



Smithsonian  
*Archives of American Art*

A Finding Aid to the Charles W. and  
Frances White Letters and Photographs  
to Melvin and Lorraine Williamson,  
1956-1961, in the Archives of American Art

Rayna Andrews

Funding for the processing of this collection  
was provided by the Henry Luce Foundation.

2019/11/26

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## Collection Overview

<b>Repository:</b>	Archives of American Art
<b>Title:</b>	Charles W. and Frances White letters and photographs to Melvin and Lorraine Williamson
<b>Identifier:</b>	AAA.willimel
<b>Date:</b>	1956-1961
<b>Extent:</b>	0.2 Linear feet
<b>Creator:</b>	White, Charles, 1918-1979 Williamson, Mel
<b>Language:</b>	English .
<b>Summary:</b>	The Charles W. and Frances White letters and photographs to Melvin and Lorraine Williamson measure 0.2 linear feet and date from 1956 to 1961. The collection includes twenty-eight letters written by Charles and Frances White to Melvin (Mel) and Lorraine Williamson shortly after their arrival in California. Approximately half of the letters are written by Charles, the other half by Frances, and two letters are written jointly. Most are signed from "Chas & Fran." Also included in the collection are photographs that Charles and Frances sent the Williamsons of their home and Charles' studio, and printed material including clippings and exhibition brochures.

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## Administrative Information

### Acquisition Information

The Charles W. and Frances White letters and photographs to Melvin and Lorraine Williamson were donated to the Archives of American Art in 2019 by Lisa Rosenberg, Melvin and Lorraine Williamson's daughter.

### Related Materials

The Archives of American Art also holds the Charles W. White papers, the Lucinda H. Gedeon research material on Charles White, and an oral history interview with Charles W. White conducted by Betty Hoag, March 9, 1965.

### Processing Information

The collection was minimally processed and a finding aid prepared by Rayna Andrews in 2019 with funding from the Henry Luce Foundation.

### Preferred Citation

Charles W. and Frances White letters and photographs to Melvin and Lorraine Williamson, 1956-1961. Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

## Restrictions

This collection is open for research. Access to original papers requires an appointment and is limited to the Archives' Washington, D.C. Research Center.

## Conditions Governing Use

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## Biographical / Historical

Painter, printmaker, and educator, Charles W. White (1918-1979) was a prominent figure in the Chicago Black Renaissance and became one of the most celebrated and influential African American artists of the twentieth century. Born and raised in Chicago, Illinois, White lived and worked throughout the country, settling in California in 1956. He taught at the Otis Art Institute from 1965 until his death. White's artwork was primarily figurative and depicted African American history, socio-economic struggles, and human relationships.

Charles and Frances Barrett White (1926-2000) married in 1950. They relocated to Los Angeles in 1956. Frances Barrett White was a social worker and educator who spent her early years in New York City. In 1994, she published a book, *Reaches of the Heart: A Biography of Charles White*.

Melvin Williamson (1923-1995) was an artist, author, and the art director of Viking Press. He attended the Art Institute of Chicago before moving to New York.

Lorraine Rosen Williamson (1926-2018) was an educator and a docent at the Jewish Heritage Museum in New York City.

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## Scope and Contents

The Charles W. and Frances White letters and photographs to Melvin and Lorraine Williamson measure 0.2 linear feet and date from 1956 to 1961. The collection includes twenty-eight letters written by Charles and Frances White to Melvin (Mel) and Lorraine Williamson shortly after their arrival in California. The letters refer to financial and personal struggles, as well as career triumphs and current events. In addition to their shared Chicago background, both the Whites and Williamsons were interracial couples. The letters include references to racial and social dynamics, especially comparing California to New York. Approximately half of the letters are written by Charles, the other half by Frances, and two letters are written jointly. Most are signed from "Chas & Fran."

The collection also contains photographs, negatives, and slides depicting Charles and Frances with friends, their home, and Charles' studio. Many photographs include explanatory notes. Also included are clippings and exhibition brochures for Charles White's 1958 exhibition at ACA Gallery, as well as Anton Refregier's *Recent Paintings* exhibition.

## Arrangement

This collection is arranged as one series.

- Series 1: Charles W. and Frances White letters and photographs to Melvin and Lorraine Williamson, 1956-1961 (0.2 linear feet; Box 1)

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## Names and Subject Terms

This collection is indexed in the online catalog of the Smithsonian Institution under the following terms:

Subjects:

African American artists  
African American painters  
Interracial marriage

Names:

White, Frances Barrett  
Williamson, Lorraine, 1926-2018

Occupations:

Art directors -- New York (State) -- New York  
Educators  
Painters -- California -- Los Angeles  
Printmakers -- California -- Los Angeles

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## Container Listing

### Series 1: Charles W. and Frances White Letters and Photographs to Melvin and Lorraine Williamson, 1956-1961

#### 0.2 Linear feet (Box 1)

The Charles W. and Frances White letters and photographs to Melvin and Lorraine Williamson measure 0.2 linear feet and date from 1956 to 1961. The collection includes twenty-eight letters written by Charles and Frances White to Melvin (Mel) and Lorraine Williamson shortly after their arrival in California. The letters refer to financial and personal struggles, as well career triumphs and current events. In addition to their shared Chicago background, both the Whites and Williamsons were interracial couples. The letters include references to racial and social dynamics, especially comparing California to New York. Approximately half of the letters are written by Charles, the other half by Frances, and two letters are written jointly. Most are signed from "Chas & Fran."

The collection also contains photographs, negatives, and slides depicting Charles and Frances with friends, their home, and Charles' studio. Many photographs include explanatory notes. Also included are clippings and exhibition brochures for Charles White's 1958 exhibition at ACA Gallery, as well as Anton Refregier's *Recent Paintings* exhibition.

The letters appear first and are arranged chronologically. They are followed by the photographic material, then the printed material. The name that appears first in the folder title indicates whose handwriting the letter is written or signed in.

Box 1, Folder 1	Frances and Charles White to Melvin and Lorraine Williamson, 1956 October 15
Box 1, Folder 2	Frances and Charles White to Melvin and Lorraine Williamson, 1956 October 29
Box 1, Folder 3	Frances and Charles White to Melvin and Lorraine Williamson, 1956 November 13 Typed letter with postscript in Frances White's handwriting.
Box 1, Folder 4	Frances and Charles White to Melvin and Lorraine Williamson, 1956 December 25
Box 1, Folder 5	Frances White to Melvin and Lorraine Williamson, 1957 February 3
Box 1, Folder 6	Charles White to Melvin Williamson, 1957 February 4
Box 1, Folder 7	Charles White to Melvin and Lorraine Williamson, 1957 February 25
Box 1, Folder 8	Frances and Charles White to Melvin and Lorraine Williamson, 1957 March 18 Includes photograph.
Box 1, Folder 9	Frances and Charles White to Melvin and Lorraine Williamson, 1957 May 5 Includes extended postscript in Charles White's handwriting.

- Box 1, Folder 10 Charles and Frances White to Melvin and Lorraine Williamson, 1957 June 5
- Box 1, Folder 11 Frances White Postcard to Melvin and Lorraine Williamson, 1957 June 17
- Box 1, Folder 12 Charles and Frances White to Melvin and Lorraine Williamson, 1957 July 30
- Box 1, Folder 13 Frances and Charles White to Melvin and Lorraine Williamson, 1957 November 17
- Box 1, Folder 14 Frances and Charles White to Melvin and Lorraine Williamson, 1958 January 12  
Typed, signed in Frances White's handwriting.
- Box 1, Folder 15 Frances and Charles White to Melvin and Lorraine Williamson, 1958 February 12
- Box 1, Folder 16 Charles and Frances White to Melvin and Lorraine Williamson, 1958 March 24
- Box 1, Folder 17 Charles and Frances White to Melvin and Lorraine Williamson, 1958 April 22
- Box 1, Folder 18 Frances and Charles White to Melvin and Lorraine Williamson, 1958 May
- Box 1, Folder 19 Frances and Charles White to Melvin and Lorraine Williamson, 1958 October 27
- Box 1, Folder 20 Charles and Frances White to Melvin and Lorraine Williamson, 1959 January 18
- Box 1, Folder 21 Charles and Frances White to Melvin and Lorraine Williamson, 1959 February 15
- Box 1, Folder 22 Charles and Frances White to Melvin and Lorraine Williamson, 1959 April 29  
This majority of this letter is in Charles White's handwriting. Frances' handwriting begins on the bottom of the 6th page and continues through the close of the letter at the top of the 8th page.
- Box 1, Folder 23 Frances and Charles White to Melvin and Lorraine Williamson, 1959 July 24
- Box 1, Folder 24 Charles and Frances White to Melvin and Lorraine Williamson, 1959 September 17  
Includes announcement for Charles White exhibition at the Pacific Town Club.
- Box 1, Folder 25 Charles and Frances White to Melvin and Lorraine Williamson, 1960 March 25
- Box 1, Folder 26 Frances White to Melvin and Lorraine Williamson, 1960 April 17?
- Box 1, Folder 27 Charles and Frances White to Melvin and Lorraine Williamson, 1960 May 8

- Box 1, Folder 28 Charles and Frances White to Melvin and Lorraine Williamson, 1960 June 20
- Box 1, Folder 29 Photographs and Negatives of Charles and Frances White, Friends, Home, and Works of Art, 1957-1961  
Many photographs include notes on the back written in Frances White's handwriting.
- Box 1, Folder 30 Slides of California, 1960 December
- Box 1, Folder 31 Printed Material, 1956-1958  
Includes clippings and exhibition brochures for Charles White's exhibition of prints and drawings at ACA Gallery, as well as an exhibition brochure for the Anton Refregier *Recent Paintings* exhibition at ACA Gallery.

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