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Guide to the

**William Alphaeus Hunton papers**

1926-1967

Sc Micro R-5003

Processed by Andre Elizee.

## Summary

**Creator:** Hunton, Alphaeus, 1903-1970

**Title:** William Alphaeus Hunton papers

**Date:** 1926-1967

**Source:** Gift of Dorothy Hunton, October 1985. SCM 85-38

**Abstract:** Personal papers including biographical statements, and correspondence with other scholars and African political leaders including E.U. Essien, Kenneth Kaunda of Zambia, and Nnamdi Azikiwe of Eastern Nigeria. Correspondence, court summonses and subpoenas, petitions, press releases, and printed matter related to Hunton's imprisonment for refusing to submit the records of the Civil Rights Bail Fund to the Dies Committee on Un-American Activities. Other papers concern his teaching activities. Hunton's work for the Encyclopedia Africana Project is represented by administrative files, personnel records, correspondence with Dr. J. Yanney-Wilson, Secretary of the Ghana Academy of Sciences, area editors, and Africanist scholars, and minutes, administrative reports and memoranda. Correspondence with Kwame Nkrumah, 1962-1970; and a clipping file on Nkrumah. Material pertaining to the National Negro Congress consisting mainly of press releases and printed matter relating to the Labor Committee of the Washington Branch of the National Negro Congress, and to the Dies Committee allegation that Hunton was a communist. Hunton's involvement with the Council on African Affairs is represented by correspondence, administrative and financial records, legal and financial documents, and printed matter.

### Conditions Governing Access:

Researchers are restricted to microfilm copy.

**Alternative Form Available:** Collection available on microfilm; New York Public Library; call number Sc Micro R-5003

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**Language of the Material:** English

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

## Creator History

Born in Atlanta, Georgia on September 18, 1903, William Alphaeus Hunton, Jr. was a scholar and a political activist. His grandfather, Stanton Hunton, a former slave, migrated from Virginia to the little town of Chatham in Canada in 1840. An abolitionist and a close friend of John Brown, he participated in the planning of the battle of Harper's Ferry. His son, William Alphaeus, Sr. migrated to Atlanta where he served as the first black General Secretary of the black section of the Young Men's Christian Association. Addie Waite Hunton, Alphaeus Sr.'s wife, studied sociology at the College of the City of New York and at Kaiser Wilhelm University in Strassburg, Germany. She taught at the Alabama A & M College and was a founding member of the National Association of Colored Women. The couple moved to Brooklyn with their two children, William Alphaeus, Jr. and his sister Eunice, after the Atlanta riots of 1906.

William Alphaeus Hunton, Jr. attended Boys High School in Brooklyn. His father had died prematurely in 1916, and he worked as a porter for the next few years to finance his education. He graduated from Howard University in 1924, and Harvard University in 1926. Upon graduation from Harvard, he became an instructor and later a lecturer and assistant-professor in the English and Romance Languages Department at Howard University. During this time, he was also a Ph.D candidate at New York University. His doctoral dissertation, *Tennyson and the Victorian Political Milieu* was accepted in 1938. Hunton successfully argued that Tennyson and other influential ideologues of British imperialist expansion in the 19th century were more concerned with leadership and the preservation of the status quo than the democratic ideals of the French revolution.

While still at Howard University, Hunton attended the founding convention of the National Negro Congress in Chicago in 1936. A member of the National Executive Board, he helped launch the Washington, D.C. branch of that organization and was the chairman of its Labor Committee. He led and participated in several campaigns to "blast Jim Crow out of Washington," and in his own words, "make the District budget serve the human needs of the community." Through boycotts, picket lines, demonstrations, petitions and strikes, the Washington branch of the National Negro Congress sought to combat racial discrimination against black workers in the federal government bureaucracy, in stores, hotels and various branches of industry, as well as in the fields of health, education and housing. In April 1940, Hunton was instrumental in organizing the NNC's third conference in Washington, D.C.; he chaired the committee which drafted the NNC constitution, and delivered a major address, *Negroes and the War* on nationwide radio. The National Negro Congress was a broad federation of some 3,000 civic, religious and fraternal organizations dedicated to the achievement of social, cultural, political and economic equality for blacks. During the Second World War, however, it was accused by the Dies Committee on Un-American Activities of attempted sabotage of the defense industry through the "infiltration of black communists" in the work force.

Hunton became the Educational Director of the Council on African Affairs in 1943, during a one year leave of absence from Howard University. The following year, he resigned from his job as a professor and settled permanently in New York with his third wife, Dorothy Williams. After the withdrawal of Max Yergan from the post of Executive Director of the CAA, Hunton additionally assumed the role of executive secretary - assuring, often alone, the functioning of the entire organization until its dissolution in 1955. Through his work in the CAA, Hunton sought to educate the general public about the history of Africa and its struggle against colonialism and imperialism. In addition to the publication of its monthly bulletin *New Africa* and a regular newsletter, *Spotlight on Africa*, which featured in-depth stories on Africa by renown scholars such as W.E.B. DuBois and Hunton himself, the Council mounted effective public

campaigns and raised funds around specific issues such as the Campaign of Defiance Against Unjust Laws in South Africa, the partition of the former Italian colonies in East Africa by the NATO powers in 1949 and the jailing of black leaders in Kenya and South Africa in 1953. But the emergence of the Cold War and the increasing scrutiny of the House Un-American Activities Committee of civil rights and progressive organizations in this country hampered the work of the Council. The CAA and its officers were repeatedly investigated and accused of subversion, unpatriotism and disloyalty. Then, in 1951, Hunton, along with three other trustees of the Civil Rights Bail Fund, itself labelled a “communist front,” were sentenced to six months in prison for refusing to submit their records to the HUAC.

Due to the generally negative attitude toward communists and their associates in this country, Hunton was unable, after the dissolution of the CAA in 1955 to resume his academic career. His book, *Decision on Africa* was published in 1957 with an introduction by DuBois who praised it as an important scholarly work. Meanwhile, he worked for the Hudson Bay Fur Company and as a seasonal employee. Although he was able during that period to travel to Africa where he was honored by several heads of state, according to his wife, he often deplored that he could not contribute more than occasional lectures to the quickly unfolding political situation in the Africa of the late 1950s. Thus, when President Sekou Toure invited him to immigrate to Guinea, he quickly accepted.

In the course of an interview with President Sekou Toure in Conakry in July 1960, Hunton outlined his interest in editing a new English edition of Toure's speeches and writings, and in teaching a course on Foreign Affairs at the Guinean National School of Administration. Meanwhile, he accepted the post of English teacher at the Lycée Classique de Donka, and for a time served as temporary editor of the weekly English bulletin of the Information Ministry. In 1962 he resigned his appointment and accepted an invitation from W.E.B. DuBois to work in Ghana under his direction.

Two years earlier, Nkrumah had invited DuBois to Ghana to write a comprehensive history of Africa and its contribution to world civilization. Undertaking this pioneering effort was a welcomed challenge to Hunton's scholarly and administrative abilities. In addition, he wanted the opportunity to work directly with DuBois and Nkrumah, whose philosophies of pan-africanism and anti-imperialism he had espoused since the 1940s. As secretary of the Encyclopedia Africana Project at the Ghana Academy of Sciences Hunton proved to be an effective administrator who, within five years, built the conceptual, human and material framework for the ten volume encyclopedia slated for publication under the auspices of the Organization of African Unity, beginning in 1970. With the overthrow of Nkrumah, however, he was demoted in late 1965 to the post of area editor. The following year, Hunton was expelled from Ghana, along with his wife and other American expatriates, and given ten days to leave the country. The Encyclopedia Africana Project was subsequently abandoned.

The expulsion order was consistent with Hunton's expressed views, prior to the coup, on governments similar to the National Liberation Council which overthrew Nkrumah. Following the independence of several African countries in the early 1960s and the publication of his major book, *Decision on Africa*, Hunton had written and lectured widely on neo-colonialism and imperialist domination versus development in Africa. He asserted that the colonial powers had yielded to popular self-government demands in certain areas in order to strengthen their economic domination, and that the rulers of certain of the newly independent African countries were in fact “the willing servants of their imperialist masters.” In a speech at the German African Society in East Germany in 1961, he explained that the *comprador* *comprador* =dependent merchant or capitalist sectors which function as managers or middle-men for international financial interest in the underdeveloped world.

African ruling classes had reneged on their promises of improvement for the majority of people in favor of personal greed, increased economic and political dependency on international finance capital, and

military rule. Hunton's embryonic sociology of class, leadership and development in the emerging African nations thus earned him the enmity of the post-Nkrumah government.

Following the expulsion order, the Hunttons sailed to New York in late 1966, only to return to Africa the following year on a personal invitation from Zambian president Kenneth Kaunda. Hunton had hoped at first to resume his work on the Encyclopedia Africana while in Zambia, but Kaunda's efforts near the Ghanaian military government were to no avail. He began work instead on a history and compilation of the nationalist movement in Zambia, under the sponsorship of the Kenneth Kaunda Foundation. This project was also never completed. William Alphaeus Hunton died of cancer in Lusaka on January 13, 1970 at the age of 63.

## **Scope and Content Note**

Divided into five series, the William Alphaeus Hunton Papers (1926-1970) consist of PERSONAL and PROFESSIONAL Papers, ORGANIZATIONAL Files for the National Negro Congress and the Council on African Affairs (CAA), and LITERARY Manuscripts of William Alphaeus Hunton and LITERARY Manuscripts of Dorothy Hunton. The collection contains documentation on Hunton's life and career, and the administration of the CAA and the Encyclopedia Africana Project in Ghana.

## **Key Terms**

### **Geographic Names**

Africa -- Politics and government -- 1945-1960  
Ghana -- Politics and government -- 1957-1979  
Nigeria -- Politics and government -- 1960-1975  
South Africa -- Politics and government -- 1948-1961  
United States -- Politics and government -- 1933-1953  
United States -- Social conditions -- 1933-1945

### **Subjects**

African Americans -- Civil rights  
African Americans -- Political activity  
African Americans -- Societies, etc  
Black militant organizations -- South Africa  
Black nationalism -- South Africa  
Blacks -- South Africa -- Political activity  
Civil rights -- United States  
Civilization, African -- Research  
Encyclopedia Africana project  
Governmental investigations -- United States  
Political parties -- South Africa

### **Names**

Hunton, Alphaeus, 1903-1970  
Azikiwe, Nnamdi, 1904-1996  
Bunche, Ralph J. (Ralph Johnson), 1904-1971  
Dies, Martin, 1900-1972  
Essien-Udom, Essien Udosen  
Hunton, Dorothy  
Kuanda, Kenneth D. (Kenneth David), 1924-

Nehru, Jawaharlal, 1889-1964  
Nkrumah, Kwame, 1909-1972  
Roosevelt, Eleanor, 1884-1962  
Sisulu, Walter  
Yanney-Wilson, J  
African National Congress  
Civil Rights Bail Fund  
Council on African Affairs  
Ghana Academy of Sciences  
National Negro Congress (U.S.)  
National Negro Congress (U.S.). Washington Branch. Labor Committee  
United States. Congress. House. Special Committee on Un-American Activities (1938-1944)

## Container List

### Personal Papers

The *PERSONAL* papers include biographical statements; correspondence with E. U. Essien, professor of political science at Ibadan University in Nigeria, following Hunton's expulsion from Ghana and with J. Suret-Canale, a French historian, President Kenneth Kaunda of Zambia, E. Harper Johnson, Afro-American artist and writer, and Nnamdi Azikiwe, Premier of Eastern Nigeria; correspondence, court summons and subpoena, petitions, press releases and printed matter related to Hunton's five month sentence in jail for refusing to submit the records of the Civil Rights Bail Fund to the Dies Committee on Un-American Activities; material related to his expulsion from Ghana and clippings of newspaper and magazine articles about Hunton.

- b. 1 Biographical 1908-1970
- b. 1 f. 1
- b. 1 f. 2 Correspondence 1948, 1958, 1962-1967
- b. 1 f. 3 Civil Rights Bail Fund - William Alphaeus Hunton Case 1951
- b. 1 f. 4 Expulsion From Ghana 1967
- b. 1 f. 5 Articles About Hunton 1950S, 1971

### Professional Papers

The *PROFESSIONAL* series encompasses his teaching career at Howard University and at the Lycée Classique de Donka in Guinea, and the administrative files from the Secretariat of the Encyclopedia Africana Project. The files on Howard University include his letters of appointment and resignation, lecture notes, bibliographies and class syllabi, and letters and articles he wrote as Secretary of the Howard University Teachers Union which he helped found in 1938.

The Guinea file contains correspondence related to his appointment and his trip there, miscellaneous printed matter, and the text of a lecture on Richard Wright given by Hunton in Conakry. Hunton's correspondence with Kwame Nkrumah (1962-1970) and a substantial clipping file on the latter can be found in the Ghana subseries. Administrative files of the Encyclopedia Africana Project which constitute the bulk of this subseries contain Hunton's personnel records, correspondence with Dr. J. Yanney-Wilson, Secretary of the Ghana Academy of Sciences, with area editors and Africanist scholars, as well as minutes, administrative reports and memoranda.

#### Howard University

- b. 1 f. 6 Correspondence 1926-1944
- b. 1 f. 7 Teachers Union 1938
- b. 1 f. 8 Lecture Notes
- b. 1 f. 9 Guinea 1960-1962

#### Ghana - Encyclopedia Africana Secretariat

- b. 1 f. 10 Correspondence - Kwame Nkrumah 1962-1965
- b. 1 f. 11 Correspondence - General 1962-1966
- b. 1 f. 12 Personnel File 1966
- b. 1 f. 13 Administrative File 1963-1966
- b. 1 f. 14 Printed Matter - Kwame Nkrumah

## Organizational Files

The *ORGANIZATION* series contains material related to the National Negro Congress and the Council on African Affairs.

The file of the *National Negro Congress* consists mainly of press releases and printed matter related to the Labor Committee of the Washington branch of the National Negro Congress, and to the Dies Committee's allegation that Hunton was a communist.

The *Council on African Affairs (CAA)* subseries is divided into correspondence, administrative records, legal and financial documents and printed matter. Outstanding correspondents include Kwame Nkrumah and Eleanor Roosevelt (1944), Ralph Bunche (1945), Jawaharlal Nehru (1946) and Walter Sisulu, Secretary-General of the African National Congress of South Africa (1953). Located in the Administrative Record is a memorandum addressed to Paul Robeson, Chairman of the CAA, by three members of the organization charging then Executive Director Max Yergan of "malfeasance, misfeasance and non-feasance" (1948), as well as reports of the Educational Director (Hunton) and the minutes of the meeting of the Executive Board which led to the dissolution of the Council. The Financial Records, mainly reports and bank statements, relate to fundraising projects of the CAA, particularly the African Famine Relief Campaign, the Kenyatta Defense Fund and the Campaign of Defiance Against Unjust Laws in South Africa.

b. 1 f. 15 National Negro Congress 1941-1942

Council On African Affairs

b. 1 f. 16 Correspondence 1945-1955

b. 1 f. 17 Administrative File 1944-1955

b. 1 f. 18 Financial 1946-1954

b. 1 f. 19 Legal 1949-1955

Press Releases

b. 2 1946

b. 2 f. 1

b. 2 f. 2 1947

b. 2 f. 3 1948-1954

Printed Matter

b. 2 f. 4 New Africa 1946-1952

b. 2 f. 5 Spotlight On Africa 1953-1955

b. 2 f. 6 Clippings

### Literary

The *LITERARY* series contains an abridged version of *Tennyson and the Victorian Political Milieu*, Hunton's Ph. D thesis, published by the Graduate School of New York University in 1938, and typescripts of lectures, articles and reviews written by Hunton from 1938 to 1968. Letters and reviews by DuBois, Azikiwe, Elliott P. Skinner, Saunders Redding and Cyril Briggs related to his book, *Decision on Africa* are included therein.

b. 2 f. 7 Academic 1934-1938

Decision On Africa

b. 2 f. 8 Correspondence 1956-1960, 1966

b. 2 f. 9 Reviews 1957-1961

b. 2 f. 10 Reference Notes

Lectures, Articles And Reviews

b. 2 f. 11 1938-1958

b. 2 f. 12 1959-1968

Printed Matter

b. 3 Articles About W.E.B. Dubois 1963, 1967

b. 3 f. 1

Literary (cont.)  
Lectures, Articles And Reviews (cont.)  
Printed Matter (cont.)

b. 3 f. 2        Speaking Engagements 1940S, 1950S

b. 3 f. 3        Notes

Dorothy Hunton Typescripts

The last series consists of two typescripts by DOROTHY HUNTON: *Selected Writings of William Alphaeus Hunton* and *Alphaeus Hunton, the Unsung Valiant*, published by the author in 1986.

*Alphaeus Hunton, The Unsung Valiant* 1986

b. 3 f. 4        pp. 1-110

b. 3 f. 5        pp. 111-242

b. 3 f. 6        pp. 243-346

*Selected Writings Of William A. Hunton*

b. 3 f. 7        pp. 1-95

b. 3 f. 8        pp. 96-201

b. 3 f. 9        pp. 202-260