boxes)

Source: New York Times Company, donated 2007.

Abstract: The Metropolitan Desk records is a collection of letters, memoranda, and clippings created by *The New York Times* Metropolitan Desk (City Desk) from 1954 to 1980. This department was responsible for *The Times*' news coverage of the New York City region. The records document the daily operations of the department and include files of City Editor Frank S. Adams, Metropolitan Editor A.M. Rosenthal, and his successors Arthur Gelb, Mitchel Levitas, and Sydney Schanberg.

Access: Apply to Manuscripts and Archives Division for access at <http://www.nypl.org/mssref>.

Copyright information: Copyright for documents created by New York Times Company principals and staff has been transferred to The New York Public Library.

Preferred citation: New York Times Company records. Metropolitan Desk records, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library.

Custodial history: This collection was originally re-housed and organized in 1990 by The Times archives staff. The staff discarded ten boxes (approximately 4 linear feet) worth of files.

Processing note: The order and folder titles, which The Times archives staff imposed on the collection, have been maintained.

Creator history

The Metropolitan Desk, also known as the City Desk, the New York Desk, or the Metro Desk, was one of the three main desks at *The New York Times*, along with the National Desk and the Foreign Desk. This department was responsible for *The Times*' news coverage of the New York City region, which extended to the five boroughs, New Jersey, and Connecticut. The city editor controlled the New York reporting staff, the largest news department at *The Times*. Unlike foreign or national correspondents, New York staff members, both general reporters and beat specialists, received daily story assignments from the city editor. The earliest city editor represented in this collection is Frank S. Adams who held the title from 1952 to 1963. After Adams left *The Times*, the department's name was changed from City Desk to Metropolitan Desk and the department head's title became the metropolitan editor. This position was held by Abraham M. Rosenthal (1963-1967), Arthur Gelb (1967-1976), Mitchel Levitas (1976-1977), and Sydney Schanberg (1977-1980). In addition to regional political and social news, the Metropolitan desk also oversaw New York cultural coverage (art, dance, film, music, and theater) until 1962 when Managing Editor Turner Catledge created the position of cultural news editor that reported directly to him. Although this collection only documents up until 1983, the Metropolitan Desk is still one of the main *Times* departments today.

Scope and content note

This collection documents the daily operations of the Metropolitan Desk, which was responsible for reporting on the New York City region. The bulk of the collection consists of internal correspondence and memoranda from city editors to various staff members in which they critiqued specific stories, commented on the overall performance of the department, discussed the handling of news reporting, and disseminated editorial and style policies. Taken together, these notes reveal the Metropolitan Desk's process of gathering news. Also present are communications between the Metropolitan Desk and high ranking editors at *The Times*, such as Turner Catledge and E. Clifton Daniel. Notably, these contain discussions of conflicts between the National and Metropolitan Desks on ambiguous distinctions between national and regional news. Correspondence to and from the following editors is filed in their individual people files and throughout the collection: City Editor Frank S. Adams (1952-1963); Metropolitan Editors Abraham M. Rosenthal (1963-1967), Arthur Gelb (1967-1976), Mitchel Levitas (1976-1977), and Sydney Schanberg (1977-1980).

These files do not comprehensively document the Metropolitan desk; they cover only the years 1952 to 1980, the bulk of which were created between 1961 and 1979. *The New York Times* archivists weeded items from the collection in 1990. Items kept largely represent letters and memoranda sent to or from senior editors with fewer communications among reporters or lower-level editorial staff members. For additional records related to the Metropolitan Desk, see the A.M. Rosenthal papers and the New York Times Company Records. A.M. Rosenthal papers.

Arrangement

The New York Times Company records. Metropolitan Desk records are organized into the following series:

- Series I: People, 1945-1979
- Series II: Subjects, 1961-1983

Key terms

Subjects

American Newspapers -- New York (State) -- New
York
Journalism -- United States -- 20th century
Newspapers -- Language

Names

Dr. X
Gelb, Arthur, 1924-
Levitas, Mitchel
New York Times Company
Rosenthal, A. M. (Abraham Michael), 1922-2006
Schanberg, Sydney H. (Sydney Hillel), 1934-

Special formats

Manuscripts for publication
Photographs

Container list

Series I: People, 1945-1979 (1.25 boxes)

This series is made up of files that contain items to, from, or concerning various individuals, primarily *New York Times* staff members, with some files on politicians and other newsmakers. Staff member files typically include letters and memoranda between them and Metropolitan Desk editors. They frequently consist of feedback on and assessments of their work. A few staff files also contain biographical and work history reports and photographs of the staff (portraits and shots from events and inside *The Times*' offices). While this series contains some correspondence with sources, politicians, and other prominent New Yorkers, most of the non-staff members' files are made up of letters discussing *The Times*' reporting on these individuals, though they occasionally contain notes on off-the-record events such as luncheons or one-on-one meetings.

Files are arranged alphabetically by name. Entries without box and folder numbers cross-reference related material in other files. These files do not necessarily collect every letter, memorandum, or document related to the individual; subject files should also be consulted, particularly for additional letters and memoranda among Metropolitan Desk editors.

- b.1 f.1 Abrams, Melville E., 1963
- b.1 f.2 Adams, Frank S., 1954-1966
Includes photographs. Additional correspondence with City Editor Frank S. Adams is filed in the appropriate subject files.
- b.1 f.3 Altman, Lawrence K., 1962
Asbury, Edith Evans (See: Dick Gerald)
Berger, Meyer (See: Columbia University)
Bigart, Homer (See: Columbia University)
- b.1 f.4 Buckley, William F., 1963-1964
Buder, Leonard (See: News Sources)
Caldwell, Earl (See: News Sources)
- b.1 f.5 Carey, Hugh (Gov.), 1978
Summary of an off-the-record interview with New York Governor Hugh Carey
Chambers, Marcia (See: News Sources)
- b.1 f.6 Dicklet, Gerald, 1979
Correspondence regarding threats to *Times* reporter Edith E. Asbury
Dubinsky, David
See: International Ladies Garment Workers Union
Farber, Myron A. (See: Dr. X Case)
Faulkner, William (See: Copyrights)
Gelb, Arthur
Correspondence with Metropolitan Editor Arthur Gelb is filed in the appropriate subject files
- b.1 f.7 Goodman, Roy, 1977
Summary of an off-the-record interview with Roy Goodman
- b.1 f.8 Greenfield, James L., 1964-1965
- b.1 f.9 Gruson, Sydney, 1963-1964
- b.1 f.10 Gupte, Pranay, 1977-1979 (See also: News Sources)
- b.1 f.11 Haddad, William F., 1977
Hess, John (See: News Sources)

Series I: People, 1945-1979 (cont.)

- b.1 f.12 Hunter-Gault, Charlayne, 1977
Includes photographs. See also: News Sources
Jascalevich, Mario E. (Dr.) (See: Dr. X Case)
Kaiser, Charles (See: News Sources)
- b.1 f.13 Koch, Edward (Mayor), 1977-1978
- b.1 f.14 Krock, Arthur, 1962-1964
Levitas, Mitchel
Correspondence with Metropolitan Editor Mitchel Levitas is filed in the appropriate subject files
Lynn, Frank (See: News Sources)
Maitland, Leslie (See: News Sources)
Milling, Eileen (See: Dr. X Case)
Millones, Peter
See: International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union
Murphy, Michael J. (Police Commissioner) (See: Police News)
Narvaez, Alonso (See: News Sources)
- b.1 f.15 O'Dwyer, Paul, 1965
- b.1 f.16 Olsen, Arthur, 1964
Pace, Eric (See: News Sources)
- b.1 f.17 Papp, Joseph, 1967-1969
- b.1 f.18 Patterson, Floyd, 1963
Raab, Selwyn (See: News Sources)
- b.1 f.19 Rockefeller, Nelson A. (Gov.), 1979
Correspondence and documents regarding *The Times* coverage of the death of Nelson Rockefeller
Rosenthal, Abraham M.
Correspondence with Metropolitan Editor Abraham M. Rosenthal is filed in appropriate subject files throughout the collection, including Personal and Private Papers: A.M. Rosenthal
Schanberg, Sydney H.
Correspondence with Metropolitan Editor Sydney H. Schanberg is filed in the appropriate subject files
Sheppard, Nathaniel (See: News Sources)
- b.2 f.1 Siegal, Allan M., 1977-1980
Notes sent by Allan M. Siegal, news editor, to the metropolitan desk. See also: Editorial Policy: Metropolitan News - News Desk
Smothers, Ronald (See: News Sources)
Sullivan, Ronald (See: News Sources)
- b.2 f.2 Sulzberger, Iphigene Ochs, 1961-1965
- b.2 f.3 Thomas, Robert Mc. G., 1973-1980 (Includes photograph)
Tomasson, Robert E. (See: News Sources)
Treaster, Joseph (See: News Sources)

Series I: People, 1945-1979 (cont.)

- b.2 f.4 Valenti, Jack, 1968-1969
Wright, Charles (See: Free Press and Fair Trial)

Series II: Subjects, 1961-1983 (3.75 boxes)

This series is made up of alphabetical subject files that are organized (and titled) by topical keywords, types of news assignments, specific news stories, or organizations. Internal correspondence and memoranda make up the bulk of these files and consist of communications between Metropolitan Desk editors and reporters. These items reveal the news gathering and editing process of the Metropolitan Desk and document daily interactions between the metropolitan editors and the rest of their staff. Topics discussed include reporter assignments and criticisms and notes on specific news stories. Of note are the Editorial Policy files that include memoranda from Assistant Managing Editor Allan M. Siegal, who was closely involved with copyediting and enforcing style standards. These memoranda explain a wide range of editorial decisions, from usage of specific terms for sensitive topics (abortion, civil rights, religious news, criminal news, and others) to headline writing and stopping the use of specific archaic terms and phrases.

Of special interest are the files concerning the "Dr. X Killings" that relate to a series of murders at a hospital in Bergen County, New Jersey, in 1966. Reporter Myron Farber, who investigated the case for *The Times*, was jailed in 1978 for refusing to disclose confidential sources and documents to the court. The file contains correspondence regarding the development of Farber's initial investigation, records concerning his and *The Times'* legal fight, and letters and clippings on the public response to Faber serving jail time. The News Sources files contain additional Metropolitan Desk records regarding subpoenaed reporters.

Files are arranged alphabetically by file title. Entries without box and folder numbers cross-reference related material in other files.

- b.2 f.5 Aesthetic Realism, 1977
- b.2 f.6 Air Pollution, 1966-1964
Readers' mail about *The Times* report on air pollution
- b.2 f.7 American Press Institute, 1969
- b.2 f.8 *Associated Press*, 1964-1965
Complaints and recommendations from *The Times* about the *Associated Press* service
Audubon Society (See: Libel and Slander)
- b.2 f.9-12 Awards (to *The Times* and Staff Members), 1964-1980
See also: New York County Lawyers Association; Pulitzer Prizes
Black Panthers (See: News Sources)
Bon Vivant Soup (Botulism Case) (See: Libel and Slander)
- b.2 f.13 Charity Appeal Boxes, 1961-1966
- b.2 f.14 Chess Column, 1962-1965
- b.2 f.15 Columbia University, 1961-1965
Correspondence concerning the Meyer Berger Award
- b.2 f.16 Communications, 1966, 1983
Correspondence regarding *The Times'* use of mobile radio systems and police scanners

Series II: Subjects, 1961-1983 (cont.)

- b.2 f.17 Copyrights, 1967
Correspondence regarding the publication in *The Times* of a letter by William Faulkner.
Courts (See: Free Press and Fair Trial)
- b.2 f.18 Critics and Criticism, 1967-1977
Of interest: memorandum from Arthur Gelb about the validity of a training program for critics (1968)
- b.2 f.19-21 Dr. X Case, 1973-1980
Files about Myron Farber, a *Times* reporter who was put in jail for refusing to surrender his notes on the Dr. X. killings in a Bergen County, New Jersey, hospital
- b.3 f.1-2 Editorial Policy: Metropolitan News, 1961-1969
Of interest: correspondence concerning the publication of names of criminals; estimates of crowd sizes; decisions regarding front page news stories
- b.3 f.3-6 Editorial Policy: Metropolitan News - Editing Staff, 1977-1980
Primarily memoranda from the metropolitan editor to the metropolitan editing staff commenting on the presentation of the news
- b.3 f.7 Editorial Policy: Metropolitan News - News Desk, 1977-1979
Memoranda, largely from News Editor Allan Siegal, to the metropolitan desk providing guidelines on how to handle particular news items, such as stories about feminism and women's issues and rules about the use of pejorative quotes and other terms
- b.3 f.8-10 Editorial Policy: Metropolitan News - Reporting Staff
Communications between the metropolitan editor and the reporters on the metropolitan desk
- b.3 f.11 Free Press and Fair Trial, 1962-1979
Correspondence about compliance with the Free Press Fair Trial guidelines and memoranda concerning specific examples of issues concerning criminal trials
- b.4 f.1 Freedom of Information Requests, 1978
- b.4 f.2 Homosexuals, 1964 (See also: Aesthetic Realism)
Memoranda about a *Newsweek* article regarding *The Times* coverage of homosexuality in New York City and a copy of the article
Hostage-taking (See: Iran)
- b.4 f.3 International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union, 1967
Complaints from the chairman of the ILGWU about a news story by Peter Millones
- b.4 f.4 Investigative Reporting, 1973-1980
- b.4 f.5 Iran, 1980
Memoranda regarding plans by the national desk for a special report on the hostages in the American Embassy in Iran and on their families in the United States; reporters from the metropolitan desk were involved in the coverage
Journalism Schools
See: Long Island University; New York University
- b.4 f.6 Jury Duty, 1977
Memoranda about requests from *The Times* to get staff excused from jury duty
- b.4 f.7-9 Legal Matters, 1964-1980
Primarily readers' complaints that were turned over to *The Times*' legal department
- b.4 f.10 Libel and Slander, 1962-1977

Series II: Subjects, 1961-1983 (cont.)

- b.4 f.11 Long Island Bureau, 1983
- b.4 f.12 Long Island University, 1966
- b.4 f.13 Metropolitan Desk: Management - Management by Objectives Program (MBO), 1976-1980
The MBO program was sometimes referred to as QIP (Quality Improvement Program)
- b.4 f.14 Metropolitan Desk: Staff, 1965-1980
See also: Editorial Policy: Metropolitan News - Editing Staff; Editorial Policy: Metropolitan News - Reporting Staff
- b.4 f.15-16 Metropolitan Desk: Staff - Miscellaneous, 1977-1980
Files on individual members of the metropolitan desk, files alphabetically by name
National Audubon Society, 1978 (See: Libel and Slander)
- b.5 f.1 National Edition, 1978
Memorandum outlining the role of the metropolitan desk in the project of a potential national edition
- b.5 f.2 Negroes, 1962-1968
Correspondence about racial identification in news stories and *The Times'* hiring of African Americans
- b.5 f.3 New York County Lawyers Association, 1978
- b.5 f.4 New York University, 1966
- b.5 f.5 Newark Bureau, 1983
- b.5 f.6 *Newark Star Ledger*, 1967
- b.5 f.7 News Department, 1966
Letter from A.M. Rosenthal outlining the physical arrangements in the newsroom
- b.5 f.8 News Department: Metro Desk Relationship with Other Desks, 1977-1980
- b.5 f.9-10 News Sources, 1978-1980
Correspondence regarding subpoenas to individual reporters of the metropolitan desk, arranged alphabetically by reporter name; analysis by James C. Goodale of legal developments concerning subpoenas
- b.5 f.11 Newsroom Technology (General), 1976-1979
Includes a survey of estimated telegram terminal usage among reporters on the metropolitan news staff
- b.5 f.12 Obituaries, 1962-1980
Correspondence regarding a program to improve the obituary page (1963-1964); memoranda on the procedures for creating advance obituaries (1978)
- b.5 f.13 Personal and Private Papers (Arthur Gelb), 1967-1968
- b.5 f.14 Personal and Private Papers (A.M. Rosenthal), 1963-1966
Planning (General)
See: Metropolitan desk: Management - MBO Program
- b.5 f.15 Police News, 1961-1966
Of interest: correspondence with Police Commissioner Michael Murphy regarding media coverage of police news
- b.5 f.16 Pulitzer Prizes (Nominations), 1979

Series II: Subjects, 1961-1983 (cont.)

- Racial Reference in the News (See: Negroes)
- Radio Cars (See: Communications)
- b.5 f.17 Religious News, 1962-1964
 - Readers' correspondence about printing sermons
 - Reporter's Notebook
 - See: Editorial Policy: Metropolitan News - News Desk
 - Reporters' Privilege (See: News Sources)
 - Subpoenas to Reporters (See: News Sources)
- b.5 f.18 *Village Voice*, 1964
 - Correspondence about criticism of *The Times* in an article in the *Village Voice*
- b.5 f.19 Weather News, 1961-1967