

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Alexander Smalls

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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>	Smalls, Alexander, 1952-
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Alexander Smalls,
<b>Dates:</b>	September 20, 2016
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2016
<b>Physical Description:</b>	8 uncompressed MOV digital video files (4:15:12).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Restaurateur and opera singer Alexander Smalls (1952 - ), the father of Southern Revival Cooking, has opened five restaurants in New York City: Café Beulah, Sweet Ophelia's, The Shoebox Café, Minton's and The Cecil. He wrote the cookbook <i>Grace the Table: Stories and Recipes from My Southern Revival</i> . Smalls was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on September 20, 2016, in New York, New York. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2016_021
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Restaurateur and opera singer Alexander Smalls was born on February 7, 1952 in Spartanburg, South Carolina. He graduated from Spartanburg High School in 1970, and enrolled at Wofford College before transferring to the University of North Carolina School of the Arts, where he received his B.F.A. degree in opera in 1974. He then attended the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania between 1974 and 1977.

Upon graduation, Smalls, a classically trained baritone, toured professionally as an opera singer. As a member of the Houston Grand Opera, he performed in the George Gershwin opera *Porgy and Bess*, which earned Grammy and Tony Awards in 1977. Smalls studied opera and culinary arts in Europe; upon returning to the United States in the late 1970s, he founded his own catering business, Small Miracle. In 1994, Smalls launched his first restaurant, Café Beulah, in New York City, specializing in Southern Revival cooking that combined Gullah and international cuisines. Then, in 1996, Smalls opened Sweet Ophelia's, a casual dining venue featuring late-night, live entertainment in New York City's SoHo neighborhood. He went on to open The Shoebox Café, an upscale Southern bistro in New York City's Grand Central Terminal; however, the restaurant closed in 2001 in the aftermath of 9/11. Smalls founded a second catering business, Smalls & Co., which served a celebrity clientele that included Denzel Washington, Spike Lee and Toni Morrison. In 2012, Smalls established Harlem Jazz Enterprises; and, in partnership with Richard Parsons, opened two restaurants in Harlem in 2013: Minton's and The Cecil.

Smalls has appeared on television on NBC, CNN, ABC, CBS, and the Food Network, among others. He also served as a contributor to *Food & Wine*, *The Washington Post*, the *New York Times*, the *New York Daily News*, the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* and *Crain's New York Business*. Smalls authored the memoir and cookbook *Grace the Table: Stories and Recipes from My Southern Revival*, which features a foreword from jazz musician Wynton Marsalis.

Smalls was the recipient of the Legacy Award given by Amsterdam News in 2014, and the C-Cap Honors Award given by C-Cap in 2015. He joined the board of the Harlem School of The Arts in 2014, and served as board chair of director of Opus 118 Music School from 2007 to 2009.

Alexander Smalls was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on September 20, 2016.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Alexander Smalls was conducted by Julieanna L. Richardson on September 20, 2016, in New York, New York, and was recorded on 8 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Restaurateur and opera singer Alexander Smalls (1952 - ), the father of Southern Revival Cooking, has opened five restaurants in New York City: Café Beulah, Sweet Ophelia's, The Shoebox Café, Minton's and The Cecil. He wrote the cookbook *Grace the Table: Stories and Recipes from My Southern Revival*.

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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:

Smalls, Alexander, 1952-

Richardson, Julieanna L. (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

### Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Smalls, Alexander, 1952---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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## Occupations:

Restaurateur

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Opera Singer

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## HistoryMakers® Category:

BusinessMakers|MusicMakers

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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 Alexander Smalls, September 20, 2016. The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection, 1900 S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

### Processing Information

This interview collection was processed and encoded on 5/30/2023 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 Alexander Smalls, Section A2016\_021\_001\_001, TRT: 1:30:52  
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- Video Oral History Interview with Alexander Smalls, Section A2016\_021\_001\_002, TRT: 2:30:43  
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- Video Oral History Interview with Alexander Smalls, Section A2016\_021\_001\_003, TRT: 3:32:42  
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- Video Oral History Interview with Alexander Smalls, Section A2016\_021\_001\_004, TRT: 4:31:07  
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- Video Oral History Interview with Alexander Smalls, Section A2016\_021\_001\_005, TRT: 5:30:14  
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- Video Oral History Interview with Alexander Smalls, Section A2016\_021\_001\_006, TRT: 6:30:42  
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- Video Oral History Interview with Alexander Smalls, Section A2016\_021\_001\_007, TRT: 7:30:22  
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- Video Oral History Interview with Alexander Smalls, Section A2016\_021\_001\_008, TRT: 8:38:30  
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