

## Holden - Native American Women Playwrights

The NAWPA is an impressive collection of materials pertaining to Native American female playwrights. Located at Miami University since 1996, the collection is home to articles and works written by Spiderwoman Theater. The writings vary from scripts, articles, newspapers clippings, and even a lawsuit with Marvel comics.

The Spiderwoman Theater troupe is composed of female playwrights and a large percentage of Native American women and other minorities. The troupe has a strong lesbian presence and called for social change in American society. The troupe publishes and produces plays that challenge the normal roles of women and minorities. Open to the public, the collection materials are well organized and easily accessible. Many of the plays/playscripts embody the beliefs of the troupe and are an excellent way to better understand the members and the issues they challenged.

The collection houses correspondence between troupe members and letters in which they communicate with others in the theater world. For instance, there is a letter in response to some of the troupe members trying to recruit a coach for their performances in Europe. The letter discusses details about the potential coach and what he required from the troupe members to be their coach, including a request that the coach receive portions of the theater profits. This collection has many other letters and documents like this that reveal much about the business side of performing. For anyone interested in how business in the theater world worked for the troupe, this collection is full of material that will be very revealing. The business

letters also will give an insight into the troupe's contacts in the theater world and locations that they planned on performing across the world.

Arguably, one of the most interesting collection pieces are the ones dealing with the legal issues that Spiderwoman Theater faced with Marvel comics regarding, the use of the name Spiderwoman and who owned the trademark to the name. Marvel comics asked for the theater to cease using the name Spiderwoman because they believed that the theater group was using its copyrighted material and thus infringing their company's intelligent properties. The Spiderwoman theater group responded by arguing that the name Spiderwoman cannot be copyrighted because it was the name of a goddess in their traditional Native American religion. The group claimed that the name has existed for over thousands of years and that Marvel has no right to claim ownership of such an ancient name. The theater group goes even as far as stating that they have a stronger claim to the name because they are using it in a manner that is related to its roots involving the goddess.

There are documents and newspaper articles that have updates from Marvel and the Spiderwoman Theater troupe attempting to come to a resolution on this naming issue. One article states that some people believed that Marvel was uncomfortable with the name Spiderwoman being associated with the troupe because of its lesbian and political viewpoints. Some newspaper articles describe how both sides were discussing how to come to an agreeable compromise without going to court. There is a section stating that the Spiderwoman Theater troupe was considering paying a tiny licensing fee or to add under its plays that it had no association with Marvel. The communications ultimately did not result in a compromise and the

case did go to court. This part of the collection will be informative and has plenty of sources to assist anyone who is interested in legal history or the history of Marvel and their copyright claims.

The Native American female playwrights' collection at Miami University is full of informative documents and sources for any person interested in the history of the theater or the business side of the theater world. The collection contains materials that are exclusive to it, making this of even greater importance to research. Visitors will be able to hold the original documents and even take non-flash pictures of the material for studying outside of the archives. The staff in charge of maintaining the collection has done a very good job. They are friendly and willing to assist anyone with questions or concerns relating to the material in the collection.