

Collection #
BV 3422,
SC 2682

**SOUL PEOPLE REPERTORY COMPANY, INC.
(INDIANAPOLIS, IND.)
SCRAPBOOK, 1973–1987**

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Processed by

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Indianapolis, IN 46202-3269

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COLLECTION INFORMATION

VOLUME OF
COLLECTION: 1 bound volume and one folder with loose items

COLLECTION
DATES: 1973–1987

PROVENANCE: Anna M. Parker

RESTRICTIONS: None

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ALTERNATE FORMATS:

RELATED HOLDINGS:

ACCESSION NUMBER: 2001.0942

NOTES:

HISTORICAL SKETCH

Soul People Repertory Company was a community-based organization established in Indianapolis in September 1975 by Helen Whitelowe. It was one of the many theater companies founded to express an African-American perspective after a new tide of Black Nationalism swept the United States during the 1960s. According to company literature, the organization was structured "to provide Greater Indianapolis and Central Indiana audiences with the many cultural facets and forms for enlightenment through theatre from a black perspective."

Helen Whitelowe came to Indianapolis in 1953. She became involved with the New World Players, a theatrical group headed by Reverend Mose Laderson, Sr. The New World Players became the Laderson Players. Laderson received grant funding and started the Hillside Cultural Center, Inc. The latter was located at 1737 Ingram before moving to 2802 N. Kenwood (formerly Indianapolis Public School #36). Laderson did production for the theater company and Whitelowe taught acting classes. John Gibson taught Creative Writing. Whitelowe and Gibson began conversations about the production of a radio show that would feature a restaurant or barber shop as a gathering hub of African Americans. As a result of their collaboration, "Soul People" became a series broadcast on radio. The fifteen-minute soap opera that aired in 1972 ran for a few episodes on WTLC-FM. It was picked up by WIBC-AM and WNAP-FM. Gibson scripted, introduced, and acted in the show. Later, Sandra White wrote it. After the demise of the radio show, Gibson and Whitelowe (who had directed and performed the lead role of Becky in the series) and several of its other actors banded together and became the Soul People Repertory Company, a full-fledged theatrical troupe. They retained the name "Soul People," hoping to keep their radio audience as a support base for the theater company.

Often the theater company performed original works. They did dramas, comedies, and musicals. Some of their performances included: *Big Mama*; *Boochie*; *Day of Absence*; *Don't Bother Me, I Can't Cope*; *An Era Recaptured*; *The First Breeze of Summer*; *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide when the Rainbow is Enuf*; *Hour Glass*; *Interview with God*; *The Me Nobody Knows*; *Mojo*; *My Mark, My Name*; *A Night of One-Act Plays*; *No Exit*; *No Place to be Somebody*; *The Prodigal Sister*; *Purlie*; *River Niger*; *River of my Song*; *Simply Heavenly*; *Tambourines of Glory*; *To be Young, Gifted, and Black*; *We Wear the Mask*; and *Zooman and the Sign*.

Productions were funded by ticket sales, fundraising projects, and grants. Helen Whitelowe directed the majority of the performances through the 1980s. Other directors included Bob Gillman, Bernie Hall, Joseph Laderson, and Glenn White.

In addition to their home theater, initially located at the Central Avenue United Methodist Church, SPRC's

performances were held at various venues throughout the city including the Command Playhouse at Fort Harrison, Crispus Attucks High School, Hedback Community Theatre, Indiana National Bank Plaza, Indianapolis Women's Prison, Lilly Theatre at the Children's Museum, Scenic View Country Club, and the St. Peter Claver Center. To encourage more exposure, often plays were performed at different places during a single run. In 1980 and 1983, for example, Judi Ann Mason's *Living Fat* was performed at the Central Avenue United Methodist Church, the Forest Manor Multi-Service Center, and the Lilly Theatre. As part of community outreach SPRC performed many works for schools.

Beyond its theatrical performances, the Soul People Repertory Company held several community programs. In 1976, the black drama troupe sponsored a weekend of Broadway shows and a sightseeing trip to New York. The organization brought noted playwright, Ed Bullins, to Indianapolis. "An Evening with Ed Bullins" was held at the Hilton Hotel on 23 August 1980. The theatre company sponsored a Community Festival, Champagne Sips for patrons, rent parties reminiscent of the 1930s for fundraising, and dramatic readings.

As early as 1980, the troupe offered a plethora of classes for the general public. The focus of the courses was to teach and enhance self-discipline and self-expression. The class curriculum included adult, teenage, and children's basic acting, stagecraft skills and movement, jazz dance, and martial arts. Along with its goal to present "quality family-oriented productions," SPRC also periodically offered seminars and workshops in the arts.

During a telephone interview (14 January 2002) Helen Whitelowe, who retired as director of the Soul People Repertory Company during the late 1980s, gave the purpose and value of the theater group: "We were interested in presenting materials that were informative, educational, and entertaining. We exposed persons with talent that had no previous background or training to the community. I enjoyed mixing brand new people with seasoned actors. Many people had a chance to go into themselves to develop characters. Trips to New York and Chicago exposed more people to the world of theater." Glenn White replaced Whitelowe as director of the troupe. The theater company officially closed in 1995.

Sources: Materials in the collection. Telephone interviews conducted by Wilma L. Gibbs with Glenn White (Indianapolis Museum of Art), 9 January 2002, and Helen C. Whitelowe, 14 January 2002.

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

The collection (1973–87) is composed of a scrapbook and one folder of loose items originally in the volume. Most of the materials pertain to the Soul People Repertory Company (SPRC), an African-American theatre group founded in Indianapolis in 1975. There are also materials that relate to the Hillside Cultural Center, Inc., a forerunner of SPRC, and its productions. Items in the collection include correspondence, programs, postcards, flyers, news clippings, certificates, stage bills, and photographs.

Collection materials also relate to the productions of other theaters; the activities of staff at SPRC including Helen Whitelowe, Glenn White, Mose Laderson, Sr., Jerry Lewis, Wilma Greene, and Bellary C. Darden; work of other known personalities such as Ed Bullins, Mari Evans, and Steve Oxendine; and general African-American history and cultural events.

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CATALOGING INFORMATION

For additional information on this collection, including a list of subject headings that may lead you to related materials:

1. Go to the Indiana Historical Society's online catalog: <http://157.91.92.2/>
2. Click on the "Basic Search" icon.
3. Select "Call Number" from the "Search In:" box.
4. Search for the collection by its basic call number (in this case, BV 3422).
5. When you find the collection, go to the "Full Record" screen for a list of headings that can be searched for related materials.