

## CHARLES BLITZER

Charles Blitzer was born in New York City on August 10, 1927. He received his Bachelor of Arts degree at Williams College in 1947, after which he migrated to Harvard to take his M.A. in 1949 and his Ph.D. in 1952. His principal teachers in graduate school were Carl J. Friedrich and W. Y. Elliot, who supervised his doctoral thesis on 'The Political Thoughts of James Harrington, 1611-1677.' In 1957, with Friedrich as co-author, he published his first book, *The Age of Power*. This and another work, *An Immortal Commonwealth*, published in 1960, were written during the ten years, 1950 to 1960, in which he taught as instructor and assistant professor in the political science department at Yale University. In the last five years of his teaching at Yale he also served as alderman of the city of New Haven.

In 1960 he took the position of executive associate at the American Council of Learned Societies, in New York City. His principal responsibility was the ACLS fellowship program. Each year, from the hundreds of applicants, he prepared the dossiers of fifty finalists, from which the ACLS committee made ten awards. Charles always made his own private list of winners, which, in each of the five years he administered the program, never differed by more than one from the committee choices.

Reluctant to give up teaching, he moonlighted by teaching classes at the New School for Social Research in 1960-61, and in 1964-65 as a visiting professor at the City University of New York.

In terms of long-range consequences, his most important contribution while he was with the ACLS was as staff director for the National Commission on the Humanities, established in 1963 by the ACLS, Phi Beta Kappa, and the Council of Graduate Schools. The report of the commission, published in 1964, spelled out the need for federal support of the humanities and social sciences as reported to the commission by twenty-four learned societies. A copy of the report was sent to every member of Congress. Within a year the commission's report led to legislation that established

two independent agencies, the National Endowment for the Humanities and the National Endowment for the Arts.

In 1965 Charles left the ACLS to become director of education at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C. Three years later he became assistant secretary for history and art, a position he held for fifteen years. The Smithsonian, with its many institutes and museums dealing with wide-ranging cultural subject matters, was an ideal environment for Charles to put to work his scholarly interests and his love of the arts. One of his first acts was to appoint a visiting committee of distinguished scholars and scientists, with the late Gordon Ray, president of the John Simon Guggenheim Foundation, as chairman. The committee met twice a year and on each visit reviewed the work of two of the nineteen museums and institutes that make up the Smithsonian. A report on each visit was submitted to the Secretary, S. Dillon Ripley. The reports, though generally constructive, were sometimes highly critical. On one memorable visit, to the National Zoo, the committee pointed out that nowhere in the zoo's exhibits was there any mention of evolution. Another observed that many of the exhibits in the Museum of National History were out of date and sometimes biased. With members like Carl Sagan, Murray Gell-Mann, Ruth Patrick, Stephen Jay Gould, and men and women of equal standing in other fields, the committee's recommendations carried considerable weight.

Another of Charles's innovations was the establishment of the post of artist-in-residence at the Smithsonian, to which Saul Steinberg was the first to be appointed.

The Smithsonian's budget was largely dependent upon government appropriations, but there was also some financial support from private sources that was used for programs not in the other Congressional appropriations. These privately supported activities were a source of tension that sometimes erupted into outright hostility. Charles was at the center of one such occasion. He had produced an exhibit for one of the museums of a typical urban slum dwelling, complete with live roaches and rats. When this

realism aroused the indignation of some members of Congress, the Smithsonian was charged with using private funds to circumvent Congress. It came as no surprise that Charles, the roaches, and the rats lost.

In 1979 Charles became a member of the Phi Beta Kappa Visiting Scholars Committee; he was elected to the society's senate in 1982, to vice-president in 1991, followed by the national presidency from 1994 to 1997. The early nineties were years of controversy over political correctness, multiculturalism and structuralism, in which Charles played a mainly conservative role. After his term as president, Charles served on the executive committee until his death. Altogether, he served on the Phi Beta Kappa Senate for sixteen years.

In 1983 Charles accepted a position as president and director of the National Humanities Center, a private, independent institution for research and study in the humanities founded in 1976 and located in North Carolina's Research Triangle Park. Its basic function is a fellowship program, which provides about forty scholars each year with residence and research support. Charles spent five years at the Center, primarily engaged in raising funds for the Center's endowment and its programs.

Five years later, Charles was offered the directorship of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars in Washington, D.C. Though he was happy with his work at the National Humanities Center, he was strongly attracted by the offer and had a special reason for accepting it, because, in 1971 he and Daniel Patrick Moynihan, then a presidential advisor at the White House, had been the leaders in founding the Wilson Center as an institute for advanced research and study of international relations. Charles, as assistant secretary of the Smithsonian, had arranged to have the center housed in the Smithsonian Castle.

From 1988 to 1997 Charles served with distinction as director of the Woodrow Wilson Center. During his tenure the fellowship program grew to thirty-five, with fellows of international repute, among them Madeleine Albright, Anatoly Dobrynin, and former

Israeli ambassador, Itamar Rabinovitch. His signal accomplishment in the nine years of service was to arrange the move of the center from the Smithsonian Castle to vastly improved facilities in the new Ronald Reagan Building. His successor as director, Lee H. Hamilton, hailed the new headquarters as 'a tangible symbol of Charles Blitzer's decades of dedicated service to, and leadership of, the Woodrow Wilson Center.'

Throughout his career Charles took an active interest in global cultural communications and exchange. From 1972 to 1978 he was chairman of the Council for International Exchange of Scholars. Another deep and long-lasting interest was as a member of the Indo-U.S. Sub-Commission on Education and Culture from 1974-76, and as its chairman from 1989 to 1992. He also served as a member of the Asian Cultural Council 1984 to 1991, and of the U.S.-New Zealand Council from 1992 until his death.

His *Who's Who* entry, in addition to the activities described above, lists numerous activities as a trustee, or member of visiting committees and boards of directors of various educational and cultural institutions, among them Dumbarton Oaks, the Center for Electronic Texts in the Humanities, Smith College, the Holocaust Museum, the Hirschhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, and the Sackler Gallery. The last two institutions were added to the Smithsonian during his tenure as assistant secretary for history and art.

His was a full life and a remarkable one of effective leadership and devotion to humane learning. He died on February 19, 1999, at the age of seventy-one, of emphysema.

Frederick Burkhardt

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