Summary

Creator: Allegra, Donna

Title: Donna Allegra papers

Date: 1981-2002

Size: .4 linear feet (1 half linear feet box)

Source: Gift, Donna Allegra, 2002

Abstract: The Donna Allegra Papers, 1981-2002, contain twenty-five published essays, short stories and poems spanning across Allegra’s writing career. Prominent subjects include race and anti-black racism, feminism, social class, and butch gender identity. Allegra draws on her experiences as a construction electrician and a dancer in her fictional work, and her memoir writing explores her strained relationship with her mother and her travels in Guinea studying dance.

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Preferred citation: [Item], Donna Allegra papers, Sc MG 792, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, The New York Public Library

Creator History

Donna Allegra is an African-American lesbian writer, poet, essayist and dancer. Born and raised in Brooklyn, Allegra studied theater at Bennington College and Hunter College, graduating from New York University in 1977 with a Bachelor’s degree in dramatic literature, theater history and cinema. She worked as a construction electrician to support her writing and dancing, reviewed dance, theatre and film productions as a freelance cultural journalist, and produced lesbian and feminist-oriented radio programming for WBAI from 1975-1981.

Allegra was an early member of the Jemima Writers Collective, the first black lesbian writing group in
New York City. The collective grew out of the Salsa Soul Sisters, the oldest black lesbian organization in the United States, and was founded to encourage black women writers to share their creative work with each other in a supportive environment. Fellow members of Jemima included Candace Boyce, Georgia Brooks, Linda Brown, Robin Christian, Yvonne Flowers (Maua), Chirlane McCray, Irare Sabasu, and Sapphire. Allegra later joined the Gap-Toothed Girlfriends Writers Workshop.

A prolific writer of poetry, short stories and biographical essays, Allegra has been published in over thirty lesbian and feminist anthologies and numerous black and lesbian journals and magazines. In 2001, she published her first book, "Witness to the League of Blonde Hip Hop Dancers," a collection of twelve short stories and a novella about black lesbian dancers. In addition to her writing career, Allegra is an accomplished African folklore and jazz dancer.

Scope and Content Note

The Donna Allegra Papers, 1981-2002, contain twenty-five published essays, short stories and poems spanning across Allegra's writing career. Prominent subjects include race and anti-black racism, feminism, social class, and butch gender identity. Allegra draws on her experiences as a construction electrician and a dancer in her fictional work, and her memoir writing explores her strained relationship with her mother and her travels in Guinea studying dance.

The Donna Allegra Papers are organized into two series. The Biographical series, approximately 2000-2001, contains bibliographies of her published essays, short stories and poems, short biographies and various material related to public appearances. The Writings series, 1981-2002, consists of twenty-two photocopied biographical essays and short fiction centered on the black lesbian experience and organized chronologically by date of publication in gay and lesbian anthologies, including excerpts of an unpublished novel, "The Secrets of Light and Power." Also included are four poems published in two lesbian poetry anthologies.

Key Terms

Subjects
African American dancers
African American lesbians
African American women authors
African American women critics
African American women journalists
African American women poets
African Americans -- Race identity
African Americans -- Social conditions
Black author
Dancers -- New York (State) -- New York
Erotic literature writers
Essayists -- New York (State) -- New York
Feminism -- United States
Folk dancers -- New York (State) -- New York
Identity politics -- United States
Lesbian authors
Politics and culture -- United States
Sex role -- United States
Women dancers -- New York (State) -- New York
Working class authors

Genre/Physical Characteristic
Essays
Fiction
Poetry

Geographic Names
United States -- Race relations

Names
Allegra, Donna
Jemima Writers Collective (New York, N.Y.)
Salsa Soul Sisters (Organization : New York, N.Y.)