

John Garfield:

An Inventory of His Papers at the Harry Ransom Center

Descriptive Summary

- Creator:** Garfield, John, 1913-1952
- Title:** John Garfield Papers
- Dates:** 1932-2010, undated
- Extent:** 4 document boxes, 2 oversize box (osb), 2 bound volumes (bv) (5.04 linear feet)
- Abstract:** The John Garfield papers, 1932-2010, consist of production photographs and film stills, headshots, photographs, posters, sheet music, clippings, and press releases from his film and stage work; film contracts, articles, magazines, family photos, and correspondence donated by his daughter, Julie Garfield.
- Call Number:** Film Collection No. FI-00074
- Language:** English
- Access:** Open for research. Researchers must create an online Research Account and agree to the Materials Use Policy before using archival materials.
- Special Handling Instructions:** Special Handling Instructions: Most of the binders in this collection have been left in an unaltered or minimally processed state to provide the reader with the look and feel of the original. **When handling the binders with inserted materials, users are asked to be extremely careful in retaining the original order of the material.** Most of the photographs and negatives in the collection have been sleeved, but patrons must use gloves when handling unsleeved photographic materials.
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Administrative Information

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Biographical Sketch

John Garfield (1913-1952) was an American actor. Born Jacob Julius Garfinkle on March 4, 1913 on the Lower East side of Manhattan, he would always be called “Julie” by those who knew him personally. He had a difficult childhood, as his mother died when he was seven-years-old and his father sent he and his younger brother to live with different sets of relatives. Garfield ended up in Brooklyn. He was a troubled youth, finally getting kicked out of school. He relocated to the Bronx to live with his father again and entered for junior high school at P.S. 45 under the care of Angelo Patri. It was Patri who encouraged him to join debate and, seeing that he had a gift for expressing himself colorfully, finally theater. Patri helped Garfield get a drama scholarship to attend Roosevelt High School. This lasted for a semester, long enough for Garfield to perform two parts in *A Midsummer’s Night Dream*. After entering and quitting two other high schools in 1929, Garfield applied to The American Laboratory Theater run by Richard Boleslavski and Mme. Maria Ouspenskaya. When he was accepted, it was Patri who gave Garfield a five-dollar stipend for the next five months to follow his dream. It was an important time for Garfield, as he would meet Stella Adler, Lee Strasberg, as well as other members of what would become the Group Theater.

When The American Laboratory Theater closed its doors after that year, Garfield moved to the Civic Repertory Theater where he was an apprentice doing all manner of things related to the theater, ranging from cleaning to playing bit parts on stage. He also met Robbe Seidman, the friend of one of his fellow apprentices and who would eventually become his wife—but not before taking off with an old neighborhood buddy on a hitchhiking and train jumping trip clear to the West coast. The duo made it to California to work for a few weeks before deciding to return home separately. It was on his return journey that Garfield fell ill with rheumatic fever, which would result in a permanently weakened heart.

Nevertheless, Garfield made it back to New York City in 1932, to Robbe, and to acting classes at Civic Rep. There he met aspiring playwright and actor, Clifford Odets, who told him about the newly-formed Group Theater. Known for popularizing Method acting, Group Theater was founded by Harold Clurman, Lee Strasberg, and Cheryl Crawford. It wasn’t until three years later in 1934 that Garfield would be accepted to apprentice at Group Theater, however. In the meantime, he had his first two Broadway experiences in 1932 and 1933 in *Lost Boy* and *Counsellor-At-Law*. This is when he would first appear under the name “Garfield”.

Garfield and Robbe Seidman were married on January 27, 1935 and by this time he was very active in Group. This was also the year in which many of its members and Robbe would join the Communist Party. Garfield never joined. Though he described himself as liberal politically, his passion was for acting and he didn’t give political causes much time. Robbe, by contrast, was more politically active and Garfield often signed whatever petition she endorsed.

Between 1934 and 1936, Garfield appeared in six Group Theater productions—*Gold Eagle Guy* (1934), *Awake and Sing!!!* (1935), *Waiting for Lefty* (1935), *Weep for the Virgins* (1935), *The Case of Clyde Griffiths* (1936), and *Johnny Johnson* (1936)—before appearing again in a Broadway production *Having a Wonderful Time* (1937), which would run for 132 performances. At that time, Clifford Odets gave Garfield the script for *Golden Boy*, having written the lead just for him. Harold Clurman, however, cast Garfield in a smaller role, something that Garfield couldn't get over. So, when Warner Bros. approached him for a screen test, he agreed to try out.

The Warner Bros. executives saw something special in Garfield and signed him to a two-picture deal. Garfield headed to Hollywood to play a supporting role in *Four Daughters* (1938), for which he was nominated for an Academy Award. For his second picture, *Blackwell's Island* (1939), he earned top billing. Seeing that he was a star in the making, Warner Bros. signed him to a seven-year studio contract. Unfortunately Garfield was so good at playing the anti-hero, rebel character that audiences adored, as he did in *Four Daughters*, that he was rarely given any chance to play anything different. Regardless, Garfield averaged three pictures a year during his Warner Bros. contract, including such notables as *Dust Be My Destiny* (1939), *Saturday's Children* (1940), *The Sea Wolf* (1941), *The Fallen Sparrow* (1943), *Pride of the Marines* (1945), and *Humoresque* (1946), and a couple of MGM studio loan films, *Tortilla Flat* (1942) and *The Postman Always Rings Twice* (1946). It was actually John Steinbeck himself who suggested Garfield for *Tortilla Flat*.

When his contract with Warner Bros. was up, Garfield was offered roles from nearly every major production company, but instead decided to start his own. He partnered with Bob Roberts and formed Bob Roberts Productions. The two set about looking for a script and decided to hire Arnold Manoff to write the true story of boxer Barney Ross, who had an upbringing strikingly similar to that of Garfield. Roberts and Garfield, with the help of independent studio Enterprise, made and released *Body and Soul* in 1947. It was a hit and Garfield was nominated for an Academy Award for his leading role. Garfield also had a supporting role in *Gentleman's Agreement* (1947, 20th Century Fox) that year alongside Gregory Peck. Roberts and Garfield made one other joint production in 1948, *Force of Evil*.

Garfield went on to make four more films before proceedings with the House Un-American Activities Committee black-listed him in 1951, accusing him of being affiliated with communist activities, a claim which he denied and for which no evidence was ever produced. Much to the contrary, Garfield was a staunch supporter of American Troops during the war, donating money to causes for enlisted soldiers, buying and selling war bonds, participating in USO tours abroad to entertain troops, starring in studio films in support of the war, and even trying to enlist twice in the military to join the fight—his heart condition made him ineligible, however.

After being black-listed in Hollywood, Garfield returned to Broadway in the starring role of *Golden Boy* in 1951, finally getting the part denied to him in 1938. In the previous few years leading up to 1952, Garfield's heart gave him more trouble. The intense physical workouts he insisted on for *Golden Boy*, coupled with the stress of appearing before HUAC, are believed to have been the main cause for the heart attack he suffered in his sleep on May 21, 1952.

Fearing a riot, the New York City Police Department begged Garfield's widow, Robbe, to have a public funeral. She finally relented, and an estimated 10,000 people came to pay their last respects to John Garfield.

Sources:

Notts, Robert. *He Ran All The Way: The Life of John Garfield*. New York: Limelight, 2003.

Scope and Contents

The John Garfield papers, 1932-2010, consist of production photographs and film stills, headshots, photographs, posters, sheet music, clippings, and press releases from his film and stage work; film contracts, articles, family photos, and correspondence donated by his daughter, Julie Garfield. A small amount of material related to the investigation of the House Un-American Activities Committee is present, including a photocopy of a portion of an FBI file on Garfield, as well as materials related to his service to the Hollywood War Effort. The papers are organized into two series: I. Films and Stage Plays, 1932-1952 and II. Career and Personal Papers, 1933-2010.

Series I. Films and Stage Plays is divided into two subseries: A. Films, 1938-1951, and B. Stage Plays, 1932-1952. Subseries A. is arranged alphabetically and contains stills, photographs, memos, posters, clippings, and sheet music. All thirty-five productions John Garfield was attached to are represented. Notable materials include a letter from Garfield to director Michael Curtiz on his character in *Breaking Point*, memos from Jack Warner about dailies for *Saturday's Children*, publicity stills of Garfield with Cary Grant for *Destination Tokyo*, scene stills and behind-the-scenes photos with Lana Turner from *The Postman Always Rings Twice*, as well as numerous candid photos at the end of the subseries.

Subseries B. Stage Plays, 1932-1952, is arranged alphabetically by title of production. All of Garfield's professional stage plays are represented in the form of stills, photographs, playbills, and clippings. His pre-Hollywood stage work is housed in a binder put together by his family. Perhaps most notable in this subseries is the presence of heavily annotated copies of Constantin Stanislavski's seminal book on acting, *An Actor Prepares*, and Clifford Odets' *Golden Boy*. The scrapbook also contains photographs of the summer workshops that Garfield spent with The Group Theater, as well as early, undated photocopies of stills of Garfield in his high school production of *A Midsummer's Night Dream*.

Series II. Personal and Career Papers, 1933-2010, contains Garfield's Hollywood studio contracts, numerous clippings, magazines, articles written by Garfield and some of his colleagues, and photographs of Garfield entertaining the troops during war time, along with material related to his trial in front of the House Un-American Activities Committee—including a photocopy of part of the FBI file on Garfield's activities. Other important documents present include the eulogy from Garfield's funeral, as well as the tribute to him written by Clifford Odets. Finally, there is a family photo album of Garfield with his wife and children.

Related Material

The Ransom Center also holds a small John Garfield Collection (FI-05253) consisting of one photograph of Garfield and a lobby card for *The Postman Always Rings Twice*

Index Terms

Subjects

Stills (Motion Pictures) – United States.

Motion Pictures, American.

Document Types

Certificates.

Clippings.

Correspondence.

Eulogies.

Film stills.

Legal documents.

Obituaries.

Photographs.

Scripts.

Scrapbooks.

Serials (publications).

Sheet music.

Series I. Films and Stage Plays, 1932-1952

Subseries A. Films, 1938-1951

Air Force (1943). Post card signed by Garfield, publicity stills, behind-the-scenes photographs; photocopies of publicity, scene, and production stills, 1943, undated **Container** 1.1

Between Two Worlds (1944). Scene and publicity stills; photocopies of scene and publicity stills, and behind-the-scenes photographs, 1944, undated **Container** 1.2

Blackwell's Island (1939). Photocopies of scene and publicity stills, clippings, 1939, undated **Container** 1.3

Body and Soul (1947)

Scene and publicity stills, photographic reproductions of scene stills and wardrobe test shot, clippings, 1947 **Container** 1.4

AMPAS program, 2010 **Container** osb 5

Sheet music, undated **Container** osb 8

Breaking Point (1950). Scene stills, photographs, partial contact sheet, photocopies of scene stills, photocopy of production notes, photocopy of letter from Garfield to director Michael Curtiz, clippings, photocopy of poster, 1950, undated **Container** 1.5

Castle on the Hudson (1940). Clippings, scene stills, photographic reproduction of poster, 1940, undated **Container** 1.6

Dangerously They Live (1941). Photocopies of production, behind-the-scenes, and scene stills; clippings, undated **Container** 1.7

Daisy Kenyon (1947). Photocopies of two stills (Joan Crawford, Dana Andrews, Henry Fonda), undated **Container** 1.8

Daughters Courageous (1939). Clippings article from NY Journal American, photographic reproduction of poster, 1939, undated **Container** 1.9

Destination Tokyo (1943). Publicity stills (with Cary Grant), production photographs, photocopies of production stills, photocopy of article from U.S. Navy Press Section titled "Navy Waves Share Spotlight with 'Destination Tokio.'" , undated **Container** 1.10

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Scene still, photographic reproduction of publicity stills, photocopies of scene stills, undated **Container** 2.8

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Counsellor at Law (1931). Photocopy of playbill, photographic reproduction of scene stills, photocopies of scene stills, undated

Golden Boy (1937). Photocopy of playbill, photographic reproduction of poster, photographic reproduction of scene stills, scene stills, undated

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Series II. Personal and Career Papers, 1933-2010

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Correspondence between John Garfield and Ira Sherwin, 1932-1944	Container 4.8
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