Finding Aid of the Shirley Adelson Siegel papers 0303

Finding aid prepared by Katie Richardson and Andrew Goodrich
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USC Libraries Special Collections
Doheny Memorial Library 206
3550 Trousdale Parkway
Los Angeles, California, 90089-0189
213-740-5900
specol@usc.edu
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Abstract: Between 1947 and 1950, attorney and housing rights advocate Shirley Adelson Siegel lived in Los Angeles and became deeply involved with *pro bono* committee work related to the promotion of civil rights and affordable housing. Although she lived in Los Angeles for less than four years, her work helped shape legislation that was later developed at both the local and state levels. The collection consists of publications, press releases, correspondence, meeting agendas and minutes, and supplemental materials related to her work in the areas of affordable housing and urban redevelopment policy.

creator: Siegel, Shirley Adelson, 1918-

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Scope and Content
The collection contains materials that relate to Siegel's efforts at housing reform between 1947 and 1950, the years that she lived and worked in Los Angeles. Included are press releases and article clippings; Siegel's handwritten notes; correspondence exchanged between Siegel, government officials, and other housing rights advocates; memoranda; reports; transcripts from Siegel's speaking engagements; agendas and minutes from the various committees that Siegel served on; draft legislation, resolutions, and legal opinions related to housing and urban development policy; pamphlets, newsletters, and publications issued by the organizations with which Siegel was affiliated; and several copies of a journal article written by Siegel regarding race restricted covenants. Items in the collection are organized according to the individual organizations and specific issues that Siegel worked with during her time in Los Angeles.

Biographical note
Born July 3, 1918 in the Bronx, New York, Shirley Adelson Siegel was raised in New York City by Jewish immigrant parents. The Great Depression hit the family hard: when Siegel was 13 she and her family were evicted from their Manhattan home when her father, a struggling businessman, failed to make rent. However, despite the family's financial woes, Siegel excelled in school. After graduating at the top of her high school class in the mid-1930s, she enrolled at Barnard College and pursued an undergraduate degree in government. She graduated from Barnard with honors in 1937.

Siegel's foray into housing and redevelopment policy occurred while she was a student at Barnard. Through the National Youth Administration, an employment program financed through President Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal, she attained an internship at the New York Legislative Service and earned 50 cents an hour analyzing housing and urban development legislation. It was there that Siegel was first introduced to public housing, slum clearance, redevelopment, and discrimination in the housing market - issues that would later come to define her work and her legacy.

In 1938, Siegel briefly matriculated at the London School of Economics and then enrolled in Yale Law School, where she stood out as the only woman in a class of 125 men. Keeping true to her interests in public policy and housing, she chose to specialize in property law - which at the time was considered to be a young, progressive, and obscure arm of the legal profession. She received her law degree from Yale in 1941 and joined the New York State Bar shortly thereafter.

Initially, Siegel struggled to find work after graduating from Yale, due in large part to what she described as the *double handicap* of being both female and Jewish. Finally, in 1942, she accepted a position at Proskauer, Rose, and Parkus where she once again stood out - this time, as the firm's first-ever female attorney. But even while she worked in private practice, Siegel never lost sight of her passion for public interest law; her evenings and weekends were spent volunteering at the American Civil Liberties Union, where she assisted with the Supreme Court case against Japanese internment camps that had been established during World War II. In 1945, she left her position at Proskauer to become Executive Director of the newly-founded New York Citizens Housing Council.

Siegel moved to Los Angeles in 1947 after marrying her husband, Elwood, who worked in the entertainment industry. At the time, Los Angeles was in the midst of a housing crisis that was rooted in a combination of factors, including a shortage of...
adequate units for World War II veterans, overt racism in the real estate market, the proliferation of slums, and a lack of action on the part of elected officials. It was also in the late 1940s that the nation was embroiled in controversy over the Taft-Ellender-Wagner housing bill, which allocated federal money for slum clearance, redevelopment, and the construction of tens and thousands of units of low-rent public housing in many of the nation’s largest cities, including Los Angeles.

Upon her arrival in Los Angeles, Siegel was hired as Executive Director of the Los Angeles Citizens Housing Council, an organization that advocated for fair housing and community development policies in the greater Los Angeles area. It was under Siegel’s direction that the Housing Council spearheaded a ballot initiative, California Proposition 14, that called for the creation of a comprehensive, state-administered public housing program. While the measure was ultimately defeated at the ballot box, it nonetheless laid the foundation for many future attempts at housing reform.

Siegel also engaged in a considerable amount of pro bono committee work related to housing and urban development in Los Angeles. She volunteered for the California Housing Association, first as its Southern California Secretary and later on its Board of Directors; for the Los Angeles County Conference on Human Relations, as its Housing Committee chair; for the League of Women Voters’ Los Angeles Chapter, as its Legislative Action Committee chair; for the American Jewish Committee, as a staff representative for its Legal and Civic Action Committee; and for the California Federation for Civic Unity, on its Board of Directors.

In 1950, Siegel and her husband left California and returned to New York, but her work in public interest law was far from being over. She continued to serve as an active participant in committee work, and in 1959 she was tapped by New York State Attorney General’s office to head its first-ever Civil Rights Bureau. For years, she served as general counsel to the city’s Housing and Development Administration under Mayor John Lindsay, and she also chaired the Housing and Urban Development Committee at the New York City Bar. From 1979 to 1982, she served as Solicitor General for the state of New York.

Siegel’s first husband Elwood died in 1994. In 1997 she married her second husband, Henry Fagin, who had gained notoriety in his own right as a distinguished architect, city planner, and college professor. The couple remained married until Fagin’s death in 2009.

As of 2010, some 74 years after her career in housing law began, Siegel continued to practice law in New York, specializing in cases involving foreclosure, eviction, and tenants rights.

Acquisition
The collection was given to the University of Southern California in 2005 by Shirley Adelson Siegel.

Preferred Citation
[Box/folder# or item name], Shirley Adelson Siegel papers, Collection no. 0303, Regional History Collection, Special Collections, USC Libraries, University of Southern California

Subjects and Indexing Terms
American Jewish Committee. Los Angeles Chapter. -- Archives
League of Women Voters of Los Angeles. -- Archives
Los Angeles Citizens Housing Council. -- Archives
O’Dwyer, Thomas, Monsignor -- Archives
Siegel, Shirley Adelson, 1918- -- Archives
Agendas (administrative records)
California--Housing--20th century--Archival resources
Civil rights--California--Los Angeles--Archival resources
Clippings
Correspondence
Discrimination in housing--California--Los Angeles--Archival resources
Housing--California--Los Angeles--Archival resources
Legislation--California--Archival resources
Low income housing--California--Archival resources
Memorandums
Minorities--Housing--California--Los Angeles--Archival resources
Minutes
Newsletters
Notes
Box 1, Folder 1-2  Los Angeles Citizens Housing Council 1947-1948
Scope and Content
These files pertain to Siegel's role as Executive Director of the Los Angeles Citizens Housing Council, a post she held from 1947 to 1948. Included are article clippings, handwritten notes, correspondence, reports, memoranda, journal excerpts, several editions of the Council newsletter, other publications created and distributed by the Council, various pieces of housing-related legislation drafted at the state and federal levels, and the Council's 1947 Report on the Conference on Housing. All materials in these files relate to the Council's objective of ensuring the existence of equitable and affordable housing in Los Angeles, and many pertain specifically to the controversial Taft-Ellender-Wagner housing bill which spearheaded the construction of federally-subsidized public housing developments.

Box 1, Folder 3  Speaking Engagements: California 1947-1950
Scope and Content
In her capacity as Executive Director of the Los Angeles Citizens Housing Council, Siegel delivered a number of speeches about race restricted covenants, informal gentlemen's agreements, and other discriminatory tactics that existed within California's housing market in the mid-twentieth century. The file consists of materials related to Siegel's speaking engagements between 1947 and 1950. Included is correspondence; pamphlets, brochures, and article clippings announcing her speeches; and transcriptions of several interviews and speeches delivered by Siegel.

Box 1, Folder 4  American Jewish Congress Commission on Law and Social Action: California 1946-1948
Scope and Content
As a member of the American Jewish Congress's Commission on Law and Social Welfare, Siegel advocated against restrictive covenants, which were often written into housing deeds to exclude members of the Jewish faith from purchasing real estate. Materials in this folder pertain to Siegel's tenure as a member of the Commission. Included are memoranda, correspondence, and Commission newsletters, as well as transcripts from several Los Angeles-area court cases that challenged the constitutionality of discriminatory housing tactics.

Box 1, Folder 5  Los Angeles Housing Educational Fund and Los Angeles Citizen Housing Council 1949-1952
Scope and Content
Included in this folder are materials pertaining to the Los Angeles Housing Educational Fund, an arm of the Los Angeles Citizens Housing Council with which Siegel was involved. The folder contains minutes from the Educational Fund's Board of Directors' meetings, handwritten notes taken at these meetings, an informational pamphlet, press releases, correspondence, and a legal memorandum.
Box 1, Folder 6-7  
**California Housing Initiative 1947-1948**  
Scope and Content  
In 1948, Siegel was selected to serve on the Southern California Advisory Committee for the California Housing Initiative. The committee circulated petitions and advocated in favor of the California Housing Initiative (Proposition 14) that was taken before voters in the November, 1948 statewide election. Proposition 14, which sought to implement a statewide public housing program for low-income individuals and families, ultimately failed at the ballot box but nonetheless laid the groundwork for similar legislation that was drafted at the federal level soon thereafter. The folder consist primarily of correspondence exchanged between Siegel and other public housing advocates regarding Proposition 14. Also included are handwritten notes; pamphlets; a voter guide; an operating budget; press releases; reports and summaries; and a copy of the petition that was circulated in order for the initiative to qualify for the November, 1948 ballot.

Box 1, Folder 8  
**California Housing Association 1948-1949**  
Scope and Content  
Materials in this folder pertain to Siegel's role as the Southern California Secretary of the California Housing Association, a post that she held in 1949. Included are pamphlets published by the Association, correspondence, minutes from the Association's board meetings, and several issues of Association newsletters. Items in the series primarily relate to how California was affected by the implementation of the Housing Act of 1949, a landmark piece of federal legislation that sought to provide "a decent home and a suitable living environment for every American family" through the clearance of slums and the construction of public housing projects.

Box 1, Folder 9  
**Fair Employment Practices Committee and Council for Equality in Employment 1949**  
Scope and Content  
In 1949, Siegel worked in conjunction with the Council for Equality in Employment to draft a Fair Employment Practices Ordinance, which aimed to prohibit discrimination in the workplace because of race, color, creed, national origin, or ancestry. The folder contains materials related to Siegel's work in this capacity. Included is correspondence related to the creation of the ordinance, draft copies of the ordinance, and a chart listing cities that had adopted similar measures.

Box 1, Folder 10  
**Race Restricted Covenants: California Activities and Congregational Church 1948**  
Scope and Content  
The folder includes materials published by the Congressional Committee for Christian Democracy regarding the United States Supreme Court's 1948 ruling in *Shelley v. Kraemer*, which outlawed court enforcement of race restricted covenants that were often used to exclude minorities from certain urban and suburban neighborhoods. Included are press releases, a resolution, correspondence, and fact sheets, all of which discuss the Committee's stance on restrictive covenants and strategies to overcome racism in the housing market.

Box 1, Folder 11  
**Los Angeles County Commission on Human Relations 1948-1949**  
Scope and Content  
The folder includes materials related to county-wide housing issues, as addressed by the Los Angeles County Commission on Human Relations. Included are agendas and meeting minutes from Commission meetings, memoranda distributed among Commission members, and correspondence. Materials pertain to the racial and ethnic composition of public housing developments within the county, as well as plans for the clearance and redevelopment of blighted neighborhoods.
Los Angeles County Housing Authority 1949-1950
Scope and Content
Although the Housing Act of 1949 allocated millions of dollars of federal funds for the identification, demolition, and redevelopment of distressed and blighted areas, the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors failed to apply for funds that had been earmarked for county-wide redevelopment projects. This drew the ire of Siegel and her colleagues at the California Housing Association, who argued that the Supervisors' lack of action suggested a lack of commitment to ensuring that fair and adequate housing existed within the county. Materials in this file pertain to the state of the Los Angeles County Housing Authority in 1949 and 1950 and include notes, article clippings, press releases, correspondence, memoranda, meeting agendas, and interview transcripts. Also included is a formal declaration issued by the California Housing Association, and a list of recommendations that was created by the Association and directed at the Board of Supervisors.

League of Women Voters of Los Angeles 1949-1950
Scope and Content
Materials in this folder relate to Siegel's tenure as Chairman of the League of Women Voters' Los Angeles Legislative Action Committee, a post she held in 1949. Included is correspondence, memoranda, notes, and several editions of the League Reporter, the League of Women Voters' official newsletter. Materials pertain to the League's commitment to overcoming racial and economic discrimination.

Housing Discrimination 1947-1950
Scope and Content
This folder includes materials pertaining to discrimination in the housing market, with an emphasis on race-restricted covenants and the Supreme Court's decision in Shelley v. Kraemer (1948) which prevented the enforcement of the covenants in court. Included in the series are article clippings, memoranda, correspondence, handwritten notes, and a breakdown of the racial and ethnic composition of public housing developments in the City of Los Angeles.

Los Angeles Conference on Community Relations: Non-Discrimination 1949-1951
Scope and Content
From 1949 to 1950, Siegel served as Housing Commission Chairman for the Los Angeles County Conference on Community Relations, a consortium of community-based organizations that aimed to advance racial and economic equality and challenge institutionalized discrimination throughout Los Angeles County. These files include materials related to an ordinance drafted by Siegel and other conference members in 1950 that prohibited segregation and discrimination in urban redevelopment projects. Included are pamphlets describing the mission and purview of the Conference; correspondence; press releases and article clippings; several issues of The Community Reporter, the Conference's official newsletter; reports; agendas, minutes, and supplemental materials from meetings conducted by the Conference's Housing and Executive committees; notes; memoranda; and drafts of the aforementioned ordinance.

American Jewish Committee: Legal and Civic Action Committee 1948
Scope and Content
In 1948, Siegel served as a staff representative to the Legal and Civic Action Committee of the American Jewish Committee's Los Angeles chapter. During Siegel's tenure, the Committee launched an investigation into the racial pattern of tenant selection in Los Angeles County's public housing developments, and determined that whites, Mexican-Americans, and African-Americans were segregated in separate housing projects, with African-Americans assigned to inferior quarters. Included in this folder are a copy of the Committee newsletter, memoranda, minutes from Legal and Civic Action Committee meetings, reports, and article clippings.
**Box 1, Folder 18**

**1948 Article The Supreme Court Rules Out Race Restrictive Covenants - Women Lawyers Journal, 1948 1948**

**Scope and Content**
In 1948, Siegel authored an article entitled *The Supreme Court Rules Out the Race Restrictive Covenant*, which was published in the *Women Lawyers' Journal* and discusses *Shelley v. Kremer's* implications on race restrictive covenants. Included in the folder are two copies of Siegel's article and three letters of commendation that were subsequently mailed to Siegel.

**Box 1, Folder 19**

**Los Angeles County Conference on Community Relations 1949-1951**

**Scope and Content**
Siegel served as Chairman of the Housing Committee for the Los Angeles County Conference on Community Relations, an organization that functioned as an information clearinghouse and sought to coordinate housing and community development efforts in Los Angeles County. The file consists of materials related to Siegel's tenure at the Conference. Included is an informational pamphlet discussing the scope and purview of the Conference; minutes from the Conference's staff and committee meetings; reports and memoranda regarding current issues; a membership roster; letters and telegrams; a program from the Institute on Community Relations for City Officials and Employees held in 1945; and several editions of *The Community Reporter*, the Conference's semi-monthly newsletter.

**Box 1, Folder 20**

**San Francisco Council for Civic Unity 1949**

**Scope and Content**
In 1949, the Council for Civic Unity of San Francisco submitted an ordinance and a resolution to the County Board of Supervisors that aimed to prevent discrimination on the basis of race, creed, color, or ancestry for all redevelopment projects within the county. During this effort, several members of the Council consulted with Siegel, who was spearheading a similar effort in Los Angeles at the time. The file is comprised of materials related to the proposed San Francisco ordinance and the exchange between Siegel and Council officials. Included are several draft resolutions; handwritten notes; correspondence; legal opinions; and memoranda regarding the purpose of the Ordinance, its composition, and its validity.

**Box 1, Folder 22**

**California Federation for Civic Unity 1949-1950**

**Scope and Content**
In 1950, Siegel was elected to serve on the Board of Directors of the California Federation for Civic Unity, an organization that advocated racial and religious tolerance in public affairs. Prior to her nomination to the Board of Directors, Siegel had served as the Chairman of the Housing Workshop for the organizations fourth annual conference in 1949. Materials in this folder correspond to Siegel's contributions to the Federation between 1949 and 1950. Included are informational pamphlets; correspondence; several editions of the organization's newsletter, *Blueprint for Action*; a program, itinerary, and summary report of the Federation's fourth annual conference; a roster of the Board of Directors elected in 1950, which included Siegel; and minutes from several Board of Directors meetings.

**Box 1, Folder 21**

**Civil Liberties in General 1946**

**Scope and Content**
This folder consists of miscellaneous materials related to civil liberties in general. Included is a memorandum regarding the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, which was adopted by the United Nations in 1948; a copy of the Bill of Rights; an article clipping and a report regarding civil rights legislation proposed by President Truman in 1948; a court transcript from *Oyama v. California* (1946), a Supreme Court case that challenged the validity of restrictive alien land laws; handwritten notes; a list of possible candidates for a Los Angeles-based human rights committee; and a proposed constitution drafted by the Citizens Community Council of Greater Los Angeles.