



## David M. Grant Papers (S0552)

**Collection Number:** S0552

**Collection Title:** David M. Grant Papers

**Dates:** 1917-1986, bulk 1930-1982

**Creator:** Grant, David M., 1903-1985

**Abstract:** The David M. Grant Papers document David M. Grant's career in St. Louis as a civil rights activist and lawyer. Beginning in 1931, Grant organized protests and demonstrations against racial discrimination. He was also active in the local Democratic Party, Labor unions, and a founder of St. Louis' March on Washington Movement chapter. Grant also served on the U.S. Presidential Committee on Equal Employment Opportunity. The papers include speeches, correspondence, photographs, political fliers, and newspaper clippings.

**Collection Size:** 0.8 cubic feet  
(18 folders, 7 photographs, 6 audio recordings, 1 oversize poster)

**Language:** Collection materials are in English.

**Repository:** The State Historical Society of Missouri

**Restrictions on Access:** Collection is open for research. This collection is available at [The State Historical Society of Missouri Research Center-Saint Louis](#). If you would like more information, please contact us at [stlouis@shsmo.org](mailto:stlouis@shsmo.org). Collections may be viewed at any research center.

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**Preferred Citation:** [Specific item; box number; folder number] *David M. Grant Papers* (S0451); The State Historical Society of Missouri Research Center-St. Louis [after first mention may be abbreviated to SHSMO-St. Louis].

**Donor Information:** The papers were donated to the University of Missouri by Mildred Grant on November 11, 1995 (Accession No. SA3187). An additional donation to the State Historical Society of Missouri was made by David Wesley Grant on March 7, 2017.

**Alternate Forms Available:** Digital images of this collection are available online at the State Historical Society of Missouri Digital Collections: <https://digital.shsmo.org>.

**Related Materials:** Additional materials related to the David M. Grant Papers can be found in the following collections:

*Theodore D. McNeal Scrapbook*, (S0321)  
*Saint Louis March On Washington Paper*, (S0170)  
*Ernest Calloway Papers*, (S0011)  
*Arthur Witman Photograph Collection*, (S0836)

**Processed by:** Processed by WHMC Staff, date unknown. Finding aid updated by Erin Purdy, July 2022.

### **Historical Note:**

David Marshall Grant was born January 1, 1903, in the Mill Creek Valley neighborhood of St. Louis, to William Grant and Elizabeth Holliday Grant, who worked as chiropractors. He graduated Sumner High School in 1918, and from 1920 to 1923 he attended the University of Michigan. Between 1923 and 1927, Grant worked various jobs: as a club car porter on railroads out of St. Louis, as a crane operator, and as a waiter in seasonal resort cities across the country. Grant then attended Howard University Law School and graduated in 1930. Grant was admitted to the Missouri Bar in 1930, the Federal Bar in 1938, and to the Bar of the United States Supreme Court in 1948. He was a practicing lawyer for over 50 years and was honored as a senior counselor by the Missouri Bar Association. Amongst other work, he was a St. Louis assistant city counselor (1933-1941), and worked as an assistant circuit attorney (1914-1942).

Grant returned to St. Louis in 1930 and became active in local Democratic politics and in fighting discrimination there. In 1931, Grant organized his first picket for economic justice against the newly built Woolworth Company dime store located on Franklin Avenue, which resulted in African Americans being employed in the store. In 1932 and 1933, he worked with Jordan W. Chambers to rally support for the Democratic mayoral candidate Bernard F. Dickmann, who won the race and became the first Democratic mayor in the city in 24 years. He also campaigned with the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) for President Franklin Roosevelt.

Building on his success in organizing community efforts and gaining employment for Black citizens, in 1938, Grant helped coordinate the St. Louis Colored Clerks Circle, a labor union that demonstrated at stores which refused to employ African Americans, including Kroger Groceries. Grant also served as the President of the St. Louis chapter of the NAACP. He organized a campaign to get dairies to hire Black milk truck drivers, organized sit-ins at lunch counters in St. Louis department stores and acted as lawyer for arrested protestors, and won the opening of the Fox Theater and American Theater to Black audiences.

During World War II, Grant and Theodore McNeal organized the St. Louis chapter of the March On Washington Movement (MOWM), bringing local action to a nationwide call by A. Phillip Randolph and other labor leaders. During the push for increased wartime production, the March on Washington Movement was initially concerned with wartime industries that refused, or failed, to hire Black employees. In August 1942, MOWM held a rally of over 9,000 African Americans at which A. Phillip Randolph spoke, and two weeks later organized a peaceful demonstration of 10,000 protestors at Carter Carburetor. In 1943 MOWM organized parades of over 300 protestors around the Southwestern Bell Telephone Company building. The picket led to Southwestern Bell opening offices with Black employees in Black neighborhoods.

In 1945, Grant focused on discrimination in education by bringing a lawsuit against Washington University. The case eventually went before the U.S. Supreme Court, but Grant dropped the suit when Washington University integrated in 1948. He also opposed the establishment of what he believed to be an underfunded segregated university, Lincoln University of Law, on the site of the former Poro College.

In 1952 he was instrumental in bringing Josephine Baker to St. Louis to give a homecoming performance at Kiel Auditorium on behalf of the committee protesting overcrowding in the St. Louis Black schools. Because Josephine Baker could not stay at the segregated Chase Hotel, she stayed at the Grant family's home. Grant's first wife was named Thelma. His second marriage was to Mildred Hughes (d. 2007), and the couple had two children, in 1945 and 1949.

In 1950 Grant became the first Black man appointed to the St. Louis Police Retirement Board, which administered police pensions. In 1956, he won an election to the Board of Freeholders to rewrite the City of St. Louis Charter. After the charter, Grant began serving as legislative research director for the St. Louis Board of Aldermen in 1957, a position he held for 28 years. In 1961 Grant was appointed as a member of the Missouri State Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights.

In the 1960s, Grant was instrumental in writing the Democratic Party's national Civil Rights policies and advised President Lyndon B. Johnson's administration on equal hiring practices. In 1960 Grant served with Eleanor Roosevelt on the Democratic National Platform Committee. He helped to write the civil rights plank for the Kennedy-Johnson campaign, and in 1962 President Kennedy appointed Grant as a U.S. delegate to Uganda's independence celebration. Grant also served on the U.S. Presidential Committee on Equal Employment Opportunity under Vice President later President Lyndon Johnson.

David Grant died on August 12, 1985 at the age of 82.

**Arrangement:**

The collection has been arranged into a single series.

**Scope and Content Note:**

The David M. Grant papers document Grant's career as a civil rights leader, lawyer, and a politician. The papers include material pertaining to his family history; Grant's speeches and articles; and correspondence from 1936-1956. Of interest are political posters and fliers and newspaper clippings about the 1932 mayoral race and other events in Grant's life. Also included are awards, memorabilia, and photographs. There is a transcript of an oral history interview given by Grant in 1979. They include the proposed civil rights plank submitted to the 1960 Platform Committee of the Democratic National Convention. The papers also contain information on Josephine Baker, mainly pertaining to her 1952 St. Louis Homecoming at the Kiel Auditorium, including a copy of her speech, the Kiel lease agreement, correspondence, and publicity for the performance.

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- f. 13 Recordings of address to Soldan High School, 1958
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