



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

Guide to the

Joan Jett Blakk/Lick Bush in '92 archive

1991-1996

Sc MG 897

Processed by Terrell Armistead and Nora Soto, 2016.

Summary

Creator: Blakk, Joan Jett

Title: Joan Jett Blakk/Lick Bush in '92 archive

Date: 1991-1996

Size: 0.21 linear feet (1 box)

Source: Gift, Elspeth kydd and Gabriel Gomez, 2010

Revision History: Finding aid updated by Lauren Stark.

Abstract: The Joan Jett Blakk/Lick Bush in '92 Archive, ca. 1991-1996, documents Terence Smith's drag persona Joan Jett Blakk as she campaigns in the 1991 Chicago mayoral election and the 1992 presidential election. The collection consists of news articles, academic essays, campaign speeches, promotional material, and ephemera related to Blakk's political campaigns, as well as clippings, reviews, and promotional material for the documentaries *Drag in for Votes* and *Lick Bush in '92* by Gabriel Gomez and Elspeth kydd. There is also a miscellaneous folder for events attended by Blakk and a file for the playscript and programs of *Womandingo*, a play which featured Blakk.

Preferred citation: [Item], Joan Jett Blakk/Lick Bush in '92 archive, Sc MG 897, 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 Terrell Armistead and Nora Soto, 2016.

Separated Materials:

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

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

Joan Jett Blakk is the drag performance and political persona of Terence Smith, a gay Black actor and activist. Born in Chicago, Illinois, and raised in Detroit, Michigan, Smith began performing as a drag queen by the name of Teri Stuart in 1974. After relocating to Chicago, he became heavily involved in the city's gay community, and was a founding member of the Chicago chapter of Queer Nation, a nationwide LGBT organization with the goal of increasing the visibility of the LGBT community and their sociopolitical issues.

Smith created his Joan Jett Blakk persona when he was invited to perform in a revue with gay performance artists Gurlene and Gurlette Hussey. Blakk's first solo drag performance was at the avant-garde Club Lower Links in May 1990, and she quickly developed a following after appearing in several AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP) benefits and gay performance events. In 1991, Smith was asked by Queer Nation to run for mayor of Chicago against Richard Daley under his Joan Jett Blakk persona as a form of public and political drag performance. While Blakk lost the election, her campaign achieved Queer Nation's objective of bolstering LGBT awareness and combatting the rising issue of homophobia in Chicago. The mayoral race was videotaped and made into the documentary *Drag in for Votes* (1991), directed by Gabriel Gomez and Elspeth kydd.

In 1992, Blakk became the first drag queen to run for president, entering the presidential race on the Queer Nation Party ticket. Blakk's candidacy aimed to bring national attention to LGBT issues through public performance art, and her campaign succeeded in raising the national profile of the LGBT community by obtaining mainstream coverage on television, radio and news publications. Blakk's presidential campaign slogan, "Lick Bush in '92," inspired the title of a second documentary directed by Gomez and kydd, *Lick Bush in '92* (1993), which chronicled Blakk's year-long campaign for president. The documentary was screened at various gay and lesbian film festivals in Chicago and San Francisco.

Smith relocated to San Francisco after the election, where he joined the Pomo Afro Homos, a gay Black performance group, and launched his own live talk show, "Lite Nite with Joan Jett Blakk." In 1996, he ran for president as Joan Jett Black again on the Blakk Pantsuit Party ticket, campaigning to "Lick Slick Willie in '96". Blakk launched her final political campaign in 1998, running for mayor of San Francisco against incumbent Willie Brown. Smith continues to live and work in San Francisco, and has appeared in the documentaries *Pride Divide* (1997) and *Gendernauts: A Journey through Shifting Identities* (1999).

Scope and Content Note

The Joan Jett Blakk/Lick Bush in '92 Archive, ca. 1991-1996, documents Terence Smith's drag persona Joan Jett Blakk as she campaigns in the 1991 Chicago mayoral election and the 1992 presidential election. The collection consists of news articles, academic essays, campaign speeches, promotional material, and ephemera related to Blakk's political campaigns, as well as clippings, reviews, and promotional material for the documentaries *Drag in for Votes* and *Lick Bush in '92* by Gabriel Gomez and Elspeth kydd. There is also a miscellaneous folder for events attended by Blakk and a file for the playscript and programs of *Womandingo*, a play which featured Blakk.

Key Terms

Subjects

African American actors
African American gay men
African American political activists
African American presidential candidates
African Americans in the performing arts
Authors, Black
Female impersonators
Gay activists -- United States

Names

Blakk, Joan Jett
Gomez, Gabriel, 1962-
Kydd, Elspeth

Container List

- b. 1 f. 1 Flyers
Speeches
- b. 1 f. 2 National Coming Out Day, Northwestern University 1991 October 11
- b. 1 f. 3 Announcement of presidential candidacy 1992 January 17
- b. 1 f. 4-5 Clippings
- b. 1 f. 6 Academic articles
Consists of essays and excerpts of book chapters that analyze the validity and effectiveness of Blakk's performative political campaign by questioning the meaning of drag and "camp," or queer parody.
- b. 1 f. 7 *Documentaries Drag in the Votes and Lick Bush in '92* 1991-1993
Includes clippings, promotional material, and reviews.
- b. 1 f. 8 Miscellaneous event programs and invitations
- b. 1 f. 9 *Womandingo*
Play written by Sterling Houston and directed by Arnold Aprill of City Lit Theater Company. Blakk played the part of "Miss Scarlett," a parody of Scarlett O'Hara.