

# Black Academy of Arts and Letters Records, 1968-1980

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# Introduction

The Black Academy of Arts and Letters (BAAL) was established to "define, preserve, promote, cultivate, foster and develop the arts and letters of black people," as stated by Dr. C. Eric Lincoln in his founding address. Notable contributions by blacks to black America were to be recognized by Academy members, who themselves represented some of the finest achievements in arts and letters.

The Black Academy was founded on March 29, 1969, in Boston and was incorporated on June 12 in the state of New York as a nonprofit, tax-exempt organization. The Twentieth Century Fund financed initial operating expenses, providing \$50,000 in each of the first three years. With this money, Academy officials hired a staff and, in March 1970, opened its temporary headquarters at 475 Riverside Drive.

The Founding Committee was chaired by Dr. Lincoln, and membership was limited to fifty, with provisions to admit new fellows each year. The first board of directors was comprised of Lincoln (president), John O. Killens (vice president), Alvin F. Poussaint (treasurer), and Doris Saunders (secretary), along with Dr. Charles V. Hamilton, Dr. Vincent Harding, Robert Hooks, Charles White, and John A. Williams.

In September 1970 the first annual meeting of the Black Academy was held and included workshops and an awards banquet. At the first awards ceremony the Academy elected the late W. E. B. Du Bois into its Hall of Fame, thereby removing the long-standing visa restrictions imposed by the State Department on Mrs. Shirley Graham Du Bois, who thus was now able to attend. The painter, Henry Ossawa Tanner, and historian, Carter G. Woodson, were also enrolled. Other honorees that year included Lena Home, C. L. R. James, Diana Sands, Amiri Baraka, and Paul Robeson for their contributions to arts and letters. Annual meetings were held in September 1971 and October 1972.

In addition, the Academy established an Annual Letters competition for black authors. Among the first recipients were Mari Evans for poetry, Franklin W. Knight for scholastic work, William Melvin Kelly for fiction, and George Jackson for nonfiction. In 1972 the Academy received grants from the National Endowment for the Arts and the Johnson Publishing Company to conduct a conference in Chicago to assess the state of black art in the United States. The purpose of the conference was to establish a resource bank in preparation for compiling a directory of cultural activities in the black community.

Also in 1972, in an effort to economize, all staff positions at the Academy were eliminated, and an office manager was hired to tend to the day-to-day operations of the Academy. The BAAL records indicate that the board of directors and committees functioned through 1973, although there were no further annual meetings. The official date of the dissolution of the Academy is not known.

## Scope and Content

The records of the Black Academy of Arts and Letters (1968-1980) have been divided into three chronologically arranged series. Series I, the **Board of Directors Files** (1969-1973), contains related correspondence, agendas, and minutes of meetings, as well as the records of the three board committees.

Series II, the **Administrative Records** (1968-1980), includes materials on the founding of BAAL and those related to the day-to-day operation of the Academy. Daily correspondence, memoranda, financial papers, and mailing lists are also included.

The materials for the **Annual Meetings** (1970-1972), Series III, encompass the planning and programming of the 1970, 1971, and 1972 meetings, each of which covered two to three days of activities including workshops, cocktail parties, auctions, and awards banquets. These files also include correspondence, programs, transcripts of meetings, and financial records.

# Reel Contents

**Reel    Box**

**No.    No.    Folder/Contents**

## Series I: Board of Directors Files

1969

1	1	1	Black Academy of Arts and Letters—Incorporation Papers, 1969-1970
		2	President—Speeches and Addresses, 1969-1970
		3	Correspondence
		4	Agendas/Minutes of Meetings
		5	Credentials Committee

1970

6	Correspondence, Jan-April
7	Correspondence, May-December
8	Memoranda
9	Agendas/Minutes of Meetings
10	Awards Committee
11	Credentials Committee—Correspondence, 1970-1971
12	Credentials Committee—Candidates for Membership File

1971

1	2	1	Correspondence
		2	Memoranda
		3	Agendas/Minutes of Meetings
2	2	4	Awards Committee—Correspondence
		1	Credentials Committee, January-May
		2	Credentials Committee, June-December
		3	Credentials Committee—Nominees for New Fellows
		4	Credentials Committee—Special Election, President Leopold Senghor
		9	Credentials Committee—Ballots for New Fellows
		10	Membership, 1971

1972

11	Correspondence, January-April
12	Correspondence, May-December
13	Memoranda
14	Agendas/Minutes of Meetings

**Reel    Box**

**No.    No.    Folder/Contents**

- |   |   |  |
|---|---|--|
| 2 | 3 | 1    Credentials Committee                         |
|   |   | 2    Credentials Committee—Ballots for New Fellows |
|   |   | 3    Nominations Committee                         |
|   |   | 4    Proposition re: Term of Office                |

*1973*

- |  |  |                                       |
|--|--|---------------------------------------|
|  |  | 5    Memoranda                        |
|  |  | 6    Membership—Biographical Sketches |
|  |  | 7    Membership—Biographical Sketches |
|  |  | 8    Membership—Biographical Sketches |

**Series II: Administrative Records**

*1968*

- |   |   |  |
|---|---|--|
| 3 | 3 | 9    Founding of Black Academy of Arts and Letters, 1968-1969                |
|   |   | 10   Founding of Black Academy of Arts and Letters—Proposal, 1968-1969       |
|   |   | 11   Correspondence—Founding of Black Academy of Arts and Letters, 1968-1971 |
|   |   | 12   Membership—Founding Members   |

*1969*

- |  |  |                        |
|--|--|------------------------|
|  |  | 13   Constitution      |
|  |  | 14   Financial Records |

- |   |   |                           |
|---|---|---------------------------|
| 3 | 4 | 1    Correspondence, 1969 |
|---|---|---------------------------|

*1970*

- |  |  |                                       |
|--|--|---------------------------------------|
|  |  | 2    Correspondence, February-April   |
|  |  | 3    Correspondence, May-June         |
|  |  | 4    Correspondence, July             |
|  |  | 5    Correspondence, August-September |
|  |  | 6    Correspondence, October          |
|  |  | 7    Correspondence, November         |

- |   |   |                                      |
|---|---|--------------------------------------|
| 4 | 4 | 8    Correspondence, December        |
|   |   | 9    Correspondence—Du Bois, Shirley |
|   |   | 10   Memoranda                       |
|   |   | 11   Personnel Committee             |
|   |   | 12   Personnel Records               |

- |   |   |  |
|---|---|--|
| 4 | 5 | 1    Personnel Records—Candidates for Director |
|   |   | 2    Financial Records                         |

**Reel    Box****No.    No.    Folder/Contents**

4	5	3	Financial Records—Payroll
		4	Financial Records—Black Academy of Arts and Letters Contributors

*1971*

		5	Correspondence, January-February
		6	Correspondence, March-April
		7	Correspondence, May-June
		8	Correspondence, July-August

5	6	1	Correspondence, September
		2	Correspondence, October
		3	Correspondence, November-December
		4	Correspondence—Daily Mail Lists
		5	Memoranda
		6	Personnel Committee
		7	Biographical Sketches
		8	Biographical Sketches
		9	Minutes/Reports
		10	Program Proposals
		11	W. E. B. Du Bois Cocktail Party

6	7	1	Book Committee—Nominations for Awards, 1970 (works published in 1970)
		2	Book Committee—Nominations for Awards, 1971
		3	Book Committee—Nominations for Awards, 1971
		4	Book Committee—Book Lists
		5	Book Committee—Selections for Awards in Letters (works published in 1971)

6	8	1	Book Committee—Evaluation Forms
		2	Writers, 1971—Questionnaires
		3	Manual for Black Writers
		4	Artists' Committee
		5	Housing Committee, 1969-1971, n.d.
		6	Schomburg Committee, 1971
		7	John O. Killens, March 21 (book party)
		8	John O. Killens and John A. Williams, Reading Tour
		9	Fundraising
		10	Fundraising—Field Foundation

*1971*

		11	Fundraising—Ford Foundation
		12	Fundraising—Norman Foundation
		13	Fundraising—Stern Family

**Reel    Box**

**No.    No.    Folder/Contents**

6       8       14    Second World Festival of Black Arts

6       9       1      Financial Records, 1970-1971  
          2      Financial Records, 1970-1971

7       9       3      Financial Records, 1971  
          4      Newspaper Clippings, 1969-1971

**1972**

5      Correspondence, 1972  
 6      Insurance Coverage, 1970-1972  
          Staff Meetings  
 8      Book Committee  
 9      Book Committee—Evaluation Forms

7       10      1      Langston Hughes's House  
          2      Premiere of "Buck and the Preacher"  
          3-4   National Conference to Assess the State of Black Arts and Letters,  
                 May 26-28, 1972  
          5      National Conference to Assess the State of Black Arts and  
                 Letters—Transcript  
          6      Financial Records  
          7      Visitors' Register  
          8      Press Releases, 1969-1972  
          9      Newsletters, 1969-1972  
          10     Correspondence, 1973  
          11     Letters, 1974-1978

8       11      1      Financial Records, 1970-1973  
          2      Financial Records, 1973-1975, 1978  
          3      Financial Records, 1975-1977  
          4      Financial Records, 1977-1980  
          5      Mailing Lists  
          6      Mailing Lists  
          7      Mailing Lists  
          8      Mailing Lists  
          9      Mailing Lists  
          10     Mailing Lists

**Series III: Annual Meetings**

**1970**

9       12      1      Correspondence  
          2      Correspondence—Awards Banquet  
          3      Program Committee

**Reel    Box**

<b>No.</b>	<b>No.</b>	<b>Folder/Contents</b>
9	12	4    Pre-Banquet Party — Twentieth Century Fund
		5    Awards Banquet — Program
		6    Attendance
		7    Reservations — Membership
		8    Awards Banquet — Reservations
		9    Awards Banquet — Paul Robeson
		10   Awards Banquet-Transcript
		11   Post Awards Banquet
9	13	1    Transcript of Awards Banquet
		2    Workshops
		3    Social Science Workshop
		4    History and Education Workshop
		5    Performing Arts Workshop
10	13	6    Literature Workshop
		7    Fine Arts Workshop
		8    Film and Photography Workshop

**1971**

10	14	9    Correspondence
		10   Program Committee, 1970-1971
		11   Program
		12   Belafonte/Dee Party
		13   Belafonte/Dee Party (post-party letters)
		14   Reservations—Membership
		15   Awards Banquet—Reservations and Seating
		16   Awards Banquet—Invitations to be Sent
		17   Awards Banquet—Financial Records
		1    Awards Banquet Pledges
		2    Reservations—Membership
		3    Correspondence—Post-Awards Banquet
		4    Transcript, September 18
		5    Transcript, September 19
		6    Transcript, Awards Dinner
		7    Workshops
		8    Waldorf Astoria

**1972**

9    Correspondence
10   Benefit Cocktail Auction, October 8, 1972
11   Reservations
12   Program