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FBI SURVEILLANCE OF JAMES FORMAN AND SNCC



This collection of FBI reports comprises the Bureau's investigative and surveillance efforts primarily during the 1961-1976 period, when James Forman was perceived as a threat to the internal security of the United States. The collected materials also include Forman's involvement with the "Black Manifesto" and the Bureau's "COINTELPRO" investigations into "Black Nationalist - Hate Groups / Internal Security," which include information on the activities of SNCC.

Date Range: 1961-1976

Content: 6,115 images

Source Library: Special Collections and Archives, Benjamin S. Rosenthal Library, Queens College, City University of New York

Detailed Description:

Source Note: James Forman Library - FBI Files, Department of Special Collections and Archives, Queens College, City University of New York. This collection comprises boxes 1-8.

N.B.: Text for this description is from the finding aid composed by Special Collections Fellow Andy McCarthy and approved by Civil Rights Archive Project Manager Annie Tummino.

Biographical Note

Born to a poor sharecropper family in 1928, James Forman was raised on his grandmother's Mississippi farm and as an adolescent moved to Chicago with his mother. Graduating in 1946 from Englewood High School, Forman matriculated at Wilson Junior College for a semester and joined the United States Air Force in 1947. Spending much of his four-year stint in the Pacific, Forman was discharged in September 1951, after which he enrolled in the University of Southern California. In early 1953, Forman suffered what he called a "breakdown" after a wrongful arrest and physical and psychological abuse by the Los Angeles Police Department. The experience caused Forman to enter a California state mental hospital, and served as a turning point for his revolutionary political beliefs. In March 1954 Forman returned to Chicago and enrolled in Roosevelt University, where he graduated in January 1957.

In the summer of 1961, Forman was recruited to work for the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) in Atlanta, Georgia. SNCC was active in voter registration

for disenfranchised black populations throughout the South. Forman acted as Executive Secretary of SNCC until 1966, arranging transportation, food, and housing for volunteers, and raising funds. From 1967-1969, Forman served as SNCC's International Affairs Director and became involved with linking SNCC to the black power movement.

Forman authored a memoir, *The Making of Black Revolutionaries*, and founded the Unemployment and Poverty Action Committee (UPAC), a nonprofit social action organization, serving as its president from 1974-2003. Forman received a Master's Degree in African and African American Studies from Cornell University in 1980, and earned a Ph.D. in Philosophy from the Union of Experimental Colleges and Universities in 1981. Leaving academia, Forman moved to Washington, D.C. and started *The Washington Times*, a short-lived newspaper, and founded the Black American News Service. He continued to write books and pamphlets, taught classes, and produced documentaries. In 2004, Forman traveled to the Democratic National Convention in Boston to take part in a ceremony dubbed the "Boston Tea Party" with members of the D.C. delegation, where bags of tea were tossed into Boston Harbor to protest the lack of representation for the District. Forman died in January 2005 of colon cancer at the age of 76.

(Source: James Forman (1972) *The Making of Black Revolutionaries*; David J. Gary (2010) "Survey Report of the James R. Forman Library").

Collection Description

The collection is comprised of all FBI reports and relevant personal papers from the James R. Forman Library Collection. The Forman Library was acquired in 2010 by the Queens College Department of Special Collections & Archives. [In addition to the FBI files, the library consists of roughly 1,700 volumes of books; 2,000 periodicals and pamphlets; 100 audio cassette tapes; 60 VHS tapes; 2 boxes of personal papers; several 5 1/4 inch floppy computer discs; two KCA20 broadcast quality tapes; and one box of color slides.]

Forman filed a series of Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests with the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and the Air Force. The collected materials include FBI files on James Forman, Forman's involvement with the "Black Manifesto," and several files on 20th century organized crime leaders. [The latter "files on organized crime leaders have been published as a separate collection.] Arranged with the collection of FBI reports is one folder of FOIA correspondence between Forman, his lawyers, and several government agencies. Based on these documents, as well the Finding Aid for the James Forman Papers in the Library of Congress, Forman's earliest FOIA activity occurred in 1976.

Series I: James Forman: FBI Reports, 1961 - 1976

Subseries 1: Forman, James (1961-1976) Box 1-4

The files appear to have been independently organized into two "sets," each "set" marked in pencil, with each individual "file" assigned a number 1-15. In addition, each page is numbered in pencil in the lower right corner.

These FBI files involve direct investigations of James Forman. Included in Box 1 is a handwritten summary of the report marking instances and facts, file and page numbers. According to the summary, which is written in third person, the FBI released the redacted James Forman files in 1978, covering the years 1961 to 1976, "when the subject's activities were no longer considered to be a threat to the internal security to the United States."

Subseries 2: Black Manifesto (circa 1969) Box 5-6

In 1969, Forman aligned with the National Black Economic Development Conference (BEDC), and issued the "Black Manifesto," which demanded \$500 million dollars from Christian and Jewish groups in the United States as reparations for the slave trade. The FBI opened investigations against Forman and BEDC under offense codes for extortion, racketeering and civil unrest.

Series II: COINTELPRO: FBI Reports, 1967 - 1968 Box 7

Each bound file follows an original order, arranged in 3 folders.

By cover letter dated November 16, 1979, civil rights historian Clayborne Carson forwarded copies of FBI reports to James Forman at Forman's request. The files are unbound and personally ink-stamped by Carson, indicating the files' origin. The files are related to the Bureau's "COINTELPRO" investigations into "Black Nationalist - Hate Groups / Internal Security," which include information on the activities of SNCC. The files reference numerous FBI attempts to undermine the credibility of the black power movement through fabricated propaganda, "a counterintelligence maneuver aimed at exploiting the factionalism existing in the Black Panther Party (BPP)."

Series III: Miscellaneous: FBI Reports & Papers, 1947 - 1988 Box 8

Each bound FBI file is arranged according to the original FBI file number. Loose papers, documents and correspondence are filed in three folders.

The FBI files include subjects such as Irgun Zvai Leumi, the Stern Committee, and the Jewish Defense League. The papers include an FOIA cover sheet prepared by the Bureau with a "serial description" of "deleted page information; an FBI report dated 1967 on SNCC; Forman's FOIA correspondence; and correspondence with the CIA and FBI.