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Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division

Guide to the

Joseph Black papers

1961-1977

Sc MG 78

Home to Harlem Project, funded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation

Processed by Debra Carter.

Summary

Creator: Black, W. Joseph (William Joseph), 1934-1977

Title: Joseph Black papers

Date: 1961-1977

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Abstract: W. Joseph Black (1934-1977) was an architect and urban planner. The Joseph Black Papers document his research and architectural projects, particularly Visions of Harlem and the Harlem Music Center.

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Creator History

W. Joseph Black was born July 25, 1934 in Carthage, Texas, and was raised in Chicago. He attended the University of Illinois at Chicago and completed his undergraduate education at Columbia University. He later attended the Columbia University School of Architecture and earned his Master of Science degree in Urban Planning. Although Black's career was short-lived, he traveled extensively and held architectural and planning positions in Africa, Latin America, Europe and New York City during the 1960s and 1970s. It was in Harlem, however, that Black chose to make his major architectural and cultural statements.

As a consultant to the New York City Planning Commission, the Model Cities Administration and the New York State Urban Development Corporation, Black undertook comprehensive studies of Harlem's

planning needs and designed programs for a variety of community development projects such as the Park Avenue North Study, the St. Nicholas Historic District, and the Fifth Avenue Park Walk. This work, in combination with a long-range architectural research project on Harlem begun in the 1960s increased and deepened his knowledge of, and commitment to, that community.

In 1968 Black received the A.W. Brunner Award from the Architectural League of New York to study the role of black architects and planners in solving critical urban problems. The Brunner award enabled Black to concentrate on the development of a project that included a mixed-income residential, cultural and commercial complex, which he called the "Gateway to Harlem." He formed the Harlem Music Center (HMC) in 1969 as the first phase of the cultural complex.

The purpose of the Center was to create music workshops, performance areas, archives, facilities for teaching, performing, recording, research and cultural exchange. To assist in the development of the Center, Black enlisted a number of musicians and concerned citizens, including Max Roach, Herbie Hancock, Donald Byrd and Archie Shepp, to serve in a variety of capacities ranging from teaching to service on the advisory board. Although the Harlem Music Center operated for approximately five years, Black was not successful in implementing the residential and commercial components of the Gateway to Harlem complex, and eventually the Harlem Music Center folded.

While Black devoted much of his time to the Harlem Music Center, he continued his involvement in other career activities. Primary among them were the *Visions of Harlem: Past, Present and Future* and the *Black Builders of America* projects. *Visions of Harlem*, originally conceived in 1970 as an exhibition and book project, was sponsored and funded by the Museum of Modern Art. *Visions* was to be a celebration of Harlem's history and architecture from the seventeenth to the twentieth centuries. After a series of delays, the exhibition opened at the Studio Museum in Harlem in November 1974 and the American Institute of Architects Gallery in Washington, D.C. in 1975. The book project apparently was never completed, although a press release announcing its publication by Architectural Record Books was released in 1976. For the *Black Builders* project, Black received a National Endowment for the Arts grant in 1973. This project focused on the many known and unknown builders in this country, 1619 to 1974. The outcome of this project is not clear. In 1975 Black moved to Washington, D.C. He obtained a teaching post at the University of the District of Columbia in the Department of Community Planning and Development, which he held through 1976.

Black was married to Romaine Hill; they had no children. He died of cancer at the age of forty-two in 1977.

Scope and Content Note

The W. Joseph Black Papers document his research and architectural projects, particularly *Visions of Harlem* and the Harlem Music Center. There is little personal information in the collection, although his vita provides both personal and professional data. A good portion of the material is not original, but has been kept because of its integral relationship to Black's work.

Key Terms

Occupations

African American architects

Subjects

African American architecture
African Americans in the professions
Architecture -- New York (State) -- New York
Black author
Community development corporations
Historic buildings -- New York (State) -- New York
Urban renewal -- New York (State) -- New York

Geographic Names

Harlem (New York, N.Y.)
Harlem (New York, N.Y.) -- History
Harlem (New York, N.Y.) -- Social life and customs

Names

Black, W. Joseph (William Joseph), 1934-1977
Harlem Music Center
Harlem Urban Development Corporation

Container List

b. 1 f. 1 Biographical Information

Correspondence

CORRESPONDENCE, 1961-1977, has been arranged into outgoing and incoming letters. The letters for the most part deal with Black's efforts to find employment and support for his various professional plans and ideas, such as the Music Center, and the Park Avenue Walkway.

b. 1 f. 2 Incoming 1961-1977

b. 1 f. 3 Outgoing 1965-1977

Writings

WRITINGS consist primarily of several undated drafts of *Visions of Harlem: Past, Present and Future*. It is not clear whether the manuscript was completed or if the manuscript in the collection is the final version. There are also manuscripts for at least two other books or articles on Harlem, from an architectural perspective.

b. 1 f. 4 Harlem

b. 1 f. 5 Rare Views Of Harlem

b. 1 f. 6 Manuscript For Book On Harlem

b. 1 f. 7 *Visions Of Harlem - Correspondence* 1970-1976

b. 1 f. 8 *Visions - Part I*

b. 1 f. 9 *Visions - Part I*

b. 1 f. 10 *Visions - Part I*

b. 1 f. 11 *Visions - Part I*

b. 2 f. 1 *Visions - Part I*

b. 2 f. 2 *Visions - Part II*

b. 2 f. 3 *Visions - Part II*

b. 2 f. 4 *Visions - Part II*

b. 2 f. 5 *Visions - Part III*

b. 2 f. 6 *Visions - Part III*

b. 2 f. 7 *Visions - Part III*

b. 2 f. 8 *Visions - Part III*

b. 2 f. 9 *Visions Of Harlem*

b. 2 f. 10 *Visions Of Harlem - Draft*

Research Material

RESEARCH MATERIAL, n. d. This series is composed of photocopies of materials Black apparently collected for his various projects and general knowledge. The types of materials included are articles, reports, bibliographies, and photographs covering a variety of subjects focused on Harlem. Among them are Harlem street scenes, architecture, landmarks, and Harlem pre- and post-1960. Some of the photographs can be found in the Schomburg Center's Joseph Black Photograph Collection, while many others appear to be photocopies he received from repositories and individuals while doing research.

b. 3 f. 1 Bibliographies

b. 3 f. 2 Distribution Of Negro Families

b. 3 f. 3 Distribution Of Negro Families

b. 3 f. 4 East Harlem

b. 3 f. 5 Harlem Architecture - Street Scenes

b. 3 f. 6 Harlem Architecture - Street Scenes

Research Material (cont.)

- b. 3 f. 7 Harlem - Street Scenes
- b. 3 f. 8 Harlem Churches
- b. 3 f. 9 Harlem Community Programs
- b. 4 f. 1 Harlem Before 1960
- b. 4 f. 2 Harlem After 1960
- b. 4 f. 3 Harlem Real Estate
- b. 4 f. 4 Harlem Real Estate
- b. 4 f. 5 Harlem's Top People - 1953
- b. 4 f. 6 Jumel Mansion
- b. 4 f. 7 Landmarks
- b. 4 f. 8 New York Landmarks
- b. 4 f. 9 Negro In New York
- b. 4 f. 10 Studio Museum In Harlem
- b. 4 f. 11 Handwritten Notes
- b. 4 f. 12 Miscellaneous Articles

Projects

PROJECTS include the Harlem Music Center records, 1968-1974, and Harlem Urban Development Corporation projects, as well as materials from other projects.

- b. 5 f. 1 *Visions Of Harlem - Exhibition* 1970-1974
- b. 5 f. 2 *Visions Of Harlem - Film*

Harlem Music Center

From the Harlem Music Center records it is clear that Black was the main driving force behind the Music Center. He served as executive director from its inception until 1973, when he resigned (see memo dated April 11, 1973 Box 5, folder 6) as a result of lack of funding and apparent loss of interest on the part of the Board members. The Harlem Music Center files are incomplete, but what is available gives a fairly adequate picture of the operation. Among the files are correspondence, minutes, memoranda and financial records.

- b. 5 f. 3 Correspondence 1968-1974
- b. 5 f. 4 Gateway To Harlem Proposals 1969
- b. 5 f. 5 By-Laws, Lease 1969-1973
- b. 5 f. 6 Memoranda 1968-1973
- b. 5 f. 7 Agenda & Minutes 1969-1972
- b. 5 f. 8 Financial Records 1969-1972
- b. 5 f. 9 Financial Records 1970-1973
- b. 5 f. 10 Financial Records 1970-1974
- b. 5 f. 11 Press Releases 1971
- b. 6 f. 1 Harlem Music Center
- b. 6 f. 2 Harlem Music Center
- b. 6 f. 3 Community Workshop
- b. 6 f. 4 Programs 1971-1973
- b. 6 f. 5 Christmas Gala 1971
- b. 6 f. 6 Printed Material
- b. 6 f. 7 Clippings

Projects (cont.)

- b. 6 f. 8 Development Projects
- b. 6 f. 9 East Harlem Multi-Service Center
Harlem Urban Development Corporation

The Harlem Urban Development Corporation material includes some original reports written by Black, such as the Park Avenue North study. The majority of the material, however, consists of project reports and other data he collected and/or received as a result of his work with the HUDC. A file entitled "Development Projects" (Box 6, folder 8) contains typed carbon copies of project outlines and descriptions that may be the products of Black's work, but they are not identified as such. Also found in this folder are the few items from his tenure with the Model Cities Administration.

- b. 6 f. 10 Living In Harlem
- b. 6 f. 11 Manhattan North Development
Fifth Avenue - Park Walk & Miscellaneous
- b. 7 f. 1 Park Avenue North - Draft
- b. 7 f. 2 Park Avenue North Study
- b. 7 f. 3-11 Harlem Urban Development Corporation
- b. 8 f. 1-5 Harlem Urban Development Corporation
- b. 8 f. 6 Development Proposal
- b. 8 f. 7 Environmental Protection
- b. 9 f. 1 Housing - Glean Chase
- b. 9 f. 2 Housing - Urban Design Group
- b. 9 f. 3 Randalls Island - Wards Island
- b. 9 f. 4 Schomburg Center
- b. 9 f. 5 Outside - New York City
- b. 9 f. 6 Outside - New York City
- b. 9 f. 7 Photographs
- b. 9 f. 8 Photographs - Architectural Designs
- b. 9 f. 9 Photographs - Architectural Designs
- b. 10 Printed Material