



The New York Public Library  
Manuscripts and Archives Division

Guide to the

**Geoffrey Biddle Alphabet City papers**

1977-2001

MssCol 23870

Compiled by Kit Fluker, 2016.

## Summary

**Creator:** Biddle, Geoffrey

**Title:** Geoffrey Biddle Alphabet City papers

**Date:** 1977-2001

**Size:** 2.91 linear feet (10 boxes, 1 volume, 1 oversized folder)

**Source:** Purchased from Geoffrey Biddle, 2016.

**Abstract:** Geoffrey Biddle is a photographer whose book *Alphabet City* (published 1992) documented the Puerto Rican community on New York City's Lower East Side in the late 1970s. This collection contains photographs taken in the Alphabet City neighborhood in the late 1970s and 1980s, including but not limited to those published in *Alphabet City*. The collection also contains sound recordings and partial transcripts of the interviews that Biddle conducted in 1988 and 1989 for use in the book, and correspondence and reference material related to the Lower East Side and the development and publication of the book.

**Access:** Advance notice required.

**Conditions Governing Access:**

Sound materials are unavailable pending digitization.

**Preferred citation:** Geoffrey Biddle Alphabet City papers, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library.

**Processing note:** Compiled by Kit Fluker, 2016.

## Creator History

Geoffrey Biddle is a photographer who has been active since the 1970s. In the late 1970s, Biddle began to document the Puerto Rican community on New York City's Lower East Side, in the neighborhood known as Loïsaida or Alphabet City. At the time, the area was known for a flourishing

illegal drug trade and high levels of violent crime and unemployment. The photographs won an award for best photo essay from the Missouri School of Journalism in 1987.

During the 1980s, Biddle developed a book centering around the photographs. In 1988 and 1989, he visited subjects of his 1970s photographs – including those in prison and those who had moved to Puerto Rico – and conducted interviews with them. The resulting book contains 46 of Biddle's photographs from the 1970s, juxtaposed with text from the later interviews and new photographic portraits. *Alphabet City* was published by the University of California Press in 1992, with an introduction by Miguel Algarín.

## **Scope and Content Note**

The Geoffrey Biddle Alphabet City papers primarily concern the publication and creation of the book *Alphabet City*. The collection contains photographs, recordings, correspondence, clippings, notes, book mock-ups, and other materials related to New York City's Lower East Side in the late 1970s and the 1980s.

Photographs include prints and contact sheets of the images published in the book, as well as other photographs that Biddle took in New York City during the period. Interviews that Biddle conducted with *Alphabet City*'s subjects in 1988 and 1989 are represented by sound recordings and partial transcripts. Sound materials are unavailable pending digitization.

Correspondence and research files include letters to and from people featured in the book; correspondence with publishers (primarily academic ones) who ultimately rejected the book; and clippings and notes that Biddle made regarding the project that became *Alphabet City*, as well as other New York-based photography projects.

The development of the concept, text, and layout of *Alphabet City* is documented through correspondence with staff at the University of California Press; drafts and mock-ups of the book; galleys; and Biddle's notes on content and design.

## **Key Terms**

### **Subjects**

Authors and publishers  
Puerto Ricans -- New York (State) -- New York

### **Genre/Physical Characteristic**

Correspondence  
Dummies (printed matter)  
Interviews  
Manuscripts for publication  
Photographs

### **Geographic Names**

Lower East Side (New York, N.Y.) -- Pictorial works  
Lower East Side (New York, N.Y.) -- Social conditions  
New York (N.Y.) -- Pictorial works

New York (N.Y.) -- Social conditions

**Occupations**

Photographers

## Container List

### Photographs

- b. 1 f. 1-11 Lower East Side 1977-1989
- b. 1 f. 12 Lower East Side and the Bronx 1979-1987  
Includes photographs of boxers taken for *GEO* magazine.
- b. 1 f. 13 *Alphabet City Portraits* 1988-1989
- b. 7 f. 1-14 *Alphabet City* late 1970s
  - b. 8 *Alphabet City* late 1970s (14 matted prints.)  
Includes one photograph that was not published in *Alphabet City*.
  - b. 9 *Alphabet City* late 1970s (10 matted prints.)
  - b. 10 *Alphabet City* late 1970s (19 matted prints.)
- b. 2 f. 1-7 Interviews  
Transcripts and release forms.
- b. 1 f. 14 Notebooks 1988-1989  
Notes on interviews and ideas for *Alphabet City*.
- b. 3 f. 1-4 Correspondence and Research 1979-1994
- Publication
  - b. 4 f. 1 University of California Press Correspondence 1991-1992, 2001
  - Drafts and Mock-Ups
    - b. 4 f. 2-8 Circa 1992
    - b. 4 f. 9 *Alphabet City -- Unbound Pages* 1992  
Complete unbound copy of final book.
  - v. 1 *Loisaida* 1980s  
Mock-up with introduction by Biddle but no other text. Incorporates photographs that were not used in the final version of *Alphabet City*. Images are glued to the pages and some have come loose.
- b. 5 f. 1-6 *Alphabet City* circa 1989  
Complete mock-up closely resembling final version.
  - o. 1 Uncut Galleys
  - b. 6 Portraits (1988-1989) with Text (19 prints.)