

C Rollins, James H. (1940-), Papers, 1961-1981
3056 3 cubic feet

RESTRICTED

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INTRODUCTION

James Henry (Jimmy) Rollins was a black civil rights activist and University of Missouri law student who was convicted of dispensing marijuana in 1968, jumped bail to avoid prosecution and was subsequently caught and imprisoned in 1974 for that and other crimes. The papers consist primarily of letters from the imprisoned Rollins to one of his supporters, and of notes, newspaper clippings, case files, and other printed material related either to his case or to contemporary political and racial conditions in Columbia and at the University of Missouri.

DONOR INFORMATION

The James H. Rollins Papers were donated by Rollins to the University of Missouri on 17 November 1994 (Accession No. 5491) as part of the Black Alumni Organizations Collecting Project. The information folder for this project can be found in the accession folder for the University of Missouri-Columbia, Black Studies Program, Papers (Accession No. 4984). An addition was made to the collection in March 2011 (Accession No. 6269). The papers are part of the Boone County Black Archives.

RESTRICTIONS

The FBI Files (folders 70-72) are closed until the donor's death.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

James Henry Rollins was born on December 18, 1940, and was raised in St. Louis. He entered the University of Missouri-Columbia in 1961 and graduated with degrees in mathematics and economics in 1965. By the spring of 1967, the second year law student was active in the politics of the University and the city of Columbia. He was chairman of the local chapter of the Congress of Racial Equality (C.O.R.E.), a member of Students for a Democratic Society, and was very vocal in various civil rights issues, including a controversial stand on the closing of Columbia's Douglass School and the integration of the predominately black student population into other Columbia schools.

In March of 1967, Rollins was arrested and charged with illegal possession of marijuana, which was later changed to a charge of dispensing marijuana. More than two months later, prior to going to trial and just four days before taking final exams for his second year in law school, the Faculty Committee on Student Conduct suspended Rollins from the University. He appealed the ruling to the Committee of Deans, who voted to reinstate him as a student until the end of the semester. However, Chancellor John W. Schwada overruled the deans and upheld the dismissal. The chancellor's letter said the suspension was "not based on any criminal charges which may be filed against you . . . but upon evidence of behavior in violation of accepted standards of student conduct." Appeals to both the University president and the Board of Curators were also denied.

Student groups, professors, and other concerned citizens in the community wrote letters and held rallies and sit-ins protesting Rollins' dismissal. A special meeting of the MU chapter of the American Association of University Professors resulted in a resolution calling on the University administration to revoke Rollins' suspension, stating that it "seems clear enough that the disciplinary charges are at least indirectly related to the cause of his arrest."

Rollins returned to his hometown of St. Louis and continued his civil rights activities. In August, he was one of seven arrested in connection with a disturbance arising from a protest rally at a housing development in St. Louis. In September, Rollins was elected, with Dr. Benjamin Spock, as co-chairman of the National Conference on New Politics, described by the St. Louis Post-Dispatch as "a coalition of peace groups and radical political organizations."

Rollins' trial was held in Boone County on March 19, 1968, the same day that a very controversial Open (Fair) Housing referendum was being voted on in Columbia. Rollins and many others would contend that this was only one of many facts that prejudiced his case. The jury handed down a guilty verdict and a sentence of five years in prison. Rollins filed an appeal, arguing that the charges, the conviction, and the punishment were all a consequence of his civil rights activities and that it was impossible for him to receive an impartial trial in Boone County.

Rollins was not alone in his belief that he was framed. Many Columbia citizens supported him, but none more than Mr. and Mrs. Paul Schmidt, who put up a \$5,000 property bond to keep Rollins out on bail until his appeal was heard. Unfortunately, the Schmidts lost their money when Rollins disappeared sometime in late 1969, just prior to the denial of his appeal in January, 1970.

While a fugitive, Rollins was known to have used the aliases, Lee J. Evans and Robert R. Cody, and to have lived in California, New York, and Africa. In 1971, Rollins was sought for the shooting deaths of two men in California and in 1972 he was arrested in Kenya on drug and weapons charges. He fled prosecution both times. Then, in September 1974, he was arrested in New York for mail fraud involving the transfer to a New York City bank of \$650,000 worth of money orders stolen in Kenya. He served several months in federal prison for that charge before being transferred to California to stand trial for the 1971 murder of two former colleagues. After the first trial ended in a hung jury, he was convicted of two counts of voluntary manslaughter at a second trial in October of 1975. Rollins was returned to Federal prison in Pennsylvania until he was transferred to Missouri State Penitentiary in early February 1976, to begin serving his sentence on the original drug conviction. In 1978, as Robert R. Cody, he began serving his time in California on the manslaughter charges. He was released in 1980.

While in prison, Rollins was constantly working on his case, filing appeals and trying to reduce his time. He spent a great deal of time in the law library and was known as a "writ writer" and trouble-maker. Whenever something happened to deny his appeals or paroles, Rollins was usually certain that it was racially or politically motivated. He also spent some of his time in both Missouri and California prisons taking several courses toward a master's degree.

Several of the people who stood behind him during his trial and appeals continued to communicate with Rollins while he was in prison. Liz Schmidt, who might easily have turned her back on him, since his flight in 1970 cost her and her husband \$5,000, was one of his most faithful correspondents through the years he was in prison -- even visiting him on a regular basis while he was in prison in Jefferson City and writing a letter of recommendation when he came up for parole.

After serving more than five years in prison, James Rollins now lives in St. Louis.

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

The James H. Rollins Papers cover only a relatively short period in the life of James Rollins and are not meant to be representative of his entire life and/or accomplishments. The papers consist of five series: **Chronological Files**, **Prison Correspondence**, **Legal Documents**, **FBI Files**, and **Miscellaneous**. The **Chronological Files**, are comprised of newspaper clippings and other printed materials, such as copies of MU student newspaper *The Maneater*, as well as a few letters and notes, and are subdivided into **general** and **personal** files, which are each arranged chronologically. The **Prison Correspondence**, arranged chronologically, consists primarily of letters from Rollins while he was incarcerated in various prisons in Missouri, Pennsylvania and California.

The **General Chronological Files**, 1961-1977, n.d., contain newspaper clippings and other printed materials primarily relating to civil rights and other political issues at the University of Missouri and in the town of Columbia during the turbulent 1960s and 1970s. Some issues covered include the closing of the Douglass School and the integration of its predominately black population into other Columbia schools; the failure of the passage of an Open (Fair) Housing referendum in Columbia in 1968; the dissatisfaction of both students and professors with University of Missouri administration; anti-Vietnam War demonstrations; interracial dating; illegal drug use; and the criminal justice system.

The **Personal Chronological Files**, 1967-1977, consist of items related specifically to the activities of James Rollins, including newspaper articles detailing his civil rights activities, arrests, trials, and incarcerations, as well as notes and impressions about a 1977 hearing, apparently written by staunch supporter, Liz Schmidt. Also included is one folder of clippings and articles relating to the Open Housing referendum, which were gathered to help with the unsuccessful 1977 appeal of the original drug charge.

The **Prison Correspondence** series, 1975-1980, is also arranged chronologically and consists primarily of letters written by Rollins to Liz Schmidt of Columbia, Missouri, from the various prisons in which he was incarcerated. In his correspondence, Rollins frequently discusses his efforts to appeal his case, his activities in prison, general prison conditions, comparisons of one prison to another, and his opinions on prison reform, as well as remarks about mutual acquaintances. He continued to maintain that many of the things that happened to him in the criminal justice system were the result of his race and/or his political activities. These letters are the strength of this collection, in that they reveal at least a portion of the feelings and insights of a militant young African-American who was serving time for offenses he consistently denied committing. Future researchers will find his opinions valuable in studying race relations and criminal justice conditions in Missouri in the 1960s and 1970s.

The **Legal Documents** series, 1969-1981, contains court records stemming from cases in Missouri, New York, California, and the U.S. Supreme Court and document his legal battles and multiple appeals.

The **FBI file** series, 1968-1978, includes Rollin's Federal Bureau of Information records which he requested through the Freedom of Information Act. These files are currently restricted and cannot be viewed.

The **Miscellaneous** series contains the *Bryant Family Tree*, written by Susan M. Bell and the Mars Place Redevelopment Plan, which was an effort by Rollins to rehabilitate the Clara-Ashland-Blackstone-Mebert area of St. Louis by constructing new single family homes.

FOLDER LIST

Chronological Files – General Series

- f. 1 Chronological file – General, 1961-1963
- f. 2 Chronological file – General, 1964
- f. 3 Chronological file – General, 1965
- f. 4 Chronological file – General, 1966
- f. 5-9 Chronological file – General, 1967 January-February
- f. 10-11 Chronological file – General, 1968 March
- f. 12 Chronological file – General, 1969
- f. 13 Chronological file – General, 1970
- f. 14 Chronological file – General, 1973-1975
- f. 15 Chronological file – General, 1976-1977
- f. 16 Chronological file – General, n.d.

Chronological Files – Personal Series

- f. 17-19 Chronological file – Personal, 1967
- f. 20-22 Chronological file – Personal, 1968
- f. 23 Chronological file – Personal, 1972-1977

Prison Correspondence Series

- f. 24 Prison Correspondence, 1975
- f. 25-31 Prison Correspondence, 1976
- f. 32-34 Prison Correspondence, 1977
- f. 35-38 Prison Correspondence, 1978-1980

Legal Documents Series

- f. 39 State of Missouri vs. James Henry Rollins, Supreme Court of Missouri, 1969
- f. 40-43 United States of America vs. James Henry Rollins aka Lee Evans, U. S. Court of Appeals, Southern District of New York, 1974
- f. 44 Before the Grand Jury of Alameda County, California, in the matter of the Investigation of Lee J. Evans, 1975
- f. 45-48 People of the State of California vs. Lee J. Evans, Court of Appeals, 1975
- f. 49 In regards to Lee Jay Evans on Habeas Corpus, in the Court of Appeal of the State of California, 1975
- f. 50-54 People of the State of California vs. James H. Rollins, aka Lee J. Evans, Robert Cody, Superior Court of California 1975
- f. 55 The People of the State of California vs. James H. Rollins, Court of Appeal, Transcript
- f. 56-58 Robert R. Cody vs. P. J. Morris, In the Supreme Court of the State of California

- f. 59 James H. Rollins vs. the People of the State of California, in the U.S. Supreme Court, Oct. term 1977
- f. 60 James H. Rollins vs. the United States of America, in the U. S. Supreme Court, Oct. term, 1977
- f. 61 People of the State of California vs. Robert Cody, Court of Appeal, State of California, 1979
- f. 62 Circuit Court, City of St. Louis, Petition for Dissolution of Marriage
- f. 63 Legal file, Robert Cody, California Institution for Men, 1978-1980
- f. 64 Robert Cody vs. Conard Blevins, et al, U.S. District Court, Northern District of California, 1980
- f. 65 Robert Cody vs. P. J. Morris, U.S. District Court, Northern District of California, 1978-1981
- f. 66 James H. Rollins vs. Donald Wyrick, Missouri State Penitentiary, U.S. District Court, Western District of Missouri, transcript, 1977
- f. 67 Certificate of Mandatory Release, U. S. Parole Commission, 1977
- f. 68 James H. Rollins vs. Milt Harper, et al, U.S. Court of Appeals, 8th District, 1978
- f. 69 James H. Rollins vs. Donald Wyrick, U. S. Supreme Court
- f. 70-72 FBI file – **RESTRICTED**
- f. 73 *The Family Tree of Lawson Montgomery Bryant, Sr. and Catherine Bennett Bryant*
- f. 74 Mars Place Redevelopment Plan

INDEX

Subject	Folders	Image
Allen, William S.	7, 8	
Blacks--Civil rights--Missouri, Columbia	1-4, 9-11, 14, 15, 17-20, 22	
Blacks--Race identity	19	
Boone County Black Archives	1-38	
Bryant, Catherine Bennett	73	
Bryant, Lawson Montgomery, Sr.	73	
Civil rights--Law and legislation	2, 10	
Clark, Montague Graham, Jr. (1909-2001)		
Congress of Racial Equality (CORE)--Missouri, Columbia, 1960s	1, 2, 17	
Conley, Frank (1932-)	17-20, 22, 23	
Crime	15, 23	
Criminal justice, Administration of	14, 24-38	
Discrimination in education--Missouri, Columbia	4-6, 12	
Discrimination in housing--Missouri, Columbia	2, 3, 6, 8-10, 12, 20, 21	
Discrimination in public accommodations	2	
Douglass School, Columbia, Missouri	3, 5, 6	
Drug abuse--Law and legislation	6, 8, 12, 14, 17-20, 22-24	
Election, 1964--Missouri, Columbia	f. 2	

Subject	Folders	Image
Ellinger, James	15	
Genealogy		
Interracial dating, 1967	5	
King, Martin Luther, Jr. (1929-1968)--Commemoration of	11	
Legal documents--California	44-65	
Legal documents--Missouri	39, 66-68	
Legal documents--New York	40-43	
Mars Place Redevelopment--St. Louis	74	
Men--Societies		
Missouri Commission on Human Rights	11	
Missouri, Columbia, 1960s	1-12, 17-22	
Missouri, Columbia, 1970s	13-15, 22-23	
Missouri, Columbia. Municipal Airport	2, 3	
Missouri, Columbia. Municipal Airport	2-3	
Missouri. Penitentiary, Jefferson City	23, 27-35	
Monsees, Mary Louise	17-20	
Papish, Barbara	14	
Prisons, 1970s	15, 24-38	
Race discrimination, Missouri, Columbia	2-6, 8-10, 12, 20, 21, 27	
Race relations	19	
Rollins, James H. (1940-)	5, 15, 17-74	
Rollins, James H. (1940-)	31	y
Schmidt family	31	y
Schmidt, Liz	22, 24-38	
Schwada, John W. (1919-1990)	7, 8, 17-19	
Sexual behavior, 1979	38	
Sons of the American Revolution, Missouri Society		
Students for a Democratic Society--Missouri, Columbia	5, 7, 9, 17	
University of Missouri-Columbia, 1960s	1-3, 5-9, 12, 17-20	
University of Missouri-Columbia, 1970s	13-15, 34-38	
Urban Renewal--Missouri, Columbia	14, 16	
Vietnam War, 1961-1975	11	
Vietnam War, 1961-1975--Protests, demonstrations, etc.	4, 7, 12, 13	
Youth--Sexual behavior, 1979	38	