

# Guide to the Peter F. O'Brien Collection on African American Writers and Performers

JWJ MSS 99



by Beinecke staff

January 2013

P. O. Box 208330  
New Haven, CT 06520-8330  
(203) 432-2977  
beinecke.library@yale.edu  
<http://beinecke.library.yale.edu/>

---

## 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
Peter F. O'Brien .....	4
Scope and Contents .....	4
Arrangement .....	5
Collection Contents .....	6
I. February 1994 Acquisition, 1940-1992 .....	6
II. March 1994 Acquisition, 1964-1985 .....	7
III. November 1994 Acquisition, 1965-1989 .....	8
IV. January 1995 Acquisition, 1964-1994 .....	9
V. March 1998 Acquisition, 1998 .....	10
Selected Search Terms .....	11

---

## Collection Overview

**REPOSITORY:** Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library  
P. O. Box 208330  
New Haven, CT 06520-8330  
(203) 432-2977  
beinecke.library@yale.edu  
<http://beinecke.library.yale.edu/>

**CALL NUMBER:** JWJ MSS 99

**CREATOR:** O'Brien, Peter F. (Peter Francis)

**TITLE:** Peter F. O'Brien collection on African American artists

**DATES:** 1940-1998

**PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION:** 1.51 linear feet (6 boxes)

**LANGUAGE:** English

**SUMMARY:** The collection contains material compiled by Father Peter F. O'Brien on twentieth century African American cultural figures. The collection consists chiefly of subject files on prominent mid-century artists, authors, and performers, including stage and screen actors, singers, and dancers. Individuals covered include: James Baldwin, Paul Robeson, Antonio Salemme, Ethel Waters, Mabel Mercer, and Thelma Carpenter, among others. Files contain printed materials, such as newspaper clippings and programs and playbills for productions, letters, and photographs.

**ONLINE FINDING AID:** To cite or bookmark this finding aid, please use the following link: <https://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/beinecke.obrien>

---

## Requesting Instructions

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 <https://hdl.handle.net/10079/fa/beinecke.obrien>.

To order reproductions from this collection, please send an email with the call number, box number(s), and folder number(s) to [beinecke.images@yale.edu](mailto:beinecke.images@yale.edu).

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

b.        box

---

## Administrative Information

---

### Immediate Source of Acquisition

Gift of Peter F. O'Brien, 1994-1998.

---

## Conditions Governing Access

The materials are open for research.

---

## Conditions Governing Use

The Peter F. O'Brien Collection on African American Writers and Performers 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

Peter F. O'Brien Collection on African American Writers and Performers. James Weldon Johnson Collection in the Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

---

## Processing Information

This collection received a basic level of processing, including in some instances rehousing and minimal organization, when it arrived at the library. Each acquisition is described separately in the contents list below, identified as a unique grouping and titled according to year of acquisition.

As a rule, descriptive information found in the Collection Contents section is drawn in large part from information supplied with the collection and from an initial survey of the contents. Folder titles appearing in the contents list below are often based on those provided by the creator or previous custodian. Titles have not been verified against the contents of the folders in all cases. Otherwise, folder titles are supplied by staff during initial processing.

This finding aid may be updated periodically to account for new acquisitions to the collection and/or revisions in arrangement and description.

Former call numbers: Uncat Za MS 316, Uncat Za MS 395, Uncat Za MS 421, Uncat Za MS 429, and Uncat JWJ MS 62.

---

## Peter F. O'Brien

Father Peter F. O'Brien, S.J. ( -2015) was a Roman Catholic priest and a member of The Society of Jesus. Also a noted jazz historian, Father O'Brien managed the musical career of Mary Lou Williams from 1970 to 1981 and served as Executive Director of The Mary Lou Williams Foundation. He taught English composition at St. Peter's College in Jersey City, New Jersey and was a chaplain for Compassionate Care Hospice.

Biographical information taken from the Mary Lou Williams Foundation website, <<http://marylouwilliams.org/contact.htm>>, accessed 8 January 2013.

---

## Scope and Contents

The collection contains material compiled by Father Peter F. O'Brien on twentieth-century African American cultural figures. The collection consists chiefly of subject files on prominent mid-century artists, authors, and performers, including stage and screen actors, singers, and dancers. Individuals covered include: James Baldwin, Paul Robeson, Antonio Salemme, Ethel Waters, Mabel Mercer, and Thelma Carpenter, among others. Files contain printed materials, such as newspaper clippings and programs and playbills for productions, letters, and photographs.

## **Arrangement**

Orgnaized chronologically into five groupings by date of acquisition: I. February 1994 Acquisition. II. March 1994 Acquisition. III. November 1994 Acquisition. IV. January 1995 Acquisition. V. March 1998 Acquisition.

---

## Collection Contents

### I. February 1994 Acquisition, 1940-1992

0.7 linear feet (2 boxes)

The February 1994 Acquisition contains subject files on African American culture and performers. The files consist chiefly of printed materials, including newspaper clippings and programs and playbills for productions, but letters and photographs are also present.

Former call number: Uncat Za Ms 316.

b.1	<i>PMLA</i> issue	1990 January
b.1	"Salemme-Robeson"	1948-1977, undated
b.1	"Carl Van Vechten"	1955-1974, undated
b.1	"Drawings"	1975
b.1	"James Baldwin"	1974-1976, undated
b.1	"Ethel Waters" 2 Folders	1964-1991, undated
b.1	"Mabel Mercer"	1964-1984, undated
b.1	"African American Theatre"	1942-1986, undated
b.1	"Paul Padgett"	1974
b.2 (Oversize)	"Approved Budget 1980-1981"	1969-1983, undated
b.2 (Oversize)	"Diana Sands"	1968-1977, undated
b.2 (Oversize)	"Various Artists"	undated
b.2 (Oversize)	"Gilbert Price +Bruce Hubbard"	1940-1991, undated
b.2 (Oversize)	"Harlem On My Mind"	1968, undated
b.2 (Oversize)	"Int. Re Ethel Waters + Van Vechten"	1992
b.2 (Oversize)	"Obits: Count Basie..."	1984, undated
b.2 (Oversize)	<i>Life</i> issue	1964 May 29

## **II. March 1994 Acquisition, 1964-1985**

*0.21 linear feet (1 box)*

The March 1994 Acquisition contains additional printed materials and photographs relating to African American culture and performers.

Former call number: Uncat Za MS 395.

---

b.3	Miscellaneous material relating to African American culture	1964-1985, undated
-----	---	-----------------------

**III. November 1994 Acquisition, 1965-1989***0.21 linear feet (1 box)*

The November 1994 Acquisition contains letters to Peter O'Brien and additional clippings files.

Former call number: Uncat Za MS 421.

Organized into two subgroupings: Correspondence and Subject Files.

## Correspondence

b. 4	Carpenter, Thelma	1970 April 19
b. 4	Harris, Julie	1969 November 18
b. 4	Lucioni, Luigi	undated
b. 4	Padgette, Paul	1969
b. 4	Salemme, Antonio; Salemme, Martha	1965, 1970

## Subject Files

b. 4	Graham, Billy	1969
b. 4	Lundy, Carmen	1983-1987
b. 4	Van Vechten, Carl	1980
b. 4	Waters, Ethel	1970-1989, undated
b. 4	Miscellaneous material	1970, undated



**IV. January 1995 Acquisition, 1964-1994***0.21 linear feet (1 box)*

The January 1995 Acquisition contains mixed clippings files on African American cultural figures.

Former call number: Uncat Za MS 429.

b. 5	"Mabel Mercer + Ethel Waters"	1964-1972
b. 5	"Gilbert Price, Other Theatre + Film Pieces..."	1964-1994
b. 5	"Van Dyke-Salemme-Banks-Anselm-Fania Van Vechten"	1964-1972
b. 5	"Diana Sands + Thelma Carpenter"	1964-1971

## **V. March 1998 Acquisition, 1998**

*0.21 linear feet (1 box)*

The March 1998 Acquisition contains printed material relating to the 1998 stage production of "Mamba's Daughters" by Dorothy and DuBose Heyward.

Former call number: Uncat JWJ MS 62.

---

b. 6	Miscellaneous material relating to "Mamba's Daughters" <i>2 Folders</i>	1998
------	--	------

---

## **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 actors  
African American dancers  
African American singers  
American literature -- 20th Century  
American literature -- African American authors

### **Genres / Formats**

Photographic prints

### **Names**

Baldwin, James, 1924-1987  
Carpenter, Thelma, (Vocalist)  
Mercer, Mabel, 1900-1984  
O'Brien, Peter F. (Peter Francis)  
Robeson, Paul, 1898-1976  
Salemme, Antonio, 1892-1995  
Waters, Ethel, 1896-1977