

Finding Aid: Gloria Naylor Archive

Creator:

Gloria Naylor, January 25, 1950-September 28, 2016

Dates:

1979-2010, with the majority of the material from 1983-2006

Provenance:

Gloria Naylor donated the majority of the material to Sacred Heart University (Fairfield, CT) in 2009, with subsequent smaller donations between 2012 and 2014.

Extent:

58 boxes, including 4 oversized boxes containing 3D artifacts and 2 boxes of audiovisual materials (cassette tapes and video tapes). Approximately 47 linear feet, not including oversized or audiovisual materials.

Abstract:

The papers of writer Gloria Naylor record her noteworthy contributions to twentieth-century literature, including drafts, correspondence, publishing materials, press materials, and research materials relating to Naylor's novels, non-fiction essays, and her edited anthology of short stories by Black writers. The collection also documents Naylor's interest in writing for theatre and screen, with drafts, correspondence, press material and research pertaining to television, theatre, and film adaptations of her novels and records pertaining to her film production company, One Way Productions. Extensive biographical and miscellaneous materials in the collection include personal correspondence, journal entries, travel itineraries, date books, awards, academic appointments, and artwork.

Brief Biographical Note:

Gloria Naylor was a writer of poetry, fiction, plays and screenplays, and non-fiction essays. She is best known for her novels: *The Women of Brewster Place* (1982), *Linden Hills* (1985), *Mama Day* (1988), *Bailey's Cafe* (1992), and *The Men of Brewster Place* (1998). Other published works include: short fiction and personal essays published in newspapers and magazines such as *Essence*, *Ebony*, *Ms.*, and *The New York Times*; an edited anthology of the best short stories by African American Writers, *Children of the Night* (1995); and a "fictionalized memoir," entitled *1996* (2005). Her plays include a stage adaptation of her novel *Bailey's Cafe*, and her

screenplays, most of which were never produced, include an adaptation of her novel *Mama Day* that Naylor unsuccessfully sought to produce through her own film production company, One Way Productions (1990-2000).

Extended Biographical Note:

Writer Gloria Naylor (1950-2016) was born on January 25th, 1950 in New York City, the eldest of Roosevelt and Alberta McAlpin Naylor's three daughters. Raised in New York City (the Bronx, Harlem, and Queens), Naylor graduated from high school in 1968. She was baptized as a Jehovah's Witness that same year and did missionary work first in New York City and later in North Carolina and Florida, supporting herself as a switchboard operator. She left the Jehovah's Witnesses in 1975 and returned to New York City, where she graduated from CUNY-Brooklyn College in 1981, with a degree in English. While she was still a student at Brooklyn College, Naylor's short story, "A Life on Beekman Place," was accepted for publication in *Essence* magazine.

Building on her first publishing success, Gloria Naylor finished writing her first novel, *The Women of Brewster Place*, in 1981 and used her advance to travel to Cadiz and Tangier, where she began work on her second novel, *Linden Hills*. She started a Master's Degree in African American Studies at Yale University in 1981 and continued to work on *Linden Hills* as a thesis project, under the supervision of Dr. Henry Louis Gates, Jr.; she graduated in 1983. *The Women of Brewster Place*, which recounts the interconnected lives of Black women living in a New York City apartment building, was published in 1982. It received the National Book Award for best first novel in 1983. Numerous honors, awards, and appointments followed for Gloria Naylor, including writer-in-residence at Cummington Community of the Arts (1983), fellow with National Endowment for the Arts (1985), delegation member on a United States Information Agency trip to India (1985), and visiting academic appointments at George Washington University, Princeton University, University of Pennsylvania, New York University, and Boston University.

Working from her brownstone in Brooklyn, Naylor published her second novel, *Linden Hills*, in 1985, and her third novel, *Mama Day*, in 1988. With three acclaimed novels in print, Naylor was awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship and appointed as a Senior Fellow in the Society for the Humanities at Cornell University in 1988. Naylor published her fourth novel, *Bailey's Cafe*, in 1992, and subsequently served as a visiting writer at the University of Kent. Following the publication of *Bailey's Cafe*, Gloria Naylor began work on what she originally planned to be her fifth book, a historical novel about the Sapphira Wade, the legendary ancestor of the main characters in *Mama Day*; she took two research trips in 1993—to the western Sahel and to Scandinavia, in part to conduct research for this novel. During this period, Naylor did editorial work as well, as a contributing editor at the journal *Callaloo* and as editor of *Children of the Night: The Best Short Stories by African American Writers, 1967 to the Present* (1996), an update to Langston Hughes's 1967 *Best Short Stories by Negro Writers*.

In 1995, Naylor went to her home on St. Helena Island, off the coast of South Carolina, intending to spend a year focused on writing her novel, *Sapphira Wade*. Changing her plans, she returned to her home in Brooklyn and wrote *The Men of Brewster Place*, which was published in 1998. In 2005, Naylor published a “fictionalized memoir,” entitled *1996*, which describes the experiences of racist surveillance that drove her from St. Helena Island. Between 2004 and 2006, Naylor returned to *Sapphira Wade* and completed a draft of the novel’s first section.

In addition to her novels, Gloria Naylor pursued theatrical, filmmaking, and television projects, as both a writer and producer. In 1989, Naylor’s *The Women of Brewster Place* was adapted as a two-part television miniseries with Oprah Winfrey, and characters from the novel inspired a short-lived weekly television series in 1990. Seeking to maintain more creative control over adaptations of her work, Naylor founded her own film production company in 1990. Through this company, One Way Productions, Naylor sought to produce *Mama Day* as a film, working through numerous drafts of a screenplay and reaching out to filmmakers and actors. Despite her efforts, *Mama Day* was never realized on the screen, and neither were several other screenplays that Naylor wrote, including an episode of a children’s show and a drama about the experiences of incarcerated women at Parchman prison. Naylor also wrote for the theatre; in 1994, Naylor’s adaptation of *Bailey’s Cafe* was performed at the Hartford Stage in Connecticut, directed by Novella Nelson. Naylor shut down One Way Productions in 2000.

Gloria Naylor sold her Brooklyn brownstone and moved away from New York City in 2009. She died of heart failure near her home in Christiansted, St. Croix on September 28, 2016.

Sources for the Biographical Note (in addition to the material in the collection):

Fowler, Virginia. *Gloria Naylor: In Search of Sanctuary*. Twayne Publishers, 1996.

Montgomery, Maxine Lavon, Ed. *Conversations with Gloria Naylor*. University Press of Mississippi, 2004.

Slotnick, Daniel E. “Gloria Naylor, Whose Honored Novel Was Set in a Housing Project, Dies at 66.” *The New York Times*, 3 October 2016.
www.nytimes.com/2016/10/04/books/gloria-naylor-national-book-award-winner-dies-at-66.html. Accessed 12 May 2020.

Wilson, Charles E., Jr. *Gloria Naylor: A Critical Companion*. Greenwood, 2001.

Scope and Contents (Extended):

The papers of writer Gloria Naylor record her noteworthy contributions to twentieth-century literature, including drafts and proofs, correspondence, publishing materials, press materials, and research materials relating to Naylor's novels, non-fiction essays, and her edited anthology of short stories by Black writers. The collection also documents Naylor's interest in writing for theatre and screen, with drafts, correspondence, press material and research pertaining to television, theatre, and film adaptations of her novels and records pertaining to her film production company, One Way Productions. Extensive biographical and miscellaneous materials in the collection include personal correspondence, journal entries, travel itineraries, date books, awards, academic appointments, and artwork. The collection documents Naylor's trajectory as a writer, from the publication of her first book *The Women of Brewster Place* through the unfinished novel she began to draft in 2004 and the transnational networks of writers, performers, and artists with whom she was connected.

The materials date from 1979-2010, with the bulk of the material from 1983-2006. They are organized in six series: I. Correspondence (1981-2010, 15 boxes); II. Writings (1979-2007, 26 boxes); III. Financial Records (1982-2006, 2 boxes); IV. Awards (1984-2002, 4 boxes); V. Personal Books (6 boxes); VI. Audio and Video (2 boxes, 1984-2000).

Series I: Correspondence, Boxes 1-15

This series, 1981-2010, includes personal and organizational correspondence to and from Gloria Naylor, with three subseries, each arranged chronologically: A. Incoming Correspondence (1981-2007, 11 boxes); B. Outgoing Correspondence (1982-2006, 1 box); C. Engagements (1982-2007, 3 boxes).

Gloria Naylor kept much of her outgoing correspondence, and often, attached duplicate copies of her responses to incoming materials; consequently, some outgoing correspondence appears in both subseries A and subseries B. Incoming and outgoing correspondence documents Gloria Naylor's interactions with fans of her novels as well as with writers and scholars. Business correspondence speaks to Gloria Naylor's creative process in letters to her long-time editor, Corlies (Cork) Smith, and agent, Sterling Lord, as well as her relationships with publishers Viking, Penguin, and Ticknor and Fields. Extensive correspondence between 1990 and 2000 documents projects associated with Naylor's film production company, One Way Productions.

The correspondence records Naylor's exchanges with numerous writers, scholars, and artists from all over the world, making these a valuable record of late-twentieth-century intellectual networks. Noteworthy correspondents include Julia Alvarez, Houston Baker, Pat Barker, Lucille Clifton, Frank Conroy, Jonathan Culler, Miriam DeCosta-Willis, Michael Dorris, Andrea Dworkin, Louise Erdrich, Maria Epes, Henry Louis Gates, Jr., Nikki Giovanni, Allen Ginsburg, Josephine Humphreys, Terri

Jewell, Gloria Joseph, Ammu Joseph, Anjum Katyal, Ann Petry, Toni Morrison, Faye Moskowitz, Okey Ndibe, Novella Nelson, Nabaneeta Dev Sen, Gloria Steinem, Adrienne Rich, and Miriam Jiménez Román, among many others.

The Engagements subseries includes materials related to invited lectures and readings, interviews, publicity tours, visiting academic positions, and fellowships—including itineraries and reports from her United States Information Agency tours to India in 1985 and to West Africa in 1993. Itineraries, correspondence, and press clippings, and copies of lectures document numerous public engagements between 1982 and 2007 at colleges, universities, and cultural institutions.

Series II: Writings, Boxes 16-44

This series, 1979-2007, includes research materials, journals, notes, drafts (handwritten, typescript, and electronic), proofs with line edits, reviews, and promotional materials pertaining to Gloria Naylor's published and unpublished writings. This series is arranged into eight sub-series: A. *The Women of Brewster Place* (undated, 1979-2007, 1 box); B. *Linden Hills* (undated, 1982-85, 2 boxes); C. *Mama Day* (undated, 1987-1997, 4 boxes); D. *Bailey's Cafe* (undated, 1987-94, 5 boxes); E. *The Men of Brewster Place* (undated, 1991-1998, 2 boxes); F. *The Children of the Night* (undated, 1993-1996, 6 boxes); G. *Sapphira Wade* (undated, 2004-2007, 3 boxes); H. *Other Writings* (1980-1999, 3 boxes). Of particular note, an unfinished, handwritten draft and extensive research materials for *Sapphira Wade*, which Naylor intended to be her seventh novel, can be found in Subseries G.

Screen and stage adaptations are arranged in the sub-series for the appropriate novel. These include the teleplay for *The Women of Brewster Place*, adapted by Karen Hall, with Gloria Naylor's handwritten comments; numerous drafts of Naylor's own unproduced screenplay for *Mama Day*; several drafts of the *Bailey's Cafe* play, with notes pertaining to rehearsals and performance at the Hartford Stage in 1994; and screenplays that are not adaptations of novels in Series H.

In keeping with the arrangement of materials as received from Gloria Naylor in 2009, there is no subseries focused on 1996, the only one of Naylor's published works for which the collection does not include drafts and revisions. Researchers seeking information on this work will find relevant materials in Series I and Series III.

Series III: Financial Records, 2 boxes

This series, 1982-2006, includes personal, financial, and business records. The materials in this series are quite diverse: travel and educational receipts from her time at Yale University; appointment books; astrology charts; awards and certificates (see also Series IV); contracts for novels, essays, and screenplays; royalties statements; correspondence with publishers and charities; correspondence, invitations, publicity materials related to events arranged through

the Speakers Bureau; handwritten journals from 1999-2000; and personal and professional photographs. Many of these records, including phone messages and communications with her assistant, Caledonia Kearns, pertain to One Way Productions, Gloria Naylor's film production company. (For additional correspondence, see Series I.)

Series IV: Awards, 4 boxes

This series includes honorary degrees, writing and publishing awards, and leadership and service awards Gloria Naylor received between 1984 and 2004. Institutions represented include Los Angeles County Public Library, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, Black Caucus American Library Association, Sacred Heart University, Galveston College, Brooklyn College, Yale University African American Studies Program, New York City PS 180, Chicago State University, National Coalition of Black Women, among others.

Series V: Publications and Mailings, 3 boxes

This series includes books from Gloria Naylor's personal library as well as mailers from publishers, festivals, exhibitions, conferences, magazines, and events, most of which feature Naylor's work. The majority of the materials does not include annotations. The books include editions and translations of all her novels and her anthology, *Children of the Night*, as well as writing guides and readers.

We have not included a date range for these materials, because publication dates for the books may or may not reflect the dates when Naylor acquired or engaged with them.

Series VI: Media, 2 boxes

This series includes video and audiocassettes, including recordings of talks and interviews Naylor gave as well as interviews that Naylor conducted with residents of Robinsonville, Mississippi as research for essays she published in *Essence*, *People*, and *Ms.* Between 1985 and 1988.

Processing Notes:

The bulk of the collection materials arrived at Sacred Heart in 2009, having already been sorted, arranged, and often labeled, although Naylor's role in this process is unknown. Between 2012 and 2014, Gloria Naylor sent additional small donations of materials, mostly awards and personal books. The materials received minimal processing at Sacred Heart University between 2012 and 2014. In 2019, Sacred Heart University and scholars at Lehigh University collaborated to produce a more detailed finding aid, create online resources, and to begin digitizing the collection. At each stage of this process, the collection's original arrangement, including the folder titles as they were received, have been retained—with one exception.

The exception to this principle of arrangement is in Series I. Upon receipt from Gloria Naylor in 2009, the three subseries in Series I were originally arranged chronologically. In 2018, archivist Kelly Shand created new folders and reorganized materials to more consistently distinguish engagements, business correspondence, and personal correspondence in Series I. Accordingly, researchers should note that the distinction between business and personal correspondence was not present in the materials received from Gloria Naylor; additionally, some materials have been moved from general incoming or outgoing correspondence into the Engagements sub-series. Because there is no record of where materials were originally located, we have not attempted to restore the materials to their original arrangement, and instead indicate the folders devised in 2018 with an asterisk (*). A list of original folder titles, as they were recorded prior to 2018, is included as an appendix to this finding aid.

Because we have retained the original arrangement of materials as much as possible, researchers will find correspondence throughout Series II and Series III. For that reason, researchers interested in finding particular correspondents or correspondence may wish to request the detailed spreadsheet with some more information. To request it, please email innaylor@lehigh.edu

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Amanda Timolat, Sacred Heart University (2012-14)
Kelly L. Shand, Sacred Heart University (2018)
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Nadia Butler, Lehigh University (2021-22)
Isaiah Rivera, Lehigh University (2021)
Ellen Boyd, Lehigh University (2022-23)
Lauren Gilmore, Lehigh University (2022-23)
Afiwa Afandalo, Lehigh University (2021-23)

Access:

The Gloria Naylor Archive is open for researchers; to visit, please make an appointment by writing to innaylor@lehigh.edu. It will be located at Lehigh University in Bethlehem, PA through May 2023. After that, it will be at its permanent location at Sacred Heart University in Fairfield, CT.

Select materials from Series 2 related to *The Women of Brewster Place*, *Linden Hills*, and *Mama Day* are available digitally.

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