Collection Title: James Cooper Papers
Collection Number: U0056
Collection Dates: 1963-1966
Size: 3 boxes; 3.5 cubic feet


Language: English

Restrictions to Access: None, open for research. The collection does contain notes relating to the legal cases Mr. Cooper advised in Mississippi. Materials do not appear to breach lawyer-client privilege. Researchers are requested to alert the archivist if there is any material that does violate lawyer-client privilege.

Provenance: Attaché case and papers donated by James Cooper’s daughter, Cynthia Cooper, August 2018.

Preferred Citation: [Item] in the James Cooper Papers (U0056), Richard E. Bjork Library Special Collections, Stockton University (Galloway, NJ).

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HISTORICAL INFORMATION:
The Lawyers’ Committee for Civil Rights Under the Law is an organization that formed in 1963, at the request of President John F. Kennedy, to protect the constitutional rights of those participating in the Civil Rights movement. These lawyers joined on a voluntary basis to represent disenfranchised African Americans who were being denied legal counsel on criminal matters, and the lawyers also filed affirmative action suits to desegregate public places, to reduce harassment of Civil Rights workers by law and other government officials, as well as police officers and prosecutors who were violating constitutional rights set forth by the 1964 Civil Rights Act.

James Cooper already had an established law firm, Arkus & Cooper, in Atlantic City, New Jersey, when he volunteered to participate in the Lawyers’ Committee for Civil Rights Under Law. Cooper went to Natchez, Mississippi in late January 1966 and was assigned several cases during his two-week stay. After his return to Atlantic City, he gave a public presentation about his experiences in Mississippi and continued to advocate for civil rights and volunteerism throughout his career.
Born November 2, 1929 in Atlantic City, James L. Cooper was a graduate of Atlantic City High School, Rutgers University, and Rutgers Law School. He married Lorraine Lisse and had two children, Kevin and Cynthia. Cooper died on April 15, 2017.

Cooper began to practice law in Atlantic City in 1957. In addition to his law practice, Cooper was involved with numerous charitable organizations and causes, such as the redevelopment Historic Gardner’s Basin, the 1970s casino gambling campaigns, the Atlantic Cape Community College Foundation, and his own Let Us Eat Please. After his retirement, Cooper taught constitutional law and American government classes at Richard Stockton State College as a Distinguished Visiting Professor.

Sources:


SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE:
This collection contains the briefcase James Cooper used on his trip to Mississippi in 1966 and the documents from his work there as a volunteer in the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law.

Within this briefcase, James Cooper kept original notes, drafts, memoranda, and photographs as well as other contents that capture the essence of racism in the South during the height of the Civil Rights Movement. The notes are detailed accounts of the violent and poor treatment of African Americans in 1966. Photographs also demonstrate how deeply segregated the South was during his visit, which included trips to a doctor’s office, a housing development, and a county jail. Also contained are Cooper’s notes for the public presentation he gave upon his return to Atlantic City at Beth Israel.

The collection also contains information relating to court procedures in Mississippi and reference materials, such as case law and procedures from supporting organizations. While the bulk of the materials are from his two-week trip in early 1966, some of the research materials are from earlier in the 1960s.

The collection does contain notes relating to the legal cases he advised in Mississippi. Materials do not appear to breach lawyer-client privilege, and the statute of limitations for these cases has expired. Researchers are requested to alert the archivist if there is any material that does violate lawyer-client privilege.

ARRANGEMENT NOTE:
This collection is arranged in 5 series.
**Series 1. Mississippi 1966.** This series contains traveling information pertaining to Cooper’s trip to Mississippi, which consists of maps and flight and hotel arrangements accompanied with notes. While in Mississippi, Cooper went to Neshoba County where he picked up three jarring racist coloring pages. In the contents of this series is also a magazine, *Mississippi News and Views*. It features an article reviewing and promoting *The Gray Book*, which suggests media portraying a skewed image of Mississippi’s treatment of African Americans. There is a page from the *Clarion-Ledger* in Jackson, Mississippi on February 1, 1966, that conveys racist and violent behavior during this moment. This series also contains a photocopied article of Roy L. Self, a former Baptist minister from Mississippi, who was dismissed from his duties because he volunteered to be part of the President’s Committee.

**Series 2. Committee Case Work.** This series contains copies certifying that Cooper’s license to practice law is in good standing. There are anecdotal notes Cooper wrote about the treatment of African Americans in Mississippi as well as journaling various other experiences, many of which are reflected in the photographs in series four within this collection. There are several drafts and official memoranda as well as official court orders relating to the cases on which he worked. Cases are filed alphabetically by the client’s last name. Also contained in this series is general information on the Lawyers’ Committee for Civil Rights Under Law with periodically updated outcome reports.

Research and manuals with case law and procedures can be found in this series, as well as other reference items pertaining to law and civil rights. In this series, is *The Defensive Transfer of Civil Rights Litigation from State to Federal Courts*, by Anthony G. Amsterdam volume 1 and *NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund Inc.* volumes 1-3.

**Series 3. Atlantic City Correspondence and Reaction.** This series contains a newspaper from the *Atlantic City Press* published on February 19, 1966, describing Cooper’s work in Mississippi at that time. Cooper’s correspondence with his law partner, Saul Arkus, and letters of praise, commending him on his civil rights activism are also in this series. Reactions to his participation in the Civil Rights movement are reflected in the letters of praise he received in 1966. There is a flyer advertising Cooper’s speaking event for the Reform Congregation Beth Israel at the Temple. His notes for this lecture are contained in this series.

**Series 4. Photographs.** This series contains photographs from James Cooper’s trip to Mississippi in February 1966. Pictures in this series show potential African American and white jurors for a trial. This picture is important to the collection because there is a corresponding note in Cooper’s files that detail the context of the picture explaining that all of the African Americans were dismissed from their duties as potential juror. This series of photographs also contain images of a segregated doctor’s office, restaurant from the trip, Neshoba County Jail, and pictures of other volunteer civil rights lawyers.
Aside from his travels, there are also pictures of his family and of Atlantic City. This series also contains negatives of the photographs. The negatives have been digitized and are available to view in the reading room.

**Series 5. Realia.** The attaché case that Cooper used on his trip to Mississippi is the only item in this series.

**SUBJECTS:**
African Americans– Civil rights – Mississippi—History--20th century
Civil rights movements – Mississippi – History -- 20th century
Civil rights workers – Mississippi – History --20th century
Lawyers – Mississippi
Lawyers – New Jersey
Lawyers’ Committee for Civil Rights Under Law
Mississippi – Race Relations – History --20th century
Racism – Mississippi—History -- 20th century

Brown, R. Jess
Carter, R.P.
Cooper, James L.
Christfield, George
Cleveland, Charlie
Echoles, Samuel
Ellis, Rufus
Evers, Charles
Freeman, C.D.
Hall, Carsie A.
Josephson, Florence E.
King, James E.
Martin, Charles
Owens, James
Peyton, Roosevelt
Riley, Ollie
Self, Roy
Smith, Charles
Tucker, Eddie
Turner, Early Lee
Whitley, Josh
Young, Jack A.

**CONTENTS LIST**
**Series 1. Mississippi, 1966**

| 1966 Mississippi information                  | Folder 1 | Box 1 |
### Series 2. Committee Case Work, 1963-1966

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<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Folder</th>
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<tr>
<td>Certificate of Good Standing, letterhead from his law firm in Margate, NJ</td>
<td>Folder 1</td>
<td>Box 1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lawyers’ Committee for Civil Rights Under Law</td>
<td>Folder 2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Legal research</td>
<td>Folder 3</td>
<td>Box 1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Case Assignments and office forms</td>
<td>Folder 4</td>
<td>Box 1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Daily log and notes</td>
<td>Folder 5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Case: Cleveland, Charlie</td>
<td>Folder 6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Case: Echoles, Samuel</td>
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<td>Case: Evers, Charles</td>
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<td>Case: Peyton, Roosevelt</td>
<td>Folder 9</td>
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<tr>
<td>Case: Riley, Ollie</td>
<td>Folder 10</td>
<td>Box 1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Case: Turner, Early Lee / Whitley, Josh / Christfield, George</td>
<td>Folder 11</td>
<td>Box 1</td>
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<td>Mississippi law practice and procedure</td>
<td>Folder 12</td>
<td>Box 1</td>
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<td><em>Citizens’ Guide to the 1964 Civil Rights Act</em> (2 copies)</td>
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<td>Box 2</td>
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<tr>
<td>NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund Civil Rights Law Institutes, <em>Cases and Materials</em> (3 volumes)</td>
<td>Folder 14</td>
<td>Box 2</td>
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<tr>
<td>NAACP, <em>The Defense Transfer of Civil Rights Litigation from State to Federal Courts</em> by Anthony G. Amsterdam</td>
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### Series 3: Atlantic City, Correspondence, and Reaction, 1966

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<td>Correspondence and notes</td>
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### Series 4: Photographs, 1966

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### Series 5: Realia

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### Processing Information

Processed by: Brianna DeCicco, October 2018.