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Lafargue Clinic Records

Sc MG 141

Bulk Dates: 1946-1981 (bulk 1946-1958)

Extent: Shelving Unit: 4 boxes  
Linear feet: 1.6

Source and Date: George Mosse, 1982

Processor's Name: Janice Quinter

Date Finding Aid Completed: May 2005

Abstract: Material regarding the founding and operation of this Harlem based mental health clinic, patient records and files on the professional staff.

Provenance: The collection was donated to the Schomburg Center by George Mosse, Dr. Hilde Mosse's husband.

Organization note: Collection is organized in three series: Administrative Files, Patient Records, and Writings.

Access: Researchers must sign Confidentiality Form for access to patient case files and personnel records.

Reproductions: All requests subject to limitations noted in divisional policies on reproduction.

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Other Source of Description: RLIN #: NYP89-A135

Citation: [Item], Lafargue Clinic Records, Sc MG 141, Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library

Index Terms

Names: Lafargue Clinic (New York, N.Y.); St. Philip's Episcopal Church (Harlem, New York, N.Y); Mosse, Hilde L.; Wertham, Frederic, 1895-1981.

Subject: African Americans – Health and hygiene – New York (State) – New York; Child psychiatry – New York (State) – New York; Psychiatric clinics – New York (State) – New York; Community mental health services – New York (State) – New York; Mental health – New York (State) – New York; Mental health counseling -- New York (State) – New York; Mental health facilities – New York (State) – New York; Harlem (New York, N.Y.) – Social conditions.

**LAFARGUE CLINIC RECORDS**

**The New York Public Library**

**Schomburg Center for Research  
in Black Culture**

**515 Malcolm X Boulevard  
New York, New York 10037**

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**LAFARGUE CLINIC RECORDS. 1946-1981 (bulk 1946-1958)**  
**1.4 lin. ft.**

**Historical Sketch**

Lafargue Clinic was founded in 1946 by the well-known psychiatrist Fredric Wertham (director of the mental hygiene clinic at Queens General Hospital), along with novelist Richard Wright and Earl Brown, a staff writer for *Life*. Reverend Shelton Hale Bishop, rector of St. Philip's Episcopal Church, offered free use of the basement space in the parish house, where the clinic remained until its closing in 1959. The clinic was named after the nineteenth century Cuban physician, philosopher and social reformer, Paul Lafargue.

As the first mental hygiene clinic in Harlem, Lafargue was established to provide low cost treatments (25¢ per visit for those who could afford it) to a primarily black population. At the time black people in need of psychiatric care could not obtain treatment in most New York City hospitals and clinics due to racial discrimination. As originally conceived, the clinic was to concentrate on juvenile cases, as Dr. Wertham hoped to treat children to reduce the percentage of juvenile delinquency cases in Manhattan. Although it was assumed that the vast majority of the patients would be black, the founders were determined that no color line would be drawn regarding either their patients or staff. In practice, Lafargue treated black and white, adults and children, and aided patients from other parts of New York as well as Harlem.

The emphasis of the Lafargue Clinic was not on testing, but on practical, intensive and if necessary, prolonged psychotherapy. The clinic determined that in addition to mental disturbances induced by the special problems of a segregated minority, there were many diagnoses of neuroses and psychoses common in other communities. The staff was adamant that the patients be treated at Lafargue as they would be by psychiatrists elsewhere. No referrals for appointments were necessary, although some patients were sent by the Veterans Administration and the State Department of Social Welfare, treatments at the clinic were voluntary.

Lafargue Clinic received no public funding though it accepted contributions. By 1947 its all volunteer staff consisted of fourteen psychiatrists, twelve social workers and other specialists and clerical workers. Among the professional staff were Dr. Hilde Mosse (Physician-in-Charge), Katherine Williams Battle, Peter Beron, Charles Collins (black psychotherapist), Ernst Jolowicz, Andre Tweed (black psychiatrist), and Luise Zucker. Dr. Wertham saw all new patients. The clinic was open only two evenings a week as the staff had private practices or worked for other institutions.

In the early 1950's Lafargue Clinic participated in one of the many legal cases leading up to the landmark *Brown vs Board of Education* decision to abolish school segregation. Based upon a 1951 study of black and white children in Delaware undertaken by the Clinic, Dr. Wertham and the staff determined that school segregation caused mental health problems. Lawyers of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, representing a group of children and their parents who were contesting segregation in Wilmington, used the results of the study in

that court case. The judge decided in favor of the plaintiffs, and African-American children were admitted to two schools in Delaware which were not previously integrated. Several psychiatrists on staff published clinical studies based upon their experiences, among them Hilde Mosse and Fredric Wertham.

### **Scope and Content**

The Lafargue Clinic Records consist of material regarding the founding and operation of the clinic, and includes correspondence, memoranda, statistics, articles, manuscripts and news clippings about the clinic, and news articles by or about the professional staff. Half the collection consists of patient records and files on the professional staff.

The **ADMINISTRATIVE FILES series, 1946-1958 (. 8 lin. ft.)** contains information about the establishment and operation of the clinic. Much of the correspondence concerns invitations for Drs. Fredric Wertham and Hilde Mosse to address school groups and organizations, primarily in New York City. Topics they spoke about include various aspects of mental health, discipline for children, and Dr. Wertham's 1954 study about the harmful effects of violent comic books on children and their relationship to juvenile delinquency, discussed in his book entitled *Seduction of the Innocent*. A letter dated September 1, 1956 written to Kenneth Clark by Dr. Mosse deplores the lack of mention of the 1951 desegregation study conducted by the Lafargue Clinic, at a conference about desegregation chaired by Clark in 1956.

The folder "Statistics, 1946-1956" lists numbers of patients broken down by race, gender, adult or child, number of visits, and patient fees. The diagnoses and whether the individual improved are also provided, as are the names of the patients. The professional background of the staff is also indicated. The folders "Clinic Routine" contain information concerning the way the staff should take the patient's history, critiques of staff and related comments, 1949-1953.

The professional staff record, 1947-1966, contain applications and letters of recommendation for clinic employees, curriculum vitae and/or resumes, performance evaluations, conference programs, and letters of recommendation Dr. Mosse wrote for her own staff, some personal letters to her, notes she prepared, and other correspondence. The staff represented in these files include Kathryn Williams Battle, Charles Collins, and Ernst Jolowicz. Several of the staff immigrated to the United States from Europe before and during World War II, and they relate their experiences in these files.

This series also includes printed information prepared by Lafargue Clinic; this publicity encompasses reprints and news clippings, 1946-1958.

The **PATIENT RECORDS series, 1946-1958 (.4 lin. ft.)** consist of files for thirty-two individuals who received treatment at the Lafargue Clinic, among them children and adults, male and female, and black and white. The case files are arranged alphabetically by name of patient. Case files include intake records (which give general information about the patient such as

residence, date of birth, date of acceptance into the clinic, name of person who referred patient and marital status), evaluation notes, psychiatric and medical test reports, and results of Rorschach and IQ tests, observations, letters requesting treatment, and letters requesting information about patients from external organizations. There are also drawings by school age patients, patient testimonies, and letters from parents requesting treatment for their children. Many of the testimonies, the reports and patient observations are highly sensitive. These documents reflect cases of behavior disorder, depression, abuse, and sexual exploration and exploitation, among other psychiatric and medical conditions. Many of the cases were observed and treated over a period of weeks or years, 1947-1958.

In the series **WRITINGS, 1946-1981 (.3 lin. ft.)** additional descriptions can be found concerning the clinic written by the staff, particularly several drafts of a chapter for an unpublished book by Mosse, "Child Psychiatry and Social Action," 1981. There are also published articles by Mosse and Wertham. An NBC television script "The House I Enter: A Portrait of the American Doctor" includes a scene of an interview with Wertham at Lafargue Clinic in 1957. This series also contains reviews of his book, *Seduction of the Innocent*.

Provenance

Gift of George Mosse, Dr. Hilde Mosse's husband, who donated the files to the Schomburg Center at Dr. Mosse's request after her death. The files were rescued and kept by Dr. Mosse following the closing of the clinic.

MG 141 SCM 82-8

Complementary Collections:

Mosse Family Papers at the Leo Baeck Institute, Center for Jewish History

**Container List**

<b><u>Box</u></b>	<b><u>Folder</u></b>	
		ADMINISTRATIVE FILES
1	1	Administrative Papers, 1947-1956
	2	Administrative Papers, 1956-1961
		Correspondence
	3	1946-1953
	4	1954
	5	1954-1956
	6	1956
	7	1957-1958
	8	Memoranda, 1953-1954
	9	Statistics, 1946-1956
	10	"Diary" - Activities Detailed, 1955-1956
	11	Clinic Routine, 1949-1952
	12	Clinic Routine, 1952-1953
	13	Psychology Tests, 1947
	14	Clinical Techniques, n.d.
	15	Clinic Forms, Greeting Cards, and Printed Matter, 1954-1957
	16	Visitors, 1950-1952
	17	Christmas Gifts, 1951-1958
	18	Dispensary License, 1947
2		Professional Staff - RESTRICTED
	1	Battle, Kathryn Williams, 1947-1958
	2	B, 1951-1965
	3	Collins, Charles, 1949-1966
	4	D - G, 1951-1958
	5	H - Je, 1952-1959
	6	Jo - O, 1946-1958
	7	P - R, 1948-1957
	8	S - Z, 1947-1953
		Publicity
3	1	Reprints re Lafargue Clinic, 1946-1958
		News Clippings re Lafargue Clinic
	2-3	1946-1947
	4	1948-1956
	5	1946-1947
	6	1947-1956

**Container List**

<b><u>Box</u></b>	<b><u>Folder</u></b>	
3	7	News Clippings re Mental Health in Harlem and St. Philip's Episcopal Church, 1951, 1959-1970
	8-30	PATIENT RECORDS - RESTRICTED
4	1-9	PATIENT RECORDS - RESTRICTED
	10	Observation of Children Watching Cinderella, 1955
		WRITINGS
		Manuscripts by Hilde L. Mosse
		"Child Psychiatry and Social Action"
	11	Latest Draft, 1981
	12	Drafts, n.d.
	13	Draft - Indication for Psychotherapy - pp. 604-616
	14	Writings by Other Authors and Background Information, 1946-1981
	15	Articles by Hilde Mosse, 1949-1959
		Fredric Wertham
	16	Articles by Fredric Wertham, 1944-1956
	17	NBC Television Script - "The House I Enter: A Portrait of the American Doctor" - Includes a Scene re Lafargue Clinic with Dr. Wertham, 1957
	18	Fredric Wertham - <i>Seduction of the Innocent</i> - Articles, 1955-1956
	19	Panel and Patient Discussions - Fredric Wertham, 1947 and 1957
	20	Articles by Other Authors, 1947-1956

