



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

Guide to the

Brad Johnson papers

ca. 1970-2011

Sc MG 844

Processed by Bob Lobou and Steven G. Fullwood, June 2001.

Summary

Creator: Johnson, Brad, 1952-2011

Title: Brad Johnson papers

Date: ca. 1970-2011

Size: 2.29 linear feet (6 boxes)

Source: Gift of Brad Johnson, 2011.

Revision History: Finding aid updated by Lauren Stark.

Abstract: Brad Johnson was a gay African American poet and writer. The Brad Johnson papers include biographical materials, published and unpublished poems, and correspondence.

Preferred citation: [Item], Brad Johnson papers, Sc MG 844, 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 Bob Lobou and Steven G. Fullwood, June 2001.

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

Brad Johnson was a gay African American poet and writer. Born in California in 1952, and raised in

Philadelphia, he graduated from Yale University after spending his junior year in France. From 1981-1985, he also served in the Navy aboard the U.S.S. Nassau as an operations specialist. Following his discharge, he worked briefly as a clerk and typist for the U.S. Mint and as a translator for the Franklin Institute, before obtaining a civil service appointment in 1986 as a mail handler with the U.S. Postal Service in Philadelphia. Johnson remained in that position until at least the mid-1990s, if not longer. His early poems, from the 1970s, were in French. His publishing career as a poet began in 1985 and continued through the 1990s, chiefly in anthologies including *In the Life: A Black Gay Anthology*, edited by Joseph Beam, and Black, gay-oriented periodicals such as *The Pyramid Periodical*. Major themes of his poems include love, romance, sex, homophobia, and loneliness. After the 1990s, he described his writing output as "scant" and eventually he became "reclusive and stopped writing." Johnson died in 2011 from complications due to AIDS.

Scope and Content Note

The Brad Johnson Papers, 1952-2011, are arranged into three series: Biographical, Writings, and Correspondence. The Biographical file documents the major events in his life: education, Navy career, work history, involvement in gay organizations, publishing history, and diaries. The Writings series forms the bulk of the collection, especially his poems, both published and unpublished. The Correspondence series contains a significant amount of letters from a former lover, the musician and conductor, Charles Darden, and others. Of note is a long "coming-out" letter to his parents expressing the anger and loneliness of the gay Black man in America.

Arrangement: Arranged into three series: I. Biographical; II. Writing; and III. Correspondence.

Key Terms

Subjects

African American authors
African American gays -- Poetry
African American poets
African Americans -- Intellectual life
AIDS (Disease) -- United States
American poetry -- African American authors
Authors, Black
Gay and lesbian studies
Homosexuality
Racism -- United States

Names

Darden, Charles
Johnson, Brad, 1952-2011
Yale University

Container List

Biographical ca. 1970-1985

This series includes personal effects such as Johnson's high school yearbook, several Yale term papers, and a memorial book from the USS Nassau, the ship on which Johnson served in the Navy for 4 years.

- b. 1 f. 1-3 Personal information
- b. 1 f. 4-5 Address books
 - Yale University
- b. 1 f. 6 Transcripts
- b. 1 f. 7 France
- b. 1 f. 8 The Black Orchids
- b. 1 f. 9 Gay Alliance
- b. 1 f. 10 General
- b. 2 f. 1 Yearbook
 - Work experience
- b. 2 f. 2 Translation
- b. 2 f. 3 General
- b. 2 f. 4-6 Military records
- b. 3 Diaries

Writing 1978-2005

This series is largely comprised of poetry, most of which appears to be unpublished. The published poems include "When He Love," his first publication, in *Essence Magazine* (June 1978). Other poems were published in *In The Life: A Black Gay Anthology*, *The Road Before Us*, *Other Countries*; and one in the first issue of *The Pyramid Periodical*. Notable is Johnson's contribution to *Milking Black Bull* (1993-1994), which includes his poetry suite, "Dare to Hear", dedicated "For Charles Darden and Michael Khoury, who loved me." After that, his publishing history falls silent. The large collection of manuscript poems are arranged alphabetically by title, followed by a folder of untitled poems, and another containing poems written in French during Johnson's tenure at Yale. There are also three issues of the *Gator Gazette*, a shipboard newspaper from his years on the U.S.S. Nassau, each containing a poem by Johnson, 1982-1983. A miscellaneous file includes letters from several editors, soliciting contributions from Johnson, but there is no indication if anything was published. Other writings include an extensive review of Essex Hemphill's chapbook, *Earth Life*, which Johnson wrote for *Black/Out* (1986), the journal of the National Association of Black Lesbians and Gays, edited by Joseph Beam. Lastly, there is a file of short prose pieces (essays and short stories), most undated.

Includes some poetry in French.

- b. 4 f. 1 "When He Love"
- b. 4 f. 2 *In the Life: A Black Gay Anthology contributions*
- b. 4 f. 3 *Other Countries contributions*
- b. 4 f. 4 *The Pyramid Periodical contributions*
- b. 4 f. 5 *The Road Before Us contributions*
- b. 4 f. 6 *Milking Black Bull contributions*
- b. 4 f. 7-16 Alphabetically arranged poems
- b. 4 f. 17-20 Untitled poems
 - b. 4 f. 21 Essex Hemphill review
 - b. 4 f. 22 Surrealism essay for Yale

Writing (cont.)

b. 4 f. 23 Essays and short stories

b. 4 f. 24 Miscellaneous

Correspondence 1973-2004

This series is comprised primarily of incoming letters and a small file of copies of outgoing letters. The largest group of letters is from a former lover, Charles Darden (1946-2013), a conductor and musician. Most letters date from the 1970s (bulk dates 1973-1977). Many of the letters were written from Europe, specifically when Darden's career took him abroad. There appear to be gaps in their correspondence, as there are some letters from Darden in the late 1980s, none in the 1990s, and few in the early 2000s. There is also a typed letter from Maya Angelou (January 1974) acknowledging receipt of poems from Johnson, but giving reasons for not accepting them for publication, instead forwarding them to Paula Giddings at Howard University Press. Miscellaneous letters range from the 1970s through the 2000s. Two letters are particularly revealing of Johnson: 1) a handwritten, multipage letter in the form of an interview with his brother, Michael, in which they discuss sexual and family issues, and 2) a long letter written (again in longhand) shortly before Johnson's death, to Diana Lachatanere, then curator of the Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Division of the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture.

b. 5 f. 1 Family

b. 5 f. 2 "Interview" with brother Michael

b. 5 f. 3 Angelou, Maya

b. 5 f. 4-7 Darden, Charles

b. 5 f. 8 De Veaux, Alexis

b. 5 f. 9 Khoury, Mike

b. 5 f. 10 Juergen (Australian friend)

b. 5 f. 11 Johnson, Randall/Letty Lecour

b. 5 f. 12-16 Miscellaneous 1970s-2000s

b. 5 f. 17 Unsigned

b. 5 f. 18 Mackie, Deryl

b. 5 f. 19 Other people's work

b. 5 f. 20 Outgoing

b. 5 f. 21 Miscellaneous

b. 6 Oversized