



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

Guide to the

Umbra Poets Workshop collection

1978 - 2006 [bulk 1978 - 1986]

Sc MG 538

Summary

Creator: Umbra Poets Workshop

Title: Umbra Poets Workshop collection

Date: 1978 - 2006 [bulk 1978 - 1986]

Size: .4 linear feet (One archival box)

Source: Gift of Michel Oren in 1986 and 2007.

Abstract: The Umbra Poets Workshop was a group of young African-American writers who met on New York City's Lower East Side from 1962 to 1965 to conduct readings and discuss writing and politics. The Umbra Poets Workshop collection consists of oral history interviews with fourteen of the poets along with letters relating to the formation of Umbra and Calvin Hernton's activities.

Conditions Governing Access:

Transcripts and interviews with Ishmael Reed and David Henderson are closed.

Preferred citation: [Item], Umbra Poets Workshop collection, Sc MG 538, 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 and Theresa Walker-Ray in 1986 and 2007.

Creator History

The Umbra Poets Workshop was a group of young African-American writers who met on New York City's Lower East Side from 1962 to 1965 to conduct readings and discuss writing and politics. Early members of the group included Thomas C. Dent, Calvin Hernton, Ishmael Reed, David Henderson, Joe Johnson, and Askia M. Toure (then Rolland Snellings). They founded *Umbra*, a literary magazine, in 1963. The workshops held in the City's Lower East Side, where many of them lived, provided a creative

space to attempt new literary styles, and to communicate leftist political ideology through a Black aesthetic. The group, known for the intensity of its readings of "street poetry" and influenced by black nationalist ideas and the African oral tradition, was among the forerunners of the Black Arts movement.

Scope and Content Note

The Umbra Poets Workshop collection consists of oral history interviews with fourteen of the poets, conducted by Michel Oren, with one exception, Amiri Baraka, who was interviewed by fellow Umbra member, Lorenzo Thomas. In addition, there are along with letters relating to the formation of Umbra and Calvin Hernton's activities. Lorenzo Thomas' manuscript, "Annotated Bibliography of the Umbra Workshop 1962-1982," is included.

Key Terms

Subjects

African American authors -- Interviews
African American poets -- Interviews
African Americans -- Intellectual life -- 20th century
American literature -- African American authors
American poetry -- African American authors
Poets, American -- 20th century -- Interviews
Poets, Black -- 20th century -- Interviews

Genre/Physical Characteristic

Interviews

Names

Baraka, Amiri, 1934-2014
Berger, Art.
Dent, Thomas C.
Hernton, Calvin C.
Johnson, Joe, 1940-2019
Poindexter, Jane
Thomas, Lorenzo, 1944-2005
Touré, Askia M.
Walcott, Brenda
Society of Umbra
Umbra Poets Workshop

Container List

- b. 1 f. 1 Amiri Baraka interview 1984 June 21
- b. 1 f. 2 Art Berger interview undated
- b. 1 f. 3-4 Tom Dent interview and letters 1981 - 1986
Letters are from Dent to Michel Oren. Two interviews included, one from December 25, 1981, and one from June 21, 1984.
- b. 1 f. 5 David Henderson interview undated
Restricted.
Calvin Hernton
- b. 1 f. 6-7 Interviews 1982 October 17 - 1986 April 12
- b. 1 f. 7 Article by Oren about Hernton 2006
- b. 1 f. 8 Letters from Hernton, Joseph H. Berke, and Raymond Patterson 1982 - 2002
- b. 1 f. 9 Joe Johnson interviews 1979 January 3 - 1984 July 16
- b. 1 f. 10 Jane Poindexter interview 1983 October 1
- b. 1 f. 11 Ishmael Reed interview 1983 February 8
Restricted.
- b. 1 f. 12 Lorenzo Thomas interview 1983 July 31
- b. 1 f. 13 Askia Muhammad Toure interview 1983 July 13
- b. 1 f. 14 Brenda Walcott interview 1978 June 27
- b. 1 f. 15-16 "Annotated Bibliography of the Umbra Workshop, 1962-1982", compiled by Lorenzo Thomas 1984
- b. 1 f. 17 Miscellaneous