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Atlanta, GA 30307

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Records of Louis Martin, Special Assistant to the President: A Guide to Its Records at the Jimmy Carter Library

Collection Summary

Creator: Office of the Assistant to the President

Title: Records of Louis Martin, Special Assistant to the President

Dates: 1977-1981

Quantity: 50 linear feet, 120 containers

Identification:

Accession Number: 80-1

National Archives Identifier: 1084

Scope and Content:

The files consist of correspondence, memoranda, notes, resumes, photographs, miscellaneous printed material, newspaper clippings, desk calendars, mailing lists, telephone messages, speech drafts concerning anything interesting to the blacks, minority, and women communities from 1978-1981. Material in this collection focuses on education, community service, urban development, housing, small business, and civil rights.

Creator Information: Office of the Assistant to the President

This office was headed by Louis Martin, who was appointed as the President's personal representative to blacks. His duties included serving as the visible point of contact between blacks and the White House. He conveyed to the President any concerns, issues, and needs of blacks. He monitored governmental programs and pending initiatives of interest to blacks. Martin defended, described, and supported programs and policies of the administration as they relate to blacks.

Many of Martin's duties, as head of the office, concerned communication between the White House and principal black spokesmen throughout the country. As documented in these files, the White House attempted to keep the black community abreast of what the Carter Administration was doing on behalf of blacks and the black community by using Martin as a liaison through which problems, concerns, and suggestions could be given to the White House. Martin's longstanding association with the black press and the Democratic Party proved invaluable in developing the sensitivity, the knowledge, and the contacts necessary in the performance of this job.

[Biographical information](#) on key office personnel is located at the end of the finding aid.

Restrictions:

Restrictions on Access: These papers contain documents restricted in accordance with applicable executive order(s), which governs National Security policies, applicable statutes/agency restrictions, and material which has been closed in accordance with the donor's deed of gift.

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Related Material:

Related materials in this repository: Various series of the White House Press Office Files

Index Terms:

Limited to major topics under each category
Persons: Louis Martin

Organizations: Democratic National Committee (DNC), National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP)

Subjects: African-Americans, minorities, women, education, community service, urban development, housing, small business, and civil rights

Types of Material: Correspondence, memoranda, notes, resumes, photographs, miscellaneous printed material, newspaper clippings, desk calendars, mailing lists, telephone messages, and speech drafts

Administrative Information:

Preferred citation: [Type of Document], [Names of Sender and Recipient or Title of Document], [Date], [Collection Title], [Series Title], [Folder Title], [Box Number], Jimmy Carter Presidential Library.

Acquisition information: These historical materials were received under provisions of the instrument of gift that Jimmy Carter signed January 31, 1981.

Processing information: The first series of the collection was opened in August 1987.

System of Arrangement:

The records Louis Martin, Special Assistant to the President are divided into one series:

Series Title	National Archives Identifier
Louis Martin's Files	140949

Detailed Description of the Collection

[Louis Martin's Files](#)

Scope and Content: Containers 1-120. This series was opened in August 1987. This series consists of correspondence, memoranda, notes, printed material, desk calendars, photographs, speech drafts, newspaper clippings, mailing lists, computer print-outs, reports, and telephone messages. Arranged alphabetically by folder title.

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Last Modified - September 2015

Biographical Information

Louis Martin

Louis Martin was born on November 18, 1912 in Shelbyville, Tennessee, and grew up in Savannah, Georgia. After first attending Fisk University, Martin went on to graduate from the University of Michigan in 1934, earning a degree in journalism. With college behind him, Martin traveled to his father's native country, Cuba, and spent two years as a freelance writer based in Havana. He returned to the United States in 1936 and landed a job as a reporter with the *Chicago Defender*, a major black newspaper. He spent only half a year there before moving back to Michigan to help launch a new black paper, the *Michigan Chronicle*, serving as its first editor and publisher.

Martin remained at the *Chronicle* for eleven years. It was during this period that Martin became an active supporter of Democratic politics. Working in Detroit, he saw the day-to-day struggles of workers in the automobile industry. He viewed the Democratic Party as the best vehicle for advancing the cause of organized labor. As head of a newspaper, he was in a position to make that view known to a large number of people. He also helped found the National Newspaper Publishers Association, a group of black publishers, and served for two terms as the organization's president. In 1947 Martin left the *Chronicle* and moved back to Chicago to become editor-in-chief at the *Defender*. He ran the *Defender* for the next dozen years.

In 1959 Martin went to Lagos, Nigeria, where he spent a year as an editorial advisor to a newspaper company called the Amalgamated Press. Returning to the United States in 1960, Martin was recruited by R. Sargent Shriver to work on the presidential campaign of his brother-in-law, John F. Kennedy. Martin played a pivotal role in steering black voters toward Kennedy, and this voting bloc proved key to Kennedy's victory in the election. In particular, Martin was responsible for orchestrating Kennedy's sympathy call to Coretta Scott King when her husband, the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., was arrested in Atlanta for a traffic violation. The call received a great deal of attention in black communities nationwide, and helped to cement support for Kennedy among African Americans. Several years later, Martin helped smooth tensions between King and President Lyndon Johnson when King came out against Johnson's handling of the war in Vietnam.

On the heels of the Kennedy victory, Martin was named deputy chairman of the Democratic National Committee in 1961. He remained in that position until 1969, serving as a close advisor on all race-related issues to Presidents Kennedy and Johnson. He was, in fact, one of the few bureaucrats who was able to survive the Kennedy-to-Johnson transition with all of his power intact. Martin was given much of the credit for turning out an amazing 96 percent of the black vote for Johnson during the 1964 presidential election. That performance went a long way toward convincing Johnson to keep him around.

During the 1960s and 1970s, Martin was instrumental in backing the appointments of African Americans to scores of posts in Washington and elsewhere, most notably Thurgood Marshall's seat on the Supreme Court. Vernon Jordan, who has held a number of important positions, is another powerful African American who benefited from Martin's sponsorship. Others whose

appointments Martin helped engineer include cabinet members Robert Weaver and Patricia Roberts Harris; Andrew Brimmer, the first black Federal Reserve Board member; and Army Secretary Clifford Alexander.

As his behind-the-scenes influence in Washington grew, Martin was able to convince more and more prominent policy engineers within the Democratic machine that a civil rights agenda was not only the right moral road to take, but the best one strategically for the party as well. Martin left his Democratic National Committee post in December of 1968, and returned once again to Chicago to assume editorship of the Defender. He maintained a presence in Washington, however, by establishing the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, a think tank whose mission was to provide technical and research support for black officials and scholars all over the United States. Martin served as chairman of the Joint Center's board for eight years. It was his successor, former University of Chicago vice president Eddie Williams, who first dubbed Martin "the godfather of black politics." Martin himself preferred the title "inside agitator."

In 1978, with the Democrats back in the White House, Martin was hired as a special assistant to President Jimmy Carter, specializing in policies affecting minorities and women. Following the end of Carter's presidency, Martin accepted a position at Howard University as assistant vice president for communications in 1981. He stayed at Howard until 1987, when he returned yet again to Chicago to work for Calmar Communications, a public relations firm that his wife and her sister had started a few years earlier. He also contributed weekly columns to the Defender. In 1988, Martin suffered a stroke, and two years later he and his wife moved to Diamond Bar, California, where he died in January of 1997, at the age of 84.