



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

Guide to the

Eugene Gordon papers

1927-1972

Sc MG 117

Processed by Andre Elizee, 2006.

Summary

Creator: Gordon, Eugene, 1891-1974

Title: Eugene Gordon papers

Date: 1927-1972

Source: Purchased from Bolerium Books, which acquired the papers from Gordon's granddaughter, Chiwe Gordon.

Abstract: The collection ranges from 1927 to 1972 and consists of correspondence, manuscripts and printed matter. Gordon's writings, the bulk of the collection, are organized into three categories: Autobiographical, Fiction and Nonfiction. The autobiographical narratives range from stories of growing up black in New Orleans and rural Georgia to an enemy encounter during World War I in France. There is also a detailed diary of a writing retreat in the New Hampshire White Mountains in 1933. His fiction work includes a compilation of short stories and a complete draft of his novel "Picnic in Court House Square." The nonfiction work ranges from his 1920s articles on the black press and a series of travel articles written in the Soviet Union in the 1930s, to later articles and essays on integration, the columnist George Schuyler and the civil rights movement. "Black Women's Long Tough Course: from 'dat gal' Carline to This Woman Angela," written in defense of Angela Davis in 1972 was his last major essay.

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Language of the Material: English

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Creator History

The African-American journalist and fiction writer Eugene Gordon was born in Oviedo, Florida in 1891, but was raised in the waterfront section of New Orleans. He studied English and journalism at Howard and Boston Universities and served in World War I in Europe, before joining the staff of the Boston Daily Post as an assistant feature writer in 1919. From 1924 to 1927, he conducted annual surveys of the black press for Opportunity magazine. His short story "Game" was awarded first and second prizes

in Opportunity magazine's 1927 literary contest. His work, both fiction and nonfiction, appeared in that early period in American Mercury, Plain Talk, Scribner's, the Nation magazine and the Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science. Along with Helene Johnson and Dorothy West, he founded the Saturday Evening Quill Club of non-professional writers, and for three years edited its annual, The Saturday Evening Quill (1928-1930). He was also a co-founder of the Boston John Reed Club, and was the first editor of its magazine Leftward.

A member of the American Communist party since 1931, Gordon co-authored with Cyril Briggs a pamphlet, The Position of Negro Women, and lived for a time in the Soviet Union where he worked as a reporter for the Moscow Daily News. He worked as a feature editor, reporter and writer for the Worker from 1938 to 1946. In the 1950s, he was on the staff of the National Guardian newspaper and, as a correspondent for that publication, attended the historic 1955 Afro-Asian Bandung Conference in Indonesia, which gave birth to the Non-Aligned Movement. In addition, he wrote a column, "Another Side of the Story", for the African-American press from 1958 to 1959. Gordon was also an artist whose paintings were shown at the Hudson Guild Gallery, the District 65 union hall and the Countee Cullen branch of the New York Public Library.

Also an author, Gordon's first wife, Edythe Mae, wrote short stories and verses and was featured in the Saturday Evening Quill. A compilation of her work was published in 1996 (Selected Works of Edythe Mae Gordon, New York: G.K. Hall). His second wife, June Kroll, organized textile and millinery workers in the 1930s, and was executive director of the Emma Lazarus Federation of Jewish Women's Clubs at her death in 1967. By an earlier marriage, she had been the daughter-in-law of Ella Reeve Bloor, the widely known "Mother Bloor" of Communist Party politics. At his own death in 1974, Eugene Gordon was praised by Communist Party Chairman Henry Winston as a longtime activist in literary affairs and "a dedicated partisan in the fight on many fronts for Democracy and Socialism".

Scope and Content Note

The Eugene Gordon Papers range from 1927 to 1972 and are organized into six series: PERSONAL, CORRESPONDENCE, ORGANIZATIONS, WRITINGS, the BANDUNG AFRO-ASIAN CONFERENCE and PRINTED MATTER AND FRAGMENTS. They consist for the most part of occasional correspondence, manuscripts and memorabilia. The last series, relevant only to a detailed study of the author's work, is in offsite storage.

Arrangement: I. Personal papers; II. Correspondence; III. Organizations; IV. Writings; V. Bandung Afro-Asian Conference; VI. Printed matter

Key Terms

Subjects

African American communists
African American journalists
African Americans -- Autobiographical fiction
African Americans -- Massachusetts -- Boston
African Americans -- Segregation -- Southern States
American fiction -- African American authors

Genre/Physical Characteristic

Diaries

Names

Cunard, Nancy, 1896-1965

Davis, Angela Y. (Angela Yvonne), 1944-

Gordon, Edythe Mae, 1896-

Gordon, Eugene, 1891-1974

Gordon, June, 1901-1967

Kotane, Moses, 1905-

Schuyler, George S. (George Samuel), 1895-1977

Asian-African Conference

Chelsea Minority Action Organization (New York, N.Y.)

League of Struggle for Negro Rights (U.S.)

Saturday Evening Quill Club (Boston, Mass.)

Container List

Personal

- b. 1 f. 1 Biographical
- b. 1 f. 2 Autobiographical
- b. 1 f. 3 Diary, Telephone and Appointment Books
- b. 1 f. 4 Military Record
- b. 1 f. 5 Financial
- b. 1 f. 6 Art, Exhibitions
- b. 1 f. 7 Sketchbooks
- b. 1 f. 8 Pertaining to Gordon's Death
- b. 1 f. 9 Gordon, Edythe Mae - First Wife
- b. 1 f. 10 Gordon, June - Second Wife
- b. 1 f. 11 Pertaining to June Gordon's Death
- b. 1 f. 12 Gordon, Gene - Son
- b. 1 f. 13 Miscellaneous

Correspondence

Gordon's letters to the editor written in the 1950s and 1960s were usually in the defense of the Soviet Union. His Nancy Cunard file in the CORRESPONDENCE series includes an exchange with Julius Lester who reviewed the 1969 reprint of Cunard's anthology *Negro*, and an essay "The Green Hat Comes to Chambers Street" written for Hugh Ford's memorial book, *Nancy Cunard: Brave Poet, Indomitable Rebel*. Gordon contributed an article "Blacks Turn Red" to Cunard's 1933 *Negro* anthology.

- b. 1 f. 14 1930-1973
- b. 1 f. 15 Letters to the Editor
- b. 1 f. 16 *Letter to Daily Worker Editor on the "War Effort"* undated
- b. 1 f. 17 Cunard, Nancy
 - b. 2 f. 1 Harper, Solomon
 - b. 2 f. 2 Hudson, Hosea
 - b. 2 f. 3 Jefferson School of Science 1953
 - b. 2 f. 4 Wright, Bruce
 - b. 2 f. 5 Memorandum re: Maude White Katz's "The Negro Woman, Her Heritage and Her Potential"

Organizations

Much like his correspondence, only fragments of the author's political papers have survived. They form part of the ORGANIZATIONS series. A one-page statement tantalizingly discusses the Montgomery Bus Boycott in the context of the 1955 Bandung Conference, and challenges a sacred cow of Communist Party orthodoxy, the so-called "Negro-Labor Alliance". The file for the Chelsea Minority Action Organization includes material Gordon developed for a course on "the Negro's Contribution to U.S. Civilization and Culture", and a detailed memorandum to Roland Hayes on "whether the Negro's organizations should be open to whites".

- b. 2 f. 6 Communist Party - U.S.A
- b. 2 f. 7 *Daily Worker Newspaper*
- b. 2 f. 8 League of Struggle for Negro Rights - Borden Branch (Boston)
- b. 2 f. 9 John Reed Club of Boston 1932
- b. 2 f. 10 *National Guardian Newspaper*

Organizations (cont.)

- b. 2 f. 11 Chelsea Minority Organization
- b. 2 f. 12 ILGWU Cooperative Houses
- b. 2 f. 13 Miscellaneous

Writings

Gordon's WRITINGS, the bulk of the collection, are organized into five subseries: Autobiographical, Fiction, Nonfiction, Research Material and Other Authors. The latter is a compilation of mostly published writings the author collected for the Saturday Evening Quill and for a proposed anthology of short stories.

Autobiographical

Much of Gordon's Autobiographical works are presumed to be fictionalized narratives, as his brother Buddy (handwritten note in the collection) did not recognize them as factual. They range from stories of growing up in New Orleans and rural Georgia, with scenes of racial violence and lynchings, to an enemy encounter during World War I in France. There is also a detailed diary of a writing retreat in the New Hampshire White Mountains in 1933.

- b. 2 f. 14-15 "Once I Was Afraid" (Early Childhood)
- b. 2 f. 16 "Georgia Country" (Fragment)
- b. 2 f. 17-18 "Southern Boyhood" - Outlines
- b. 2 f. 19 "*Southern Boyhood Nightmares*", *International Literature* 1934 (Missing Pages).
- b. 2 f. 20 "Southern Boyhood Nightmares" - Robert Charles Vignette
- b. 2 f. 21 "Negro in New Orleans"
- b. 2 f. 22 "Jim Peters' Black Boy"
- b. 2 f. 23 "Playing Hide and Seek with Jerry"
- b. 2 f. 24 "Integration"
- b. 3 f. 1 Diary - Writing Retreat, New Hampshire White Mountains 1933
- b. 3 f. 2 Fragments
- b. 3 f. 3 Poetry

Fiction

The Fiction subseries includes a compilation of short stories arranged alphabetically, stories written under the pseudonym Egor Don, skits written in the 1930s while on the staff of the Moscow Daily News, a radio script about Crispus Attucks and the American Revolution, a screenplay set in 1940 occupied Paris, featuring General Charles de Gaulle and French colonial administrator Félix Eboué, and a complete draft of his novel "Picnic in Court House Square". Of the latter, Gordon wrote that he rewrote the novel completely on a suggestion from a publisher, but that he never resubmitted it for publication.

- b. 3 f. 4 Short Stories, A - H
- b. 3 f. 5 Short Stories, K - Z
- b. 3 f. 6 *Opportunity Magazine* 1927
Egor Don (Pseudonym)
- b. 3 f. 7 "Angel Had Madelina"
- b. 3 f. 8 "Game"
- b. 3 f. 9 "Golden Eggs - Scrambled"
- b. 3 f. 10 Short Short Stories
- b. 3 f. 11 Clark Hall (Pseudonym) - "Killer at Large"
- b. 3 f. 12 Frank Lynn (Pseudonym) - "Robert Charles, Cop Killer of New Orleans"
- b. 3 f. 13 *Skits - Moscow Daily News*

Writings (cont.)

Fiction (cont.)

- b. 3 f. 14 Screenplay - The Fall of France to the Nazis (Featuring Charles de Gaulle, Félix Eboué)
- b. 3 f. 15 Radio Script - "Man Against Oppression"
- b. 4 f. 1-2 Story Ideas
- b. 4 f. 3-4 Notebooks
- b. 4 f. 5 Notes for Article on Charles Burroughs
- b. 4 f. 6 Notes for Various Stories
- b. 4 f. 7 Miscellaneous Notes
- Novel: "The Picnic in Court House Square"
- b. 4 f. 8 Book I
- b. 4 f. 9 Book II
- b. 4 f. 10 Book III
- b. 4 f. 11 Book IV
- b. 5 f. 1 Book V
- b. 5 f. 2 Book VI
- b. 5 f. 3 Book VII
- b. 5 f. 4 Letters and Notes

Non-Fiction

Organized by title, the author's Nonfiction work ranges from his 1920s articles on the Black Press published in *American Mercury* and *Opportunity*, to a series of travel articles written in the Soviet Union in the 1930s, and to his later, mostly non-published articles and essays on integration, the columnist Georges Schuyler and the civil rights movement. "Another Side of the Story" is a non-syndicated weekly column the author wrote for the black press in 1958-1959. "Black Women's Long Tough Course: from 'dat gal' Carline to This Woman Angela", written in defense of Angela Davis in 1973 was his last major essay. Gordon also wrote under several pseudonyms in the late 1950s and 1960s, perhaps to circumvent the effect of being blacklisted.

- b. 5 f. 5 The African and His Descendants in U.S. History"
- b. 5 f. 6 "Agnew's Odious Remarks" 1972
- b. 5 f. 7-8 "Another Side of the Story" 1958-1959
- b. 5 f. 9 "Black Women's Long Tough Course: from 'dat gal' Carline to This Woman Angela"
- b. 5 f. 10-11 "Black Women's Long Tough Course" - Drafts and Notes
- b. 5 f. 12 *Boston May Day Article. The Worker* 1933
- b. 5 f. 13 *Notes for a Review of Crisis of the Negro Intellectual*
- b. 5 f. 14 "Christianity and the Negro", *The Lantern* 1929
- b. 6 f. 1 "Civil Rights Movement Plus Voting Equals: Instrument of Political Change"
- b. 6 f. 2 "Cult of the White Woman" undated
- b. 6 f. 3 "From Gorky to Astrakhan on the Volga"
- b. 6 f. 4 "Happy Birthday to You" (Central Park)
- b. 6 f. 5 "Genuine vs. Bogus Democracy"
- b. 6 f. 6 "George Samuel Schuyler"
- b. 6 f. 7 "How Prostitution Has Been Fought and Almost Completely Eliminated in the USSR", *Moscow News* 1937
- b. 6 f. 8 "Integration: Irrelevant or Inevitable"
- b. 6 f. 9 "Liberals in Boston", *Plain Talk* 1930

Writings (cont.)

Non-Fiction (cont.)

- b. 6 f. 10 *Moscow Daily News Articles*
- b. 6 f. 11 Draft, "Nazi Fascism in Madison Square Garden"
- b. 6 f. 12 Comments and Notes on Negro Economics
- b. 6 f. 13 "Negro Fictionists in America"
- b. 6 f. 14 "*The Negro Grows Up*", *Plain Talk* 1929
- b. 6 f. 15 Negro History Class, Boston 1934
Also see oversize box 9.
- b. 6 f. 16 "*Negro Labor Advances*", *Jewish Life* 1953
- b. 6 f. 17 "The Negro's Newspapers"
- b. 6 f. 18 "*Negro Novelists and the Negro Masses*", *New Masses* 1933
- b. 6 f. 19 "*The Negro Press*", *American Mercury* 1925
- b. 6 f. 20-21 "New York City: Juvenile Delinquents' First Refuge" 1958
Written as Frank Lynn.
- b. 6 f. 22 Scrapbook of Printed Articles by Edmond Gordon 1930
 - b. 7 f. 1 "Stopover at Karachi"
 - b. 7 f. 2 "The Thirteen Most Interesting Negroes in the United States"
 - b. 7 f. 3 "The Thirteen Most Important Negroes in the United States"
 - b. 7 f. 4 "*Uncle Tom's Cabin to Stevedore*", *New Theatre* 1935
 - b. 7 f. 5 Untitled. New York State's Public Welfare Law and Black Immigrants from the South
 - b. 7 f. 6 "Vietnam" - Speech Notes
 - b. 7 f. 7 "You May Be a Criminal" (Smith-McCarran Act)

Research Material

The Research Material subseries is a small but rich sampling of primary source documents related to racial discrimination in the military and in New York City housing during World War II; the abduction and rape of a 24 year-old Alabama African-American woman, Recy Taylor, by a gang of white youth; and the extradition from New York of a Florida chain gang fugitive, Willie Reid. Reid's case is documented by a writ of habeas corpus his sister filed on his behalf, challenging the validity of his conviction and alleging he would be lynched upon his return to Florida. The housing incident involves Lawrence and Anita Patterson, an interracial couple a white friend had helped move into an apartment in the complex where she lived in the summer of 1943. All three tenants were soon ordered to vacate the premises, but a successful campaign organized with the help of the Communist Party prevented their eviction. Three months later, Lawrence Patterson would write of the World War II Louisiana labor battalion where he was conscripted, as "a prison without walls", and of his fellow soldiers as "coolie labor" assigned to the most demeaning tasks: "There isn't much patriotism here, and no love or respect for the country". Also included are a 1944 letter to Philadelphia Communist Party leader James Ford, providing eyewitness accounts of the frame-up of a South Carolina field hand, Arthur Middleton, on rape charges, and two reports by an African-American woman identified only as "Lilyan", addressed to the New York Council of the Arts, Sciences and Professions, charging that the phasing out of her title as Secretary to the National Director, Irving Adler, in 1953, in the midst of a labor dispute, was due to racial discrimination. These documents presumably laid the basis for articles Gordon wrote for the *Daily Worker*.

- b. 7 f. 8 Anita and Lawrence Patterson 1943
- b. 7 f. 9 Recy Taylor and Willie Reid Cases 1947, 1955
- b. 7 f. 10 James Ford Letter - Arthur Middleton Case 1944
- b. 7 f. 11 New York Council of the Arts, Sciences and Professions 1953

Other Authors

- b. 7 f. 12 *Saturday Evening Quill. (Bound Volume)*
- b. 7 f. 13 Introduction for an Anthology of Short Stories

Writings (cont.)

Other Authors (cont.)

- b. 7 f. 14 Bennett, Gwendolyn. "The Wedding"
- b. 7 f. 15 *Blue, Cecil. "The Flyer" (From Opportunity)*
- b. 7 f. 16 Fauset, Arthur Huff. "Symphoensque" and "Jumby"
- b. 7 f. 17 Hughes, Langston. "Luani of the Jungles"
- b. 7 f. 18 *Hurston, Zora Neale. "Sweat" (From Fire!)*
- b. 7 f. 19 Matthews, John F. "Clay", "Swamp Mocassin"
- b. 7 f. 20 Schalk, Gertrude. "The Red Cape"
- b. 7 f. 21 West, Dorothy. "Prologue to a Life", "The Typewriter" and "An Unimportant Man"

Bandung Conference 1955

Included in this series is an exchange of letters between Gordon and the editor of the National Guardian newspaper, and a draft of the article the newspaper refused to publish on both a "policy and journalism standpoint". Gordon who referred in his article to the African contribution to the Conference as incidental or minor, attributed his difference with the newspaper to white chauvinism and "blindness". The Bandung files also comprise several draft articles on Indonesian grassroots organizations; notes of an interview with Moses Kotane, the South African trade-unionist and Communist Party leader who attended the conference as an observer; an account of the author's negative encounter with Richard Wright at the Conference; and an essay, "Before - and Seven Years After", on the antecedents, origins and aftermath of Bandung. Also included are eight copious travel diaries, voluminous background notes, and a notebook discussing Richard Wright's *Color Curtain* and Carl T. Rowan's *The Pitiful and the Proud*. Gordon's work was generally consumed with Jim Crow racism and the defense of the Soviet Union, but at Bandung, the author looked beyond the East-West divide at issue of grassroots organizing and social justice in the post-colonial world. In that particular instance, he was perhaps ahead of his time.

- b. 7 f. 22 *National Guardian - Correspondence*
- b. 7 f. 23 Notes on North Africa
- b. 7 f. 24 Interview with Indonesian Peasant Leader
- b. 7 f. 25 "Background of the Afro-Asian Conference"
- b. 7 f. 26 Outline of Article on Dutch-Indonesian Dispute Over West Irian
- b. 8 f. 1 Notebook on Bandung, Alice Childress and Mayor Wagner's Visit to Harlem
- b. 8 f. 2 Draft Article on Indonesian Elections
- b. 8 f. 3 "The Coming Government of Indonesia" - Outlines and Notes
- b. 8 f. 4 "The Coming Government of Indonesia" - Draft Article *
- b. 8 f. 4 Outline of Remarks at Forum on Bandung
- b. 8 f. 5 "Before—and Seven Years After - Bandung"
- b. 8 f. 6 Bandung Notebooks
- b. 8 f. 7 Miscellaneous
 - b. 9 Oversize Material
 - b. 10 Printed Matter, Fragments and Notes