

PAULA COOPER CASE RECORDS, 1986-1989

Collection #
M 565

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Processed by
Charles Latham
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USER INFORMATION

VOLUME OF COLLECTION: 2 manuscript boxes (0.7 linear feet)

COLLECTION DATES: Inclusive 1986-1989; Bulk 1987

PROVENANCE: Karl L. Mulvaney, Supreme Court Administrator, 312 State House, Indianapolis, IN 46204, 13 August 1990

RESTRICTIONS: None

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ALTERNATE FORMATS: None

RELATED HOLDINGS: None

ACCESSION NUMBER: 1990.0523

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Paula Cooper (1970-) was convicted of killing Ruth Pelke. Pelke was stabbed 33 times on 14 May 1985 in Gary, Indiana. According to reports, Cooper and three younger friends skipped school, drank wine, and smoked marijuana before visiting Pelke and inquiring about Bible lessons. Testimony further alleged that Pelke was murdered after

admitting the girls into her house, and that they took ten dollars and the keys to Pelke's car. The assigned public defender advised Paula to plead guilty. Jack Crawford prosecuted the Lake County case and , Judge James Kimbrough sentenced Paula to death. She was sent to death row at the Indiana Women's Prison. In December 1986 Cooper's case was taken up by Monica Foster, a young lawyer who had worked as a public defender. Foster and others organized a campaign in Cooper's behalf, based on mounting public opinion, particularly in Europe and especially in Italy, where the death penalty had been outlawed. Appeals were made to the Indiana Supreme Court, which received two million signatures; to Governor Robert Orr, who received an appeal from the Pope in September 1987; and to the United Nations, which received a million signatures. Judge Kimbrough was to hear new arguments in the case, but the process was slowed by his death and the appointment of a new judge. The Indiana Supreme Court heard arguments in the case, and on 13 July 1989 the Court overturned the death sentence, substituting the maximum allowable prison term (60 years, with a minimum term of 26 years).

Sources: Materials in collection

Criterion, vol. 27 no. 38, 24 June 1988, p. 2

City, vol. 26 no. 1, January 1988, pp. 68

Clipping file, Indiana Division, Indiana State Library

SCOPE AND CONTENT

This collection, filling two manuscript boxes, contains letters, petitions, clippings, cards, telegrams, and lists of signatures, all addressed to the Indiana Supreme Court, from the period 1986-1989. The letters are arranged chronologically.

BOX 1 contains letters, cards, clippings, and lists of signatures. Many of the items are undated, but most of the dated material comes from the summer of 1987. As is probably true of most campaigns of this kind, there is a good deal of duplication. For example, one handwritten letter dated 25 August 1987 has been photocopied and the copies signed by fifteen different people, all apparently from Naples. A clipping from an Italian paper accounts for many of the cards; it tells Paula's story, then gives the address of the Indiana Supreme Court, and a simple message in English: "So that justice may triumph. So that Cooper may live." Another frequently repeated message in Italian: "Per Paula Cooper e contro la Pena di Morte (for Paula Cooper and against the death penalty).

A vast majority of the material originated in Italy. There are several items from Belgium, and a few from Holland and West Germany.

BOX 2 contains telegrams, also mainly from Italy. The most frequent message is "So that justice may triumph, so that Paula Cooper may live."

The material in this collection is simply a footnote to a widely publicized case. It is remarkable in showing both the volume and the organization of the campaign against the death penalty.

BOX AND FOLDER LISTING

BOX 1: Letters, Clippings, Cards, and Signatures **FOLDER**

1 Letters, 1986-August 1987

2 Letters, September 1987

3 Letters, October 1987-1989, n.d.

4 Clippings
5 Cards
6 Signatures
7 Signatures
8 Signatures
9 Signatures
10 Signatures

**BOX 2: Telegrams
FOLDER**

1-8 Telegrams

CATALOGUING INFORMATION

MAIN ENTRY: Cooper, Paula, 1970-

SUBJECT ENTRIES: Cooper, Paula, 1970- --Public opinion

Foster, Monica

Indiana. Supreme Court

Catholic Church--Italy

Catholic Church--United States

Franciscans--Italy

Franciscans--United States

Capital punishment--Indiana--Public opinion

Capital punishment--Indiana--Religious aspects--Catholic Church

Death row inmates--Indiana--Indianapolis

Afro-American teenage girls--Indiana--Gary

Afro-American prisoners--Indiana--Indianapolis

Afro-American criminals--Indiana--Gary

Public opinion--Italy

Crime in mass media--Indiana

Murder in mass media--Indiana

Criminal justice, Administration of--Indiana

Murderers--Indiana--Public opinion

Women murderers--Indiana--Public opinion

Church and social problems--Italy--Catholic Church

United States--Foreign public opinion

Indiana--Foreign public opinion

END