



The New York Public Library
Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture,
Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division

Guide to the

Jules Bledsoe papers

1931-1939

Sc MG 255

Summary

Creator: Bledsoe, Jules, 1898-1943

Title: Jules Bledsoe papers

Date: 1931-1939

Size: 1.17 linear feet (4 boxes)

Source: Gift of Philip and Bessie Caswell, April 1986.

Revision History: Finding aid updated by Lauren Stark.

Abstract: Singer and actor Jules Bledsoe created the role of Jo and the interpretation of the song "Old Man River" in the original production of Show Boat (1927). This collection consists of correspondence, contracts, musical compositions, legal documents, financial records, programs, broadsides, and news clippings documenting Bledsoe's professional career, particularly in Europe.

Preferred citation: [Item], Jules Bledsoe papers, Sc MG 255, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, The New York Public Library

Language of the Material: English

Processing note: Accessioned by Mary Yearwood, September 1986.

Separated Materials:

Transferred to the Art and Artifacts Division: drawings and posters.

Transferred to the Photographs and Prints Division: photographs.

Creator History

Singer and actor Jules Bledsoe (1898-1939) was born in Waco, Texas. A former medical student at Columbia University, he made his concert debut in Aeolian Hall, New York City, on April 21, 1924. Bledsoe created the role of Jo and the interpretation of the song "Old Man River" in the original

production of *Show Boat* (1927). He also was known for his title role in *The Emperor Jones*.

Scope and Content Note

The Jules Bledsoe papers consist of correspondence, contracts, musical compositions, legal documents, financial records, programs, broadsides, and news clippings documenting Bledsoe's professional career, particularly in Europe. Items of significance include legal correspondence and court documents generated by his lawsuit against Lew Leslie of *Blackbirds* fame; a manuscript score of Shirley Graham's opera *Tom Tom*; and a large number of manuscript compositions by Bledsoe. Additionally, there are several letters from composer Clarence Cameron White about his opera, *Ouanga!*. Also included are personal correspondence with friends and family members, and papers relating to a resort that he owned in Roxbury, New York, called Jessie's Farms. Of special interest is a substantial number of musical manuscripts of art songs, spirituals, and instrumental pieces composed and arranged by Bledsoe.

Key Terms

Subjects

African American actors
African American businesspeople
African American composers
African American entertainers
African American singers
African Americans in the performing arts

Names

Bledsoe, Jules, 1898-1943
Du Bois, Shirley Graham, 1896-1977
Leslie, Lew, 1886-1963
White, Clarence Cameron, 1880-1960

Container List

Correspondence

- b. 1 f. 1 Personal 1934-1939
- b. 1 f. 2-5 Professional 1934-1939
 - Includes Bledsoe vs C.B. Cochran and Lew Leslie, 1936-1937, in folder 3.
- b. 1 f. 6 Contracts 1937
- Financial records
- b. 1 f. 7 1931-1935
- b. 1 f. 8 1936
- b. 1 f. 9 1937-1939
- b. 1 f. 10 Printed matter 1931-1939
- b. 1 f. 11 Untitled lyrics undated
- b. 1 f. 12 *Cobb, Jacob. Christophe, the Black King of Haiti (libretto)* undated
- b. 1 f. 13 *Du Bois, Shirley Graham. Tom, Tom (libretto)* undated
- b. 1 f. 14 Miscellaneous synopses, untitled undated
 - b. 2 *Du Bois, Shirley Graham. Tom, Tom* 1932
 - Includes manuscript vocal score. Manuscript compositions and arrangements by Jules Bledsoe.
 - b. 3 *Songbook for The Emperor Jones*
 - b. 3 Sheet music for "Muddy Waters" and "By the Shalimar"
 - b. 3-4 Compositions and arrangements by Bledsoe