

## **Audre Lorde- Short Biography**

Audre Geraldine Lorde (\* 18. February 1934; † 17. November 1992) was the daughter of Caribbean immigrants from Grenada. She spent her childhood in Harlem and went to catholic schools. In grade 8 Lorde began to write poetry. From 1954-1959, after finishing High School, she went to Hunter College and earned a bachelor degree in library sciences. In 1961 she completed her studies with a master from Columbia University.

After graduating Audre Lorde worked as a librarian, wrote poems and married the lawyer Edward Ashley Rollins with whom she had two children. While being at university she had already confessed being homosexual. And when Lorde got divorced from her husband in 1970 she had several relationships with women.

Since the 1960s Audre Lorde's poems were published on a regular basis in numerous anthologies and literary journals. She supported the civil rights as well as the women's rights movement and fought for the rights of homosexuals. In 1968 her first volume of poems *The First Cities* was published. While working as a poet Lorde also gave lectures in English literature at Hunter College. At the end of the 70s she was diagnosed with breast cancer, which became a central subject of her literary work. She dealt with the illness e.g. in *Cancer Journals* (1980) and in *A Burst of Light* (1988). Another major work by Audre Lorde is her "Biomythography" *Zami*, which is about her childhood and youth in Harlem. In the 1980s Lorde moved to the Caribbean island Saint Croix.

Audre Lorde was a founder member of *Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press*, a publisher for coloured female writers. Lorde travelled around the world and gave lectures in many different countries such as Switzerland, Great Britain, Germany and the Netherlands. From 1984 to 1992 Lorde spent a few months in Berlin each year. As a visiting professor for North-American studies at the Free University of Berlin she offered numerous seminars. Through her social and political commitment, in particular through her lectures and workshops, Lorde supported the Afro-German (women's) movement. From 1991 to 1993 she was appointed Poet Laureate of New York State.

Audre Lorde was committed to politics as well as her literary work until she died of cancer on the island Saint Croix in 1992.

## **The Collection's History**

In 2011 the estate of Audre Lorde was handed over to the university archive of the Free University of Berlin in form of a donation by Prof. Dr. Dagmar Schultz. By providing subsidies for women the John-F.-Kennedy Institute for North-American Studies of the Free University of Berlin made it possible to finance a project dealing with the archival description of Lorde's estate. The estate was assessed by the archivists Natalie Fromm and Torben Heinrich Lindemann, who were scientifically supervised by Prof. Dr. Dagmar Schultz. The project enabled to organize, preserve and provide access to Audre Lorde's literary heritage.

## **The Collection's Content**

The Collection contains 248 archival units (approx. 1 shelf metre of files). A documentary about Audre Lorde by Dagmar Schultz is included. It deals with the time Lorde spent in Berlin and is called "Audre Lorde- The Berlin Years, 1984-1992" (2002). The documentary's director, Dagmar Schultz, was not only connected to Audre Lorde by her scientific and literary work but also by a lasting friendship. Schultz was an important contact person for Lorde and accompanied her during her stays in Berlin. The documentary as well as the archival units are based on those stays.

The audio records of Lorde's lectures as a visiting professor at the Free University of Berlin (Department of American Literature of the John-F.-Kennedy-Institute) from the summer semester 1984 form a main focus of the collection. They include:

- Lecture/Proseminar: Contemporary Black Women's Literature
- Proseminar: Contemporary Women's Poetry (Creative Writing Workshop)
- Main Seminar: The Poet as Outsider

Furthermore, the collection contains records documenting Audre Lorde's public commitment during her stays in Berlin from 1984 to 1992. Audio and video records of readings of her literary work (which are partly translated into German) as well as audio records of events dealing with her main topic of research can also be found. Additionally, the estate includes the correspondences of the Orlanda Frauenverlag (formerly subrosa Frauenverlag), which contains e.g. manuscripts with Lorde's personal remarks. The private correspondences between Audre Lorde and Prof. Dr. Dagmar Schultz as well as written obituaries (e.g. newspaper articles and letters) and audio and video data of events commemorating Audre Lorde are also preserved in the archive. Moreover, there are posters showing poems by Lorde and posters announcing events, which took place in memory of the poet. About 160 photographs, which were mainly taken by Prof. Dr. Dagmar Schultz (and partly taken by Ute Weller) from the middle of the 80s until Lorde's death in 1992, show Audre Lorde in her personal environment e.g. together with May Ayim, Ika Hügel-Marshall, Gloria I. Joseph, Ria Cheatom and Ellen Kuzwayo.

## **Further Archival Units**

Following documents, which relate to Audre Lorde, can be found in the university archive:

- Record guest lecturers: personal file Audre Lorde,
- Library collection: Dagmar Schultz (ed.): Audre Lorde, Adrienne Rich: Macht und Sinnlichkeit. Ausgewählte Texte, Orlanda Frauenverlag, 4. expanded edition, Berlin 1993,

- Publication collection: index of names and course catalogue of the summer semester 1984 of the Free University of Berlin
- Collection personalia: newspaper articles about Audre Lorde
- Collection of newspaper cuttings: newspaper articles about Audre Lorde
- Estate Audre Lorde dealing with her work and influence in the USA: Spelman College/USA, Archives, contact partner: Ms Taronda E. Spencer, contact: college archives, e-mail: [tspencer@spelman.edu](mailto:tspencer@spelman.edu), Fax: 404-270-5980, Phone: 404-270-5533

### **Archival description:**

The following media can be found in the archive:

- Writings in analogue form (files) as well as in digital form (PDF)
- Auditory documents in analogue (audio-cassettes) and digital form (MP3)
- Posters
- Pictures in form of photographs, negatives, slides and digital records (JPEG)

For the archival description the archive software CMI-Star was used. The processing of auditory media in digital form was done with the program Audacity. Duplicates and archival units, which were sorted out, were given back to the former owner. In order to preserve the collection, copies of thermal paper were made (the original was kept). Digital reproductions of photographs were printed out in order to complete the collection of analogue pictures. Analogue records were demetalized and filed in u-clips and folders. The whole collection was put into acid free archive boxes. Audre Lorde's analogue estate consists of about one shelf metre of files and includes seven boxes which add up to 248 archival units.

### **Access to the Records**

All documents of the collection are accessible to the public in the reading room of the university archive. However, certain restrictions concerning the reproduction of the photos and the documentary film were defined in the deed of gift from 12.06.2012: publications on the internet through third parties are prohibited until 31.12.2026. For exceptions and all kind of publications regarding printed and visual media the express authorization of the originator is needed. In any case a copyright of the photographer (©Dagmar Schultz) has to be added. The documentary "Audre Lorde-The Berlin Years, 1984-1992" can be watched in the university archive's reading room. A reproduction or publication of the film is only permitted if the marketing company's exploitation rights are taken into account and if the author/producer gives her approval.