Guide to the J. Benton White Papers 2019.06.03

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J. Benton White (d. 1931- ) was the first ombudsman on racial issues at San Jose State University. His position was created in 1967 by President Robert D. Clark in response to racial conflict and discrimination on campus, and was the first of its kind at a college or university in the United States. The bulk of the papers are correspondence, news clippings and reports from 1967-1971.

**Arrangement**

The collection is arranged in two series: Subject Files and Office Files. Folders in the first series have been alphabetized by title and materials have been kept in original order. Folders in the second series have been alphabetized by format and materials have been arranged chronologically.

**Content Description**

The J. Benton White Papers consist primarily correspondence, news clippings, some photographs and reports that White created and collected in his position as SJSU ombudsman for race relations from 1967-1969.

White was included in discussions of racial discrimination on campus, especially against black and Mexican-American students. The papers reflect the activities of the civil rights movement on the SJS College campus, especially regarding housing discrimination. A major topic of interest documented in the papers is the decision of SJS College and Stanford athletes to wear black armbands in football games against Brigham Young University in 1969 to protest discrimination against black people by the Church of Latter-day Saints. The papers also address administration of the Economic Opportunity Program (EOP), which was created to support minority and economically disadvantaged students succeed in college.

**Biographical / Historical**

J. Benton White (d. 1931- ) grew up in Alabama and studied theology at Emory University and Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary. He began serving as a chaplain for the Air Force in the late 1950s, before moving to the Wesley Foundation, the United Methodist campus ministry, at the University of Nebraska. In 1961, he came to California to direct the Wesley Foundation at San José State College and became active in the civil rights movement on campus. President Robert D. Clark in the fall of 1967 chose White to be the first ombudsman, a position created in response to racial discrimination and conflict. It was the first of its kind at a college or university in the United States and became a model for similar roles at other institutions in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

After serving as ombudsman for two years, White became the assistant to the interim president of SJS College, Robert Burns in 1969. He founded the Religious Studies program in 1970 and worked as SJSU faculty until his retirement in 1992. He has written several academic books in the field of religious studies, published a novel and continues to be active in the United Methodist Church.

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**Processing Information**

Collection processed by Monica Keane, June 2019

**Related Materials**

San José State University Oral History Project Collection

**Related Materials**

San José State University Faculty Papers of H. Brett Melendy

**Related Materials**
Series I: Subject Files 1967-1999 1967-1969

Arrangement
The materials in this series are original subject files of the creator related to specific incidents and individuals from his time as SJSU ombudsman. Folders in this series have been alphabetized by title and materials have been kept in original order.

Scope and Contents
Subject files created by J. Benton White related to his position as SJS College ombudsman for race relations. A major topic of interest is the decision of SJS College and Stanford athletes to wear black armbands in football games against Brigham Young University in 1969 to protest discrimination against black people by the Church of Latter-day Saints.

Box 1, Folder 1  Brigham Young Univ. Football Game 1969
Box 1, Folder 2  Confidential--Bronzan, Bob
Box 1, Folder 3  President Clark's Death
Box 1, Folder 4  Speed City


Arrangement
The materials in this series document the professional activities of the creator in his role as SJSU ombudsman, as well as public information that he collected related to this role. The folders have been arranged alphabetically by format and materials have been arranged chronologically within each folder.

Scope and Contents
General files created by J. Benton White related to his position as SJS College ombudsman for race relations. White was included in discussions of racial discrimination on campus, especially against black and Mexican-American students. The papers also reflect the administration of the Economic Opportunity Program (EOP), which was created to support minority and economically-disadvantaged students succeed in college. The correspondences from students and community organizations to White and President Clark reflect the civil rights movement on the SJS campus.

Box 1, Folder 5  Article, Benton 1971
Box 1, Folder 6  Correspondence to President Clark 1968-1969
Box 1, Folder 7  Correspondence from White 1967-1969
Box 1, Folder 8  Correspondence to White 1968-1969
Box 1, Folder 9  Meeting Notes 1968-1969
Box 1, Folder 10  News Clippings 1967
Box 1, Folder 11  News Clippings 1968
Box 1, Folder 12  News Clippings 1969
Box 1, Folder 13  News Clippings, undated
Box 1, Folder 14  News Releases, Administration 1968-1969
Box 1, Folder 15  Notes on the History of the Academic Senate at SJSU 1999
Box 1, Folder 16  Ombudsman Assemblies and Reports 1968-1971
Box 1, Folder 17  Photos circa 1969
Box 1, Folder 18  Speeches and Public Statements, White 1967-1968
Box 1, Folder 19  University Administration Documents 1968-1970