

Commissioner Benjamin Ward (1926-2002) Papers
Finding Aid
Lloyd Sealy Library – Special Collections John Jay College

by Tania Colmant-Donabedian

July 31, 2009

rev. EB & TCD 3/12/14

Overview of the papers:

The Benjamin Ward Papers consist of approximately 4 linear feet in 5 boxes. The materials chronologically span his entire professional career, with some gaps. The papers were donated to the Lloyd Sealy Library of John Jay College of Criminal Justice in 2009 with additions to the papers in 2011 and 2012 by his daughter, Mary Ward of Palm Coast, Florida. One item was subsequently donated to the papers in 2014 by Hildy Simmons.

Biographical Note

Benjamin Ward was the first African-American Police Commissioner of New York City, serving from 1984 to 1989. Born in Brooklyn in 1926, Benjamin Ward was destined to be the first African American in several of the appointments.



When he entered the New York Police force in 1951, Ward became the first African-American police officer of Brooklyn's 80th Precinct. He steadily rose through the ranks of the Police Department for fifteen years before his assignment as Special Legal Counsel to Police Commissioner Howard R. Leary.

By 1968 he was named a Deputy Police Commissioner and became the Chief Hearing Officer in all departmental disciplinary matters. Following this, he was chosen to be the Deputy Commissioner of Community Affairs with responsibilities for the Youth Aid Division and Auxiliary Forces Section. In 1973 Mayor John V. Lindsay appointed Ward to assume responsibility as New York's Traffic Commissioner. Two years later, Governor Hugh L. Carey elected

him New York State Department of Correctional Services Commissioner. He was the first African American to hold the position.

Mayor Edward I. Koch appointed Ward for three different posts during his administration. First, in 1978 he was appointed Chief of the New York City Housing Authority Police. A year later Ward became the Commissioner of the New York City Correction Department; he held this post for four years.

In 1984, Koch appointed Ward as New York City's 34th Police Commissioner. He assumed this position during a period of racial and civil unrest and high crime rates in the city. During that time he established college credit requirements for NYPD promotions. He also presided over the Department during the 1988 Tompkins Square Riots as well as the 1984 Eleanor Bumpers shooting among other controversial police response incidents.

After retiring, he served on various boards in the private sector and assumed several teaching positions including as Adjunct professor of Criminal Justice at John Jay College of Criminal Justice, CUNY; Adjunct Professor of Law at Brooklyn Law School, and Adjunct Professor at Hudson Valley Community College.

Benjamin Ward passed away in 2002. His funeral mass was held at St. Patrick's Cathedral.

Biographical Time line:

(* = Benjamin Ward was the first African American to fill position)

August 10, 1926: Born as one of 11 children in the Weeksville (Brownsville) section of Brooklyn.

1944: Graduated from Brooklyn Automotive Trades High School

1944: Drafted into the US Army, Served as Military Policeman and criminal investigator

1951: Enters NY Police Academy

1955: NYPD Patrolman assigned to Brooklyn's 80th Precinct (Crown Heights)

1958: Graduated Brooklyn College, AS in Police Science

1960: Graduated Brooklyn College, Sociology BA, Magna Cum Laude

1962: Patrol Sergeant, 68th Precinct

1962-66: Head of Youth Division, Special Investigations Unit

1967: Brooklyn Law School Doctorate of Law, top 1% of class

1968: Promoted to Lieutenant, and aide to Police Commissioner's Office

1969: Executive Director, Civilian Complaint Review Board

1970: Deputy Police Commissioner*, Chief of Community Affairs Commission

1973: Traffic Commissioner, New York City Department of Transportation

1974: Director of Pretrial Services Agency- Vera Institute of Justice

1975: Commissioner*, New York State Department of Correctional Services

1978: Commissioner, New York City Housing Authority Police Department

1979: Commissioner*, New York City Department of Corrections

1980: Appointed to the Crime Control Planning Board

1984: Police Commissioner*, New York City Police Department (NYPD)

October, 1989: Retirement

Adjunct Professor of Law at Brooklyn Law School,

Adjunct Professor of Corrections at the John Jay College of Criminal Justice

Adjunct professor of the Hudson Valley Community College in Troy, NY

June 10, 2002: died at the age of 75.

References:

(2009) Benjamin Ward. *Contemporary Black Biography*. Vol. 68. Farmington Hills, Mich.: Gale.

(2002, July) Benjamin Ward, New York's first Black police commissioner, dies. *Jet* 102/3:15-16.

Benson, M. A Conversation with Benjamin Ward. *Spotlight* 13/6: 28-35.

Dunlap, D. W. (1989, September 27). Ward Bids Farewell as 'a Cop's Cop': Eleanor Bumpurs's death was the toughest moment. *New York Times*, B3.

Martin, D. (2002, June 11). Benjamin Ward, New York City's First Black Police Commissioner, Dies at 75. *New York Times*, A27.

Mcquiston, J. T. (1988, March 17). Ward Orders Some College for Top Ranks: 2 to 4 Years of Study Will Be Required Ward Imposes a College Requirement for Future Ranking Officers. *New York Times* B1.

Box and Folder Listing:

Box 1: Papers

Correspondence with Police Commissioner 1971-1973
Materials related to Traffic Commissioner NYC Transportation Administration, 1974
Correspondence with Edward Koch 1979-1992
Miscellaneous Correspondence 1980-1989
Speeches by and about Benjamin Ward -2 folders
Outside employment 1980s
List of NYPD Commissioners since 1901
Manuscript of "Top Cop", a memoir by Benjamin Ward
Interview Transcript of Benjamin Ward
by the Columbia Oral History Office, Edward Koch Oral History Project
Articles by and about Benjamin Ward-newspapers
Articles by and about Benjamin Ward-other publications

Box 2: Audio Visual materials

Photographs
Micro-cassettes of press conferences, hearings and events
B&W Photographs of Sing Sing Prison
Oversized albums of color photograph of
NOBLE Conference
Dedication to USS Theodore Roosevelt
VHS tape of Commissioner Benjamin Ward memorial mass,
Saint Patrick's Cathedral June 14, 2002

Box 3: NYPD Files

*Please Note: **Researchers using these files must agree to Restrictions related to Privacy & non-disclosure***

1978-1985 Chief Dillon - IAD investigation
1985-1986 Major Case squad organized crime investigation
1987 "New York 8"
1983-84 Disciplinary investigation of the conduct of PO Vincent Caldara- 3 folders
1987-1988 IAD #66s87 investigation into PO Vincent Caldera and Captain Callahan

Box 4 : 2011 (and 2014) addition to the Collection

Correspondence
Personal Resume 1/6/1968
Fifteen black and white Photographs
10/20/1969 - B.W. with others, shaking hand
10/24/1969 - B.W. pinning policewoman
9/25/1970 - Hispanic Dinner (2 photos)
7/10/71 - 7th PJ Track Meet (2 photos)
1972 - B.W. giving speech at Port Authority annual dinner
8 undated [1960s-70s] and unidentified photos of official functions including
B.W. (1 color)
NYPD Press Releases re: Benjamin Ward
Newspaper Clippings about Benjamin Ward (3 folders)
Newsletter and Magazine Articles about Benjamin Ward
Ephemera

Miscellaneous (2014 addition)

Box 5 : 2012 addition to the collection

1956 NYPD *Rules and Procedures* issued to Benjamin Ward, annotated with several inserts

The Knapp Commission Report on Police Corruption New York: George Braziller

Trial Hand Book for New York Lawyers by Aaron J. Broder

Police Corruption by Herman Goldstein w/ letter to BW from Pat Murphy

Canons of Ethics by Edward Thompson Company 1955 (NY Bar Association)

Benjamin Ward News clippings Files

Women in Policing by Catherine Milton

The New York City Mentor Hand Book by Judy Breck

-Benjamin Ward Police Commissioner Seventy-Eighth Annual NAACP Convention (photo album)