



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

Processed by Janice Quinter, May 2005.

Summary

Creator: Thomas, Piri, 1928-2011

Title: Piri Thomas papers

Date: 1957-1980

Size: 4.17 linear feet (10 boxes)

Source: Gift of Piri Thomas, 1981.

Abstract: Piri Thomas was an author, poet, and playwright. The Piri Thomas papers document several areas of Thomas's professional activities, including his writings and his work with and involvement in social justice organizations, from 1957 to 1982.

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's representatives.

Preferred citation: [Item], Piri Thomas papers, Sc MG 180, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, The New York Public Library

Language of the Material: English A small amount of material in this collection is written in Spanish.

Processing note: Processed by Janice Quinter, May 2005.

Separated Materials:

Transferred to the Photographs and Prints Division: photographs

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 he 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's 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.

Arrangement: Papers organized into five series: I. Personal papers; II. Correspondence; III. Manuscripts; IV. Organizations and agencies; and V. Printed material.

Key Terms

Subjects

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

Genre/Physical Characteristic

Manuscripts (documents)

Geographic Names

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

Names

Thomas, Piri, 1928-2011

Container List

Personal papers 1967-1979

The series, Personal papers, 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.

- b. 1 f. 1 Biographical information
- b. 1 f. 2 Interviews 1967
- b. 1 f. 3 Receipts 1968-1979
- b. 1 f. 4 Correspondence 1972-1979

Correspondence 1962-1980

The Correspondence series includes numerous requests to speak at public schools, colleges, prisons, and organizations as well as requests to participate in conferences and other events.

Arranged first alphabetically, followed by general correspondence in chronological order.

- b. 1 f. 5 Actor's Guild, Speakers Bureau 1967-1972
- b. 1 f. 6 Alan Burke Show, WNEW Television 1967-1968
- b. 1 f. 7 The Ann Arbor Teach-In on Prisons 1977
- b. 1 f. 8 Art Without Walls 1977
- b. 1 f. 9 Canadian Broadcasting Corporation re interview 1967
- b. 1 f. 10 Caravan House 1967-1969
 - Includes correspondence with Peter Bloch regarding appearances.
- b. 1 f. 11 Chicago freelance appearances 1976-1979
- b. 1 f. 12 Comstock, New York prison 1977-1978
- b. 1 f. 13 Creative Artists Public Service Programs (CAPS) panelist 1978-1979
- b. 1 f. 14 Fan letters 1967-1979
- b. 1 f. 15 Foundations 1962-1971
- b. 1 f. 16 From children, students, and friends 1969-1973
- b. 1 f. 17 Inquiries (general) 1967-1973
- b. 1 f. 18 Kennedy, Edward and Robert 1967-1968
- b. 1 f. 19 National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders re testimony 1967
- b. 1 f. 20 P.E.N. (Poets, Playwrights, Essayists, Editors, Novelists) Prison Writing Program Committee 1975-1977
- b. 1 f. 21 Personal business (relative to writing) 1969-1974
- b. 2 f. 1 Puerto Rican community 1967-1969
 - Includes a significant speech delivered by Thomas at WNET in 1972, during a protest in which Puerto Rican activists demanded a show by, for, and about the Latino community. After the protest, this group created REALIDADES, the first public affairs show by, for, and about Latinos to ever air on national television, and the first bilingual show on national television.
- b. 2 f. 2 Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre Company 1975-1977
- b. 2 f. 3 Speaker Bureau (Hurok and others) 1971-1976
- b. 2 f. 4 Thank you letters to Thomas 1968-1980
- b. 2 f. 5 Women Job Corps, Kansas City appearance 1967
- b. 2 f. 6 1960-1966

Correspondence (cont.)

- b. 2 f. 7-8 1967
Includes 23rd Precinct.
- b. 2 f. 9-10 1968
- b. 2 f. 11 1969
- b. 2 f. 12 1970-1972
- b. 2 f. 13 1973-1975
- b. 2 f. 14 1976
- b. 2 f. 15 1977
- b. 3 f. 1 1978-1980
- b. 3 f. 2 undated

Manuscripts 1960s-1981

The Manuscripts series includes drafts in various stages of Thomas's 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 for 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 playscript 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's short stories, poetry, and lyrics. Additionally, a researcher discovered a very significant speech, undocumented in any historical account.

Arranged first alphabetically by title, then alphabetically by genre (lyrics, playscripts, poems, etc.).

- b. 3 f. 3 "Amigo Brothers"
9 pages.
- b. 3 f. 4 "The Blue Wings and the Puerto Rican Knights"
7 pages.
- b. 3 f. 5 "Christmas as un Muchacho on Barrio's Way"
5 pages.

Down These Mean Streets

- b. 3 f. 6-8 Rough drafts
- b. 3 f. 9-10 Annotated drafts
- b. 3 f. 11 Fragments
- b. 3 f. 12 Reviews 1967
- b. 3 f. 13 Clippings 1967-1974
- Correspondence
- b. 3 f. 14 Cameron, Angus (Alfred A. Knopf) 1967-1969
- b. 3 f. 15 General 1967-1977
- Book banning
- b. 4 f. 1 Correspondence 1971-1972
- b. 4 f. 2 Statements at public meeting 1971
- b. 4 f. 3 Court case brief on banning in the Island Trees Union Free School District 1979

Manuscripts (cont.)

Down These Mean Streets (cont.)

Book banning (cont.)

- b. 4 f. 4 Woodworth, Mark. "The Banning of El Barrio, Down These Mean Streets of Censorship" typescript 1972
- b. 4 f. 5 Clippings 1971-1981
- b. 4 f. 6 "El Christmas Tree"
Annotated, 6 pages.
- b. 4 f. 7-12 "God's Gotta Know I'm Trying"
394 pages.
"In The Temple of the Child-Like Mind"
- b. 4 f. 13-14 Draft
144 pages.
- b. 4 f. 15 Handwritten draft
115 pages.
- b. 5 f. 1 Heavily annotated draft
103 pages.
- b. 5 f. 2-3 Annotated pages
- b. 5 f. 4-5 Draft
130 pages.
- b. 5 f. 6-7 Final version
136 pages.
- b. 5 f. 8 "Putting It on for Juanita"
Annotated, 8 pages.
Savior, Savior, Hold My Hand
- b. 5 f. 9 Draft
167 pages.
- b. 5 f. 10 Annotated draft
- b. 5 f. 11-12 Incomplete drafts (includes handwritten)
- b. 5 f. 13 Grant application 1967
- b. 5 f. 14 Reviews 1972-1973
Seven Long Times
- b. 6 f. 1-4 Original typescript and explanation
203 pages.
- b. 6 f. 5 Synopsis of chapters
- b. 6 f. 6-7 Handwritten introduction and manuscript
- b. 6 f. 8 Reviews 1974
Stories from El Barrio
- b. 6 f. 9-10 Heavily annotated draft
112 pages.
- b. 6 f. 11 Correspondence 1977-1980
- b. 6 f. 12 Reviews 1978
- b. 6 f. 13 Lyrics, "Share with Me"
Playscripts
Golden Streets (Calles de Oro)
- b. 6 f. 14-15 Annotated typescripts 1969
- b. 6 f. 16 Proposal to develop play into film 1972-1973

Manuscripts (cont.)
Playscripts (cont.)
Golden Streets (Calles de Oro) (cont.)

- b. 6 f. 17 Correspondence, budget, and news clippings 1970-1973
- b. 7 f. 1-2 "104th Street" annotated draft
- b. 7 f. 3 "Sabado Morning" or "There's Gotta Be Sunshine" 1975
111 pages.
- b. 7 f. 4 Poems
- b. 7 f. 5 Review 1970
- Screenplays and telescripts
- b. 7 f. 6-10 *Petey and Johnny (a.k.a. East Side Story)*
Includes typescript, manuscript notes, fragment, and filming information.
Repetitions of Indignity (a.k.a. Hard Times in the Ghetto)
- b. 7 f. 11 Script for NBC television
115 pages.
- b. 7 f. 12 Film agreement, budget, and correspondence 1975
- b. 7 f. 13 *The World of Piri Thomas telescript for National Educational Television*
1968

Writing by others

- b. 8 f. 1 Bryant, Horace
- b. 8 f. 2-3 Turner, Faythe E. "Puerto Rican Writers on the Mainland: Neorican Writers, a Thematic Study" (dissertation) 1978
181 pages.
- b. 8 f. 4 Other 1976-1977
- b. 8 f. 5 Poetry

Organizations and agencies 1957-1980

This series documents Thomas's activism with organizations and government agencies on behalf of Puerto Ricans, youth, and prisoners.

Arranged in alphabetical order.

- b. 8 f. 6 ASPIRA Guild 1968-1973
Includes correspondence and reports on conferences.
- b. 8 f. 7 Conference on Literature and the Urban Experience, Rutgers University 1980
- b. 8 f. 8-9 Criminal Justice Coordinating Council, Organized Crime Committee 1971-1972
- b. 8 f. 10 Radio Free Norfolk, Inside Voices Prison 1974
- b. 8 f. 11 District 1199 Task Force, National Union of Hospital and Health Care Employees 1978-1979
- b. 8 f. 12 Latin Leadership Conference, Wesleyan University 1969
- b. 8 f. 13 Maryland State Correctional Education Libraries 1977-1980
- b. 8 f. 14 Southern Christian Leadership Conference, voter registration 1957-1962
U.S Commission on Civil Rights Hearings in New York 1972 February
- b. 9 f. 1-2 "The Status of the Public Education of Puerto Rican Children in the City of New York", report by Thomas
- b. 9 f. 3 Staff report on public education for Puerto Rican children in New York City
- b. 9 f. 4 WCBS-TV, Repertoire Workshop program transcripts 1962-1963
- b. 9 f. 5 White House Conference on Children and Youth 1970

Organizations and agencies (cont.)

Youth Development, Inc

b. 9 f. 6 Reports by Thomas and clippings 1960-1962

b. 9 f. 7 Staff meeting minutes 1960-1961

Printed material 1962-1982

This series contains programs for his plays, films, poetry readings and recitations, and speaking engagements.

b. 10 f. 1 Book catalogs 1972-1978

b. 10 f. 2 Organization descriptions

News clippings

b. 10 f. 3-6 About Thomas 1962-1980

b. 10 f. 7-8 General 1962-1979

b. 10 f. 9 Publicity 1967-1978

From publishing companies and the Speakers Bureau.

b. 10 f. 10 Newsletters 1966-1975

Programs

b. 10 f. 11 A - I 1967-1980

b. 10 f. 12 J - N 1967-1979

b. 10 f. 13 N - W 1968-1982

b. 10 f. 14 Reports 1969-1973