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Sanders, William Willard "Whitey," 1930-2021 (MSS 659)

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Manuscripts & Folklife Archives
 Department of Library Special Collections
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 Bowling Green, KY 42101-1092

Descriptive Inventory

MSS 659 SANDERS, William Willard “Whitey,” 1930-2021

6 boxes. 69 folders. 1,425 items. 1953-2021. Originals, photocopies, DVDs.

2005.161.2; 2008.25.1-12

Related collections: [MSS 722](#), [MSS 723](#)

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

William Willard Sanders (known as “Bill” or “Whitey”), the son of Romie Covington Sanders and Katherine (Tomerlin) Sanders, was born in Springfield, Tennessee on 14 October 1930. He graduated from Pompano Beach High School in Florida, then attended the University of Miami before accepting a football scholarship at Western Kentucky State College (now WKU). During 1953, Sanders set an NCAA record for completing 66 of his 98 passes as quarterback.

An English major at WKU, Sanders enrolled in a freshman art class with professor Ivan Wilson, who he credited with putting him on his future career path; while still a student, Sanders contributed cartoons to WKU’s student newspaper, *The College Heights Herald*. Another influence was Gene Graham, a Pulitzer Prize-winning editorialist and cartoonist for the *Nashville Tennessean*. On 12 February 1955, Sanders married Gene Graham’s niece Joyce Wallace, also a WKU student.

After graduating from WKU in 1955, Sanders was drafted to play professional football, but military service sent him to Korea with the U.S. Army. Put in command of a unit of the military newspaper *Stars and Stripes*, he contributed cartoons while overseeing printing and distribution. While in Korea, his reading of *Herblock’s Here and Now* by the legendary cartoonist Herbert Block sparked Sanders’ interest in political cartooning.

After his Army service, Sanders became a reporter with the *Pacific Stars and Stripes* in Tokyo, then worked as a freelance cartoonist with the *Japan Times*. In 1959, he accepted a position as cartoonist for the *Greensboro Daily News* in Greensboro, North Carolina. In June 1963 he became editorial cartoonist for *The Kansas City Star*, and in September 1967 moved to *The Milwaukee Journal*. Sanders’ cartoons reflected *Journal* editorial policy until 1987; thereafter, his work represented his own views rather than the paper’s.

Given considerable freedom to express his strong liberal opinions, Sanders frequently drew ire from newspaper readers, local officials and conservative groups. A proponent of civil rights, civil liberties, gun control, women’s rights, contraception and sex education, he was a harsh critic of the Vietnam War and the administrations of Presidents Richard Nixon and Ronald Reagan. His treatment of local issues such as public accommodation laws and police misconduct also created conflict with politicians, judges and the public. In February 1970,

Sanders received a month-long suspension from *The Milwaukee Journal* for “moonlighting” when some of his cartoons appeared in a local underground newspaper, a penalty that sparked debate about political pressure on the *Journal*. However, Sanders was also known for his independence; his views on free speech, for example, led him to criticize 1960s student activists who objected to giving their opponents a forum on university campuses.

Over his career, Sanders’ cartoons were syndicated nationally to more than 100 newspapers, and his work appeared in other nationally known publications such as *Time*, *Newsweek*, *U.S. News and World Report*, and *The New York Times*; a 1962 cartoon about civil rights was reprinted in the Soviet newspaper *Izvestia*. A jazz musician, popular speaker, and participant in professional organizations, Sanders served as president of the American Association of Editorial Cartoonists (AAEC) and received numerous awards and honors including the Kansas City Civil Liberties Achievement Award (1963) and the Wisconsin Civil Liberties Award (1979). He was inducted into the Wisconsin Media Hall of Fame, the Milwaukee Press Club Hall of Fame, and the WKU Hall of Distinguished Alumni. Collections of his work can be found in *Run for the Oval Room: They Can’t Corner Us There* (Alpha Press, 1974); *The Sanders Book: Selected Political Cartoons by Sanders* (Milwaukee Journal, 1978); and *Adventures in Whopperland: a collection of political cartoons, written opinions and essays* (Lulu, 2006).

Sanders retired from *The Milwaukee Journal* in 1991. He and his wife Joyce, the parents of four daughters, moved to Fort Myers, Florida, where Sanders continued to draw cartoons for his blog, *Sanders Cartoon-Commentary*. In 2018, he published a memoir, *Against the Grain: Bombthrowing in the Fine American Tradition of Political Cartooning* (NewSouth Books). Sanders died on 27 February 2021.

COLLECTION NOTE

This collection consists of material pertaining to the career of editorial cartoonist Bill “Whitey” Sanders. The three main aspects of the collection are: biographical and feature articles documenting his career (Box 1); correspondence, consisting largely of reader reaction to his editorial cartoons for the *Greensboro Daily News*, *The Kansas City Star* and *The Milwaukee Journal*, as well as other professional correspondence (Boxes 2-5); and miscellaneous material relating to his career, such as his involvement in conferences and professional organizations, awards, appearances and writings (Box 6).

Box 1 contains articles, clippings, interview features and other biographical material about Sanders, often illustrated with his cartoons. In addition to articles and profiles detailing Sanders’ career, of interest are: a 1963 article recounting Sanders’ meeting with President John F. Kennedy (Folder 2); *Editor and Publisher* and *Saturday Review* articles reporting on the hostile reaction, led by the John Birch Society and its sympathizers, to Sanders’ cartoons after he began work at *The Kansas City Star* (Folder 2); and the uproar over Sanders’ 1982 depiction of a police officer that some found obscene (Folder 3; see also Box 4, Folder 2).

Boxes 2-5 contain correspondence, largely from readers but also from colleagues; from collectors, politicians and other public figures, usually to request the original of a cartoon; from organizations seeking to arrange a speech, presentation or exhibit; from publications seeking permission to reprint a cartoon; and from aspiring cartoonists asking for advice. Readers who take time to write generally convey negative comments, but some praise Sanders’ work or offer

ideas for cartoons. Negative reactions to Sanders' depiction of national, state and local topics range from thoughtful letters to brief expressions of outrage, general insults, and comments written directly on a clipping of the offending cartoon. In a few cases, readers utter extreme expressions of racism, anti-Semitism or apocalyptic thinking. Though infrequent, Sanders' replies to some readers are also included. Among the items of interest:

- Feedback from several colleagues on a 1962 Sanders article in the *AAEC News* regarding the role of the editorial cartoonist (Box 2, Folder 1)
- Candid letters from former colleagues at the *Greensboro Daily News* regarding personnel at the paper and politics in North Carolina (Box 2, Folders 5-7)
- Passionate declarations from right-wing extremists and a UFO conspiracy theorist (Box 2, Folders 10, 13 and 14)
- Letters and cartoons about controversial Milwaukee County Circuit Judge Christ T. Seraphim, who was a favorite Sanders target and with whom he participated in a 1977 televised debate on capital punishment (Box 2, Folders 10; Box 3, Folder 13; Box 4, Folder 11)
- Reaction to Sanders' 1970 suspension from the *Milwaukee Journal*, including a supportive note from the *Kaleidoscope*, where his unauthorized work appeared (Box 3, Folder 1)
- Reaction to Sanders' cartoon of a "trigger-happy" police officer operating under cover of "law and order" (Box 3, Folder 1), and his portrayal of President Richard Nixon's support of an anti-crime bill as endorsement of a Nazi-style police state (Box 3, Folder 2)
- Letters from organizers and supporters of the early-1970s "women's liberation" movement (Box 3, Folders 2, 7 and 8; Box 4, Folder 13)
- Reaction to Sanders' treatment of local issues, including school integration (Box 2, Folder 6), open housing laws (Box 2, Folders 10 and 12), and stadium construction (Box 4, Folder 8)
- A 1976 drawing of Sanders by John Kascht, just beginning his career as a caricature artist (Box 3, Folder 12)
- Reaction to Sanders' portrayal of President Ronald Reagan and his seeming indifference to poverty and welfare programs, including a cartoon showing victims hanging from an inadequate social "safety net" (Box 4, Folder 2 and 5)
- Letters to Sanders from other well-known cartoonists including Herbert Block "Herblock" (Box 2, Folder 12; Box 5, Folder 1); Pat Oliphant (Box 5, Folder 1); C. D. Batchelor (Box 2, Folder 9; Box 5, Folder 1); Duncan McPherson (Box 3, Folder 9); and Ben Wicks (Box 2, Folder 8)
- Post-retirement Christmas cards and letters from Sanders, mostly to staff of WKU's Department of Library Special Collections, with cartoons portraying the Sanders family and current political figures.

Box 6 contains miscellaneous material relating to Sanders' professional career. Folder 1 contains extended correspondence and contracts regarding speaking engagements and conferences (similar, more brief communications also appear throughout Sanders' correspondence in Boxes 2-4). Folder 2 contains programs and announcements of awards received by Sanders. Folder 3 contains various programs recorded on DVD including features about Sanders' work, a performance of his band, the Basin St. Saloon Band, and some footage of Sanders playing quarterback while a student at WKU. Folder 4 contains selected banquet

and convention programs and membership directories of the AAEC. Folder 5 contains materials from the 1966 AAEC convention in Kansas City at which Sanders was elected president for the ensuing year and includes invitations to speakers, schedules and the banquet program. Folders 6 and 7 contain Sanders' articles and associated material describing his experiences and impressions gathered during a USO-sponsored tour of Vietnam and Thailand in 1967, and a 1973 tour of Thailand. Folder 8 contains published articles and book reviews by Sanders, mostly on political subjects and the art of cartooning. Folder 9 contains manuscript writings by Sanders, mostly discussing the Vietnam War, the Watergate scandal, and other aspects of the administration of President Richard Nixon; also included is a book outline. Folders 10 and 11 contain notices and reviews for Sanders' books, *Run for the Oval Room* and *The Sanders Book*. Folder 12 contains miscellaneous manuscript writings and essays, and Folder 13 contains a few printouts from Sanders' blog. Folder 14 contains photocopies of miscellaneous Sanders cartoons, including a compilation prepared by the Greater Kansas City Civil Liberties Union. The remaining miscellaneous items in this box consist of royalty statements, which also list some of the newspapers in which Sanders cartoons were syndicated (Folder 15); an *amicus* brief, using a Sanders cartoon as an exhibit, submitted by the AAEC and others in support of a 1986 U.S. Supreme Court case involving *Hustler* magazine and the Reverend Jerry Falwell (Folder 16); and a directory, with photographs, of *Milwaukee Journal* staff in 1987 (Folder 17).

SHELF LIST

BOX 1	William "Whitey" Sanders	1963-2013	91 items
Folder 1	Inventory		1 item
Folder 2	Biographical data, clippings, articles about	1958-1973	31 items
Folder 3	Biographical data, clippings, articles about	1974-1982	17 items
Folder 4	Biographical data, clippings, articles about	1983-1987	15 items
Folder 5	Biographical data, clippings, articles about	1988-2021	11 items
Folder 6	Biographical data, clippings, articles about	n.d.	16 items
BOX 2	William "Whitey" Sanders	1959-1969	367 items
Folder 1	Correspondence	1959-1962	44 items
Folder 2	Correspondence	Dec.-June 1963	27 items
Folder 3	Correspondence while at <i>Greensboro Daily News</i> , undated	n.d.	2 items

Folder 4	Correspondence	July-Dec. 1963	27 items
Folder 5	Correspondence	1964	46 items
Folder 6	Correspondence	1965	30 items
Folder 7	Correspondence	1966	20 items
Folder 8	Correspondence	Jan.-Aug. 1967	11 items
Folder 9	Correspondence while at <i>Kansas City Star</i> , undated	n.d.	21 items
Folder 10	Correspondence	Sept. 1967- Apr. 1968	34 items
Folder 11	Correspondence	May-Dec. 1968	34 items
Folder 12	Correspondence	Jan.-Mar. 1969	31 items
Folder 13	Correspondence	Apr.-June 1969	12 items
Folder 14	Correspondence	July-Dec. 1969	28 items
BOX 3	William “Whitey” Sanders	1970-1980	431 items
Folder 1	Correspondence	Jan.-May 1970	46 items
Folder 2	Correspondence	June-Dec. 1970	46 items
Folder 3	Correspondence	Jan.-Mar. 1971	38 items
Folder 4	Correspondence	Apr.-Dec. 1971	22 items
Folder 5	Correspondence – sex education course, Unitarian Church West, Milwaukee	1971-1972	17 items
Folder 6	Correspondence	Jan.-June 1972	26 items
Folder 7	Correspondence	July-Dec. 1972	30 items
Folder 8	Correspondence	1973	29 items
Folder 9	Correspondence	Jan.-May 1974	41 items

Folder 10	Correspondence	June-Dec. 1974	22 items
Folder 11	Correspondence	1975	7 items
Folder 12	Correspondence	1976	16 items
Folder 13	Correspondence	1977	23 items
Folder 14	Correspondence	1978	27 items
Folder 15	Correspondence	1979	16 items
Folder 16	Correspondence	1980	25 items
BOX 4	William “Whitey” Sanders	1981-1991	319 items
Folder 1	Correspondence	1981	39 items
Folder 2	Correspondence	1982	44 items
Folder 3	Correspondence	1983	16 items
Folder 4	Correspondence	1984	19 items
Folder 5	Correspondence	1985	15 items
Folder 6	Correspondence	1986	17 items
Folder 7	Correspondence	1987	22 items
Folder 8	Correspondence	1988	24 items
Folder 9	Correspondence	1989-1999	20 items
Folder 10	Correspondence while at <i>Milwaukee Journal</i> – n.d. General positive & negative, undated		36 items
Folder 11	Correspondence while at <i>Milwaukee Journal</i> – n.d. State and local issues, undated		19 items
Folder 12	Correspondence while at <i>Milwaukee Journal</i> – n.d. Presidents Johnson, Nixon, Ford, Reagan		22 items
Folder 13	Correspondence while at <i>Milwaukee Journal</i> – n.d. Various topics, undated		27 items

BOX 5	William “Whitey” Sanders	2005-2018, n.d.	36 items
Folder 1	Correspondence	n.d.	14 items
Folder 2	Correspondence	2006-2008	3 items
Folder 3	Christmas cards and letters from Sanders	2005-2018	19 items
BOX 6	William “Whitey” Sanders	1953-2006	181 items
Folder 1	Conferences, workshops, speeches – Programs, contracts, etc.	1968-1979	24 items
Folder 2	Awards and recognitions – Programs, notices	1967-2003	10 items
Folder 3	DVDs of interviews and appearances	1953-1992	13 items
Folder 4	Association of American Editorial Cartoonists – Miscellaneous programs, publications, membership directories	1963-1995	7 items
Folder 5	Association of American Editorial Cartoonists – Annual convention	1966	18 items
Folder 6	Vietnam and Thailand tour	1967-1968	9 items
Folder 7	Thailand tour	1973	8 items
Folder 8	Articles by Sanders	1957-1982, n.d.	11 items
Folder 9	Writings about Nixon administration	n.d.	27 items
Folder 10	<i>Run For the Oval Room</i> – Reviews	1974	9 items
Folder 11	<i>The Sanders Book</i> – Notices, reviews	1979	3 items
Folder 12	Miscellaneous writing by Sanders	n.d.	4 items
Folder 13	Sanders cartoon/commentary blog	2006	2 items
Folder 14	Miscellaneous cartoons by Sanders	1959-1979, n.d.	25 items
Folder 15	Publishers-Hall Syndicate royalty statements	1968-1974, n.d.	9 items

Folder 16	Amicus brief for <i>Hustler Magazine v. Jerry Falwell</i> with Sanders cartoon as exhibit	1987	1 item
Folder 17	<i>Milwaukee Journal</i> staff directory	1979	1 item

BIBLIOGRAPHIC RECORD

MSS SANDERS, William Willard "Whitey," 1953-2021
659 1930-2021

Correspondence, articles and miscellaneous material documenting the career of newspaper editorial cartoonist Bill "Whitey" Sanders. Includes letters from readers, public figures and fellow cartoonists, video of programs and appearances, and material related to Sanders' books and his participation in professional organizations.

6 boxes. 69 folders. 1,425 items. Originals, photocopies, DVDs.

2005.161.2; 2008.25.1-12

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SEE or SEE ALSO

Sanders, Bill, 1930-2021
 See:
 Sanders, William Willard

Sanders, "Whitey," 1930-2021
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