



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

Guide to the

Alton Douglas Rison papers and additions

1971-1987

Sc MG 409

Schomburg NEH Automated Access to Special Collections Project

Summary

Creator: Rison, Alton Douglas, 1930-

Title: Alton Douglas Rison papers and additions

Date: 1971-1987

Size: 13.96 linear feet (34 boxes)

Source: Gift of Alton D. Rison, January 1987-1988.

Revision History: Finding aid updated by Lauren Stark.

Abstract: Alton Rison was principal of Junior High School 117 in Brooklyn, New York, from 1971 to 1985, where he implemented a series of modern corporate management methods with the goal of changing "school chaos to achievement." This collection documents Rison's administration at Junior High School 117 and the methods he used to improve teaching methods and increase accountability of student achievement levels.

Conditions Governing Access:

Student discipline reports, grievances, and "Principal's Opinions of Teacher's Performance" (box 31) are restricted indefinitely. Researchers must sign confidentiality form to view box 33.

Preferred citation: [Item], Alton Douglas Rison papers and additions, Sc MG 409, 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 Sule Greg Wilson, 1988.

Separated Materials:

Transferred to the Art and Artifacts Division: posters.

Creator History

Alton Rison was principal of Junior High School 117 in Brooklyn, New York, from 1971 to 1985, where he implemented a series of modern corporate management methods with the goal of changing "school chaos to achievement." Rison was born in Brooklyn and received his Bachelor of Arts degree in Sociology, in 1953, from Huston-Tillotson College in Austin, Texas, and his Master of Arts degree in sociology from the University of Texas in 1958. He served in the United States Army as a psychiatric social worker and neuropsychiatric technician.

Rison worked as a Junior High School teacher in Brooklyn (1958-1962) and Queens, New York (1962-1970), and as Assistant Principal of Junior High School #59 in Queens (1970) before becoming Principal of Junior High School #117 Francis Scott Key, in Brooklyn in February 1971. Rison's changes in the school system included requiring teacher accountability through a variety of methods such as classroom inspections and statistics on projected and actual student pass/fail rate, and the use of television coverage. He also established a think tank of teachers to create projects for all departments as well as the entire school, a "report card for staff accountability", and classroom ratings; and he encouraged parents to speak with teachers. Approximately forty schools in inner city areas adopted his method of teaching and administration. Although Rison's methods were controversial during his tenure, the school rose markedly in academic achievement and student involvement. To document the progress of his methods, Rison kept voluminous records and required teachers to prepare monthly progress reports and deposit copies of all examinations with him. Each department was required to produce a "Materials of Management" binder for display in the Administrative Offices, so other teachers at #117 could study their methods and results.

In addition to his educational career, Rison was also an writer. An early member of the Harlem Writers Guild, he wrote and produced plays from novels and short stories in the 1960s.

Scope and Content Note

This collection documents Alton Rison's administration at Junior High School 117 and the methods he used to improve teaching methods and increase accountability of student achievement levels in this inner city school in Brooklyn, New York, in the 1970s-1980s. The papers contain faculty memoranda, curricula, school board policies and those designed by Rison, statistics on achievement and percentage of pass/fail students, and documents pertaining to the effectiveness of different teaching systems. His annual "Daily Events" files contain memoranda, schedules, and reports for each day of the school year and summer sessions. Additional materials include daily "Cabinet Meeting" minutes (1982-1984) and yearbooks (1971-1986). The collection also documents the teacher/union/administration clashes that occurred as Rison implemented his plan. Also in this collection are Rison's writings which include his unpublished autobiography, "From School Chaos to Achievement (A True Story)", and scripts for his unpublished plays such as "In the Principal's Office", "In the Teacher's ", and "Oh Brooklyn, You're My Home!". Photocopies of reviews of his work as a principal and playwright, and posters from one of his plays, complete the collection.

Arrangement: Arranged into 7 series: I. Daily events; II. Faculty memos; III. "Management of materials"; IV. Statistics; V. Restricted; VI. Autobiography; and VII. Additions.

Key Terms

Subjects

African American educators

African American school principals

African American sociologists

African Americans -- Education

Authors, Black

Teachers -- Training of -- New York (State) -- New York

Names

Rison, Alton Douglas, 1930-

Container List

Daily events 1975-1984

- b. 1 1975-1977
Includes faculty and Board of Education memos.
- b. 2 1977-1978
Includes information on special programs.
- b. 3 1978-1979
Includes Board of Education memos.
- b. 4 1979-1980
Includes business matters.
- b. 5 1980-1981
Includes school district memos.
- b. 6 "Guide to Programs in a Junior High School" 1982
- b. 7 1981-1984
Includes cabinet meetings (1982-1984) and materials on pensions and polarization during the 1981-1982 school year.

Faculty memos 1971-1986

- b. 8 1971 February-1973 December
- b. 9 1974 January-1976 June
- b. 10 Cabinet meetings 1984 September-1986 June

"Management of materials" 1974-1987

Arranged by teacher last name and class.

Ray, Science

- b. 11-12 1976-1977
- b. 13 1979-1980
- b. 14 1980-1981
- b. 15 Teacher's program design 1974-1984

Karp, Social Studies

- b. 16 1976-1977
- b. 17 1977-1978
- b. 18 1979-1980
- b. 19 1980-1987
Also includes materials on Karp's English class.

Carey, English

- b. 20 1976-1977
- b. 21 1977-1978
- b. 22 1979-1980

- b. 23 Woffard, Math 1976-1977

Roman, Bilingual

- b. 24 1976-1977
Also includes Roman's Modern Language class.
- b. 25 1977-1978
Also includes Roman's Modern Language class.

"Management of materials" (cont.)
Roman, Bilingual (cont.)

b. 26 1979-1980

b. 27 1980-1981

Statistics 1971-1985

Program designs

b. 28 1973 September-1974 June

b. 28 1978 September-1984 June

b. 28 Letters 1972-1975

b. 28 Organizational materials

b. 29 1971-1976

b. 30 Oversize charts 1975-1985

Includes "Scottlife 1985", Junior High School 117's yearbook; "Instructional Strategies in Schools with High Concentrations of Low Income Pupils", 1975; progress charts, 1981; Rison's portfolio; scientific interpretation of teacher development progress charts, Sept. 1977-June 1978; grading charts; "How to Teach Black Children" by Alton Rison; "A.D.'s Teachers' and Parents' Guide to Pass the TAAS in Mathematics"; and "A.D.'s Teachers' and Parents' Guide to Pass the TAAS in Language Arts (Reading and Writing)" by Alton Rison.

Restricted

"Principal's opinion of Teacher's Performance", suspensions, and grievances (box 31) restricted indefinitely.

Autobiography

b. 32 Rison, Alton. "From School Chaos to Achievement: A True Story"

b. 32 Rison's portfolio and resume

Additions 1971-1986

b. 33 Scripts written by Rison

Researchers must sign a confidentiality form to view this box.

b. 34 School materials 1982-1984

Includes agendas from daily cabinet meetings.

b. 35 Yearbooks 1971-1986