

**Oleta L. Crain**

**Military Officer and Civil Servant**

**Blair-Caldwell African American Research Library  
Denver Public Library**

## **Oleta L. Crain Collection**

### **Blair-Caldwell African American Research Library Denver Public Library 2004**

<b>Provenance:</b>	The collection was donated to the Blair-Caldwell African American Research Library by Oleta Crain in 2003.
<b>Ownership:</b>	Literary and copyrights have been assigned to the Denver Public Library.
<b>Call Number:</b>	MS-ARL48
<b>Size:</b>	1 box (0.5 linear feet), 2 oversize photographs
<b>Processed by:</b>	Brent Wagner
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#### **Biographical Note**

Around 1920, Oleta Lawanda Crain was born in Earlsboro, Oklahoma, to Mrs. V. Paula Crain. She grew up in nearby Wewoka, Oklahoma, and graduated from Douglass High School. Although Crain studied for three years at Langston University, she received her B.A. in Social Science from Lincoln University in Jefferson City, Missouri. She belonged to Delta Sigma Theta, a national honor society for black women.

After college, Crain taught history and coached basketball teams in Hugo, Oklahoma. Later, she relocated to Denver, where she pursued a Master's degree in religious education from the Iliff School of Theology. Due to the Second World War, Crain left her studies to enlist in the military. She was, in fact, the first black woman in Denver to join the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps (WAAC).

As a victim of segregation, Crain had to wake earlier than her white counterparts to shower, but she "was so happy to be black, and not have to put up with barracks life" [since she slept in her own private room]. Still, though, Crain made the best of it and retired from the Air Force in 1963 with the rank of Major.

After her military career, Crain joined the Labor Department in Washington as a contract expert. In 1968, she transferred to Boston and obtained a Master's of Public Administration from Northeastern University. Next, she worked for the Women's Bureau, in Denver, as a regional administrator. There, Crain sought to improve wages, working conditions, and career opportunities for women.

In the mid-1990s, The Colorado Women's Hall of Fame inducted Crain as a member.

### **Scope and Content Note**

Primarily, the Crain Collection contains photographs, correspondence, and newspaper clippings. These items document her military endeavors with the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps (WAAC) and the United States Air Force during the 1940s.

Box 1, Folder 1 contains Crain's orders to report for duty at Fort Des Moines (Iowa). Box 1, Folder 2 holds newspaper clippings about her service and promotions. Box 1, Folder 3 encompasses two military uniform emblems and a folded flag that commemorates Crain's fifty-six years of government service. Box 1, Folder 4 contains a press release and invitation to the October 2003 event hosted by the Colorado Federation of Business & Professional Women's Clubs that honors Crain as a "Trailblazer." Box 1, Folder 5 houses photographs of Crain and her military buddies.

### **Container list**

Box 1 F1	Correspondence	1942
Box 1 F2	Publications	ca.1947, 1995
Box 1 F3	Awards (i)	1997, n.d.
Box 1 F4	Awards (ii)	2003
Box 1 F5	Photographs	1943 - 1998

### **Oversize photographs**

16.25" x 19.25" – 1995 - Crain color portrait in grey/white/black suit

12" x 14.5" – ca. 1943 - Crain monochrome photograph in WAAC uniform as lieutenant