



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

Guide to the

Piri Thomas papers

1957-1980

Sc MG 180

Summary

Creator: Thomas, Piri, 1928-2011

Title: Piri Thomas papers

Date: 1957-1980

Size: 4 linear feet (10 archival boxes)

Abstract: The Piri Thomas Papers document several areas of Thomas' professional activities including his writings and his work with and involvement in social justice organizations from 1957 to 1982. The collection consists primarily of manuscripts for his books, films and plays, in addition to correspondence with and files on a variety of organizations focusing on artistic, social justice and educational issues.

Access: Advance notice required.

Conditions Governing Use: Materials may not be used for publication, reproduction, or other forms of copying except for single copies for research purposes without written permission of Piri Thomas or his representatives

Preferred citation: Piri Thomas papers, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library

Creator History

Author, poet and playwright, Piri Thomas is best known for his autobiography, "Down These Mean Streets" (1967) which deals with his early years growing up in East Harlem, the challenges of his Afro-Puerto Rican/Cuban heritage, and his involvement with drugs and gangs. His second and third books "Savior, Savior, Hold My Hand" (1972) and "Seven Long Times" (1974) are accounts, respectively, of the two years he spent in East Harlem following his release from prison and his incarceration. In addition to autobiographies, Thomas also wrote plays, screenplays, short stories and poetry. He was influential in the Nuyorican Movement as an author and poet and is acknowledged as one of the pioneers of spoken word poetry, a form of poetry performance.

Scope and Content Note

The Piri Thomas Papers document several areas of Thomas' professional activities including his writings and his work with and involvement in social justice organizations from 1957 to 1982. The collection consists primarily of manuscripts for his books, films and plays, in addition to correspondence with and files on a variety of organizations focusing on artistic, social justice and educational issues. The series, Personal Papers, 1967-1979 includes writings by and about Thomas, some prepared for publicity purposes, and an interview conducted in 1967 which provides extensive insight into his thinking at the time. The Manuscripts series, 1960s-1981 includes drafts in various stages of Thomas' published and unpublished work. There is associated correspondence, news clippings and reviews for his books, plays, screenplays and miscellaneous writings. The most complete documentation exists for "Down These Mean Streets," consisting of manuscript drafts and post-publication files. Of interest are files related to the banning of this book in the 1970s. There are drafts for his other autobiographies "Savior, Savior, Hold My Hand" and "Seven Long Times" as well as his 1978 book "Stories From El Barrio." Included in the collection are drafts of two unpublished book length manuscripts, "God's Gotta Know I'm Trying" and "In the Temple of the Child-Like Mind." A play script for "The Golden Streets," screenplay for "Petey and Johnny" and two teleplays, "The World of Piri Thomas" and "Repetitions of Indignity" form part of the series. There are also examples of Thomas' short stories, poetry and lyrics. The Correspondence series, 1962-1980, includes numerous requests to speak at public schools, colleges, prisons and organizations as well as requests to participate in conferences and other events. The Organizations/Agencies series, 1957-1980 documents Thomas' activism with organizations and government agencies on behalf of Puerto Ricans, youth and prisoners. Printed Material, 1962-1982 contains programs for his plays, films, poetry readings and recitations, and speaking engagements.

Arrangement: Papers organized into five series: I. Personal Papers; II. Correspondence; III. Manuscripts; IV. Organizations , Agencies; and V. Printed Material

Key Terms

Subjects

American drama
American literature
Authors, Puerto Rican
Black author
Censorship -- United States
Discrimination in education -- United States
Human rights -- United States

Genre/Physical Characteristic

Manuscripts

Geographic Names

New York (N.Y.) -- Social conditions -- 1960-1980

Names

Thomas, Piri, 1928-2011