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Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture,
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Guide to the
Collection of screenplays on Malcolm X
1968-1975
Sc MG 969

Processed by Lauren Stark, October 2019.

Summary

Creator: Baldwin, James, 1924-1987

Title: Collection of screenplays on Malcolm X

Date: 1968-1975

Size: 0.83 linear feet (2 boxes)

Source: Purchase from Boo-Hooray, July 2019.

Abstract: This collection consists of ten early screenplays written for a film on the life of Malcolm X by various authors, including James Baldwin, Hakim A. Jamal, Arnold Perl, Joseph A. Walker, and Calder Willingham.

Preferred citation: [Item], Collection of screenplays on Malcolm X, Sc MG 969, 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 Lauren Stark, October 2019.

Related Materials:

James Baldwin papers, Sc MG 936, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, The New York Public Library

The Malcolm X collection: papers, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, The New York Public Library

Malcolm X manuscripts, Sc MG 951, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, The New York Public Library

Creator History

After the assassination of Malcolm X and the publication of his autobiography in 1965, the rights for a film on his life were acquired by Marvin Worth, a producer, who hired James Baldwin to write the screenplay. Baldwin had a difficult time finishing the screenplay, so Worth hired Arnold Perl to assist; the two completed a 250-page manuscript which was not viewed favorably by Columbia Pictures. Baldwin left the project, and it was sold to Warner Brothers. A few years later, Baldwin published his script and Perl produced a documentary. Other drafts were written by such notable writers as Calder Willingham, Hakim A. Jamal, and Joseph A. Walker. The film was not completed, however, until 1992 when Spike Lee adapted the Baldwin and Perl script.

Scope and Content Note

This collection consists of ten draft screenplays for a film about Malcolm X, all written between 1968-1975. Three of the screenplays were written by James Baldwin with a fourth written by Baldwin and Arnold Perl. Two additional screenplays were written by Arnold Perl, two by Joseph A. Walker, and one each by Hakim A. Jamal and Calder Willingham. These scripts are mostly photocopies, but many contain handwritten edits and revisions, including two of Baldwin's manuscripts. Most are dated.

Arrangement: Arranged first alphabetically by author, then chronologically.

Key Terms

Subjects
Authors, Black
Documentary films
Motion picture plays
Screenwriters

Genre/Physical Characteristic
Motion pictures (visual works)

Names
Baldwin, James, 1924-1987
Jamal, Hakim A., 1931-1973
Perl, Arnold
Walker, Joseph A., 1935-
Willingham, Calder, 1922-1995
X, Malcolm, 1925-1965

Container List

Baldwin, James 1968-1972

b. 1 f. 1   Film treatment typescript (photocopy) 1968 July

Draft for *One Day, When I Was Lost*, Baldwin's screenplay about Malcolm X. Includes a note from Baldwin discussing the difficulties that affected the draft, which were created by the conflicts between the estate of Malcolm X and the Nation of Islam.

b. 1 f. 2   *One Day, When I Was Lost typescript (photocopy)* undated

Incomplete screenplay, marked "draft". Includes handwritten edits, presumably by Baldwin.

b. 1 f. 3   Complete first draft typescript (photocopy), written with Arnold Perl 1969 May

Includes a letter to Marvin Worth at Columbia Pictures. Also contains a few handwritten edits, but it is unclear if they are Baldwin's, Perl's, or both.

b. 1 f. 4   *One Day, When I Was Lost typescript (photocopy)* 1972 April

b. 1 f. 5-6   *Jamal, Hakim A. From the Dead Level: Malcolm X and Me* ca. 1971

Typescript draft for his 1972 book; photocopy with handwritten edits.

Perl, Arnold 1970-1972

b. 2 f. 1   *Malcolm X draft typescript (photocopy)* 1970 January 27

Draft for a 1972 documentary; written with the assistance of Emily P. Kaplin and Sedat Pakay.

b. 2 f. 2   *Malcolm X final script* 1972 May 22

For Warner Bros. documentary.

b. 2 f. 3-4   *Walker, Joseph A. To Turn a Corner draft typescripts* 1975

Two drafts for an unproduced film on Malcolm X; the draft in folder 4 was originally bound (cover removed for preservation purposes).

b. 2 f. 5   *Willingham, Calder. Malcolm X draft typescript* ca. 1970

Photocopy with some handwritten edits for an unproduced film.