



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

Guide to the

Robert Hamburger transcripts and research materials

1973-1978

Sc MG 834

Summary

Creator: Hamburger, Robert, 1943-

Title: Robert Hamburger transcripts and research materials

Date: 1973-1978

Size: 2.5 linear feet (6 boxes)

Source: Gift of Robert Hamburger, December 1978.

Revision History: Finding aid updated by Lauren Stark.

Abstract: Robert Hamburger (1943-), professor of creative writing and literature with a focus in civil rights, is the author of numerous books that cover a variety of genres from oral history and personal journalism to travel and memoir. The Robert Hamburger transcripts and research materials consist of interview transcripts, interview outlines, introductory essays, critiques, and research material that Robert Hamburger collected and produced for his books *Our Portion of Hell: Fayette County, Tennessee, an Oral History of the Struggle for Civil Rights* (1973) and *A Stranger in the House* (1978), a book about the lives of domestic workers working for white families in New York City; and other works, including "The Whitehall Hotel: A Community of Outcasts, a Proposal for an Oral History Project", "Castaways: or Last Chance Hotel", and "A Journal of the Plague Year".

Conditions Governing Use: Donor retains copyright.

Preferred citation: [Item], Robert Hamburger transcripts and research materials, Sc MG 834, 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 Miranda Mims, April 2011.

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

Robert Hamburger (1943-), professor of creative writing and literature with a focus in civil rights, is the author of numerous books that cover a variety of genres from oral history and personal journalism to travel and memoir.

Scope and Content Note

The Robert Hamburger transcripts and research materials consist of interview transcripts, interview outlines, introductory essays, critiques, and research material that Robert Hamburger collected and produced for his books *Our Portion of Hell: Fayette County, Tennessee, an Oral History of the Struggle for Civil Rights* (1973) and *A Stranger in the House* (1978), a book about the lives of domestic workers working for white families in New York City; and other works, including "The Whitehall Hotel: A Community of Outcasts, a Proposal for an Oral History Project", "Castaways: or Last Chance Hotel", and "A Journal of the Plague Year".

Arrangement: Organized into four series: I. Our Portion of Hell; II. A Stranger in the House; and III. Other.

Key Terms

Subjects

African American household employees
African American women household employees
African Americans -- Suffrage
Civil rights
Race relations
Sharecropping
Social classes

Geographic Names

United States -- History -- 20th century

Names

Hamburger, Robert, 1943-

Container List

Our Portion of Hell 1973

The first series contains materials relating to *Our Portion of Hell*. Within the series are interview transcripts recounting the civil rights struggles that took place in Fayette County, Tennessee, one of the poorest counties in the United States at that time. The transcripts present a first person account by the African American residents of Fayette County, describing the events that transpired after they organized their first voter registration drive in 1959. The violence and discrimination that ensued continued for decades, ranging from local stores blacklisting voters to evicting people from houses where in some cases the families had lived for generations. The residents were subsequently forced to create temporary homes in a "tent city". In addition to the transcripts of those represented in *Our Portion of Hell*, there are several transcripts from people whose testimony does not appear in the published book, including Joe Henry Griggs, Marjoreen Jefferson, Mary Jones, Dorothy Marie Lewis, and Eunice Wright.

The Introduction and general description folder holds introductory and background information on the author, the project, and the situation in Fayette County. However, this lengthy introduction is not included in its entirety in the published book. In addition, there is a timeline, a description for the interview process, and an outline for the structure of the book.

There are a number of research materials in this series; they include photocopies of court transcripts, printed materials on the history of Fayette County, and news articles. The research focuses on the civil rights abuses endured by the residents of Fayette County and the work of the Fayette County Civic and Welfare League. The League, founded by John McFerren, a resident of Fayette County, was responsible for organizing the voter registration drive and promoting and protecting civil rights in the county. Among the League materials are photocopies of conference proceedings and samples of the publication, *The League Link*, 1961-1963. Additionally, there is a photocopy of the transcript for the February 12, 1961, radio broadcast of the *As We See It* series; Viola McFerrin (wife of the League founder), Senator Hubert Humphrey (D. Minn), Don Slaiman, and moderator Harry W. Flannery discussed "Tenant Farmers and Voting Rights" (it appears that the transcripts were on legal size paper; the photocopies were done on letter size paper, thus the bottom third has been cut off). The School system folder contains photocopies of legal documents relating to the education system in Fayette County, including a consultant's report about school integration in 1975, and news articles.

- b. 1 f. 1 Introduction and general description
Interview transcripts
- b. 1 f. 2 A-G
Interviewees include Allen, Gladys; Bates, George; Brown, Hayward; Coach, Velma; Dowdy, June; Franklin, Floyd; Graham, Alberta; Gray, Edward (no transcript); Gray, Ophelia; Gray, Venetta; and Griggs, Joe Henry (not in the book).
- b. 1 f. 3 H-J
Interviewees include Hobson, Priscilla; Hobson, Vester (no transcript); Horton, Maggie Mae; Horton, Magnolia; Horton, Robert; Jameson, Harpman; Jameson, James; Jameson, Minnie; Jefferson, Marjoreen (not in book); Jones, Elvin Lewis; and Jones, Mary (not in book).
- b. 1 f. 4 L-P
Interviewees include Lewis, Dorothy Marie (not in book); Liddell, E.D.; McFerren, John; McFerren, Viola; Mormon, Square; Mormon, Wilola; Niles Jr., David; and Parks, Cooper.
- b. 1 f. 5 R-W
Interviewees include Rivers, Mary Sue; Settles, Linnell; Shaw Jr., Leroy; Shields, Porter; Walker, William Henry "Gyp"; Westbrook, Kathy; Williams, Cleotis; Williams, Early B.; Wilson, Myles; and Wright, Eunice (not in book).

A Stranger in the House 1978

The second series contains transcripts (including multiple annotated drafts) and an introduction for *A Stranger in the House*. This collection of oral histories includes interviews with thirteen African American women employed in households in New York City and the surrounding area. Each woman presents her personal perspective on domestic work. Several of the women have used pseudonyms in the book but in the transcripts their actual names appear. Pseudonyms appear in parentheses. Along with the interview transcripts there is an annotated introduction by Hamburger. As with *Our, Portion of Hell*, the introduction that appears in the book was an edited version. Additionally, there are descriptions of the interviews, including the details of how Hamburger met each participant, the environments in which he visited them, and his assessment of each interview.

- b. 2 f. 1 Introduction and general description
Interview transcripts
- b. 2 f. 2 B-D
Interviewees include Bethune, Roena (Mackey, Laetitia); Davis, Lena (Daniels, Laura); and Doughlin, Eileen (O'Hara, Ellen).
- b. 2 f. 3 H-J
Interviewees include Hairston, Rose Marie; James, Laverne (Jones, Lu Anne); and Jones, Pauline (Larson, Irene).
- b. 2 f. 4 K
Interviewee includes Knox, Elizabeth.
- b. 2 f. 5-6 M
Includes McQuay, Eva and Mitchell, Christina (Michaels, Arletta).
- b. 3 f. 1 N
Interviewee includes Nivens, Minnie (Stevens, Minnie).
- b. 3 f. 2 R
Interviewee includes Reed, Carolyn.
- b. 3 f. 3 W
Interviewee includes Watkins, Celeste (Waters, Cecile).

Other

Hamburger also wrote *All the Lonely People: Life in a Single Room Occupancy Hotel* in 1983 for which there are two short pieces ("The Whitehall Hotel: A Community of Outcasts, a Proposal for an Oral History Project" and "Castaways: or Last Chance Hotel") explaining his interests in writing a book on this subject. Additionally, there are various drafts for "A Journal of the Plague Year", which does not appear to have been published.

- b. 3 f. 4 "The Whitehall Hotel: A Community of Outcasts, a Proposal for an Oral History Project" and "Castaways: or Last Chance Hotel"
"A Journal of the Plague Year"
Does not appear to have been published.
- b. 4 f. 1 Third revision introduction
- b. 4 f. 2 Notes and cuts
- b. 4 f. 3-5 Third revision
- b. 5 f. 1-5 First draft
- b. 6 f. 1-5 First version with edits