

Guide to
the Microfilm Edition
of the

FBI File on Roy Wilkins

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Introduction

Roy Wilkins (1901-1981) was a prominent member of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) from the 1930s through the 1970s, serving as executive secretary from 1955 to 1965. The son of a Methodist minister, Wilkins was born in St. Louis and raised in Minnesota, where he was educated and began his career as a civil rights activist. He started as a reporter for the *Kansas City Call*, later serving as its managing editor from 1922 to 1931. At the request of NAACP Executive Secretary Walter White, Wilkins moved to New York to edit the *Crisis*, the official publication of the NAACP, in 1931. He agitated strongly for equality in the armed forces during and after World War II, and he was a key figure in the prevention of Communist infiltration of the NAACP. Because of this policy, Wilkins came under fire from more progressive and radical black leaders, who accused him of being an Uncle Tom. Wilkins advanced the cause for racial equality by contesting local discrimination and police brutality cases around the nation. He retired from the NAACP in 1977.

The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) did not start a file on Wilkins until 1955, when White died. Wilkins, described by one FBI source as White's "right-hand man," was chosen as his successor. Because the FBI was concerned about Communist infiltration of the NAACP, Wilkins became a key figure in the investigation of the organization. Although the file clearly establishes that Wilkins was anti-Communist, he was watched for other reasons: namely, death threats and strong criticisms made against him by black radical groups.

The file begins with a detailed synopsis of Wilkins's activities from 1922 to 1958, and it is particularly useful in relating his statements on civil rights issues of the time. Most of the documents following the synopsis originate in the late 1960s; the file includes the public "farewell letter" from Eldridge Cleaver, minister of information for the Black Panther Party, to Stokely Carmichael, after the latter was thrown out of the party for his concessionary views.

The documents reproduced here were drawn from the Washington files of the FBI and have been released under the

Freedom of Information Act; certain documents or portions of documents have been deleted by the FBI pursuant to provisions of that legislation. The material has been filmed in the exact order and condition in which it was released, and every effort has been made to publish the most legible copies available.

Because Wilkins was not investigated until 1955, the file is organized haphazardly and does not have the typical strict chronological arrangement of most FBI files. The Roll Notes is not a complete inventory of the file; however, it gives an indication of the types of material or specific documents that may be particularly worthwhile for research.

ROLL NOTES

FBI File on Roy Wilkins

Bureau File Number 60-78270

Section 1:

February 1958

Roll 1, 0001-0255

Correlative summary of activities from 1922 to 1958

Section 2:

June 1958 - November 1969

Roll 1, 0256-0617

File summary dated 6/6/58

Reports on Wilkins's visit to the Bureau, 2/25/60

Supplemental correlation summary, 1/31/62

Memo dated 10/11/63 detailing death threat to Wilkins

Supplemental correlation summary, 1/17/64

Reports on Wilkins's visit to the Bureau, 11/27/64, and his threats to release damaging information about the FBI

Report on speech at Dayton, 3/16/65

Report on visit to Mississippi, 11/10/65

Supplemental correlative summary, 4/20/67

Memo regarding the Jamaica Rifle and Pistol Club's plot to assassinate Wilkins, 6/28/68

Report on speech at Selma, Alabama, 7/24/69

Supplemental correlative summary, 8/8/69

Report on appearance in Tampa, Florida, 8/22/69

Report on march in Clarksdale, Mississippi, 11/22/69

Section 3:

July 1963

Roll 1, 0618-0668

Reports on extortion attempt and death threat on postcard dated 7/16/63

Section 4:

January 1963 - February 1964

Roll 1, 0669-0724

Reports on death threat dated 1/5/64

Section 5:

Does not exist

Section 6:

August 1970 - March 1971

Roll 1, 0726-0761

Memos regarding alleged Hartford, Connecticut, police brutality

Section 7:

May 1969 - November 1972

Roll 1, 0762-0866

Memo dated 5/20/69 on possible racial violence

Report on the sanitation workers' dispute in Oklahoma City,
8/15/69

Report on racial disturbance in Augusta, Georgia, 5/11/70

NAACP letter dated 4/30/70 protesting Attorney General John
Mitchell's speech before the Mississippi Delta Council

Teletype dated 7/28/69 regarding Alabama racial disturbances

Newspaper clippings

Report dated 5/4/72 on Students Organized for Black Unity (SOBU)

Reports on efforts to organize nonprofessional workers at the
Louise Obici Memorial Hospital, Suffolk, Virginia, 11/69

Report on desegregation of Memphis, Tennessee, public schools

"Open Letter to Roy Wilkins," an article by Huey Newton, minister
of defense for the Black Panther Party, from the 9/26/70 issue
of the *Black Panther*

Reports on Wilkins's request for a meeting with Black Panther
Party officers, 7/1/70

Report on Black Panther Party relations with Canada, 11/7/72

Section 8:

Achronological

Roll 1, 0867-0914

Teletype dated 10/9/76 regarding bomb threat

Memos from 1937 and 1938 regarding Wilkins

Section 9:

Does not exist

Section 10:

October - November 1969

Roll 1, 0916-0957

Teletypes and lab analysis of death threat on Wilkins made by the

Tennessee Klavern of the United Klans of America

Section 11:

September 1968 - December 1969 **Roll 1, 0958-END**

Memo regarding racial incident at California State College at
Hayward

Teletypes regarding Jackson, Mississippi, police shooting, James
Earl Green, victim

Column by Jack Anderson asserting black leaders are under FBI
scrutiny

Farewell letter from Eldridge Cleaver to Stokely Carmichael

Copy of *Semper Fi* regarding black rebellion in the U.S. Marine
Corps

Memos regarding the panel discussion held at Boston College,
12/8/69