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Guide to the Robert M. Hutchins and Associates Oral History Interviews



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Descriptive Summary

Identifier	ICU.SPCL.HUTCHINSINTERVIEWS
Title	Hutchins, Robert M., and Associates. Oral History Interviews
Date	1958, 1973-1979
Size	1 linear foot (2 boxes)
Repository	Special Collections Research Center University of Chicago Library 1100 East 57th Street Chicago, Illinois 60637 U.S.A.
Abstract	Transcripts of interviews conducted by George W. Dell for a biography of Robert Hutchins. With the exception of one interview with Hutchins in 1958, the interviews were given in 1973-1978. Other interviewees include Lawrence Kimpton, Mortimer Adler, Clifton Fadiman, Richard McKeon, Rexford G. Tugwell, and others.

Information on Use

Access

This collection is open for research.

Citation

When quoting material from this collection, the preferred citation is: Robert M. Hutchins and Associates. Oral History Interviews, [Box #, Folder #], Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library

Biographical Note

Robert Maynard Hutchins (1899-1977) was born in Brooklyn, New York, the son of William James Hutchins, a professor of theology who ultimately became President of Berea College (Kentucky). Hutchins enrolled at Oberlin (where his father taught) in 1915 but discontinued his undergraduate studies in 1917 to serve with the Ambulance Corps of the U. S. Army. For his conduct, he was decorated by the Italian government. He resumed his education at Yale in 1919, graduating in 1921.

He graduated from the Yale Law School in 1925 while also serving as Secretary of the University since 1923. He joined the faculty of the Law School in 1925, becoming a full professor in 1927. He became Acting Dean (1927) and then Dean of the Law School in 1928. While at Yale, he was instrumental in creating the Institute of Human Relations, an interdisciplinary center for the legal, medical, and sociological study of contemporary social problems.

Hutchins' youth made his appointment as President of the University of Chicago something of a surprise, but according to Harold Swift, Chairman of the Board of Trustees, the search committee was concerned to find an individual with the personality and the intellectual drive to fill the position. Hutchins' gregarious nature and his commitment to curriculum reform, evident at Yale, seemed to make him an ideal candidate to provide the kind of leadership and vision that the University had not had since William Rainey Harper.

The initial years of Hutchins' administration were dramatic ones. He accepted and implemented plans for a general reorganization of the University that had been in the works since the administration of Ernest D. Burton (1923-25). These reforms were intended to simplify the administrative structure of the University, to promote interdisciplinary work among the faculty, and to redefine the undergraduate curriculum. The so-called "New Plan" or "Chicago Plan" created four graduate divisions-Humanities, Social Sciences, Physical Sciences, and Biological Sciences – and established a consolidated College as a separate division of the University. Hutchins' major interest, however, was in the nature and goals of undergraduate education in general and the College in particular. Curricular reforms, with which his name has become more or less synonymous, emphasized the role of the College in providing general education grounded in philosophy and philosophical analysis. Impatient with the increasingly fine division of academic labor and the intensification of research specialization, Hutchins became an outspoken advocate of the value of general education. He lectured tirelessly on the meaning of college and seemed to relish his self-assumed role as a leading American educator.

Hutchins' candor and glibness, his self-confidence and (to some) his dogmatism were mixed blessings. The Walgreen investigations (1935) into possible subversive activities on the part of certain faculty at the University put Hutchins in the public eye as an eloquent defender of academic freedom against the claims of naive xenophobes. On the other hand, his style and opinions antagonized parts of the faculty who came to resent what they interpreted as arrogance and a sort of "party line" within the University. Their fears of Hutchins' power and their perception of the declining role of faculty governance at the University, stood behind the Senate Memorial (1944) to the Board of Trustees. Protesting some of Hutchins' assertions about the role of the University in contemporary society, the Memorial coincided with widespread administrative reforms designed at least in part to more clearly define the respective roles of the President and the University Senate in the making of educational policy.

As a public figure, Hutchins championed a variety of issues and causes. Although he opposed America's entry into World War II, he cooperated with the government in the establishment of the Metallurgical Laboratory (1942) on campus as part of the Manhattan Project. Following the war, Hutchins was in the forefront of groups seeking to control the destructive potential of nuclear energy and to evaluate the broader implications of scientific research. He was sympathetic to the idea of a single world order (which he could trace to Thomas Aquinas) and in 1945 established, at the request of G. A. Borgese and Richard McKeon, the Committee to Frame a World Constitution. One year earlier he had been appointed chairman of the Commission

on the Freedom of the Press. Funded by grants from Time, Inc. and the Encyclopedia Britannica (of which Hutchins had been a director since 1943), the Commission inquired into the nature, function, duties, and responsibilities of the press in America. It was particularly sensitive to the constraints on a free press in the contemporary world.

Controversial and opinionated, Hutchins served as President (and then as Chancellor) of the University longer than any other individual. He retired in 1951 to assume the Directorship of the Ford Foundation.

Scope Note

This collection contains transcripts of interviews conducted by George W. Dell in the process of researching for a biography of Robert Maynard Hutchins. With the exception of one interview of Hutchins in 1958, the interviews were given in 1973-1978. The University of Chicago Library purchased photocopies of the transcripts from Dell in 1986. No use of them may be made without crediting him.

In addition to interviewing Robert Hutchins himself, Dell met with colleagues of Hutchins at the Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions, others who knew him at the University of Chicago and the Ford Foundation, and also his brother Francis. Among the prominent persons represented in the collection are Mortimer Adler, Clifton Fadiman, Richard McKeon, and Rexford G. Tugwell. The interviews contain information and evaluative comments that should be of value to researchers studying aspects of Hutchins's life or his milieu.

The transcripts are arranged in alphabetical order. Folders contain binders with photocopies of the original transcripts, many of which were annotated or corrected by Dell and the interviewees. A brief index of subjects discussed is included at the beginning of each transcript; a single index for all the Hutchins interviews is in the first folder (1:8). Most of the transcripts are verbatim, but many contain names and words which are abbreviated. The folder for Edward H. Levi (2:4) contains only Dell's notes rather than the full transcript. An undated "interview" of Hutchins (1:13) is actually a compilation of statements by Hutchins edited by Dell, based on material in the other interviews.

Related Resources

The following related resources are located in the Department of Special Collections:

<http://www.lib.uchicago.edu/e/spcl/select.html>

Subject Headings

- Kimpton, Lawrence Alpheus, 1910-
- Adler, Mortimer Jerome, 1902-

- Fadiman, Clifton, 1904-
- McKeon, Richard Peter, 1900-
- Tugwell, Rexford G. (Rexford Guy), 1891-
- Hutchins, Robert Maynard, 1899-
- University of Chicago -- History
- University of Chicago -- Presidents

INVENTORY

Box 1

Folder 1

Adler, Mortimer, July 15, 1976

Box 1

Folder 2

Ashmore, Harry, August 5, 1974

Box 1

Folder 3

Ashmore, May 25, 1976

Box 1

Folder 4

Douglas, James H., Jr., June 3, 1975

Box 1

Folder 5

Fadiman, Clifton, August 2, 1974

Box 1

Folder 6

Hoffman, Hallock, April 13, 1976

Box 1

Folder 7

Hutchins, Francis S., May 29, 1975

Box 1

Folder 8

Hutchins, Robert M., November 24, 1958

Box 1

Folder 9

Hutchins, May 29, 30, and June 1, 1973

Box 1

Folder 10

Hutchins, January 6 and 8, 1975

Box 1

Folder 11

Hutchins, May 24, 25, and 26, 1976

Box 1

Folder 12

Hutchins, January 12 and 13, 1977

Box 1

Folder 13

Hutchins, undated (compilation from previous interviews)

Box 2

Folder 1

Kelly, Frank, August 2, 1974

Box 2

Folder 2

Kelly, April 13, 1976

Box 2

Folder 3

Kimpton, Lawrence A., July 25, 1976

Box 2

Folder 4

Levi, Edward H., November 4, 1977 and March 2, 1978 (notes only)

Box 2

Folder 5

Lichtman, Richard, May 21, 1975

Box 2

Folder 6

Mayer, Milton, December 29, 1976

Box 2

Folder 7

McKeon, Richard, June 3, 1975

Box 2

Folder 8

McKeon, June 29, 1976

Box 2

Folder 9

Schwab, Joseph J., April 12, 1976

Box 2

Folder 10

Sheinbaum, Stanley, December 30, 1975

Box 2

Folder 11

Streeter, Robert E., November 1, 1977

Box 2

Folder 12

Tugwell, Rexford G., January 8, 1975

Box 2

Folder 13

Tyler, Ralph W., March 11, 1978

Box 2

Folder 14

Weissbourd, Barney, July 13, 1976

Box 2

Folder 15

Wilkinson, John, January 12, 1977