

Herbert Benjamin Papers

A Finding Aid to the Collection in the Library of Congress

Prepared by Laura J. Kells



Manuscript Division, Library of
Congress

Washington, D.C.

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Finding aid encoded by Glenn R.
Gardner, 2010

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Collection Summary

Title: Herbert Benjamin Papers

Span Dates: 1915-2004

Bulk Dates: (bulk 1923-1982)

ID No.: MSS85109

Creator: Benjamin, Herbert, 1900-1983

Extent: 3,000 items plus one oversize ; 14 containers; 5.6 linear feet

Language: Collection material in English

Repository: Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

Abstract: Communist Party official. Correspondence, memoranda, memoirs and additional writings, notes, printed matter, and other papers primarily relating to Benjamin's life and his work in the Communist Party, particularly his activities as a leader in the organized unemployed movement during the 1930s.

Selected Search Terms

The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the Library's online catalog. They are grouped by name of person or organization, by subject or location, and by occupation and listed alphabetically therein.

People

Benjamin, Herbert, 1900-1983.

Organizations

Communist Party of the United States of America.

Industrial Workers of the World.

National Hunger March (1st : 1931 : Washington, D.C.)

National Hunger March (2nd : 1932 : Washington, D.C.)

National Unemployment Council.

Workers Alliance of America.

Subjects

Communism--Michigan.

Communism--New York (State)

Communism--Ohio.

Communism--Pennsylvania.

Communism--United States.

Depressions--1929--United States.

New Deal, 1933-1939.

Unemployed--United States.

Places

United States--Economic conditions--1918-1945.

United States--Politics and government--1901-1953.

Administrative Information

Provenance

The papers of Herbert Benjamin, Communist Party official, were given to the Library of Congress by his son, Ernst Benjamin, in 2004.

Copyright Status

Copyright in the unpublished writings of Herbert Benjamin in these papers and in other collections in the custody of the Library of Congress is reserved. Consult a reference librarian in the Manuscript Division for further information.

Access and Restrictions

The papers of Herbert Benjamin are open to research. Researchers are advised to contact the Manuscript Reading Room prior to visiting. Many collections are stored off-site and advance notice is needed to retrieve these items for research use.

Preferred Citation

Researchers wishing to cite this collection should include the following information: Container number, Herbert Benjamin Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

Biographical Note

<i>Date</i>	<i>Event</i>
1900, Dec. 17	Born Benjamin Grefenson, Effingham, Ill.
1919	Joined Industrial Workers of the World
1920	Married Jennie Cooperman
1921	Joined Communist Party of America, Erie, Pa.
1923-1931	Held positions in Communist Party districts in New York, Ohio, and Pennsylvania
1928	Became national committee member, Communist Party of the United States of America (CPUSA)
1931	Named national organizer of unemployed for the CPUSA Led National Hunger March to Washington, D.C.
1931-1935	National secretary, Unemployed Councils
1932	Led second National Hunger March to Washington, D.C.
1935-1940	General secretary-treasurer, Workers Alliance of America
193?	Married Lillian Gerber
1940	Conducted a national "party building tour" to promote the CPUSA
1940-1942	General executive board member and national executive secretary, International Workers Order
1942-1944	Head of Communist Party in Missouri
194[?]-195[?]	Owner and operator, Metropolitan News Agency, Washington, D.C. Manager, Trenton Terrace Apartments, Washington, D.C.

1953-1978	Merchant, Pottery Fair, Washington, D.C.
1983, May 10	Died, Rockville, Md.

Scope and Content Note

The papers of Herbert Benjamin (1900-1983) span the years 1915-2004, with the bulk of the material dating from 1923 to 1982. They are arranged as general correspondence, subject files, writings, and oversize. A large portion of the collection relates to Benjamin's activities as a member of the Communist Party of the United States of America (CPUSA) from 1921 to 1944, particularly his work as a leader of the organized unemployed movement during the 1930s.

The most detailed information about Herbert Benjamin's life as a communist in the 1920s and 1930s is in his unfinished autobiography, "Memoirs of an Indelible Red," filed in the writings section. Benjamin devoted the last decade of his life to writing and rewriting his autobiography. In his drafts, Benjamin described the experiences that led him to join the Industrial Workers of the World and then the Communist Party. He recounts his attendance at the 1922 Communist Party convention in Bridgman, Michigan; his work in Buffalo, Cleveland, and New York, and in Philadelphia, Reading, and Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania; his leadership of the first and second National Hunger marches on Washington, D.C., in 1931 and 1932; the work to organize the unemployed during the Depression; and the circumstances which led him to end his public association with the CPUSA. The writings also contain Benjamin's statements of his political beliefs and personal reassessments over four decades.

Subject files contain records of the organizations in which Benjamin worked on behalf of the unemployed in the 1930s, including the National Unemployment Council, the Unemployed Councils, and the Workers Alliance of America. Files of the CPUSA relate to Benjamin's nationwide speaking tour in 1940 for the purpose of "party building." Subject files compiled in later years on people, issues, and current events often include Benjamin's thoughts on the topics. Files on "Historians" document Benjamin's contact with historians in the 1970s and his reaction to historical assessments of the organized unemployed movement in the 1930s.

Arrangement of the Papers

This collection is arranged by type of material.

Container List

<i>Container</i>	<i>Contents</i>
BOX 1	General correspondence
BOX 1	Darcy, Sam A., 1977-1980
BOX 1	Family members, 1956-1959, 1968, 1982-1983, 1994, undated
BOX 1	Gordon, Max, 1974-1983, undated
BOX 1	Miscellaneous correspondents, 1954-1956, 1965-1983, undated (3 folders)
BOX 1	Rosenzweig, Roy, 1972-1976, undated
BOX 1	Sargent, James E., 1981-1982
BOX 1	Subject files
BOX 1	China versus USSR, 1960-1964, undated
BOX 1	Communist Party of the United States of America
BOX 1	Miscellany, 1923-1924, 1943-1946, ca. 1965, 1976-1981, undated (2 folders)
BOX 2	Notebooks, 192[?], 194[?]
BOX 2	Speaking tour
BOX 2	Correspondence and memoranda, 1940
BOX 2	Fliers and handbills, 1940
BOX 2	Miscellany, 1940 (2 folders)
BOX 2	Notes, 1940, undated
BOX 2	Press clippings, 1940, undated
BOX 2	Unemployment, 1928-1938, 1951, 1961, undated
BOX 2	Congress of Industrial Organizations, 1939, undated
BOX 2	Fagin, Sophia (niece)
BOX 2	Fliers and handbills, 1939-1941, undated (3 folders)
BOX 2	Miscellany, 1939-1941, 2004, undated
BOX 3	Freedom of Information Act requests, 1976-1978, undated
BOX 3	Historians, 1974-1976, undated (2 folders)
BOX 3	Howe, Irving, and Lewis Coser, <i>The American Communist Party</i> , 1957 (4 folders)
BOX 3	Hunger marches, 1930-1933, 1956, 1973, 1981-1982, undated (4 folders)
BOX 4	International Workers Order, 1940-1942, undated (6 folders)
BOX 4	Interview for Source, Inc., 1976
BOX 4	Khrushchev, Nikita Sergeevich, 1960-1964, undated
BOX 4	Miscellany
BOX 5	1915, 1921-1932, 1940-1947, 1953-1974 (2 folders)

Container List

<i>Container</i>	<i>Contents</i>
BOX 5	1975-1982, undated <i>See also Oversize</i> (2 folders)
BOX 5	National Conference on New Politics, Chicago, Ill., 1967-1968, undated (3 folders)
BOX 5	National Unemployment Council, 1934-1936, undated (2 folders)
BOX 5	New American Movement, 1977, undated (2 folders)
BOX 5	New Deal, 1933-1941, 1965, 1973, undated
BOX 6	Poland, 1981-1982, undated
BOX 6	Political demonstrations, 1967-1978, undated
BOX 6	Poor People's March, 1968-1972, undated
BOX 6	Radical archives project, 1966-1968, 1975, undated
BOX 6	Social security
BOX 6	Correspondence regarding Benjamin's project, 1983
BOX 6	Notes, undated
BOX 6	Press clippings, 1975-1983, undated
BOX 6	Writings and reflections, 1982-1983, undated
BOX 6	Stevenson, Adlai E. (1900-1965), 1958-1959, undated
BOX 6	Unemployed Councils
BOX 6	Gallup, N. Mex., 1933-1934, 1965, undated
BOX 6	General, 1931-1934, undated (2 folders)
BOX 6	Unemployment and social insurance, 1933-1935, 1977, undated
BOX 7	Unification of unemployed organizations, 1935-1936, undated <i>For additional material see same container</i> , Workers Alliance of America
BOX 7	Unitarian-Universalist Fellowship of Huntington, Huntington, Long Island, N. Y., 1977-1978, undated
BOX 7	Vietnam War, 1967-1968, undated
BOX 7	Viewpoint Publishing Group, 1977-1978, undated
BOX 7	Violence and militancy, 1967-1969, undated
BOX 7	Workers Alliance of America
BOX 7	1935-1938 (7 folders)
BOX 8	1939-1942, 1951, 1980-1982, undated (6 folders)
BOX 8	Writings
BOX 8	Letters to editors 1933, 1960, 1968-1973, 1979-1980, undated
BOX 8	Memoirs
BOX 8	Correspondence, 1973-1983, undated
BOX 8	Drafts
BOX 8	Outlines, 1965, 1977-1978, undated
BOX 8	Preface, undated
BOX 9	Section 1, prologue, boyhood, 1973-1983, undated (5 folders)
BOX 9	Section 2, riding the rails and hobo life, 1965, 1979, undated (2 folders)

Container List

<i>Container</i>	<i>Contents</i>
BOX 9	Section 3, Erie, Pa., undated (2 folders)
BOX 10	Section 4, Industrial Workers of the World, undated (4 folders)
BOX 10	Section 5, communist underground, 1964-1965, 1976-1978, undated (5 folders)
BOX 11	Section 6, Cleveland, Ohio, Reading, Pa., Wilkes-Barre, Pa., 1965, 1978, undated
BOX 11	Section 7, factional leader, 1978-1979, undated (2 folders)
BOX 11	Section 8, "Sacco and Vanzetti Must Not Die," undated
BOX 11	Section 9, Philadelphia, Pa., district, 1976, undated (3 folders)
BOX 11	Section 10, New York in the early stage of the Depression, 1975-1979, undated (2 folders)
BOX 11	Section 11, Cleveland, Ohio, and USSR, 1975-1979, undated
BOX 12	Section 12, first National Hunger March, 1973-1981, undated (6 folders)
BOX 12	Section 13, between hunger marches, 1981-1982, undated (4 folders)
BOX 13	Section 14, second National Hunger March, 1981, undated
BOX 13	Section 15, New Deal, 1982
BOX 13	Section 16, concluding chapter, 1965, 1976, undated
BOX 13	Unidentified, 1979, undated
BOX 13	Illustrations, 1931-1932, 1969, undated
BOX 13	Miscellany, 1973-1978, undated
BOX 13	Research notes, 1936, 1973-1976, undated (3 folders)
BOX 13	Miscellaneous writings
BOX 14	1932-1940, 1959-1975 (3 folders)
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BOX 14	Notes and jottings, undated (3 folders)
BOX 14	Statements of personal political beliefs, 1944[?]-1957, 1965-1973, 1982-1983, undated (2 folders)
BOX OV 1	Oversize
BOX OV 1	Miscellany, undated (Container 5)