African American Writers’ Archives: Richard Wright (1908–1960)

Richard Wright is perhaps best known for his critically-acclaimed collection *Uncle Tom’s Children*: Four Novellas (1938), his ground-breaking novel *Native Son* (1940) and his autobiography, first published as *Black Boy: A Record of Childhood and Youth* (1945). *Black Boy* was the on the bestseller list from April 29 to June 6 of that year, despite being denounced as obscene in the U.S. Senate by Democrat Theodore Bilbo of Mississippi, and the book solidified, Wright’s then reputation as the most famous black author in America. Wright spent the remainder of his career in Paris where he continued to produce fiction, extensive travel writings, essays about social and political issues of the day and, toward the end of his life, an impressive body of haiku. A restored text, *Black Boy (American Hunger): A Record of Childhood and Youth*, was established by The Library of America in 1991.

Richard Wright, *Black Boy: A Record of Childhood and Youth* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1945). The autobiography illustrates the profound journey that Wright takes as an aspiring writer—from a childhood mired in poverty to great hope for future success, a success made palpable by the publication of the book itself. A sense of freedom for Wright is inextricably tied to literacy as evidenced by the famous scene of his forging a note to a segregated public library.


Richard Wright’s library cards (1940–55) and a passport issued at Buenos Aires, Argentina, March 6, 1950; Occupation: Writer. The passport includes stamps and visas for Haiti, the United Kingdom, Spain, the Gold Coast, and Switzerland.
Book jacket proofs (American and German; n.d.)
Photograph of a book display featuring *Black Boy* at Washington Square Library (1945).

Richard Wright, “Black Confession” earliest manuscript, holograph draft of *Black Boy* (ca. 1942).
Dorothy Canfield Fisher to Richard Wright, July 1, 1944.
Richard Wright to Dorothy Canfield Fisher, July 6, 1944.