

PENNSSTATE



Guide to the John Black Memorial Service Video Recording, 2006

Accession number: 2006-0111H
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Historical Collections and Labor Archives

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Descriptive Summary

- Title:** John Black Memorial Service Video Recording, 2006
- Accession:** 2006-0111H
- Provenance:** The Black memorial service was videotaped at the prompting of Paul Clark, who then donated both videotapes to the Historical Collections and Labor Archives, 2006.
- Extent:** 2 videocassettes (1 hour, 39 minutes, 18 seconds) + 2 DVD service copies
- Repository:** Pennsylvania State University, University Libraries, Special Collections Library

Administrative Information

Access

Unrestricted access.

Use Restrictions

Two service copies of the videocassettes were made in DVD format. A DVD player is available in the reading room to provide access to the collection. The originals are not available for use.

Preferred Citation

John Black Memorial Service Video Recording, 2006, Accession 2006-0111H, Historical Collections and Labor Archives, Special Collections Library, University Libraries, Pennsylvania State University.

Arrangement

The videocassettes are arranged in order of the memorial service program.

Biographical Note

John Black, labor leader, activist, and revolutionary, was born to an American father and German mother in Germany on 17 January 1921. He became active in the anti-fascist underground as an early teen. His conservative parents then sent him to a prestigious Huguenot school in Germany, but he was soon expelled along with other leftist students. He continued his work with the resistance in the years before the war, and left Germany at age 18 to avoid the draft. In England he worked briefly with the Communist Party, agreeing with the positions headed by Leon Trotsky. He came to New York the following year.

In New York, he worked in blue-collar jobs and through these he met Sam Marcy and Dorothy Ballan, militant labor organizers in the paper-box workers' union. He became a member of the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) and with it opposed United States entry into World War II.

Once the Cold War began, splinters developed in the SWP and Black joined Marcy in forming the Workers World Party in 1959. Black settled in Buffalo, New York, where he married theater troupe member Bernice Bates. Working in a hospital there, he was soon organizing hospital and health care workers. He often led organizing drives to New York City, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania.

He worked with the Retail, Wholesale, and Department Store Union (RWDSU) which organized health care workers as District 1199P. Black continued to organize dietary, laundry, and housekeeping workers as an extension of the civil rights struggle. Moving to State College, Pennsylvania, John Black served as the first President of the local 2,600 member 1199P from 1974 to 1984. During this time, he led the organizing of many 1199P chapters including those at Chambersburg Hospital, Centre Community Hospital, Mercy Hospital in Wilkes-Barre, Pottstown Memorial Medical Center, Pottsville Hospital, Reading Nursing Center, William Penn Nursing Center, Aliquippa Hospital, Washington Hospital, Canonsburg Hospital, Beaver Valley Nursing Center, and Guardian Elder Care - Nanticoke (St. Stan's). The 1199P discussed mergers with the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) in 1981, but internal RWDSU conflicts prevented the merger. The 1199P received its official charter in 1991.

John Black was a strong supporter of the movement to free Mumia Abu-Jamal. He also worked with Penn State University students on a weekly radio show, "View from the Left."

Before and after retirement in 1986, Black made fact-finding tours of Cuba and Communist countries in Europe, as well as countries in the Middle East. He suffered a heart attack while visiting Iraq in 2000 and returned to continue his research into workers' movements. He died on 7 March 2006, survived by his wife, children Mark, Douglass, and Jennifer, and two grandchildren. To honor his life of labor activism, a memorial service was held on 1 May 2006 at the Friends Meeting House in State College, Pennsylvania.

Bibliography

Griswold, Deirdre. "John Black 1921-2006: Foe of Hitler; Organizer of Hospital Workers." *Workers World Newspaper*, 30 March 2006, vol. 48, no. 12. Viewed at <http://www.workers.org/pdf/2006/ww033006.pdf> on 15 Aug. 2006.

"John Black: Founder of Our Union & Tireless Fighter for Workers' Rights and Civil Rights, 1921-2006," SEIU District 1199P Web site, http://www.seiu1199p.org/ourlocal/john_black_life.cfm. Viewed 15 Aug. 2006.

Beadling, Tom, et al. *A Need For Valor: The Roots of the Service Employees International Union, 1902-1992* (Washington, D.C.: Service Employees International Union, 1992): 69, 77.

Scope and Content

The two videocassettes record the Memorial Service on 1 May 2006 at the Friends Meeting House, State College, Pennsylvania. Friends and supporters chose May 1st for the service to commemorate John Black's lifelong dedication to the struggle of workers internationally. Speakers include Andy McInerney, editor, *Socialism and Liberation* magazine; Deirdre Griswold, editor, *Workers World Daily*; John August, executive director, Coalition of Kaiser Permanente Unions; Thelma Price, community activist; a recorded message from Mumia Abu-Jamal from death row; Jeff Martin, former president of the Students and Youth Against Racism, Penn State; plus officers of the Service Employees International Union District 1199P, and readers of two letters of condolence sent to Black's widow, Bernice.

Related Material

An oral history of John Black is in the Historical Collections and Labor Archives oral history collection. A copy of the memorial service program is available in the control folder.

Index Terms

These materials are indexed under the following headings in the catalog of the Pennsylvania State University. Researchers wishing to find related materials should search the catalog under these index terms.

Personal Name Subjects

Black, John, 1921-2006

Corporate Subjects

Retail, Wholesale, and Department Store Union. Local 1199P Hospital and Health Care Union (Pittsburgh, Pa.)

Topical Subjects

Labor union members

Labor unions -- Organizing

May Day (Labor holiday)

Speakers

Abu-Jamal, Mumia

August, John

Griswold, Deirdre

McInerney, Andy

Martin, Jeff

Price, Thelma

Form/Genre Terms

Digital cinematography

DVDs

Memorial service

Container List

Memorial Service Series

Memorial service, 2006.

Videocassette 1

1 hour, 28 minutes, 24 seconds

Videocassette #1 includes a taped talk by John Black about the significance of May Day to the workers movement internationally. Following this, the program consisted of talks by labor editors, union leaders, community activists, and the former president of

Students and Youth Against Racism. A taped statement by Mumia Abu-Jamal is included on the program.

Videocassette 2

10 minutes, 54 seconds

Videocassette #2 contains condolences from friends to family members.