

From NOLA desegregation to Hollywood

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Memorabilia from alumnus Harold Sylvester is now in the collection at the Amistad Research Center at Tulane University. (Photo by Paula Burch-Celentano)

Tulane University alumnus Harold Sylvester parlayed his 1972 bachelor's degree in theater and psychology into a successful career in Hollywood, one highlighted by his renowned performance as the lovable Griff on the sitcom "Married ... With Children."

But, according to representatives from the [Amistad Research Center](#) at Tulane, Sylvester's true impact was as a significant figure in the desegregation process in New Orleans. It was something he achieved using his experiences as a star basketball player, first for St. Augustine High School in New Orleans, then for the

Tulane hoops team, which accepted Sylvester as the university's first African-American to earn an athletic scholarship.

That's why Amistad officials were ecstatic when Sylvester, who remains active in the entertainment business, recently donated his personal papers to the African-American research center.

In all, Sylvester's donation to Amistad consists of 30 feet of correspondence, photographs, scripts and other materials that follow his entertainment career, said Christopher Harter, director of library and reference services at the Amistad Research Center.

"His papers complement a number of collections on those topics already held at Amistad, and the center's staff eagerly anticipate organizing the papers and making them accessible to researchers," Harter said.

Most prized by Amistad staff are Sylvester's notes, scripts and other documents related to the lauded and popular 1999 TV movie "Passing Glory," which narrates the late-1960s story of all-black St. Augustine High School's groundbreaking basketball game against all-white Jesuit High. "Passing Glory" was written and co-produced by Sylvester, who was a member of that landmark St. Aug squad.

Harter added that Sylvester's interest in donating his materials to the center arose from a *New Wave* story on the Amistad's exhibition on the history of the [Free Southern Theater](#), of which Sylvester was a member in the 1970s.

“Harold Sylvester's papers not only document his career in film and television but his efforts to affect positive change around him.”—Christopher Harter, Amistad Research Center