



Smithsonian Institution

Smithsonian Institution Archives

Proceedings of the Board of Regents Meeting held on September 16, 1991

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prominent collectors. The press was particularly helpful in helping to identify collectors in their regions and in promoting the project.

The outreach phase involved visiting regions which appeared to be rich in cultural resources. Over the last three months, collections were viewed in New York City, Houston, Gettysburg, Atlanta, Los Angeles, Pittsburgh, and Baltimore. More than 40 letters from 10 different states were received, and approximately 10 phone calls continue to come in each week from potential donors.

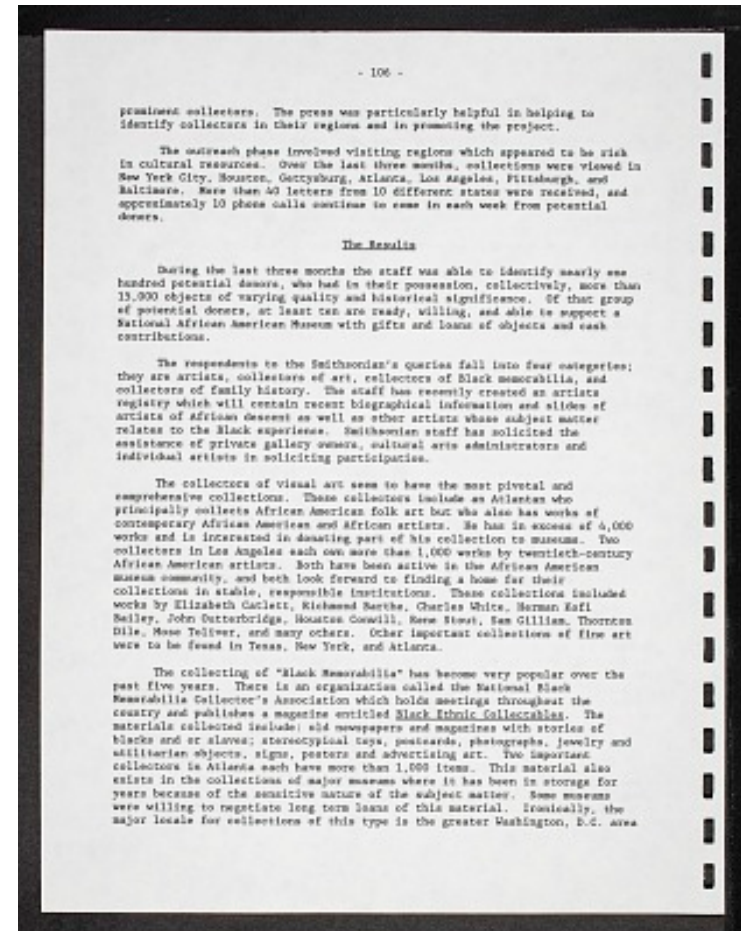
The Results

During the last three months the staff was able to identify nearly one hundred potential donors, who had in their possession, collectively, more than 15,000 objects of varying quality and historical significance. Of that group of potential donors, at least ten are ready, willing, and able to support a National African American Museum with gifts and loans of objects and cash contributions.

The respondents to the Smithsonian's queries fall into four categories; they are artists, collectors of art, collectors of Black memorabilia, and collectors of family history. The staff has recently created an artists registry which will contain recent biographical information and slides of artists of African descent as well as other artists whose subject matter relates to the Black experience. Smithsonian staff has solicited the assistance of private gallery owners, cultural arts administrators and individual artists in soliciting participation.

The collectors of visual art seem to have the most pivotal and comprehensive collections. These collectors include an Atlantan who principally collects African American folk art but who also has works of contemporary African American and African artists. He has in excess of 4,000 works and is interested in donating part of his collection to museums. Two collectors in Los Angeles each own more than 1,000 works by twentieth-century African American artists. Both have been active in the African American museum community, and both look forward to finding a home for their collections in stable, responsible institutions. These collections included works by Elizabeth Catlett, Richmond Barthe, Charles White, Herman Kofi Bailey, John Outterbridge, Houston Conwill, Rene Stout, Sam Gilliam, Thornton Dile, Mose Toliver, and many others. Other important collections of fine art were to be found in Texas, New York, and Atlanta.

The collecting of "Black Memorabilia" has become very popular over the past five years. There is an organization called the National Black Memorabilia Collector's Association which holds meetings throughout the country and publishes a magazine entitled Black Ethnic Collectables. The materials collected include: old newspapers and magazines with stories of blacks and or slaves; stereotypical toys, postcards, photographs, jewelry and utilitarian objects, signs, posters and advertising art. Two important collectors in Atlanta each have more than 1,000 items. This material also exists in the collections of major museums where it has been in storage for years because of the sensitive nature of the subject matter. Some museums were willing to negotiate long term loans of this material. Ironically, the major locale for collections of this type is the greater Washington, D.C. area



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The mission of the Smithsonian is the increase and diffusion of knowledge - shaping the future by preserving our heritage, discovering new knowledge, and sharing our resources with the world. Founded in 1846, the Smithsonian is the world's largest museum and research complex, consisting of 19 museums and galleries, the National Zoological Park, and nine research facilities. Become an active part of our mission through the Transcription Center. Together, we are discovering secrets hidden deep inside our collections that illuminate our history and our world.

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