

Quincy Troupe Papers: 1915-2008

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Abstract

Quincy Troupe (born 1939) is a poet, author, and editor, perhaps best known for co-writing *Miles: The Autobiography* (1989) with the influential jazz trumpeter Miles Davis. His father, Quincy Troupe, Sr., was an all-star catcher in Negro league baseball. The Quincy Troupe papers, dating from 1915 to 2008, mainly document Troupe's career from the mid-1970s to 2008. They also hold the scrapbooks of Quincy Troupe, Sr.

Scope and Arrangement

The Quincy Troupe papers, dating from 1915 to 2008 (83.51 linear feet (193 boxes, 5 volumes, 3 tubes); 3.51 gb (575 computer files), mainly document the writer's career from 1970 to 2008. They also hold a small set of family papers and the scrapbooks of Quincy Troupe, Sr. The collection's strongest points are its documentation of Troupe's writings and other projects, particularly his books on Miles Davis, James Baldwin, and Chris Gardner; The Miles Davis Radio Project; his editorial work for the arts journal *Black Renaissance Noir* and *Code* magazine; and his published and unpublished poetry and essays.

The collection reveals Troupe's professional activities as a poet, author, editor, and educator through calendars and datebooks; clippings; correspondence with employers, friends, colleagues, and family; transcripts of interviews with Troupe; notebooks, journals, and diaries, some of which contain unpublished or early versions of poetry or essays; a small set of photographs; programs, flyers, and posters advertising readings, lectures, panel discussions, and other public events; resumes and biographies; teaching files; writings and project files; and writings by others.

The two largest segments of the collection are Correspondence and Writings and Projects.

The Writings and Projects files contain poem and essay drafts; annotated manuscripts, proofs and galleys; correspondence; contracts; interview transcripts; photographs; and clippings. The largest file sets document Miles Davis-related projects such as *Miles: The Autobiography*, The Miles Davis Radio Project, *Miles and Me*, and various other articles and public presentations. Transcripts of interviews with Davis, musicians, and other associates and friends of Davis make up a significant portion of the files for the autobiography and the radio series. See the container list for more details.

Other major components of the Writings and Project files include the arts journal *Black Renaissance Noir*; *Code* magazine; *James Baldwin: The Legacy*; *The Pursuit of Happiness*; *Thelonious Monk: An American Composer*; and most of Troupe's published poetry collections. The poem and essay drafts, both handwritten and printed, date from 1973 to 2008. Poem manuscripts and revised drafts can also be found in the files for Troupe's published collections, as he revised some poems for different publications.

The files for published books include drafts, manuscripts, proofs, and galleys. Smaller files contain drafts and finished manuscripts of essays and articles, some unpublished.

Files for articles and books about individuals usually contain interview transcripts which are annotated and are often significantly lengthier than the published versions, revealing how Troupe constructed his portraits. Troupe's conversation with his friend Terry McMillan, for example, is much longer and more revealing than the edited excerpts that appeared in *Emerge* magazine. Likewise, the interview with Joni Mitchell (conducted by co-producer Steve Rowland for The Miles Davis Radio Project) is a fascinating document that ranges far beyond the topic of Miles Davis. Troupe's interviewees include Miles Davis, James Baldwin (his final interview), Chris Gardner, Earl Monroe, Ornette Coleman, Ben Riley, Chinua Achebe, Wayne Shorter, Ishmael Reed, Danny Glover, Salif Keïta, visual artists such as Edward Clark and Grimanesa Amoros, and Chilean poet Nicanor Parra.

Other files in the Writings and Projects files illustrate Troupe's tenure as Poet Laureate of the State of California and his resignation from the post; and his participation in literary conferences, festivals, writing workshops, and performances. Those files hold schedules, brochures, correspondence, contracts, and occasional short manuscripts of writing by students or by Troupe. See the container list for more detailed descriptions of some of these file sets.

The Troupes collect art, and Margaret Porter Troupe owned a gallery when the couple was living in California. The Writings and Projects files contain some files pertaining to art or artists.

Transcripts of interviews of Troupe are arranged under Interviews. They hold clippings in addition to transcripts. One of the longer interviews was published in the *American Poetry Review*.

Correspondence consists primarily of notes or short letters to Troupe or his wife, Margaret Porter Troupe, from friends, colleagues, representatives of events or festivals with which Troupe was working, and colleges at which Troupe taught. The files hold no ongoing correspondence with any one individual or organization. Rather, letters from individuals are scattered throughout the correspondence, which is arranged chronologically, with the exception of a few individuals or companies that have their own folders. Correspondents include Walter Mosely, Ishmael Reed, Terry McMillan, Eugene Redmond, Chinua Achebe, Hugh Masekela, Sandy Dijkstra (Troupe's agent), Coffee House Press, Simon and Schuster, Houghton Mifflin, and A Gathering of the Tribes.

Teaching files document Troupe's career in academia from 1978 to 2003. Most of the files are from his time at the University of California, San Diego (UCSD) in the 1990s and early 2000s. Smaller files date from his years at the College of Staten Island, Columbia University, and other schools. The files contain syllabi, departmental or administrative correspondence, correspondence with students, student evaluations, tenure reviews, course schedules and catalogs, and student papers. The UCSD files also hold correspondence regarding Troupe's resignation from the university in the wake of his resignation from the post of Poet Laureate of the State of California. Researchers should also consult the Correspondence files for more documentation of Troupe's academic career.

The Notebooks, Journals, and Diaries are extensive, dating from 1968 to 2003, and are filled with poetry, observations, the beginnings of essays, and business notes. A portion of the books are numbered, though not in chronological sequence. Calendars and Datebooks primarily document Troupe's professional activities.

Programs, Flyers, and Posters are arranged chronologically. They document events of all types, including readings, performances, lectures, panel discussions, and award ceremonies. Letters or correspondence regarding events can be found with some items.

Clippings offer coverage of Troupe as early as his high school years (1956), but most date from 1968 to 2006, including periodicals from the late-1960s that no longer exist. Many of the clippings are articles by Troupe, but most are about him.

The Quincy Troupe, Sr. files hold his scrapbooks of photographs and letters documenting his time in Negro league baseball; leagues in Mexico, Cuba, Puerto Rico, Venezuela, and the Dominican Republic; and his amateur boxing career. The files also contain Quincy Troupe's correspondence with others about his father, and manuscripts and letters regarding his introduction to the 1995 edition of his father's memoir *20 Years Too Soon*.

The Troupe Family papers consist of correspondence among Troupe's siblings and his mother, Dorothy Smith, as well as photographs of Smith's family dating back to 1915.

The Writings by Others consist of manuscripts, or galleys sent by students, authors, and publishers for Troupe's review, feedback, or blurbs. Some include letters or resumes from the authors, and may contain Troupe's annotations or responses. Authors include Jeffrey Renard Allen, Paul Beatty, Charles Fuller, Derek Walcott, Walter Mosely, Margaret Atwood, Adrian Castro, Chinweizu, Ruth Forman, Margo Natalie Crawford, and the attorney Walter L. Gordon. These files also contain transcripts of interviews with Derek Walcott (not conducted by Troupe).

Biographical/Historical Information



Quincy Troupe (born 1939) is a poet, author, and editor, perhaps best known for co-writing *Miles: The Autobiography* (1989) with the influential jazz trumpeter Miles Davis [photo at left by Jerry Jack].

Troupe was born in St. Louis, Missouri. His father, Quincy Troupe, Sr., was an all-star catcher in Negro league baseball, and an amateur boxing champion. He played in leagues in Central and South America as well as the United States, and wrote a memoir, *20 Years Too Soon* (1977), about his baseball career.

Troupe became known first for his poetry. He was a member of the Watts Writers Workshop in Los Angeles, which formed in response to the Watts riots of 1965, and he edited *Watts Poets – A Book of New Poetry and Essays* (1968). His published collections of poetry include *The Architecture of Language* (2006), *Transcircularities: New and Selected Poems* (2002), *Choruses* (1999), *Avalanche* (1996), *Weather Reports: New and Selected Poems* (1991), *Skulls Along the River* (1984), *Snake-Back Solos: Selected Poems, 1969-1977* (1979), which received an American Book Award, and *Embryo Poems, 1967-1971* (1974). Troupe is also a highly-regarded performer of his poetry. He was featured on the Bill Moyers series *The Power of the Word* on PBS in 1989.

Miles: The Autobiography received an American Book Award in 1990. Troupe's other prose books include *Miles and Me: A Memoir of Miles Davis* (2000), *The Pursuit of Happiness* (with Chris Gardner, 2006), and *Earl the Pearl: My Story* (with Earl Monroe, 2013). He also co-produced *The Miles Davis Radio Project* (1989-1991), a public radio series; and wrote *Thelonious Monk: American Composer* (1991), a television documentary. Troupe prepared multiple drafts of a screenplay for *Miles and Me*. The film was in development for several years, but was never produced.

Troupe edited the anthologies *James Baldwin: The Legacy* (1989) and *Giant Talk: An Anthology of Third World Writing* (1975); served as senior editor of the journal *River Styx*; and is a founding editor of *Confrontation: A Journal of Third World Literature*, *Black Renaissance Noir*, and *American Rag*. He was the founding editorial director of *Code* magazine (1999-2000), and was involved in the early stages of *Advance* magazine in the mid-1980s, which eventually became *Emerge*. Troupe has also written freelance articles for many magazines, including *Spin* and *Elle*, and he was editor-at-large for *The Green Magazine*.

In 1991, Troupe received the Peabody Award for The Miles Davis Radio Project. His other honors include a fellowship from the New York Foundation for the Arts (1987); an American Book Award for lifetime achievement (2010); and the Milt Kessler Award for Poetry (2003). In 2002, Troupe was named Poet Laureate of the State of California, a post from which he was forced to resign after a background check revealed he had lied on his resume.

From the mid-1970s until 2003, he taught creative writing at the College of Staten Island, Columbia University, and the University of California, San Diego, and he continues to teach writing workshops for children and adults. Troupe lives with his wife, Margaret Porter Troupe, in Harlem, New York.