



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

Guide to the

"No Crystal Stair: Black Life and the *Messenger*, 1917-1928" interviews
1970-1972
Sc MG 826

Summary

Creator: Kornweibel, Theodore

Title: "No Crystal Stair: Black Life and the *Messenger*, 1917-1928" interviews

Date: 1970-1972

Size: 0.02 linear feet (2 folders)

Source: Gift of Theodore Kornweibel, June 2010.

Revision History: Finding aid updated by Lauren Stark.

Abstract: These interviews consist of six oral history interviews conducted by Theodore Kornweibel in 1970-1972, to provide firsthand accounts for his book *No Crystal Stair: Black Life and the "Messenger," 1917-1928*, published in 1975. The book examines the political, economic, and social alternatives available to Black people in the 1920s, including Garveyism, socialism, and trade union movements. Interviewees are: Arna Bontemps, James Ivy, Theophilus Lewis, Ernest Rice McKinney, A. Philip Randolph, and George S. Schuyler, all of whom either contributed articles to the *Messenger* or were on its board.

Preferred citation: [Item], "No Crystal Stair: Black Life and the *Messenger*, 1917-1928" interviews, Sc MG 826, 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 Moving Image and Recorded Sound Division: audio materials. For more information, please contact the division at schomburgaudiovisual@nypl.org or 212-491-2270.

Creator History

Theodore Kornweibel is a retired professor of African American history at San Diego State University, and an author and editor of six monographs. His works include *Investigate Everything: Federal Efforts*

to *Compel Black Loyalty During World War I*, *Seeing Red: Federal Campaigns Against Black Militancy, 1919-1925*, and *"No Crystal Stair: Black Life and the "Messenger", 1917-1928"*.

The *Messenger* was a monthly political magazine published by and for African Americans between 1917 and 1928. It was co-founded in New York City by economist Chandler Owen and labor activist A. Philip Randolph to promote socialist ideology and New Negro strategies for racial progress. The magazine included articles on many of the issues important to African Americans during World War I and the postwar period, and thus helped to strengthen African American intellectual and political identity in the age of Jim Crow. It also played a critical role in the development of the Harlem Renaissance; after 1920, The *Messenger* featured a greater number of articles about Black culture and began to publish rising Black writers, featuring poetry, fiction, and literary criticism.

Scope and Content Note

These interviews consist of six oral history interviews conducted by Theodore Kornweibel in 1970-1972, to provide firsthand accounts for his book *No Crystal Stair: Black Life and the "Messenger," 1917-1928*, published in 1975. The book examines the political, economic, and social alternatives available to Black people in the 1920s, including Garveyism, socialism, and trade union movements. Interviewees are: Arna Bontemps, James Ivy, Theophilus Lewis, Ernest Rice McKinney, A. Philip Randolph, and George S. Schuyler, all of whom either contributed articles to the *Messenger* or were on its board.

The interviewees discuss their role in the the *Messenger*, among other related topics. Randolph's extensive interview focuses on his reasons for founding the magazine, its stance against World War I, and his personal opposition to the Russian Communist Party because it was "anti-labor in action". Schuyler discusses other staff members as well as the shift, beginning in 1923, in the content of the articles from a radical to a middle class focus.

Key Terms

Subjects

African Americans -- Legal status, laws, etc
African Americans -- Social conditions
Authors, Black
Socialism and society

Names

Bontemps, Arna, 1902-1973
Ivy, James W., 1901-1974
Kornweibel, Theodore
Lewis, Theophilus, 1891-1974
McKinney, Ernest Rice, 1886-1984
Randolph, A. Philip (Asa Philip), 1889-1979
Schuyler, George S. (George Samuel), 1895-1977
Messenger (New York, N.Y. : 1917-1928)