

## SOVEREIGNTY COMMISSION ONLINE SERIES 2515: MISSISSIPPI STATE SOVEREIGNTY COMMISSION RECORDS, 1994-2006

<http://da.mdah.ms.gov/sovcom/>

On March 29, 1956, in the wake of the Supreme Court's decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*, the Mississippi Legislature created a new state agency, the Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission, to "do and perform any and all acts deemed necessary and proper to protect the sovereignty of the state of Mississippi, and her sister states" from "encroachment thereon by the Federal Government or any branch, department or agency thereof." From 1956 to 1973, the commission promoted segregation in Mississippi and investigated its perceived enemies, mainly those associated with the Civil Rights Movement.

Investigators combed the state for 17 years, meeting with local police, communicating with Citizens' Council members, cultivating paid Black informants, and sharing information with other states. Agency files brimmed with investigative reports documenting Movement activities and personnel. Movement reports, letters, leaflets, news clippings, and other materials confiscated in raids by local police were turned over and preserved in Sovereignty Commission files. Sorted by place and person, the files reveal just how far Mississippi was willing to go to preserve white supremacy.

In 1977, the Mississippi Legislature abolished the Sovereignty Commission and ordered that the records be sealed at the Mississippi Department of Archives and History until 2027. This filing cabinet sealed with metal bands was one of several cabinets that held files. After years of litigation, the files were opened to the public in 1998.

### Subjects that can be addressed within this Digital Archive:

- Civil Rights
- Sovereignty Commission
- Medgar Evers
- Ross Barnett
- James P. Coleman
- Ku Klux Klan
- White Citizen's Council
- NAACP
- Voter Registration
- Confederacy



3. Search for “James Coleman” under Basic Name Search. Select “Coleman, James” and click SCR ID #99-40-0-20-1-1-1. Read the letter online or at the transcript below.
- Who wrote this letter? Where is he from? Who is this letter sent to? What is the basic premise of the letter?
  - In the letter, what organizations does Gottlick ask Governor Coleman for information on?
  - Notice the terminology Gottlick uses in the letter, particularly when he says “righteousness of the Southern policy.” What does that mean?
  - At the bottom of the letter, Gottlick writes, “P.S. I’m still saving my Confederate money.” What do you think this means?
4. Open <https://mshistorynow.mdah.ms.gov/issue/mississippi-sovereignty-commission-an-agency-history> and read the paragraphs titled “Coleman administration,” “Barnett administration,” and “Waller administration.”

Each of the five total gubernatorial administrations involved in the Sovereignty Commission took a different approach on the organization’s purpose. Compare the approaches of the Coleman, Barnett, and Waller administrations regarding the Sovereignty Commission.

Transcription

*[This letter is written on John D. Gottlick's letterhead.]*

*John D. Gottlick*

*2525 W. 115<sup>th</sup> Street*

*Chicago 43, Illinois]*

Hon. [Ray?] Gore

Hon. James Coleman,

Governor's Mansion,

Jackson, Mississippi

Your Excellency:

Allow me to wish you greetings and the best of health and luck.

I write to congratulate you and your fine administration on your marvelous conservative administration and heartily agree with your every policy and cannot begin to praise you and it enough. I want you to know that we in the North are not all a bunch of radical liberals and "one racers."

In regard to the latter, could you supply me with information regarding the Ku Klux Klan and more so the White Citizen's Councils of the South. I believe we could use one here in Chicago to cope with our race problem.

Having seen your appearance on the television program "Meet the Press" I am more convinced than ever of the righteousness of the Southern policy. Please send me any information or literature about it. I would greatly appreciate & put to good use.

With every possible good wish, I remain,

Most Sincerely,

John D. Gottlick

P.S. I'm still saving my Confederate money.