



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

Guide to the

C. L. R. James letters and additions

1939-1986 [bulk 1939-1946]

Sc MG 132

Summary

Creator: James, C. L. R. (Cyril Lionel Robert), 1901-1989

Title: C. L. R. James letters and additions

Date: 1939-1986 [bulk 1939-1946]

Size: 2.71 linear feet (7 boxes)

Source: Purchased from Constance Webb in 1987; additions acquired in 1988.

Revision History: Finding aid updated by Lauren Stark.

Abstract: C. L. R. James was a West Indian scholar, political activist, and writer. Born in Trinidad in 1901, James began his career as a writer and sports journalist. He migrated to Great Britain in 1932, where he published his first major work, *The Black Jacobins*, in 1938. He became acquainted with Marxism and Trotskyism in 1934, meeting with Leon Trotsky in Mexico in 1938. In New York during the 1940s, he led a small faction of left-wing Communists opposed to the policies of the Communist Party-USA, as well as to some of the main tenets of Marxism-Leninism and Trotskyism. Following his expulsion from the United States in 1953, during the Cold War, James relocated to London, residing at times in Trinidad, where he launched an opposition party against the government of Eric Williams, and in the United States, where he lectured periodically. James died in 1989. The C. L. R. James letters consist mainly of letters written by James to his former wife and political associate, Constance Webb. James's letters discuss a wide variety of subjects including love, politics (especially Marxism), art, history, sports, literature, and popular culture. Also included are miscellaneous letters and organizational materials documenting James's political activities in the United States, 1938-1953; and letters written to Webb, regarding her writings on Richard Wright, from Arna Bontemps, Lawrence Reddick, and Ellen Wright. Numerous letters also discuss the Johnson-Forest Tendency, a faction led by C. L. R. James, under the pseudonym of J. R. Johnson, and Raya Dunayevskaya (also known as Freddie Forest) within the Socialist Workers Party, which later evolved into the group Facing Reality. The letters are voluminous, averaging 20 pages on loose leaf paper; handwritten; undated; and either signed with a majuscule N (first letter of his nickname and political pseudonym Nello) or unsigned. They were transcribed and annotated by Webb.

Conditions Governing Use: Only transcripts of letters can be used for reproduction (including photography).

Preferred citation: [Item], C. L. R. James letters and additions, Sc MG 132, 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 Andre Elizee, April 1987.

Related Materials:

The Black Jacobins: typescript, 1967 by C. L. R. James, SC MG 891, Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture.

Creator History

C. L. R. James was a West Indian scholar, political activist, and writer. Born in Trinidad in 1901, James began his career as a writer and sports journalist. He migrated to Great Britain in 1932, where he published his first major work, *The Black Jacobins*, in 1938. He became acquainted with Marxism and Trotskyism in 1934, meeting with Leon Trotsky in Mexico in 1938. In New York during the 1940s, he led a small faction of left-wing Communists opposed to the policies of the Communist Party-USA, as well as to some of the main tenets of Marxism-Leninism and Trotskyism. Following his expulsion from the United States in 1953, during the Cold War, James relocated to London, residing at times in Trinidad, where he launched an opposition party against the government of Eric Williams, and in the United States, where he lectured periodically. James died in 1989.

Scope and Content Note

The C. L. R. James letters consist mainly of letters written by James to his former wife and political associate, Constance Webb. James's letters discuss a wide variety of subjects including love, politics (especially Marxism), art, history, sports, literature, and popular culture. Also included are miscellaneous letters and organizational materials documenting James's political activities in the United States, 1938-1953; and letters written to Webb, regarding her writings on Richard Wright, from Arna Bontemps, Lawrence Reddick, and Ellen Wright. Numerous letters also discuss the Johnson-Forest Tendency, a faction led by C. L. R. James, under the pseudonym of J. R. Johnson, and Raya Dunayevskaya (also known as Freddie Forest) within the Socialist Workers Party, which later evolved into the group Facing Reality. The letters are voluminous, averaging 20 pages on loose leaf paper; handwritten; undated; and either signed with a majuscule N (first letter of his nickname and political pseudonym Nello) or unsigned. They were transcribed and annotated by Webb.

Arrangement: Arranged first by order of acquisition, and then chronologically.

Key Terms

Subjects

African American authors
African Americans -- Political activity
Authors, Black

Socialism

Geographic Names

United States -- Politics and government

United States -- Social life and customs

Names

Bontemps, Arna, 1902-1973

James, C. L. R. (Cyril Lionel Robert), 1901-1989

Reddick, Lawrence Dunbar, 1910-1995

Webb, Constance

Wright, Ellen, 1912?-2004

Wright, Richard, 1908-1960

Johnson-Forest Tendency

Container List

Original collection

James to Webb transcriptions

- b. 1 f. 1 1939
- b. 1 f. 2 1940
- b. 1 f. 3 1943
- b. 1 f. 4 1944 January-April
- b. 1 f. 5 1944 May-July
- b. 1 f. 6 1944 August-September
- b. 1 f. 7 1944 September-December
- b. 1 f. 8 1945
- b. 1 f. 9 1946
- b. 1 f. 10 undated

- b. 2 f. 1 General correspondence

Also includes a bulletin.

Webb, Constance

- b. 2 f. 2 Letters received 1948-1981
- b. 2 f. 3 Writing
- b. 2 f. 4 Pearlstein, Edward writing
- b. 2 f. 5 Johnson-Forest Faction
 - Includes correspondence and organizational material.
- b. 2 f. 6 Newspaper correspondence 1955-1958
- b. 2 f. 7 Printed matter
- b. 2 f. 8-10 Various essays

James to Webb original letters

- b. 3 1939-1944 July
- b. 4 1944 August-1946

Additions

James to Webb transcriptions

- b. 1 additions f. 1 1946-1947
- b. 1 additions f. 2 1947-1948
- b. 1 additions f. 3 1948-1986
- b. 2 additions f. 1 Biographical and bibliographic information
- b. 2 additions f. 2 Book reviews
- b. 2 additions f. 3 Correspondence 1948
- b. 2 additions f. 4-8 Writing
- b. 2 additions f. 9-10 Johnson-Forest Tendency documents
- b. 2 additions f. 11 Webb, Constance correspondence and writing
- b. 2 additions f. 12 Pearlstein, Edward
- b. 3 additions James to Webb original letters 1946-1986