



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

Guide to the

Essex Hemphill and Wayson Jones collection

1981-2008 [bulk 1981-1996]

Sc MG 832

Processed by Joyce Joseph and Steven G. Fullwood, 2011.

Summary

Creator: Hemphill, Essex

Title: Essex Hemphill and Wayson Jones collection

Date: 1981-2008 [bulk 1981-1996]

Size: 0.83 linear feet (2 boxes)

Source: Gift of Wayson Jones, 2010.

Revision History: Finding aid updated by Lauren Stark.

Abstract: The Essex Hemphill and Wayson Jones Collection documents the collaboration and friendship of poet (Hemphill) and musician (Jones), and their artistic endeavors to foreground the experiences of Black gay life in the United States.

Preferred citation: [Item], Essex Hemphill and Wayson Jones collection, Sc MG 832, 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: Processed by Joyce Joseph and Steven G. Fullwood, 2011.

Separated Materials:

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, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture

Creator History

Essex Charles Hemphill was an African American poet, performer, editor, and cultural activist. Hemphill and Wayson Jones, a musician and performer, became roommates while attending the University of Maryland where Jones was a music student. Their friendship developed into a creative partnership when Jones joined Cinque, a poetry ensemble group that Hemphill co-founded with Larry Duckette in 1983. The trio performed in Washington, D.C. and appeared in Marlon Riggs's documentary about Black gay men, *Tongues Untied*. In 1985, Hemphill and Jones began performing as a duo and were recipients, along with filmmaker Michelle Parkerson, of two residencies at the Painted Bride Arts Center in Philadelphia in 1986 and 1987.

Hemphill continued to write and perform until his death on November 4, 1995, due to complications associated with HIV/AIDS. Currently, Jones continues to perform in the D.C. area, and has been exploring representation ideas in his work, especially in regards to racial/sexual orientation.

Scope and Content Note

The Essex Hemphill and Wayson Jones collection documents the collaboration and friendship of poet (Hemphill) and musician (Jones), and their artistic endeavors to foreground the experiences of Black gay life in the United States. The collection contains biographical information by and about Hemphill and Jones, as well as various tributes, 1981-2008. Hemphill's published and unpublished writings, 1982-1994, and scripts for collaborative performances and projects, 1983-1994, are included. There are also programs, flyers, and clippings.

Arrangement: Arranged into 4 series: I. Personal; II. Writings; III. Collaborations; and IV. General.

Key Terms

Subjects

African American composers
African American editors
African American entertainers
African American gay men
African American musicians
African American poets
African American political activists
African Americans in the performing arts
Authors, Black
Gay activists -- United States
Gay artists -- United States
Gay men in literature
Gay men's writings, American

Names

Duckette, Larry, 1953-2001
Hemphill, Essex
Jones, Wayson, 1957-
Parkerson, Michelle
Riggs, Marlon T.

Container List

Personal 1981-2008

This series is comprised primarily of biographical information written by and about Hemphill, various tributes, and planning documents for the Hemphill memorial, "Vital Signs", in 1996. There are also a few letters from Hemphill to Jones, and biographical information about Jones in the form of a transcribed interview..

Biographical information

- b. 1 f. 1 Hemphill, Essex 1985-2008
- b. 1 f. 2 Hemphill, Essex and Wayson Jones 1985-2004
- b. 1 f. 3 Correspondence 1989-1991
- b. 1 f. 4 Tributes to Hemphill 1995
- b. 1 f. 5 "Vital Signs" Memorial 1996

Writings 1982-1994

This series consists of Hemphill's published and unpublished writings. Of the published writings, there are copies of the chapbooks *Some of the People We Love Are Terrorists* (1982), *Diamonds Was in the Kitty* (1982), *Plums* (1983), as well as a manuscript for the chapbook "Conditions" (1985, 1994). Unpublished writings contain 5 manuscripts: "Family Jewels" (1989), "Critical Care" (1993), "Domestic Life" (1994), "Tomb of Sorrow" (n.d.) and "Vital Signs" (n.d.). There are also articles and essays published by Hemphill and material on various projects, including information on incomplete projects such as: "The Evidence of Being Project", an oral history project about Black gay lifestyles in the early 20th century; "Besides Companions", an anthology of Black, gay men's short fiction; and "A Dose of Color", a collaborative event with the filmmaker Isaac Julien.

Chapbooks

- b. 1 f. 6 *Plums* 1982
- b. 1 f. 7 *Some of the People We Love Are Terrorists* ca. 1982
- b. 1 f. 8 *Diamonds Was in the Kitty* 1983

Manuscripts

- b. 1 f. 9 *Published (Conditions)* 1985-1994

Unpublished

- b. 1 f. 10 "Family Jewels" 1989
- b. 1 f. 11 "Critical Care" ca. 1993
- b. 1 f. 12 "Domestic Life" 1994
- b. 1 f. 13 "Tomb of Sorrow" undated
- b. 1 f. 14 "Vital Signs"

- b. 1 f. 15 Articles

- b. 1 f. 16 Projects

Collaborations 1983-1994

This series contains several scripts, including one for an early Cinque performance (n.d.). There is a script for the Hemphill and Jones collaboration, *Earth Life* (1985), and the screenplay for the film, *Tongues Untied* (n.d.). There are also scripts for group collaborations with Michelle Parkerson, including "Voicescapes" (1986), as well as a Jones and Parkerson collaboration titled "The Amazon Papers" (n.d.).

- b. 1 f. 17-19 Cinque 1983-1985
Includes an early performance script and other writers' works.
- b. 2 f. 1-2 Hemphill and Jones 1985
Includes scripts for *Earth Life* and Marlon Riggs's *Tongues Untied*.

Collaborations (cont.)

- b. 2 f. 3-5 Hemphill, Jones, and Michelle Parkerson 1986
Includes manuscript for "Murder on Glass" and scripts for "Voicescapes".
- b. 2 f. 6 Jones and Parkerson, "The Amazon Papers" script undated
- b. 2 f. 7 Unidentified collaboration, "Persistent Voices" undated

General 1981-1999

This series consists of programs, flyers, and clippings. Programs and flyers contain almost identical information in different formats. These materials chronicle various Hemphill and Jones performances, including their Painted Bride performance for Voicescapes and their frequent visits to d.c. space. There is also information on The Black Gay and Lesbian Leadership Forum and a flyer for a benefit performance for the National Coalition of Black Lesbians and Gays. The clippings include an array of newspaper reviews, interviews, and features on Hemphill and Jones from many news outlets including the *Washington Post*, *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, and the *Washington Blade*.

- b. 2 f. 8 Flyers
- b. 2 f. 9 Programs
- b. 2 f. 10 Clippings