

Historical Society Adds Microform on Civil Rights Movement

by Bob Knecht, State Archives, Kansas State Historical Society

Researchers now have access to more information about civil rights and school desegregation in the 1950s and 1960s at the Kansas Historical Society's State Archives and Library. The Library recently added 33 rolls of microfilm documenting civil rights issues and how they were addressed in the Eisenhower and Kennedy administrations, 1953–1963. This new microfilm supplements existing holdings that document the struggle for equality in educational opportunity and civil rights in Kansas from as early as 1881. The microfilm was purchased with an Interlibrary Loan Development Program (ILDP) grant from the Kansas Library Network Board. This microfilm may be used at the State Archives and Library in Topeka, or researchers can ask their local library to borrow the film through the interlibrary loan program.

Topeka occupies a unique place in both the State and national civil rights movements. As an initial location for the world-famous *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*, litigation and the site of the Brown v. Board National Historic Site, the city is symbolic of the triumph of the Constitution over racial segregation.

The Kansas Historical Society has been bolstering its collection of primary source materials on civil rights, particularly during the Brown era, circa 1950-1999, with microfilmed copies of pertinent records. The school desegregation records from the White House central files during the Eisenhower administration, 1953–1961, contain internal memorandums and working papers, as well as correspondence with external individuals and groups. The records show the deliberations leading to official administration decisions and policies. They relate to events preceding and following the U.S. Supreme Court's *Brown* decision such as the integration of Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas.



While the *Civil Rights During the Kennedy Administration* microfilm does not contain anything as sensational as the *Brown* decision or the Little Rock controversy, the nineteen rolls of microfilm show the evolution of the civil rights movement and how the Kennedy administration used its executive authority to end or reduce discrimination in those areas where the federal government had jurisdiction: federal employment and contracts, housing programs, school funding, and interstate transportation and commerce. The records show how the federal government observed the states' handling of civil rights issues. Differences between the administration and Congress and between the President and white Southerners are noted.

The original records reproduced on these two microfilm publications are in the Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library in Abilene and the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library in Boston, Massachusetts.

These records will augment microfilmed records of other groups from the same period purchased in the past decade, such as the records of the legal team of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), 1913–1965, on school integration and records of Kansas NAACP branches, 1914–1955, previously acquired by the Historical Society with ILDP funding.

This microfilm allows the Kansas Historical Society to have records showing evidence of the role played by the President and U.S. Attorney General charged with implementing the Supreme Court's *Brown* decision. In addition, the Historical Society has a microfilm copy of the Federal Court records in the *Brown* case. In its state archives holdings, the Society has records of previous Kansas court cases on school desegregation back to 1881 and records of governors and attorneys general on the subject. The Historical Society's manuscripts collection includes papers of some of the individuals involved in the *Brown* litigation and Topeka school integration, as well as oral histories collected primarily in 1991 and 1992 from people involved in the cases that were combined under the *Brown* umbrella.

With this microfilm of the Eisenhower administration's central files on school desegregation and the Kennedy administration's central, staff, and office files on civil rights, the Historical Society can now make available to researchers the records of an additional major participant in the civil rights struggles of the 1950s and early '60s -- the Executive Branch of the federal government. The fact that Dwight Eisenhower was a Kansan makes the acquisition of this microfilm of his administration's records all that more significant.

Information on the Society's interlibrary loan program may be found at <http://www.kshs.org/library/illpoli.htm>.

The Kansas State Historical Society's Library is open:
9 a.m. – 4:30 p.m. Tuesday – Saturday at 6425 SW Sixth Avenue, Topeka KS 66615-1099. To plan a visit, please check www.kshs.org or call 785/272-8681 or TTY 785/272-8683.