

**Eldridge Cleaver**

**Co-founder of Black Panther Party**

**Blair-Caldwell African American Research Library  
Denver Public Library**

**Eldridge Cleaver Papers**  
**Blair-Caldwell**  
**African American Research Library**  
**2004**

**Provenance:** The collection was donated to the Blair-Caldwell African American Research Library in 2004.

**Ownership:** Literary and copyrights have been assigned to the Denver Public Library.

**Call Number:** MS-ARL109

**Size:** 1 box (0.25 linear feet)

**Processed By:** Brent Wagner

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**Biographical note**

Leroy Eldridge Cleaver was born on 31 August 1935 to Leroy (a dining car waiter) and Thelma (a janitor) Cleaver in Wabbaseka, Arkansas. As a child, Cleaver endured two family moves – to Phoenix (where he shined shoes) and then to Los Angeles (where marijuana hustling landed him in reform school). By 1957, in addition to theft charges, Cleaver was convicted of assault and sent to prison. While in Folsom and San Quentin, he wrote essays outlining his views on racial issues and revolutionary violence. Compiled in his book, *Soul on Ice*, these ideas bred the mentality of the Black Power movement.

A co-founder of the Black Panther Party, Cleaver served as the Information Minister. He was involved in a shootout with Oakland Police in 1968. Faced with arrest (the FBI placed him on its most-wanted list), Cleaver lived as an exile in Cuba, Algeria, and Paris. In 1975, Cleaver returned voluntarily to the United States and, after a protracted legal battle, received only probation. He later denounced the Black Panthers, converted to Christianity, became a supporter of the Republican Party, and toured the country giving speeches about his religious and secular experiences.

During the 1980s and 1990s, his behavior relapsed and he endured more brushes with the law (for traffic violations and cocaine addiction). Throughout the regression, he maintained his “born-again” Christian bent.

Cleaver died in 1998 on the first of May.

### **Scope and Content**

The Eldridge Cleaver Papers are divided into four series: Biographical Documents, Correspondence, Publications, and Miscellaneous. Within each series, the documents are arranged chronologically.

The bulk of this donation pertains to Cleaver's time in California during the late 1970s. After returning to the United States in 1975, Cleaver renounced the Black Panther Party, converted to Christianity, and remained active in the San Francisco Bay Area.

The Biographical Series (Box 1, Folder 1) contains a revision draft copy of an entry about Cleaver for *Contemporary Authors*, a well-known reference tool.

The Correspondence Series (five folders) is divided into four subseries: Legal, Status Reports, Speaking Engagements, and Miscellaneous. The Legal subseries contains a signed, scathing memo from Cleaver to Marvin Jackmon, a special aide to the Black Panther Party. The nature of the memo seems to be indicative of the rift that occurred between Cleaver and the Panthers; four communiqués comprise the Status Reports subseries. Cleaver wrote two long and candid messages that convey his episodes from Algeria in 1972. (Among other things, apparently, he was accused of being involved in a hijacking incident.) The other two missives (one written by Kathleen, his wife) serve as updates for people following Cleaver's 1976 post-bail activities; the Speaking Engagements subseries contains letters sent to Cleaver by various organizations that paid him to make public appearances. Researchers will find itineraries and drafts of contracts that Cleaver used to command \$3,500 fees; and, the Miscellaneous Correspondence (Box 1, Folder 6) contains eight pages of notes that Cleaver took on a yellow legal pad. The notes represent a hodge-podge of thoughts and scribbles on a variety of topics.

The third series, Publications (six folders), contains six subseries: Legal, Transcripts, Speeches, Reprints/Pamphlets, Drafts, and Clippings. One 3-page court order (Case No. 42278, "The People of the State of California" versus "Eldridge Cleaver," Superior Court of California, Alameda County, dated 23 August 1976) comprises the Legal subseries. The presiding judge, Alan A. Lindsay, issued instructions for parties involved in the case not to speak with the media; The second subseries, Transcripts, consists of a 29 August 1976 NBC "Meet the Press" episode that featured Cleaver, along with Bill Monroe (NBC News), Ford Rowan (also with NBC), Paul Delaney (*New York Times*), and Robert Novak (*Chicago Sun-Times*); the Speeches subseries contains a list of dates and places (civic, campuses, churches, and media outlets) that hosted Cleaver in 1976. Also, there exist two samples of his religious speeches; several article reprints and pamphlets occupy the fourth subseries. These include "The Education of Eldridge Cleaver" (*Reader's Digest*), "Eldridge Cleaver at Exile's End" (*Washington Post* and "Firing Line"), *The FBI, OPD, and Eldridge Cleaver*, and *The Crusader* (vol.1, no.1)

(Newsletter of the Eldridge Cleaver Crusades). Also grouped within this Reprints/Pamphlets subseries are three flyers from 1977 that advertise Cleaver appearances; the fifth Publications subseries, Drafts, contains proofs and edits of text and photographs that Cleaver used to create final, production quality pamphlets, advertisements, and newsletters. Correspondence from Governor Jerry Brown appears, as do some ancillary magazine articles, and a portion of an FBI most-wanted poster; a slew of newspaper clippings resides in Box 1, Folder 12. This last subseries, Clippings, mostly features journalism from the year 1977. The publications include, but are not limited to, the *Palo Alto Times*, the *San Diego Squire*, the *Vancouver Sun*, the *San Francisco Examiner*, the *San Francisco Chronicle*, and the *Santa Cruz Sentinel*.

The last series, Miscellaneous, consists of one folder (Box 1, Folder 13). Researchers can view business cards, stationery, and a list of entertainers that presumably supported Cleaver with his legal woes.

### **Related Material**

Lauren Watson Papers (ARLM79) (<http://aarl.denverlibrary.org/archives/minus.html>)

### **Container list**

Box 1	F1	Biographical Documents ( <i>Contemporary Authors</i> draft)	ca. 1969
Box 1	F2	Correspondence (Legal)	26 July 1977
Box 1	F3	Correspondence (Status Reports)	1972
Box 1	F4	Correspondence (Status Reports)	ca. 1977
Box 1	F5	Correspondence (Speaking Engagements)	ca. 1977
Box 1	F6	Correspondence (Miscellaneous)	1971, 1977, n.d.
Box 1	F7	Publications (Legal)	1976

Box 1	F8	Publications (Transcripts)	1976
Box 1	F9	Publications (Speeches)	1976
Box 1	F10	Publications (Pamphlets / Reprints)	1976 – 1977
Box 1	F11	Publications (Drafts / Galleys)	1970s
Box 1	F12	Publications (Clippings)	1973, 1977
Box 1	F13	Miscellaneous	1970s