

# Guide to the Jeannette Mirsky Papers BC20.12

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## Summary Information

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<b>Repository:</b>	Barnard Archives and Special Collections
<b>Creator:</b>	Mirsky, Jeannette
<b>Title:</b>	Jeannette Mirsky Papers
<b>Date [inclusive]:</b>	1892-1987
<b>Date [bulk]:</b>	1921-1986
<b>Physical Description:</b>	14.42 Linear Feet 27 document boxes, 1 oversize box
<b>Physical Location:</b>	This collection is stored offsite and advance notice is required for access. To use this collection, please contact the Barnard Archives and Special Collections at 212.854.4079 or archives@barnard.edu.
<b>Language of the Material:</b>	English
<b>Language of the Material:</b>	Bulk of collection is in English. Some folders contain newspaper clippings in German.
<b>Abstract:</b>	The collection consists of the personal papers of author, geographer, explorer, and Barnard alumna, Jeannette Mirsky. It includes her personal and business correspondence, academic records, manuscripts, drafts, publications, photographs, maps, and information about her world travels.

### Preferred Citation

Jeannette Mirsky Papers, 1892-1987; Box and Folder; Barnard College Archives and Special Collections, Barnard Library, Barnard College.

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## Biography

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Jeannette Rachel Mirsky was born in 1903 to Michael D. Mirsky and Frieda Ettelson Mirsky. She attended Barnard College, where she earned her A.B. in 1924. From 1935-1938 Mirsky did graduate work at Columbia University, studying under Franz Boas and Margaret Mead.

Mirsky was married twice, first to Arthur J. Barsky, who she divorced in 1940, and then to Edward Ginsburg, an industrial engineer, who she married in 1942. Mirsky lived briefly in South Carolina with

Ginsburg, but ultimately moved to Princeton, NJ in 1950, where Mirsky would reside for the rest of her life. Edward Ginsburg died in 1959, and Mirsky did not remarry again. Throughout her career she continued to publish under the name Mirsky, although she did change her last name to Ginsburg after her marriage to Edward.

In 1934 Mirsky published her first book, *To the North!*, which recounts the history of Arctic exploration. Her book largely discredited Frederick Cook's claims to discovering the North Pole, and went out of print for a number of years due to a lawsuit by Cook. The book was re-released in 1946 by Alfred A. Knopf under the new title, *To the Arctic!: The Story of Northern Exploration from the Earliest Times to the Present*. In addition to English, the book was published in German, Spanish, and French.

Jeannette Mirsky continued to publish books until 1977. Her books include, *The Westward Crossings* (1946), *The World of Eli Whitney* (1952), *Elisha Kent Kane and the Seafaring Frontier* (1954), *The Great Chinese Travelers: An Anthology* (1964), *Houses of God* (1965), and *Sir Aurel Stein, Archaeological Explorer* (1977). During this time she also wrote book reviews, was a contributor to *Encyclopedia Britannica*, edited *The Lady*, a book by Barnard Professor Emily James Putnam, was a visiting fellow in the department of East Asian Studies at Princeton University, and spent much of her time travelling.

Jeannette Mirsky died in Princeton, NJ on March 10, 1987 at the age of 83.

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## Collection Scope and Content Summary

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This collection consists of correspondence, academic records, manuscripts, drafts, publications, photographs, newspaper clippings, and travel documents of Barnard alumna, author, and world traveler, Jeannette Mirsky. Also contains program for her memorial service in Box 28. The correspondence is almost exclusively letters, postcards, and telegrams addressed to Mirsky. Carbon copies of letters composed by Mirsky are mostly limited to business transactions with publishers.

Mirsky's original writings are contained in manuscripts, notes, and drafts related to her publications. Complete manuscripts of *To the North!*, *The Westward Crossing*, *Houses of God*, *The World of Eli Whitney*, and *Sir Aurel Stein* are included in this collection, and feature extensive notes and edits by Mirsky and outside editors.

The photographs in this collection are often unlabeled, and include images collected for various publications, images of Mirsky's travels, and personal and family photos. Mirsky also held on to many newspaper clippings of her book reviews. The collection also contains additional clippings that she gathered for research purposes. There is a large collection of clippings from German language newspapers as well.

Of special interest are materials related to a speaking engagement at the University of Alaska where Mirsky traveled north of the Arctic Circle, and received a lithograph noting this accomplishment. Of

additional interest are a series of letters in which Mirsky was recommended for an honorary doctorate at Columbia University.

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## Collection Arrangement

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The records are arranged in seven series, two of which have been further arranged in subseries. The contents are arranged in original order. The series and subseries arrangement of the records is as follows:

Series 1, Academic Records, 1921-1948

Series 2, Correspondence, 1892-1987

Subseries 2.1, Personal Correspondence, 1921-1986

Subseries 2.2, Business Correspondence, 1937-1984

Subseries 2.3, Michael Mirsky Papers, 1892-1924

Series 3, Manuscripts, Drafts, and Publications, 1921-1986

Subseries 3.1, Maps and Illustrations, 1940-1980

Subseries 3.2, *To the North*

Subseries 3.3, *The Westward Crossing*, 1965-1978

Subseries 3.4, *Houses of God*, 1940-1969

Subseries 3.5, *The World of Eli Whitney*, 1939-1984

Subseries 3.6, *Sir Aurel Stein. 1970-1978*

Series 4, Newspaper Clippings, 1921-1987

Series 5, Photographs, 1921-1986

Series 6, Travel Expenses and Receipts, 1970-1982

Series 7, Financial Documents and Taxes, 1921-1986 (Restricted)

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## Administrative Information

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### Publication Information

Barnard Archives and Special Collections

### Access

Box 27 contains confidential documents related to Jeannette Mirsky's personal finances, taxes, and publication royalties. Due to the confidential information they contain, taxes, royalties, and financial information have been moved to box 27. Access to this box is restricted until 2017.

### Publication Rights

Permission to publish material from the collection must be requested from the Barnard College Archives. The Barnard College Archives approves permission to publish that which it physically owns; the responsibility to secure copyright permission rests with the patron.

### Acquisition Information

Donated to the Archives by the Society of Women Geographers, 2012.

### Processing History

This collection was processed and the finding aid written by graduate assistant Heather Lember in June, 2013. Updated by Joan Hsiao Archive Fellow in November, 2017.

Descriptive Rules Used: Finding aid adheres to that prescribed by Describing Archives: A Content Standard

Encoding: Machine readable finding aid encoded in EAD 2002.

Finding aid written in English.

### Accruals

No additions are expected.

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## Controlled Access Headings

- Explorers
- Women explorers
- America -- Discovery and exploration
- Arctic regions -- Discovery and exploration
- Women geographers
- Barnard College -- Alumni and alumnae

## Collection Inventory

### Academic Records, 1921-1948

box 4, 9, 19

Physical Description: 1 Linear Feet 3 archives boxes

#### Scope and Contents Note

Box 9, Folder 2 contains correspondence regarding Jeannette Mirsky's nomination for an honorary degree at Columbia University.

Box 19, Folder 1 contains a notebook from an Anthropology course entitled "Social Organization" which Mirsky was enrolled in from 1934-1935 at Columbia University.

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### Correspondence, 1892-1987 (1921-1979)

box 2-10,  
14-25

Physical Description: 9.2 Linear Feet 22 archives boxes

box 28

### Personal Correspondence, 1921-1986

box 2-10,  
14-22, 24

Physical Description: 8.34 Linear Feet 20 archives boxes

box 28

### Correspondence with Edward Ginsberg, 1942-1954

box 7, 20, 22

Physical Description: 1.25 Linear Feet 3 archives boxes

#### Historical Background

This subseries consists of correspondence between Jeannette Mirsky and her husband, Edward Ginsberg. Ginsberg was an industrial engineer and Jeannette

Mirsky's second husband. The two married in 1942 and lived briefly in South Carolina, before moving to Princeton, NJ in 1950. Edward Ginsburg died in 1959, and Mirsky did not remarry again. Jeannette Mirsky continued to publish under the name Mirsky, although she did change her last name to Ginsburg after her marriage to Edward. Much of their correspondence occurred during Mirsky's extensive travels.

**Business Correspondence, 1937-1985  
(1940-1979)**

box 5, 7-8,  
17-20

Physical Description: 3.3 Linear Feet 8 archives boxes

box 28

**Michael Mirsky Papers, 1892-1924**

box 23

Physical Description: 0.5 Linear Feet 1 archives box

**Historical Background**

This subseries consists of the personal and business correspondence of Jeannette Mirsky's father, Michael Mirsky. This predates the birth of Jeanette Mirsky, and includes correspondence with Michael's wife and Jeannette's mother, Frieda Ettelson Mirsky.

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**Manuscripts, Drafts, and Publications,  
1921-1986 (1937-1979)**

box 2-8,  
10-13, 16-20,  
22-25

Physical Description: 7.5 Linear Feet 20 archives boxes

box 28

**Maps and Illustrations, 1940-1984  
(1946-1968)**

box 6, 10, 13,  
18, 21, 26

Physical Description: 2.9 Linear Feet 7 archives boxes

box 28

**To the North**

box 10-13, 21

Physical Description: 2 Linear Feet 5 archives boxes

**The Westward Crossing, 1965-1978**

box 11, 22

Physical Description: 1.25 Linear Feet 3 archives boxes

box 28

**Houses of God, 1940-1969**

box 11, 13,  
21



Physical Description: 1.5 Linear Feet 3 archives boxes

**The World of Eli Whitney, 1939-1984  
(1952-1953)**

box 11-12, 23

box 28

Physical Description: 1.67 Linear Feet 4 archives boxes

**Sir Aurel Stein, 1970-1978**

box 4, 8

Physical Description: 1.25 Linear Feet 3 archives boxes

box 28

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**Newspaper Clippings, 1921-1987**

box 1, 4-6,  
15-17, 19, 22,  
24

Physical Description: 4.6 Linear Feet 11 archives boxes

**Language of Series Materials**

box 28

Box 1 and 15 contain newspaper clippings in German; Box 28 contains obituary from New York Times and local paper

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**Photographs, 1921-1986**

box 1, 3-4,  
12-13, 16-21

Physical Description: 5.0 Linear Feet 12 archives boxes

box 28

**Scope and Contents note**

Box 21, folder 5 contains photographic negatives labeled *To the Arctic!*

Box 21, folder 6 contains 16mm film dated August, 1938.

Box 22, folder 9 contains photographic negatives labeled *Westward Crossing*.

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**Travel Expenses and Receipts, 1930-1984  
(1946-1973)**

box 1, 6-7,  
16, 18

Physical Description: 1.25 Linear Feet 5 archives boxes

### Scope and Contents note

Box 16, folder 8 contains a lithograph noting Mirsky's travelling north of the Arctic Circle and information about her speaking engagement at the University of Alaska.

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### Financial Documents and Taxes (Restricted), 1970-1982

box 27

Physical Description: 0.5 Linear Feet 1 archives box

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