The papers of Mel Ravitz were placed in the Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs in 1999 by Dr. Ravitz and were opened for research in February of 2000.

Mel Jerome Ravitz was born in New York City on January 7, 1924, but moved to Detroit with his family in 1929. He graduated from Detroit’s Central High School in 1942 and went on to receive a B.A. in history from Wayne State University in 1948. While there, he worked as a staff announcer for WJLB-AM and wrote a column for the school’s newspaper, Detroit Collegian. In 1949, he earned an M.A. in sociology from the New School for Social Research, returning to Detroit that year and taking a job as news editor for the fledgling UAW radio station, WDET-FM. He was awarded a Ph.D. in sociology from the University of Michigan in 1955.

In 1953 the Detroit City Plan Commission hired Dr. Ravitz as Director of Community Organization to coordinate local participation in neighborhood conservation projects as mandated by the Federal Housing Act for those cities receiving urban renewal funds. He left that position in 1960, but the associations with block clubs and neighborhood organizations formed during those years provided the political base from which Mel Ravitz mounted his first campaign for Detroit Common Council in 1961.

He was reelected in 1965 and again in 1969, this time as president of the Council, but relinquished his seat to run for mayor in the 1973 Democratic primary won by Coleman Young. A year later Dr. Ravitz joined the Detroit-Wayne County Community Mental Health Services Board as staff director, but left in 1982 to begin the first of another four terms on Detroit’s City Council, retiring in 1997. A strong proponent of regional solutions to urban problems, he also chaired the Wayne County Board of Supervisors from 1966-68 and the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments, which he helped to create, from 1970-71.

Serving the city of Detroit for twenty-eight years, under four mayors, Mel Ravitz earned a reputation for hard work, integrity and fairness. A frequent critic of mayoral policy, identifying himself as the loyal opposition, his focus was always on the average citizen, solutions to grassroots problems and neighborhood revitalization rather than high profile riverfront and downtown development projects. A forceful civil rights advocate and
vigorous opponent of racial discrimination, he was often identified as Detroit’s most liberal-minded white city official in the 1960's.

Mel Ravitz pursued dual careers in academia and politics, a situation he judged beneficial to his performance in both. He taught intermittently at Wayne State University from 1949 until his retirement in 1987 as Emeritus Professor of Sociology. He was instrumental in the formation of Wayne State’s Department of Urban Planning in the mid-1950's and has written and spoken extensively on urban problems and social planning.

The Mel Ravitz Collection offers a rich source of documentation on the momentous changes engulfing Detroit and other large, northern industrial cities during the latter half of the twentieth century and local attempts to deal with the far-reaching social and economic problems arising from these changes. The papers reflect not only the turbulent history of Detroit politics during those years, but Dr. Ravitz’s professional and scholarly interest in community participation in redevelopment decisions, urban housing policy, police-community relations, mental health care, race relations and regional planning.

**Important subjects in the collection:**

Afro-American police--Michigan--Detroit
Afro-Americans--Community development--Michigan--Detroit
Afro-Americans--Economic conditions--Michigan--Detroit
Afro-Americans--Housing--Michigan--Detroit
Afro-Americans--Medical care--Michigan--Detroit
Afro-Americans--Social life and customs--Michigan--Detroit
Air--Pollution--Michigan--Wayne County
Archer, Dennis W.
Butzel Family Center (Detroit, Mich.)
Cable television--Michigan--Detroit
Casino gambling--Michigan--Detroit
Cavanagh, Jerome P.
Community development, Urban--Michigan--Detroit
Comprehensive Health Planning Council of Southeastern Michigan
Day care centers--Michigan--Detroit
Democratic Party--Michigan
Detroit. Belle Isle Park
Detroit Commission on Children and Youth
Detroit churches
Detroit (Mich.)--Buildings, structures, etc.
Detroit (Mich.)--Central business districts--Planning
Detroit (Mich.). City Council
Detroit (Mich.). City Plan Commission
Detroit (Mich.)--Community centers
Detroit (Mich.)--Community organization
Detroit (Mich.)--Crime and criminals
Detroit (Mich.)--Discrimination in education
Detroit (Mich.)--Discrimination in employment
Detroit (Mich.)--Discrimination in housing
Detroit (Mich.)--Housing policy
Detroit (Mich.)--Manpower development programs
Detroit (Mich.). Model Neighborhood Agency
Detroit (Mich.). Police Dept.
Detroit (Mich.). Police Dept. STRESS
Detroit (Mich.) riot, 1967
Detroit Central High School
Detroit. Citizens’ District Councils
Detroit General Hospital
Detroit House of Correction
Detroit Metropolitan Area (Mich.)--Community health programs
Detroit Metropolitan Area (Mich.)--Local transit--Planning

**Important subjects (cont’d):**

Detroit Metropolitan Area (Mich.)--Politics and government
Detroit Public Schools
Detroit-Wayne County Community Mental Health Board
Drug abuse--Michigan--Detroit
Elmwood Park Projects II and III (Detroit, Mich.)
Express highways--Environmental aspects--Michigan--Detroit
Federal aid to community development--Michigan--Detroit
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Grass Roots Organization Workers (G.R.O.W.)
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Gun control--Michigan--Detroit
Health planning--Michigan
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Homeowners’ associations--Michigan--Detroit
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Magnum Oil Company
Mental health policy--Detroit Metropolitan Area (Mich.)
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Southeast Michigan Council of Governments
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University City II Project (Detroit, Mich.)
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Wayne County (Mich.)--Politics and government
Wayne State University (Detroit, Mich.)
West Central Organization--Michigan--Detroit
Young, Coleman A.
Youth--Services for--Michigan--Detroit

Important correspondents in the collection:

Archer, Dennis W.
Barbour, Al
Beckham, Charles
Blessing, Charles
Cavanagh, Jerome P.

Important correspondents (cont’d):

Citron, Abraham
Cohn, Avern
Collins, Barbara-Rose
Del Rio, James
Gribbs, Roman S.
Edwards, George C., Jr.
Edwards, George C. III
Fisher, Max
Gentry, Bronson
Girardin, Ray
Gomon, Josephine
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Hewitt, Ronald
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Meltzer, Marvin
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Swieczkowska, Clara
Wierzbicki, Anthony
Wolfgang, Myra
Young, Coleman A.
Young, Joseph F., Jr.

Non-manuscript material:

Over 100 photographs and a few items of memorabilia documenting Mel Ravitz’s political campaigns and his career as a Detroit City Councilman have been placed in the Archives Audiovisual Collection.
Contents

72 storage boxes, 1 small flat

Series I, Detroit City Council, 1962-1997, Boxes 1-55, p. 6
Series includes constituent mail, departmental reports responding to citizen complaints and material relating to issues under discussion by the Council. The bulk of the files document Mel Ravitz’s tenure from 1962-1973, especially the years 1970-1973 when he served as president of the Council. The files are arranged chronologically and then alphabetically. Inclusive dates of subject files spanning more than one year are noted in the folder heading. File headings also may have changed over time. Correspondence, for example, filed alphabetically in the early 1960s, was later placed in the appropriate department file. By 1972 alphabetical correspondence files were replaced by those labeled “miscellaneous” and “personal.” The files from 1982-1997, much less voluminous, are arranged alphabetically and then chronologically.


Series III, Community and Professional Organizations, 1961-1993,
Boxes 56-66, p. 39
Material relating to his service as an officer or board member of these organizations.

Series IV, Speeches and Writings, Biographical Background and Publicity, 1943-2001, Boxes 66-70, p. 43
In addition to articles published, speeches delivered and papers presented by Mel Ravitz, the series includes magazine profiles and newspaper articles about him, oral interviews and public testimony he gave, radio scripts he wrote, certificates and awards he received, entries from a journal he kept in the 1940s and a small amount of correspondence pre-dating his Council years. Council resolutions he introduced will be found in Series I as will public statements issued during his last four terms on the Council.

Series V, Publications, 1939-1978, Boxes 70-73, p. 47
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21. Article; “Community Development” in *Journal of the Community Development Society*, 1982/1
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23. Article; “The Culture Concept and Urban Design” in *City Planning*, 1958/3
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32. Articles, newspaper, authored by MJR; *Detroit Collegian*, 1944-45

33. Biographical background
34. Correspondence, n.d., 1943-44
35. Correspondence, 1945-47
36. Correspondence, 1956, 1959, 1961
38. Interviews with Todd Shaw on low-income housing in Detroit, 1994
40. Lectures, 1960s-1970s
41. Letter to President Nixon re his acceptance speech, 28 Aug 1972
42. Letters to the Editor, 1947, 1961-62, 1964-65
43-44. Letters to the Editor, 1969-73
45-48. Letters to the Editor, 1984-97
49-60. Newspaper clippings re MJR, 1955-73
61. Newspaper clippings re MJR, 1982-97
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64. Papers/speeches; children and families, 1964-79
65. Papers/speeches; the church, 1956-68
66. Papers/speeches; commencement addresses, 1959-68

**Box 68**

1. Papers/speeches; community organization, 1960-91
2. Papers/speeches; community speaking engagements, 1970
3-21. Papers/speeches; community speaking engagements, 1981-96
22. Papers/speeches; crime/police-community relations, 1960-72
23-25. Papers/speeches; Detroit: problems and prospects, 1956-90

**Box 69**

1. Papers/speeches; education/schools, 1968-76
2-4. Papers/speeches; health care/mental health services, 1966-81
5. Papers/speeches; housing, 1959-72
7. Papers/speeches; miscellaneous, 1960-91
8. Papers/speeches; neighborhood conservation, 1956-86
9-10. Papers/speeches; planning, 1955-91

**Box 69 (cont’d)**

13. Papers/speeches; poverty, 1964-90
14-15. Papers/speeches; race relations/civil rights, 1958-77
16-17. Papers/speeches; regionalism/suburbs, 1962-82
18. Papers/speeches; SEMCOG, 1967-71
19. Papers/speeches; urban change, 1957-65
20. Papers/speeches; urban problems, 1962-69

**Box 70**

1. Papers/speeches; urban problems, 1970-92
2. Papers/speeches; urban renewal, 1956-67
4. Public testimony/statements; Blue Cross-Blue Shield rate increases, 29 Jun 1970
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