
Finding aid prepared by Smithsonian Institution Archives
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Collection Overview

Repository: Smithsonian Institution Archives, Washington, D.C., osiaref@si.edu
Title: African-American Exhibits at the Smithsonian Interviews
Identifier: Record Unit 9603
Date: 1999, 2001
Extent: 10 audiotapes (reference copies).
Language: English

Administrative Information

Preferred Citation
Smithsonian Institution Archives, Record Unit 9603, African-American Exhibits at the Smithsonian Interviews

Use Restriction
Restricted.

Historical Note

Museum exhibits are the result of a complex interplay between curators, collections, social currents, and the public. In 1999 and 2001, Smithsonian predoctoral fellow Michèle Gates Moresi conducted oral history interviews about the history of African-American exhibits at the Smithsonian Institution as part of her dissertation research. In 1999 and 2001, Gates Moresi interviewed six curators from the National Museum of American History (NMAH), Richard E. Ahlborn, curator in the Division of Community Life; Ellen Roney Hughes, curator in the Division of Community Life; Claudia B. Kidwell, curator in the Division of Costume; Edith P. Mayo, former curator in the Division of Political History; Keith Melder, former curator in the Division of Political History; and Rodris Roth, curator in the Division of Domestic Life. In 2001, she also interviewed Cynthia H. Hoover, curator in the Division of Musical History, also at the NMAH.

Introduction

The Smithsonian Institution Archives began its Oral History Program in 1973. The purpose of the program is to supplement the written documentation of the Archives’ record and manuscript collections with an Oral History Collection, focusing on the history of the Institution, research by its scholars, and contributions of its staff. Program staff conduct interviews with current and retired Smithsonian staff and others who have made significant contributions to the Institution. There are also reminiscences and interviews recorded by researchers or students on topics related to the history of the Smithsonian or the holdings of the Smithsonian Institution Archives.
The History of African American Exhibits at the Smithsonian Oral History Interviews were compiled by graduate student Michèle Gates Moresi as part of her research on the presentation of African American history at the Smithsonian.

Descriptive Entry

The History of African American Exhibits at the Smithsonian Oral History Interviews conducted by Michèle Gates Moresi cover each curator's role in and views on National Museum of American History exhibitions that have portrayed African-Americans. These interviews cover the relationship between research and exhibition at the NMAH; changes in attitudes towards culturally diverse exhibits; exhibit processes during 1964 to 1990 at National Museum of History and Technology (now NMAH) and the incorporation of Negro History an other ethnic groups, especially Hispanics; the Bicentennial of the American Revolution exhibit, *A Nation of Nations*; and integration of African American collections into the music, costume, and political history collections.

The History of African American Exhibits Oral History Collection consist of 7 interview sessions, totaling approximately 9.0 hours of audiotape recordings, and 231 pages of transcript. There are three generations of recordings: original audio cassettes, preservation digital audio .wav files, reference digital audio .mp3 files and reference audio cassettes. In total this collection is comprised of 10 original audio cassette tapes, 18 preservation digital audio .wav files, 18 reference digital audio .mp3 files, and 10 reference copy audio cassettes. The original tapes are reserved in preservation storage.

Names and Subject Terms

This collection is indexed in the online catalog of the Smithsonian Institution under the following terms:

**Subjects:**
- African Americans
- African Americans -- History
- Employees
- Exhibitions
- Museum curators -- United States -- Interviews

**Types of Materials:**
- Audiotapes
- Interviews
- Oral history

**Names:**
- Ahlborn, Richard E.
- Ahlborn, Richard E., interviewee
- Gates Moresi, Michèle, interviewer
- Kidwell, Claudia Brush
- Kidwell, Claudia Brush, interviewee
- Mayo, Edith
- Mayo, Edith, interviewee
- Melder, Keith E.
- Melder, Keith E., interviewee
- National Museum of American History (U.S.)
National Museum of History and Technology
Roth, Rodris
Roth, Rodris, interviewee