

Benacerraf, Baruj, papers

Baruj Benacerraf papers

1945-1983

Title Statement

Benacerraf, Baruj, papersA Guide to the Baruj Benacerraf Papers 1983.03.07

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Profile Description

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Descriptive Rules: Describing Archives: A Content Standard

Descriptive Summary

Unit ID

1983.03.07

Unit ID

/repositories/3/resources/569

Unit Date

1945-1983

Mixed Materials

1 (box)

Language

English

source

Benacerraf, Baruj, 1920-2011

Extent

0.16 Linear Feet 4 folders

Repository

VCU Health Sciences Library

Administrative Information

Access Restrictions

The collection is open for research.

Use Restrictions

There are no restrictions.

Acquisition Information

Gift of Baruj Benacerraf.

Preferred Citation

Baruj Benacerraf Papers, 1945-1983, Accession number 1983.03.07, Special Collections and Archives, HHealth Sciences Library, Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, VA.

Biographical / Historical Information

Baruj Benacerraf was born in Caracas, Venezuela October 29, 1920, but raised in Paris, France. His family returned to Venezuela in 1939 due to the rise of the Nazi Party in neighboring Germany and the onset of World War II. A year later his family moved to New York City where Benacerraf enrolled at Columbia University and graduated in 1942. He planned to attend medical school but struggled to gain admission because of the Jewish quotas imposed by many universities. After being rejected by twenty five schools, Benacerraf was accepted by the Medical College of Virginia (MCV). A family friend connected to the college served as a personal reference for the aspiring physician. MCV and other medical schools across the United States compressed their curriculum into three years to accelerate the number of trained physicians available to support the war effort. Benacerraf entered medical school in 1942 and received his Doctor of Medicine just as the war was concluding in Europe in the spring of 1945. Following a one-year internship at Queen's General Hospital in New York, he served in the United States Army before embarking on a career as a biomedical researcher. He was affiliated with a number of institutions from France to Massachusetts before accepting a faculty position at Harvard University in 1970. For the next twenty-one years Benacerraf continued his immunological research at Harvard as professor and researcher.

Benacerraf is best known for earning the Nobel Prize in Medicine or Physiology in 1980 along with George D. Snell and Jean Dausset. Exploring the body's immune system, they discovered a histocompatibility complex- the part of DNA that controls immune response. In the 1960s, Benacerraf carried out experiments on Guinea pigs which built upon Snell and Dausset's earlier work, and found that only some had responses to specific antigens. After selectively breeding the Guinea pigs, he discovered that this trait was genetic, and demonstrated that a previously unknown gene within the major histocompatibility complex existed and could be passed down between generations. This gene is now known as an immune-response gene, and is found within the same chromosome region that determines the formation of H antigens.

Although Benacerraf never returned to his alma mater as a faculty member or research scientist, he remained connected to the college, participating in class reunions and special events, as well as delivering the commencement address in 1981 for Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU). In 2009, the VCU School of Medicine named one of its four student medical societies for Benacerraf. The Nobel Laureate died August 2, 2011 at the age of 90 in Jamaica Plain, Boston, Massachusetts.

For more information on Benacerraf's life, please see

<https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/medicine/1980/benacerraf/auto-biography/>. Benacerraf's Nobel Prize lecture is available online at <https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/medicine/1980/benacerraf/lecture/>

Scope and Contents

Materials in this collection include photographs, reprints, materials relating to his Nobel prize, a grant proposal, and other academic materials related to his educational and teaching career.

Keywords

Benacerraf, Baruj, 1920-2011

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Arrangement

Folders arranged alphabetically.

Description of Subordinate Components

Academics

Unit ID /repositories/3/archival_objects/57962

Unit Date 1945-1978

Mixed Materials 1 (box)

Container 1 (folder)

Nobel Prize

Unit ID /repositories/3/archival_objects/57963

Unit Date 1980

Mixed Materials 1 (box)

Container 2 (folder)

Photographs

Unit ID /repositories/3/archival_objects/57964

Unit Date 1970-1980

Mixed Materials 1 (box)

Container 3 (folder)

Reprints

Unit ID /repositories/3/archival_objects/57965

Unit Date 1974-1975, 1981, undated

Mixed Materials 1 (box)

Container 4 (folder)