



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

Guide to the

Laura Adorkor Kofey research collection

1926-1981

Sc MG 228

Processed by Hanna Bailey.

Summary

Creator: Newman, Richard, 1930-2003

Title: Laura Adorkor Kofey research collection

Date: 1926-1981

Source: Donated by Richard Newman, October, 1987. SCM 88-36

Abstract: The Richard Newman/Laura Adorkor Kofey Research collection consists of Newman's research notes and the manuscripts, in its various drafts, for his chapter on Kofey in his book, "Black Power and Black Religion : Essays and Reviews," (1987). Included is Newman's correspondence concerning his research on Kofey and the AUC, newspaper clippings, photocopies of telegrams between UNIA officials and Marcus Garvey concerning Kofey, pamphlets, and information concerning the AUC, and Newman's notes.

Access: Advance notice required.

Preferred citation: Laura Adorkor Kofey research collection, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library

Language of the Material: English

Processing note: Processed by Hanna Bailey; Machine-readable finding aid created by Apex Data Services; revised by Terry Catapano.

Creator History

Laura Adorkor Kofey was born in 1875, outside of Accra in present day Ghana. She immigrated to the U.S. in the mid-1920's, and appears to have settled in Detroit for a time. Kofey claimed to have come at her father, King Knesipi's request, to encourage African Americans to move to Africa. Although her African parentage has been proven, the details of her life before she joined Marcus Garvey's United Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), are unknown. In 1926 Kofey moved from Detroit to Florida and became active in the Miami division of the UNIA. At this time, Garvey was imprisoned and problems arose when Kofey acted without his authorization. She collected funds from UNIA members, ostensibly to purchase a sawmill to send to Africa and also to provide African Americans passage to Africa.

Because he believed she was taking advantage of his followers, Garvey publicly disassociated the UNIA from Kofey in 1927. In addition, UNIA officials accused Kofey of being a fraud; among other accusations, they claimed she was born in Georgia. An eloquent speaker, Kofey rapidly acquired a large following, including many Garveyites. In order to organize her followers, she established the African Universal Church (AUC) in 1927. The church placed Garvey's ideology of black nationalism within a religious framework, stressing community advancement. On March 8, 1928, Kofey was shot and killed while addressing a group of her followers in Miami. The UNIA was suspected of the murder, but nothing was ever proven. Kofey's followers continued to maintain the AUC, and the memory of their leader. After her death, the AUC established branches in New York, Alabama, and Georgia. In more recent years the number of AUC congregations has diminished. The details of this biographical note were primarily drawn from Newman's article. Richard Newman received his Bachelor of Arts degree from Maryville College. He went on to study at Union Theological Seminary, Syracuse University, and Harvard University. Newman taught at Vassar College, Syracuse University, and Boston University, where he was chairman of the Department of Social Sciences. He was later Senior Editor of G.K. Hall and Co. in Boston, and Executive Editor at Garland Publishing Inc. in New York. He has been with the New York Public Library since 1981. His essay, "Warrior 'Mother of Africa's Warriors of the Most High God': Laura Adorkor Kofey and the African Universal Church", appeared in his book, *Black Power and Black Religion: Essays and Reviews* (1987). In addition, Newman has written and edited several other publications.

Scope and Content Note

The Richard Newman/Laura Adorkor Kofey Research Collection is divided into two series: Writings and Research File. The first includes seven drafts of Newman's article, "Laura Adorkor Kofey and the African Universal Church." These drafts are arranged chronologically in order of revisions, the final one being almost identical to the final essay which appears in Newman's book. The drafts contain handwritten annotations throughout. They illustrate Newman's editing process leading to his final product. The second series of the collection is the Research File. This series contains several files: Newman's correspondence from 1972-81 concerning his research on Kofey and the AUC; his grant application to Boston University; clippings that he used in his research; photocopies of telegrams between UNIA officials and Marcus Garvey concerning Laura Kofey; pamphlets and information concerning the AUC; and lastly Newman's handwritten notes, which are somewhat difficult to decipher.

Arrangement: Organized into two series: I Writings; II Research File

Key Terms

Subjects

African Americans -- Religion
Black nationalism -- United States
Black power -- United States

Titles

Preservation of the Black Religious Heritage Project funded by Lilly Endowment
Schomburg NEH Automated Access to Special Collections Project

Names

Newman, Richard, 1930-2003
Garvey, Marcus, 1887-1940
Kofey, Laura, Adorkor, 1875-1928
African Universal Church
Universal Negro Improvement Association

Container List

- b. 1 Writings
 - “Laura Adorkor Kofey And The African Universal Church”
- b. 1 f. 1 First Draft, Handwritten
- b. 1 f. 2 First Draft, Typewritten
- b. 1 f. 3 First Draft, Revised
- b. 1 f. 4 Revision #1
- b. 1 f. 5 Revision #2
- b. 1 f. 6 Revision #3, Partial Draft
- b. 1 f. 7 Revision #4
- Research Files
- b. 1 f. 8 Correspondence 1972-81
- b. 1 f. 9 Grant Research Application 1973
- b. 1 f. 10 Clippings 1926-73
- b. 1 f. 11 Telegrams 1927
- b. 1 f. 12 The African Universal Church 1928-68
- b. 1 f. 13 Handwritten Notes Ca. 1970'S