

Freedom Inc. Collection (AC81)

Introduction:

The Freedom, Inc. Collection contains documents and artifacts related to the history and activities of Freedom Incorporated, a civil rights political organization, founded in Kansas City in the early 1960s, during the 1970s and 1980s.

Descriptive Summary:

Creator: Freedom Inc

Title: Freedom Inc Collection

Date Range: 1976- 1986

Size: 0.417 linear feet (1 box)

Collection Number: AC81

Donor Information:

FIC

Citation Note:

Freedom Inc. Collection (AC81) Black Archives of Mid-America, Kansas City, Missouri.

Related Collection:

AC55 Neal J. McKinley Collection

AC36 Orchid I. Leon Scrapbook

Administrative Information:

Reproduction Restrictions: Unrestricted.

Access Restrictions: Unrestricted.

Historical Sketch:

In 1962, Leon M. Jordan, Bruce R. Watkins, Fred Curls, Howard Maupin, Leonard S. Hughs, Jr, Marion Foot, Rosemary Lowe, and Charles Moore founded Freedom Incorporated (Freedom, Inc.) as a political organization with the goal of campaigning for African American civil rights.

They established their headquarters at 2506 Prospect Ave, next to Green Duck Tavern, which Leon Jordan owned. Jordan was also chosen as the organizations first Chairperson, with Bruce R Watkins as co-Chair.

In their first political campaign, Freedom, Inc. supported Leon Jordan and Rosemary Lowe for the Committeeman and woman of 14th Ward. Leon Jordan won, but Rosemary Lowe lost. The focus of their second campaign was the successful election of Bruce Watkins as council member of the 3rd District. In 1964, Freedom, Inc. was responsible for the registration of thousands of people from the Black community. Having experienced 2 successful years of growing political power, the leadership of Freedom, Inc. then decided to field six men and three women in the August primaries of the 2nd District, 4th District, 17th Ward, 14th Ward, and 2nd Ward, with the goal of dethroning Louis Wagner and the Jacksonian Democratic Club (the remains of Tom Pendergast's Machine) from prominence in local politics. They then entered into a political partnership with Charles Curry's Committee for County Progress (CCP) in 1965. Most of the candidates back by Freedom, Inc. in the 1966 Primaries. Once again, their focus lay with the 2nd, 3rd, 14th, and 17th Wards.

During the 1968 Primaries, Freedom, Inc. continued to heavily campaign in the 2nd, 3rd, 14th, and 17th Wards. One of their new focal points was the 16th Ward. As well as State Representatives. They nominated five men to the State House. That year, the Kansas City Star endorsed every Freedom, Inc. candidate. Support from CCP and The Star led to multiple wins for Freedom, Inc. However, the partnership between CCP and Freedom, Inc. began to fracture in 1970 when multiple members of CCP began to run against one another. In response, another "fraction" Pendergast Machine, now known as the Regular Democrats, invited Freedom, Inc. to partner with them, to which Freedom, Inc, agreed. That same year, Freedom, Inc. founder Leon Jordan was assassinated outside The Green Duck Tavern on July 15. Bruce R. Watkins became the new President and Harold Holliday the Chairperson of the Board.

Despite the loss of Leon and changes amongst democratic political factions, Freedom, Inc. continued to grow its political power and candidates endorsed by Freedom, Inc. continued to run successful campaigns during the 1970s. By 1972, Freedom, Inc. controlled the 3rd, 14th, 16th, 17th,

and 18th Wards, and the Jacksonian Democratic Club lost the last of its political control within the City. They also began to gather the support of white community members. Yet, during the 1974 election, the Citizen's Council and Regular Democrats coordinated support began to break Freedom, Inc.'s political influence with the City. That influence continued to slip away during the latter half of the 1970s. Freedom, Inc. managed to regain a measure of their lost prominent in the 1980s, including getting the first Black man from Kansas City elected State Senator, the first Black man from KC to be elected to Congress, and the first Black Mayor.

Today, Freedom, Inc. is active in 12 Wards: 2nd, 3rd, 7th, 14th, 15th 16th, 17th, 18th, 19th, 24th, 23rd and 26th wards.

Scope and Content Note:

Series 1 : Organizational Documentation

This series contains documents describing the origin and history of Freedom Inc, as well as lists of Committee Members from 1983, and Board Members.

Series 2: Newsletter

This series contains a Newsletter from March 1976.

Series 3: Correspondence

This series contains letters and meeting announcements from 1976- 1986 between the Board members to one another, and letters to Horace Peterson confirming Freedom's support of the Black Archives.

Series 4: Invitations

This series contains invitations to various functions hosted by Freedom Inc.

Series 5: Promotional Materials

This series contains programs from Freedom Inc events, advertisements, and flyers in support of political candidates and measures.

Series 6: Ballots

This series consists of a variety of ballots produced by Freedom Inc in various City and State elections.

Series 7: Newspaper Clippings

This series contains a small number of short articles featuring Freedom Inc from the KC Star and KC Times from the late 1970s.

Series 8: Ephemera

This series contains a variety of objects including a postcard and two political campaign buttons.

Series 9: Posters

This series consists of 5 political campaign posters created by Freedom Inc.

Collection Inventory

All oversized documents [OS] have been removed from the box and placed in the Flat File Cabinet #1 Drawer #3.

Series 1: Organizational Documentation

- f. 1 Introduction
- f. 2 Missouri Ethics committee Form
- f. 3 Board and Committee Members
- f. 4 Agenda, 1980

Series 2: Newsletter

- f. 5 Newsletter, 1976

Series 3: Correspondence

- f. 6 Letter from Keith Brown to Horace Peterson
- f. 7 Correspondence, 1976
- f. 8 Correspondence, 1978

- f. 9 Correspondence, 1979
- f. 10 Correspondence, 1980
- f. 11 Correspondence, 1982
- f. 12 Correspondence, 1983
- f. 13 Correspondence, 1984
- f. 14 Correspondence, 1985
- f. 15 Correspondence, 1986

Series 4: Invitations

- f. 16 Invitations

Series 5: Promotional Materials

- f. 17 Flyers
- f. 18 Programs
- f. 19 Advertisements

Series 6: Ballots

- f. 20 Official Ballots
- f. 21 Voter's Guide

Series 7: Newspaper Clippings

- f. 22 Newspaper Clippings

Series 8: Ephemera

- f. 23 Salad Tea Donation Envelope
- f. 24 Blacks in Government Picnic Ticket stub
- f. 25 NAACP Reservation Card
- f. 26 Postcard
- f. 27 Receipt Booklet
- f. 28 Campaign Buttons
- f. 29 Poem by Lloyd C. Daniels, 1984

Series 9: Posters

- f. 30 Curls for State Representative [OS]
- f. 31 “We’re For...” [OS]

Processed by Laura Darnell, Head Archivist, April 2024. Updated by Laura Darnell, Head Archivist, April 2026.

Sources:

Freedom Inc. Forward. “Freedom History.” Accessed April 2024.

<https://www.freedomincorporated.org/freedom-history/>

Jackson County Democratic Committee. “Freedom, Inc.” Internet Archive. Archived December 2009. Accessed April 2024.

<https://web.archive.org/web/20091212105339/http://jacksoncountymississippi.com/community-profiles/freedom-inc/>

Lindsay, Ronald, Jackie Robinson, John L. Brooks, Cheryl Caldwell, Algy Mason, Shalonn Curls, Troy Nash, and Quinton Lucas. The Celebration of the Life of Mrs. Rosemary Smith Lowe. Morning Star Missionary Baptist Church of Jesus Christ, 2020.

<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5075895f84ae84c1f4ec0443/t/5f75d02d15e1c70b35fac3ac/1601556528825/The+Celebration+of+the+Life+of+Mrs.+Rosemary+Lowe+with+photos+16pg+v3.pdf>.