

Guide to the Chester B. Himes Papers

JWJ MSS 42



by Bergis Jules and Ellen Doon

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Table of Contents

Collection Overview	3
Requesting Instructions	3
Administrative Information	3
Immediate Source of Acquisition	3
Conditions Governing Access	4
Conditions Governing Use	4
Preferred Citation	4
Processing Information	4
Chester B. Himes (1909-1984)	4
Scope and Contents	5
Arrangement	5
Collection Contents	6
Series I: Writings	6
Series II: Correspondence	12
Series III: Printed Material	13
Series IV: Photographs and Artwork	14
Series V: Estelle B. Himes Writings, Undated	15
Selected Search Terms	16

Collection Overview

REPOSITORY: Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library
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New Haven, CT 06520-8330
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CALL NUMBER: JWJ MSS 42

CREATOR: Himes, Chester B., 1909-1984

TITLE: Chester Himes papers

DATES: 1936-1980

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION: 9.83 linear feet (28 boxes)

LANGUAGE: Chiefly in English, some materials in Spanish and French.

SUMMARY: The Chester Himes Papers consist of original manuscripts, correspondence, photographs and artwork that document his long career as a writer. The manuscripts offer insight into Himes's creative process and many of them also represent the original versions and original titles for works that were later altered for publication. The bulk of the correspondence reveals Himes's relationship with the publishers and editors of his books and also offers a glimpse into the author's thoughts on his own work. The photographs and artwork document Himes's life with his family, friends and colleagues.

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To request items from this collection for use in the Beinecke Library reading room, please use the request links in the HTML version of this finding aid, available at <http://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/beinecke.himes>.

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Key to the container abbreviations used in the PDF finding aid:

b. box
f. folder

Administrative Information

Immediate Source of Acquisition

Gift of the author, 1953-1976. Gift of the author through Carl Van Vechten, G. P. Putnam's Sons, Doubleday and Book of the Month Club, 1952-1972. Gift of Lesley Himes, 1986.

Conditions Governing Access

The materials are open for research.

Conditions Governing Use

The Chester Himes Papers is the physical property of the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University. Literary rights, including copyright, belong to the authors or their legal heirs and assigns. For further information, consult the appropriate curator.

Preferred Citation

Chester Himes Papers. Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

Processing Information

All descriptive information for writings in Series I. and Series V. was transcribed from pre-existing catalog cards.

Material in this collection formerly used the call numbers Uncat JWJ MS 12; JWJ MSS Himes; and ZAN 5 +2 V.5, V.6.

This collection was processed as part of the Beinecke Library Summer Internship Program in 2008.

Chester B. Himes (1909-1984)

Chester Bomar Himes was born in Jefferson City, Missouri on July 29, 1909 to Estelle Bomar Himes and Joseph Sandy Himes. He had two brothers, Edward and Joseph. Throughout his adolescent years Himes lived in Missouri, Arkansas, Georgia, Mississippi and Ohio, mainly because his father, Joseph, was a teacher who worked in these locations. Himes graduated from East High School in Cleveland, Ohio in 1926 and spent the early part of his adult life in Cleveland and Columbus, where he enrolled at Ohio State University to study medicine. He was expelled from Ohio State University in 1928 and shortly afterward was arrested, convicted for armed robbery, and sentenced, at the age of nineteen, to a twenty-five year term in prison. Himes served only part of that sentence, from 1928 to 1936, at the Ohio State Penitentiary in Columbus, during which time he became a published and somewhat well-known writer. Evidently inspired to begin writing by a 1930 prison fire in which 300 inmates were killed, while in prison he published a number of articles and short stories in newspapers and magazines, most notably in *Esquire*.

Released from prison in 1936, he married Jean Lucinda Johnson in 1937. From 1938 to 1941 he worked for the *Cleveland Daily News* and the Ohio Writers' Project, for which he wrote a history of Cleveland for the WPA Guide Series. Himes moved to California in 1941 and continued writing and working at shipyards until 1944, all the while trying with little success to secure a publisher for his novel *Black Sheep* (later published, in 1952, as *Cast the First Stone*). With the help of a Rosenwald Fellowship he was able to complete his first book, *If He Hollers Let Him Go*, which was published in 1945. His second book, *Lonely Crusade*, was published in 1947. Himes moved to Paris around 1953, and in 1955 published *The Primitive*. The first book of his now famous hard-boiled detective fiction series, *For Love of Imabelle*, which features two African American detectives from Harlem, Coffin Ed Johnson and Grave Digger Jones, was released in 1957. Himes spent the rest of his days living and writing in Europe, including stints in France, Germany and England, but primarily in Moraira on the southern coast of Spain with his second wife, Lesley Packard Himes. He published many other works including his two volume autobiography, *The Quality of Hurt* (1973) and *My Life of Absurdity* (1976). He died in Moraira, Spain on November 12, 1984.

Scope and Contents

The Chester Himes Papers consists of original manuscripts, correspondence, photographs and artwork that document his long career as a writer. The manuscripts offer insight into Himes's creative process and many of them also represent the original versions and original titles for works which were later altered for publication. The bulk of the correspondence reveals Himes's relationship with the publishers and editors of his books and also offers a glimpse into the author's thoughts on his own work. The photographs and artwork document Himes's life with his family, friends and colleagues.

Arrangement

Organized into five series: I. Writings, 1936-1976. II. Correspondence, 1947-1980. III. Printed Material, 1947-1964. IV. Photographs and Artwork, 1953-1967. V. Estelle B. Himes Writings, undated.

Collection Contents

Series I: Writings

9.34 linear feet (25 boxes)

The series is comprised of Chester Himes's original manuscript drafts, draft fragments, and miscellaneous notes and sketches. Some of the manuscripts and draft fragments are signed by Himes and also contain handwritten corrections. The manuscripts in this series also include the original titles that Himes had for his books. The series includes galley proofs and page proofs, some with corrections and notes from Himes and the various publishers of his books.

Some notable manuscripts in this series include, *If He Hollers Let Him Go*, Himes's first novel published in 1945; *Lonely Crusade*, his second novel, published in 1947; and *Cast The First Stone*, published in 1953. Also present in this series are some of Himes's short pieces of writing including an autobiographical essay and an essay on his impressions of life in Europe.

Series I is arranged alphabetically by title of work.

<i>All Shot up</i>		
Author's original title: <i>Don't Play with Death</i>		
b. 1, f. 1-4	Setting typescript (original), signed With author's ms. corrections and publisher's editorial markings. As published: New York, Avon Book Div., Hearst Corp. [1960].	1959 December 14
b. 1, f. 5	Autobiographical Account Typescript (carbon). Autobiographical sketch written as a letter to John Williams. With additional typed and autograph notes on his family history, 2 leaves. See also William's interview with Himes published in <i>Amistad I</i> , 1970, p. 25-93.	1962 October 31
b. 1, f. 6	Autobiographical Sketch	1964 July 22
<i>Big Gold Dream</i>		
b. 1, f. 7-10	Setting typescript (original) With ms. corrections and publisher's editorial markings. As published: New York, Avon Book Div., Hearst Corp. [1960].	1958 October 3
<i>Blind Man with a Pistol</i>		
b. 1, f. 11-15	Typescript (original) Leaves 273-289 are xeroxes. With clipping mounted on second leaf.	1967
b. 2, f. 16-20	Another typescript (carbon) Corrected version, with the author's ms. corrections.	1967
b. 2, f. 21-26	Photographic copy of above: pp. 1-[305] With ms. editorial markings.	1969
b. 24, f. 260	Galley Proofs With the author's ms. corrections and editorial markings.	1969
b. 24, f. 261	Page Proofs With ms. editorial markings.	1969

<i>A Case of Rape</i>		
b. 2, f. 27-28	Typescript (carbon) Published in French, with title, <i>Une Affaire de Viol</i> (1963)	1963
<i>Cast the First Stone</i> Author's original titles: <i>Black Sheep</i> and <i>Yesterday Will Make You Cry</i> .		
b. 3, f. 29	Notes and References, typescript (original) and author's ms. (original) Includes signed pencil sketch by Himes of a prison courtyard, entitled "Journey's End," and letter from "Prince Rico" to Himes.	1936-1952
b. 3, f. 30-32	<i>Black Sheep</i> , typescript (original) Incomplete, discarded leaves only? With the author's ms. corrections. Including a list of ten suggested titles.	1952
b. 3, f. 33-38	<i>Yesterday Will Make You Cry</i> , typescript (original), signed Original version of his novel <i>Cast the First Stone</i> . With 2 additional leaves laid in.	1952
b. 4, f. 39-45	Setting typescript (original) With author's corrections, revisions and editorial markings. A novel; published; New York, Coward-McCann, inc. 1952.	1952
<i>Cotton Comes to Harlem</i>		
b. 5, f. 46	Agreement between Chester Himes and G.P. Putnam's Sons	1964 June 5
b. 5, f. 47-50	Setting typescript (original), signed With ms. corrections and editorial markings.	1965
b. 25, f. 262	Galley Proofs With ms. editorial markings.	1964
b. 25, f. 263	Galley Proofs Another set: As published: New York, G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1965.	1964
b. 25, f. 264	Page Proof	1965
<i>The Crazy Kill</i> Author's original title: <i>A Jealous Man Can't Win</i>		
b. 5, f. 51-53	Typescript (original) With author's ms. corrections and publisher's editorial markings. Published: New York, Avon Book Div., Hearst Corp. 1959.	1959
b. 5, f. 54-57	Xerox copy of above Setting copy, with additional ms. corrections and editorial markings.	1959
<i>Day after Day</i>		
b. 6, f. 58-62	Typescript (original), signed With author's ms. corrections.	undated

*For Love of Imabelle*Author's original title: *The Five Cornered Square*.

b. 6, f. 63-66	Setting typescript (original) With author's ms. corrections and publisher's editorial markings. Published in France as <i>La reine des pommes</i> (1958)	undated
<i>The Heat's On</i>		
b. 6, f. 67-70	Setting typescript (original) Author's ms. corrections and misc. editorial markings.	1966
b. 25, f. 265	Galley Proofs With a few author's corrections including editorial markings.	1965 September 28
<i>If He Hollers Let Him Go</i>		
Authors original title: <i>Breakout</i>		
b. 7, f. 71	Synopsis of a novel, signed With inscription by author.	undated
b. 7, f. 72-75	Typescript (original), signed With author's corrections and inscription.	1947 February 5
b. 7, f. 76-81	Typescript (carbon), signed With author's inscription.	1947 February 5
b. 7, f. 82	Impressions of Europe Typescript (carbon), signed. An account of his experiences in England, France and Spain. Dated 1 March 1954, Mallorca, Spain. Submitted to <i>Ebony</i> .	1954 March 1
b. 7, f. 83	The Job of Writing	undated
<i>Lonely Crusade</i>		
b. 8, f. 84	Draft fragments	undated
b. 8, f. 85	Notes	undated
b. 8, f. 86	"The Anatomy of Fear"	undated
b. 8, f. 87	"First Idea"	undated
b. 8, f. 88	"Fear"	undated
b. 8, f. 89	"The Magnificent Inspiration"	undated
b. 8, f. 90	Chapter Notes	undated
b. 8, f. 91	The Coleman Case Transcript With the author's ms. corrections. Excerpts from the criminal case against Festus Coleman quoted extensively in chapter 9 of his novel, <i>Lonely Crusade</i> .	undated
b. 8, f. 92	"The Orbit of Obsession"	undated

Lonely Crusade (continued)

b. 8, f. 93-102	Typescript (original) With author's ms. corrections.	1947 March 8
b. 9, f. 103-110	Typescript (original) With author's ms. corrections.	1947 March 8
b. 9, f. 111-115	Typescript (carbon) With author's ms. corrections.	1947 March 8
b. 10, f. 116-119	Typescript (carbon) With author's ms. corrections.	1947 March 8
b. 10, f. 120-128	Setting typescript With author's ms. corrections	1947 April 2
b. 26, f. 266-267	Galley proofs	1947
b. 10, f. 129	Memo to Liberals	undated
<i>My Life of Absurdity</i>		
b. 11, f. 130-139	Setting typescript (original) With author's ms. corrections and editorial markings. His autobiography Vol. II.	1976
b. 12, f. 140-143	Xerox of setting typescript	undated
b. 26, f. 268	Final galley proof With ms. corrections and editorial markings.	1976
b. 26, f. 269	Page proof With a few ms. editorial markings.	1976
b. 12, f. 144	"Now is the Time! Here is the Place!"	1942 September
<i>Pinktoes</i> Author's original title: <i>Mamie Mason</i> .		
b. 13, f. 145-148	Typescript (original), signed With the author's ms. corrections, and his subtitle, "An Exercise in Good Will".	undated
b. 13, f. 149-153	Typescript (original), signed With the author's ms. corrections and revisions, and his subtitle, "An Exercise in Good Will". With four additional leaves (photostats) of earlier page proof.	undated
b. 27, f. 270	Page Proof With ms. corrections and editorial markings.	1961, 1965

The Present Tense

The Present Tense (continued)

b. 14, f. 154-162	Typescript (original; inc.) With author's extensive ms. corrections and additions sometimes on the versos of leaves.	undated
<i>The Primitive</i> Author's original title: <i>The End of a Primitive</i> .		
b. 15, f. 163-166	Typescript (original) A novel. Published: New York, New American Library [1956]. With a TLS from Himes to William Targ. World Publishing CO., 1954 Jun. 21, Mallorca, SP.	1954 June 21
b. 15, f. 167-168	Typescript (carbon) Revised version.	1953
<i>The Quality of Hurt: The Autobiography of Chester Himes</i>		
b. 16, f. 169-177	Setting typescript (original) With the author's ms. corrections and editorial markings. His autobiography, Volume I.	1972
b. 17, f. 178-184	Another setting typescript (xerox copy) Final version, with ms. corrections and editorial markings.	1972
b. 27, f. 271	Galley Proofs With ms. corrections and editorial markings.	1972
<i>The Real Cool Killers</i> Author's original title: <i>If Trouble was Money</i> .		
b. 18, f. 185-187	Typescript (carbon), signed With the author's ms. corrections, revisions and a few editorial markings. Published: New York, Avon Book Div., Hearst Corp. [1959].	undated
b. 18, f. 188-190	Typescript (carbon) Earlier version, with a few author's ms. corrections.	undated
<i>The Silver Altar</i>		
b. 19, f. 191-199	Typescript (original), signed Draft, with author's extensive ms. corrections and revisions. Written in collaboration with Willa Thompson.	undated
b. 19, f. 200	Statement of a Plan of Work Typescript (carbon). Submitted with an application to the Rosenwald Foundation.	1947 January 17
b. 19, f. 201	Stool Pigeon Typescript (carbon). Draft of a synopsis for a story about a prison fire.	1947 May 12
<i>The Third Generation</i> Author's original titles: <i>Three Generations</i> and <i>The Cord</i> .		
b. 20, f. 202-204	Notes, typescripts and autograph mss Includes identifications of characters, plot outline, synopsis of the ending. Also includes miscellaneous fragments and drafts.	undated

The Third Generation (continued)

b. 20, f. 205-206	Prologue, typescript (original) Drafts of episodes probably intended as an introduction to his <i>The Third Generation</i> , relating to the Manning family history. With author's extensive ms. corrections and revisions. Including a corrected version of the prologue for the title <i>The Cord</i> and an original prologue with corrections for the title <i>Three Generations</i> .	undated
b. 20, f. 207	<i>Three Generations</i> , prologue, another typescript (original) A revised draft of the above version. Incomplete, with the author's ms. corrections and additions. Using the subtitle: Book I...The First Generation.	undated
b. 20, f. 208	Early draft, typescript (original) and autograph ms. Preliminary working versions, with extensive corrections and typed revisions pasted in. Incomplete, with drafts of chapters, I, II and portions of III-V only.	undated
b. 20, f. 209	Another early draft, typescript (original) Draft with author's extensive ms. corrections and revisions, sometimes on versos of leaves. Incomplete.	undated
b. 20, f. 210	Another early draft, typescript (original) Later draft incorporating revisions of above draft with additional ms. corrections. Incomplete.	undated
b. 20, f. 211	<i>The Cord</i> , incomplete drafts, autograph ms. Working draft, incomplete, of chapters I, II and III with many typed revisions pasted in.	undated
b. 20, f. 212	<i>The Cord</i> , incomplete draft, typescript (original) Draft, incomplete, with author's extensive corrections and revisions, sometimes on versos of leaves.	undated
b. 21, f. 213-217	<i>The Cord</i> , typescript (original) Later draft with extensive ms. corrections, revisions and some editorial markings. Leaves 10, 13-27, 316 lacking.	1954
b. 21, f. 218-219	<i>The Cord</i> , another typescript (original) Drafts and miscellaneous fragments deleted from the above version.	undated
b. 22, f. 220-224	<i>The Cord</i> , final draft, another typescript (original) With author's ms. corrections and some editorial markings.	undated
b. 22, f. 225	Unidentified writings, draft fragments	undated

Series II: Correspondence

0.21 linear feet (1 box)

The series contains a small amount of Himes's incoming and outgoing correspondence. The bulk of the correspondence documents Himes's professional relationships with G.P. Putnam's Sons editor William Targ and photographer and writer Carl Van Vechten. The letters between Targ and Himes date from when Targ served as editor and editor in chief at two different publishing companies, The World Publishing Company, where he was from 1942 until 1964, and G. P. Putnam's Sons, where he worked from 1964 until 1978. The series also includes one letter from Himes to Helen Meyer, editor at Dell Publishing Co. Inc and four letters from Himes to Roslyn Targ, wife of William Targ and owner of Roslyn Targ Literary Agency Inc.

A large amount of the correspondence discusses contracts and payments for some of Himes's manuscripts and movie contracts. Some of the letters contain considerable discussion about discrepancies in payments and contracts for Himes's book, *Cotton Comes To Harlem*, which was turned into a movie. Other letters discuss Himes's life traveling in Europe and his life in Spain. The letters also discuss Himes's disapproval of the way publishers edited some of his books. In a letter to Helen Meyer, Himes protests the cover and descriptive copy of his book *Run Man Run*. Carl Van Vechten's letters discuss Himes's writings, his gifts to Yale, his travels, and their mutual friends and interests.

Series II. is arranged alphabetically by correspondent.

b. 22, f. 226	Meyer, Helen	1969 January 31
	"Prince Rico"	
	See: Series I. Writings, Cast the First Stone.	
b. 22, f. 227	Roslyn Targ Literary Agency Inc.	1972-1976
b. 22, f. 228-240	Targ, William	1948-1980, undated
	Includes a letter from Samuel Goldwyn, Jr., to Himes, a letter from from Targ to Goldwyn, and a letter from Anthony Boucher to Targ.	
	Van Vechten, Carl	
b. 22, f. 241	1947-1957	1947-1957
b. 22, f. 241a	1958-1964	1958-1964

Series III: Printed Material

0.21 linear feet (1 box)

The bulk of this series consists of clippings of reviews of Himes's second novel, *Lonely Crusade*. Although sales of the book in the United States did not reflect this, when *Lonely Crusade* was first released it caused a considerable amount of controversy. As a result, a large number of book reviews were published in major newspapers such as *The New Yorker*, *The New York Times*, *The Cleveland Plain Dealer* and *The New York Post* as well as in smaller African American newspapers and magazines such as *The Chicago Defender* and *The Crisis*. The series also includes reviews by major figures in the literary and journalism world during the mid-twentieth century including Arna Bontemps, James Baldwin, Guy Savino, William Targ and Willard Motley. Some of the clippings also discuss Himes's life, his work and his travels in Europe.

b. 23, f. 242-244	Reviews: Lonely Crusade	1947-1948
b. 28, f. 245	Oversize reviews: <i>Lonely Crusade</i>	1947
b. 23, f. 246	Other clippings and photocopies	1968

Series IV: Photographs and Artwork

0.21 linear feet (1 box)

The photographs in this series document Himes's life with his family and friends. The series includes portraits of Himes, reproductions of snapshots of Himes as a child and as a teenager and also some photographs of his mother, Estelle Bomar Himes, and his brother Joseph S. Himes, Jr.. Also included in this series are photographs of Himes with Regine Fischer, and a number of images of Himes in the studio and home of his friend Walter Coleman, the American painter. Coleman's wife was the silversmith Torun Bülow-Hübe, and there are several photographs of her and her work. Also included are two photographs of Himes speaking on a panel that includes Rebecca West at an event in France celebrating the thirtieth anniversary of Feux Croisés, and two photographs of Himes with French author Jean Giono.

Dates pencilled on the photographs were added by the library at the time of acquisition, and refer to letters from Himes to Carl Van Vechten, which can be found in the Carl Van Vechten Papers. These letters provide context for the photographs.

b. 23, f. 247	Portraits of Chester Himes	1957, 1963, undated
b. 23, f. 248	Himes Family	1957, 1959
b. 23, f. 249	Himes with Regine Fischer	1957-1959
b. 23, f. 250	Himes with Jean Giono	1957-1959
b. 23, f. 251	Himes and Lesley Packard with Walter Coleman and Torun Bülow-Hübe	1960 Dec 25
b. 23, f. 252-253	Feux Croisés celebration Includes images of Gabriel Marcel, Himes, Rebecca West, Maurice Bourdel, Rosalina Coelho Lisboa, Nikos Kazantzaki, Jose-Maria Gironella, Max-Pol Fouchet. Accompanied by event program and booklet, <i>Feux Croisés: Ames et Terres Etrangères</i> (Numéro Spécial du Lisez-Plon, Nouvelle Série 1/1957).	1957 May 21
b. 23, f. 254	Postcards of Arachon, France	1953
b. 28, f. 255	Christmas card to William and Roslyn Targ, collage by Lesley Himes	1967 December
b. 28, f. 256	Original drawing, untitled, anonymous "Journey's End," pencil sketch of prison yard See: Series I. Writings, Cast the First Stone	undated

Series V: Estelle B. Himes Writings, Undated

3 Folders

b. 23, f. 257	Notes on the Himes family history, autograph ms. and typescript	Undated
b. 23, f. 258	"The Ol' Lick Log," draft (incomplete) of a novel, autograph ms.	Undated
b. 23, f. 259	Poems, autograph ms. and typescripts Contents: 1. Autumn, 2. The Commission, 3. The Graduate, 4. My Business School Teacher, 5. The Party, 6. A La-Invicuts, 7. The Storm.	Undated

Selected Search Terms

The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the Library's online catalog. They are grouped by name of person or organization, by subject or location, and by occupation and listed alphabetically therein.

Subjects

African American authors
Authors -- 20th Century -- Archives

Genres / Formats

Drawings (visual works)
Photographs

Names

Himes, Chester B., 1909-1984 -- Archives
Himes, Estelle Bomar
Targ, William, 1907-
Van Vechten, Carl, 1880-1964