

## Bonnie Lee Moss Rattner Collection

Papers, 1961-1997

4.5 linear feet  
3 storage boxes  
1 large flat

Accession #1725

The papers of Bonnie Lee Moss Rattner were placed in the Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs in 1998 by Ms. Rattner and were opened for research in 2006.

Bonnie Lee Moss Rattner was a Wayne State University student who earned a bachelor's degree from the University in 1962 in English education and then studied briefly at Paris's Sorbonne University and the University of Michigan before beginning a career as a secondary school English teacher and mother. She returned to Wayne State University in 1965 to undertake graduate studies, which culminated in 1979 with her earning a Master of Arts degree in English.

It was in 1978 that she discovered Zora Neale Hurston's novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, which Rattner described as a life-changing experience. She decided to write an adaptation of the play that she initially titled "Eatonville" as her master's thesis project under the guidance of Wayne State University Professor L. Todd Duncan.

Rattner then spent several years in her effort to obtain the stage rights for the novel. Retitled "To Gleam It Around, To Show My Shine," the play was first performed for the public in 1983 at Wayne State University's Hilberry Theater.

Rattner devoted herself to convincing producers across the country to stage the play, which she referred to as her "second child," and she met with resounding success. "To Gleam It Around, To Show My Shine" was staged in New York at the Richard Allen Center in 1985 and at Harlem's Center for Cultural Research and at the Alliance Theater for the Atlanta New Play Project in 1986. Rattner's play received an award from the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts Fund for New American Plays in 1987, resulting in a 1988 production of "To Gleam It Around, To Show My Shine" at the Crossroads Theater in New Brunswick, New Jersey. Along with *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Rattner obtained the rights to Hurston's *Of Mules and Men*, which she adapted as "Light of Diamonds." A portion of that adaptation was performed in 1983 at Howard University by Ruby Dee.

Throughout her career as a writer, Rattner was deeply involved with seeing that worthy African-American literature obtained wider recognition. Rattner co-wrote an adaptation of Langston Hughes's *Not Without Laughter*. She also became co-producer of "Asinamali," a musical that opened on Broadway in 1987, and she sought wider

recognition for the work of Phillip Hayes Dean, whose plays “Robeson” and “Freedman” obtained international success.

In the 1990's, Rattner and Duncan began working on a book on the life of former Michigan Supreme Court Justice Otis M. Smith, the state's first black Supreme Court Justice. She also worked as a free-lance writer, writing numerous articles for publications such as *The Michigan Alumnus*, *Michigan Magazine* and *The Detroit News*.

The Bonnie Lee Moss Rattner Collection contains clippings, correspondence, articles, address lists, scripts and miscellaneous material pertaining primarily to Ms. Rattner's “To Glean It Around, To Show My Shine,” a two-act play based upon the novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God* by Zora Neale Hurston. Among the various subjects covered in the collection are African-American literature, Zora Neale Hurston, Langston Hughes, grant proposals, production rights, Wayne State University, playwriting and productions for the stage. Files are arranged alphabetically by subject.

**Important subjects in the collection:**

Adaptation of Previously Published Literature  
African-American Literature  
Stage Production  
Copyright and Publishing Rights  
Grant Writing  
Music  
Screenplays  
Women's Literature

**Important correspondents in the collection:**

Phillip Hayes Dean  
Ruby Dee  
Robert Nederlander  
Otis M. Smith

## Box 1

1. African-American literature; articles, 1978-90
2. Amelon, Debbie; articles, notes, n.d.
3. "Asinamali," 1987
4. Black Prima Donnas concert, 1989
5. Chennault, Steve; corres., 1981-84
6. Contracts, 1982-84
7. Correspondence, 1977-81
8. Correspondence, 1982
- 9-10. Correspondence, 1983
- 11.12. Correspondence, 1984
13. Correspondence, 1985
14. Correspondence, 1986
15. Correspondence, 1987
16. Correspondence; 1988
17. Correspondence, 1989
18. Correspondence, 1990
19. Correspondence, 1991
20. Correspondence, 1992
21. Correspondence, 1993
22. Correspondence, 1994
23. Correspondence, 1995
24. Correspondence, 1996
25. Correspondence, 1997
26. Correspondence, 1998-99
27. Crossroads Academy, 1993-95
28. Crossroads Theatre production of "To Glean," 1988
29. Dean, Phillip Hayes, 1986-88
30. Dee, Ruby, 1982-84
31. "Eatonville"; M.A. thesis, 1977
32. Engagement calendar, 1982

## Box 2

1. Hilberry Theatre production of "To Gleam," 1983
2. Hurston, Zora Neale; articles about, 1975-97
- 3-4. "Light of Diamonds"; scripts, set, songs, 1983-84, 1997
5. McGregor Memorial Conference Center; report, 1990
6. Metro Detroit Youth Foundation, 1979-85
7. *Not Without Laughter* adaptation, 1982-88
8. "To Gleam It Around"; notes, n.d.
9. "To Gleam It Around"; problems of adaptation, n.d.
10. Guggenheim Fellowship, 1987
- 11-12. Rattner, Bonnie Lee Moss; academic papers, 1961-1974
13. Rattner, Bonnie Lee Moss; photographs, n.d.
14. Rattner, Bonnie Lee Moss; resumes, academic transcript
15. Rattner, Bonnie Lee Moss; writings, n.d., 1979
16. Smith, Otis; corres., magazine profile, notes, 1986-96
17. *Their Eyes Were Watching God*; playwright's notations, n.d.
18. *Their Eyes Were Watching God*; synopsis, n.d.
19. *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and Zora Neale Hurston; notes, n.d.
20. "To Gleam It Around"; edits, 1983

## Box 3

"Eatonville" and "To Gleam It Around"; scripts, 1977-98

## Box 4

"To Gleam It Around"; scripts, posters