

**MONTGOMERY COUNTY ARCHIVES**

**Guide to the Records of the**  
**GILES-JOHNSON DEFENSE COMMITTEE**  
**1963-1967**

**Record Group 18: Civic Organizations**

**February, 2016**  
**Revised December, 2017**

Montgomery County Archives  
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### **ADMINISTRATIVE HISTORY**

In 1961, three young black men, brothers John and James Giles along with Joseph Johnson, were convicted of the rape of a 16-year-old girl and sentenced to the death penalty in the Maryland courts. The Giles brothers' mother had been employed by Montgomery County resident Mrs. Howard Ross, who subsequently formed the 60-member Giles-Johnson defense committee in an effort to bring to light unheard-evidence that put into question the testimony of the alleged victim at the trial. In 1963, due to the efforts of the Committee, Governor Millard Tawes commuted the men's death sentences to life imprisonment. The Committee continued their efforts, claiming the miscarriage of justice and the harsh sentencing was due to the men's race and class. The Giles brothers were retried in 1967 and the charges were dropped. Joseph Johnson was eventually pardoned by Governor Spiro T. Agnew in 1968.

This landmark case was appealed before the Supreme Court; as a result Maryland law was changed to allow motions for trials based on newly-discovered evidence.

### **EXTENT**

Less than 0.25 cubic feet in five folders.

### **SCOPE AND CONTENT**

This collection contains material produced by the Giles-Johnson Defense Committee and material documenting its activities. Records include meeting minutes, clippings, newsletters, correspondence, reports, petitions, and other court documents related to the case. Material is arranged in chronological order.

### **CONDITIONS GOVERNING ACCESS**

This collection is open for research.

### **LANGUAGE**

English.

### **PROVENANCE**

Unknown, but likely obtained with material transferred from the Marie Bennett Memorial Library (disbanded by MCPL), possibly in Accession 97-46.

### **RELATED MATERIAL**

The Special Collections, University of Maryland Archives holds an extensive collection (8.5 linear feet) of material on this case. See the [finding aid](#) at Archives UM.

### **USING THESE RECORDS**

To request records listed in this finding aid, the following information should be given to the archivist:

Record Group 18, **Records of the Giles-Johnson Defense League**, Series Number and Name, Box Number and Folder Title(s).

The preferred citation for materials from these records is:

Montgomery County Archives; Gaithersburg, Maryland. Record Group 18: Civic Organizations. Records Title: The Records of the Giles-Johnson Defense League. Series

number and series name. Box number and folder title, if appropriate

**PROCESSING PROCEDURES**

Preservation copying of newspaper clippings was performed whenever feasible. Records in folders were arranged in forward chronological order, with undated records appearing at the end of the folder.

**PROCESSING STAFF/FINDING AID AUTHOR**

Sarah Hedlund

**FOLDER INVENTORY:**

Documentary of a Capital Criminal Proceeding in Maryland: The Giles-Johnson Case as of July 20, 1964 (Court Transcripts), 1964

Committee Activity, 1963-1964

Court of Appeals/Supreme Court Briefs and Petitions, 1964-1965

Committee Activity, 1965-1967

Publications and Clippings, 1964, 1965 and undated