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Ronald Alford collection

Title: Ronald Alford collection
Collection No: MSS.435
Extent: 0.75 cubic feet
Inclusive Dates: 1949-2002

Abstract: The collection includes a variety of materials related to the careers of Ronald “Butch” Alford with the Associated Press’ Memphis Bureau and Memphis Board of Review. It also includes materials related to Alford’s service as a volunteer public relations professional during presidential visits to Memphis in 1976 and 1978.

Donor: Ronald Alford, Germantown, Tennessee, November 2004
Processed by: James E. Montague, 2005; Brigitte Billeaudeaux, 2016.
Access: Open to all researchers.
Language: English
Preferred Citation: Ronald Alford collection, Special Collections Department, University Libraries, University of Memphis.

Publication date: December 2016
Biographical information

Ronald “Butch” Alford (1941-2016) served in the Air Force and received a Bachelor of Science degree in journalism and a Master of Education degree from Memphis State University. He worked as a copyboy and reporter for the Commercial Appeal before joining the staff of the Associated Press in August 1965. It was during this period when the erroneous report that James Meredith had been shot dead was issued by the Associated Press instead of the correct report that “James Meredith had been shot in the head.” This collection includes various accounts of that incident.

Alford served as assistant public information director at Memphis State University and later as the first information director of Shelby State Community College. He was also information director with the Tennessee Higher Education Commission. Alford served on the Memphis Board of Review which was created in 1968 to prevent the dissemination of obscene materials to juveniles. During his tenure, the board was sued by several movie exhibitors for violation of the First and Fourteenth Amendments to the U.S. Constitution. The court ruled that the Memphis Board of Review was powerless to enforce the city’s anti-obscenity ordinance.

Scope and contents

This collection includes a variety of materials related to the careers of Ronald “Butch” Alford. Much of the collection focuses on two periods of time in Alford’s life: his position at the Associated Press’ Memphis Bureau and his time working on the Memphis Board of Review. This collection includes materials related to Alford’s service as a volunteer public relations professional during President Ford’s visit to Memphis in 1976 and President Carter’s visit to Memphis in 1978.

Along with materials related to Alford’s careers in news media and public relations, there are accounts from others in the public relations field that cover the James Earl Ray trial, the death of Elvis Presley, and some of the history of public relations in Memphis, Tennessee.

Subject terms

Alford, Ronald
Associated Press
Carter, Jimmy, 1924-
Ford, Gerald R., 1913-2006
Meredith, James, 1933-
Motion pictures—Censorship—United States—History
Public Relations Society of America—Tennessee—Memphis
Inventory

Box 1

Folder

Series 1: Employment with the Associated Press

1. Alford’s account of events that resulted in the erroneous reporting of James Meredith’s death, c2002.
2. Various press accounts reporting the shooting of James Meredith, c1966.
3. Associated Press letter written by Thomas Aden to Sam Blackman, General News Editor re: The erroneous report that James Meredith was killed at Hernando, Mississippi, 1966 June 6.
5. Memo to staff by Sam Blackman re: The James Meredith shooting and reporting procedures, 1966 June 21.
7. Correspondence, press reports, newspaper articles, and an excerpt from a book that is related to the false reporting of James Meredith’s death, c1966 and undated.
8. 1966 June 17 edition of Life magazine with coverage of James Meredith’s march in Mississippi.


11. Meredith, J. “A challenge to change: We as black Americans must not forget the past, but negative attitudes will only cloud our future,” Newsweek, 1997 October 6, clippings and news stories from unknown publications about James Meredith post 1966.


13. Copy photograph and photocopied image of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and others.
14. Forty-six color images of the memorials located on the University of Memphis campus.

Series 2: Memphis Board of Review

15. Letter to Fred L. Davis, Chairman Council of the City of Memphis from Mayor Wyeth Chandler re: Memphis Board of Review appointments, 1972 December 12; Letters to Ronald S. Alford from William C. Boyd, director of Public Service re: The Memphis Board of Review, 1973 January- March; Certificate of appointment to the Board of Review; Clipping from unknown publication announcing Alford’s appointment to the
Board of Review.
16 List of review board members with contact information.
18 Stock letters, forms and official documents used by the Memphis Board of Review; indecency ordinance for the City of Memphis, copy of Memphis Code Sec. 22-23.1 thru 31.15
20 Evaluation forms used by members of the Memphis Board of Review.
22 Letter to Theatre owners and managers from Las Savell, Chairman Memphis Board of Review re: violations to Memphis’ ordinance on obscenity, 1972 November 29.
23 Unnumbered ordinance to amend language in Chapter 22 of the code of ordinances of the City of Memphis, two copies.
24 Unnumbered ordinance to amend language in Chapter 22 and 31 of the code of ordinances of the City of Memphis and a partial copy of Memphis Code 22-39, four copies.
25 Letters to Members of Board of Review from Ross B. Clark II, staff attorney re: the motion picture “Tommy” and rules and procedure of the Board of Review, June to July 1975.
26 Letters from the Memphis Board of Review to the Motion Picture Exhibitors of Memphis re: movie ratings for movies reviewed by the board, 1974-1975.
27 WHBQ-TV 13, Editorials re: Memphis Board of Review to determine what television programs can be allowed on Memphis television stations, January 26- February 1, 1973; two copies of each.
28 Photocopied clippings from the *Commercial Appeal, Memphis Press-Scimitar* and *Showtime* related to the Memphis Board of Review’s activities and the movie “Last Tango in Paris.”
30 Clippings from the *Commercial Appeal, Memphis Press-Scimitar*, and *TV Guide* related to Memphis Board of Review and censorship.
31 Letter to Memphis Board of Review from Joe Pipkin, Mid-South Coliseum chairman re: policy on performances at the Mid-South Coliseum, 1974 January 15.
32 Letter to Wyeth Chandler, Mayor of Memphis, from Las Savell, chairman re: complaints about Rock and Roll performances at the Mid-South Coliseum, April 25, 1973.
33 *Commercial Appeal* and *Memphis Press-Scimitar* articles concerning Rock and Roll concerts and Memphis’ juvenile obscenity ordinance.
35 Clippings from the *Commercial Appeal* and correspondence re: proposed changes to Memphis City Ordinance regarding juvenile access to obscene materials, 1974-1975.
36 Original drawing, prints, and clippings of *Commercial Appeal* editorial cartoons by artist Draper Hill

Letters from citizens in support of the Memphis Board of Review, 1974 February - March.

Opinions from Memphis City Council members Fred Davis, Bob James, and Jack McNeil concerning the Memphis Board of Review, undated.

Clippings from the *Memphis Press-Scimitar* and the *Commercial Appeal* relating to a lawsuit filed by national film distributors against the Memphis Board of Review citing that Memphis’ enforcement of an obscenity ordinance is unconstitutional, 1974-1976.


**Box 2**

**Series 3: Public Relations**

1. Alford’s handwritten notes and transcription of Senator Albert Gore, Sr.’s statement to the *Memphis Press Scimitar* at Memphis State University’s commencement, 1969 January 25.


3. Contents of a notebook compiled by Alford as a public relations volunteer during President Gerald Ford’s visit to Memphis, 1976 May.

4. Contents of a notebook compiled by Alford as a public relations volunteer during President Jimmy Carter’s visit to Memphis for the 1978 Democratic Party mini convention held December 8th through 10th. Copy of President Carter’s speech to the convention included in the contents.


   Miller, K. “PR can enhance profits by building internal unity.” *Memphis Business Journal*.


9 Memphis Chapter of the PRSA, Memphis Image Survey Summary, undated.
10 VIPR (Very Important Public Relations folks) meeting attendee list, 2001 October 6.
11 50th Anniversary Committee Meeting Agenda of the Memphis Chapter of the Public Relations Society of America, Saturday, 2001 October 6.
12 Program from Golden Gala of the Public Relations Society of America Memphis Chapter, 2002 April 26.

**Series 4: Miscellaneous**

13 Letter to Mr. Alford from Clarence Saunders dated May 9, 1949, thanking Mr. Alford for his letter regarding a visit to Keedoozle.
14 Newspaper clippings about Clarence Saunders, founder of the Piggly Wiggly and Keedoozle stores and the original owner of the Pink Palace.