The Urban League of St. Louis, Inc., was formed in 1918 as a result of race riots in East St. Louis, Illinois, the previous year, in which 39 blacks had been killed because they had taken the jobs of striking white employees of an aluminum plant. St. Louisans were eager to avoid a similar occurrence on the Missouri side of the Mississippi River, and they were also aware that the War Department, which did not want any disruptions of such a vital industry during wartime, was sponsoring an Urban League branch in East St. Louis.

In June, 1918, the Urban League of St. Louis was officially formed as a branch of the national organization of the same name, which had been started in New York in 1910. Its original purpose was to deal with difficulties faced by blacks as they migrated from the rural deep South to northern cities. Many of them were not ready for the complications of big-city life.

The League's first executive secretary in St. Louis was George Buckner. He had a staff of four and a budget of $10,000, which had to be collected from the community as a whole. Despite these constraints, he initiated construction of an open-air school for crippled black children and a dental clinic. He also got the League accepted as a member of the Community Fund (now known as the United Way), which meant that a prime source of League funding would be St. Louis' largest voluntary giving program.

Buckner resigned late in 1923, by which time the League's board of directors was integrated (this would eventually become a League tradition of long standing). Gordon Simpson succeeded Buckner in 1924.

John T. Clark became Executive Director in 1926. He and his staff handled 16,000 job applications in his first year. They placed a total of 6,000 applicants, mostly in "domestic service". Clark would later become a national leader in the formation of black unions. In 1932 he organized the first Block Units in St. Louis. He believed that neighbors could band together to secure their rights to services, which the city government seemed determined to neglect.

Leo Bohanon succeeded Clark as Executive Director in 1950. He came on at a time when the League had just begun eliminating job placements in domestic service and transferring all of the relevant files to the Missouri State Employment Service. Bohanon noted in the League's annual report for 1951 that the job was completed on May 14 of that year.

William E. Douthit became Executive Director in 1964. He sent his staff into Kinloch to make proposals for urban-renewal projects. The result was a $95,000 federal grant. He also expanded services to include senior citizens. Today, the Urban League is active in such diverse fields as employment, education, senior citizens activities, on-the-job training, and...
public information.

**SCOPE AND CONTENT**
The Urban League Collection contains annual reports; monthly and quarterly newsletters; a "fact sheet" dated 1974; a supplement to the St. Louis Sentinel of April 20, 1976; miscellaneous notices and invitations; the newspaper Urban League of St. Louis; and several informational pamphlets: What's Happening at the Urban League? (undated, 2 copies); The Negro in the St. Louis Economy (1954); and Trend of Negro Areas in St. Louis (1947, 2 copies).

JOHN T. CLARK
The papers of Mr. Clark, the longtime Executive Director of the Urban League of St. Louis, are available from the archives of Washington University in St. Louis.

**FOLDER LIST**

1. Urban League of St. Louis annual reports: 1938-42, 44-45, 48 (digest), 57, 60, 64-70, 72, 74, 79 (3 parts, in folder)
2. Monthly Newsnotes: 11/68, 12/68, 2/69, 3/72, 6/72, 2/73, 3/73, 3/74, 12/74
   Quarterly Newsletters: Spring 1969, Summer 69, Summer 73
   Research Notes: 1/69, 2/69, 3/69
   "Fact Sheet", dated 1974
   St. Louis Sentinel "Yes I Can" supplement, 4/20/76
3. Miscellaneous invitations, notices, etc., ca. 1975-82
5. Trend of Negro Areas in St. Louis, 1947, 2 copies
   The Negro in the St. Louis Economy, 1954
   What's Happening at the Urban League?, undated, 2 copies

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