



Amplifying Black Voices

in the AFL-CIO Civil Rights Department Records:
A Case Study in Content Appraisal for Digitization

Historical context of organized labor and civil rights

Prior to the merger of the American Federation of Labor and the Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO) in 1955, Black workers experienced exclusion, segregation and 2nd class membership within the labor movement. Consequently, there is a near total absence of Civil Rights material in the AFL records (1881-1955) and few civil rights records survived related to the more progressive CIO (1935-1955).

The AFL-CIO Civil Rights Records

- **Discrimination case files, 1956-1984**, over 1800 local case files, often charges filed at the workplace or local level by rank-and-file workers.
- **1963 March on Washington**, documentation of organized labor's support, including correspondence, subject, and Civil Rights organization files.
- **Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Voting Rights Act of 1965**, lobbying files, significant documentation of labor's key role in passing this landmark law.
- **Executive Order 11246, 1965**, requiring Equal Employment Opportunity by federal contractors, documented in files related to the AFL-CIO building trades, particularly in Philadelphia and other major northern cities.
- **Memphis sanitation strike, 1968**, documentation of labor solidarity and the ongoing role of Dr. Martin Luther King in supporting the labor movement.

