

David W. Hardy Papers, 1953-2002



David W. Hardy

Overview of the Collection

- Title:** David W. Hardy Papers, 1953-2002
- Creator:** David Walter Hardy (1942-2011)
- Accession(s):** PPL-2017-032
PPL-2024-010
- Size:** Approximately 3.25 linear feet of records, comprised of:
One (1) records storage box
One (1) half document box
One (1) newspaper box (this box also contains material from other collections)
- Repository:** Plainfield Public Library, Local History Department, 800 Park Avenue, Plainfield, NJ 07060
- Abstract:** The David W. Hardy Papers document his decades-long journalism career, with particular emphasis on his eyewitness account of the events surrounding the July 1967 Plainfield uprising and subsequent testimonies, as well as his unfinished book on the subject. His papers also document his investigative reporting on political corruption in New Jersey and his fight against racial discrimination in the newspaper industry. The collection includes correspondence, notes and interviews, clippings, broadsides, testimony and television transcripts, and photographs and negatives.
- Language:** The records are in English.

Biographical Information

David Walter Hardy (1942-2011) was born and raised in the West End of Plainfield and graduated from Plainfield High School and Fairleigh Dickinson University. His journalism career began as a

sports writer, and the first Black reporter, for Plainfield's *Courier News*. He was working for the paper in July 1967, when rioting broke out in the city, due to increased racial tensions with police and unaddressed grievances of Plainfield's Black community. As the only Black reporter at the paper who could gain access to the "riot zone," Hardy was handed a camera and assigned to cover what was happening in his own neighborhood. On the evening of Sunday, July 16, he became an eyewitness to the killing of John Gleason, a white police officer who was beaten and stomped to death by an enraged Black crowd, in reaction to the officer shooting and critically wounding a young Black man moments before. After the officer was killed, Hardy was seen taking pictures and confronted by a small group; one man threatened him with a gun until Hardy turned over his camera, which was then smashed. Tensions and violence escalated further that night when weapons, including semiautomatic rifles stolen from a nearby Middlesex arms manufacturer, were used in an armed uprising and exchange of sniper fire that lasted until the early hours of the morning.

The following day, meetings and attempted negotiations took place with aggrieved Black community members, community leaders, Mayor George Hetfield, and state officials, including Commissioner of Community Affairs Paul N. Ylvisaker, State Attorney General Arthur J. Sills, and Colonel David Kelly of the State Police. David Hardy was present at these gatherings, acting as a liaison, as well as working with and introducing Ylvisaker's staff member, Donald McDonald to people in the Black community. An agreement was eventually reached that included investigating grievances (police brutality, lack of recreation facilities, public housing issues), extending the West End perimeter and pulling out all city and state law enforcement from within it, thus allowing residents to establish their own street patrol, and releasing, without bond, some of the people arrested during the rioting. The demand to release prisoners was emphasized by Linward Cathcart, a representative of the Black resistance, who claimed violence would ensue if this action was not taken in a timely manner. In exchange, he and others would make attempts to facilitate the surrender of the stolen weapons by Wednesday afternoon.

On Tuesday, July 18, David Hardy was questioned by a detective from the Union County Prosecutor's Office regarding Officer Gleason's homicide. Hardy identified who took his camera and broke it, but could not positively identify that same person as being in the crowd that killed Gleason. In an amended statement made in August, Hardy said he felt coerced and bullied by the detective to give him that name. That same day, residents in the protected perimeter of the West End started cleaning up broken glass and other debris in the streets. The atmosphere was quieter, but still tense.

Because there was no voluntary surrender of the stolen guns and ammunition by the following day, Governor Richard Hughes proclaimed that Plainfield was in a "state of disaster and emergency," thus giving authority, in his eyes, to conduct a search of private property without warrants. A caravan of patrol jeeps and trucks with heavily armed state police and National Guard moved into the blockaded West End. Hardy was a witness to the state troopers and guardsmen performing the house-to-house search. Although accompanied by Black community members, from groups such as the Plainfield Human Relations Commission and the local NAACP, to ensure that no incidents occurred, the search teams damaged some homes. The search concluded with only a few weapons confiscated. The area continued to be cordoned off, with residents patrolling their own neighborhood and keeping the peace. Armed guardsmen remained outside the perimeter, until they left Plainfield on Friday, July 21, at which time the checkpoints and roadblocks around the blockaded West End were removed. However, state and city police continued their search for the stolen guns used in the uprising, as well as the investigation into Gleason's death.

In the meantime, David Hardy's eyewitness account of the killing of Officer Gleason, published the morning after in the *Courier News*, picked up by other papers nationwide, and broadcast on the television news, resulted in hate mail from both Black and white readers and viewers from around the country. Because he saw and wrote about what happened, although he could not identify any suspects, and perhaps because it was known that he liaised with state officials, Hardy was aware of threats made on his life by some members of Plainfield's Black community. He felt forced to find other employment and leave the area. By extension, his mother and sister, Martha, who were still living in the West End at the time, were temporarily moved for their safety. Hardy started looking for a new job almost immediately, but did not start working for the New York *Daily News* until September 1967.

The national recognition David Hardy gained because of his eyewitness account, elicited invitations to speak based on his understanding and experience of the situation. On July 18, mere days after the uprising, he was invited via telegram to appear as a panelist on the CBS program "Face the Nation," to interview Governor Hughes about the riots that took place in New Jersey. That September, Hardy was asked to give testimony in Washington, D.C. before the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, also known as the Kerner Commission. Named after its chair, Governor Otto Kerner Jr. of Illinois, the Commission was established by President Lyndon B. Johnson in July 1967 to investigate the root causes of urban riots occurring across the United States. The Commission used Hardy's testimony, the only documented account of the events that took place before, during, and after an unprecedented racial uprising, as a prime source for their report on racism in America, which was published the following year.

In November 1967, David Hardy was subpoenaed to appear before the Union County Grand Jury as a witness in the investigation of Officer Gleason's homicide. He went on to testify in the mass criminal trial that took place the following year. His testimony concerned how one of the defendants smashed his camera. The case resulted in the convictions of only two people out of eleven: George Merritt and Gail Madden. Their convictions were overturned and a second trial took place in 1974. Although it appears Hardy was present at this trial based on his notes found in the collection, it is not clear if he was called to testify as a witness. Hardy was subpoenaed again in 1977 as a witness for the defendant, George Merritt. This was Merritt's third trial. His second conviction was overturned in 1974, but Madden's was not. Hardy closely followed all cases from the start.

As a reporter, David Hardy kept a diary with a timeline of events leading up to and including the Plainfield uprising. This diary, along with other notes, interviews, and court transcripts, was used to write an account of Hardy's experiences, initially titled "Inside a Black Insurrection." The book was set to be published by New York publisher Frederick A. Praeger, Inc. in November 1969. For reasons unknown, by 1971, Hardy had still not completed and submitted the book. Hardy returned to the manuscript in the early 1980s, renaming it "Ashes and Blood." This time, he could not find any interest in publishing it. Perhaps because, as one publisher pointed out, it was written with an objective, journalistic point of view instead of a more personal one, which they believed would be more successful. Another publisher thought the events were too remote in time and overshadowed by current stories.

In September 1967, after experiencing threats and pressure to leave Plainfield and his job at the *Courier News*, David Hardy found new employment as a general assignment reporter, and again one of the first Black reporters, at the New York *Daily News*. He briefly left this position to work at the *Washington Post*, but returned to the *News* in 1972. During his second tenure there, Hardy focused on investigative reporting and politics. He developed a reputation for exposing political corruption in Hudson County, NJ and in particular, its county seat in Jersey City. In 1986, Hardy

won awards, accolades, and a Pulitzer Prize nomination for a series of articles he wrote on convicted ex-New Jersey state senator David Friedland, who faked his own death in the Bahamas to avoid jail and became the subject of an international manhunt by the FBI for more than two years.

At the same time that David Hardy was being honored for the reporting he was doing at the *Daily News*, he and three other Black journalists at the paper were suing it for discriminatory practices. Hardy, a newspaper union activist and chairman of the Daily News Black Caucus, first filed his complaint with the Federal Equal Employment Opportunity Commission in March 1980, stating that Black reporters were rarely assigned or moved off of major stories, not awarded merit pay raises, and faced retaliation for filing complaints. In 1987, after a seven-year legal battle, Hardy became the lead plaintiff in a successful, landmark trial by jury that resulted in a multi-million dollar settlement made by the paper.

After leaving the *Daily News* in 1987, David Hardy worked as a part-time writer for Dow Jones and the Dorf Feature Service, a local news bureau providing coverage for the *Star-Ledger*. At the time of his death, Hardy was working on a new book chronicling his struggles with racism and his continued fight to expose injustices. He died suddenly at the age of 68 in 2011.

[Source: David Hardy obituary (Courier News, January 18, 2011) and materials found in collection]

Scope and Contents

The David W. Hardy Papers document his decades-long career as a Black journalist and include a variety of materials, dating from 1953 to 2002, with bulk dates from the late 1960s through the early 1980s. The majority of this material focuses on Hardy's eyewitness account of the events surrounding the 1967 Plainfield uprising, his subsequent testimonies, and his unfinished book on the subject. Additional materials document his investigative reporting on political corruption in New Jersey and his fight against racial discrimination in the newspaper industry. Record types include correspondence, notes and interviews, clippings, broadsides, testimony and television transcripts, and photographs and negatives.

Arrangement

The David W. Hardy Papers are arranged into three series:

Series 1: Plainfield Uprising and Aftermath

Subseries A: Trials and Testimonies

Subseries B: Book Manuscript and Research

Series 2: Employment and Career

Series 3: Plainfield and Personal

Index Terms

People:

Hardy, David Walter, 1942-2011

Places:

Plainfield (N.J.)

Subjects:

African American journalists--New Jersey
Investigative reporting--New Jersey
Race relations--New Jersey--Plainfield
Riots--New Jersey--Plainfield--20th century

Related Items

Plainfield Black History Resources on the [July 1967 Uprising / Civil Unrest "Plainfield Riots"](#) (Civil Unrest 1967 tab). Oral history interviews of residents, conducted in 2015, regarding their memories and personal experiences of that time include [Jacqueline Hardy-Casey](#), David Hardy's sister.

David Frost Papers

Physical Characteristics and Technical Requirements

This collection consists of paper documents that do not require any additional technology for access. However, there are PDF files on a disc that require the use of a computer to view.

Series Description**Series 1: Plainfield Uprising and Aftermath [1953-2009, undated]****Series Description**

Series 1 contains materials related to David Hardy's connection to the Plainfield uprising, the trials and hearings that took place in its aftermath, and his attempt to capture his account and understanding of the events in a book. Items include numerous newspaper clippings, Hardy's notes and timeline of events, a journalist's magazine featuring safety tips on reporting on riots, subpoenas, copies of Hardy's testimonies before the Kerner Commission and the Union County Grand Jury, copies of exhibits from the Senate Committee hearings on civil disorder and Plainfield arrest reports, letters and telegrams, a television program transcript, photographs (possibly taken by Hardy), background notes and interviews, and an unfinished book manuscript. Materials that reference the riots that took place in Newark that same summer are also included in this series.

Arrangement

Series 1 is arranged by subject chronologically and fills 35 folders, housed in two boxes.

Series 2: Employment and Career [1964-1987, undated]

Series Description

Series 2 contains materials related to David Hardy's career as a Black journalist, working from the 1960s through the 1980s, and in particular, his investigative reporting on David Friedland and his fight against racial discrimination at the *Daily News*. Items include correspondence, such as letters regarding employment and recommendations, a newsletter and publications, New Jersey Commission of Investigation annual reports, press parking locations in New York City, a strongly worded letter to a Jersey City judge, materials related to David Friedland, including a U.S. Marshals wanted poster, broadsides of articles written by Hardy, and court case documents (PDF files), and negatives of what appears to be Hardy's retirement party.

Arrangement

Series 2 is arranged by subject chronologically, fills ten folders, and is housed in two boxes. The broadsides share space in a newspaper box with materials from other collections.

Series 3: Plainfield and Personal [1961-1994, undated]

Series Description

Series 3 contains materials that reflect David Hardy's continued interest in Plainfield, as evidenced by the clippings he kept over the years, as well as the letter sent to Gannett Newspapers regarding the state of the *Courier News*. Other materials, such as the 1964 publication about Cassius Clay, music magazines and lyrics, television program transcripts about a housing project in Newark, and clippings on various subjects, are considered personal ephemera that speak to Hardy's interests, but may have also been used by him as resources in his writing and reporting. In addition, this series contains a torn map featuring New York City with New Jersey on the opposite side and a copy of a check from a Georgia bank to David Hardy and attorneys for a large amount of money.

Arrangement

Series 3 is arranged by subject chronologically and fills eight folders, housed in two boxes.

Administrative Information

Access & Restrictions

The David W. Hardy Papers are available for research.

Access is restricted to materials prepared by the Local History department staff. All materials must be viewed in the Plainfield Room and may not be removed to another area of the library without permission of the Library Director or designee. Materials must be handled carefully and kept in order. Materials must not be leaned upon, altered, folded, ripped, or traced upon. Marks may not be added or erased from materials. Materials must be returned directly to Local History department staff and inspected before the researcher leaves the Plainfield Room.

One photocopy may be made (by Plainfield Public Library staff) of each document for the purpose of research; official Local History departmental reproduction fees may apply. Permission to publish must be obtained by the Plainfield Public Library Board of Trustees as delegated to the Library

Director. Permission to publish does not constitute a copyright clearance. The researcher is responsible for further copyright restrictions. The Plainfield Public Library is not responsible for the misuse of copyrighted material.

Preferred Citation

Identification of item; Date (if noted); "David W. Hardy Papers", Box and Folder Number, Local History Department, Plainfield Public Library, Plainfield, New Jersey.

Acquisition Information

The bulk of the collection was donated by David Hardy's sister Jacqueline Hardy Casey in 2017, with additional material donated by her in 2024.

Processing Information

The 2017 donation was inventoried by Sally Weiner in December 2022. The 2024 addendum was inventoried by Sally Weiner in February and March 2024. Both donations were processed in July 2025 and the finding aid written in August 2025 by Sally Weiner. Finding aid content follows the guidelines suggested by *Describing Archives: A Content Standard*.

Collection Inventory

Series 1: Plainfield Uprising and Aftermath [1953-2009, undated]

Box	Folder	Title/Description	Date(s)
1	1	Plainfield uprising - Clippings	1967
	2	Hardy eyewitness account - Clippings	1967
	3	Hardy witness statements	1967
	4	Plainfield uprising - Notes and timeline	1967
	5	Letters to Hardy after uprising	1967
	6	CBS "Face the Nation" - Telegram, guest program notice, transcript	1967
	7	Search for guns - Clippings	1967
	8	Kerner Commission - Correspondence, notes, testimony transcript	1967
	9	Senate Committee hearings - Exhibits on Plainfield	[1967]
	10	Copies of arrest records from Plainfield Police Department	1967
	11	Union County Grand Jury - Subpoena and testimony transcript	1967
	12	Gleason trial - Clippings	1968
	13	Merritt and Madden's petition for release and second trial - Clippings	1969, 1974
	14	George Merritt - Subpoena for third trial, pamphlet, clippings	1977-1980
	15	Mayor George Hetfield - Bio and obituary	1953-2004
	16	Governor Richard Hughes - Clippings	1963-1971
	17	Paul Ylvisaker - Newark and Plainfield riot chronologies, clippings	1963-1970
	18	Riots and uprisings - Booklet and clippings	1967-1979, undated

	19	Notebooks and loose notes	1977, undated
	20	Book - Correspondence, contract, notes on publishers	1969-1984
	21	Book research - Police reports, witness statements, notes	1967-1969, undated
	22	Book research - Gleason autopsy	1967
	23	Book research - Interviews	1969-1971
	24	Book - Handwritten manuscript pages and notes	undated
	25	Book - Typed manuscript pages with edits	undated
	26	Book - Typed manuscript pages	undated
	27	Book - Typed manuscript pages	undated
2	1	Photographs - Plainfield uprising and City Hall interior	1967
	2	"Editor & Publisher" magazine	1967
	3	Subpoena for Gleason trial	1968
	4	New Jersey Riot Chronology	undated
	5	Commendation letters to Hardy from Ylvisaker and Hughes	1967-1968
	6	"Speak Out! For the Release of Plainfield's Black Hostages"	[1969]
	7	Merritt and Madden's second trial - Hardy's notes	1974
	8	Plainfield uprising - Hardy email	2009

Series 2: Employment and Career [1964-1987, undated]

Box	Folder	Title/Description	Date(s)
1	28	Places in city (NY) where radio, TV & press cars can park	undated
	29	Newspaper union publications	1984
2	9	Student transcript (copy), Fairleigh Dickinson University	1964
	10	Employment - Correspondence, application, letters of recommendation	1967-1978
	11	State of New Jersey Commission of Investigation annual reports	1971-1972
	12	Letter from Hardy to Judge Connors, Jersey City	1975
	13	"TNS Reports" newsletter - Re: discrimination lawsuit against <i>Daily News</i>	1980
	14	U.S. Marshals wanted poster for David Friedland	1985
	15	Court documents - United States vs. David Friedland (PDF files on disc)	1988-1989
	16	Negatives - Retirement party from <i>Daily News</i>	[1987]
*		Series of articles on David Friedland - Broadsides (*Plainfield Families Box 3)	1985-1986

Series 3: Plainfield and Personal [1961-1994, undated]

Box	Folder	Title/Description	Date(s)
1	30	Plainfield - Clippings	1961-2007
	31	Cassius Clay publication	1964
	32	Music magazines and song lyrics	1967-1971
	33	Misc. subjects (Vietnam, civil rights, <i>Washington Post</i>) - Clippings	1978-1981, undated

2	34	Map of New York City / New Jersey (torn)	1967
	17	Plainfield - Letter from Hardy to Gannett Newspapers, re: <i>Courier News</i>	1992
	18	Kawaida Towers, Newark - Television program transcripts	1972
	19	Check (copy) from Georgia bank to Hardy and attorneys	1994