

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with William Smith

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## Overview of the Collection

<b>Repository:</b>	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
<b>Creator:</b>	Smith, William Lee, 1929-
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with William Smith,
<b>Dates:</b>	September 9, 2003
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2003
<b>Physical Description:</b>	4 Betacame SP videocassettes (1:59:05).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Education executive William Smith (1929 - 2008 ) was a senior advisor in the U.S. Department of Education who oversaw teacher training programs. Smith was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on September 9, 2003, in Washington, District of Columbia. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2003_243
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Senior education executive William L. Smith spent his professional career working to improve inner-city education. Born in Boston, Massachusetts, on January 3, 1929, Smith developed a strong sense of sacrifice and community growing up during the Great Depression.

After completing high school, Smith received a presidential scholarship to Wiley College where he finished a year early, graduating with honors in January, 1949. He then won a scholarship to Boston University to continue his studies, but his plans were interrupted in the fall of 1950 when he enlisted in the U.S. Army at the

outbreak of the Korean War. Smith helped integrate General Douglas MacArthur's famed honor guard and received a Bronze Star and a Purple Heart for his battlefield service. When he returned to the United States, Smith resumed his studies, earning his M.Ed. degree in 1955. Smith then was hired as a teacher and administrator in Cleveland's public schools, where he worked until 1968.

Smith continued his studies at Case Western Reserve University and just before receiving his PhD degree in education, he was asked in 1970 to join the U.S. Department of Education. He moved to Washington, D.C., and began a long and meritorious career with the Department of Education. There, Smith oversaw teacher training, educational development and vocational education. Starting in 1995, Smith worked as a senior advisor within the Department of Education.

Smith's writings on teacher education, administration and educational multiculturalism have appeared in some fifty publications. He represented the Department of Education abroad at several international conferences on education.

Smith passed away on February 29, 2008 at the age of 79. He was married to Audrey Morton Smith and had two adult children with his first wife, Mable.

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## **Scope and Content**

This life oral history interview with William Smith was conducted by Larry Crowe on September 9, 2003, in Washington, District of Columbia, and was recorded on 4 Betacame SP videocassettes. Education executive William Smith (1929 - 2008 ) was a senior advisor in the U.S. Department of Education who oversaw teacher training programs.

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## **Restrictions**

### **Restrictions on Access**

Restrictions may be applied on a case-by-case basis at the discretion of The HistoryMakers®.

### **Restrictions on Use**

All use of materials and use credits must be pre-approved by The

## Related Material

Information about the administrative functions involved in scheduling, researching, and producing the interview, as well as correspondence with the interview subject is stored electronically both on The HistoryMakers® server and in two databases maintained by The HistoryMakers®, though this information is not included in this finding aid.

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## Controlled Access Terms

This interview collection is indexed under the following controlled access subject terms.

### Persons:

Smith, William Lee, 1929-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

### Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews  
Smith, William Lee, 1929- --Interviews

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African American educators--Interviews

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Government employees--Interviews

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## Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

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The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

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United States. Dept. of Education

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## **Occupations:**

Education Executive

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## **HistoryMakers® Category:**

EducationMakers|CivicMakers

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## **Administrative Information**

### **Custodial History**

Interview footage was recorded by The HistoryMakers®. All rights to the interview have been transferred to The HistoryMakers® by the interview subject through a signed interview release form. Signed interview release forms have been deposited with Jenner & Block, LLP, Chicago.

### **Preferred Citation**

The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with William Smith, September 9, 2003. The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection, 1900 S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

### **Processing Information**

This interview collection was processed and encoded on 2/5/2020 by The HistoryMakers® staff. The finding aid was created adhering to the following standards: DACS, AACR2, and the Oral History Cataloging Manual (Matters 1995).

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## **Other Finding Aid**

A Microsoft Access contact database and a FileMaker Pro tracking database, both maintained by The HistoryMakers®, keep track of the administrative functions involved in scheduling, researching, and producing the interview.

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## Detailed Description of the Collection

### Series I: Original Interview Footage

Video Oral History Interview with William Smith, Section  
A2003\_243\_001\_001, TRT: 0:30:15 2003/09/09

William Smith was born on January 3, 1929 in Boston, Massachusetts to Willie Lee Davis and Mary Allen Smith. Smith has limited knowledge of his family history. His paternal grandfather was white and his uncle passed for white. Smith's parents met while in the employment of a family in Boston's Beacon Hill neighborhood where his mother was a cook and his father was a butler. His parents never married. Smith describes his memories of his mother and her use of corporal punishment; she passed away when he was fourteen. After her death, Smith moved into the Charles Hayden Goodwill Inn for Boys where he was mentored by Dr. Emil Hartl. He describes his relationship with his father, and how his father's friendship with Samuel Eliot Morison, a noted historian, helped to refine Smith's senior thesis at the University of Massachusetts. As a child, Smith attended Quincy Elementary School in Boston's Chinatown neighborhood. Smith talks about gender segregation in Boston Public Schools and realizing his racial identity.

African American educators--Interviews.

Government employees--Interviews.

Video Oral History Interview with William Smith, Section  
A2003\_243\_001\_002, TRT: 0:29:40 2003/09/09

William Smith talks about his relationship with his father, Willie Lee Davis. After his mother's death, Smith lived at Charles Hayden Goodwill Inn for Boys and attended Boston Technical High School in Boston, Massachusetts. He recalls influential figures in his life including Charles J. Modeest (ph.), a counselor at the Goodwill Inn who

secured a scholarship for Smith to attend Claflin College in Orangeburg, South Carolina. After his freshman year, Smith transferred to Wiley College in Marshall, Texas where he joined the marching band. He remembers fighting to retain his scholarship at Wiley when Dr. Julius S. Scott, Sr. became college president in 1948. After graduation, Smith enlisted in the U.S. Army during the Korean War and his unit integrated the 1st Calvary Division in 1950. In the Army, Smith was promoted to Master Sergeant and was inspired to become a teacher while working in Army intelligence. He also talks about Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., a contemporary whom he never met.

Video Oral History Interview with William Smith, Section  
A2003\_243\_001\_003, TRT: 0:29:00 2003/09/09

William Smith received his first teaching position while stationed at Camp Atterbury with U.S. Army Intelligence in Indiana. Filling in for a snowbound instructor, Smith received a citation for outstanding teaching from the commanding general and was promoted to the rank of master sergeant. Smith married his first wife while in the U.S. Army. After serving in the U.S. Army, he taught in Boston, Massachusetts before moving to Cleveland, Ohio where he began teaching at East Technical High School. Smith describes using his military training in the classroom. He also describes his doctoral studies at Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland where philosophy professor Richard Derr played a formative role in Smith's development. In 1965, Smith was appointed principal of Patrick Henry Junior High School in Cleveland. He describes his tenure as president including the introduction of an innovative teacher in-service education system at the school. Smith completed his doctoral studies at Case Western in 1970.

Video Oral History Interview with William Smith, Section  
A2003\_243\_001\_004, TRT: 0:30:10 2003/09/09

William Smith's accomplishments as principal of Patrick Henry Junior High School in Cleveland, Ohio from 1965 to 1968 led to an invitation to join the U.S. Department of Education in 1970. He was appointed U.S. Commissioner of Education in 1979. During his federal career, Smith

received three Presidential Rank Awards from Presidents Ronald Reagan, George H.W. Bush, and Bill Clinton. Smith talks about those influential in the field of education like Dwight Allen and Nicolas Hobar. He also reflects upon his philosophy of education, his legacy, and his hopes and concerns for the African American community. Smith describes the challenge of passing on certain values to his descendants and how he would like to be remembered. He concludes the interview by narrating his personal photographs.