



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

Guide to the

Michele Wallace papers

ca. 1940-2004

Sc MG 739

Summary

Creator: Wallace, Michele

Title: Michele Wallace papers

Date: ca. 1940-2004

Size: 11.21 linear feet (29 boxes)

Source: Gift of Michele Wallace, December 2004.

Abstract: Michele Wallace is best known for her first book, *Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman*, which is considered the first collection of essays published by a black woman, and the first book published by a black feminist. The Michele Wallace papers document her career as a cultural critic, journalist, and intellectual since the late 1970s.

Conditions Governing Access:

Box 28 closed until 2030.

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Language of the Material: English

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Separated Materials:

Transferred to the Moving Image and Recorded Sound Division: audio materials. For more information, please contact the division at schomburgaudiovisual@nypl.org or 212-491-2270.

Transferred to the Photographs and Prints Division: photographs

Creator History

Michele Wallace is best known for her first book, *Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman*. A feminist scholar, cultural critic, and intellectual, Wallace began her writing career while she was a student at City College of New York. Throughout the 1970s, her articles, essays, interviews, and editorials appeared in newspapers and journals such as *The Village Voice*, *Newsweek*, *Ms. Magazine*, *The New York Times*, and *Transitions*. *Black Macho* (1979), Wallace's polemic, was an instant bestseller. It is considered the first collection of essays published by a black woman, and the first book published by a black feminist. Wallace has taught at various colleges and universities over the course of her career, in addition to writing freelance.

In Wallace's second book, *Invisibility Blues: From Pop to Theory* (1991), she considers black popular cultural icons such as Michael Jackson, Ntozake Shange, Spike Lee, and her mother, Faith Ringgold, as well as black feminism. The book helped to establish Wallace as a formidable cultural critic. In her third collection, *Dark Designs and Visual Culture* (2004), Wallace continues to mine her theoretical preoccupations on autobiography, black feminism, postmodernism, and pop culture, and she offers provocative critiques on intellectuals Henry Louis Gates, Jr., and bell hooks.

Scope and Content Note

The Michele Wallace papers document her career as a cultural critic, journalist, and intellectual since the late 1970s. Material includes personal papers, such as biographical information and correspondence; writing, which includes contracts, publicity material, and reviews for books, essays, and poetry, among others; and professional papers, such as teaching material, conference papers, and contracts.

Arrangement: Organized into 3 series: I. Personal; II. Writings; and III. Professional.

Key Terms

Subjects

African American artists
African American authors
African American families -- New York (State) -- New York
African American feminists
African American journalists
African American men
African American women
African Americans -- Psychology
American literature -- Women authors
Authors, Black
Criticism -- United States -- History -- 20th century
Feminism -- United States
Feminism and literature
Feminists in literature
Identity (Psychology) in literature
Modernism (Literature) -- United States
Philosophy, Modern
Popular culture -- United States -- History -- 20th century
Postmodernism
Rap (Music)

Geographic Names

Harlem (New York, N.Y.)

Genre/Physical Characteristic

Love letters

Names

Ailey, Alvin

Bradley, Ed, 1941-2006

Dunye, Cheryl

Fritz, Leah, 1931-

Fusco, Coco

Gates, Henry Louis, Jr.

Golden, Thelma

Guy-Sheftall, Beverly

Hendryx, Nona

hooks, bell, 1952-

Iman, 1955-

Jefferson, Margo

Jones, Grace

Lee, Spike

Mankiller, Wilma, 1945-2010

Micheaux, Oscar, 1884-1951

Nelson, Jill

Nesmith, Gene

Painter, Nell Irvin

Pryor, Richard, 1940-2005

Reed, Ishmael, 1938-

Riggs, Marlon T.

Ringgold, Faith

Shange, Ntozake

Smith, Barbara 1946-

Spillers, Hortense J.

Steinem, Gloria

Sykes, Roberta B.

Tate, Claudia

Walker, Alice

Wallace, Michele -- Black popular culture

Wallace, Michele -- Dark designs and visual culture

Wallace, Michele -- Invisibility blues, from pop to theory

Wallace, Michele -- Black macho and the myth of the superwoman

Wallace, Michele

West, Cornel

Williams, Sherley Anne, 1944-1999

Sisterhood (Organization : New York, N.Y.)

Women Students and Artists for Black Art Liberation

Container List

Personal 1962-1999

The Personal series includes biographical information on Wallace in interviews, statements, letters, and educational materials. Information about her mother, artist Faith Ringgold, and other family members is also found here. Significant correspondents include Wallace's former husband, Eugene Nesmith, and writers Jill Nelson, Ishmael Reed, Roberta (Bobbi) Sykes, Alice Walker, Cornel West, and Sherley Anne Williams.

- b. 1a f. 1 Biographical information
 - b. 1a f. 2-3 Marriage 1990
 - b. 1a f. 4 Rental agreement 1988
 - b. 1b Ringgold, Faith
 - "Chapter Five: A Letter to My Daughter Michele, in Response to Her Book, Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman in (7) Parts", from Being My Own Woman: An Autobiographical Sketch of the Life of Faith Ringgold* 1980
 - We Flew over the Bridge: The Memoirs of Faith Ringgold uncorrected proof* 1995
 - Anyone Can Fly Foundation
 - Printed matter
 - Includes articles, programs, and exhibition catalogs.
 - b. 2 Wallace, Robert journals 1962-1978
 - b. 3 Also includes a poem and notes.
- ### Correspondence
- b. 4 f. 1 Family
 - b. 4 f. 2 Borne, St. Clair
 - b. 4 f. 3 Burrows, Vinie
 - b. 4 f. 4 De Veaux, Alexis
 - b. 4 f. 5 Fritz, Leah
 - b. 4 f. 6 Fusco, Coco
 - b. 4 f. 7 Gates, Henry Louis, Jr
 - b. 4 f. 8 Giovanni, Nikki
 - b. 4 f. 9 Griffin, Ada Gay
 - b. 4 f. 10 Guy-Sheftal, Beverly
 - b. 4 f. 11 hooks, bell
 - b. 4 f. 12 Lester, Julius
 - b. 4 f. 13 McMillan, Terry
 - b. 4 f. 14 Nelson, Jill
 - b. 4 f. 15 Nesmith, Gene
 - b. 4 f. 16 Painter, Nell
 - b. 4 f. 17 Reed, Ishmael
 - b. 4 f. 18 Rich, Adrienne
 - b. 4 f. 19 Riggs, Marlon
 - b. 4 f. 20 Seale, Bobby
 - b. 4 f. 21 Sims, Naomi

Personal (cont.)

Correspondence (cont.)

- b. 4 f. 22 Smith, Barbara
- b. 4 f. 23 Spillers, Hortense
- b. 4 f. 24 Sykes, Roberta (Bobbi)
- b. 4 f. 25 Tate, Claudia C
- b. 4 f. 26 Walker, Alice
- b. 4 f. 27 West, Cornel
- b. 4 f. 28 White, Evelyn C
- b. 4 f. 29 Williams, Sherley Anne
- b. 4 f. 30 Willis, Deborah

Education

- b. 5 f. 1 New Lincoln High School diploma 1969
City College of New York
- b. 5 f. 2 Undergraduate papers
- b. 5 f. 3 Master's thesis
- b. 5 f. 4 Yale University
New York University
- b. 5 f. 5-7 "*The Strange Career of Race, Gender and Jim Crow in U.S. Silent Film: From Uncle Tom's Cabin to Oscar Micheaux, 1895-1929*", dissertation draft 1999
- b. 5 f. 8 Ph.D. records
- b. 6 f. 1-3

Writing 1975-2002

The Writing series contains five subseries, Books, Articles and essays, Interviews, Fiction, and Poetry. The Books subseries includes contracts; annotated galleys; correspondence with publishers; publicity materials; reviews for *Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman*, *Invisibility Blues: From Pop to Theory*, and *Dark Designs and Visual Culture*; and a file for the book, *Black Popular Culture: A Project* by Wallace and edited by Gina Dent. The Articles and essays subseries contains drafts for articles, essays, and critical papers published in the *Village Voice* and other magazines, journals, and anthologies. Her published interviews with Alvin Ailey, Nona Hendryx, Iman, Grace Jones, Wilma Mankiller, and Richard Pryor are included in the Interviews subseries. Wallace's unpublished novel, "Aint Nobody Business," can be found in the Fiction subseries, along with correspondence with publishers, and other unpublished fiction. The Poetry subseries contains a file of unpublished poems written by Wallace.

Arranged into 5 subseries: (1) Books; (2) Articles and essays; (3) Interviews; (4) Fiction; and (5) Poetry.

Books

Generally arranged chronologically.

Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman 1975-1995

- b. 6 f. 4 Book proposal 1975
- b. 6 f. 5-6 Galleys (annotated) 1978
- b. 27 f. 5
- b. 6 f. 7 Doubleday correspondence 1979-1989
- b. 6 f. 8 Reviews 1979-1991
- b. 6 f. 9 Publicity tour 1979
- b. 6 f. 10 Advances and royalties 1979-1982

Writing (cont.)

Books (cont.)

Black Macho and the Myth of the Superwoman (cont.)

- b. 6 f. 11 Verso 1990-1995
Includes contract, introduction, and correspondence.
Invisibility Blues: From Pop to Theory 1987-1997

- b. 7 f. 1 Contract 1989
- b. 7 f. 2 Book prototype
- b. 7 f. 3 Essays
- b. 7 f. 4 Uncorrected page proofs 1990
- b. 7 f. 5 Correspondence 1987-1997
- b. 7 f. 6 Reviews 1990-1992
- b. 7 f. 7 Tour and lecture schedule 1991
- b. 7 f. 8 Royalties 1992-1993

Dark Designs and Visual Culture 2002

- b. 7 f. 9-10 Essays
- b. 7 f. 11 Letters
- b. 7 f. 12 Photo illustrations and text
- b. 8 f. 1 *Black Popular Culture* 1988-1991
Includes contract and prototype.

Articles and essays

Arranged alphabetically by title or subject of article/essay.

- b. 8 f. 2 "Art on My Mind" 1995
- b. 8 f. 3 "Black Female Spectatorship and the Dilemma of Tokenism" 1997
- b. 8 f. 4 "Black Participation in the Film Industry: A History (1914-1993)"
- b. 8 f. 5 "Black Voices Series" 1994
- b. 8 f. 6 "The Birth of a Nation: Discourses of Reconstruction and Jim Crow"
- b. 8 f. 7 Bradley, Ed ("Ed Bradley at Ease") 1983
- b. 8 f. 8 "Count Your Blessings: The Gospel According to Ashford and Simpson"
1996
- b. 8 f. 9 "Defacing History"
- b. 8 f. 10 "The Envelope"
- b. 8 f. 11 "For Whom the Bell Tolls" 1995
- b. 8 f. 12 "*God Blessed the Child,*" liner notes for *Aretha Franklin: The Early Years*
1996
- b. 8 f. 13-14 "The French Collection" 1997
- b. 8 f. 15 "The Gap"
- b. 8 f. 16 Gates, Henry Louis
b. 9 f. 1
- b. 9 f. 2-3 Lee, Spike
- b. 9 f. 4 "Memoirs of a Bomb Thrower" 1996
- b. 9 f. 5 "Million March March" 1995
- b. 9 f. 6 "Modernism, Postmodernism and the Problem of the Visual in Afro-
American Culture" 1991
- b. 9 f. 7 "Multiculturalism to Oppositionality" 1991
- b. 9 f. 8 *Parrish Art Museum articles for Face Value: American Portraits* 1994-1995

Writing (cont.)

Articles and essays (cont.)

- b. 10 f. 1 "Poverty to Prosperity" 1976-1983
- b. 10 f. 2 Pryor, Richard ca. 1975
- b. 10 f. 3 "Race, Gender and Psychoanalysis in Forties Film"
- b. 10 f. 4 "Race, Gender and Speculations on the Visualization of Biopower in U.S. Imperialism"
- b. 10 f. 5 "Race, Gender and the Body in Contemporary Advertising: From Women's Magazines to Women's Rap" 1990
- b. 10 f. 6 Reed, Ishmael
- b. 10 f. 7 Shange, Ntozake
- b. 10 f. 8 "Tim Rollins + K.O.S.: The 'Amerika' Series" 1989
- b. 10 f. 9 "*Uncle Tom's Cabin: Before and After Jim Crow*"
- b. 10 f. 10 "The Watermelon Woman" 1996
- b. 10 f. 11 "When Black Feminism Faces the Music, and the Music Is Rap" 1990

Interviews

- b. 11 f. 1 Golden, Thelma 1994
- b. 11 f. 2-3 Book project (possibly) collection
- b. 11 f. 4 Clippings
- b. 11 f. 5 General 1975-1990s

Fiction

"Ain't Nobody's Business"

- b. 11 f. 6 Proposal outline
- b. 11 f. 7 Chapters 1-4
- b. 12 f. 1 Chapters 5-6 and epilogue
- b. 12 f. 2 Dial Press 1982
Includes contract and letters.
- b. 12 f. 3-5 Older and unfinished or in-progress fiction
- b. 12 f. 6 Poetry
- b. 12 f. 7 Unpublished papers
- b. 12 f. 8 Publishers, general
Includes correspondence and articles on publishing.

Professional 1970s-2004

The Professional series is divided into six subseries: Teaching; Associations, Conferences, lectures and speaking events, contracts and Correspondence and Research files. The Teaching files are primarily syllabi and classroom notes from English courses she taught at the University of Oklahoma; State University of New York, Buffalo; University of California; City College of New York; University of Wisconsin; and Rutgers University. The Associations subseries contains files for The Women Students and Artists for Black Art Liberation (WSABAL), and The Sisterhood. Founded in 1970 by Faith Ringgold, Wallace, and her sister, Barbara Wallace, WSABAL was an ad hoc group of the Art Workers' Coalition, an organization of white artists protesting against the Museum of Modern Art and their callous treatment of artists and their work. The file contains letters about plans to demonstrate at the SVA show, as well as letters Wallace penned to Gloria Steinem, editor of *Ms. Magazine*. The Sisterhood was a black women's writers group which featured among its membership Margo Jefferson, Audre Lorde, Ntozake Shange, Alice Walker, and Wallace. These files contain minutes for meetings in 1977, in-house proposals, and letters to the membership. Additionally, Wallace's records for attending and presenting at conferences are found in the third subseries, Conferences, lectures, and speaking events. There are files for conferences including "1968 in Global Perspective", at Brooklyn College in 1988; "Critical Fictions" and "Black Popular Culture/Mass Culture Conference", at the Dia Art Foundation, in 1990 and 1991 respectively; and "Yari Yari: Black Women Writers and the Future", at New York University in 1997. Most files include drafts of speeches, research, and information about the conference or event. The next two subseries, Contracts and Correspondence, arranged by Wallace separately, relate to published writings in journals and art catalogs, as well as conferences, lectures, and speaking appearances, from 1991-2004. The last subseries, Research files, are for individuals and subjects that Wallace has written about since the early 1970s, including rap music, black women, slavery, and the arts.

Arranged into 6 subseries: (1) Teaching; (2) Associations; (3) Conferences, lectures, and speaking events; (4) Contracts; (5) Correspondence; and (6) Research files.

Teaching

Arranged chronologically.

- b. 13 f. 1 University of Oklahoma 1985
- b. 13 f. 2-4 State University of New York, Buffalo 1987-1989
- b. 13 f. 5 University of California, San Diego 1987
City College of New York
- b. 13 f. 6-7 Syllabi 1990-1997
- b. 13 f. 8 Dworkin, Ira (Dissertation Committee)
- b. 13 f. 9 Kaplan, Ann and NEH fellowship application 1995
- b. 13 f. 10 General
- b. 13 f. 11 University of Wisconsin correspondence
- b. 14 f. 1-3 Douglass College, Rutgers University 1997-1998
- b. 14 f. 4-5 General 2002
Includes Robert Lopez (Dissertation Committee).

Associations

- b. 14 f. 6 Women Students and Artists for Black Art Liberation 1975
- b. 14 f. 7 The Sisterhood 1977
- b. 14 f. 8 Black women's organizations

Conferences, lectures, and speaking events

Arranged chronologically.

- b. 15 f. 1 "1968 in Global Perspective", Brooklyn College 1988
- b. 15 f. 2 "Cultural Studies Now and In the Future", University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign 1989

Professional (cont.)

Conferences, lectures, and speaking events (cont.)

- b. 15 f. 3 "Critical Fictions", Dia Art Foundation 1990
- b. 15 f. 4 "Black Popular Culture/Mass Culture Conference", Dia Art Foundation 1991
- b. 15 f. 5 *Tikkun* "Sexuality after Thomas/Hill" roundtable 1991
- b. 15 f. 6 "100 Years of Cinema", Society for Cinema Studies Conference 1995
- b. 15 f. 7 Lectures 1995-1996
- b. 15 f. 8 "Yari Yari: Black Women Writers and the Future", New York University 1997
- b. 15 f. 9 "Black Feminism 2000", Columbia University 2000

Contracts

Arranged chronologically.

- b. 16 f. 1 1980s
- b. 16 f. 2 1989-1990
- b. 16 f. 3 1991
- b. 16 f. 4 1992
- b. 17 f. 1-3 1993
- b. 17 f. 4 1994
- b. 17 f. 5 1995
- b. 17 f. 6 1995-1996
- b. 18 f. 1 1996
- b. 18 f. 2 1997
- b. 18 f. 3 1997-1998
- b. 18 f. 4 1998-1999
- b. 19 f. 1 1999-2000
- b. 19 f. 2 2000-2001
- b. 19 f. 3 2003-2004

Correspondence

Arranged chronologically.

- b. 20 f. 1 1970-1974
- b. 20 f. 2 1975
- b. 20 f. 3 1976
- b. 20 f. 4 1977
- b. 20 f. 5 1978
- b. 20 f. 6 1979
- b. 20 f. 7 1980
- b. 20 f. 8 1981
- b. 20 f. 9 1982
- b. 20 f. 10 1983
- b. 20 f. 11 1984
- b. 20 f. 12 1985
- b. 20 f. 13 1986
- b. 20 f. 14 1987
- b. 21 f. 1 1988

Professional (cont.)
Correspondence (cont.)

- b. 21 f. 2-3 1989
- b. 21 f. 4-6 1990
- b. 22 f. 1-2 1991
- b. 22 f. 3-4 1992
- b. 22 f. 5-6 1993
- b. 23 f. 1 1994
- b. 23 f. 2-4 1995
- b. 23 f. 5-8 1996
- b. 24 f. 1-2 1997
- b. 24 f. 3 1998-1999
- b. 24 f. 4 2000

Research files

Arranged alphabetically by topic or individual.

- b. 25 f. 1 African film
- b. 25 f. 2 Afro-American history
- b. 25 f. 3 AIDS
- b. 25 f. 4-5 Art 1992-1993
- b. 25 f. 6 Berger, Maurice
- b. 25 f. 7 Black modernists to postmodernists
- b. 25 f. 8 Black women and employment
- b. 25 f. 9 Black women writers
- b. 25 f. 10 Black writers
- b. 25 f. 11 Child abuse
- b. 25 f. 12 Conservatism ("The Right")
- b. 25 f. 13 Crime
- b. 25 f. 14 Dance
- b. 25 f. 15-16 Drugs
- b. 25 f. 17 Education
- b. 25 f. 18 Family
- b. 25 f. 19 Feminism
- b. 25 f. 20 Florida history
- b. 26 f. 1 Gay writers
- b. 26 f. 2 Harlem Hospital
- b. 26 f. 3 Hall, Stuart
- b. 26 f. 4 Holiday, Billie
- b. 26 f. 5 International
- b. 26 f. 6 Jackson, Jesse
- b. 26 f. 7 Jefferson, Margo
- b. 26 f. 8 Modernism
- b. 26 f. 9 Morrison, Toni
- b. 26 f. 10 Native Americans

Professional (cont.)
Research files (cont.)

- b. 26 f. 11 Politics
- b. 26 f. 12 Poverty
- b. 26 f. 13 Profiles
- b. 26 f. 14 Racism
- b. 26 f. 15 Research (clippings)
- b. 26 f. 16 Sex
- b. 26 f. 17 Slave trade and Jews
- b. 26 f. 18 Slavery
- b. 26 f. 19 The visual/the problem with the visual
- b. 26 f. 20 Wideman, John Edgar
- b. 27 f. 1 Wilson, Fred
- b. 27 f. 2 Women writers
- b. 27 f. 3 Wright, Richard

General

- b. 27 f. 4 Taxes
 - b. 27 Notebooks
 - b. 27 Books
 - b. 28 Restricted
- Restricted until 2030.