



# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Henrietta 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, Henrietta
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Henrietta Smith,
<b>Dates:</b>	August 13, 2007
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2007
<b>Physical Description:</b>	5 Betacam SP videocassettes (2:26:44).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Library science professor and school media librarian Henrietta Mays Smith (1922 - ) became the first African American faculty member at the University of South Florida's School of Library and Information Science. Smith was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on August 13, 2007, in New York, New York. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2007_235
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Library science professor and school media librarian Henrietta Mays Smith was born on May 2, 1922 in Harlem, a neighborhood in New York. Smith is the daughter of Nettie Johnson Mays, a domestic worker, and Henry Lucas Mays, a chef who worked on riverboats on the Hudson. Smith attended Hunter College, studying English and history. She earned her B.A. degree from Hunter College in 1943 and in 1946, she received her B.S.L.S. degree from Columbia University. Smith then moved to Tallahassee, Florida, where she served as a cataloguer at Florida A&M University for the next two years. Dr. Smith received her M.S.L.S. degree from Columbia University in 1959.

Smith started her career working for Florida A&M University's Library as a cataloger and later returned to New York to complete her M.S.L.S. degree. She also worked at the Countee Cullen Branch of the New York Public Library as a children's librarian where she became interested in storytelling and the power of oral traditions. In 1949, she married Isaiah Courtney Smith, a young civil rights lawyer. Returning once again to Florida, Smith worked for Broward County Public Schools, as a school media specialist. In 1975, at the age of fifty three, she received her Ph. D. degree from the University of Miami and joined the faculty of the Florida Atlantic University's School of Education. After ten years at Florida Atlantic, she left the institution and joined the faculty of the University of South Florida's School of Library Science where she was the first and only African American faculty member on campus. She specialized in children's librarianship and the art of storytelling.

Since retiring in 1993, Smith has remained active in the library science field. She has sat on many American Library Association (ALA) selection committees for several literary awards such as the Coretta Scott King Awards, the Caldecott Award, and the Newbery Award. In 1994, she edited the book "The Coretta Scott King Book Awards: From Vision to Reality." She has been a board member of the Florida Association of Media in

Education (FAME) and the Florida Library Association (FLA) and has continued her general membership. She has also been involved with Storytellers Association, an association which teaches and develops multicultural storytelling and the oral tradition. In 2000, she wrote the introduction to "Lift Every Voice and Sing: A Pictorial Tribute to the Negro National Anthem."

Smith lives in Florida with her husband, I.C. Smith, now a retired judge. She has two adult children, Cynthia Smith Jackson and Robin Smith. In 2008, she was honored by the American Library Association (ALA) as the recipient of the Association for Library Service to Children's (ASCL) Distinguished Service Award for Smith's accomplishments and contributions to children's librarianship.

Henrietta Mays Smith was interviewed by The HistoryMakers on August 13, 2007.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Henrietta Smith was conducted by Adrienne Jones on August 13, 2007, in New York, New York, and was recorded on 5 Betacam SP videocassettes. Library science professor and school media librarian Henrietta Smith (1922 - ) became the first African American faculty member at the University of South Florida's School of Library and Information Science.

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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 HistoryMakers®. Appropriate credit must be given. Copyright is held by The HistoryMakers®.

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## 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, Henrietta M.

Jones, Adrienne (Interviewer)

Burghelea, Neculai (Videographer)

## Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews  
Smith, Henrietta M.--Interviews

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African American librarians-Interviews.African

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American librarians--Florida--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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Broward County (Fla.). School Board.

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## HistoryMakers® Category:

EducationMakers

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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 Henrietta Smith, August 13, 2007. The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection, 1900 S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

### Processing Information

This interview collection was processed and encoded on 8/15/2011 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, August 13, 2007

Video Oral History Interview with Henrietta Smith, Section A2007\_235\_001\_001, TRT: 0:29:25  
2007/08/13

Henrietta Smith discusses her childhood in Harlem. She was born on May 22, 1922 and lived on 137th Street. Much of her extended family, like aunts and cousins lived in the same apartment building or in a building on the street. Both of her parents came from South Carolina. Her father, Henry Lucas Mays, was a chef on Hudson River boats and her mother, Nettie Johnson Mays, was a domestic worker. Smith and her sister both attended P.S. 139. Her earliest memory was of her family. The family would eat dinner together every night and her father would sit in his big Morris chair and read from the Daily Tribune. Smith and her sister, Emily Mays, both attended P.S. 139 for elementary school.

Segregation--New York (State)--New York.

African Americans--New York (State)--New York.

African American education--New York.

African American children--New York (State)--New York.

Video Oral History Interview with Henrietta Smith, Section A2007\_235\_001\_002, TRT: 0:30:13  
2007/08/13

Henrietta Smith talks about her education while growing up in New York, New York. She attended P.S. 139 for elementary school and P.S. 181 for middle school. Her sister, Emily Mays, also attended these schools with her, but they went to separate high schools. Smith attended Morris High School, now known as Morris Educational Campus, in Bronx, New York. In 1943, when Morris High School tried to bar her from attending graduation for racial reasons, the National Association for the Advancement for Colored People (NAACP) came to her defense. After receiving her B.A. degree from Hunter College in 1943, she enrolled in Columbia University's School of Library Science where she earned her B.S.L.S. and M.S.L.S. degrees, in 1946 and 1959, respectively. After working at New York Public Library, Smith took a job in Tallahassee, Florida, as a cataloger with Florida A&M University's library. Smith discusses the racism and segregation she faced in Florida.

African Americans--Segregation--Florida.

Library education--New York (State)--New York.

African American Librarians--United States--History.

National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.

Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University--Employees.

African American students--Education (Secondary)--New York (State)--New York.

Video Oral History Interview with Henrietta Smith, Section A2007\_235\_001\_003, TRT: 0:30:08  
2007/08/13

Henrietta Smith discusses her courtship and marriage to Isaiah Courtney Smith, a young civil rights lawyer who worked to integrate schools in Florida. Her

mentor, Augusta Baker, a New York City librarian encouraged her to become involved with children's storytelling. After working as a school media specialist, she attended University of Miami and in 1975, Smith received her Ph. D. degree in library science. After teaching for ten years at Florida Atlantic University's School of Education, she left the position to join the faculty of the School of Library Science at University of South Florida, where she became the first African American faculty member at the university.

Public libraries--Florida

United States--Race Relations.

African Americans--Civil rights--20th century.

African American librarians.

Library education--Florida.

African Americans--Marriage.

University of South Florida. School of Library and Information Science--Faculty.

Video Oral History Interview with Henrietta Smith, Section A2007\_235\_001\_004, TRT: 0:29:25  
2007/08/13

Henrietta Smith recounts her career at the School of Library Science at the University of South Florida, as well as the experience of being the only African American faculty member on the university campus. Smith became involved with the Coretta Scott King Task Force at the American Library Association (ALA), editing the book "The Coretta Scott King Book Awards: From Vision to Reality." She discusses her affiliation with Storytellers International, a group dedicated to multiculturalism storytelling and oral traditions. Smith affirms her belief and dedication in reading and encouraging young people to read.

African Americans and libraries.

African Americans--American Library Association.

African Americans--Reading comprehension--Study and teaching.

African American librarians.

University of South Florida. School of Library and Information Science--Faculty.

American Library Association. Coretta Scott King Task Force.

Storytellers International.

Video Oral History Interview with Henrietta Smith, Section A2007\_235\_001\_005, TRT: 0:27:33  
2007/08/13

Henrietta Smith looks back on her life. She gives advice to young professionals in the library and information science fields. She advises these young professionals to join professional organizations, such as the American Library Association (ALA). Smith has concerns about the future of libraries and the commitment of parents and schools to provide comprehensive education to young students. Henrietta Smith concludes the interview by explaining and narrating photographs of family and career.

African Americans--Education.

African Americans--Social conditions.

African American librarians.

African American vocational guidance.