

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with The Honorable Calvin Smyre

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Smyre, Calvin, 1947-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Calvin Smyre,
Dates:	March 21, 2002
Bulk Dates:	2002
Physical Description:	6 Betacame SP videocassettes (3:04:12).
Abstract:	State representative The Honorable Calvin Smyre (1947 -) was elected to the Georgia State House of Representatives in 1974, at the age of twenty-six, as its youngest member at the time. In 1984, he was the first African American from Georgia elected to the Democratic National Committee. As campaign chairman and advisor, he helped Jimmy Carter and Bill Clinton win their presidential campaigns. Smyre was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on March 21, 2002, in Atlanta, Georgia. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2002_027
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

State Representative of Georgia, Calvin Smyre was born on May 17, 1947. Smyre studied business administration at Fort Valley State University, where he earned his B.S.

In 1974, at the age of twenty-six, Smyre was elected to the Georgia State House of Representatives, as its youngest member at the time. He is known for his early efforts as an organizer and director of the "War on Poverty" program. In 1986, Governor Joe Frank Harris appointed Smyre the floor leader. It was the first time a black representative held this position in Georgia. Smyre sponsored successful legislation on the construction of the Georgia Dome, the honoring of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s birthday as a state holiday and the fight to remove the Confederate battle emblem from the state flag. He has served as a member of state house committees on appropriations, ethics, higher education and special rules. As Chairman of the House Rules Committee, he steered hundreds of successful bills to the full House, including stiffer restrictions on teen and drunken drivers.

Smyre has also been active on a national level, acting as a delegate to every Democratic National Convention since 1980. In 1984, he was the first African American from Georgia elected to the Democratic National Committee. As campaign chairman and advisor, he helped Jimmy Carter and Bill Clinton win their presidential campaigns. He also served as an adviser to former Vice President Al Gore during Gore's run for president in 2000.

Smyre has also been a key figure in the world of finance. He is the executive vice president of corporate affairs for Synovus Financial Corporation, a multi-financial services company with more than \$14.9 billion in assets. He is also the chairman, CEO of the Synovus Foundation. He acts as the secretary of the National Black Caucus of State Legislators. He sits on the Board of Trustees of the Medical College of Georgia Foundation; the Morehouse School of Medicine; the Jack D. Hughston Foundation and the Fort Valley State University Foundation as its Chair.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with The Honorable Calvin Smyre was conducted by Julieanna L. Richardson on March 21, 2002, in Atlanta, Georgia, and was recorded on 6 Betacame SP videocassettes. State representative The Honorable Calvin Smyre (1947 -) was elected to the Georgia State House of Representatives in 1974, at the age of twenty-six, as its youngest member at the time. In 1984, he was the first African American from Georgia elected to the Democratic National Committee. As campaign chairman and advisor, he helped Jimmy Carter and Bill Clinton win their presidential campaigns.

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:

Smyre, Calvin, 1947-

Richardson, Julieanna L. (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Smyre, Calvin, 1947---Interviews

African American legislators--Georgia--Interviews

African American politicians--Georgia--Interviews

Families of military personnel--United States

Columbus (Ga.)--Social life and customs

Americans--Foreign countries

Military bases, American--Germany

Fort Valley State University

Ford Motor Company--Employees

Elections--United States--Georgia

Georgia Dome (Atlanta, Ga.)

Symbolism in politics--Confederate States of America

Flags--Georgia

Democratic Party (U.S.)

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Georgia. General Assembly. House of Representatives.

Occupations:

State Representative

HistoryMakers® Category:

PoliticalMakers

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 Calvin Smyre, March 21, 2002. 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).

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 Calvin Smyre, Section A2002_027_001_001, TRT: 0:30:56 ?

Georgia state representative Calvin Smyre describes his family background, and details his father's and grandfather's service in the military. Smyre recalls the effects of having to live in several different places due to his father's service, but fondly recalls the time he spent in Columbus, Georgia. Smyre also describes his early years at school.

African American legislators--Georgia--Interviews.

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Families of military personnel--United States.

Columbus (Ga.)--Social life and customs.

Americans--Foreign countries.

Military bases, American--Germany.

Fort Valley State University.

Ford Motor Company--Employees.

Elections--United States--Georgia.

Georgia Dome (Atlanta, Ga.).

Symbolism in politics--Georgia.

Flags--Confederate States of America.

Democratic Party (U.S.).

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Calvin Smyre, Section A2002_027_001_002,

TRT: 0:30:10 ?

Georgia state representative Calvin Smyre recalls his itinerant childhood, a result of his father's military service. Smyre describes his favorite activities in Columbus, Georgia. Smyre devotes a great deal of time to describing his experience in Germany, where his father spent four years at a military base. Smyre explains his culture shock and how he used sports and photography to adjust. He also describes his high school in Germany and details his new integrated environment.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Calvin Smyre, Section A2002_027_001_003,
TRT: 0:31:29 ?

Georgia state legislator Calvin Smyre continues to describe his four year residence in Germany, explaining how it changed his outlook and the dynamics of his family. Smyre recalls his college admissions process, and explains why he chose to attend Fort Valley State University. Smyre details his experience at Fort Valley, sharing his transition from German culture to black culture, and describing his course of study and his most influential professors.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Calvin Smyre, Section A2002_027_001_004,
TRT: 0:30:31 ?

Georgia state representative Calvin Smyre recalls his difficulty graduating from Fort Valley State University, and explains how it taught him to value the opportunities he had. Smyre describes his brief stint in the Army, and his employment at Ford Motor Company and at a textile mill. Smyre recalls how his participation in volunteer public service led to his interest in politics. Smyre details his first election to the Georgia House of Representatives at age twenty-six, and describes his rapid rise through the ranks. Smyre discusses various committees on which he served and names some influential lawmakers upon his election.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Calvin Smyre, Section A2002_027_001_005,
TRT: 0:29:43 ?

Georgia state representative Calvin Smyre details the success he has achieved over his three decades in the Georgia state legislature. Smyre discusses his struggle to change Georgia's state flag and eradicate its Confederate symbology, a struggle that lasted nearly ten years. Smyre talks about his integral role in building the Georgia Dome, which helped attract the 1996 Summer Olympics to Atlanta. Smyre also discusses his efforts in educational reform.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Calvin Smyre, Section A2002_027_001_006,
TRT: 0:31:23 ?

Georgia state representative Calvin Smyre reflects on his career in the Georgia House of Representatives, discussing the impact of his three decades of leadership, and explaining why he never ran for national office. Smyre speculates about his future plans, and does not rule out becoming Speaker of the Georgia House. Smyre also talks about the state of the Democratic Party, his ability to cross racial lines, and his legacy.