

CURTIS MACDOUGALL (1903-1985) PAPERS, 1940-1992

Series 16/13

Boxes 1-2 (including one half-size box)

Biography

During his more than 35 years at Northwestern University, Curtis MacDougall – Dr. Mac to his students – emerged as one of America’s leading journalism experts and educators. He was unapologetically blunt, remaining outspoken on his beliefs, political and otherwise, until his death at the age of 82 in 1985.

Curtis Daniel MacDougall was born on Feb. 11, 1903, in Fond du Lac, Wisconsin. It was there, at the *Fond du Lac Commonwealth-Reporter*, that he started his journalism career at the age of 15. MacDougall received his Bachelor’s degree in English from Ripon College in Ripon, Wisconsin, in 1923. He also received a Master’s degree in Journalism from Northwestern (1926), a Ph.D. in Sociology from the University of Wisconsin (1933), and an honorary Litt.D. from Columbia College (1965). Before joining the Northwestern faculty in 1935, MacDougall reported for the *St. Louis Star-Times* and United Press International; edited the *Evanston Daily News-Index*; and wrote editorials for the *Chicago Sun*. From 1939 to 1942 he was the state supervisor of the Illinois Writers Project, where he edited the work of Saul Bellow, Nelson Algren, and Studs Terkel, among others.

MacDougall authored more than a dozen books over more than 50 years, including *Hoaxes* (1941), *Understanding Public Opinion* (1953), and *Gideon’s Army* (1965-66), a three-volume history of the Progressive Party movement of the late 1940s. His most important book was *Interpretative Reporting* (1938), a standard text in journalism schools across the world for more than 50 years. He was working on the book’s ninth edition at the time of his death.

In 1944 MacDougall ran for Congress in Illinois’ 10th District on the platform of “preventing World War III and World Depression II.” While distributing handbills for his campaign in Lake Forest in September of 1944, MacDougall (along with Northwestern English faculty members Harrison Hayford and Merrell D. Davis) was arrested under a city ordinance prohibiting the distribution of political literature; after much negative publicity, the city dropped the case. MacDougall went on to lose that election – and two more. He also ran unsuccessfully for the U.S. Senate in 1948 and participated in the 13th District Democratic Congressional Primary in 1970.

MacDougall’s political activism came at a cost. In 1936, while Editor of the *Evanston Daily News-Index*, he wrote an editorial criticizing the Federal Bureau of Investigation. FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover responded with a letter, which MacDougall printed, but the incident still caused Hoover to initiate an investigation of MacDougall that would last 35 years. In 1978, under the Freedom of Information Act, MacDougall obtained the 292 pages of surveillance reports collected over the course of the investigation; he kept a bound copy on his coffee table. His political outspokenness also caused a rift with the Northwestern administration. In fact, MacDougall was so bitter when he left Northwestern that he asked his family not to allow the University to participate in his memorial service.

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Description of the Series

The Curtis MacDougall Papers fill one and one-half boxes and span the years 1940 to 1992. Class handouts and syllabi comprise the bulk of the material, although there is a considerable amount of material pertaining to MacDougall's political campaigns. The material in each folder is arranged chronologically.

The biographical folder includes basic information about MacDougall's professional accomplishments. Personal and professional correspondence and several Northwestern University press releases are included in this folder.

Clippings, which span the years 1944 to 1992, document events such as MacDougall's speeches and awards and the FBI's 30-year surveillance of him. Letters to the Editor written by MacDougall and obituaries about him and his wife are included in this folder.

The curricular documents and handouts from two of MacDougall's graduate-level Medill courses, Contemporary Public Affairs and Reporting of Public Affairs, are divided by course. One folder contains beat reports – the memos students wrote about their reporting experiences to help future students. The material dates from 1955 to 1956.

The papers also contain an undated paper titled "Interpretative Reporting – 50 Years of Significant Contributions to Journalism Education" about the lasting effects of MacDougall's textbook, *Interpretative Reporting*.

Most of the material concerning MacDougall's political campaigns relates to his 1944 bid for the 10th District Congressional seat. Political literature and clippings documenting MacDougall's arrest are included.

The papers also include a few samples of MacDougall's writings. MacDougall was also a frequent participant on "The Reviewing Stand," a radio show co-sponsored by Northwestern and Chicago's WGN. Transcripts from shows on which MacDougall appeared are included.

Provenance: The Curtis MacDougall Papers consist of material separated from the Joe Blade Papers (Series 31/6/26), the University Archives' Biographical Files (Acc. # 87-59), and the Harrison Hayford Papers (Acc. #87-247).

Restrictions: None.

Separations: About one-half inch of duplicate material was discarded.

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Container List

<u>Box</u>	<u>Folder</u>	<u>Title</u>	<u>Date</u>
1	1	Biographical Material	1945-1989
	2	Clippings	1944-1992
	3	Curricular Documents and Handouts: Contemporary Affairs	1955-1956
	4	Curricular Documents and Handouts: Reporting of Public Affairs I	1955-1956
	5	Curricular Documents and Handouts: Reporting of Public Affairs II	1955-1956
	6	Curricular Documents and Handouts: Reporting of Public Affairs III	1955-1956
	7	Curricular Documents and Handouts: Reporting of Public Affairs Beat Reports	1955-1956
2	1	“Interpretative Reporting – 50 Years of Significant Contributions to Journalism Education” by Daniel E. Thornburgh	n.d.
	2	Political Campaigns	1944-1970
	3	Writings	1940-1973
	4	Transcripts, “The Reviewing Stand”	1943-1952