



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

Guide to the

Richard Witherspoon papers

1971-2006 [bulk 1980-1991]

Sc MG 791

Summary

Creator: Witherspoon, Richard

Title: Richard Witherspoon papers

Date: 1971-2006 [bulk 1980-1991]

Size: 2.09 linear feet (5 boxes, 1 oversize folder)

Source: Gift of Richard Witherspoon, May 2000.

Revision History: Finding aid updated by Lauren Stark.

Abstract: This collection includes Witherspoon's published and unpublished poetry, including his best known works: *An American Haiku Novel* and *On the Stair*, both in his signature style of linked-haiku or renga. A travel journal kept in Africa, a critique of the Kenyan educational system, a play about the Black hijacker of a bus, an educational program report, various printed material, notebooks, and miscellaneous correspondence complete the collection.

Preferred citation: [Item], Richard Witherspoon papers, Sc MG 791, 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: Accessioned by Steven G. Fullwood, June 2008.

Separated Materials:

Transferred to the Moving Image and Recorded Sound Division: audio and moving image materials. For more information, please contact the division at schomburgaudiovisual@nypl.org or 212-491-2270.

Transferred to the Photographs and Prints Division: photographs

Related Materials:

In the Life Archive (ITLA) miscellaneous collections, Sc MG 736, Manuscripts, Archives and Rare

Books Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture

Other Countries records, Sc MG 627, Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture

Creator History

Born in New York City in 1947, Richard Witherspoon (a.k.a. James R. Patton) is a poet who began publishing poetry in the 1970s and subsequently published with Black gay writing groups that produced *Yemonja: The Blackheart Collective* (1982), *Other Countries* (1988), and *The Road Before Us* (1991) as well as more generally in *Black Men/White Men* (1983), *The James White Review* (1993), *LYNX* (1989-1997), *frogpond* (1981), and *New Cicada* (1985-1997).

As a gay African American poet, physically and psychically in diaspora, Witherspoon, regarding the hegemonic oppression of difference and publishing nationally and internationally in print and on the Web, transgressively opposes this oppression by creating worlds of linked-haiku (renga) wherein, sexually, all flourish. Additionally, as an educator in the NYC public school system for over twenty-five years, he views education acquisition as a transgressive act of liberation against a system intent on limiting possibilities rather than expanding possibilities for all.

Scope and Content Note

This collection includes Witherspoon's published and unpublished poetry, including his best known works: *An American Haiku Novel* and *On the Stair*, both in his signature style of linked-haiku or renga. A travel journal kept in Africa, a critique of the Kenyan educational system, a play about the Black hijacker of a bus, an educational program report, various printed material, notebooks, and miscellaneous correspondence complete the collection.

Arrangement: Arranged into 5 series: I. Personal papers; II. Writing; III. Urban League, Harlem Manpower Education Program; IV. Correspondence; and V. Journals and notebooks.

Key Terms

Subjects

African American dramatists
African American gays
African American poets
Authors, Black

Names

Witherspoon, Richard
Other Countries

Container List

Personal papers 1984-1994

- b. 1 f. 1 Biographical information
- b. 1 f. 2 Family
- b. 1 f. 3 Africa journal 1987 July 29-September 9
Includes Burkina Faso, Mali, and Senegal.
- b. 1 f. 4 "Experiences in Kenya's Educational System", University of Kenya 1994
September

Writing 1972-2007

Poetry

- b. 1 f. 5 *An American Haiku Novel manuscript with Ross Paxton*
- b. 5 f. 1 o. 1
- b. 1 f. 6 "Education Sentimentale" manuscript
- b. 1 f. 7 *On the Stair manuscript*
- b. 1 f. 8-9 Untitled manuscripts 1972
- b. 1 f. 10-11 Poems 1982-2007
- b. 5 f. 2-5
- b. 1 f. 12 June Jordan Poetry Workshop 1978
- b. 1 f. 13 Other Countries Workshop
- b. 2 f. 1-2 Playscripts
Includes *Why* and various, unproduced scripts.
- b. 2 f. 3 Fiction
- b. 2 f. 4 Unidentified manuscripts
- b. 2 f. 5 Published works 1973-1997
- b. 2 f. 6 *Yemenja promotional material* ca. 1981
- b. 2 f. 7-10 Urban League, Harlem Manpower Education Program 1973-1974
Includes reports, correspondence, memoranda, and notes.
- b. 2 f. 11 "James R. Patton vs. New York City School Construction Authority" 2000
- b. 2 f. 12-13 Notes and printed matter

Correspondence

- b. 3 f. 1 1971
- b. 3 f. 2 1972-1977
- b. 3 f. 3 1978
- b. 3 f. 4 1979
- b. 3 f. 5 1980
- b. 3 f. 6 1981
- b. 3 f. 7 1982
- b. 3 f. 8 1983
- b. 3 f. 9 1984
- b. 3 f. 10 1986
- b. 3 f. 11 1987-1989
- b. 3 f. 12 1990s

Correspondence (cont.)

- b. 3 f. 13 undated
- b. 4 Journals and notebooks