



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

Guide to the

**Etienne and Ghislaine Charlier collection**

1927-1994 [bulk 1942-1979]

Sc MG 820

## Summary

**Creator:** Charlier, Etienne D.

**Title:** Etienne and Ghislaine Charlier collection

**Date:** 1927-1994 [bulk 1942-1979]

**Size:** 0.42 linear feet (1 box)

**Source:** Gift of Ghislaine Rey, 2009.

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

**Abstract:** The Etienne and Ghislaine Charlier collection is comprised of letters, political treatises, and printed matter, all useful for a study of the Haitian left in Haiti and abroad. There is very little in the way of the biographical or personal, especially for Etienne, and the majority of the collection's letters are incoming to Rey Charlier. Despite this, the collection still offers a sense of the Charliers' political thinking and development, particularly through four documents written by Etienne Charlier. These are *Aperçu sur la formation historique de la nation haïtienne*; the 1947 one year anniversary report of the Parti Socialiste Populaire, "Fascisme et Nazisme ou Socialisme Scientifique"; and a copy of the *Comité Central du Parti Communiste Haïtien's* *Analyse Schematique*, 1932-1934, co-written with Jacques Roumain.

**Preferred citation:** [Item], Etienne and Ghislaine Charlier collection, Sc MG 820, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, The New York Public Library

**Language of the Material:** French Most of the collection is in French.

**Processing note:** Accessioned by Edwina Ashie-Nikoi, April 2010.

## Creator History

Étienne Charlier was a Haitian Marxist historian whose *Aperçu sur la formation historique de la nation haïtienne* and numerous articles published in the daily *La Nation* interpreted Haiti's history and contemporary realities through a Marxist framework. His wife, Ghislaine Rey Charlier, was a writer

whose work includes *Memoires d'une affranchie* (*Memories of a Freedwoman*) and *Anthologie du roman haïtien de 1859 à 1946* (*Anthology of the Haitian Novel, 1859-1946*).

Étienne Charlier was introduced to Marxism while pursuing a doctorate in Paris. In mid-1934, he and others, including Jacques Roumain, Max Hudicourt and Anthony Lèspes, officially formed the Parti Communiste Haïtien (PCH). The party, composed primarily of privileged "milats", argued class over color divisions as the most important threat against Haitian society. The party's stance informed Charlier's work, which underscored the economic factors that had dictated Haiti's development since colonial times, while also highlighting the significance of the color and 'caste' divisions.

The Vincent regime briefly imprisoned Roumain and Hudicourt in early 1933 and eventually drove them into exile. In the words of one historian, the PCH "languished" during this period, although the younger members of the party, Charlier included, continued their activities. With Élie Lescot's pardon of Vincent's opponents in May 1941, Hudicourt and Roumain returned to Haiti and set about reforming the PCH with a view to challenging Lescot's pro-U.S. government. This time, the radical group included Roumain's brother Michel, whose Parti Populaire Démocratique had previously collaborated with Hudicourt's La Reaction Démocratique to oppose Vincent. However, this was not enough to bridge growing differences within the PCH and, eventually, Jacques Roumain would leave the group, explaining, "[They] are my friends but we do not share the same political ideas. [They] are socialists and I am a communist."

In 1943, "the socialists", after much negotiation with the Lescot government, started *La Nation*, financed by Hudicourt and edited by Max Sam, a Black Marxist who had worked with Michel Roumain as a writer for *Le Nouvelliste* and was the grandson of former president T.A. Simon Sam. After a brief shutdown from 1944 to 1946 that also saw the exile of Hudicourt, the young socialists that were *La Nation*'s main contributors reorganized themselves politically as the Parti Socialistes Populaire (PSP) and campaigned in the 1946 elections. This was the first time parties on the left fielded a significant number of candidates. Charlier, Hudicourt, Sam, and George Rigaud, another party member, all ran for seats in the Chamber of Deputies. Only Hudicourt won, becoming the sole leftist in the Assembly.

A year later, Hudicourt died at home under mysterious circumstances, propelling Charlier to a greater leadership role in the PSP as its secretary-general. A few months later, however, he had to flee the capital incognito in reaction to President Dumarsais Estimé's clampdown on radical groups. The presses of *La Nation* did not escape the wrath of the government's officials; they were destroyed and the paper, as well as the party, was effectively dissolved.

In June 1956, Charlier, with Michel Roumain as his assistant, began editing *Haiti Libéré*, the weekly newspaper arm of the Haitian Democratic Alliance presided over by George Rigaud. Publishing scathing critiques of Paul Magloire's military junta, the newspaper would support Senator Louis Dejoie's unsuccessful presidential bid against François Duvalier. After his rise to power, Duvalier's government branded the Alliance a communist organization and charged it with attempts "to create anarchy by dislocating organizations of [sic] the country which made for peace and security." Rigaud, Charlier and Roumain were detained and the Alliance, which described itself as "a non-party organization [working for] the defense of civil rights," was outlawed.

Étienne Charlier died suddenly in 1960. Rey Charlier died in 2017.

## Scope and Content Note

The Étienne and Ghislaine Charlier collection is comprised of letters, political treatises, and printed

matter, all useful for a study of the Haitian left in Haiti and abroad. There is very little in the way of the biographical or personal, especially for Étienne, and the majority of the collection's letters are incoming to Rey Charlier. Despite this, the collection still offers a sense of the Charliers' political thinking and development, particularly through four documents written by Étienne Charlier. These are *Aperçu sur la formation historique de la nation haïtienne*; the 1947 one year anniversary report of the Parti Socialiste Populaire, "Fascisme et Nazisme ou Socialisme Scientifique"; and a copy of the Comité Central du Parti Communiste Haïtien's *Analyse Schematique, 1932-1934*, co-written with Jacques Roumain.

In addition to the 1947 report on the party, the PSP folder also contains a 1979 letter from Gesner Prudent to poet Paul Laraque and an undated interview between unidentified subjects, both of which discuss the PSP, its influential actors, and the contemporary political milieu in which they operated. Rey Ghislaine's "Introduction à L'Histoire du Parti Socialiste Populaire D'Haiti P.S.P. (1946-1950)" ("Introduction to the History of the PSP") and "Réponses Aux Questions D'Un Jeune Camrade" ("Responses to Questions from a Young Comrade"), and the folder on Max Hudicourt, complete the documentation on the PSP, its activities, and personalities. The Hudicourt folder contains biographical material, including an account of the moments shortly after his death which was controversially ruled a suicide; typescripts of a 1940 issue of *Combat*, a magazine he founded while in exile in the U.S.; and an essay, "Haiti, Face a la Paix de demain" and its printed English translation, *Haiti Faces the Peace of Tomorrow*.

Rey Charlier's letters offer a glimpse into both her creative and political activities. The correspondents read like a who's who of the crème of Haiti's political opposition and include the doyen of Haitian noirisme, Jean Price-Mars. In general, the letters from Price Mars to Rey Charlier, all written in the year before his death in 1969, demonstrate a tender friendship between the writer and the Haitian intellectual. Another friend, Herman L. Désir, was the Secretary-General of La Ligue des Patriotes Haitien and a Board Director of the American Haitian Committee. In addition to his letters to Rey Charlier, Désir's folder contains several letters and statements in defense of Haiti and Haitians. Along with his correspondence to Rey Charlier in which he discusses her work, the folder for scholar and translator Carrol F. Coates also contains the translated chapter from Rey Charlier's "Memoires d'une affranchie", published in a special edition of the journal *Callaloo*.

Materials such as the statement of the Support Committee for the Haitian People reveal Rey Charlier's continuing activism in exile. The committee was set up to give concrete form to the solidarity between various organizations working in the Haitian diaspora. Other documents contained in the collection include a 1927 interview in *La Revue Indigene* with poet Emile Roumer; a manifesto of the Parti D'Entente Populaire D'Haiti (P.E.P); letters and statements from the Coordination de la resistance haïtiennne au Quebec, a group formed in response to the September 30, 1991, coup in Haiti which deposed the country's first democratically elected president; and materials dealing with Rey Charlier's *Anthologie du Roman Haïtien*.

## Key Terms

### Subjects

Authors, Black  
Authors, Haitian

### Geographic Names

Haiti -- History -- 1934-1986  
Haiti -- Politics and government -- 20th century  
Haiti -- Race relations

Haiti -- Social conditions

**Names**

Charlier, Etienne D.

Hudicourt, Max, 1905-1947

Rey-Charlier, Ghislaine, 1918-2017

## Container List

- b. 1 f. 1 Biographical
- b. 1 f. 2 *Aperçu sur la formation historique de la nation haïtienne* 1954
- b. 1 f. 3 Parti Socialiste Populaire 1947-1979
- b. 1 f. 4 Hudicourt, Max ca. 1947
- b. 1 f. 5 Manifeste du Parti d'Entente Populaire d'Haiti et Programme de la Nouvelle  
Indépendance undated
- Correspondence
- b. 1 f. 6 Roumain, Jacques, Lucas Prémice, and Ghislaine Charlie 1942-1975
- b. 1 f. 7 Price-Mars, Jean 1968
- b. 1 f. 8 Coates, Carrol 1991-1994
- b. 1 f. 9 General 1974
- b. 1 f. 10 Désir, Hermann L 1979-1981
- b. 1 f. 11 Coordination de la Résistance Haïtienne au Québec 1994
- b. 1 f. 12 *Anthologie du Roman Haïtien* 1978
- b. 1 f. 13 Miscellaneous 1927
- b. 1 f. 14 Printed matter 1934