



Repairing Archival Description: AFL-CIO Civil Rights Department records

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UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND LIBRARIES

Caption: Martin Luther King Jr. on the picket line for Scripto Strike, January 15, 1965. (AFL-CIO Information Department, Photographic Prints collection)

Presented as part of the session
“How it’s Made: Labor in the Archives”
Fighting for Freedom Symposium
April 4, 2024

Advancing Workers Rights in the American South: Digitizing the Records of the AFL-CIO's Civil Rights Division

- CLIR grant: Digitizing Hidden Collections
- 3 Year Grant: May 2021 - May 2024
- Partner grant:
 - University of Maryland
 - Georgia State University
- Goal: Digitize and provide access to AFL-CIO Civil Rights Southeast Division and national-level records from the AFL, CIO, and AFL-CIO Civil Rights Department, 1943-1999
- 119 linear feet total from both partners
- Opportunity for University of Maryland to enhance and revise collection description in general, repair description, and edit

April 21, 1976.

Mr. George Meany, Pres.
AFL - CIO International Headquarters
815 16th St. N.W.
Wash. D.C. 20006

Dear Brother Meany:

We are writing in abhorrence of the growing wave of racist violence against minorities linked to the anti-busing campaign led by certain politicians here in Boston. We believe that our union must take a powerful stand condemning these KKK-type attacks and call on all trade unionists to help put a stop to them. We praise the recent example of the three white MBTA drivers who helped defend their two black brothers against a group of vicious racists in South Boston on April 17th. Our entire union solidarity and strength depends on our ability to mobilize against and stamp out this racist violence. These attacks are anti-union as well as racist and pose a threat to our jobs as well as our physical safety. For example, the Amalgamated Meat Cutters have been forced to cease meeting at their South Boston headquarters due to vandalism and attacks on black members, black teamster and bus drivers have been periodically stoned in South Boston and Boston Globe drivers were stoned last summer supposedly due to the anger of anti-bussers against that newspaper. The list does not end here and is growing daily as you have probably heard. There have been retaliations against innocent whites as a result of this racist violence going unchecked by the authorities. This, of course, we condemn as well, but only see these harmful reactions on the rise unless the progressive, anti-racist forces in the labor movement come forward now and show that there is an alternative to race war. Our unions must stand up unified and strong against racism as we have done before in the past.

It is time that the entire AFL-CIO took a positive step in nipping this vicious racism in the bud. We can not allow it to build more fear in our own ranks, cripple our unions and their ability to fight for decent wages and working conditions in our upcoming contracts and possibly murder some of us.

We look to you to demonstrate some leadership now. Let us publicly call for:

1. Making racist violence a federal crime.
- and,
2. Our membership taking a united stand to help defend our black brothers and sisters against racist attacks on our jobs and in our communities.

In Solidarity,

cc: Paul Quirk, Pres.
Local 509, SEIU
Franklin Murphy, Pres.
AFL-CIO, Greater Boston
Regional Office
George Hardy, Int. Pres.
SEIU

(The following signatures
are of workers at the Grove
Hall Welfare Office in
Dorchester.)

Kevin M. Bayne, Steward Local 509 SEIU
Pat C. Hoag, Chairman
Josephine Hill
Josephine Hill
Paul Howard
Mercedes McPherson
Jana Vitagliano
Carolyn Kennedy
Alice White

RECEIVED
APR 26 1976

Caption: Letter from workers at the Grove Hall Welfare Office in Dorchester, MA to George Meany regarding racist anti-union attacks, April 21, 1976. (AFL, CIO, and AFL-CIO Civil Rights Department, Discrimination Case Files)

“How we made it” at UMD

25% selected and digitized at UMD

45 linear feet (or 36 boxes)

Preparation steps for digitization

Vendor list for tracking, folder and box labeling, preservation concerns, page counts

Labor films rights research

Rights holder

Levels of access

Redacting/restricting PII

Metadata creation for digital repository aggregate harvesting

Project landing page development

<https://digital.lib.umd.edu/awr>

Social media outreach

Blog posts:

<https://hornbakelibrary.wordpress.com/?s=clir+labor>

Instagram: @hornbakelibrary

What is reparative description?

n.

remediation of practices or data that exclude, silence, harm, or mischaracterize marginalized people in the data created or used by archivists to identify or characterize archival resources

adj.

relating to remediation of practices or data that exclude, silence, harm, or mischaracterize marginalized people in the data created or used by archivists to identify or characterize archival resources

[Frick and Proffitt 2022](#), There is a balance between urgency and mindfulness; the work of reparative description is urgent and should be a top-level priority, but, by its very nature, it cannot be rushed.

[Punzalan and Marsh 2022](#), There is increasing energy in this area to undertake reparative description projects via the implementation of culturally responsive metadata and community autonyms and authority terms. Description and processing, where possible, should be collaborative or undertaken in consultation with relevant community members.

Harmful Language in Finding Aids

If you encounter language in our finding aids that is harmful or offensive, we welcome your feedback, questions, or concerns. Please email us at askhornbake@umd.edu. A staff member will respond to your feedback and communicate any action we will take to update the language.

Finding aids contextualize archival collections and describe their arrangement and contents so that researchers can discover materials relevant to their needs. However, researchers may encounter harmful, offensive, or outdated language in our finding aids. This is in part because our finding aids were written over the course of many decades, and in the past, it has not been a priority to regularly review and update language. Additionally, sometimes we reused description that came directly from the materials' original creators without altering the language. We recognize that librarianship is a predominantly white profession with a historical commitment to the impossible goal of describing material from a neutral point of view. This practice reinforces the marginalization of underrepresented communities by both upholding harmful naming conventions and failing to include descriptive information that would help identify materials about these communities in the future.

Recognizing the impact of language on both our researchers and those represented within our collections, Special Collections and University Archives staff are dedicated to identifying and reducing harmful language in our finding aids. We are taking the following steps:

Reviewing all finding aids to identify where we have used harmful language.

Updating language or, in cases where existing language is retained, adding contextual information to explain why.

Updating internal style guidelines to ensure that we develop and implement archival description practices that are anti-oppressive and consistent with how the subjects of our materials describe themselves.

Beyond these initial efforts to rectify harmful language, we commit to regularly reviewing our practices and finding aids to keep pace with ongoing changes in language and archival practices. Although we will strive to create inclusive, respectful, and accurate description, we will make mistakes along the way. We welcome your feedback via email at askhornbake@umd.edu.

A list of [resources](#) that we've consulted to inform this work is also available for anyone interested in learning more.

Resources for Conscious Editing

UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND MAKE A GIFT

UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES RESEARCH GUIDES

UMD Libraries / Research Guides / Resources for Creating Inclusive and Conscious Archival Description / General Resources


Resources for Creating Inclusive and Conscious Archival Description

This guide provides information and learning resources for writing inclusive and conscious archival description.

General Resources

- Tools, Style Guides, and Resources by Area of Focus
- Statement on Harmful Language in Finding Aids
- About Special Collections and University Archives
- Contact Us

Subject Guide



Welcome

This guide provides information and resources for writing inclusive and conscious archival description. Archival description, usually in the form of a **finding aid**, is written by archivists to describe the arrangement and contents of an archival collection. The following resources are intended to educate and assist archivists in creating description that is accurate, inclusive, and respectful of the people and communities that create, use, and are represented in archival collections.

General resources

- Case studies
- Style guides and local practices**
- Training and self-reflection
- Further reading and listening

Arroyo-Ramirez, Elvia. "Invisible Defaults and Perceived Limitations: Processing the Juan Gelman Files." Medium, October 30, 2016. Presented at the Fall 2016 meeting of the Preservation and Archiving Special Interest Group, New York, NY, October 28, 2016. <https://medium.com/on-archivy/invisible-defaults-and-perceived-limitations-processing-the-juan-gelman-files-4187fdd36759>.

Bolding, Kelly. "Reparative Processing: A Case Study in Auditing Legacy Archival Description for Racism." Presented at the Midwest Archives Conference, Chicago, IL, March 24, 2018. https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1MhOXx5ZIVjb_8pfvFquMqLsUUIOHFFMT4js5EP4qnA/edit?usp=sharing.

Dean, Jackie. "Conscious Editing of Archival Description at UNC-Chapel Hill." *Journal of the Society of North Carolina Archivists* 19 (2019): 41-55. https://www.ncarchivists.org/resources/Documents/JSNCA/JSNCA_Vol16_2019.pdf.

deGraffenreid, Alexandra. "Reparative Processing of the Luis Alberto Sánchez papers: Engaging the Conflict between Archival Values and Minimal Processing Practices." *Across the Disciplines* 18, no. 1/2 (2021-2022): 33-46. <https://doi.org/10.37514/ATD-J.2021.18.1-2.04>.

Tang, Annie, Dorothy Berry, Kelly Bolding, and Rachel E. Winston. "Toward Culturally Competent Archival (Re)Description of Marginalized Histories." Presented at the annual meeting of the Society of American Archivists, Washington, DC, August 16, 2018. https://digitalcommons.chapman.edu/library_presentations/23.

Access Team Survey

Survey phases:

- Phase 0: Finding aid audit
- Phase 1: Review audit, create editing plan
- Phase 2: Make edits and document

Audit ratings:

0: Need more information

1: Issues in offensive or harmful language used to describe people or communities

2: Needs better contextualization about events, issues, and social standards of the time described.

3: No suggestions/edits

4: Folder Title Issues

AFL-CIO Civil Rights Department records



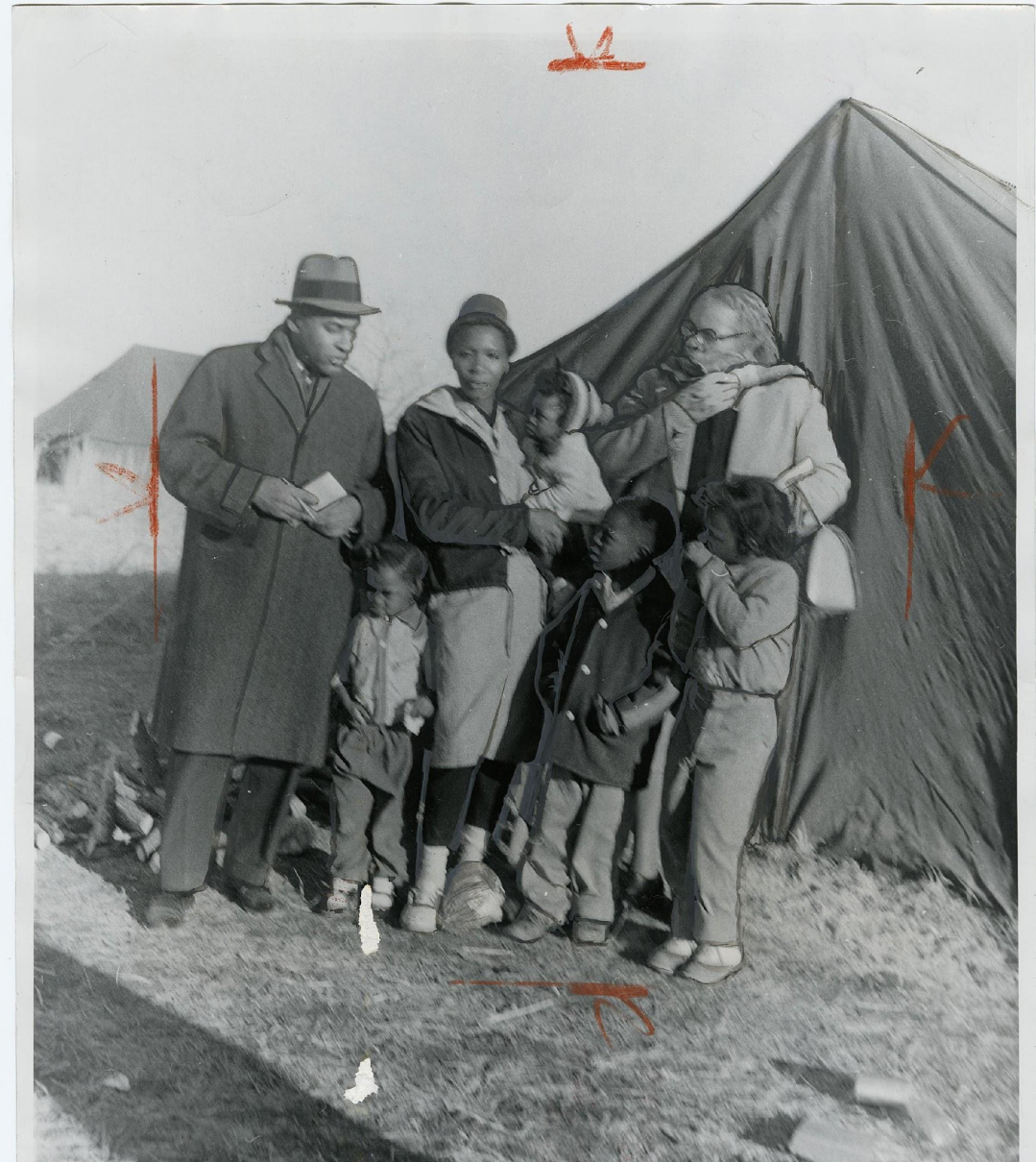
[AFL, CIO, and AFL-CIO Civil Rights Department records \(0044-LBR-RG9-001\).](#)



[AFL, CIO, and AFL-CIO Civil Rights Department, Discrimination Case Files \(0054-LBR-RG9-002\).](#)



[AFL, CIO, and AFL-CIO Civil Rights Department records \(0068-LBR-RG9-003\).](#)

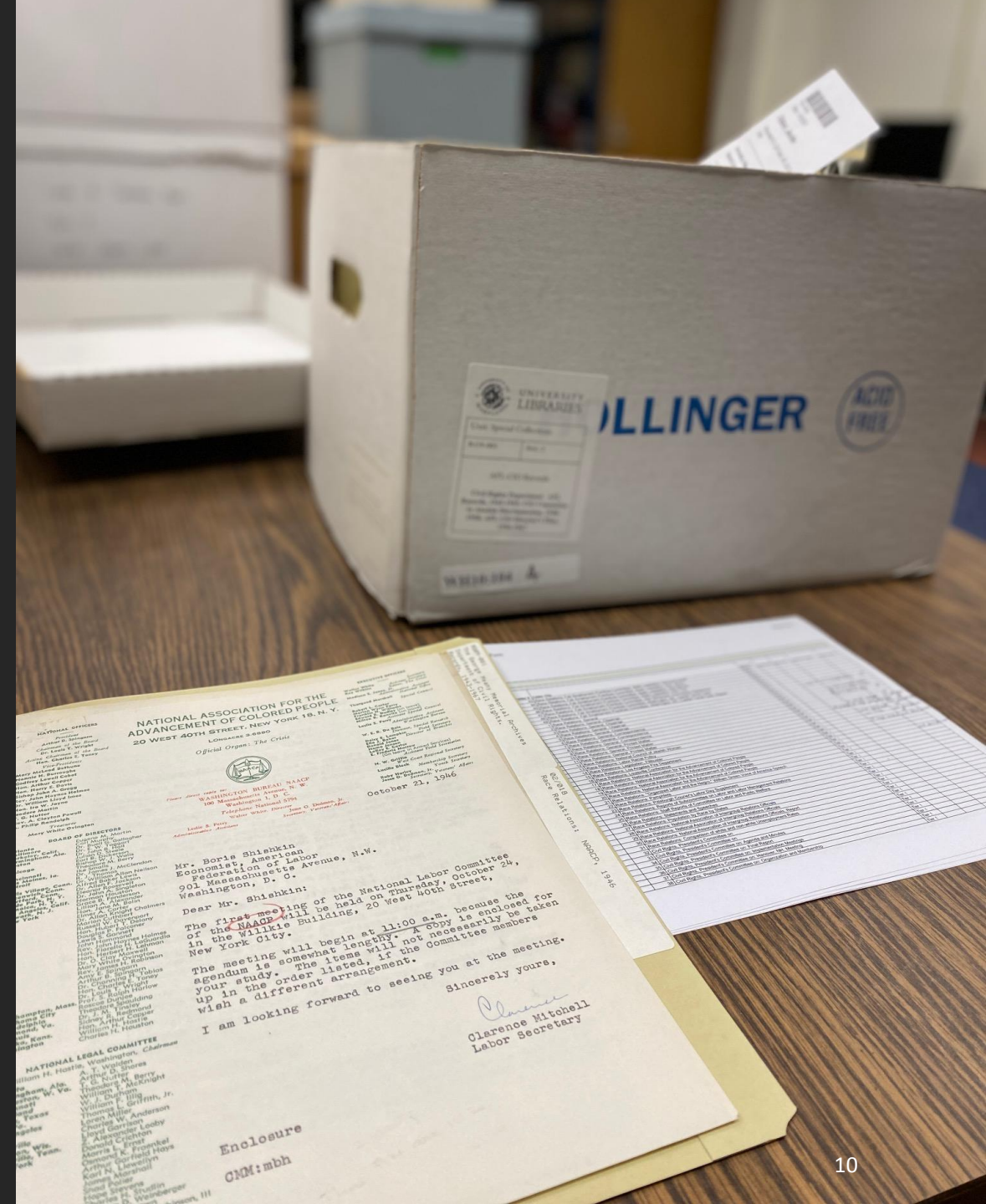


Caption: Evicted sharecropper, Mrs. Early B. Williams (center), is shown with her four children in front of their tent in "Freedom Village," Somerville, Tenn., after being evicted from her home along with other Negroes allegedly for voting in presidential election. At left is Theodore Brown, assistant director of AFL-CIO Dept. of Civil Rights, while at right is Mrs. Victoria Davidson, missionary nurse from Chicago. 1961. (AFL-CIO Information Department, Photographic Prints collection)

CLIR Grant Review and Editing

General edits:

- Typos
- Sentence rephrasing
- Acronyms
- Folder titles



Caption: Letter from Clarence Mitchell notifying Boris Shishkin of the first meeting of the National Labor Committee of the NAACP, October 21, 1946. (AFL, CIO, and AFL-CIO Civil Rights Department records)

Record Group description

- Combined three different documents to create one full department history to add to each finding aid.
- Context and additional information added.
- Outdated language revised.

Example 1:

In the late 1960 and early 1970s, it worked with affiliates and with the AFL-CIO Building Trades Department and the Human Resources Development Institute (HRDI) to establish affirmative action programs for recruiting and preparing ~~minority youngsters~~ **young people of color** for **apprenticeships and** jobs in the skilled trades.

Example 2:

One of the earliest activities of the Civil Rights Department was the investigation of complaints of discrimination in employment. The department became active in the issues of fair employment practices, discrimination in housing, and school desegregation, and it began working directly with affiliated unions and state and local central bodies on civil rights issues. **The documented experiences include discrimination of race, color, gender, religion, and disability, among others.** At its 29 August 1956 meeting, the Executive Council adopted a Civil Rights Committee report that requested the creation of a subcommittee to facilitate the processing of complaints. This Subcommittee on Complaints (later Subcommittee on Compliance) first met 20 November. **There is little detailed information on the conciliation of most cases.**

Collection Level description

- Scope and Content Note
- Related Materials Note
- Added list of department staff names and a list of acronyms to the Biographical/Historical Note
- Processing Information Note
- Revision Statement

[AFL, CIO, and AFL-CIO Civil Rights Department, Discrimination Case Files \(0054-LBR-RG9-002\)](#)

Added sentence:

"The experiences documented in the complaints include discrimination of race, color, sex, religion, and disability, among others."

[AFL-CIO Civil Rights Department records \(0068-LBR-RG9-003\)](#)

Added context of APRI being an AFL-CIO constituency group as of 1965 in the Historical Note and Scope and Content Note.

Series Level description: RG9-001, Series 1

- Scope and Content Note

Sentence added as explanation in the Series Scope and Content Note regarding reason for use of terms: minorities, Jews, Negroes, Orientals:

“The harmful language within the original documents was not censored because it provides historical context for understanding the era, attitudes, and opinions of their creators.”

AFL, CIO, and AFL-CIO Civil Rights Department records, 0044-LBR-RG9-001. Special Collections and University Archives.

<http://hdl.handle.net/1903.1/42524>

Original sentence:

“There are also four folders of material on the anti-labor White Citizens Councils.”

Revised to:

“There are also five folders of material on the anti-labor and pro-segregation white citizens councils, which was a highly influential economic and political organization in the Southern states. They were led by business executives, attorneys, university trustees, civic leaders, clergymen, state governors, state politicians, and representatives in U.S. Congress and the U.S. Senate, and were active from the early 1950s until their decline in the late 1960s.”

Folder Level description: RG9-001, Series 1

Series 1, Box 2, Folder 12

"Race Relations: Jews" was changed to "Race Relations: National Council of Jewish Women."

Naming the full name of the Jewish council is more accurately depicting a women's organization.

Series 1, Box 2, Folder 31

"Race Relations: Negro Unemployment Rates" changed to "Race Relations: Comparison of white and non-white Unemployment Rates".

Both terms can be found in folder contents; the updated title is a more accurate description.

Series 1, Box 3, Folder 7

Government Contracts, President's Committee on: Conference, "Minority Community Resources": quotes were added to "Minority Community Resources" because that is the name of the conference according to the contents of the folder.

Series 1, Box 5, Folders 7-9

"School Desegregation: Little Rock, Arkansas, Incident" was changed to "School Desegregation: Little Rock, Arkansas" omitting the adjective "Incident" in order to remove a subjective term for describing the folder contents.

In Progress - Reparative Description

- Pilot phase
- Review Committee forming
- Community Engagement planning
- Problematic LC subject headings
- Access Team will continue to address harmful language identified in Collection Survey, and as needed when notified by the general public.
- Group work VS. Individual work
- How much revision is needed VS. how much is sufficient?
- How do we strike a balance with our staff and resources?
- Continuing antiracist work: Individually and in community

Digital Repositories

University of Maryland Digital Collections

Search: Labor

Georgia State University Digital Collections

Search: AFL-CIO

Civil Rights Digital Library

Contributing Institution: [Georgia State University. Special Collections](#)

Contributing Institution: [University of Maryland, College Park. Libraries.](#)

Digital Public Library of America

Collection: [Advancing Workers' Rights in the American South](#)

Collection: [AFL-CIO Southeast Division Civil Rights Department Records](#)

Umbra Search Engine for African American History

Contributing Institution: [Georgia State University. Special Collections](#)

Contributing Institution: [University of Maryland, College Park. Libraries.](#)

Archives for Black Lives in Philadelphia

https://archivesforblacklives.files.wordpress.com/2020/11/ard_r_202010.pdf

UMD LibGuide: Resources for Creating Inclusive and Conscious Archival Description

<https://lib.guides.umd.edu/conscious-archival-description/general-resources>

Urban League of Philadelphia records (Temple University)

https://library.temple.edu/finding_aids/urban-league-of-philadelphia-records

American Civil Liberties Union records (Princeton University)

<https://findingaids.princeton.edu/catalog/MC001>

Civil Rights Digital Library (re: Little Rock Integration)

http://crdl.usg.edu/events/little_rock_integration/?Welcome

AFL, CIO, and AFL-CIO Civil Rights Department records, 0044-LBR-RG9-001. Special Collections and University Archives.

<http://hdl.handle.net/1903.1/42524>

AFL, CIO, and AFL-CIO Civil Rights Department, Discrimination Case Files, 0054-LBR-RG9-002. Special Collections and University Archives

<http://hdl.handle.net/1903.1/42541>

AFL-CIO Civil Rights Department records, 0068-LBR-RG9-003. Special Collections and University Archives

<http://hdl.handle.net/1903.1/42551>

Resources Consulted

Caption: CIO poster, "Wipe Out Discrimination", undated (Labor Posters, Broadside, and Art collection)

Thank You!

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