

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with The Honorable Jock Smith

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Smith, Jock M., 1948-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Jock Smith,
Dates:	September 5, 2007
Bulk Dates:	2007
Physical Description:	8 Betacame SP videocassettes (3:32:05).
Abstract:	Law professor, attorney, and municipal court judge The Honorable Jock Smith (1948 - 2012) was senior partner at Cochran, Cherry, Givens & Smith, P.C. in Tuskegee, Alabama. He was a former judge for the State of Alabama and wrote his autobiography entitled "Climbing Jacob's Ladder: a Trial Lawyer's Journey in Behalf of the 'Least of These'." Smith was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on September 5, 2007, in Montgomery, Alabama. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2007_245
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Attorney, law professor, municipal court judge, and trial lawyer Jock Michael Smith was born on June 10, 1948, in New York City to Betty Lou Nance Bowers and Jacob Smith. Despite the untimely death of his father in 1956, Smith still excelled academically, receiving his B.S. degree from Tuskegee University in 1970 and his J.D. degree from the University of Notre Dame's Law School on May 20, 1973.

After receiving his law degree, Smith then became a legal advisor to the NAACP's Civil Rights Project in Broome County, New York. A year later, Smith moved to Alabama, and in 1977, he became the assistant attorney general for Montgomery, Alabama. That same year, Smith opened his own law firm in Tuskegee, Alabama where he represented plaintiffs and defendants in both criminal and civil suits until 1998. In 1987, Smith became a city municipal judge in Camp Hill, Alabama, and spent two years on the bench. In 1990, he became County Attorney in Macon County, Alabama. He represented the county in all legal matters for fifteen years. In 1993, Smith worked as an administrative law judge for Alabama's Department of Environmental Management. The following year, he founded Scoring For Life, Inc., a non-profit organization that encourages teens, children and adults with motivational messages. In 1997, Smith became a principal stockholder and sports agent for Cochran Sports Management while working alongside Johnnie L. Cochran Jr. A year later, Smith joined Cochran at the firm of Cochran, Cherry, Givens & Smith, P.C. in Tuskegee, Alabama as a senior partner. In 1999, he also became a play-by-play announcer for Tuskegee University's Tiger Football and the Tuskegee Community Network. In addition to his legal career, Smith also taught at State University of New York at Binghamton and Tuskegee Institute.

Smith has received numerous awards, including honorary doctorates of Divinity Degrees from the Pentecostal Bible College, Tuskegee, Alabama and the Montgomery Bible Institute and Theological Center, Montgomery, Alabama, and keys to the cities of New Orleans, Louisiana, Memphis, Tennessee and Flint, Michigan. He has been recognized by the Alabama Trial Lawyers Association for tireless dedication and unwavering commitment, inducted into the Million Dollar Advocates Forum and received the Inaugural Johnnie L. Cochran, Jr. Journey to Justice Award in 2005 at the National Bar Association Convention. "The Martindale-Hubbell" legal publication has given Smith its highest rating, the AV Rating, and "Lawdragon" Legal Magazine in Los Angeles, California selected him as one of America's Top 500 Trial Litigators in 2006 and 2007. Smith was inducted onto the President's Advisory Council of the National Wildlife Federation (NWF), making him the first African American to serve on that board. In 2002, he published his autobiography entitled, "Climbing Jacob's ladder: a Trial Lawyer's Journey in Behalf of the 'Least of These'."

Jock Smith passed away on January 8, 2012.

Jock Smith was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on September 5, 2007.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with The Honorable Jock Smith was conducted by Denise Gines on September 5, 2007, in Montgomery, Alabama, and was recorded on 8 Betacame SP videocassettes. Law professor, attorney, and municipal court judge The Honorable Jock Smith (1948 - 2012) was senior partner at Cochran, Cherry, Givens & Smith, P.C. in Tuskegee, Alabama. He was a former judge for the State of Alabama and wrote his autobiography entitled "Climbing Jacob's Ladder: a Trial Lawyer's Journey in Behalf of the 'Least of These'."

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®.

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.

Controlled Access Terms

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

Persons:

Smith, Jock M., 1948-

Gines, Denise (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Smith, Jock M., 1948---Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Macon County (Ala.)

Camp Hill (Ala.)

Occupations:

Law Professor

Attorney

Municipal Court Judge

HistoryMakers® Category:

EducationMakers|LawMakers

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 The Honorable Jock Smith, September 5, 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 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).

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.

Detailed Description of the Collection

Series I: Original Interview Footage

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Jock Smith, Section A2007_245_001_001, TRT: 0:28:10 2007/09/05

The Honorable Jock Smith was born on June 10, 1948 in New York City to Betty Lou Bowers Nance and Jacob Smith. His maternal family originated in Kentucky, where they were descended from U.S. Senator Henry Clay; and

migrated to Kansas City, Kansas, where his maternal grandfather, T.A. Bowers, became a Christian Methodist Episcopal minister. Smith's mother attended the Kansas State College of Agriculture and Applied Science in Manhattan, Kansas, and his father was a student at the nearby University of Kansas. The couple later moved to New York City, where Smith's father attended the Brooklyn Law School, and then became a partner at the law firm of Watson, Carter and Smith, the first black firm with an office in Manhattan. Smith often accompanied his father to Brooklyn Dodgers games, where they saw Jackie Robinson play. When Smith was eight years old, his father was assassinated by an opponent in a legal case. From that time, Smith was raised by his mother and maternal grandmother, Rebecca Bowers.

World Series (Baseball) (1955).

African American families--New York (State)--United States.

United States--Race relations.

Brooklyn Dodgers (Baseball team)--History.

Robinson, Jackie, 1919-1972.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Jock Smith, Section A2007_245_001_002, TRT: 0:28:00 2007/09/05

The Honorable Jock Smith's paternal grandmother, Lula Smith, raised Smith's father and two uncles in Kansas City, Kansas. Smith's parents met there as children, and continued dating after his mother enrolled at the Kansas State College of Agriculture and Applied Science in Manhattan, Kansas. When Smith's father returned from World War II, they married and moved to New York City. There, Smith's father attended the Brooklyn Law School during the day, and worked at night as a server at the black-owned Forest Hills Inn. When Smith was young, his family integrated Nashville Boulevard in Queens, New York, and were followed by a small group of black doctors, military officers and lawyers. Smith's family attended Queens' Presbyterian Church of St. Albans, where he was one of three African American members of the Little League baseball team and the Boy Scout troop. Smith began his education at Queens' P.S. 15, and went on

to attend J.H.S. 59 and Andrew Jackson High School.

African Americans--Education (Higher).

African American lawyers--New York (State).

African Americans--Religion.

African American couples.

World War, 1939-1945.

United States. Army. Infantry Regiment, 24th (1869-1951).

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Jock Smith, Section A2007_245_001_003, TRT: 0:28:50 2007/09/05

The Honorable Jock Smith struggled as a student at J.H.S. 59 and Andrew Jackson High School in Queens, New York. During Smith's junior year, a guidance counselor told his mother that he would make a good garbage collector. This event motivated Smith to improve, as did the encouragement he received in a public speaking class. In 1966, with the help of his mother's friend, Walter Bowie, Smith matriculated at the Tuskegee Institute in Tuskegee, Alabama. There, he learned about philosophy and African American history. He also played tennis with Lionel Richie; and, as a member of the student government, worked with university president Luther Foster, Jr. During Smith's senior year, he was elected as student body vice president, and collaborated with classmate Tom Joyner to host speakers like Adam Clayton Powell, Jr., Nikki Giovanni and Julian Bond. Smith also met his first wife at the Tuskegee Institute. He was called for a military examination, but disqualified from the draft due to undiagnosed atopic dermatitis.

Tuskegee University--Students.

Black power--Alabama--United States--History--20th century

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

Vietnam War, 1961-1975.

Civil rights movements--Alabama--Tuskegee--History--20th century.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Jock Smith, Section

The Honorable Jock Smith excelled academically at the Tuskegee Institute in Tuskegee, Alabama, where he also played baseball and joined the Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity. He worked during the summers; and his mother, Betty Lou Bowers Nance, helped finance his tuition. Smith received a scholarship to the University of Notre Dame Law School; and, before matriculating, worked for his father's former law partner, Judge James Watson, at the U.S. Customs Court. Smith had been shielded from southern racism at the all-black Tuskegee Institute, but faced frequent discrimination at the University of Notre Dame in South Bend, Indiana. He founded a chapter of the Black American Law Students Association, and worked at the local Urban League. After graduating, he worked briefly for the NAACP in Binghamton, New York; and then returned to the Tuskegee Institute to teach law from 1974. After three years there, Smith integrated the State of Alabama Office of the Attorney General, where he became an assistant attorney general.

African American college athletes--Alabama--Tuskegee.

Alpha Pi Alpha Fraternity.

African American students--Norte Dame College of Law.

Racism--Indiana.

African American lawyers.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Jock Smith, Section A2007_245_001_005, TRT: 0:28:30 2007/09/05

The Honorable Jock Smith was a trial lawyer in Alabama for twenty-one years. During his career, he successfully defended an African American man charged with raping a white woman, and saved a woman from wrongful eviction in Alexander City, Alabama. In 1988, Smith represented Lucy R. Turner, who was the victim of fraud by insurance agent Richard Perry. She was awarded \$5 million, the largest compensation ever won by a black lawyer in Alabama at the time. While practicing as an attorney, Smith also served as municipal judge in Camp Hill, Alabama; and as an administrative law judge at the Alabama Department of Environmental Management. During this time, Smith renewed his Christian faith at a

New Year's Eve celebration at the Christian Life Church in Montgomery, Alabama. In 1996, Smith was asked to host attorney Johnnie Cochran while he was in town for a book signing. One year later, Cochran invited Smith to help establish a sports agency, Cochran Sports Management, LLC.

Southern Life and Health Insurance Company--Trials, litigation, etc.

Cochran, Johnnie L., 1937-2005.

African American lawyers--Alabama.

African Americans--Religion.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Jock Smith, Section A2007_245_001_006, TRT: 0:30:05 2007/09/05

The Honorable Jock Smith met his second wife, Yvette Smiley-Smith, at the Alabama Democratic Conference in 1978. She encouraged him to help attorney Johnnie Cochran form Cochran Sports Management, LLC; and, the following year, Smith was approached by attorneys Keith Givens and Sam Cherry about founding a national law firm. The firm of Cochran, Cherry, Givens and Smith opened offices in Alabama, Georgia and Los Angeles, California; and then expanded to Chicago, Illinois; New Orleans, Louisiana; and New York City. They recruited top performing lawyers, including Hezekiah Sistrunk, Jr. and James D. Montgomery. The firm focused on civil casework, including *Tolbert v. Monsanto Company*, the largest environmental dispute in the history of the nation. Smith won \$80 million for a woman who was defrauded by a pest control company; and won a \$1.6 billion verdict in 2004 for a client who was swindled by insurance agent Richard Perry, whom Smith had prosecuted for a similar wrongdoing in 1988.

Actions and defenses--Alabama.

African American couples--Alabama.

Cochran, Johnnie L., 1937-2005.

African American lawyers--Alabama.

African American lawyers.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Jock Smith, Section A2007_245_001_007, TRT: 0:28:30 2007/09/05

The Honorable Jock Smith helped attorney Johnnie Cochran found Cochran Sports Management LLP in 1997, beginning their long term business partnership. Smith's interest in sports extended to his personal life; and, over twenty-five years, he accumulated a large collection of rare sports memorabilia, including Muhammad Ali's boxing robe and Babe Ruth's baseball uniform. Smith also collected other types of historical artifacts, including the papers of Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Frederick Douglass and Alexander Hamilton. At the time of the interview, Smith hoped to create a museum to house the collection. In 2002, Smith published his autobiography, 'Climbing Jacob's Ladder: A Trial Lawyer's Journey on Behalf of "The Least of These".' Smith describes his concerns for the African American community, and his advice to future generations. He talks about his wife, Yvette Smiley-Smith, whom he married in 1979; and their daughter, Janay Smith. Smith also reflects upon his legacy. Sports collectibles.

Discrimination in sports.

African American families--Alabama.

African American lawyers--United States--Biography.

African American fathers--Alabama.

African American couples--Alabama.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Jock Smith, Section A2007_245_001_008, TRT: 0:11:00 2007/09/05

The Honorable Jock Smith narrates his photographs.