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877

CURTIS POWELL

PAPERS

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CURTIS POWELL PAPERS, 1935-2002
(Sc MG 877)

Bulk Dates: 1968-1971, 1991-2002

Extent: Shelving Unit: 2 boxes
Linear Feet: .8

Source and Date: Gift of Susan Powell, 2013

Processor's Name: David B. Hobbs

Date Finding Aid Completed: April 11, 2013

Abstract: Scientific research papers and presentations, patent and grant applications, publications and correspondence relating to Black Panther activities

Organization note: Collection is organized into 3 series: Personal Papers, Black Panthers Papers, and Professional Papers

Access: Unrestricted access

Reproduction: All requests subject to limitations noted in divisional policies on reproduction

Copyright: Information on copyright (literary rights) available from repository

Citation: (Item), Curtis Powell Papers, Sc MG 877, Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library

Index Terms

Names: Kinshasa, Kwando Mbiassi
Powell, Curtis
Sprung, Horn, Kramer & Woods

Subject: Black Panther Party
Black Panthers Trial, New York, 1970-1971
New York University
Patent Medicines
Trypanosomiasis
Trypanosomiasis-Africa
Trypanosomiasis in animals
Vaccine

PREFACE

This finding aid was prepared as part of an archival processing project arranged through support of New York University's Department of English, in collaboration with the Schomburg Center.

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**CURTIS POWELL (1935-2002). PAPERS, 1935 - 2002, (bulk dates, 1968-1971 & 1991-2002)
2 boxes (.8 linear feet).**

Biographical Sketch

Curtis Nelson Powell was born on October 25, 1935 in Orange, New Jersey. When he was 18 years old, he joined the Marine Corps and served in Korea. During his military tenure, Powell read a chemistry book that piqued his interest in science, and following his honorable discharge in 1955, he enrolled in Seton Hall University. He graduated in 1959 with a degree in Chemistry and worked in research laboratories at San Francisco State College, Albert Einstein College of Medicine, and the University of Paris, studying brain enzymes and carcinogenesis, finally receiving his PhD from the University of Stockholm (Sweden) in 1968.

While conducting research in Paris, Powell spoke of meeting Malcolm X, whom he said "turned me around" ("This is Dr. Curtis Powell..." Box 1 Folder 2). After receiving his PhD, he returned to New York to take a post-doctoral position at the Columbia College of Physicians & Surgeons' Institute of Cancer Research, and joined the New York branch of the Black Panther Party. On April 2, 1969, despite limited evidence, Powell, along with 20 other Party members, were arrested and charged with conspiracy, attempted murder and arson. Held under a prohibitive bail of \$50,000, Powell remained in jail until May 1971 when he and the other Panthers were acquitted of all charges.

Following his release, Powell spent ten months working on viral oncology for the Public Health Research Institute of the City of New York before moving to Lusaka, Zambia to take a position as a lecturer at the University of Zambia. During his six years at the University of Zambia, he began his research on trypanosomiasis - a viral infection transmitted by mosquito bites that can cause Chagas disease or sleeping sickness - that would define the rest of his professional career. In 1979, supported in part by a grant from the World Health Organization, Powell relocated to Kenya to dedicate himself to independent research on immunoprotective solutions for trypanosomiasis and developing a potential vaccine. By 1982, he had been appointed Director of the Experimental Immunity Project on Trypanosome Research, an organization created by the non-profit Sclavo Vaccine Association. While in Africa, Powell made regular trips back to the United States and abroad to present his research, giving seminars at Yale, Harvard, and Columbia Universities

among others. Powell's work would lead to the discovery of a subcellular immunological property capable of providing a resistance to trypanosomiasis, a major breakthrough for combating a virus previously treated by aggressively limiting native mosquito populations rather than treating the disease itself. His work eventually led to the successful development of the "Powell Vaccine," which he patented in 1991.

By 1994, Powell had returned to New York City. Initially, he occupied a research position at New York University's Skirball Institute; however, the school's request for Powell's patent rights led him to vacate his position and seek external funding and the construction of his own, independent facility. Powell's return to New York roughly coincided with the 20th Anniversary of the 21 Black Panthers' release, and led to a reinvigoration of his involvement in the community, culminating with a public 25th Anniversary celebration at the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture and an appearance on the NBC program "Positively Black."

Powell's life was dominated by two great passions - civil rights and scientific research; yet these seemingly separate interests were rarely far apart. His decision to move to Africa and join the University of Zambia was at least in part motivated by a belief that, in his words, "the black man will never be totally respected until Africa is respected" (from "A Brief Biography of Dr. Curtis Powell" by Dr. Kwando Kinshasa, Box 1 Folder 1). Likewise, his academic credentials and institutional affiliations were valuable assets in securing the credibility of the incarcerated 21 Black Panthers and helping to engender public sympathy.

Powell died on June 7, 2002 and is buried in Calverton National Cemetery (NY).

Scope and Content

The Curtis Powell Papers document Powell's career as a scientific researcher and as an activist for black life and culture. The Papers reveal the emergence of a unique social consciousness as well as decades of work towards a significant immunological problem - the incidence of sleeping sickness in livestock - taking Powell from New Jersey and New York City to Kenya and Zambia, and then back to the United States. The Papers are divided into three series: PERSONAL, BLACK PANTHERS and PROFESSIONAL PAPERS.

The slight **PERSONAL PAPERS** series (1 folder) includes the few documents from Powell's early life, including a copy of his birth certificate, his military discharge, his PhD diploma and a letter written to his mother from Sweden. Later documents include several iterations of his curriculum vitae, as well as an introductory "biography," written by John Jay College (City University of New York) African American Studies professor Dr. Kwando Kinshasa, that contextualizes Powell's scientific pursuits alongside his awakening social consciousness. Powell's personal correspondence contains a few letters from African acquaintances seeking assistance to continue their own higher education and several emails from molecular biologist Harvey Bialy, received in the months before Powell's death.

The **BLACK PANTHERS PAPERS** series (2 folders) contains primarily printed materials, from both Powell's arrest and incarceration or from the 1990s. Included are photocopies of: photographs taken by Roz Payne at the time of Powell's arrest; copies of "Panther 21 Trial News," "On The Ideology of the Black Panther Party," "Panther 21 - Strangers to Justice"; an article Powell wrote for "The Black Panther"; a petition for release submitted by the Columbia Presbyterian Medical Center community; and an internal report, prepared by the Black Panther Party, on the arrest of the New York 21. This series also contains documentation from the later 20th and 25th anniversary reunion efforts of the Panthers, including some correspondence from Black Panther Party members, including letters from Mutulu Shakur and Mark Cook, as well as letters regarding the organization of the 25th Anniversary celebration. Powell saved programs and handbills from the event, as well as copies of the letters negotiating his appearance on "Positively Black," which taped shortly before the anniversary celebration.

The bulk of the collection is contained within the **PROFESSIONAL PAPERS** series (.6 lin. ft.), which is divided into subseries corresponding with major activities within Powell's professional life. The first, **Research and Reports**, contains all of the formal reports Powell wrote to formalize his findings, as well as the correspondence necessary for the collection and interpretation of his research information. As most of the reports within this subseries are undated, and exist in several overlapping iterations, the reports themselves have been organized alphabetically. Likewise, some drafts of these reports contain a title page declaring them to be an "appendix," because they were taken from the appendices of Powell's 1983 curriculum vitae. The smaller **Publications and Presentations** subseries consists of copies of the published versions of reports he had

written, and papers related to presentations he gave. The next subseries, **Patents**, contains Powell's correspondence with his attorneys at Sprung, Horn, Kramer & Woods and the formal documentation they sent to him. Included in the **Funding** subseries are applications and inquiries created by Powell and his associates to secure funding for his research and the eventual manufacture of the "Powell Vaccine," as well as his correspondence with New York University detailing their disagreement on Powell's patent rights and his eventual loss of funding from the school. Finally, the **Kakmasia** subseries contains documents relating to a Kenyan Health Outreach organization with which Powell was involved during his time in Africa.

Provenance

Gift of Susan Powell
SCM 13-04

Processed by David B. Hobbs
2013

Container List

Box Folder**PERSONAL PAPERS**

1 1 Personal Papers

PANTHERS SERIES

2 Panthers 21 - 1970-1972 (arrest and
 incarceration)

3 Panthers' Reunions (1991, 1996)

PROFESSIONAL PAPERS

Research & Reports

4 Correspondence, 1983-1997

5 "Cattle Field Trials to Finalize a Candidate
 Immunoprotective Antigen Against
 Trypanosomes"

6 "Experimental Immunity Against Trypanosomiasis
 in Cattle" (with Fred Mkunza & William M.
 Olaho)

7 "Experimental Immunity Against Trypanosomiasis
 in Rabbits"

8 "Identification and Characterization of a
 Potential Peptide Vaccine Against
 Trypanosomiasis" (with Thomas
 R. Odhiambo and Richard P. Novick)

9 "Immunity Against Trypanosome Infection in the
 Mouse by a Non VSG Antigen"

10 "The Investigation of the Development of Murine
 Immunity to Trypanosomes" (with Ynolde
 Andrews)

11 "The Kapagani Cattle Experiment Immunity Trial"

12 "Partial Protection Against Natural
 Trypasomiasis After Vaccination With A
 Flagellar Pocket Antigen From
 Trypanosoma brucei rhodesiense" (with Fred
 Mkunza and William M. Olaho)

13 "The Partial Isolation and Characterization of
 an Immunoprotective Antigent Against
 Hemoflagellate Protozoan Parasites Derived By
 Recombinant Methods" (with Naomi Balaban and
 Richard P. Novick)

Container List**Box Folder**

1	14	"A Potential Peptide Vaccine Against Trypanosomiasis: Cattle Field Trials" (with Thomas R. Odhiambo)
	15	"The Zebu Cattle"
	16	Miscellaneous Data
		Publications & Presentations
2	1	1976-2002
		Patents
	2	1991-1993
	3	1994-2002
		Funding
	4	Undated-1994
	5	1994-2002
		Kakmasia
	6	Development

MANUSCRIPTS, ARCHIVES AND RARE BOOKS DIVISION

SEPARATION RECORD

The following items were removed from:

Name of Collection/Papers: Curtis Powell

Accession Number: SCM 13 - 04

Donor: Susan Powell

Gift X

Date received: Winter 2013

Date transferred: 11 April 2013

The item(s) listed below have been sent to the divisions indicated, either to be retained or disposed of there. Any items that should receive special disposition are clearly marked.

Schomburg Moving Image and Recorded Sound Division:

One videocassette, "Creativity is a Lonely Business" produced by Keith Brown

Schomburg Photographs and Print Division:

50 photographs and 8 boxes of slides