

As discussed in the CCHP's recent video, [Robert V. Guthrie and the Search for Psychology's Hidden Figures](#), little work had been done prior to the 1970s to seriously spotlight the scientific contributions of Black psychologists in the United States. In the 1950s, Black psychologists remained marginalized in a field that had historically contributed to their societal oppression. Yet circumstances leading up to the 1957 Annual Convention of the American Psychological Association led to a purposeful effort among APA leadership to solicit the opinions of the organization's Black members. In doing so, they collected valuable documentary evidence of marginalization in the nation's top professional psychological organization.

Backing up for a moment, the situation surrounding the 1957 APA Convention began seven years earlier, in 1950, when the APA resolved that its meetings would henceforth be held only in institutions, hotels, and establishments which did not discriminate on the basis of race or religion. Two years later, following instances of racial discrimination during the 1952 Convention in Washington, D.C., the APA passed an additional resolution vowing not to return the convention to Washington "until additional progress has been made towards democratic treatment of minority groups."

Fast forward to 1954, and the APA's Council of Representatives had just voted to hold the 1957 Convention in Miami Beach, Florida—a segregated city in an extremely segregated state. APA Executive Secretary Fillmore H. Sanford explained the situation in Miami Beach somewhat optimistically:

Document 1 reads as follows: The Situation in Miami Beach.

It is difficult to anticipate exactly what will happen with respect to segregation in Miami Beach in 1957. Some observers predict that Florida will move more rapidly than other southern states toward desegregation. There is some reason to believe that the recent Supreme Court ruling on segregated travel on intra-state vehicles will move things along rather rapidly. But these are predictions and not actualities. And events in the South or in Florida may or may not have an effect on Miami Beach, for Miami Beach is in many respects not a southern city.

It seems clear that we can secure signed statements guaranteeing the non-segregated use of all the facilities of a different group of hotels, hotels in competition with the group we originally approached. The new group of hotels seems now genuinely to want us on our terms. Facilities will be more than adequate. Owners of these hotels say they will give us written guarantees with respect to non-segregation. (It is understood that a decision to go to Miami Beach will not be finally made until such written agreements are available.) There can be no guarantee against discrimination outside the official hotels. But the Convention Bureau gives assurances that incidents will be very unlikely in the area of the city that we will occupy. Apparently the practice has been to "alert," shortly before mixed conventions, all the restaurants, etc., in the area of the city adjacent to the official hotels. This method is reported to have worked well. But there is no evidence on how much stress it has survived or how much care Negroes have had to exercise in order not to step on any social eggs. The hotel and Convention Bureau people are proud of their ability to handle bi-racial meetings but they probably have not yet done business with a group as sensitive and as principled as are psychologists.

There seems to be no apprehension among the Miami Beach authorities about incidents on the city's public transportation system. There seems to be some doubt about places of entertainment, such as movie houses.

All this seems to add up to a likelihood that, assuming no change for the worse, meetings in Miami Beach will be as incident-free as are meetings in Boston or in Detroit. But Miami Beach is not a desegregated city. And it still is located in the South. There will be risks. And incidents in the South will probably be more highly charged than incidents in the North.

End of document.

Note the phrase, "these are predictions and not actualities." No one at APA could know exactly what might happen if they were to host an integrated convention in Florida. The events in Washington, D.C. had shown that, despite assurances from hotels and other establishments, racist harassment and violence remained likely in any highly segregated city.

In the years leading up to the convention, votes were held and public comments were solicited from APA members, depicting a wide range of opinions. The arguments in favor of hosting the convention in Miami Beach did not dismiss the racial segregation of the city and state. Rather, proponents believed that hosting an integrated convention in the South would actually help to advance democracy in the region. As argued by Convention Manager Jack A. Kapchan:

Document 2 reads as follows: May 18, 1956

To: Fillmore H. Sanford, Executive Secretary, American Psychological Association

From: Jack A. Kapchan, Convention Manager, 1957

Subject: Miami Beach Convention in 1957

The hotel owners, convention bureau people, and the general community will cooperate with us. However, I feel that we should be providing the leadership and direction. They may not be able to follow us on every issue, but in the main, they are reasonable people. As a group, they do not relish the prospect of any tensions being induced because of the negro issue—they will probably be more concerned than we that no incidents or embarrassing situation occur. They, no doubt, wish that we did not have any negroes in our convention set-up. But, they want our money—and if they must take our negroes on our conditions in order to get our money, they will do so. Although I am not impressed with hotel owners as a group, some of our people might be quite surprised to find that not all "inn-keepers" are unreliable, lacking in intelligence, or "Scrooges." But since we are probably immune to stereotyping and projectivity the above is probably irrelevant.

2. On a second point my feelings are stronger. We can hold our conventions in many places. Probably, based upon the criteria of accessibility, comfort, facilities, expense, etc. many places would compare very favorably with Miami Beach (although the Miami Beach hotel and convention bureau people will argue this vehemently). Miami Beach (and I am not concerned with the hotel or restaurant owners) needs us more than we need them. Perhaps this whole thing is a matter of values. The progressive elements in Miami Beach, in Dade County, in Florida, in the South, need the status, prestige, and dignity of the psychologists and sociologists, NOW. Yes, we can go there in five years from now—but we shall probably not be needed very desperately then. However, I realize that this whole issue requires a definition of the role of the APA in our society and culture. In the process of social change, shall our role be one of leadership or followership? Shall our role be confined to our preachments from the classroom podium and the results of our investigations? Shall we maintain the detachment and purity of freedom

from value judgements? If we really don't care about these matters, I don't believe that we should go to Miami Beach—at least not until the “all clear” has sounded.

End of document.

Kapchan's letter was circulated among APA membership, and his argument gained the enthusiastic backing of many who cited it in their own comments. Votes were cast indicating strong support for holding the convention in Miami Beach.

Five days after Kapchan wrote his letter, Sanford drafted a written request to be sent to 37 Black psychologists who were APA members. It read:

Document 3 reads as follows: Draft May 23, 1956. News to Negro Members

Dear [blank]:

As you probably know, APA for some time has been considering Miami Beach, Florida, as a site for its 1957 Annual Meeting. For a number of reasons, given in the enclosed material, no final decision has been reached. The issues seem almost paralyzing in their complexity. The Council of Representatives and the Board of Directors now face the necessity of making a final decision at an early date. In the effort to bring into the discussions more complete information than heretofore available about the thoughts and attitudes of our Negro members, I am now writing to seek your reactions to the total situation as it now exists.

Throughout the discussions of this matter there has been information communication with some of our Negro members but there has been no systematic attempt to get in touch with all of them. As a matter of fact there has been some resistance to anything like a poll of our Negro members. Even the compilation of a list of their names has something of a bad flavor. But some members of Board and Council have expressed a desire to know more about the feelings of these to whom a meeting in the South would have a special meaning. If we are to know more, there seems no way other than to ask. Dr. S. O. Roberts, in connection with a project of the Southern Regional Education Board, has compiled a list of 37 Negroes who are APA members. We have the list. We don't know if this list is complete, but the present memo will go to each person on it.

It would be very helpful if you would read the enclosed material dealing with the question and write me a letter. I will see that your wisdom and your feelings are communicated to the Board before it makes a final decision.

Should APA hold its 1957 meetings in Miami Beach? Would the cause of democracy be served better by going, under the conditions described, or by refusing to go? Would you yourself go to the meeting in Miami Beach? Would you plan to attend the 1957 meetings if they were held, say, in Boston. You can see where your answers to these and related questions will be of material assistance to the Board in making a sound decision on this matter.

If you encounter a Negro member of APA who has not received this memo, perhaps you would be kind enough to show him your copy and invite him to respond.

I am looking forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely, Fillmore H. Sanford. Executive Secretary

End of document.

The responses that Sanford received came from a who's who of notable Black psychologists, some of whom would later be profiled by Robert V. Guthrie in his landmark book *Even the Rat Was White*. James A. Bayton, for instance, characterized a Miami Beach convention as "a mighty big risk":

Document 4 reads as follows: I certainly appreciate the problem the APA is facing in its decision about Miami Beach as the place for the 1957 meetings. However, I am surprised that the problem has to be met in light of the Washington resolution. It is true that an entire city cannot be held to account but it is also true that cities and sections of the country vary in sharply-defined "climate" with respect to racial matters. Then, too, these days of friction in the South lead me to predict that matters will be worse in a place like Florida by 1957. The Southern reactionaries are winning their battle in terms of capitalizing on the situation—since voices of moderation are all but silenced, I expect such men to use this circumstance to further inflame tensions. Since the probabilities seem loaded toward increased tension by 1957, it appears to me that APA is taking a mighty big risk in scheduling its meeting for Miami Beach.

Furthermore, I believe that the cause of democracy can be served by showing how undemocratic practices can affect the pocketbook. This is a cynical view, perhaps, but then I have very serious doubts about the capacity of certain people to respond to the "higher" values. As a matter of fact, every day's news brings further evidence of this.

As for myself, I certainly would not attend APA meetings in Miami Beach. I would try to get to meetings in Boston, as it is my policy to try to make APA meetings when they are held in the East.

June 18, 1956

James A. Bayton, National Analysts, Inc. 1015 Chestnut Street, Philadelphia 7, Pennsylvania

End of document.

Herman G. Canady, who notably studied racial bias in IQ testing, offered a longer response, holding the APA accountable to its 1950 and 1952 resolutions and placing the situation within a larger social and historical context:

Document 5 reads as follows: I have your letter and actions of the Council of Representatives relative to the Miami Beach Convention in 1957. As I read through the materials a statement which Thomas Jefferson made re the question of slavery kept coming to mind. He said: "When I reflect that God is just, I fear for my Country."

The problem of racial segregation and other unfinished tasks in our democracy have caused me much concern of late. I oppose segregation because I reject, as any self-respecting Negro must, the basic assumption underlying all phases of racial segregation, namely, that Negroes are inherently and inescapably inferior to other racial groups in our population. Whatever validity the assumption may have had, has surely been destroyed by scientific findings in psychology, sociology, and anthropology during the past quarter century as well as by the record of outstanding achievements of individual Negroes.

The question now in my mind is whether the American Psychological Association has the will and determination to follow through on the course to which the 1950 and 1952 resolutions of the Council

commit us. To give them practical effect, we shall have to take off our blinders and look at the world as it really is in the bright light of atomic and thermonuclear energy.

We realize that unless we can catch up with destructive science, unless we can make not just a step but perhaps a thousand-year jump in our social thinking, in our way of life, in our institutions, we may discover that for the first time in history, mankind will be unable to fulfill the basic requirement for survival. That requirement is adjustment to new conditions. Hence, this is no time to compromise with Satan, or even be a party to any social strategy to reinforce those who advocate moderation. In this fight for freedom, equality, and social justice, there can be no half-measures. We must brush aside the faint-hearted, weak-kneed, and pussy-footers. The rank and file of oppressed and exploited people all over the world are champing at the bit and, as Voltaire said, "All the armies in the world cannot stop an idea whose time has come."

I believe the American Psychological Association should continue to take a leading part in promoting the new social direction by rejecting all forms of racism—the idea that one race or one nation or one social class is better than all the rest—treating it as a danger to the republic, for we know too well where it leads. The only trustworthy cure for racial conflicts in our country lies in the ultimate elimination of legal, educational, economic, and social discriminations. Incidentally, what do people mean when they say, "The time is not ripe?" ... to do right? As Lincoln said, "No question is really settled until it is settled right."

If we see the true meaning of World War II, the impossibility of a lasting peace if the people of the world lose faith in democracy, then we should, out of simple necessity of self-interest, exercise greater democracy at home—even in the North. We cannot convince other nations that our democracy means very much, or that it isn't pretty hypocritical to talk about freedom for mankind, if we continue to ignore many of our problems at home. True, as other people, we like to represent our culture by its aspirations, its lofty ethical goals, and ignore its failures and inadequacies. But our past sins and present hypocracies have become a mortal danger. The question of equality of opportunity and justice for all is no longer solely a question of morals or allegiance to an ideal; it has become a question of survival.

All that I have attempted to say is that the whole trend of world events and the movements and discoveries of science are toward unity, toward abolition of racial, religious, and other artificial differences. There barriers belong to the horse and buggy days and cannot survive in a day when airplanes travel and fly at a speed of 700 miles an hour. All mechanics of civilization point to the greater integration or mingling of people and the breaking down of artificial lines. In other words, the new world society (including, of course the South) is one of inescapable human relationships.

In this tragic hour of human history, the time has come to say that until citizens of America and the citizens of the other nations of the world learn the "science of human relationships," of which the late President Roosevelt spoke, the atomic and hydrogen bombs will remain the frightful weapons which threaten to destroy us all. Herein, then, lies the golden opportunity for the American Psychological Association to take a leading part in supporting the human relations emphasis in the national scene, and bringing to all our citizens a freedom limited solely by character, ability, and industry.

As a final statement may I say that for many years my wife, children, and I have combined the APA meeting with our vacation. To reach Miami Beach, we would have to travel through such states as Georgia, South Carolina, Mississippi, and Alabama, and I do not know of a hotel or motel in route where

we could spend a night or secure a meal. Then, too, during our stay in Miami Beach, most of the city would be "off-limits" to us. Although we yearn for a Florida visit, yet we feel that the price in terms of insults, inconveniences, and embarrassments is too great. Therefore, my answer to your queries are as follows:

1. Should APA hold its 1957 meetings in Miami Beach? Ans. In light of existing conditions, No.
2. Would the cause of democracy be served better by going, under the conditions described, or by refusing to go? Ans. By refusing to go.
3. Would you yourself go to the meeting in Miami Beach? Ans. The social climate being what it is today, No.
4. Would you plan to attend the 1957 meetings if they were held, say, in Boston? Ans. Yes.

June 18, 1956

Herman G. Canady, Dept. of Psychology, West Virginia State College Institute, West Virginia

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Like Canady, Roger K. Williams offered an important justification for his refusal to attend a Miami Beach convention: the danger of interstate travel.

Document 6 reads as follows: Thank you very much for both the letter and the enclosed materials concerning the Miami controversy. Considering the experiences some of my friends have had in connection with Miami meetings and my own in both working and travelling back and forth in the coastal states, my reactions are very uncomplicated.

First of all, I find myself disinterested in going to Miami because of the obvious inability of the Arrangements Committee to control the probabilities of my personal embarrassment over one or more incidents and because I certainly would not feel myself to be a participating member if I were restricted in social contact and physical mobility. Secondly, since my family would like to accompany me, I could not subject them to the great discomforts they would have to suffer in driving there. I refer to eating, sleeping, and recreational opportunities en route. To be candid about the whole question, Miami presents too many problems and not enough solutions. In all probability, I would attend our meetings were they held in Boston.

I appreciate your requesting my reactions.

June 23, 1956.

Roger K. Williams, Dept. of Psychology, Morgan State College, Baltimore 12, Maryland

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Williams's point is an important one. To reach Miami Beach by driving, members would have to pass through the heart of the Deep South, states like Alabama and Georgia where white supremacy, segregation, and anti-Black violence were legally enshrined. This was the era of *The Negro Motorist Green Book*, a travel guide which identified the all-too-rare hotels, restaurants, and other businesses where African Americans could safely stop during their travels cross-country. Even with the *Green Book*

in hand, Black travelers still put themselves in immense danger travelling through unknown towns and cities in the Deep South.

Not all respondents to Sanford's letter were opposed to a Miami Beach convention, however. Martin D. Jenkins supported the location, so long as the APA held true to the principles of its 1950 and 1952 resolutions:

Document 7 reads as follows: I am replying to your inquiry, "Should APA hold its 1957 meetings in Miami Beach?" In view of all the factors involved, I favor holding the meetings in Miami Beach with the following conditions: (1) That there be no racial segregation by floors or hotel; and (2) that if for any reason the hotels and the convention bureau are unable to hold to their commitment to entertain guests on a non-segregated basis, the APA will cancel its 1957 meetings.

June 20, 1956.

Martin D. Jenkins, Morgan State College, Baltimore 12, Maryland

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Howard E. Wright agreed with Kapchan's letter in his response, citing a Miami Beach convention as a "desirable social strategy":

Document 8 reads as follows: This is in response to your letter of June 13, 1956 concerning how the Negro members of the APA feel regarding Miami Beach for our 1957 meeting.

In discussing the matter with my colleagues, I find a sentiment almost as random as the various pros and cons listed in your communication. There seems to be indecision but not too strong a conviction as to what is the proper course to take. This has also been my problem, namely, an inability to conclude upon the soundest course.

It is my considered judgement that the cause of democracy will be best served by going to Miami Beach in 1957. It is desirable social strategy, that the social moderates of the South, and this includes many members of APA, should be reinforced in their good will. Miami Beach is the only Southern city where a convention could be held on the standards of APA. We should not let this chance pass.

The likelihood of unpleasant situations is too minute in contrast with the exemplary benefits that should accrue.

I plan to attend in 1957, whether we meet in Miami Beach or in Boston.

I am proud to belong to an organization which has made such an intelligent study of this matter. Congratulations and success in reaching a happy decision.

June 18, 1956.

Howard E. Wright, Dept. of Psychology, N. C. College at Durham, Durham, North Carolina

End of document.

Yet perhaps the most stirring response to this matter came from Mary A. Morton:

Document 9 reads as follows: This is in reply to your letter of 13 June, 1956, in which you posed questions incident to holding the 1957 annual meeting in Miami Beach, Florida.

You state in your letter that "The issues are almost paralyzing in their complexity." For me, as an individual, the issues are simple: (1) Will Mary Morton feel secure in joining in any and all proposals for joint activity or will she have to wonder if the particular place involved will welcome her along with all others in the group? (2) Will she always be permitted to go in alone for a coke? If she is going to have to be concerned about things like these, she stays at home. She does not spend money and energy travelling, voluntarily, to any place where she will have to wonder whether her freedom of choice must be restricted by reason of skin color. Conventions should be intellectually stimulating but they should also be relatively carefree.

As for "difficulties which can arise anywhere in the USA," there is a very real difference between them. In San Francisco, I can insist on exercising freedom of choice without fear of legal reprisal. In Florida, state and local laws are set up specifically to prevent white, as well as colored, persons from exercising such freedom.

Miami Beach may really become an oasis in a desolate region for purposes of the 1957 meeting, but my acute awareness of how desolate is the region would prevent my enjoying any sojourn into the oasis. Local newspapers and radios would certainly be constant reminders that I was in hostile territory.

And, of course, I still remember the bold statement of policy enunciated by APA after the Washington, D. C. confusion.

For the reasons given, I will not attend any meeting held in Miami Beach, Florida.

July 2, 1956

Mary A. Morton, 923 "S" Street, N. W., Washington, D. C.

P. S. Any abruptness sense from this letter is not directed against you personally nor at APA officers, but, rather, against a state of affairs which makes for such pitiable confusion.

End of document.

In her response, Morton clearly addressed the privilege of both Sanford and the APA's Council of Representatives. They could easily distance themselves from the dangers of a segregated city, focusing largely upon high-minded principles and potential ideological victories. For Black psychologists like Morton, attending a Miami Beach convention meant putting themselves in "hostile territory," risking their safety and the safety of their loved ones for the sake of a convention that could just as easily be held in a Northern city.

In June of 1956, a committee of four was assigned to visit Miami Beach to gather further information. Stuart W. Cook represented APA's Board of Directors and chaired the committee, and was joined by psychologists Robert Kleemeier, Arthur Combs, and S. O. Roberts. Roberts had already voiced his opposition to a Miami Beach convention in no uncertain terms:

Document 10 reads as follows: I have read carefully all of the material forwarded in your letter of May 24 and have for quite some time given serious consideration to the question of the American Psychological Association meeting at Miami Beach.

As a member of the APA, I was in complete accord with the policy adopted in 1950 and felt that this action was prompted by the democratic philosophy of a group which was sincerely interested in making its ideals a reality. Such a policy is conducive to creating an atmosphere free from tension in which members of a scientific body might fully concentrate upon the development of their science, profession, and their interpersonal relationships. Once a decision has been made upon principle, I feel there should be no compromise.

Against this background of personal conviction, I am not in favor of singling out psychologists with reference to racial origin to poll for individual reactions to participate in an APA program in an area where predominantly non-democratic procedures are the order of the day even though the region is in the process of change. Living in the area, I am aware that changes are occurring that there is a great deal of good will and cooperation toward bringing about a more democratic society. I am also aware of the fact that unpredictable incidents of an unpleasant character may at times accompany such changes. To involve the APA in direct "testing" of customs and practices as over against the progress being made toward the realization of a more democratic society would tend to impose upon the entire proceedings a heavy pall, to say nothing of the undue stress it would place upon the members—those of the minority group primarily involved; those sympathetic to its cause; those closely allied to the basic customs of the region; and, those who are not affected one way or the other.

It is my opinion that whatever gains that might be made in going to Miami Beach in 1957 would not outweigh the gains made by the APA in restating its policy of refusing to go again to a city with such racial restrictions as existed in Washington in 1952. I might point out that there is nothing in the Memorandums which would indicate that the present circumstances in Miami or the surrounding area are even as good as those that existed in Washington in 1952. While it is granted that ideal conditions in reference to the Negro minority (or for that matter other minority groups on the basis of race or religion) might not be found anywhere in the United States, and while the exigencies of everyday living may necessitate exposure to practices of segregation, this does not, to my mind, justify the seeking and acceptance of situations which are clearly against the democratic ideal, not only on the basis of custom, but on legal grounds as well.

The Association should by all means be concerned with broad social issues and should use its influence and prestige as much as possible; however, I have grave doubts as to whether a voluntary scientific organization can make much impression upon a community that is largely commercially motivated and upon a region where large segments of the popular are actively resistant to the rulings of the highest court of the land.

I appreciate the opportunity to express my views in your deliberations concerning this matter. And I sincerely believe that the needs and objectives of the APA can best be served by adherence to its own high principles. Adherence to such principles may well lend greatest support to the cause of democracy and better human relations and to those working toward this achievement.

May 31, 1956

S. O. Roberts, Dept. of Psychology, Fisk University, Nashville 8, Tennessee

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The committee carried out a review of dining facilities, hotels, recreational facilities, and transportation. They met with representatives from other organizations, including the American Library Association, who hosted integrated meetings in Miami Beach. In his final report, approved by the rest of the committee, Cook testified that the group encountered no instance of discriminatory behavior. Yet the group could not eliminate all possibility of discrimination, nor could they deny that many Black attendees would feel uncomfortable staying in Miami Beach due to the culture of the South. Cook concluded:

Document 11 reads as follows: I think it is quite likely that the development of a desegregated pattern in Miami Beach may have a real impact on Florida. It makes news and for this reason will be advertised throughout Florida. This is important because the evidence is very strong that change in race relations comes fastest as a result of gradual accommodation to involuntary desegregation.

Even if one were to agree with this analysis of the potential importance of lending our support to the development of desegregation in Miami Beach, there remains the difficult task of balancing this consideration against our inability to get advance guarantees of completely equal treatment for all our members. We know we would have to compromise with our non-discrimination principle. We know the restrictions we might have to accept. Is the potential gain worth the cost?

I believe it is this choice that each one of us faces.

End of document.

The 1957 Annual Convention of the APA was held in New York City from August 30th to September 5th. The convention would not be held in Miami Beach until 1970, six years after the federal Civil Rights Act of 1964 legally prohibited discrimination on the basis of race.

The prolonged nature of this controversy and the responses of Black members of the APA highlight the tangible ways that marginalization can occur in psychology and other professional fields. In pushing for a Miami Beach convention as part of a "social strategy," supporters of the location were not entirely misguided. All major civil rights movements in the United States have required their participants to assume some risk of personal harm. Yet it was largely white psychologists who concocted this social strategy, not the Black men and women who were asked to put themselves in harm's way. Further, most of those Black psychologists were not seeking to take part in an act of defiance against Southern racism—rather, they were simply trying to participate in their professional community and attend a conference *for the benefit of their careers*.

Had the 1957 APA Conference been held in Miami Beach, Black psychologists who rightly feared for their safety in the South would have been denied access to the largest psychological conference in the United States. The comments of these psychologists helped push the APA to remain true to the principles of racial equality and integration, yet the resolutions of 1950 and 1952 should have invalidated this controversy from the beginning. Circumstances such as these were far from the only systematic barriers faced by Black psychologists in the mid-20th century, but they clearly illustrate how well-meaning policies and resolutions could, and still do, overlook the complexities of racial injustice.

Additional materials on the 1957 APA Convention are available for research in the [Stuart Cook papers at the Archives of the History of American Psychology](#) at the Cummings Center for the History of Psychology. To request additional materials from these papers, please contact ahap@uakron.edu.