
Guide to the Ralph Ellison Collection

Collection number: MS 249

The University Library
Special Collections and Archives
University of California, Santa Cruz
Santa Cruz, California

Processed by:

Kristin Sanders and the UCSC OAC Unit.

Date Completed:

October 2006

Encoded by:

UCSC OAC Unit

© 2006 The Regents of the University of California. All rights reserved.

Descriptive Summary

Title: Ralph Ellison collection

Dates: 1938-1978

Collection number: MS 249

Creator: Ellison, Ralph W.

Collection Size: 2 document boxes

Repository: University of California, Santa Cruz. University Library. Special Collections and Archives
Santa Cruz, California 95064

Abstract: The majority of this collection consists of photocopies of short stories, essays, reviews, speeches by Ellison and interviews with Ellison. Two folders contain original material signed by Ellison. The books and selected serials have been cataloged separately.

Physical location: Stored offsite at NRLF: Advance notice is required for access to the papers.

Languages: Languages represented in the collection: English

Access

Collection open for research.

Publication Rights

Property rights reside with the University of California. Literary rights are retained by the creators of the records and their heirs. For permission to publish or to reproduce the material, please contact the Head of Special Collections and Archives.

Preferred Citation

Ralph Ellison collection, 1938-1978. MS 249. Special Collections and Archives, University Library, University of California, Santa Cruz.

Acquisition Information

Purchased collection.

Biography

Ralph Waldo Ellison (1913-1994) was born in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. In 1933 he began studying music at Tuskegee Institute, but financial complications caused him to leave before graduating. He moved to Harlem in New York City to study sculpture and raise money to return to school, soon becoming a protégé of the author Richard Wright, whom he met in 1937. Ellison became associated with the Federal Writers' Project, publishing short stories and articles in such magazines as *New Challenge* and *New Masses*. In 1942 he quit working with

the Federal Writers' Project and became editor of the *Negro Quarterly*. He served as a cook in the Merchant Marines from 1943-1945. The following seven years he spent writing *Invisible Man* (1952), winner of the National Book Award in 1953. Although it was the only novel he completed during his lifetime, it gained him a place as a respected American writer and remains as one of the central texts of the African-American experience.

Ellison lived in Rome from 1955-1958 before returning to the United States to take the first of many teaching positions he was to hold at various universities. In 1964 his other major work appeared, a collection of essays and interviews entitled *Shadow and Act*. He became the Albert Schweitzer Professor in the Humanities at New York University in 1970, a position he held for nine years.

Ralph Ellison died of pancreatic cancer on April 16, 1994, and is buried in the Washington Heights neighborhood of New York City. His wife, Fanny McDonnell, lived until November 19, 2005.

Ellison's second novel, *Juneteenth* was published five years after his death, under the editorship of John Callahan, Ellison's literary executor and a professor at Lewis & Clark College. Callahan produced a 368-page condensation of the over 2000 pages written but never actually completed by Ellison over a period of forty years. Earlier drafts of it had been lost when his house burned down, forcing him to start over. The short story, *Flying Home*, was also published posthumously in 1996.

Ralph Ellison was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 1969. Other awards he received include the Langston Hughes Medal, the Rosenwald Grant, the Russwurm Award and the Chevalier de l'Ordre des Artes et Lettres. Ellison was also a charter member of the Fellowship of Southern Writers.

Compiled from biography.com and "Ralph Ellison" by Mark Busby.

Scope and Content of Collection

The majority of this collection consists of photocopies of short stories, essays, reviews, speeches by Ellison and interviews with Ellison. Two folders contain original material by Ellison. The books and selected serials have been cataloged separately.

Indexing Terms

The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the library's online public access catalog.

Ellison, Ralph W.--Archives

American literature--African American authors--History and criticism

African Americans in literature

- [Title: Ralph Ellison: A Register of His Papers in the Library of Congress.](#)
- [Date: 1890-1996](#)
-

box-folder 1:1-4 **Biographical material 1950-1973**

Physical Description: 4 folders

Series Scope and Content Summary

This series contains the few items signed by Ellison or directly related to his writing.

box-folder 1:1 **[ACS] Card - "Greetings and best wishes" n.d.**

box-folder 1:2 **[TDS] "from Shadow and Act" - review for *Saturday Review* May 17, 1958**

box-folder 1:3 **Photocopy of Ellison's review of *There is a Tree More Ancient than Eden* by Leon Forrest with [TLS] note from Selma Shapiro, Random House to "Dear Barbara". Note concerns the photocopy. February 15, 1973**

box-folder 1:4 **[Ralph Ellison signing autographs] - B/W Photograph, 8" x 10" n.d.**

box-folder 1:5-34 **Writings by Ellison 1938-1977**

2:1-27

Physical Description: 56 folders

Series Scope and Content Summary

This series contains photocopies of short stories, essays, reviews, and speeches written by Ellison.

box-folder 1:5-21 **Short Stories**

- box-folder 1:5 "Backwacking: a Plea to the Senator", *Massachusetts Review*, v.18:3 Autumn 1977
- box-folder 1:6 "Night-Talk", *Quarterly Review of Literature*, v.16 1972
- box-folder 1:7 "A Song of Innocence", *The Iowa Review*, v.1:2 Spring 1970
- box-folder 1:8 "Juneteenth", *Quarterly Review of Literature*, v.13:3-4 1965
- box-folder 1:9 "Harlem is Nowhere", *Harpers magazine*, v.229:1371 August 1964
- box-folder 1:10 "It Always Breaks Out", *Partisan Review*, v.30:1 Spring 1963
- box-folder 1:11 "The Roof, the Steeple and the People", *Quarterly Review of Literature*, v.10:3 1959-1960
- box-folder 1:12 "Prologue to Invisible Man", *Partisan Review*, v.19 January - February 1952
- box-folder 1:13 "Battle Royal", *'48: The Magazine of the Year*, v.2:1 January 1948
- box-folder 1:14 "King of the Bingo Game", *Tomorrow*, v.4:3 November 1944
- box-folder 1:15 "Mr. Toussaint", *Negro Story*, v.1:3 October - November 1944

Scope and Content Note

[reprinted from *Common Ground*]

box-folder 1:16 "Mister Toussan", *Negro Story*, v. 1:1 July - August 1944

Scope and Content Note

[reprinted from *New Masses*, November 4, 1941]

- box-folder 1:17 "Flying Home", *Cross Section: A Collection of New American Writing 1944*
- box-folder 1:18 "Mister Toussan", *New Masses*, v.23 November 4, 1941
- box-folder 1:19 "They found Terror in Harlem", *Negro Digest*, v.1:1 July 1940
- box-folder 1:20 "The Birthmark", *New Masses*, v.36:2 July 2, 1940
- box-folder 1:21 "Slick Gonna Learn", *Direction*, v.2:5 September 1939

box-folder 1:22-27 **Essays - Music & Art**

- box-folder 1:22 "The Golden Age Time Past", *Esquire*, v.50 January 1959
- box-folder 1:23 "As the Spirit Moves Mahalia", *The Saturday Review of Literature*, v.41 September 27, 1958
- box-folder 1:24 "Resourceful Human" & "Remembering Jimmy", *The Saturday Review of Literature*, v.41 July 12, 1958
- box-folder 1:25 "The Charlie Christian Story", *The Saturday Review of Literature* v.41 May 17, 1958
- box-folder 1:26 "The Swing to Stereo", *The Saturday Review of Literature*, v.41 April 26, 1958
- box-folder 1:27 "Introduction to Flamenco", *The Saturday Review of Literature*, v.37 December 11, 1954

box-folder 1:28-34 **Essays & Speeches on Politics & Culture**

- box-folder 1:28 "What America Would be Without Blacks", *Time*, v. 95 April 6, 1970
- box-folder 1:29 "Harlem's America", *New Leader*, v.49 September 26, 1966
- box-folder 1:30 "Tell it Like it is, Baby", *Nation*, v.20 September 20, 1965
- box-folder 1:31 "The Way It Is", *New Masses*, v.44 October 20, 1942
- box-folder 1:32 "A Congress Jim Crow Didn't Attend", *New Masses*, v.35 May 14, 1940
- box-folder 1:33 "Camp Lost Colony", *New Masses*, v.34 February 6, 1940
- box-folder 1:34 "Judge Lynch in New York", *New Masses*, v.33 August 15, 1939

box-folder 2:1-27 **Essays & Reviews**

- box-folder 2:1 "The Little Man at Chehaw Station: The American Artist and His Audience", *The American Scholar*, v.47 Winter 1977-78
- box-folder 2:2 "On Initiation Rites and Power: Ralph Ellison Speaks at West Point", *Contemporary Literature*, v.15:2 Spring 1974
- box-folder 2:3 "The Novel as a Function of American Democracy", *Wilson Library Bulletin*, v.41:10 June 1967
- box-folder 2:4 "Hidden Name and Complex Fate", *Authors Guild Bulletin*, February 1965
- box-folder 2:5 "On Becoming a Writer", *Commentary*, v.38:4 October 1964

box-folder 2:6 "The Blues", *New York Review of Books*, v.1:12 February 6, 1964
box-folder 2:7 "A Rejoinder", *The New Leader*, v.47 February 3, 1964
box-folder 2:8 "The World and the Jug", *The New Leader*, v.46 December 9, 1963
box-folder 2:9 "Change the Joke and Slip the Yoke", *Partisan Review*, v.25 Spring 1958
box-folder 2:10 "Stepchild Fantasy", *The Saturday Review of Literature*, v.29:23 June 9, 1946
box-folder 2:11 "Richard Wright's Blues", *Antioch Review*, v.5:2 June 1945
box-folder 2:12 "Native Land", *New Masses*, v.42 June 2, 1942
box-folder 2:13 "Transition", *Negro Quarterly*, v.1:1 Spring 1942
box-folder 2:14 "The Great Migration", *New Masses*, v.51 December 2, 1941
box-folder 2:15 "Recent Negro Fiction", *New Masses*, v.40 August 5, 1941
box-folder 2:16 "Richard Wright and Recent Negro Fiction", *Direction*, v.4:5 1941
box-folder 2:17 "Negro Prize Fighter", *New Masses*, v.37 December 17, 1940
box-folder 2:18 "Argosy Across the USA", *New Masses*, v.37 November 26, 1940
box-folder 2:19 "Big White Fog", *New Masses*, v.37 November 12, 1940
box-folder 2:20 "Southern Folklore", *New Masses*, v.37 October 29, 1940
box-folder 2:21 "Romance in the Slave Era", *New Masses*, v.35 May 29, 1940
box-folder 2:22 "Hunters and Pioneers", *New Masses*, v.34 March 19, 1940
box-folder 2:23 "TAC Negro Show", *New Masses*, v.34 February 27, 1940
box-folder 2:24 "The Good Life", *New Masses*, v.34 February 20, 1940
box-folder 2:25 "Javanese Folklore", *New Masses*, v.34 December 26, 1939
box-folder 2:26 "Ruling-class Southerner", *New Masses*, v.30 December 5, 1939
box-folder 2:27 "Practical Mystic", *New Masses*, v.28 August 16, 1938

box-folder 2:28-30 Interviews with Ellison 1955-1978

Physical Description: 11 folders

Series Scope and Content Summary

This series contains interviews with Ellison.

- box-folder 2:28 "The Essential Ellison" Interview by Ishmael Reed, Quincy Troupe, and Steve Cannon, *Y'Bird*, 1:1 1978
- box-folder 2:29 "Profiles (Ralph Ellison): Going to the Territory" Interview by Jervis Anderson, *The New Yorker*, v.52:40 November 22, 1976
- box-folder 2:30 "An Interview with Ralph Ellison: Visible Man" Interview by Howard Sage, *Pulp*, v.2:2 Summer 1976
- box-folder 2:31 Interview with Ralph Ellison by John Graham, *The Writer's Voice; Conversations with Contemporary Writers* 1973
- box-folder 2:32 "Indivisible Man" Interview by James A. McPherson, *Atlantic Monthly*, v.206:6 December 1970
- box-folder 2:33 "A Very Stern Discipline: An Interview with Ralph Ellison" Interview by James Thompson, Lennox Raphael, and Steve Cannon, *Harper's*, v.234:1402 March 1967
- box-folder 2:34 "An American Novelist Who Sometimes Teaches", *New York Times Magazine* November 20, 1966
- box-folder 2:35 "An Interview with Ralph Ellison" Interview by Allen Geller, *The Tamarack Review*, v.32 1964
- box-folder 2:36 "That Same Pain, That Same Pleasure: An Interview" Interview by Richard G. Stern, *December*, No.3 Winter 1961
- box-folder 2:37 "The Art of Fiction" An Interview by Alfred Chester and Vilma Howard, *Paris Review*, No.8 1955
- box-folder 2:38 "What's Wrong with the American Novel?", *American Scholar*, v.24:4 Autumn 1955

Scope and Content Note

[stenographic record of a discussion held at a private residence in Manhattan on Tuesday Evening, July 26, 1955. Present were Stephen Becker, Simon Michael Bessie, Ralph Ellison, Albert Erskine, Hiram Haydn, Jean Stafford, William Styron.

box-folder 2:39-40 **Writings about Ellison 1963-1971**

Physical Description: 2 folders

Series Scope and Content Summary

This series contains three bibliographies and a reprint about Ellison and Baldwin.

- box-folder 2:39 **"A Bibliography of Ralph Ellison's Published Works" by Bernard Benoit & Michael Fabre, *Studies in Black Literature*, v.2:3 Autumn 1971**
- box-folder 2:39 **Addenda to "A Ralph Waldo Ellison Bibliography 1914-1968" by Carol Polsgrove, *American Book Collector*, v.20:3 November - December 1969**
- box-folder 2:39 **"A Ralph Waldo Ellison Bibliography 1914-1967" by R.S. Lillard, *American Book Collector*, v.19:3 November 1968**
- box-folder 2:40 **Reprint of "Aspiring We Should Go" by Howard Levant, *Journal of the Mid-Continent American Studies Association*, v.4:2 Fall 1963**