

**Jackson State University  
Margaret Walker Center  
Archives and Record Division**

**Manuscript Collection**

**Collection Title:** Oliver Harrington Collection

**Dates Covered:** 1940s-1994

**Collection Number:** AF031

**Volume:** 2 linear feet

**Original** (x)  
**Duplicate** ( )  
**Microcopy** ( )  
**Photocopy** ( )

**Provenance:** Received from cartoonist, Oliver W. Harrington, in February 1994.

**Restrictions:**

None

**Copyright Warning: This material may be protected by copyright law (Title 17 U. S. Code)**

**Biography/History:**

Oliver Harrington was born in Valhalla, New York on 14th February, 1912. After being educated at Yale School of Fine Arts and the National Academy of Design, he contributed cartoons to newspapers in Harlem.

In 1935 Harrington was recruited by the Amsterdam News. It was while working for this paper that he created Bootsie, a heavy-set, bald man from Harlem. It was the first black comic strip to receive national recognition. Harrington later wrote about the birth of Bootsie: "I simply recorded the almost unbelievable but hilarious chaos around me and came up with a character. I was more surprised than anyone when Brother Bootsie became a Harlem celebrity."



During the 1930s Harrington became the first African American to establish an international reputation in cartooning. Harrington's work appeared in the Chicago Defender, The People's Voice and the Pittsburgh Courier. After the war Harrington also worked for the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People (NAACP). Harrington's cartoons often dealt with the subject of racism. He was particularly concerned about what he believed was government apathy about legislation against lynching.

In 1950 Harrington's political opinions brought him to the attention of the FBI and Joseph McCarthy. He decided to leave the country and went to live in Paris. Later he moved to East Berlin but continued to send cartoons to papers in the United States. As one critic commented: "sulphurous political cartoons attacking institutionalized racism, mindless imperialism, self-serving politicians, poverty, homelessness and bloated capitalists, all drawn in a gritty, ragged-line coarse-hatched style perfectly suited to the raw and painful bitterness of his ironic assault."

Harrington also wrote articles for American periodicals. Edited by Thomas Inge, a collection of these, *Why I Left America: And Other Essays*, was published in 1993. The same year saw the appearance of a selection of his best cartoons, *Dark Laughter*. Oliver Harrington died in East Berlin on 2nd November, 1995.

### **Scope and Content:**

The collection contains books, programs, booklets, videotapes, and printed material. This collection was arranged into series.

Series I: Books/Booklets

Series II: Photographs

Series III: Videotapes

Series IV: Programs

Series V: Newspaper Clippings



## Oliver W. Harrington Collection [AF031]

### BOX 1

#### Series I: Books/Booklets

F1 “Why I Left America” (booklets) by Oliver W. Harrington, 45 items

F2 “Where is the Justice?” by Oliver W. Harrington, 48 items

F3 “Why I Left America” (hardback books) by Oliver W. Harrington, 3 items

F4 Dark Laughter (hardback book) by Oliver W. Harrington, 1 items

### BOX 2

#### Series II: Photographs

F1 Contact sheet of Oliver Harrington with others

F2 Guest Book pages

Series III: Videotapes (4 items)

Series IV: Programs (137 items) and inserts

Series V: Newspaper Clippings (22 items)

