

Robert H. Terrell Papers
A Finding Aid to the Collection in the Library of Congress



Manuscript Division, Library of Congress
Washington, D.C.
2023

Contact information: <https://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/mss.contact>

Catalog Record: <https://lcn.loc.gov/mm76042556>

Additional search options available at: <https://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/eadmss.ms010253>

Prepared by Manuscript Division staff

Finding aid encoded by Library of Congress Manuscript Division, 2010
Revised 2023 August

Collection Summary

Title: Robert H. Terrell Papers

Inclusive Dates: 1870-1954

Bulk Dates: 1884-1925

ID No.: MSS42556

Creator: Terrell, Robert H. (Robert Heberton), 1857-1925

Extent: 2,750 items

Extent: 9 containers plus 1 oversize

Extent: 3.6 linear feet

Extent: 4 microfilm reels

Language: Collection material in English

Location: Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

LC Catalog record: <https://lccn.loc.gov/mm76042556>

Summary: Teacher, lawyer, and judge. Correspondence, speeches and writings, newspaper clippings, printed matter, and other papers relating to Terrell's interest in African American education and welfare, courts and schools in Washington, D.C., Republican politics, and the Washington Board of Trade.

Selected Search Terms

The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the LC Catalog. They are grouped by name of person or organization, by subject or location, and by occupation and listed alphabetically.

People

Anderson, Charles William, 1866-1938--Correspondence.
Bruce, Roscoe Conkling, 1879-1950--Correspondence.
Clarkson, James Sullivan, 1842-1918--Correspondence.
Higginson, Thomas Wentworth, 1823-1911--Correspondence.
Lodge, Henry Cabot, 1850-1924--Correspondence.
Lynch, John Roy, 1847-1939--Correspondence.
Mattingly, Robert N., 1884-1977--Correspondence.
McKinley, William, 1843-1901--Correspondence.
Purvis, C. B. (Charles Burleigh), 1841-1929--Correspondence.
Roosevelt, Theodore, 1858-1919--Correspondence.
Root, Elihu, 1845-1937--Correspondence.
Scott, Emmett J. (Emmett Jay), 1873-1957--Correspondence.
Taft, William H. (William Howard), 1857-1930--Correspondence.
Terrell, Robert H. (Robert Heberton), 1857-1925.
Washington, Booker T., 1856-1915--Correspondence.
Wilson, Woodrow, 1856-1924--Correspondence.

Organizations

Republican Party (U.S. : 1854-)
Washington Board of Trade.

Subjects

African Americans--Education.
African Americans--Social conditions.
African Americans--Washington (D.C.)
Courts--Washington (D.C.)
Schools--Washington (D.C.)

Places

United States--Politics and government--1865-1933.
Washington (D.C.)--History.

Occupations

Educators.
Judges.
Lawyers.

Acquisition Information

The papers of Robert H. Terrell, teacher, lawyer, and judge, were given to the Library of Congress in 1957 by his daughter, Phyllis Terrell Langston.

Processing History

The papers of Robert H. Terrell were arranged and described in 1976 by Allan Teichroew. The finding aid was revised in 2009. The finding aid was updated in 2023 by Maria Farmer as part of a division-wide remediation project by the Inclusive Description Working Group.

Related Material

Related collections in the Manuscript Division include the papers of Terrell's wife, [Mary Church Terrell](#), which contain their family correspondence.

Copyright Status

Copyright in the unpublished writings of Robert H. Terrell in these papers and in other collections of papers in the custody of the Library of Congress has been dedicated to the public.

Access and Restrictions

The papers of Robert H. Terrell are open to research. Researchers are advised to contact the Manuscript Reading Room prior to visiting. Many collections are stored off-site and advance notice is needed to retrieve these items for research use.

Microfilm

A microfilm edition of these papers is available on four reels. Consult reference staff in the Manuscript Division concerning availability for purchase or interlibrary loan. To promote preservation of the originals, researchers are required to consult the microfilm edition.

Preferred Citation

Researchers wishing to cite this collection should include the following information: Container or reel number, Robert H. Terrell Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

Biographical Note

Date	Event
1857, Nov. 27	Born, Orange, Va.
1865	Moved with family to Washington, D.C.
1884	A.B., with honors, Harvard College, Cambridge, Mass.

1884-1889	Taught, M Street High School, Washington, D.C. Studied law, Howard University, Washington, D.C.
1889	LL.B., Howard University, Washington, D.C. Appointed chief of division, Office of the Fourth Auditor, U.S. Treasury Department
1891	Married Mary Eliza Church (died 1954)
1893	LL.M., Howard University, Washington, D.C. Admitted to the bar Joined in partnership with John R. Lynch to form the law firm of Lynch and Terrell
1897	Elected to Washington Board of Trade, Washington, D.C.
1899-1901	Promoted to principal, M Street High School, Washington, D.C.
1902-1925	Judge, municipal court of the District of Columbia (known as Justice of the Peace Courts, 1901-1909)
1911-1925	Instructor in law, Howard University, Washington, D.C.
1925, Dec. 20	Died, Washington, D.C.

Scope and Content Note

The papers of Robert Heberton Terrell (1857-1925) span the years 1870-1954, with the bulk of the material concentrated in the period 1884-1925. The collection consists mainly of correspondence, speeches and writings, clippings, printed matter, and miscellaneous items.

Robert H. Terrell was a distinguished educator and jurist in an age when few Black people had access to academic or professional training. Recipient of degrees from Groton Academy and Harvard College, Terrell began his career in 1884 by teaching in the old M Street High School in Washington, D.C., before taking up study of law and eventually serving nearly twenty-five years as judge of the Municipal Court of the District of Columbia. As a Republican and a judicial appointee of four presidents, including Woodrow Wilson, Terrell was one among a select group of African Americans nominated for government office in the period of reaction following Reconstruction. His papers show a man of wealth and position whose rarity in the Black community made him a prominent spokesman for the Republican Party and for Black advancement in government and in education. Among the topics in his numerous speeches and writings were the Monroe Doctrine, the relationship of law to business, the development of African American education, and the history and status of Black people in America.

The correspondence in this collection is comprised primarily of letters received during Terrell's reappointments to the bench from 1902 to 1925. Included are greetings, letters of recommendation, and missives congratulating the jurist upon each renewal of his tenure. Copies of Terrell's own letters are usually absent from the collection, although the incoming correspondence gives indirect evidence of his thought by registering the reactions of his acquaintances. Three men whose exchanges stand out for the information they convey about Terrell and about the Black professional elite are the letters of Charles William Anderson, a collector of the Internal Revenue Service under William H. Taft; and John Roy Lynch, a former congressman and Terrell's law partner.

Other significant correspondence includes the letters of support sent to Terrell when Senator James K. Vardaman fought to block his reappointment by President Wilson in 1914. Prior to Wilson's election, Terrell had relied on his Republican connection to retain his office, but in this case a Democratic president acted contrary to the wishes of a member of his own party in keeping Terrell on the bench. That other African Americans were less successful in securing federal appointments, even under more favorable circumstances, is revealed by a reply President Taft gave to Terrell's request for the placement of an additional jobholder. "I have not done all I ought to do or all I hope to do in the matter of recognition of colored men, but positions are very hard to find," wrote Taft in explanation of his inaction. "Nobody dies and nobody resigns."

In addition to the correspondence of Anderson, Lynch, and Taft, some of the individuals represented in this collection include Roscoe Conkling Bruce, James Sullivan Clarkson, Thomas Wentworth Higginson, Henry Cabot Lodge, Robert Mattingly, William McKinley, Charles Burleigh Purvis, Theodore Roosevelt (1858-1919), Elihu Root, Emmett J. Scott, Booker T. Washington, and Woodrow Wilson.

With the exception of a few law notes, the Robert H. Terrell Papers do not include materials derived from his private law practice, from his professorship on the law faculty of Howard University (1911-1925), or from his family life. For the latter,

the reader should consult the papers of his wife, Mary Church Terrell, whose collection is also in the Manuscript Division of the Library and whose papers contain all of the family correspondence.

Arrangement of the Papers

This collection is arranged in six series:

- [Correspondence, 1884-1925](#)
- [Speeches and Writings File, 1880-1920](#)
- [Clippings, 1880-1954](#)
- [Printed Matter, 1877-1947](#)
- [Miscellany, 1870-1925](#)
- [Oversize, 1897-1922](#)

Description of Series

Container	Series
BOX 1-3 REEL 1-2	<p><u>Correspondence, 1884-1925</u></p> <p>Mainly letters received. Arranged chronologically. Available on microfilm. Shelf no. 17,902.</p>
BOX 3-5 REEL 2-3	<p><u>Speeches and Writings File, 1880-1920</u></p> <p>Holograph, typewritten, and published copies of speeches and articles. Arranged chronologically when dated and alphabetically when not.</p>
BOX 6-7 REEL 3	<p><u>Clippings, 1880-1954</u></p> <p>Newspaper clippings and memorabilia. Arranged as bound by Terrell. Unbound clippings not arranged.</p>
BOX 8 REEL 4	<p><u>Printed Matter, 1877-1947</u></p> <p>Pamphlets, books, directories, and souvenir documents. Arranged by type of material.</p>
BOX 9 REEL 4	<p><u>Miscellany, 1870-1925</u></p> <p>Appointment certificates, tax receipts, and lecture schedules; biographical sketches; legal notes and papers; programs, announcements, and cards; testimonials on Terrell's death; and other items. Arranged alphabetically by type of material.</p>
BOX OV 1	<p><u>Oversize, 1897-1922</u></p> <p>Certificates arranged and described according to the series, folder, and container from which they were removed.</p>

Container List

Container	Contents
BOX 1-3 REEL 1-2	Correspondence, 1884-1925 Mainly letters received. Arranged chronologically. Available on microfilm. Shelf no. 17,902.
BOX 1 REEL 1	1884-1912 (9 folders)
BOX 2 REEL 1-2	1913-1919 (13 folders)
BOX 3 REEL 1-2	1920-1925 (5 folders)
BOX 3-5 REEL 2-3	Speeches and Writings File, 1880-1920 Holograph, typewritten, and published copies of speeches and articles. Arranged chronologically when dated and alphabetically when not.
BOX 3 REEL 2	"The Ancient Greeks," <i>The Student's Aid</i> , Lawrence Academy, Groton, Mass., 1880, Mar. 9
BOX 3 REEL 2	"The Negro as a Soldier in the Late Rebellion," 1885, Apr. 20
BOX 3 REEL 2	[Participating Remarks on Behalf of the Class of 1889, Howard University Law School, Washington, D.C.]
BOX 3 REEL 2	[In Support of the Republican Party and the Lodge Bill], circa 1890
BOX 3 REEL 2	[Republican Campaign Speech] 1892
BOX 3 REEL 2	"The Peerless Douglass," 1895, Apr. 2
BOX 3 REEL 2	[President Grover Cleveland's Venezuelan Message], circa 1895
BOX 3 REEL 2	Address to the pupils of Sumner School, Washington, D.C., 1896, Feb. 22
BOX 3 REEL 2	"What of the Future? In Honor of Judson W. Lyons," 1898, May 19
BOX 3 REEL 2	"Frederick Barbadoes—Memorial Meeting," 1899, May 14
BOX 3 REEL 2	Banquet address, 1899, Jun. 12
BOX 3 REEL 2	Address as Grand Master of Masons at celebration of St. John's Day, 1899, Jun. 26
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BOX 3 REEL 2	[Address to Masonic banquet, Eureka Lodge], 1900, Nov. 30
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BOX 3 REEL 2	Address at Odd Fellows Lyceum, concerning James A. Garfield, 1902, Mar. 30
BOX 3 REEL 2	Address before the graduating class of the Nurses School, Howard University, Washington, D.C., 1902, May 5
BOX 3 REEL 2	"A Tribute to Laura F. Barney...", 1903, Feb. 6
BOX 3 REEL 2	<i>A Glance at the Past and Present of the Negro; an Address by Robert H. Terrell</i> (Washington: Press of L. R. Pendleton), delivered at Church's Auditorium before the Citizen's Industrial League of Memphis, Tenn, 1903, Sept. 22
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Speeches and Writings File, 1880-1920

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BOX 3 REEL 2	Welcome address to Sigma Pi Phi Fraternity, Washington, D.C., 1913, Sept. 10-12
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Speeches and Writings File, 1880-1920

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BOX 8 REEL 4	Printed Matter. 1877-1947 Pamphlets, books, directories, and souvenir documents. Arranged by type of material.
BOX 8 REEL 4	Pamphlets, books, directories, and souvenir documents, 1877-1947 (7 folders)
BOX 9 REEL 4	Miscellany, 1870-1925 Appointment certificates, tax receipts, and lecture schedules; biographical sketches; legal notes and papers; programs, announcements, and cards; testimonials on Terrell’s death; and other items. Arranged alphabetically by type of material.
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Miscellany, 1870-1925

Container	Contents
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BOX OV 1	Oversize, 1897-1922 Certificates arranged and described according to the series, folder, and container from which they were removed.
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