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## **Charles F. Holmes papers**

- Title:** Charles F. Holmes papers  
**Collection No:** MSS.298  
**Extent:** 1.1 cubic foot  
**Inclusive Dates:** 1967-1995 (Bulk dates: 1968-1969)
- Abstract:** The Charles F. Holmes papers document the work of Holmes as press liaison for the Shelby County Sheriff's Department during the trial of James Earl Ray, accused of assassinating Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr, in Memphis in 1968. The collection consists of correspondence, notes, photographs, forms and press releases.
- Donor:** Charles F. Holmes, Director of University Community Relations, Memphis State University, April 1988.
- Processed by:** Michele Fagan, 1989; Gerald Chaudron, 2014-2018.
- Access:** Open to all researchers.
- Language:** English
- Preferred Citation:** Charles F. Holmes papers, Special Collections Department, University Libraries, University of Memphis.
- Publication date:** November 2018

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## Administrative information

In 1968, during the James Earl Ray trial for the murder of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., in Memphis, Charles F. Holmes took a leave of absence from his position as Director of Public Information at Memphis State University to act as the press officer for the Shelby County Sheriff's Department. The Ray trial and the contemporaneous Sirhan Sirhan trial in Los Angeles, California, were the first trials for assassination after Jack Ruby's shooting of Lee Harvey Oswald. Because of this, the Shelby County Sheriff's Department was very security conscious and perhaps set some precedents for safety precautions in later criminal trials. As the Holmes papers indicate, those in charge of both the Ray trial and the Sirhan trial were interested in how the other was handling the matter.

Holmes, as press liaison, worked with the national and international news media representatives who covered the Ray trial. He helped to explain the courtroom security procedures and handled the numerous requests from journalists for seats in the courtroom.

Charles Holmes wrote of the events as follows:

“The world looked at Memphis after the murder of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. on April 4, 1968, and news media representatives continued the scrutiny for eleven months during legal proceedings for James Earl Ray.

Ray, using aliases including Eric Starvo Galt, John Willard and Harvey Lomeyer, fled Memphis after shooting Dr. King and eventually made his way to Canada, then to London. He went to Portugal in an unsuccessful attempt to join a mercenary group and upon return to London, he was spotted by a policeman and arrested. He would be returned to Memphis on July 19, 1968.

This would lead to nine months of legal hearings, press conferences, judicial rulings establishing gag orders—and a voracious contingent of international reporters, book authors, TV networks, press associations and historians.

Then-Sheriff William N. Morris asked for my help—as I had volunteered and helped the Memphis Police Department immediately after the murder—and I agreed to do so on a voluntary basis. An unpaid volunteer could represent the media on one hand and the Sheriff and courts on the other.

Sheriff Morris took Assistant Attorney General Lloyd Rhodes, Squire Oscar Edmonds and me to Dallas on June 27. It was there that Jack Ruby killed Lee Harvey Oswald after he was arrested for the murder of President John F. Kennedy. Ruby slipped into the jail basement with a group of reporters and shot Oswald live on television.

We prepared elaborate security precautions that applied to news media representatives and photo identification cards were provided after background checks.

On August 23, Sheriff Morris and I went to Los Angeles to observe processes implemented in the trial of Sirhan Bishara Sirhan, who had shot Robert F. Kennedy. Their trial planning representatives had visited Memphis to observe our planning and, when Ray's trial was postponed, we could see how things worked. We adapted the idea of having a closed circuit telecast of the trial for a satellite pressroom.

A few days before Ray was flown to the old Naval Air Station at Millington, an international news agency representative dropped strong hint [sic], saying an exclusive

photograph of Ray in custody in Memphis "would be worth \$20,000", a strong motivation for a possible security breach. We asked Gil Michael, who worked as a photographer for Memphis State University, if he would take photos for us gratis and he agreed. He was poised inside the jail when Ray—with Sheriff Morris hand on his arm—arrived, crouched and photographing. Ray tried to kick him in the head. The photo of Ray in the Sheriff's custody was released to the entire press corps the next day and used around the world. The threat of a bribe was thwarted.

It was estimated that some 250-300 people in the press corps that attended developments over the nine months and 146 requests for the 38 seats reserved for the press in the courtroom were filed. To accommodate a few and reject many, a rationale was developed. It said: "The selection...must be made following a philosophy of reaching the largest public, or group of publics, with a minimum of duplication." Thus the largest U.S. paper, the New York Daily News, was out and the New York Times with its European editions, was in.

Press pandemonium ebbed and flowed with hearings, etc., and Chamber of Commerce employees helped provide new-to-Memphis press visitors with accurate information on the city and its history. Still, caustic jibes were cast. An article in Time Magazine referred to Memphis as a "decaying backwater river town."

The late Judge Preston W. Battle, who presided over the court, in a press conference after sentencing Ray to spend the rest of his life in prison, said:

'I submit that up to now, we have not done too badly for a "decadent river town".

I would like to paraphrase the great and eloquent Winston Churchill, who, in a defiant reply to the Axis threat to wring England's neck like a chicken, said 'some chicken---some neck.' I would like to reply to Memphis critics, 'some river---some town.'

Then it was over, successfully completed. Lawyers went on to research appeals, the authors to write books, the speculators to speculate on plots and the historians to insert the events into the history of this nation."

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## **Scope and contents**

The papers consist of correspondence, notes, photographs, press releases and forms pertaining to Holmes' work. Some material also refers to events in Memphis during the sanitation workers' strike and after Dr. King's assassination.

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## **Subject terms**

King, Martin Luther, Jr., 1929-1968.  
King, Martin Luther, Jr., 1929-1968 -- Assassination.  
Ray, James Earl, 1928-1998.  
Sanitation Workers Strike, Memphis, Tenn., 1968.  
Sirhan, Sirhan Bishara, 1944-

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## **Inventory**

**Box 1**

Folder

- 1 Arthur J. Crowns, Jr., "A Case Study Analysis of Police Relations during the Hot Summer, 1967, in Memphis, Tennessee." 21 pp. "The basic assumption of this study was that conflict between white and colored groups in Memphis, Tennessee, should have exploded into rioting during the summer of 1967." (p.2) Crowns was an assistant professor, Memphis State University Sociology Department.

Papers:

- 2 1968 April-May. 14 items.  
Notes on Ray and Sirhan trials; arson report; MSU Information Bulletin; joint statement of Fire and Police Director and Rev. James Lawson on march from Clayborn Temple (also draft ); Memphis Police Department information bulletin on investigation of Dr. King's assassination; notes on arrests (April 5,6, 1968); camera locations; possible list of names of news agencies and reporters; MPD information bulletin with draft about having not yet received an FBI report on the weapon used in the King murder; MPD information bulletin on march; Holloman statement that there were no injuries during march; notes, "The Strategy Committee does not want television media to have flatbed trucks on Hernando."; Departmental Communication - MPD counts 19,000 people in King March, April 8; Media Guidelines for Mass March, April 8 (also draft ); MSU Public Information Office, May 7, on 3rd Annual Law Enforcement Training Conference where police will "examine their image."
- 3 1968 June 6-28. 15 items.  
Press releases from Sirhan B. Sirhan trial - 'Pitchess explains security', 'Accused Kennedy slayer indicted', 3 Los Angeles District Attorney's Office news releases, Weekly Summaries on Sirhan trial; applications from news media personnel for places in courtroom during Ray trial; June 26 letter from Judge Faquin on crowded courtroom facilities; June 26, June 27 references to procedures at Jack Ruby trial, Dallas.
- 4 1968 July 1-31. 19 items.  
Correspondence and press releases on press arrangements for Sirhan trial in Los Angeles; applications from media representatives for courtroom seats; July 12, Sheriff's Office release describing Shelby County jail; court orders- 'Order on Courthouse and Courtroom Procedures and Publicity', 'Amendment on Order'; Sheriff's Department information bulletin; press procedures report; news release to Editor and Publisher on Holmes' position as Sheriff's Office press liaison; court order - 'Report of Amici Curiae Committee'.
- 5 1968 August 2-29. 7 items.  
Los Angeles County Court order on publicity; correspondence on forms, applications for press credentials, proposed public opinion poll 'to find out how the people of Memphis feel about the James Earl Ray case'; George McMillan requests permission to interview Ray.

- 6 1968 September 4-23. 11 items.  
Correspondence on press credential applications; Search for Meaning Committee asks to interview some police officers; press releases from Los Angeles Sheriff's Department - 'Additional Information', 'Judicial Proceedings Regarding Sirhan B. Sirhan', 'Sheriff Releases Photo of Sirhan's Jail Cell'; paper by Frank C. Holloman, 'Civil Disorders- Where to Now?'; memo to Judge Battle on questionable publicity; Shelby County Court Petition for Contempt; press arrangement checklist.
- 7 1968 October 3-17. 20 items.  
Correspondence on press accreditation applications; Los Angeles Sheriff's Department press releases - 'Judicial Proceedings Regarding Sirhan B. Sirhan', 'Application for Sirhan B. Sirhan Trial Seating'; list of names on Accreditation Information Forms; Shelby County Court order on seating accommodation; seat assignments for news media representatives; protests about news media seat assignments; Shelby County Court order – 'Supplemental Report of Amici Curiae'.
- 8 1968 October 18- October 21. 15 items.  
Correspondence and protests about press accreditation applications; letter to Judge Herbert Walker, Superior Court, Los Angeles, on press seating arrangements for Ray trial; request from Harold Frediani, Criminal Courts Coordinator, Los Angeles, to visit Judge Battle's Shelby County Court.
- 9 1968 October 22-25. 13 items.  
Los Angeles Sheriff's Department press release - 'New location for press conference'; correspondence and protests on press accreditation; October 23 letter from Harold Frediani, Los Angeles Superior Court, expressing interest in Memphis security during Ray trial.
10. 1968 October 28-31. 6 items.  
Correspondence on press accreditation; form letter from Sheriff's Office to accredited media representatives on ID cards, press room, trial transcripts; list of names, Accreditation Information forms.
- 11 1968 November 4-11. 11 items.  
Correspondence on press accreditation; November 7 memo from Martest Otwell, Court Reporter, on equipment 'submitted for approval of the Court'; Nov. 7 letter from British solicitors who represented Ray during his extradition; Nov. 10 draft letter from Ray, releasing Hanes as his attorney; list of names for staffing auxiliary press room; Shelby County Court order - 'Defendant 's first motion for a continuance.'
- 12 1968 November 12-26. 13 items.  
Shelby County Court order with changes, 'Defendant's first motion for a continuance'; drafts of 4 letters denying reserved seating requests; notes on trial; correspondence on seating requests; November 19 WDIA editorial on Ray trial security.
- 13 1968 December. 17 items.  
Correspondence and a statement by Sheriff William Morris on use of the new State Office Building and Percy Foreman, Ray's attorney; biographical sketch of James Beasley; correspondence on press

- accreditation; December 3 press requests memo; December 18 list of those in press seats; December 18 response with draft to press requests memo (Dec. 3); Los Angeles County Court order- 'Publicity and Security'; December 31 list of seat assignments at Sirhan trial; list of those 'cleared to go into courtroom,' Ray trial.
14. 1969 January 1-23. 20 items.  
January 7 press seats list; correspondence on hotel accommodations for news people; January 8 editorial and fact sheet on Sirhan trial security; January 9, Holmes reviews film *Uptight* for Sheriff William Morris; January 15, Holmes to Morris on Los Angeles press facilities for Sirhan trial; January 16 information bulletin, Shelby County Sheriff's Office, disallowing closed circuit television transmission of Ray trial; January 20, Holmes to Morris on Ray trial facilities; correspondence on press seating at Ray trial; January 23, 'Interim Report on Sirhan B. Sirhan Trial.'
  15. 1969 January 24-30. 19 items.  
Correspondence on press seats at Ray trial; January 29 on remote audio.
  16. 1969 February 3-13. 11 items.  
Correspondence on press seats; Shelby County Court order permitting a "photographer of his [Ray's] selection to take photographs of said defendant for the purpose of obtaining funds with which to prepare for the trial"; Shelby County Court order permitting Ray to confer with William Bradford Huie, author; February 5 'Report of Amici Curiae'; February 7 list of names for press seats; notes regarding Huie written on manila folder.
  17. 1969 February 14-27. 11 items.  
February 14 list of names for press seats; February 14 note from Walker Percy; February 17 memo from Holmes to Judge Battle about additional press seating; correspondence on press seating.
  18. 1969 March 9-June 23, 1988 February 15. 15 items.  
Procedures for Press Room, Court Room, photographs and network television; March 10 list of names for press seats with notes on back; March 26 letter from George McMillan stating that *Life* will not use his story. "My piece was another casualty of the American paranoia." He refers to the conspiracy theory, "But frankly the whole business is taking on the irrational characteristics of Ray's thinking, and I am just glad to be out of it."; April 2 bulletin from Director of Fire and Police about April 4 Memorial March; April 4 press release about curfew (also draft); April 4 Media Guidelines for Mass March; correspondence on press seats at trial; Shelby County Court order limiting seating in court room; February 15, 1988 memo proposing MSU symposium on King assassination which was never held.
  19. 'Study of Shelby County Sheriff's Office, Criminal Courts, and All Shelby County Law Enforcement Agencies' to determine the adequacies of the present facilities. Report projects for period 1966 to 1990. 45 pages.
  20. Papers, undated. 20 items.  
News teletypes on defense attorney Percy Foreman's statements; notes on

Foreman; list of witnesses called; notes from trial; notice that curfew will continue; note about curfew to Holloman; note that Memphis Police Department "proved again yesterday that it is the nation's finest."; section of Memphis code on civil emergencies; draft with corrections about route of march; handwritten note on route of march; sketch on yellow paper of press room; typescript, "Public Statements Regarding Trial of James Earl Ray or Events Leading Up to the Trial."

- 21 Papers, undated. 16 items.  
Draft acknowledging court room seating request; draft memo on Los Angeles press facilities; draft letter to Harold Frediani, Los Angeles; correspondence on hotel accommodations for news people; draft memo from Shelby County Sheriff's Office on Ray; draft memo on press procedures; list of news representatives who "will be called to a press conference to be held in Judge Faquin's court room" and a press conference agenda; notes pertaining to security arrangements; outlines of Holmes' background, duties, problems and successes as press liaison; news teletype questioning security; Hanes complains about effect of security measures on his client; photocopy of a judge's reflections on the trial and on Memphis.
- 22 Papers, undated. 36 items.  
Notes of people's names, things to do; names of news people under heading 'Contempt Hearing'; notes on things like a mattress fire on 3rd floor of jail; notes on legal arguments of Foreman and others; notes on court room and press room equipment with note to Judge Battle on inter-com, emergency lighting, diagram of court room; notes on rioting and curfew arrests, injuries, fines; list of stores with broken windows.
- 23 Papers, undated. 15 items.  
Lists of news people with changes and corrections; list of news people at Sirhan trial; list of *Memphis Press Scimitar* reporters with addresses; Alert Call List of news representatives giving names and local addresses.
- 24 Papers, undated. 10 items.  
List of names; lists of accreditation requests; lists of seating arrangements.
- 25 Papers, undated. 18 items.  
Biographical sketches of Flora Lewis and Robert K. (Bussy) Dwyer; story by Bernard Gavzer; torn and incomplete parody of H.E.W. rulings on desegregation; Exhibit A and B - floor plans of 4th and 8th floors of Hall of Justice; sample press cards; sample FBI press application and rules; sample information card; sample Shelby County Sheriff's Office Accreditation Information form; sample press certification; notes taken on two manila folders.
- 26 Papers, undated. 39 items.  
Notes on phone calls received; notes of names and addresses.
- 27 Press Accreditation Information Forms. 22 items.  
Ahman - Byrd
- 28 Press Accreditation Information Forms. 21 items.  
Caputo - Everett
- 29 Press Accreditation Information Forms. 38 items.  
Fanion - Hutchinson

- 30 Press Accreditation Information Forms. 40 items.  
Jaffe – Mulert
- 31 Press Accreditation Information Forms. 32 items.  
Nahum - Ryden
- 32 Press Accreditation Information Forms. 23 items.  
Samsot - von Krusenstiern
- 33 Press Accreditation Information Forms. 14 items.  
Waldron - Young
- 34 Note pads. 2 items.  
Tablet 1. pp. 1-11, notes pertaining to Memphis State University, such as bad check and registration policies on p. 3; pp .11 -12, references to events in Memphis during the Sanitation Department strike and after Dr. King's assassination; p.13 and following notes relate to activities as press officer for Shelby County Sheriff 's Office; pp. 26-31, loose sheets.  
Tablet 2. pp. 1-46. Notes pertaining to duties as press liaison for Shelby County Sheriff's Office, phone calls, discussions, notes of things to do; p. 2, July 1, contains notes on discussion of security arrangements with people in the Los Angeles Sheriff's Office. "Not nearly as secure as our plans - Let anyone without credentials in to 'Public' trial."; pp. 9-46 blank.
- 35 Business Cards. 11 items.  
Photographs:
- 36 Criminal Court building, Memphis. Interior view of rear wall of court room, 1968 July 22. 4 items.
- 37 Two views of court room from judge's bench. 12 items.
- 38 Video -audio recording equipment, 1968 July 22. 2 items.
- 39 Aerial photograph of Criminal Court building. 5 items.
- 40 Aerial photograph of Criminal Court building, 1968 July 22. 3 items.
- 41 Aerial photograph of Criminal Court building from northwest, 1968 July 22.  
2 items.
- 42 Aerial photograph of Criminal Court building looking southwest. 2 items.
- 43 Interior, of module desks. Lawyers' conference room where they meet clients.  
If Ray jury was sequestered, this room would be turned into for jury members. 5 items.
- 44 Interior, of room with pool table and table and chairs. Deputies ' recreation room which would also be turned into sleeping quarters for sequestered Ray jury if needed. 7 items.
- 45 Sheriff William Morris and James Earl Ray (handcuffed). 5 items.  
Ray arriving from England and being taken to Shelby County jail.
- 46 Interior, of bed and bedside stand. Room had been set up to show how jurors would be accommodated. 5 items.
- 47 Interior, of jail cell with bed. Was Ray's cell, part of three room suite sealed off from rest of jail.
- 48 Interior, of barred room with television on other side of bars. Shows exterior of 3 jail cell suite and walkway. In walkway Ray could talk with lawyer without being overheard. Suite was under observation at all times.
- 49 Entrance to jail, ground floor.

- 50 Interior, of stairway which went to second floor courtrooms.
- 51 Two views of room with table, chairs and pitchers of water on table. This was  
room where jury would deliberate.
- 52 Journalists. 83 individual items and two sheets of photos; Martin Luther King, Jr.
- 53 Empty envelopes. 24 items.
- Newspaper clippings:
- 54 1968 June 24-October 19. 48 items.
- 55 1968 October 20-December 19. 36 items.
- 56 1969 January-February 28. 29 items.
- 57 1969 March 1-11. 17 items.
- 58 1969 March 13-June 26. 23 items.
- 59 1966 October 22, 1976 August 2, undated. 26 items.
- 60 Stipulation of facts and evidence presented by Assistant Attorney General James C.  
Beasley to Court, 1969 March 10.

**Addition, 2018**

- 61 Photographs: 9 b/w images, mostly copyrighted by World Wide Photos, re: assassination  
of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Ray trial.
- Publications:
- 62 "Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., et al, Speak on the War in Vietnam", New York:  
Clergy and Laymen Concerned About Vietnam, 1967.
- "Ray's Escape", *Newsweek*, Vol. 89, No. 25, 1977 June 20, pp. 22-26.
- OS 1 McWhirter, William A., "James Earl Ray, alias Galt, *Life*, Vol. 64, No. 18, 1968  
May 3, pp.20-29.
- Huie, William Bradford, "The Story of James Earl Ray and the Plot to  
Assassinate Martin Luther King", *Look*, Vol. 32, No. 23, 1968 November  
12, pp.96-113.
- Sketch by Ray of escape from prison in Jefferson City, Missouri, in April 1967, 1995  
September.