



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

Guide to the

**Pearl Primus collection**

1943-1993

Sc MG 852

Processed by Janice Quinter, February 2012.

## Summary

**Creator:** Primus, Pearl

**Title:** Pearl Primus collection

**Date:** 1943-1993

**Size:** 0.25 linear feet (1 box)

**Source:** Gift of Pearl Primus, 1993.

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

**Abstract:** Pearl Primus (1919-1994) was an internationally recognized dancer, choreographer, and anthropologist. She is best known for presenting African dances, which she researched in Africa; studying their function and meaning; and performing before American audiences. She and her husband and partner, Percival Borde, conducted research in Africa from 1959 through the 1960s, and established a performing arts center in Liberia. However, Primus found her creative impetus in the cultural heritage of African Americans, exploring racism, as well as the dignity, beauty, and strength of Black people. Primus received an M.A. in education (1959) and a Ph.D. (1978) in dance education from New York University. In addition to teaching at such colleges as the five college consortium in Massachusetts, she founded several schools, one of which is the Pearl Primus Dance Language Institute, where her method of blending African American, Caribbean, and African influence with modern dance and ballet was taught. The Pearl Primus collection consists of two interviews conducted by Marcia Ethel Heard (1989) and James Briggs Murray (1992) with Pearl Primus, covering her dance career in the 1940s, the late 1980s, and the meaning of dance to her personally. There are a few programs, news clippings, and articles, as well as eight colored costume sketches for unidentified and undated dances.

**Preferred citation:** [Item], Pearl Primus collection, Sc MG 852, 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:** Processed by Janice Quinter, February 2012.

**Separated Materials:**

Transferred to the Photographs and Prints Division: photographs

**Creator History**

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**Scope and Content Note**

The Pearl Primus collection consists of two interviews conducted by Marcia Ethel Heard (1989) and James Briggs Murray (1992) with Pearl Primus, covering her dance career in the 1940s, the late 1980s, and the meaning of dance to her personally. There are a few programs, news clippings, and articles, as well as eight colored costume sketches for unidentified and undated dances.

**Key Terms****Subjects**

African American anthropologists  
African American women dancers  
African Americans in the performing arts  
Authors, Black  
Women choreographers

**Names**

Primus, Pearl

## **Container List**

- b. 1 f. 1 Interviews conducted by Marcia Ethel Heard and James Briggs Murray 1989-1992
- b. 1 f. 2 Programs, flyer, and certificates 1989-1993
- b. 1 f. 3 Clippings and articles 1943-1993
- b. 1 f. 4 Costumes sketches (8)