



University Libraries Special Collections & University Archives

Elijah Williams Collection

Collection Summary

Title:	Elijah Williams Collection
Call Number:	MS 98-13
Size:	0.25 linear feet
Acquisition:	Purchased from Gerald Norwood, 1998
Processed by:	MLR, 5-17-1998; MN, 8-12-1999; MN, 12-6-2011
Restrictions:	None

Literary Rights

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Content Note

Dating from 1909 to 1983, this collection contains newspaper clippings, articles, photographs and other historical documentation about Elijah Williams, an African American and native Kansan. It also contains a manuscript written by Williams about his life, philosophy and religious beliefs. The clippings, photographs and articles highlight Williams' athletic pursuits at Emporia High School, Kansas State Teachers College and Howard University. Some information tells of his career as a probation officer in Washington, D.C.

Biography

Elijah ("Lige") Williams was born at Burlingame, Kansas, in 1903. In 1919, Williams, along with his brother and sister, saved up \$100 to rent a house and move the family to Emporia. Williams' father, Wesley, chose to stay in Burlingame, but his mother, Anne, and brother Clayton and sister Catherine wanted the family's youngest to get a college education and "amount to something."

In the fall of 1919, he enrolled in Emporia High School. Because he was an African American, Williams was not permitted to play on the basketball team but later he was to play on a segregated basketball team at EHS. Williams was, however, allowed to participate in track and his outstanding ability was noticed and he was seen as a future star.

During his high school days Williams, as noted, experienced the unfortunate treatment that was one of the by-products produced by the ignorance of racism. One incident that stayed with Williams did not involve the athletic field, but rather the chemistry lab. Williams and a classmate, Mary White, proposed to form a laboratory team but school officials would not allow the paring of black and white students in the classroom. Miss White related the situation to her father, William Allen White, who soon visited the school and conveyed his feelings about the matter to the administration. The next day, and for the rest of the year, White and Williams were lab partners. Whether this came as a result of the action of a concerned parent, or because the parent was William Allen White, the point was made, and the two students were happy with the result.

Williams graduated from EHS in the spring of 1921, but did not enroll in college until the spring semester of 1922. During that summer and fall, Williams worked saving money for school. Work had been a part of Williams' life since the age of five. He had run errands, delivered packages, shined shoes, worked for local farmers, and as a laborer on the Santa Fe Railroad. Later, when in college, he took those jobs open to a young black man in the 1920s. He waited tables, pumped gas, and worked as a harvest hand. When going to school in Washington, D.C., he worked in parking garages, was a bell hop and cab driver. Whatever he did, Williams brought intelligence, energy and a strong work ethic to the task.

Williams entered Kansas State Teachers College (Emporia, Kansas) at the start of the spring semester of 1922 with the intention of majoring in physical education and participating in athletics. Williams was particularly successful in track where he ran dashes and relays.

By the fall of 1923, Williams's life had taken another turn. He was awarded a four-year scholarship to the School of Dentistry at Marquette University, Milwaukee, Wisconsin. After the fall semester, circumstances were such that Williams felt he should return to Emporia and his mother. He wrote: "My devoted mother became very ill, and with the assistance of the coaches and athletic department of KSTC, I was persuaded to return home."

The spring of 1924 found Williams on the cinder track at the college with bigger things than victories in intercollegiate track meets looming ahead. The Olympic Trials for the 1924 Games were to be held at Harvard University. Williams had received an invitation, and having the year's fastest times in the 100 and 200 yard dashes, he appeared certain to make the team. Ten days before the trials, he pulled a tendon in his leg, and his chances to compete in the Olympics faded away. Williams declared this to be the biggest disappointment in his life, one that took him several years to get over. The emotional upheaval Williams experienced motivated him to make a change in his life, one that was to take him to the nation's capitol.

In 1925, Howard University in Washington, D.C. offered Williams a scholarship to play football and run track. The predominantly black school provided Williams a change from his past and a door to the future. Howard University was one of the few places in America that Williams could be trained for his chosen career, medicine. Williams worked to support himself while pursuing his pre-med curriculum. He graduated in 1929.

From 1929 until 1935 Williams worked for the District of Columbia Health Department. In 1935, Williams returned to Howard University where he was employed as a medical technician in the biology department. While working at the University, Williams continually took courses showing that he still had hopes of a career in medicine.

On December 22, 1935 or 1936, Williams married Gladys Lander, a graduate of the District of Columbia Teachers College. Gladys taught school for five years, and later, for twelve years, served as librarian for the Howard University Medical Library. In his personal writings, Williams often noted how lucky and blessed he was to have married Gladys.

In 1943, Williams was accepted into the medical school at Howard and once again, the illness of a

loved one altered his plans. Gladys suffered an extended illness and due to financial considerations, Williams kept working for the biology department, forgoing medical school.

Williams changed careers in 1953 and became a parole officer for the District of Columbia Department of Corrections. Williams was proud of his work, helping to rebuild the lives of troubled men. This work dovetailed with Williams's strong faith and deep religious convictions. Williams stayed with the Department until his retirement.

Throughout his adult life, Williams often returned to Emporia to visit relatives and his old college. He was proud of his athletic accomplishments and treasured the friends that he had made at Kansas State Teachers College.

Series Listing

Series 1	Box 1 FF 1	Personal Statement. Manuscript by Elijah Williams.
Series 2	Box 1 FF 2	School. Elementary and high school.
Series 3	Box 1 FF 3-5	Athletics. High school and college.
Series 4	Box 1 FF 6-8	Kansas State Teachers College.
Series 5	Box 1 FF 9	Career.
Series 6	Box 1 FF 10-11	Miscellaneous.
Series 7	Oversized Storage	Oversized. Photographs and certificate.

Box and Folder Listing

Series 1 – Personal Statement

Box 1	FF 1	Eleven manuscript pages written by Williams describing his life, philosophy and religious beliefs, n.d.
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Series 2 – School

Box 1	FF 2	First grade report card, Burlington, Kansas, 1909-1910; Emporia High School yearbook, 1921.
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Series 3 – Athletics

Box 1	FF 3	Newspaper clippings reporting Williams' participation in track and basketball at Emporia High School and Kansas State Teachers College, 1919-1924.
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| Box 1 | FF 4 | Photocopies of clippings reporting Williams' participation in track and basketball at Emporia High School and Kansas State Teachers College, 1919-1924. |
| Box 1 | FF 5 | Photograph of Williams as member of segregated Emporia High School basketball team, 1919; photographs of Williams as member of track team for Kansas State Teachers College (KSTC), and participating in State Track Meet, (college-level), 1923-1924. |

Series 4 – Kansas State Teachers College

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| Box 1 | FF 6 | Clippings of newspaper articles reporting visits by Williams to his alma mater, 1950-1971. |
| Box 1 | FF 7 | Alumni magazine including article about Williams, December 1963. |
| Box 1 | FF 8 | Correspondence concerning Welch stadium dedication, 1961, and Williams' induction into the Emporia State University Athletics Hall of Honor, 1983. |

Series 5 – Career

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| Box 1 | FF 9 | Williams' business card, photocopy of identification card and correspondence (1959) from client. |
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Series 6 – Miscellaneous

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| Box 1 | FF 10 | Newspaper, <i>Enterprise Chronicle</i> , containing obituary of Williams' father, Wesley Williams, June 13, 1946. |
| Box 1 | FF 11 | Copy of KSTC Student Newspaper, <i>The Bulletin</i> , March 18, 1930; photograph of Regional Fraternity (Alpha Phi Alpha) with Elijah Williams in second row, 1966; photograph of Fran Welch (?), track coach at KSTC. |

Series 7 – Oversized

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| Oversized
Storage | | Certificate of attendance from Osage County Schools, 1917. Photograph of Howard University Football Team, 1925. Photograph of Mulanda Chapter of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, 1949. |
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