



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

Guide to the

Jack Hunter O'Dell papers

ca. 1959-2014 [bulk 1969-2005]

Sc MG 497

Accessioned by Andre Elizee, Diana Lachatanere, and Steven Fullwood, 1993-2014. Processed by Lauren Stark, September 2021.

Summary

Creator: O'Dell, Jack (Jack H.)

Title: Jack Hunter O'Dell papers

Date: ca. 1959-2014 [bulk 1969-2005]

Size: 5.84 linear feet (14 boxes, 1 oversize folder)

Source: Gift of Jack O'Dell, 1993-2014.

Abstract: Jack Hunter O'Dell was an African American civil rights and political activist; he was known for his work with Operation PUSH and the National Rainbow Coalition, where he was the policy adviser to Reverend Jesse Jackson and director of international affairs. The Jack Hunter O'Dell papers consist mostly of professional papers related to his work with Operation PUSH, the National Rainbow Coalition, and various other civil rights organizations.

Conditions Governing Access:

Recommendation letters closed until 50 years after most recent date in each individual file.

Preferred citation: [Item], Jack Hunter O'Dell papers, Sc MG 497, 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 Andre Elizee, Diana Lachatanere, and Steven Fullwood, 1993-2014. Processed by Lauren Stark, September 2021.

Separated Materials:

Transferred to the Art and Artifacts Division: programs.

Transferred to the Photographs and Prints Division: photographs.

Creator History

Born in Detroit, Michigan, in 1923, Jack Hunter O'Dell attended Xavier University in New Orleans in 1941, where he studied pharmacology. With the outbreak of World War II, he dropped out of college and joined the merchant marines, which introduced him to many leftist ideas, progressive political movements, and the fight against exploitation and racism. In 1946, O'Dell joined other freedom fighters at the Southern Negro Youth Congress summit in Columbia, South Carolina. In 1960, O'Dell became head of fundraising and voter registration in several Southern states for the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), where he became associated with Martin Luther King, Jr; however, O'Dell's affiliation with the Communist party forced him to resign from SCLC and sever his relationship to Dr. King. It most likely did not completely end his contact with Dr. King, but forced him to keep his consultations free from public exposure. In 1963, O'Dell became the associate editor of *Freedomways* magazine, a Black intellectual and arts journal, and around 1970, he joined the faculty of Antioch College's Graduate School of Education in Washington, D.C. He joined People United to Save Humanity (Jesse Jackson's Operation PUSH) as a foreign policy adviser in 1976, and later became a consultant on international affairs for Reverend Jackson during his presidential bids in 1984 and 1988. In 1984, he became the director of international affairs at the National Rainbow Coalition, a position he held until the early 2000s. Additionally, O'Dell was a member of the boards of directors of various organizations, including SANE/Freeze Peace Organization, the Pacifica Foundation radio station group (where he served as the chair), and the Palestine Human Rights Campaign, among others. He also served as a consultant for the Southern Organizing Committee for Economic and Social Justice (SOC) and the Institute for Community Leadership. O'Dell died in October 2019.

Scope and Content Note

The Jack O'Dell papers mostly consist of professional papers related to his work with Operation PUSH, the National Rainbow Coalition, and various other civil rights organizations. There is a limited amount of personal matter, which mostly includes correspondence, some memorabilia (souvenir programs), and a transcript of an oral history interview done with James Early in 1997. The Professional papers consist of material related to his early career and activism efforts with the Committee to Defend Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), among others. These files contain correspondence, memos, reports, printed matter, and meeting minutes. The majority of the Professional papers documents O'Dell's role as policy adviser to Reverend Jesse Jackson and director of international affairs for Operation PUSH and the National Rainbow Coalition (NRC) in Washington, D.C. during the 1980s-1990s. Included in these files are correspondence (with such correspondents as Jesse Jackson and Manning Marable) and notes; conference packets and other materials related to civil rights; files related to solidarity movements in Africa, the Middle East, and Latin America; materials related to O'Dell's role as an adviser to Jesse Jackson during his presidential runs; papers related to various Marches on Washington for different causes; speeches and statements written on behalf of Jackson; and printed matter. Additionally, there are materials related to O'Dell's work with other organizations as a board member and consultant; materials related to appearances and engagements outside of his work with PUSH and the NRC (interview requests, conference materials, and printed matter); and writing samples (published and unpublished). Finally, the Subject files contain printed matter (newsletters, reports, speeches, meeting minutes and resolutions, articles, and clippings) on various subjects related to civil rights and international relations.

Arrangement: Arranged into three series: I. Personal; II. Professional; and III. Subject files.

Key Terms

Subjects

African American communists
African American political activists
African Americans -- Civil rights -- Southern States
African Americans -- Political activity
Authors, Black
Blacks -- Reparations
International relations
Political activists -- United States
Protest movements -- United States -- 20th century
Social movements

Geographic Names

United States -- Politics and government

Names

Jackson, Jesse, 1941-
King, Martin Luther, Jr., 1929-1968
O'Dell, Jack (Jack H.)
National Rainbow Coalition (U.S.)
Operation PUSH (U.S.)
Southern Christian Leadership Conference

Container List

Personal 1996-2014

- b. 1 f. 1 Correspondence and memorabilia 1960-2014
- b. 1 f. 2-3 Transcript of interview with James Early for the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture's oral history project 1997 May

Professional ca. 1959-2012

Established in 1971 by Jesse Jackson, PUSH/People United to Save Humanity (later changed from "Save" to "Serve") was an organization dedicated to improving the economic conditions of Black communities across the United States. In 1984, following his first presidential campaign, Jackson launched the National Rainbow Coalition which sought equal rights for all Americans. Today, the Rainbow PUSH Coalition is the result of a merger between Operation PUSH and the Rainbow Coalition in 1996; its mission is "to protect, defend, and gain civil rights by leveling the economic and educational playing fields, and to promote peace and justice around the world".

The Early career and activism efforts subseries contains materials for O'Dell's work with the Committee to Defend Martin Luther King, Jr., SCLC, the Medgar Evers Fund, and *Freedomways*. The Committee to Defend Martin Luther King, Jr. files consist of financial records (amounts of donations, tickets purchased, and receipts). The SCLC files include O'Dell's roles as the director of voter registration, the organizer of the Martin Luther King, Jr. film project, and director of the New York offices. The director of voter registration file contains a report, flyer, and a photocopied letter from Martin Luther King, Jr., about O'Dell's Communist affiliation, along with additional correspondence. O'Dell was the staff coordinator of a film festival in 70 cities for the showing of the documentary, *King, a Filmed Record: Montgomery to Memphis*. These files mainly consist of correspondence and memos, budget information, and contact lists. The Medgar Evers fund includes correspondence and lists of donations. *Freedomways* files contain correspondence, drafts, and final publications of O'Dell's articles, such as "Charleston's Legacy to the Poor People's Campaign", *Freedomways*, third quarter, 1969, and "Over the Rainbow: U.S. Foreign Policy and World Development", *Freedomways*, vol. 24, #1, 1984. The PUSH and NRC files are combined since these two non-profit organizations founded by Jesse Jackson were merged into Rainbow/PUSH in 1996. Besides containing files related to O'Dell's roles as the director of chapter expansion and staff development (1973-1976), director of the international affairs department (1976-1974) of PUSH, and director of international affairs for NRC, they also include materials related to O'Dell's role as an adviser to Jackson during his two presidential runs and consultant to Jackson on international affairs. Although some of these materials fall outside of the PUSH/NRC purview, they are included here because of the immense overlap in dates and overall work with Jackson in these various capacities. The subseries Work with other organizations is comprised of material related to O'Dell's participation as a Board member, advisory member, or consultant with the following civil rights organizations: Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial Center; Southern Organizing Committee for Economic and Social Justice (SOC); Committee for a National Health Service; American Friends Peace Service Committee (AFSC); World Festival of Youth and Students; Pacifica Foundation; Palestine Human Rights Campaign; SANE/Freeze; Palestine Solidarity Committee; 30th Anniversary of the Mobilization of the March on Washington; W. E. B. Du Bois Foundation; Institute for Community Leadership; Charleston Laureate Lecture Series; and Committees of Correspondence for Democracy and Socialism (CCDS). The documents in this subseries include correspondence and memos, reports, printed matter, and handwritten notes. The Appearances and engagements subseries is comprised of interview and appearance requests and printed matter for events in which O'Dell participated. These events and appearances occurred outside of his work with PUSH and NRC. Included are published interviews, event flyers, conference programs, handwritten notes, press releases, and meeting notes. The final subseries, Writing, contains published and unpublished writing by O'Dell, mostly written independently of any association with an organization. Published writing includes *Afro-Americans Stand Up for Middle East Peace* (edited by James Zogby and O'Dell, 1980) and "Race, Class, and Gender in the Struggle for Substantive Democracy" in *Jack O'Dell: The Fierce Urgency of Now* (2005; signed by all authors, including O'Dell), among others. Unpublished writing includes early handwritten notes on anti-colonialism and international relations, speech drafts and notes, possible article drafts, and fragments.

Arranged into 5 subseries: 1. Early career and activism efforts; 2. PUSH and NRC; 3. Work with other organizations; 4. Appearances and engagements; and 5. Writing.

Rainbow PUSH Coalition. "Brief History." Accessed September 27, 2021,
<https://www.rainbowpush.org/brief-history>.

Early career and activism efforts 1960-2000

Arranged chronologically.

- b. 1 f. 4 **Committee to Defend Martin Luther King, Jr 1960-1961**
Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) 1960-1971
- b. 1 f. 5 **Voter registration director 1960-1963**
Includes photocopied letter from Martin Luther King, Jr.
- b. 1 f. 6-7 **Martin Luther King, Jr. film project 1969-1970**
- b. 1 f. 8 **Director of New York offices and Executive staff member 1969-1971**
- b. 1 f. 9 **Medgar Evers Fund 1963**
- b. 2 f. 1 ***Freedomways* 1969-2000**

PUSH and the NRC 1971-2005

Arranged chronologically. NRC files begin in 1984 and overlap with PUSH in 1984-1985.

- b. 2 f. 2 **1971-1974**
- b. 2 f. 3 **1975-1976**
- b. 2 f. 4 **1977**
- b. 2 f. 5 **1978**
- b. 2 f. 6 **1979**
- b. 2 f. 7 o. 1 **1980**
Includes a poster for the 1980 March on Washington to get the U.S. out of Vieques in oversized folder.
- b. 3 f. 1 **1981**
- b. 3 f. 2 **1982**
- 1983**
- b. 3 f. 3 **January-June**
- b. 3 f. 4 **June-December**
- b. 4 f. 1 **1984**
File contains PUSH and NRC materials.
- b. 4 f. 2 **1985**
File includes PUSH and NRC materials.
- 1986**
From 1986 on, the files just refer to NRC.
- b. 4 f. 3 o. 1 **January-April**
Includes poster for NRC's 1986 convention in oversized folder.
- b. 4 f. 4 **May-December**
- 1987**
- b. 5 f. 1 **January-September**
- b. 5 f. 2 o. 1 **October-December**
Oversized folder includes "Run Jesse Run" poster, presumably signed by Jackson, from October 1987.
- 1988**

Professional (cont.)
PUSH and the NRC (cont.)
1988 (cont.)

- b. 5 f. 3 January-March
- b. 6 f. 1 April-June
- b. 6 f. 2 July-September
- b. 6 f. 3 October-December
- b. 6 f. 4 Unknown months
- b. 7 f. 1 1989
- 1990
- b. 7 f. 2 January-May
- b. 7 f. 3 June-December
- b. 7 f. 4 1991
- 1992
- b. 8 f. 1 January-June
- b. 8 f. 2 July-December
- b. 8 f. 3 1993
- b. 9 f. 1 1994
- b. 9 f. 2 1995-1996
- b. 9 f. 3 1997-1998
- b. 9 f. 4 1999-2005

Work with other organizations 1971-2008

Files listed by organization and O'Dell's role with organization.

Arranged chronologically according to dates of files (may not reflect O'Dell's participation).

- b. 10 f. 1 Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial Center Board of Directors 1971-1973
Southern Organizing Committee for Economic and Social Justice (SOC)
consultant 1975-2003
- b. 10 f. 2 1975-1991
Includes a workshop program, "The Human Costs of the Cold War: Dialogue in Alabama",
which was led by O'Dell, from 1987, and a speech that he wrote from 1990.
- b. 10 f. 3 1992-2003
- b. 10 f. 4 American Friends Peace Service Committee, Peace Education Division
1977-1985
- b. 10 f. 5 Committee for a National Health Service Executive Board 1977 June
- b. 10 f. 6 World Festival of Youth and Students delegate and member of Selection
Committee 1978-1980
- b. 10 f. 7 Pacifica Foundation Board chair 1978-2000
- b. 11 f. 1 Palestine Human Rights Campaign sponsor and Board member 1979-1988
- b. 11 f. 2 SANE/Freeze National Committee and Board member 1989-1993
- b. 11 f. 3 Palestine Solidarity Committee Advisory Board 1991
- b. 11 f. 4 30th Anniversary Mobilization of the March on Washington convener 1993
- b. 11 f. 5 W. E. B. Du Bois Foundation initiating sponsor and honorary co-chair of
125th anniversary tribute 1993-1994
- b. 11 f. 6 Institute for Community Leadership consultant 1996-2008
Also includes materials on the Jack Hunter O'Dell Education and Reflection Center.
- b. 11 f. 7 Charleston Laureate Lecture Series Advisory Board 1997

Professional (cont.)

Work with other organizations (cont.)

- b. 11 f. 8 Committees of Correspondence for Democracy and Socialism (CCDS)
Advisory Board 2002-2003

Appearances and engagements 1972-2012

Arranged chronologically.

- b. 11 f. 9 1972-2012

- b. 11 f. 10 Interview and appearance requests and notes by O'Dell 1997-2012

Writing ca. 1959-2007

Arranged into two subgroups: 1. Published and 2. Unpublished.

- b. 11 f. 11 Published 1980-2005

Also includes two drafts of "Defending Our Right to the Tree of Life", published in the *Jackson Advocate* for its 43rd anniversary issue (1981), and an editorial written on behalf of Pacifica Radio from October 20, 1988.

Unpublished ca. 1959-2007

- b. 11 f. 12 Notes on anti-colonialism and international affairs ca. 1959-2007

- b. 11 f. 13 Speeches, articles (mostly drafts), and fragments ca. 1978-2003

Includes a draft for "Racism and the Women's Rights Movement" (1980); a draft for the "president's speech" (presumably for the president of the American Liberian Association; possibly written by O'Dell on behalf of president); and a transcript of testimony given before the National Black Independent Political Party (1981), among others.

Subject files 1961-2011

This series, consisting mostly of printed matter on various topics, organizations, and individuals, mainly concerns international affairs. Most likely, many of the documents were collected and used by O'Dell not only in his roles as the director of international affairs for PUSH and NRC, consultant on foreign affairs to Jesse Jackson during his presidential runs, consultant and board member for other organizations, but also as an authority on international civil rights issues. Many of these materials overlap with materials included in the PUSH and NRC files.

Arranged alphabetically by topic, organization name, publication title, or individual/author's name.

- b. 12 f. 1 Africa, general 1976-1977
- b. 12 f. 2 Angola 1985
- b. 12 f. 3 Brazil 1970
- b. 12 f. 4 Buchenwald National Memorial 1974
- b. 12 f. 5 o. 1 Chile 1972-1979
Includes a poster of Victor Jara, inscribed and signed by Jara, from 1972.
- b. 12 f. 6 China 1976-1980
- b. 12 f. 7 Civil rights, United States, general 1969-2011
- b. 12 f. 8 Communist Party USA 1984
- b. 12 f. 9 Cuba 1973-1982
- b. 12 f. 10 El Salvador 1980-1983
- b. 12 f. 11 Europe 1981
- b. 12 f. 12 Grenada 1980
- b. 12 f. 13 Guatemala 1983
- b. 12 f. 14 Haitian refugees 1974
- b. 12 f. 15 *Hill, Robert B. The Illusion of Black Progress, National Urban League* 1978
- b. 12 f. 16 India 1980
- b. 12 f. 17 Indigenous peoples of the United States and Australia 1969-1978

Subject files (cont.)

- b. 12 f. 18 Individuals 1980-1991
Includes articles on Herbert O. Reid, and George E. Reddick, among others.
- b. 12 f. 19 Iran 1978-1984
- b. 12 f. 20 Israel 1969-1977
- b. 12 f. 21 Israel and Palestine 1973-1985
- b. 12 f. 22 King, Martin Luther, Jr 1969-1992
- b. 12 f. 23 Lebanon 1978-1982
- b. 12 f. 24 Malawi 1985-1986
- b. 12 f. 25 Marxism 1980
 - b. 13 f. 1 Middle East 1976-1980
 - b. 13 f. 2 Mozambique 1972-1986
 - b. 13 f. 3 Namibia 1975-1976
 - b. 13 f. 4 Nicaragua 1980-1984
 - b. 13 f. 5 North Korea 1970-1972
 - b. 13 f. 6 Nyerere, Mwalimu Julius K. "The Plea of the Poor", address delivered at Howard University 1977 August 5
 - b. 13 f. 7 Panama 1973-1977
 - b. 13 f. 8 Philippines 1973-1984
 - b. 13 f. 9 Politics, United States 1980-2005
 - b. 13 f. 10 Reeves, Richard. *"The Last Angry Men"*, *Esquire* 1978 March 1
 - b. 13 f. 11 Robeson, Paul 1968
Includes pamphlet in German.
 - b. 13 f. 12 Socialism 1961-1980
 - South Africa
 - b. 13 f. 13 1968-1977
 - b. 14 f. 1 1978-1992
 - b. 14 f. 2 Southern Christian Leadership Conference 1989
 - b. 14 f. 3 Torture 1980-1983
 - b. 14 f. 4 Unions 1974-2003
 - b. 14 f. 5 United Nations 1973-1988
 - b. 14 f. 6 USSR 1971-1985
 - b. 14 f. 7 Vietnam War 1971
 - b. 14 f. 8 World Conference on Reparations to Africa and Africans in the Diaspora 1990
 - b. 14 f. 9 Zaire 1985
 - b. 14 f. 10 Zambia 1975
 - b. 14 f. 11 Zimbabwe/Rhodesia 1976-1987