Helen Levi Travis Papers, 1933-2002

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The Register of Helen Levi Travis Papers, 1933-2002

Collection number: MSS 51

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Descriptive Summary

Title: Helen Levi Travis Papers,
Date (inclusive): 1933-2002
Collection number: MSS 51
Creator: Helen Levi Travis
Extent: 3 cartons,
3 linear feet
Repository: Southern California Library for Social Studies and Research
Los Angeles, CA 90044
Abstract: These are the personal papers of Helen Travis, a journalist, teacher and political activist. The collection includes correspondence, travel journals, travel and family photographs. The bulk of the collection is comprised of copies of FBI, CIA, State Department and U.S. Department of the Treasury files on Helen Travis. There is also a brief and clippings relating to the case Travis vs. U.S.A. which decided that the passports of U.S. citizens could not be revoked for traveling in countries restricted by the U.S. State Department.
Language: English.
Provenance
Helen Levi Travis, donated June 4, 2002

Access
The collection is available for research only at the Library's facility in Los Angeles. The Library is open from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., Tuesday through Saturday. Researchers are encouraged to call or email the Library indicating the nature of their research query prior to making a visit.

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Preferred Citation
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Biography
Helen Levi Travis was born in New York City on September 3, 1916. Raised in a secular Jewish family, she attended Barnard College and graduated in 1937. In 1934, at the end of her freshman year she took a student tour to the Soviet Union. After college she had jobs as a journalist, English teacher and a production line worker. But her main activities were as an activist working for peace and social justice in Detroit and later in Los Angeles. She married Robert Travis, a militant union organizer who led the Flint sit-down strike in 1936-1937, that led to General Motors finally recognizing the United Auto Workers Union.

Travis traveled to Cuba in 1947 and 1954 and again in 1962. After the last trip, in June 1963, Travis was arrested for unlawfully traveling without a valid passport to a place outside the United States, where such a passport was required. Travis took her case to the U.S. Supreme Court and in 1967 won her case, which established the right of U.S. Citizens to travel freely outside of the country.

Travis continued her activist work through the First Unitarian Church's Fellowship for Social Justice in Los Angeles, and with the Harbor Area Peace Committee. She also continued to travel and write articles about her travels and her activism.

Scope and Content
The collection is comprised of correspondence, some personal records, travel journals, travel and family color slides. The largest portion of the collection is the FBI, CIA, U. S. State Department and U.S. Treasury Department files. There are also briefs and clippings covering the Supreme Court case and Detroit Red Squad files for Helen and Robert Travis.

The correspondence includes ten years of letters from federal prisoner Sundiata Acoli (Clark Squire), a member of the Black Panther Liberation Army. Travis considered Acoli to be a political prisoner and wrote articles on his behalf.

The slides and journals of China include photos and accounts of the Travises with Pu Yi, the "last emperor".

A container list of the collection is in the Appraisal documentation.