



Smithsonian Institution Archives

Charles Blitzer Oral History Interviews, 1985-1986

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Collection Overview

Repository:	Smithsonian Institution Archives, Washington, D.C., osiaref@si.edu
Title:	Charles Blitzer Oral History Interviews
Identifier:	Record Unit 9604
Date:	1985-1986
Extent:	10 audiotapes (Reference copies).
Creator::	Blitzer, Charles, interviewee
Language:	English

Administrative Information

Preferred Citation

Smithsonian Institution Archives, Record Unit 9604, Charles Blitzer Oral History Interviews

Historical Note

Charles Blitzer (1927-1999), an academic administrator, received the bachelors from Williams College in 1947, and the Ph.D. in government from Harvard University in 1952. He served as an instructor and assistant professor of political science at Yale University from 1950 to 1960, and as executive associate, American Council of Learned Societies from 1960 to 1965, before joining the staff of the Smithsonian in 1965. Blitzer was director of the Office of Education and Training at the Smithsonian from 1965 to 1968 and Assistant Secretary for History and Art from 1968 to 1983. He served as director of the National Humanities Center from 1983 to 1988 and director of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars from 1988 to 1997.

Introduction

The Oral History Program is part of the Smithsonian Institution Archives. The purpose of the program is to conduct interviews with current and retired members of the Smithsonian staff who have made significant contributions, administrative and scholarly, to the Institution. The project's goal is to supplement the published record and manuscript collections in the Archives, focusing on the history of the Institution and contributions to the increase and diffusion of knowledge made by its scholars.

The Charles Blitzer interviews were conducted as part of the Smithsonian Institution Archives Oral History Program because of his role as a Smithsonian administrator from 1965 to 1983, especially as Assistant Secretary for History and Art.

Descriptive Entry

The Charles Blitzer Interviews were conducted during four sessions in 1985 and 1986 by Smithsonian Archives Historian Pamela M. Henson. This collection consists of four interview sessions, totaling approximately 9 hours of recordings and 272 pages of transcript.

Additional documentation pertaining to Blitzer can be found in the Records of the Office of the Assistant Secretary for History and Art.

Names and Subject Terms

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

Subjects:

- Interviews
- Museums -- Administration
- Museums -- Management
- Oral history

Types of Materials:

- Audiotapes
- Transcripts

Names:

- American Council of Learned Societies
- Blitzer, Charles
- Harvard University
- Henson, Pamela M., interviewer
- Ripley, S. Dillon (Sidney Dillon), 1913-2001
- Smithsonian Institution -- Administration
- Smithsonian Institution. Assistant Secretary for History and Art
- Smithsonian Institution. Office of Education and Training
- Williams College
- Yale University

Container Listing

Interviews

Interviews

Interview 1: August 20, 1985

Interviews

Discusses his youth and education; undergraduate studies at William College working under Richard Ager Newhall and Frederick Lewis Schuman; doctoral degree at Harvard University studying the history of political theory with William Yandell Elliott and Carl Joachim Friedrich; teaching career at Yale University; role as an Alderman for the City of New Haven; move to the American Council of Learned Societies as fellowship administrator; founding of the National Endowments for the Arts and Humanities; directorship of the Office of Education and Training; Smithsonian Research Awards program; planning for the Belmont Conference Center, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, and the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts; and work with the Pennsylvania Avenue Commission, c. 1927-1970.

Interviews

Transcript, c. 1927- , pp. 1-150 of audiotape recording, 4.0 hours.

Interviews

Audio Recordings of Interviews: Total Recording Time: 4.0 hours

- Note:
- Original Masters: 4 5" reel-to-reel analog audiotapes
 - Preservation Masters: 8 digital .wav files
 - Reference Copies: 4 audiotape cassettes; 8 digital .mp3 files

Interviews

Interview 2: September 16, 1985

Interviews

Focuses on his role as an administrator, continuing discussion of the Woodrow Wilson Center; the Anacostia Neighborhood Museum; his role as Acting and then permanent Assistant Secretary for History and Art; role of James C. Bradley and Dorothy Rosenberg; working relationship with Secretary S. Dillon Ripley; status of history and art in relationship to science at Smithsonian; Freer Gallery of Art; attempt to rationalize collections so they did not overlap; opening of National Portrait Gallery and Smithsonian American Art Museum (SAAM) in the old Patent Office Building; the International Art Program and other art programs with political ties; development of the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden; and Joshua Taylor as director of SAAM, c. 1960s-1970s.

Interviews

Transcript 1-45, of audiotape recording, 2.0 hours.

Interviews

Audio Recordings of Interviews: Total Recording Time: 2.0 hours

- Note:
- Original Masters: 2 5" reel-to-reel analog audiotapes
 - Preservation Masters: 4 digital .wav files

- Reference Copies: 2 audiotape cassettes; 4 digital .mp3 files

Interviews

Interview 3: January 27, 1986

Interviews

Discusses his role as Assistant Secretary for History and Art, including the Smithsonian American Art Museum; development of the Renwick Gallery; activities of Robert Hilton Simmons; Marvin Sadik as director of the National Portrait Gallery; the 1967 acquisition of the Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum; c. 1960s-1970s.

Interviews

Transcript, pp. 1-37, of audiotape recording, 1.5 hours.

Interviews

Audio Recordings of Interviews: Total Recording Time: 1.5 hours

Note:

- Original Masters: 2 5" reel-to-reel analog audiotapes
- Preservation Masters: 3 digital .wav files
- Reference Copies: 2 audiotape cassettes; 3 digital .mp3 files

Interviews

Interview 4: September 12, 1986

Interviews

Completes his discussion of his role as Assistant Secretary for History and Art, focusing on the Cooper-Hewitt Museum with Lisa Suter Taylor as director; the Archives of American Art; and the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, c. 1970s-1980s.

Interviews

Transcript, pp. 1-40, of audiotape recording, 1.5 hours.

Interviews

Audio Recordings of Interviews: Total Recording Time: 1.5 hours

Note:

- Original Masters: 2 5" reel-to-reel analog audiotapes
- Preservation Masters: 3 digital .wav files
- Reference Copies: 2 audiotape cassettes; 3 digital .mp3 files