



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

Guide to the

**Ernestine McClendon papers**

1958-1991

Sc MG 583

## Summary

**Creator:** McClendon, Ernestine, 1913-1991

**Title:** Ernestine McClendon papers

**Date:** 1958-1991

**Size:** 0.21 linear feet (1 box)

**Source:** Gift of Ernestine McClendon, 1995.

**Revision History:** Finding aid updated by Lauren Stark.

**Abstract:** The Ernestine McClendon papers contain McClendon's scrapbook of responses from ad agencies to her 1960 letter campaign urging them to hire Black actors and actresses. Included in the collection are her resumes, articles and reviews, some letters, contracts, music and lyrics written by McClendon, and a script and other production material for "Heartbreak by Midnight", a play she wrote which was later made into a screenplay. There are also jokes and other material for McClendon's comedy routine which she launched in 1984 at age 71.

**Preferred citation:** [Item], Ernestine McClendon papers, Sc MG 583, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, The New York Public Library

**Language of the Material:** English

**Separated Materials:**

Transferred to the Photographs and Prints Division: photographs.

## Creator History

Actress, comedienne, and playwright Ernestine McClendon was best known as New York City's first Black theatrical agent. The McClendon Agency, later the Ernestine McClendon Enterprises, Inc., maintained offices in New York and Los Angeles.

McClendon began her career as an actress during the 1950s and appeared in productions of *Raisin in*

*the Sun* and Langston Hughes's *Simply Heavenly*. In 1960, she launched a crusade to get advertising agencies to use Black actors and actresses in commercials, which resulted in her being hired by the agent Lillian Arnold to secure Black talent for Arnold's agency. She would go on to manage Black and white actors for Arnold, as well as for her own agency. Throughout the 1960s, McClendon continued to open doors for Black performers in commercials, television talk shows, and other similar venues.

## **Scope and Content Note**

The Ernestine McClendon papers contain McClendon's scrapbook of responses from ad agencies to her 1960 letter campaign urging them to hire Black actors and actresses. Included in the collection are her resumes, articles and reviews, some letters, contracts, music and lyrics written by McClendon, and a script and other production material for "Heartbreak by Midnight", a play she wrote which was later made into a screenplay. There are also jokes and other material for McClendon's comedy routine which she launched in 1984 at age 71.

## **Key Terms**

### **Subjects**

African American actresses  
African American women comedians  
African American women entertainers  
African Americans in the performing arts  
Authors, Black

### **Occupations**

Talent agents.

### **Names**

McClendon, Ernestine, 1913-1991  
Ernestine McClendon Enterprises

## Container List

- b. 1 f. 1 Biographical information
- b. 1 f. 2 Letters
- b. 1 f. 3 Contracts
- b. 1 f. 4 Scrapbook of advertising agency responses
- b. 1 f. 5 Clippings and reviews
- b. 1 f. 6-7 "Heartbreak at Midnight"
- b. 1 f. 8 Music by McClendon
- b. 1 f. 9 Jokes and comedy routine scripts
- b. 1 f. 10 "My Side and Your Side"  
Includes series of letters from McClendon, on behalf of her agency, to various theaters inquiring why they had not been using her agency.
- b. 1 f. 11 Programs, flyers, and ads
- b. 1 f. 12 Certificates