

BLACK EMERGENCY CULTURAL COALITION
RECORDS

The New York Public Library
Schomburg Center for Research
in Black Culture
515 Malcolm X Boulevard
New York, New York 10030

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**BLACK EMERGENCY CULTURAL COALITION (1969 – 1982).
RECORDS, 1971-1984. 2.5 archival boxes. (1 linear foot)**

Historical Sketch

The Black Emergency Cultural Coalition Inc. (BECC) was organized in January 1969 by a group of African-American artists, in response to the Metropolitan Museum of Art's "HARLEM ON MY MIND" exhibit, which omitted the contributions of African-American painters and sculptors to the Harlem community. Members of this initial group that protested against the exhibit included several prominent African-American artists, including Benny Andrews and Clifford R. Joseph, cofounders of the BECC. The primary goal of the group was to agitate for change in the major art museums in New York City, so that there would be greater representation of African-American artists and their work in these museums, and that an African-American curatorial presence would be established. The Coalition described itself as an action oriented watchdog group that strived to develop the legitimate rights and aspirations of individual African-American artists and the total art community. This process, which began in 1969, culminated with the call to boycott an exhibit at the Whitney Museum of American Art in 1971, after talks between the BECC and the Whitney to curate an African American art exhibit failed to achieve greater participation and visibility for the African-American artist.

In 1971 the work of the Coalition grew to include the creation of an Arts Exchange program in correctional facilities. This program arose in response to major riots at the Attica correctional facility in New York. The BECC was stirred by the prisoner's demands for rights and justice. The first class in September 1971 was held at the Manhattan House of Detention. The program grew exponentially in the following year and was implemented in twenty states. Three different types of teaching arrangements developed within the program. In New York, Rhode Island and Massachusetts, classes were taught by artists from the BECC. In other institutions such as the Greenhaven Correctional facility in Connecticut inmates taught classes, with monthly visits from artists in the Coalition. In the third variation of the program, visiting artists taught classes once or twice a month at places such as Leavenworth Federal Penitentiary and the Federal Correctional Institution in Tallahassee, Florida. The BECC also sponsored arts programs in juvenile detention centers and mental health facilities throughout the United States.

The BECC was incorporated in 1972 as a not for profit organization. The initial directors of this newly incorporated organization were Clifford R. Joseph, Benny Andrews, Camille Billops, Vivian Browne and Russell Thompson. Cliff Joseph and Benny Andrews were named co-chairmen of the Coalition with Michael Chisolm as the coordinator of the program. The work of the Coalition officers was done on a purely volunteer service with no salaries being paid. Funding for the organization came from contributions from private parties and grants. To finance the arts programs the Coalition applied for and received grants from various agencies including the National Endowment for the Arts and the New York State Council on the Arts.

Voluntarism was a major part of the BECC arts program efforts. Instructors and teachers in the BECC arts programs worked without compensation receiving small amounts of money to offset transportation expenses and supplies. Their Prison Arts Program instructors were recruited by word of mouth and by inquiries about the programs made directly to the BECC. It is noted that in some cases artists had began programs independently and sought the Coalition's help to gain legitimacy and sponsorship. The classes offered in each institution were largely dependent on the expertise of the volunteer. Thus, a variety of arts, crafts and creative writing programs were offered. The BECC advocated partnering with interested artists, university programs, and cultural groups to achieve their objectives.

BECC published a newsletter with contributing articles from its members chronicling their arts program activities, and Benny Andrews, co-chairman of the Coalition published several articles about the BECC's experiences in newspapers and art journals across the country. The Coalition also sponsored but did not administer a number of programs such as the Artisan Alliance and the Sinbad School of Art. Both of these programs were given administrative and financial support. Over the years of its existence the BECC also supported several lectures, discussions and talks about the African-American artist and society, using art in prisons and various other topics concerning the African-American community and art. They sponsored the Xango exhibit in 1980 held in New York City at the Countee Cullen Branch Library in Harlem. The exhibit, which featured the works of the German photographer Leonore Mau, captured images of Black religious rituals and rites in the African Diaspora. The BECC had offered the exhibit to the American Museum of Natural History but they had declined.

In 1981 the Coalition was given notice by the New York Department of Labor, Unemployment Insurance Division, regarding their liability for contributions that should have been made since January 1st 1978. There is no evidence of how this matter was resolved. The records of the official work of BECC cease after 1982, the year they were denied funding by the National Endowment for the Arts. There is evidence that some instructors continued their programs in various institutions but it is unclear whether they ever received reimbursement for their work or how long they continued to offer classes.

The formal closure of the BECC is not documented in the collection.

Scope and Content

The Black Emergency Cultural Coalition Records consists of the records produced by this organization between 1971 and 1984. They give a view into the administration, finances, programs and events that the BECC and its members were involved. The collection includes administrative documents, records detailing their arts programs and general materials related to their members, sponsored programs and other business. The records have been divided into three series: ADMINISTRATIVE DOCUMENTS, BECC ARTS PROGRAMS and GENERAL FILES. Administrative documents contain the subseries: Financial Documents and Grants and Funding. The BECC papers are arranged chronologically. When files cover a range of dates the first date in the range is used and they are then organized chronologically.

Administrative Documents, 1972-1984, (3.5 lin. inches).

These files contain the administrative and organizational information of the BECC. Much of this series relates to the BECC interactions with government agencies regarding their status as a not for profit or charitable organization, and to funding organizations regarding grants and their obligations after funding was established. This series has been divided into the subseries Financial Documents and Grants and Funding. Financial Documents, 1972-1984: These items are administrative documents that are financial in nature. Included are documents such as tax returns, state and federal tax status records and bank statements. Grants and Funding, 1973-1982: This series of documents chronicles the various interactions between the BECC and the funding organizations from which they sought funds. The records include correspondence, application materials, financial status reports to the granting agencies and request forms.

BECC Arts Programs, 1972-1971, (6.5 lin. inches).

This series contains BECC arts program materials covering all the programs they initiated or were involved in. The series includes correspondence, proposals, and program instructor application forms. There are also several files regarding their Prison Arts Programs. These include the timesheets of BECC instructors that give an indication of who was involved with the organization's arts programs as well as the types of services they provided. Documents pertaining to art programs that they sponsored such as the Artisan Alliance and the Sinbad School of Art are also included.

General Files, 1971-1981, (3 lin. inches).

This series consists of documents and records relating to the BECC organization and its members. It includes press clippings, articles written by Benny Andrews, the organization's mailing lists and three newsletters published by the BECC. The profile and resume of Clifford Joseph the co-chairman of the organization are found in this series. It also includes records documenting the BECC's relationship with the Whitney Museum of American Art and the Empress Fund Inc. Correspondence from the Volunteer Lawyers for the Arts and documents from the BECC sponsored Xango Exhibit are also a part of this series.

Provenance

Gift of Michael Chisolm, 1990
SCM 90-45

Processed by Sacha Page, July 2005

Container List

<u>Box</u>	<u>Folder</u>	
1		Administrative Documents
	1	Black Emergency Cultural Coalition - Incorporation Certificates, 1972
	2	New York State Board of Social Welfare – Correspondence, 1975-1980
	3	New York State Board of Social Welfare - Annual Reports, 1975-1980
		Financial Documents
	4	Tax returns and Not For Profit Status Records, 1974-1980
	5	Not For Profit/ Tax Exempt Status Records, 1972-1978
6 - 8		BECC checkbooks 1972-1981
	9	Unemployment Insurance Division Department of Labor New York State, 1978, 1981-1982 - Correspondence
	10	State and Local Sales Tax Exemption, 1981
	11	Bank Statements, 1982-1984
		Grants and Funding
	12	National Endowment for the Arts - Work Internship Information - Intern Shelly Killen, 1976
	13	New York State Council on the Arts - Grant, 1973-1975
	14	National Endowment for the Arts - Application Materials, 1974–1982
	15	BECC cash requests and fiscal reports to the National Endowment for the Arts, 1975-1979
	16	National Endowment for the Arts - Grant Applications, 1975-1979
	17	National Endowment for the Arts - Requests and Financial Status Reports, 1975-1981
	18	Correspondences - Grant Organizations, 1975-1982
	19	State Parks and Recreation – Correspondence - Barbara Connor, 1980-1981
	20	Contributions, n.d.
		B.E.C.C. Arts Programs
	21	Arts Programs – Correspondence, 1973-1977, 1980-1982
	22	Prison Arts Programs – Correspondence, 1972-1982
2	1	Artisian Alliance Program, 1974-1975
	2	New York Department of Correction – Correspondence, 1974-1975
	3	Juvenile Arts Programs, 1974-1981

Container List

<u>Box</u>	<u>Folder</u>	
2	7	“A Prison Arts Program” – Monograph by E. McBurrows and M. Ludwig, 1976
	8	Sinbad School of Art, Brooklyn, New York, 1980
	9	Prison Arts Program Information, n.d.
	10	Proposals for BECC Prison Arts Programs, n.d.
	11	Prospective BECC Arts Program Instructor Applications, n.d.
	12	Prospective BECC Arts Program Instructor Applications – New York Applicants, n.d.
		General Files
	13	Whitney Museum of American Art – Statements and Proposals, 1971
	14	Benny Andrews – Articles, 1973-981
	15	Posters and Announcements, 1974-1976, 1980
	16	Press Clippings, 1976-980
3	1	Mailing Lists, 1976, 1979, 1980
	2	Empress Fund, Inc, 1979
	3	Xango Exhibit Materials, 1980
	4	Xango Exhibit Press Releases and Invitations, 1980
	5	BECC Newsletters n.d., 1980
	6	Volunteer Lawyers for the Arts – Correspondence, 1981
	7	<i>Artworkers News</i> Volume 10, Number 9, May 1981
	8	Clifford Joseph - Profile and Resume, n.d.

MANUSCRIPTS, ARCHIVES AND RARE BOOKS DIVISION

SEPARATION RECORD

The following items were removed from: Black Emergency Cultural Coalition Papers

Name of Collection/Papers Black Emergency Cultural Coalition Papers

Accession Number SCM 90-45

Donor: Michael Chisolm

Gift X **Purchase** _____

Date received: September 10, 1990

Date transferred: August 4, 2005

The item(s) listed below have been sent to the division indicated, either to be retained or disposed of there. Any items that should receive special disposition are clearly marked.

Schomburg Photographs and Print Division:

1. Photograph of Cliff Joseph, co chairman of the Black Emergency Cultural Coalition. The print is black and white and is undated. 2. Black and white photographs from the Xango exhibit, sponsored by the Black Emergency Cultural Coalition in 1980. Thirteen photographs including duplicates, no postcards or postcard size images. Photographs separated show Yoruba rites in Brazil, Trinidad, Togo, Miami and elsewhere. Photographs taken by German photographer Leonore Mau. 3. Postcard size prints of drawings by George Knowlton. George Knowlton was an artist and instructor in the Black Emergency Cultural Coalition Prison Arts Program in Kingston, Rhode Island. Postcard prints not in Photos and Prints Division.

Accessioned by: Mary Yearwood **Date:** 1990 (Accession updated: 10/2/08 by Mary Yearwood)