



*New York State Archives*

**New York State Joint Legislative Committee on the State  
Education System Investigation Files of the Rapp-Coudert  
Committee L0260**

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New York State Archives  
222 Madison Avenue  
Albany, NY 12230  
[archref@nysed.gov](mailto:archref@nysed.gov)  
URL: <http://www.archives.nysed.gov/>

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## Overview of the Records

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| <b>Repository:</b>     | New York State Archives   |
| <b>Summary:</b>        | The Rapp-Coudert Committee was charged with investigating individuals and organizations with suspected radical ties in New York City public schools and colleges. This series consists of the Committee's investigation files. Typical contents include correspondence; interview notes and hearing transcripts; minutes; and copies of Communist, anti-war, and civil liberties publications collected by the Committee during the course of investigations. Many files contain extensive notes on individuals under investigation, and include documentation on other persons with suspected ties to Communism. |
| <b>Creator:</b>        | New York (State). Legislature. Joint Legislative Committee on the State Education System  |
| <b>Title:</b>          | Investigation files of the Rapp-Coudert Committee   |
| <b>Quantity:</b>       | 21 cubic feet   |
| <b>Inclusive Date:</b> | circa 1920-1949   |
| <b>Bulk Date:</b>      | 1935-1941   |
| <b>Series:</b>         | L0260   |

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## Arrangement

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Arranged by case number.

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## Administrative History

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The Joint Legislative Committee on the State Education System, chaired by Assemblyman Herbert A. Rapp, was created by concurrent resolution of the New York State Senate and Assembly on March 29, 1940. The Committee was given broad authority to investigate the administration and financing of education in the state, and to study "the extent, if any, to which subversive activities may have been permitted to exist in the schools and colleges of the public

educational system in the City of New York" (1942 report). Because of the wide scope of its charge, a special subcommittee, chaired by Senator Frederic R. Coudert, was assigned to investigate whether left- and/or right-wing movements-Communism, Fascism, and Nazism-had penetrated New York City public schools and colleges.

By the conclusion of its investigation, the "Rapp-Coudert Committee" had interviewed almost 700 people and interrogated some 500 witnesses in a series of open and closed hearings on the extent of "subversive activities" in New York City education, resulting in the removal of teachers, professors, and college administrators from their positions. At the City College of New York, the Rapp-Coudert investigations resulted in the termination of over fifty faculty and staff, including Professor Jack Foner, a historian who was accused of injecting left-wing thought into the classroom, and devoting excessive attention to the importance of African Americans in the curriculum.

According to its final report, the Rapp-Coudert Committee found no significant body of evidence showing a Nazi or Fascist "conspiracy against the schools," but it did uncover substantial evidence on the part of the Communist Party to penetrate into the public school and higher education systems. In particular, the Committee identified three organizations-the Teachers Union, College Teachers Union, and American Student Union-through which the Communist Party was supposedly working (1942 report). The Rapp-Coudert Committee was disbanded in 1942, even though the Joint Legislative Committee on the State Education System, which developed a plan for school district reorganization across New York State, existed until 1947.

### **Related Publications**

For additional information on the Rapp-Coudert Committee's findings, consult "Report of the Subcommittee of the Joint Legislative Committee to Investigate Procedures and Methods of Allocating State Moneys for Public School Purposes and Subversive Activities" (Albany, 1942), held by the New York State Library.

For information on the Committee for the Defense of Public Education, an organization that opposed the Rapp-Coudert Committee's methods, consult "Senator Coudert's Star Chamber; A Report on the Rapp-Coudert Committee: Private Hearings-January to March, 1941" (1941) and "Conspiracy against the Schools; An Analysis of Rapp-Coudert, March, 1940 to January, 1941" (1941), both held by the New York State Library, Manuscripts and Special Collections Unit.

Published versions of hearings of the Joint Committee on the State Education System, December 1940-March 1941, are available at the New York State Library.

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## Scope and Content Note

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This series consists of investigation files generated by the Rapp-Coudert Committee as it probed suspected radical activities (mainly leftwing/Communist, some rightwing/Fascist and Nazi) in New York City public schools and colleges from 1940-1942. While the Committee cast its net broadly, the records reveal that it focused particular attention on New York City high schools, Brooklyn College, City College of New York, and Hunter College. As it conducted investigations of students, faculty, and administrators with suspected Communist or right-wing ties at these institutions, the Committee examined organizations such as the American Student Union, a student anti-war organization that was supportive of the Soviet Union; the Young Communist League; the Teachers Union; and the College Teachers Union. It also devoted considerable attention to studying ethnic groups with ties to radical politics-including German-Americans, Italian-Americans, and Jewish-Americans-as well as foreign language teachers and others sympathetic to international causes (e.g. the labor movement).

The bulk of the records include correspondence, interview notes, hearing transcripts, minutes, pamphlets, newspaper clippings, and copies of publications compiled during the course of the investigations. Literature collected by the Committee ranges from flyers and student newspapers to leaflets and propaganda disseminated by the Communist Party. Themes such as Communism, anti-war sentiment, and civil liberties dominate these publications. Many files contain extensive Committee notes on individuals under investigation, and include witness testimony and notes on other persons with suspected ties to Communism. Notes are often annotated with page numbers, which in all likelihood correspond to the hearing transcripts where that information was captured. Much of the correspondence in this series pertains to specific individuals under investigation by the Committee; the letters often defend or accuse particular individuals of subversive activities or affiliations with left- or right-wing groups. Other letters to the Committee suggest witnesses for ongoing cases and provide "tips" on possible subversive behavior in New York City. Often, related documents such as newspaper clippings or other publications are attached to the letters.

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## Related Information

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### Related Material

A0795Series A0795, New York State Division of State Police Non-criminal Investigation Case Files, contains related records.

## Related Publications

Report of the Subcommittee of the Joint Legislative Committee to Investigate Procedures and Methods of Allocating State Moneys for Public School Purposes and Subversive Activities (Albany, 1942), is held by the New York State Library.; "Senator Coudert's Star Chamber; A Report on the Rapp-Coudert Committee: Private Hearings-January to March, 1941" (1941) and "Conspiracy against the Schools; An Analysis of Rapp-Coudert, March, 1940 to January, 1941" (1941), both issued by the Committee for the Defense of Public Education, an organization that opposed the Rapp-Coudert Committee's methods, are held by the New York State Library, Manuscripts and Special Collections Unit.; Published versions of hearings of the Joint Committee on the State Education System, December 1940-March 1941, are available at the New York State Library.

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## Use of Records

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### Access Restrictions

There are no restrictions regarding access to or use of the material.

### Alternate Formats AvailableAlternate Formats Available

Microfilm is available at the New York State Archives through interlibrary loan.

Microfilm: 57 reels; 35 mm.

[Investigation files of the Rapp-Coudert Committee, circa 1920-1949](#)

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## Administrative Information

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### Existence and Location of Originals

New York University's Tamiment Library contains a microfilm version of this series. A link to the library's online finding aid can be found below at the end of this catalog record.

### Custodial History

According to the Joint Legislative Committee's final report, all files of the Rapp-Coudert investigations were turned over to the Division of State Police on March 5, 1947. The State Police borrowed and re-filed materials from the Rapp-Coudert files while the records were in its custody; out cards have been left in place, even where materials have been re-filed.

The Rapp-Coudert files were originally accessioned as part of Series A0795, Non-criminal investigation case files of the State Police, and filled boxes 65-84 of that series. In March 2009, the records were accessioned as a separate series.

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## Access Terms

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- Teachers--Political activity
- Radicalism--New York (State)--New York
- Public schools--New York (State)--New York
- Subversive activities--New York (State)--New York
- Communism--New York (State)--New York
- Fascism--New York (State)--New York
- Education and state--New York (State)
- Education--New York (State)--New York
- Anti-communist movements--New York (State)
- World War, 1939-1945--Protest movements
- New York (State)
- New York (N.Y.)
- German Americans
- Universities and colleges--New York (State)--New York
- Jews--United States
- Italian Americans
- Case files
- Investigating
- Brooklyn College
- New York (State). Legislature. Joint Committee on the State Education System
- College of the City of New York (1926-1961). City College
- Hunter College