

The Alfred and Bernice Ligon Aquarian Collection at CSU Dominguez Hills



Alfred (1906-2002) and Bernice Ligon (1908-2000) were proprietors of the Aquarian Book Shop from 1941 on south Western Avenue in Los Angeles, California until it closed permanently in 1994. Alfred M. Ligon opened the shop with \$100 saved from his salary as a Southern Pacific Railroad waiter with the help of his sister Jeni LeGon.

He bought fiction, nonfiction and metaphysics books from a secondhand shop in downtown Los Angeles, and the shop made available to researchers his collection of historic documents that included drafts of Marcus Garvey's speeches and letters of W.E.B. DuBois.

The Aquarian Book Shop was the longest-running African American owned bookstore in the U.S. Since the death of Alfred Ligon in 2002, the Aquarian Spiritual Center, which he also founded, had been the stewards of collection. Now, the collection is the largest donation the University Archives at CSU Dominguez Hills has received on African American and metaphysical content. The collection has 5,000 items donated the Aquarian Spiritual Center, with a signed copy of *"I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings"* by Maya Angelou, a signed copy of *"An African Treasury"* by Langston Hughes, and *"Roots"* by Alex Haley, the first edition of *"Native Son"* by Richard Wright. During Black History Month in February last year, the Department of Africana Studies and University Archives and Special Collections at CSU Dominguez Hills presented "The Font of Black Culture in Los Angeles: The Alfred and Bernice Ligon Aquarian Collection", an exhibit (February 10, 2015 to September 1, 2015) of select items in the collection at the CSU Dominguez Hills university library.

Specifically, the collection contains archival (53 boxes, 30 linear feet) materials and rare books related to Alfred and Bernice Ligon as the proprietors and founders of The Aquarian Bookshop and Aquarian Spiritual Center in Los Angeles, CA; their interests in African American history and culture; and studies and teaching of metaphysics, occultism and Black gnostic studies. The archival collection concentrates on the operations and events of the Aquarian Bookshop, curriculum of the Aquarian Spiritual Center, and African American culture. The rare book collection focuses on African American history and culture; literature and poetry by Black authors; Africa and Pan-Africanism; and metaphysics, the occult, spirituality, and gnostic studies. Included in the collection are published books and periodicals, small press poetry books and chapbooks, manuscripts, pamphlets, ephemera, newspaper clippings, administrative papers, photographs, film negatives, cassette tapes, film and audio reels, VHS tapes, and digital media.

The University Archives and Special Collections are located on the fifth floor of the University Library South Wing. For more information, contact University Archives and Special Collections at (310) 243-3895 or <http://www4.csudh.edu/libarchives/>.