Finding Aid

Chester B. Himes Collection

Papers, 1936-2003

2.5 linear feet (in 5 legal size boxes)

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Xavier University Library
University Archives and Special Collections Division
Finding Aid
Chester B. Himes Collection
Papers, 1936-2003

Biographical Note

Chester B. Himes was born the youngest of three boys in Jefferson City, Missouri, on July 29, 1909. He graduated in 1926 from East High School, in Cleveland Ohio. Himes attended Ohio State University, but was forced to withdraw. After a year of criminal activity, he was sentenced to the Ohio Penitentiary for up to 25 years on December 27, 1928. In 1931, while incarcerated, Himes began to write fiction, publishing in African American journals. In 1934, Himes sold a story to Esquire Magazine to high acclaim and became a regular contributor. In 1937, he married Jean Johnson. Himes continued to publish, but without monetary success. He was hired by the Works Progress Administration as a researcher, and participated in the WPA’s Ohio Writers’ Project. He became interested in the Congress of Industrial Organizations, and is believed to have written a history of the CIO in 1937. In 1939, Himes appealed to the Ohio Governor to terminate parole and restore his citizenship, to travel out of state to find work.

Over the next 13 years Himes and his wife traveled across the country, writing and publishing with mixed reviews. His books were often violent and graphic, protesting the injustices of racism. Himes was recruited by Communist Party, and around 1944 the FBI began his surveillance, ending in 1962. With his marriage failing, in 1953 he sailed alone for France. He began to write crime fiction under the guidance of Marcel Duhamel, editor of a crime series for the Gallimard publishing house. The crime stories were based in Harlem, often featuring two detectives, Grave Digger Jones and Coffin Ed Johnson. The series was a success and in 1957 he won the Grand Prix de la Litterature Policiere award for best detective fiction. In 1970 Cotton Comes to Harlem was made into a movie by Samuel Goldwyn Jr. A 1972 sequel, “Come Back Charleston Blue,” was based on The Heat’s On. He suffered the first of several strokes in 1964, and his health slowing declined. As early as 1976, after completing his autobiography, Himes had great difficulty writing, but his prior works continued to publish. His divorce in absentia from Jean Johnson came through in 1978, and he married Lesley Packard with whom he had lived with for nearly 20 years. Chester B. Himes died in Moraira, Spain, on November 12, 1984.

Scope Note

This collection was created by Robert E. Skinner, during the course of writing Chester Himes: An Annotated Primary and Secondary Bibliography. The first three series contain papers by and about Chester B. Himes, including photographs, correspondence, interviews, his FBI surveillance report, a letter critiquing his work from the NAACP, bibliographies, stories, and scholarly works written about Himes’ work. The last three series contain the papers of Robert E. Skinner and Joseph S. Himes, Jr., the brother of Chester B. Himes. Robert E. Skinner’s papers include correspondence, curriculum vitae, drafts of his book, and published and unpublished articles. Joseph S. Himes, Jr. papers include some correspondence, curriculum vitae and published articles.
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Container List

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Box 1

Series I: Personal

Subseries A: Photographs
1/1 32 photographs and 4 negatives, includes E. M. Lesley Himes address in Spain, n.d.
1/2 1 photograph negative c.1940, with letter from Estelle to Tish, October 22, 1997.

Subseries B: Correspondence
1/4 Letter, autobiographical, to John A. Williams, with annotations by Michel Fabre, October 31, 1962.
1/5/2 Letter to Connie W. Pearlstien, August 9, 1963, with unpublished essay, “What one Must Know,” n.d.
1/6 Letter to William Targ, July 11, 1964, with “Scram,” Bachelor vol.1:8, February 1938, 26-27, 64.
1/7/1 Letter to Reme Micha, February 10, 1966.
1/7/2 Letter from Reme Micha, February 25, 1966.
1/8 Letter from William Targ to Mr. Ciapponi, April 8, 1980, with advertisement for “A Case of Rape,” Targ Editions.
1/9/1 Letter from Roslyn Targ to Lesley Himes, December 1, 1992.
1/9/2 Letter from Roslyn Targ to Lesley Himes, n.d.

Subseries C: Interviews
1/10/4 “Portrait of a Man Reading,” Michael J. Bandler, ed., Book World, April 9, 1972, 2.
1/10/7 “Yo He Sido Un Delincuente,” Ignacio Fontes and Juan Villarin, eds., publication unknown, 105-107, n.d.

See also 4/3/32.
**Subseries D: Historical Documents**


1/11/2 NAACP memorandum from Herbert Hill to Arthur Cohen, April 16, 1962.

**Series II: Literary Works and Artwork**

**Subseries A: Published Works**


1/13/1 “His Last Day,” Chester M. Himes, Abbott’s Monthly, November 1932.


1/13/6 “A Modern Marriage,” (publication unknown), August 2, 1933, 2.


1/13/12 “Scram,” Bachelor, vol.1:8, February 1938, 26-27, 64.

1/13/13 “With Malice Toward None,” Crossroad, vol.1, April 1939.


1/13/15 “Looking Down the Street,” Crossroad, Spring 1940.


1/13/17 “People We Know,” The War Worker, vol.1:8/9(?), first half November 1943, 6.

1/13/18 “People We Know,” The War Worker, second half November 1943, 8, 19.


1/13/22 “Chester B. Himes, If He Hollers Let Him Go,” publication unknown, February 16, 1946, 13.


1/13/26 “Journey’s End,” copy of drawing signed C.B. Himes, n.d.

See also 4/1/25 and 4/6/9.
Subseries B: Unpublished Manuscripts


1/15/1 “Life Everlasting,” n.d.,
1/15/3 “I’m Not Trying to Hurt You,” n.d.
1/15/5 “One Night in New Jersey,” n.d.
1/15/7 “Winter Coming On,” n.d.

See also 1/5/2.

Box 2

Subseries B: Unpublished Manuscripts (continued)

2/1 Letter about Plan B from E.M. Lesley Himes to the University of Mississippi Press, December 10, 1933.
2/2/4 “The Birth of Chitterlings, Inc.”, pages 1-17, n.d.
2/2/5 “Plan B,” chapter 5, pages 156-168, n.d.
2/2/6 “The Birth of Chitterlings, Inc.,” page 1, n.d.
2/3/4 Notes, n.d.
2/3/5 “TB,” n.d.
2/5/2 “PB,” chapter 5, pages 156-167, n.d.
2/5/5 “TB,” chapters 3-5, p.33-58, n.d.
2/5/7 “PB,” p.98-100, n.d.
2/5/8 Untitled, n.d.
2/5/9 Untitled, n.d.
2/6/1 “PB/TB,” chapters 2-5, pages 18-59, n.d.
Subseries B: Unpublished Manuscripts (continued)
2/7/2 “TB,” pages 22-32, n.d.
2/7/3 “PB,” pages 2-18, n.d.
2/7/5 “PB,” chapter 3, pages 59-64, n.d.

Box 3

Series III: Works About Chester Himes, Published and Unpublished

Subseries A: Bibliographies
3/1/5 “Chester Himes Collection-English Translation of All Foreign Titles,” Amistad Research Center, 1992, 2 copies.
3/1/6 Bibliography, Amistad Research Center(?), n.d.
3/1/7 Bibliography, Amistad Research Center(?), n.d.
See also 3/5/1, 3/8/32, 4/3/3 and 4/11/1.

Subseries B: Unpublished Conference Materials
3/2/1 “Not-So-“Sweet Prophet[s]” of Grace: The Preacher/Con Man and Religion in Selected Novels of Chester Himes,” Lynn Veach Sadler, Ph.D., delivered at the 19th Popular Culture Association meeting, St. Louis, Missouri, April 6, 1989.
3/2/3 The Chester Himes Black Mystery Writers Awards Program, brochure, Oakland, California, May 4, 1996.
See also 4/4/26.

Subseries C: Published Literature
Subseries C: Published Literature (Continued)


3/5/1 Bibliography, p.4-9, n.d.


**Subseries D: Newspaper and Magazine Articles Published 1948-2003-Original Printing**


**Subseries E: Newspaper and Magazine Articles Published 1945-1977-Photocopies**

3/8/1 “Two Novels of the Crushing of Men, One White, One Black,” Richard Wright, PM(?), November 25, 1945, m6-m7.


3/8/7 “Cast the First Stone,” B.F.K., Springfield Sunday Republican, March 1, 1953, 8D.


Subseries E: Newspaper and Magazine Articles Published 1945-1977-Photocopies (continued)
3/8/30 “Si(g)ns of the Times,” Sebastian Clarke, Black Theatre, no.5, 1971, 47-49.
Subseries F: Newspaper and Magazine Articles Published 1984-2003-Photocopies.
3/9/10 “Chester Himes: He Began Writing in the Ohio Pen,” Joe Frolik, The Plain Dealer, February 25, 1985, 1-D, 3-D.
3/9/24 “Mayhem Comes to Harlem,” Jerry Adler, Newsweek, vol.113:6, February 6, 1989, 72, 2 copies.
Subseries F: Newspaper and Magazine Articles Published 1984-2003-Photocopies
(continued)
3/9/30 “Respect Too Late for Himes,” Evelyn Theiss, (Cleveland) Plain Dealer, February 1, 1998, 1J-2J.
3/9/34 “World of Precise Dottiness,” Andrew Sinclair, Durrant’s, n.d.
3/9/41 “Author Chester Himes Dies In Benissa, Spain at Age 75,” unknown publication, p.54, n.d.
3/9/43 “Me Caigo a Trozos,” Rosa Pereda, unknown publication, p.11-12, incomplete, n.d.

Box 4

Series IV: Robert E. Skinner Correspondence

Subseries A: Correspondence with Michel Fabre, Jill A. Harris and Jean Himes, 1987-1988
4/1/4 Letter from Michel Fabre, February 24, 1988, includes chronological sketch of Chester Himes’ life.
4/1/10 Letter from Michel Fabre, March 23, 1988, with envelope.
4/1/11 Letter to Michel Fabre, March 28, 1988, with notes.
Subseries A: Correspondence with Michel Fabre, Jill A. Harris and Jean Himes, 1987-1988 (continued)
4/1/14 Letter from Michel Fabre, April 17, 1988.
4/1/19 Letter from Michel Fabre, May 17, 1988, with envelope.
4/1/28 Letter from Michel Fabre, dated July 5, 1988, with envelope.

Subseries B: Correspondence with Michel Fabre, 1989
Subseries B: Correspondence with Michel Fabre, 1989 (continued)
4/2/13 Letter from Michel Fabre, October 20, 1989, with envelope.

Subseries C: Correspondence with Michel Fabre and Clifton H. Johnson, 1990
4/3/7 Letter to Michel Fabre, n.d.
4/3/19 Letter from Michel Fabre, October 8, 1990, with envelope.
4/3/26 Envelope from Michel Fabre, December 10, 1990, with unused stamps.
4/3/30 Letter from Michel Fabre, n.d.
4/3/32 Letter from Michel Fabre, December 22, 1990, with research and Chester B. Himes interview.
Subseries D: Correspondence with Michel Fabre and Joseph Logsdon, 1991
4/4/18 Fax from Michel Fabre, August 12, 1991.
4/4/22 Fax from Michel Fabre, October 17, 1991, with duplicate that includes comments.

Subseries E: Correspondence with Michel Fabre, 1992-1993
4/5/1 Fax from Michel Fabre, January 10, 1992.
4/5/2 Fax to Michel Fabre, April 7, 1992, with cover sheet dated May 7, 1992.
4/5/4 Fax from Michel Fabre, April 13, 1992.
4/5/6 Fax from Michel Fabre, April 23, 1992.
Subseries E: Correspondence with Michel Fabre, 1992-1993 (continued)
4/5/8 Fax from Michel Fabre, June 3, 1992.
4/5/10 Fax from Michel Fabre, June 24, 1992.
4/5/14 Letter from Michel Fabre, August 1, 1992, with envelope.
4/5/16 Fax from Michel Fabre, September 3, 1992.
4/5/18 Fax from Michel Fabre, September 9, 1992.
4/5/19 Fax from Michel Fabre, October 21, 1992.
4/5/24 Letter to Michel Fabre, n.d.
4/5/26 Page from a letter, n.d.
See also 3/8/3.

Subseries F: Correspondence with Kermit J. Pike, 1988-1990
4/6/9 Letter from Kermit J. Pike, June 21, 1988, with copies of two advertisements from the
Cleveland News, October 1 and 29, 1937, possibly written by Chester B. Himes.

Subseries G: Correspondence with Donald C. Dickinson, 1989-1990
4/7/1 Letter to Donald C. Dickinson, November 15, 1989.
4/7/2 Letter to Donald C. Dickinson, December 12, 1989.
4/7/3 Letter from Donald C. Dickinson, December 19, 1989.
4/7/4 Letter to Donald C. Dickinson, January 2, 1990.
4/7/5 Letter to Donald C. Dickinson, March 13, 1990.
Subseries G: Correspondence with Donald C. Dickinson, 1989-1990 (continued)
4/7/6 Letter from Donald C. Dickinson, April 10, 1990, with copy of galley sheets.
4/7/7 Letter to Donald C. Dickinson, April 20, 1990.

Subseries H: Correspondence with Greenwood Publishing Group, 1990-1991
4/8/3 Letter from Marilyn Brownstein, April 1, 1991, with “Instructions for Preparing Camera Ready Bibliographies.”

Subseries I: Correspondence with Greenwood Publishing Group and Caroline, 1992-1998
4/9/1 Letter from Marilyn Brownstein, January 24, 1992, with edits, sticky note and photocopy of letter.
4/9/7 Letter from Ann E. LeStrange, April 9, 1992.
Subseries I: Correspondence with Greenwood Publishing Group and Caroline, 1992-1998 (continued)
4/9/20 Invoice from Greenwood Publishing Group, October 14, 1992, includes original, duplicate invoices and packing list-1.
4/9/21 Letter from Greenwood Publishing Group with Author’s Courtesy Book Purchase Form, n.d.
4/9/23 Invoice from Greenwood Publishing Group, August 31, 1994, includes original, duplicate invoices and packing list-1.

Series V: Robert E. Skinner Documents

Subseries A: Research and drafts of “Chester Himes: An Annotated Primary and Secondary Bibliography”
4/10/2 Book edits, research and handwritten notes, n.d.
4/10/3 Book draft, p.28-30, n.d.
4/10/5 Book draft and edits, p.5-18, n.d.
4/10/6 Research, n.d.
4/10/7 Research, n.d.
4/10/8 Two handwritten notes, n.d.

Subseries B: Published and Unpublished Articles
4/11/4 Two Chester Himes biographical sketches, n.d.

Subseries C: Certificate of Registration for “Chester Himes: An Annotated Primary and Secondary Bibliography”
Box 5

Series VI: Joseph S. Himes, Jr. Correspondence and Documents

Subseries A: Correspondence

Subseries B: Curriculum Vitae and Bibliography
5/2/1 Curriculum Vitae, n.d.
5/2/2 Curriculum Vitae, with notes, n.d.
5/2/3 Revised Curriculum Vitae, n.d.
5/2/4 Supplement to the Curriculum Vitae, n.d.
5/2/5 “Separation List,” handwritten bibliography of Joseph S. Himes, n.d.
5/2/6 Complete Bibliography, 1936-1991, with edits, 2 copies.

Subseries C: Published Articles 1936-1949
5/3/7 “Forty Years of Negro Life in Columbus, Ohio,” reprint from Journal of Negro History, vol.27, April 1942, 133-154, 4 copies.

Subseries D: Published Articles 1950-1959
Subseries D: Published Articles 1950-1959 (continued)


Subseries E: Published Articles 1960-1969

5/5/5  “The Assessment of Adjustment of Aged Negro Women in a Southern City,” Joseph S. Himes and Margaret L. Hamlett, reprint from Phylon, 1962, 139-147, 2 copies.
Subseries F: Published Articles 1971-1979


