

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Frank 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, Frank, 1942-
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Frank Smith,
<b>Dates:</b>	December 13, 2004
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2004
<b>Physical Description:</b>	5 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:10:52).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Civil rights activist, cultural heritage chief executive, and city council member Frank Smith (1942 - ) is a founding member of Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and has served on District of Columbia City Council. Smith is the founder and director of the African American Civil War Memorial. During his tenure on the Council, Smith supported legislation creating subsidies for housing down payments, a lottery system for disposing of condemned and surplus housing and establishing tax incentives for new business development. Smith was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on December 13, 2004, in Washington, District of Columbia. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2004_257
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Commentator, civil rights activist, politician, and speaker Frank Smith, Jr. was born on September 17, 1942, in Newnan, Georgia. His mother was a homemaker and his father was a farmer and truck driver. In 1959, Smith earned his high school diploma from Central High School, where he was a member of the New Farmers of America as well as the debate team, choir and drama club.

From 1959 until 1962, Smith attended Morehouse College in Atlanta, where he was a founding member of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). Smith left Morehouse during his senior year to play a role in the Civil Rights Movement. From 1962 until 1968, Smith worked with SNCC organizing and registering African Americans voters in Mississippi and Alabama. He is noted for his involvement and leadership role in planning and executing protests and marches in Greenwood, Mississippi, during the Freedom Summer of 1964.

In 1968, Smith moved to Washington, D.C., when he accepted a job as a researcher for the Institute for Policy Studies, focusing on education and planning issues. Smith became involved in local community issues and was elected to serve as an Advisory Neighborhood Commissioner (ANC). In 1978, Smith unsuccessfully ran for the District of Columbia City Council, but the following year he was elected to public office and served one term on the D.C. Board of Education. In 1980, Smith earned his Ph.D. degree from the Union Institute in Ohio.

In 1982, Smith was elected to the District of Columbia City Council where he represented one of the most racially, ethnically and economically diverse wards in the city. Smith was subsequently elected to serve four terms on the Council, remaining there until 1998. During his tenure on the Council, Smith supported legislation creating

subsidies for housing down payments, a lottery system for disposing of condemned and surplus housing and establishing tax incentives for new business development.

In 1998, Smith became chairman of the board and chief executive officer for the organization which worked to establish the African American Civil War Memorial and an accompanying museum. It is the only national memorial to the colored troops who fought in the Civil War and one of the most unique memorials in Washington, D.C.

Smith has received numerous awards for his civic, community and political leadership.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Frank Smith was conducted by Racine Tucker Hamilton on December 13, 2004, in Washington, District of Columbia, and was recorded on 5 Betacame SP videocassettes. Civil rights activist, cultural heritage chief executive, and city council member Frank Smith (1942 - ) is a founding member of Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and has served on District of Columbia City Council. Smith is the founder and director of the African American Civil War Memorial. During his tenure on the Council, Smith supported legislation creating subsidies for housing down payments, a lottery system for disposing of condemned and surplus housing and establishing tax incentives for new business development.

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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, Frank, 1942-

Hamilton, Racine Tucker (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

**Subjects:**

African Americans--Interviews  
Smith, Frank, 1942---Interviews

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African American political activists--Washington (D.C.)--Interviews

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African American civic leaders--Interviews

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African American politicians--Washington (D.C.)--Interviews

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City council members--Washington (D.C.)--Interviews

---

Coweta County (Ga.)--Social life and customs

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Country life--United States--Anecdotes

---

African American farmers--Georgia--Interviews

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Rural-urban migration--United States

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Morehouse College (Atlanta, Ga.)

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Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (U.S.)

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Mississippi Freedom Project

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United States--Politics and government--1963-1974

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Institute for Policy Studies

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Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party

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Barry, Marion, 1936-

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United States--History--Civil War, 1861-1865--Participation, African American

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Discrimination in higher education--United States--Illinois--Carbondale

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African American Civil War Memorial Freedom Foundation & Museum

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Museum directors--Washington (D.C.)--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:

Museum Director

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# HistoryMakers® Category:

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 Frank Smith, December 13, 2004. 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 Frank Smith, Section A2004\_257\_001\_001, TRT: 0:31:10 ?  
African American Civil War Museum founder and director Frank Smith, Jr.

begins by recalling his family background and his early childhood in Coweta County, Georgia, describing social customs and traditions of mutual aid in their close-knit community of African American tenant farmers. Smith shares memories of his family life, telling stories of holidays and attending church. He also describes rural life and recounts his early school years.

African American political activists--Washington (D.C.)--Interviews.

African American civic leaders--Interviews.

African American politicians--Washington (D.C.)--Interviews.

City council members--Washington (D.C.)--Interviews.

Coweta County (Ga.)--Social life and customs.

Country life--United States--Anecdotes.

African American farmers--Georgia--Interviews.

Rural-urban migration--United States.

Morehouse College (Atlanta, Ga.).

Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (U.S.).

Mississippi Freedom Project.

United States--Politics and government--1963-1969.

Institute for Policy Studies.

Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party.

Barry, Marion, 1936-.

United States--History--Civil War, 1861-1865--Participation, African American.

Discrimination in higher education--United States--Illinois--Carbondale.

African American Civil War Memorial Freedom Foundation & Museum.

Museum directors--Washington (D.C.)--Interviews.

United States--Politics and government--1963-1974.

Video Oral History Interview with Frank Smith, Section A2004\_257\_001\_002, TRT: 0:30:34 ?

Frank Smith, Jr. continues to describe his upbringing in Coweta County, Georgia, describing his personality, talents, and interests. Smith explains his early sense of responsibility came from his working on a farm. After discussing the migration of Georgians to the North, Smith describes his high school years and the influence of his parents. He talks about his success in high school and explains his aspirations to attend Morehouse College in Atlanta despite his family's financial difficulties.

Video Oral History Interview with Frank Smith, Section A2004\_257\_001\_003, TRT: 0:30:46 ?

Frank Smith, Jr. details his undergraduate years at Morehouse College in Atlanta, Georgia, explaining how he became involved with the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee and participated in several civil rights demonstrations. Smith then explains his involvement in summer activism in Mississippi, including the Freedom Summer of 1964, detailing the dangers he and other activists overcame. Smith explains his decision to leave college and come to Washington, D.C. as a lobbyist for the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party and describes the political climate during the late 1960s and 1970s. Smith also discusses his work at the Institute for Policy Studies.

Video Oral History Interview with Frank Smith, Section A2004\_257\_001\_004, TRT: 0:29:48 ?

Frank Smith, Jr. recounts his entrance into local politics in Washington, D.C. as a member of the school board and city council. Smith also evaluates Marion Barry's term as mayor, including his arrest and subsequent reelection. Smith then discusses the contributions of black soldiers in the United States Civil War,

explaining how their impact led to Union victory.

Video Oral History Interview with Frank Smith, Section A2004\_257\_001\_005, TRT: 0:08:34 ?

Frank Smith, Jr. discusses the African American Civil War Memorial in Washington, D.C. and explains his involvement in the memorial and the accompanying museum. Finally, he talks briefly about his family, and reflects on his life and career.