

## **Chris and Marti Alston Collection**

**Papers, 1942-1996  
(Predominantly, 1960's-1980's)**

**6 linear feet**

Accession #1779  
OCLC #

The papers of Chris and Marti Alston were placed in the Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs in 1997 by Marti Alston and opened for research in October of 2002.

Christopher Columbus Alston, Jr. was born in DeFuniak Springs, Florida on April 20, 1913. The Alstons moved to Detroit in 1916, where Chris attended public schools, dropping out of Northeastern High School to help support the family during the Depression. In 1932 he participated in the Ford Hunger March and witnessed the shooting of one of his friends, cementing a lifelong commitment to social justice. He left Detroit to organize black youth in Harlem and the South and in 1938, after founding what became the Tobacco Stemmers' and Laborers' Industrial Union (CIO) in Richmond, he traveled throughout Virginia, North Carolina and Tennessee organizing black workers for the CIO.

After returning to Detroit in 1939, Chris Alston directed the Michigan Historical Records Survey's Inventory of Negro Manuscripts, but left soon after to help the CIO organize black workers at the Ford Rouge plant and edit an African-American edition of the union newspaper, *Ford Facts*. In 1941 he co-authored *Henry Ford and the Negro People* with his first wife, Sylvia Alston, exposing the racism behind Ford's use of blacks to break the union. During World War II, as co-chair of Packard Local 190's Inter-Racial Committee, he agitated for jobs for black women. The resulting disruption caused by white hate strikes cost him his military deferment and landed him in the Aleutians for the remainder of the war. After a stint as a self-employed businessman in the early fifties, he worked at the New Haven Foundry, serving as president of its UAW Local 429 from 1958 until 1962.

In the 1960's Chris Alston left the auto plants and turned to community organizing, first as a youth worker for Detroit's Total Action Against Poverty program, which he helped develop, and then as founder of a series of community planning and development groups in his old neighborhood on Detroit's lower east side that evolved into the Forest Park I and II Citizens' District Council (1968) and the Forest Park Development Corporation (1975). Alston also set up the Coordinating Council for Community Redevelopment in 1969 to represent nineteen CDC's in Detroit urban renewal areas. His three decades of advocacy on behalf of the residents of what some described as Detroit's worst slum paid off in the construction of four low-income and senior citizen housing developments in the Forest Park urban renewal area, including one named for his friend, Paul Robeson.

In addition to his role as leader of the Forest Park redevelopment program, Chris Alston counseled older workers in public and private programs in Detroit during the 1970's and 80's and continued writing a book on the slave reparations movement he had begun during his research for the Inventory of Negro Manuscripts. In 1984 he was awarded a prestigious Distinguished Warrior citation by the Detroit Urban League. Shortly before his death on March 12, 1995 he and his wife, Marti, set up the Michigan Committee for a Democratic Haiti, which lobbied on behalf of the embattled government of Jean-Bertrand Aristide.

In 1973 Chris Alston married Martha (Marti) Arnold, whom he had met in 1969 when she was a student in a Merrill-Palmer Institute work-study program with the Forest Park CDC. With an educational background in recreation and gerontology and sharing her husband's dedication to citizen involvement in neighborhood redevelopment, Marti Alston served as an officer of the Forest Park CDC and Forest Park Development Corporation, assisting residents with program planning, grant preparation and public relations work.

The bulk of the Chris and Marti Alston papers document their experiences as community activists in the redevelopment of the Forest Park urban renewal area. To a lesser extent, the collection documents the Alstons' involvement in various social justice and human rights causes.

**RESEARCHERS USING THIS COLLECTION MUST SIGN A RESTRICTED USE FORM. NO NAMES APPEARING IN THE DETROIT POLICE RED SQUAD FILES, OTHER THAN THOSE OF CHRIS AND SYLVIA ALSTON, MAY BE CITED WITHOUT THE WRITTEN CONSENT OF THE INDIVIDUAL NAMED. NO UNPUBLISHED MATERIAL IN RESTRICTED FILES MAY BE COPIED.**

**Important subjects in the collection:**

African Americans--Michigan--Detroit  
African Americans--Housing--Michigan--Detroit  
Aged--Recreation--Michigan--Detroit  
Central Industrial Park Citizens' District Council (Detroit, Mich.)  
Community development, Urban--Michigan--Detroit  
Community organization--Michigan--Detroit  
Detroit (Mich.). Model Neighborhood Agency  
Forest Park I and II Citizens' District Council (Detroit, Mich.)  
Forest Park Development Corporation (Detroit, Mich.)  
Gangs--Michigan--Detroit  
Housing rehabilitation--Michigan--Detroit  
Michigan Committee for a Democratic Haiti  
National Coalition of Blacks for Reparations in America  
Republic of New Afrika  
Paul Robeson  
Trade-unions--African American membership  
United States. Dept. of Housing and Urban Development  
Urban homesteading--Michigan--Detroit  
Urban homesteading--Pennsylvania--Philadelphia  
Urban renewal--Michigan--Detroit

**Important correspondents in the collection:**

Diggs, Charles C., Jr.  
Obadele, Imari A. (Richard Henry, Jr.)

**Related collections:**

Blacks in the Labor Movement oral histories  
Carl Almlad  
Jerome P. Cavanagh  
Detroit Commission on Community Relations/Human Rights Department  
Developing Urban Detroit Area Research Project  
New Detroit, Inc.  
Mel Ravitz  
*Talking Union* oral histories  
Ruth M. Tenney

## **Contents**

### **5 storage boxes and 1 small flat**

**Series I, Personal Files, 1940's-1995, Box 1:**

Correspondence, interview transcripts, investigative reports, resumes, media references and other material profiling the Alstons and their accomplishments.

**Series II, Forest Park, 1965-1993, Boxes 1-5:**

Correspondence, reports, grant applications, meeting minutes, surveys, legal briefs, contracts, maps, publicity and other material related to the development of the Forest Park urban renewal area.

**Series III, Subject/Organization Files, 1942-1996, Boxes 5-6:**

Unless otherwise indicated, printed material on a number of issues the Alstons endorsed and institutions and organizations with which they were affiliated, including those like the MESC and the Michigan School of Social Science, which employed Mr. Alston.

**Non-manuscript material:**

Some photographs, including several documenting construction of the Paul Robeson International Settlement housing project, have been placed in the Archives Audiovisual Department, along with a number of audio tapes of public meetings, lectures and radio broadcasts on black history, Detroit urban renewal projects, Haiti and other issues and events.

**Series I**  
**Personal Files, 1940's-1995**  
**Box 1**

**Box 1**

1. Alston, Chris; biographical information
2. Alston, Chris; correspondence, n.d., 1975-81, 1987-91
3. Alston, Chris; employment discrimination lawsuit v. Detroit-Wayne County Area Agency on Aging, 1980-83
4. Alston, Chris; Ford Hunger March reunions, 1979, 1982, 1992
5. Alston, Chris; honors and awards, 1965-95
6. Alston, Chris; honors and awards—Detroit Urban League Distinguished Warrior, 1984
7. Alston, Chris; interview—Detroit Urban League, n.d.
8. Alston, Chris; interview—early days of labor organizing, with Charlotte Zwerin, 1990
9. Alston, Chris; interview—employment discrimination for "NAACP in Action" radio program, n.d.
10. Alston, Chris; interview—Inventory of Negro Manuscripts (Michigan Historical Records Survey), with William McAdoo, 1988-91
11. Alston, Chris; obituaries, testimonial tributes, 1995
12. Alston, Chris; presentations, 1950-93
13. Alston, Chris; press coverage, 1940's-1980's
14. Alston, Chris; UAW Pioneers Fund pension, 1976-80
15. Alston, Chris; writings, 1940's
16. Alston, Chris and Marti; property at 8125 Northlawn, n.d., 1975-77
17. Alston, Chris and Marti; wedding, 1973
- 18-19. Alston, Chris and Sylvia; Red Squad file **[RESTRICTED USE]**
20. Alston, Marti; biographical information
21. Alston, Marti; correspondence, presentations, 1975-87
22. Alston, Marti; writings—senior citizens, 1981-82
23. Alston, Marti; writings—urban homesteading, c. 1974

**Series II**  
**Forest Park, 1965-1993**  
**Boxes 1-5**

**Box 1**

- 24-25. Central Industrial Park project, n.d., 1980-82
- 26. Citizens' District Councils, laws related to, 1968-80
- 27. Citizens for Participation in Government, 1972
- 28. Coalition for Block Grant Compliance, 1976-79
- 29. Community Development Block Grant Program, 1975-78
- 30. Coordinating Council for Community Redevelopment, n.d., 1969

**Box 2**

- 1-2. Coordinating Council for Community Redevelopment, 1970-77
- 3. District Council area and rehab project maps
- 4. East City Coalition, 1980-82
- 5. East City Learning and Development Center, 1975
- 6. Forest Park; misc., n.d.
- 7. Forest Park child care programs, 1969-72
- 8. Forest Park I and II Citizens' District Council (CDC) and precursors, 1968
- 9-10. Forest Park CDC, 1969-70
- 11. Forest Park (CDC) Planning Study, 1970
- 12-13. Forest Park (CDC) Social Diagnostic Survey, 1970
- 14-21. Forest Park CDC, 1971-74

**Box 3**

- 1-7. Forest Park CDC, 1974-77
- 8. Forest Park CDC election, 1977
- 9. Forest Park CDC, 1978-79
- 10. Forest Park CDC, 1980's-1990's
- 11. Forest Park CDC; Pepsi plant project, 1989-92
- 12-15. Forest Park Community Corporation, n.d., 1970-75
- 16. Forest Park Development Corporation and precursors, n.d., 1970-72
- 17-21. Forest Park Development Corporation, 1974-80
- 22. Forest Park Development Corporation; Paul Robeson International Settlement groundbreaking ceremony, 1980
- 23-25. Forest Park Development Corporation, 1981-83
- 26. Forest Park Development Corporation, 1984-85, 1989
- 27. Forest Park redevelopment overviews, n.d., 1970-81
- 28. Forest Park youth programs, n.d., 1970-79
- 29. George Elementary School, n.d., 1967-81

**Box 4 (oversize items)**

*Sound-Off*, Detroit's Model Neighborhood Newspaper, 1971-73 (scattered issues)  
Central Industrial Park Citizens' District Council clippings scrapbook, 1980-81

**Box 5**

1. Krakow and other youth gangs, n.d., 1965-67, c. 1974
2. Love, Cicero; clippings, corres., police reports, speech, 1971-77
3. Lower East Side Community Reorganization/Neighborhood Development and Service Organization, 1966-68
4. Model Neighborhood Agency Citizens Governing Board, 1969-72
5. Neighborhood Development Organization, 1988-89
6. Northeastern (High School) Community Study Group, 1980
7. Paul Robeson/Forest Park Community Services Organization and precursors, n.d., 1970-93
8. Save Our City (SOC), 1975, 1981
- 9-10. Self-Reliance Non-Profit Housing Corporation, n.d., 1974-79
11. *Sound-Off*; corres. and reports, n.d., 1971-73, 1981
- 12-13. Urban homesteading, n.d., 1973-81

**Series III**  
**Subject/Organization Files, 1942-1996**  
**Boxes 5-6**

**Box 5**

14. Affiliations and endorsements, misc., 1940's-1990's
15. Baker, General; campaign literature, 1976, 1978
16. Black Agenda for the Eighties, National Conference on, 1980
17. Black Family Conference, 1984-91
18. Black Men in Unions Institute, 1987-91
19. Black nationalism; unsigned manuscript, n.d.
20. Black Political Convention, National, 1980
21. Black Workers, Statewide Leadership Institute for, 1985-90
22. Black-Polish Conference, 1972
23. Blacks in the military, 1970's
24. Coalition to Save the Detroit Human Rights Ordinance, 1980's
- 25-26. Detroit black history
27. Detroit grassroots organizations, misc., 1970's-1980's
28. Detroit urban renewal, 1970's-1980's
29. Mandela, Nelson, 1988-94

**Box 6**

- 1-2. Michigan Committee for a Democratic Haiti; corres., reports, minutes, flyers, clippings, 1993-96
3. Michigan Employment Security Commission; job training programs, 1970's
4. Michigan School of Social Science, 1948-50
5. Midwest Labor Institute for Social Studies, 1980's
6. National Negro Labor Council reunion, 1993
7. National People's Action, 1976-78
8. "The Poor Black People" by George Cunningham, Jr., 1968
9. Redlining, 1977-80
10. Reparations, 1990's
11. Reparations; Ray Jenkins, 1990's
12. Reparations; N'COBRA, 1989-94
13. Reparations; *Restitution*
- 14-15. Republic of New Afrika, n.d., 1972-94
16. Republic of New Afrika; Imari Obadele (Richard Henry), corres. with, n.d., 1977-79, 1984
- 17-18. Robeson, Paul, n.d., 1976-78, 1984-93
19. Robeson, Paul; interviews with Stanley Nowak and Shelton Tappes re, 1982

**Box 6 (cont'd)**

20. UAW; Doug Fraser resignation from Labor-Management Group, corres. re, 1978
21. UAW; Packard Local 190 and the KKK, 1942
22. United Community Services Black Caucus, 1971
23. Wilson, Reginald, firing by WCCC, 1980
24. Women's Conference of Concerns, 1978-84
25. Women's issues, 1970's-1980's
26. Women's issues; Victoria Woodhull