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Guide to the New York Police Department Guardians Oral History Collection 12231326

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Finding aid written in English

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Oral History Archives at Columbia

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Summary Information

Repository:	Oral History Archives at Columbia
Title:	New York Police Department Guardians Oral History Collection
ID:	12231326
ID:	OHAC
Date [inclusive]:	2015-2016
Physical Description:	.75 linear feet 1329 pages of transcripts in 2 boxes
Physical Description:	18 digital audio files (Sound recordings)
Language of the Material:	English .
Abstract:	The fourteen interviews of the NYPD Guardians oral history collection document the history of the fraternal organization and the experiences of members as police officers in New York City. The New York Police Department Guardians Association was founded in 1943 and recognized by the NYPD as a fraternal organization in 1949. Over the years it has served African American officers and civilian employees of the NYPD by developing community; providing education and mentorship; advocating within the department; and taking legal action to combat discrimination in hiring and promotion. The narrators discuss the impact of the Guardians on officers' careers, the group's advocacy against discrimination in the NYPD, and developments in police work from the 1960s-2010s.

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History

The New York Police Department Guardians Association was founded in 1943 and recognized by the NYPD as a fraternal organization in 1949. Over the years, it has served African American officers and civilian employees of the NYPD by developing community; providing education and mentorship; advocating within the department; and taking legal action to combat discrimination in hiring and promotion. In 1966, the Guardians endorsed the formation of the city's Civilian Complaint Review Board, a decision opposed by the police

union, the Patrolmen's Benevolent Association of New York. The Guardians were also involved in litigation in the early 1980s regarding disparate outcomes by race for the NYPD's entrance and promotion examinations. The latter resulted in a 1985 settlement to establish quotas for promotions. The NYPD Guardians Association continues to provide advocacy and community for members.

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Scope and Content

The fourteen interviews of the NYPD Guardians oral history collection document the history of the fraternal organization and the experiences of members as police officers in New York City. Topics include: the impact of the Guardians on officers' careers; the group's advocacy against discrimination in the NYPD; litigation in the 1980s regarding promotion exams; and activities of the Civilian Complaint Review Board, which at times saw the Guardians at odds with the NYPD Patrolmen's Benevolent Association. Narrators also discuss their daily work as officers and developments in policing from the 1960s-2010s. They reflect on police and community relations in New York during their youths and conversations about race and policing at the time of the project. Other organizations discussed are 100 Blacks in Law Enforcement Who Care and the Policewomen's Endowment Association.

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Scope and Content

Narrators are Eric Adams, Reuben Bankhead, Charles Coleman, Caudieu Cook, Deatra Fuller, Lester H. Grissom, Leroy Hendricks, Edgar Jones, Patricia Martin, Gary Miller, Robert Nero, Alicia Parker, Joseph Richardson, Annette Spellin, and Graham Weatherspoon.

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Scope and Content

Interviews are fixed as digital sound recordings (in WAV format), PDF transcripts, and print transcripts. Certain interviews were redacted. Redactions in the audio are marked by silence in the recording, lasting as long as the redacted portion. Redactions are also noted in the transcript. The archives did not receive unredacted versions of the interviews in question.

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Arrangement

Interviews are arranged in one series, alphabetically by narrator's last name.

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Administrative Information

Publication Statement

Oral History Archives at Columbia

Revision Description

xml document instance created by David Olson EAD was imported spring 2019 as part of the ArchivesSpace Phase II migration. 2017-09-11 2019-06-08

Access Restrictions

Access: Open.

Acquisition

Liz H. Strong, Gift, 2016

Custodial History

The project was initiated by Liz H. Strong for her capstone in the Oral History Master of Arts program in the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences at Columbia University. Four additional interviews were conducted after Strong graduated in October of 2015. The collection was donated to the archives in September of 2016.

Processing Information

Finding aid by David A. Olson, incorporating description by Liz H. Strong. 9/2017

Restrictions on Use

Copyright by the Trustees of Columbia University in the City of New York, 2015-2016.

Conditions Governing Access

All interviews are fully open on the web.

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Related Materials

Related Material

[Charles Coleman Collection of The Guardians Association Newsletters](#), 1986-2015, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University.

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Controlled Access Headings

- African American police -- New York (State) -- New York
- Police-community relations -- New York (State) -- New York
- Community policing -- New York (State) -- New York
- Policewomen -- New York (State) -- New York
- Police misconduct -- New York (State) -- New York
- Police administration -- New York (State) -- New York
- Discrimination in law enforcement -- New York (State) -- New York
- Black lives matter movement
- Oral histories (literary works)
- Interviews
- NYPD Guardians Association
- New York (N.Y.). Police Department -- History

Collection Inventory

Interviews

[Conditions Governing Access:](#)

Conditions Governing Access

All interviews are fully open on the web. Follow the links below.

Title/Description	Instances
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Eric Adams, 2015 April 22 and 2015 June 11

box 1

Digital Object: [Oral history interview with Eric L. Adams, 2015](#)

Scope and Content Note

Eric Adams provided two sessions of oral history interviews addressing the same subjects: his career in the New York police Department, the history of the Guardians Association, and the founding of 100 Blacks in Law Enforcement Who Care. He also goes into some detail about his personal background, including memories about police community relationships in Queens, where he grew up in the 1960s and 1970s, and his efforts to speak out against racism in the police department.

General

Eric Adams was, at the time of this interview, Brooklyn Borough President, the first African American elected to the position. In 2006, he retired from the NYPD to make a successful run for the New York State Senate. He was active on the force from 1984 to 2006. During his 22 years in the police force, he began in the Transit Police, then moved to the NYPD where he reached the rank of captain before retiring. He co-founded 100 Blacks in Law Enforcement Who Care in 1995 and also served as chair of the Grand Council of the Guardians.

Other Finding Aids

Additional information about interview contents and/or restrictions may be found in the [catalog record](#).

Reuben C. Bankhead, 2015 August 3

box 1

Digital Object: [Oral history interview with Reuben C. Bankhead, 2015](#)

Scope and Content Note

Reuben Bankhead speaks primarily of the NYPD Guardians Association, and its importance to aiding the careers of black police officers during his time with the New York City Police Department. He shares how influential the advice of more experienced police was when he was starting out, as well their advocacy and support for black officers to take promotion exams. He comments on the affect of the lawsuits brought by the Guardians Association, aiding later generations of police officers. He also touches on

how policing has changed from the 1960s and 1970s into the 2000s, and the importance of residency requirements to community policing.

General

Reuben Bankhead grew up in the Bedford-Stuyvesant neighborhood in Brooklyn, NY. He joined the New York City Police Department in 1958. Throughout his 23-year career he worked in the Manhattan Narcotics Division, the Brooklyn North Youth Squad, and the Homicide Division. He attained the rank of third grade detective before retiring in 1981. He was an active member of the NYPD Guardians Association, holding the office of First Vice President.

Other Finding Aids

Additional information about interview contents and/or restrictions may be found in the [catalog record](#).

Reuben C. Bankhead, Charles C. Coleman, Lester Grissom, Leroy Hendricks, and Robert Nero, 2015 June 8 box 1

Digital Object: [Oral history interview with Reuben C. Bankhead, Charles C. Coleman, Lester Grissom, Leroy Hendricks, and Robert Nero, 2015](#)

Scope and Content Note

This is a group oral history interview with Reuben C. Bankhead, Charles C. Coleman, Lester H. Grissom, Leroy Hendricks, and Robert Nero. They share stories from their time in the New York City Police Department (NYPD) during the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s. They were all members of the NYPD Guardians Association, and speak about how the organization influenced their careers. The conversation spans racial equality issues in NYPD, including promotion exams, and instances of retaliation for speaking out against prejudice. They describe the conflict between the NYPD Guardians Association and the NYPD Patrolmen's Benevolent Association over the attempted establishment of a Civilian Complaint Review Board in 1966. They also remember several lawsuits reversing discriminatory hiring and promotional practices.

General

Reuben Bankhead grew up in the Bedford-Stuyvesant neighborhood in Brooklyn, NY. He joined the New York City Police Department in 1958. Throughout his 23-year career he worked in the Manhattan Narcotics Division, the Brooklyn North Youth Squad, and the Homicide Division. He attained the rank of third grade detective before retiring in 1981. He was an active

member of the NYPD Guardians Association, holding the office of First Vice President.

Charles Coleman grew up in Harlem, New York and joined the New York City Police Department at age nineteen as part of the police trainee program. At age twenty-one, he was sworn in as a patrolman. During his career, he worked in the NYPD Tactical Patrol Force, the NYPD Arson Task Force, the NYPD Narcotics Division, and the Civilian Complaint Review Board among others. After 23 years on the job, he retired as a lieutenant in 1988.

Lester H. Grissom was born and grew up in the Bronx. He joined the New York City Police Department (NYPD) in 1957. He began as a patrolman in his home borough, the Bronx. Over the course of his career became a Community Affairs officer, and was also a member of the NYPD Guardians Association.

Leroy Hendricks joined the New York City Police Department (NYPD) in 1968. He was the first black officer to be assigned to the Joint Terrorism Task Force. Over his 20-year career, he was an active member of the NYPD Guardians Association.

Robert Nero was a trustee of the Guardians Association. As a member of the Housing Police for 29 years of his 35-year career, 1966 to 2001, he served on the Executive Board of the Housing PBA, and was the vice president for the Housing Guardians Association. During that time he worked on patrol and then as a community affairs officer. He transferred to NYPD in the merger of 1995 and continued with Community Affairs.

Other Finding Aids

Additional information about interview contents and/or restrictions may be found in the [catalog record](#).

Charles C. Coleman, 2015 August 19

box 1

Digital Object: [Oral history interview with Charles C. Coleman, 2015](#)

Scope and Content Note

Charles Coleman talks about his experiences working for New York City Police Department from the 1960s to the 1980s. He describes working undercover in the late 1960s during the Columbia University Protests of 1968, his experiences in Harlem as a member of the NYPD Narcotics Division, and his time with the NYPD Guardians Association. He speaks about the importance of having minorities in high-ranking positions within the department and the continuing efforts for equality within the NYPD. He was also on

the Civilian Review Board, and comments on some of its structural changes over time.

General

Charles Coleman grew up in Harlem, New York and joined the New York City Police Department at age nineteen as part of the police trainee program. At age twenty-one, he was sworn in as a patrolman. During his career, he worked in the NYPD Tactical Patrol Force, the NYPD Arson Task Force, the NYPD Narcotics Division, and the Civilian Complaint Review Board among others. After 23 years on the job, he retired as a lieutenant in 1988. He became involved with the NYPD Guardians early in his career and edited the Guardians' newsletter from 1986 until 2014.

Other Finding Aids

Additional information about interview contents and/or restrictions may be found in the [catalog record](#).

Caudieu Cook, 2015 May 4

box 1

Digital Object: [Oral history interview with Caudieu Cook, 2015](#)

Scope and Content Note

Caudieu Cook remembers his long career as a police officer in New York City as well as New York State, and as an active member of the Guardians Association. He discusses his experiences of protests in the 1960s for the end of de facto segregation in the public schools, for more minority teachers to be hired, and against the Viet Nam war. He also talks about having seen Martin Luther King Jr. speak, when he was a child, and the impact on his community after the assassinations of King and Malcolm X. Other core subjects include his education, and his work as an officer to speak out against injustice, violence, and racism.

General

Caudieu Cook is a retired detective of the NYPD Violent Felony Warrant Squad. In his 32 years as an officer, from 1976 to 2008, he also worked in the Parole Major Case Unit, and began as a NY State Corrections Officer. He was active in the Guardians Association Executive Board as the sergeant at arms, and the vice president for Manhattan and then the Brooklyn boroughs.

Other Finding Aids

Additional information about interview contents and/or restrictions may be found in the [catalog record](#).

Deatra Y. Fuller, 2016 April 14

box 1

Digital Object: [Oral history interview with Deatra Y. Fuller, 2016](#)

Scope and Content Note

Deatra Fuller discusses her time as a Police Administrative Aide for the New York City Housing Authority Police and for the New York City Police Department in the 1980s and 1990s. Her perspective on the internal operations of a few different Housing Police Service Areas, and New York City Police Precincts, led her to be very distrusting of police, and the New York City Police Department especially. She shares stories of police misconduct, sexism and social pressures in the work place, and the wrongful arrest of her son. Her friendships with members of her union, AFSCME DC37, and with members of the Guardians Association, were positive sources of support. However, after ten years as a Police Administrative Aide she stopped working for police and never went back. Also described in this interview, is her life in Harlem during the 1960s, and her views on current tensions between police and communities of color, as of 2016.

General

Deatra Fuller was born and raised in Harlem in the Grant projects during the 1950s and 1960s. During the late 1980s and early 1990s she worked as a Police Administrative Aide for the New York City Housing Authority Police and for the New York City Police Department. She briefly joined the Guardians Association, but eventually withdrew because the organization was not geared toward civilian staff. After nearly ten years as a Police Administrative Aide, she became frustrated with the department and sought other employment.

Other Finding Aids

Additional information about interview contents and/or restrictions may be found in the [catalog record](#).

Edgar S. Jones, 2015 September 25 and November 9

box 1

Digital Object: [Oral history interview with Edgar S. Jones, 2015](#)

Scope and Content Note

Edgar Jones speaks about his time in the New York City Police Department (NYPD) from the 1950s through the 1980s. The year he started his career, 1949, was the same year the NYPD Guardians Association became officially recognized by the NYPD. He describes what it was like being a member of the Guardians Association in their early days. He describes the challenges to grow the membership and how some of the lawsuits the Guardians brought against the NYPD affected his career. He also details the day to day of working in the NYPD during the three decades he was active time. Some historical events he recalls include his the 1960 New York Mid-Air Collision, USS Constellation Fire of 1960, the shooting of detective William Capers, and John F. Kennedy's visits to New York City.

General

Edgar Jones was born in Brooklyn, NY in 1923. He joined the United States Army at seventeen years old shortly before the United States entered World War II. He became a police officer in 1949, beginning as a patrolman in Brownsville, before moving to NYPD Highway Patrol as part of the Motorcycle Squad. He stayed with the Highway Patrol for sixteen years. He was an early member of the NYPD Guardians Association, which was officially recognized by the Department the same year he joined. He was also one of the first black officers assigned to Highway Patrol. He retired as a second grade detective after thirty-seven years in the NYPD.

Other Finding Aids

Additional information about interview contents and/or restrictions may be found in the [catalog record](#).

Patricia E. Martin, 2016 March 22 and 30

box 1

[Digital Object: Oral history interview with Patricia E. Martin, 2016](#)

Scope and Content Note

Patricia Martin describes her time in the New York City Police Department (NYPD) through the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s. As an African American woman she overcame prejudice to rise through the ranks and gain promotions, and explains some key ways that she was helped by the NYPD Guardians Association along the way. She specifically cites legal actions taken against the NYPD in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Additionally she discusses her childhood in Brooklyn, NY, during the 1950s and 1960s, as well as her experience of the many political awakenings of

the 1960s and 1970s. She closes with her views on how the NYPD Guardians Association has evolved over the years and what its role in the future may become.

General

Patricia Martin is a retired lieutenant of the New York City Police Department (NYPD). She was an active member of the NYPD Guardians Association and remains so after retirement. She was born in 1951 and grew up in Brooklyn, New York. Her early career was spent as a nurse in Saint Vincent's Hospital before joining the NYPD in 1981. During her 27 years on the force she was one of the earliest African American women to be promoted to sergeant, and within Brooklyn North, where she served, she was the first. She also worked for the Internal Affairs Bureau and then moved to Employee Relations after her promotion to lieutenant.

Other Finding Aids

Additional information about interview contents and/or restrictions may be found in the [catalog record](#).

Gary Miller, 2015 September 30

box 1

Digital Object: [Oral history interview with Gary Miller, 2015](#)

Scope and Content Note

Gary Miller discusses his time as a police officer during the 1980s and early 1990s. Working as an undercover officer, in the Narcotics Division of the NYPD, he remembers how police politics and racism affected the opportunities afforded to black and Latino officers. He also discusses experiences during his youth in Brooklyn and analyzes racism in America at the time of the interview.

General

Gary Miller is a retired detective of the NYPD Narcotics Division. He became an officer with the New York City Department of Correction in the 1970s. He joined the New York City Police Department in 1981. While with the NYPD, he worked undercover narcotics until his retirement in 1994. Miller was a member of the Patrolmen's Benevolent Association and the Detectives' Endowment Association, but never joined the NYPD Guardians Association.

Other Finding Aids

Additional information about interview contents and/or restrictions may be found in the [catalog record](#).

Robert Nero, 2015 March 10

box 2

Digital Object: [Oral history interview with Robert Nero, 2015](#)

Scope and Content Note

Robert Nero focuses on his work with the Housing Guardians Association, and later the NYPD Guardians Association as an active member and then a retired trustee. He also talks about his views on community policing from his perspective as a Housing Police officer in the 1960s, 1970s, 1980s, and early 1990s, and the importance of building those strong relationships if the NYPD is going to improve in the future. He discusses the impact of racism on officers' careers, from gaining employment and promotions, to harassment and officer safety. While great strides were made during his time on the force, he also expresses how much is left to be done. Other topics include his perspective on community perceptions of police violence, life growing up in Queens, his time in the military during the Cuban Missile crisis.

General

Robert Nero is a retired trustee of the Guardians Association. As a member of the Housing Police for 29 years of his 35-year career, 1966 to 2001, he served on the Executive Board of the Housing PBA, and was the vice president for the Housing Guardians Association. During that time he worked on patrol and then as a community affairs officer. He transferred to NYPD in the merger of 1995 and continued with community affairs.

Other Finding Aids

Additional information about interview contents and/or restrictions may be found in the [catalog record](#).

Alicia C. Parker, 2015 November 5

box 2

Digital Object: [Oral history interview with Alicia C. Parker, 2015](#)

Scope and Content Note

Alicia Parker describes her work with the New York City Police Department, and her involvement with the Guardians Association from the 1970s through the 1990s. She sheds light on challenges she faced as a woman of color, and how the Guardians Association and the Policewomen's Endowment Association played

an important role in her career advancement. She also provides details on the administrations of Mayor David Dinkins, for whom she provided Personal Security, and of Rudy Giuliani. Also discussed, were the distressed relations between police and communities of color in New York City, and the impact of the Black Lives Matter movement as of 2015.

General

Alicia Parker grew up in Brooklyn, New York. She joined the NYPD in 1973 and was among the first women to go on patrol as police officers. She was effected the police layoffs of 1975, but made her way back onto the force soon after. After two decades with the NYPD she retired in the early 1990s due to her distrust of the Rudy Giuliani administration. During her years on the job, she worked for the Bronx Sex Crimes Analysis Unit, the Police Academy, Personal Security for Mayor David Dinkins, and the Special Investigation Division.

Other Finding Aids

Additional information about interview contents and/or restrictions may be found in the [catalog record](#).

Joseph R. Richardson, 2015 October 27

box 2

Digital Object: [Oral history interview with Joseph R. Richardson, 2015](#)

Scope and Content Note

Joe Richardson describes his transition from working on a farm in rural Virginia to working as a police officer in 1960s New York City. He talks about his decision to change departments within the police force several times, sharing the different challenges he faced both on the street as an undercover officer and a member of the Tactical Patrol Force, as well as bureaucratic challenges while working on the Civilian Complaint Review Board. He also discusses his views on the changes within the NYPD Guardians Association over the years, and how he believes it can improve in the future.

General

Joe Richardson was born the fourteenth of fifteen children on a farm in Virginia, in 1942. In 1960, he graduated high school and decided to move to New York City, where he applied to and was accepted into the New York City Police Academy. He began work as a member of the NYPD Tactical Patrol Force, and then changed positions several times, moving from the Narcotics Division to the Civilian Complaint

Review Board to payroll, receiving several promotions along the way. He served a term as the Second Vice-President of the NYPD Guardians Association, and at the time of this interview, he was a retired trustee of the NYPD Guardians Association.

Other Finding Aids

Additional information about interview contents and/or restrictions may be found in the [catalog record](#).

Annette Spellen, 2016 March 18

box 2

Digital Object: [Oral history interview with Annette L. Spellen, 2016](#)

Scope and Content Note

Annette Spellen describes growing up in Harlem, Bushwick, and Crown Heights, and changes that have affected the community there. She discusses in detail the struggles for women's equality and racial equality in the New York City Police Department (NYPD). Two organizations that were particularly important in those struggles were the Policewomen's Endowment Association and the Guardians Association. She shares memories of the friends and mentors she had in the Guardians Association, as well as details about her work as an undercover officer and a detective with the NYPD Anti-Crime unit, Department of Investigations, and Hostage Negotiation Team.

General

Annette Spellen is a retired detective of the Anti-Crime unit and the Department of Investigations (DOI). She was born in Harlem, NY, in 1949, and moved to Brooklyn at a young age. She became a policewoman for New York City's 13th Precinct in 1969, where she was able to work under some of the earliest ranking women in the NYPD. She was affected during the layoffs of 1975, but returned in 1978. She spent three years undercover, after which she was promoted to Detective. After her time in the Anti-Crime unit, she worked in white collar crime for the DOI, and then became part of the Department's Hostage Negotiation Team. She retired in 1993, but continued to actively volunteer for the NYPD Guardians Association, National Organization of Black Law Enforcement Executives (NOBLE), and the Policewomen's Endowment Association, and others.

Other Finding Aids

Additional information about interview contents and/or restrictions may be found in the [catalog record](#).

Graham Weatherspoon, 2015 February 17

Digital Object: [Oral history interview with Graham Weatherspoon, 2015](#)

box 2

Scope and Content Note

Graham Weatherspoon talks primarily on the subject of his experiences with the Transit Guardians Association and with 100 Blacks in Law Enforcement Who Care. He also covers formative memories of his years as a Transit Police detective through the 1970s, 1980s, and early 1990s, as well as his youth growing up in East New York in the 1950s and 60s. Weatherspoon shares his views on contemporary politics, and his commentary on the conduct of the New York Police Department regarding high profile shootings of African American police officers and civilians.

General

Graham Weatherspoon is a retired detective of the Transit Police Department's Major Case Unit and NYPD's Brooklyn North Robbery Unit. Over the course of 21 years with the police, 1974 to 1995, he served as vice president of the Transit Guardians Association, and was a founding member of 100 Blacks in Law Enforcement Who Care. At the time of this interview he was a board member of the Amadou Diallo Foundation, and also a public speaker.

Other Finding Aids

Additional information about interview contents and/or restrictions may be found in the [catalog record](#).

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