

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Audrey Lavinia Smaltz

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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>	Smaltz, Audrey Lavinia, 1937-
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Audrey Lavinia Smaltz,
<b>Dates:</b>	March 8, 2005
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2005
<b>Physical Description:</b>	6 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:40:18).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Fashion show stage manager Audrey Lavinia Smaltz (1937 - ) is the founder and organizer of Ground Crew, a backstage management group which has staffed many fashion shows including those by Vera Wang, Giorgio Armani, Oscar de la Renta, Michael Kors, Kenneth Cole and Ralph Rucci. Smaltz has also worked with corporations like Nike, Vogue, and Saks Fifth Avenue. Smaltz was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on March 8, 2005, in New York, New York. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2005_060
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Fashion show manager Audrey Lavinia Smaltz was born on June 2, 1937 in New York City. Growing up in the Harlem River Houses with neighbors such as Dr. Alvin Poussaint, Bob Moses and David Scott, Smaltz attended P.S. 46 and the Harriet Beecher Stowe Girls Junior High School. Accepted into New York City's High School of Music and the Performing Arts, she took her first professional modeling job from baseball's New York Giants. After graduating high school in 1955, Smaltz worked as a model and fashion commentator. An art major at the City College of New York, Smaltz also worked for Metropolitan Life Insurance and the Rueben H. Donnelly Corporation. In 1962, Smaltz worked as a model and salesperson at Bloomingdale's and she became an assistant fashion coordinator for the store in 1964. Hired by Lane Bryant Clothing in 1965, she worked as a model and buyer and also as a fashion coordinator. Moving to Chicago in 1969, Smaltz joined the Ebony Fashion Fair in 1970 as a commentator and fashion editor. In 1977, Smaltz organized her Ground Crew team, a backstage management group which has staffed many fashion shows including those by Vera Wang, Giorgio Armani, Betsey Johnson, Oscar de la Renta, Bill Blass, Alice Roi, Michael Kors, Luca Luca, Nanette Lepore, Tommy Hilfiger, Kenneth Cole and Ralph Rucci. Smaltz has also worked with corporations like Nike, Vogue, Saks Fifth Avenue, Macy's, and J. Crew.

A contributing editor to *Vogue*, *Mirabella* and *Mode* magazines, Smaltz appears frequently on QVC and the Oprah Winfrey Show. She is a board member of the Black Fashion Museum, Dress for Success, the Gracie Mansion Conservancy and Fashion Group International.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Audrey Lavinia Smaltz was conducted by Larry Crowe on March 8, 2005, in New York, New York, and was recorded on 6 Betacame SP videocassettes. Fashion show stage manager Audrey Lavinia Smaltz (1937 - ) is the founder and organizer of Ground Crew, a backstage management group which has staffed many fashion shows including those by Vera Wang, Giorgio Armani, Oscar de la Renta, Michael Kors, Kenneth Cole and Ralph Rucci. Smaltz has also worked with corporations like Nike, Vogue, and Saks Fifth Avenue.

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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:

Smaltz, Audrey Lavinia, 1937-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Burghelea, Neculai (Videographer)

### Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Smaltz, Audrey Lavinia, 1937---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:

Fashion Show Stage Manager

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# HistoryMakers® Category:

StyleMakers

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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 Audrey Lavinia Smaltz, March 8, 2005. 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 Audrey Lavinia Smaltz, Section A2005\_060\_001\_001, TRT: 0:29:35 ?

Audrey Lavinia Smaltz was born on June 2, 1937 in Harlem, New York. Smaltz's mother, Rebecca Dora Capers-Smaltz, was born in Hilton Head, South Carolina and moved to Boston, Massachusetts with her aunt at a young age. She then moved to New York City, where she worked as an elevator operator at Wanamaker's department store. Smaltz's father, Raymond Smaltz, who was of German, American Indian and African ancestry, was born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. He worked for the post office in New York until his retirement.

Smaltz's parents met in South Carolina and both had a penchant for gambling. Smaltz recalls that they often took the family to the South for summer vacations. As an adult, she made a trip to Hilton Head, South Carolina where she met her maternal relatives for the first time. Smaltz describes the history of her family name and Gullah heritage as well as her father's cousin in Beaufort, South Carolina. She also talks about the origins of the name of her fashion show business, The Ground Crew.

Video Oral History Interview with Audrey Lavinia Smaltz, Section A2005\_060\_001\_002, TRT: 0:29:25 ?

Audrey Lavinia Smaltz talks about her parents' wedding and honeymoon in Staten Island, New York. She and her two older brothers were all born at home, rather than in a hospital. They grew up in the Harlem River Houses, which were among the first public housing projects in New York City built by an African American architect. Smaltz recalls the atmosphere of the community, including the sounds and sights of nearby Yankee stadium and her neighbors' and father's whistling to the local children. As a child, Smaltz was a tomboy and spent much of her time playing with her brothers and wandering through the neighborhood. She attended P.S. 46 Elementary School and then the High School of Music & Art in New York City. HistoryMaker Diahann Carroll and Billy Dee Williams also attended the same high school. She recalls her prom date with Robert "Bob" Parris Moses, who went on to become a SNCC leader.

Video Oral History Interview with Audrey Lavinia Smaltz, Section A2005\_060\_001\_003, TRT: 0:29:10 ?

Audrey Lavinia Smaltz describes attending high school at the High School of Music & Art in the Bronx, as well as HistoryMaker Ophelia DeVore's School of Charm. She describes her first modeling assignment, as a "Say Hey" Kid for baseball player Willie Mays, Jr. Smaltz discovered that fashion show commentators were paid more than models, and began to comment on shows, with her mother as her watchful critic. She also participated in beauty pageants. The family moved back to Washington Heights in Manhattan, and after graduating from high school in 1955, she attended City College of New York and took classes for several years while working, first at Metropolitan Life Insurance Company then as an advertising art director for Reuben H. Donnelly Corporation. She also worked briefly as a stock broker. In 1962, she was hired as a model at Bloomingdale's and was promoted to fashion coordinator and worked for Doris Salinger. In 1965, she began working at Lane Bryant as an assistant coat and suit buyer.

Video Oral History Interview with Audrey Lavinia Smaltz, Section A2005\_060\_001\_004, TRT: 0:29:44 ?

Audrey Lavinia Smaltz recalls how her bosses at Bloomingdale's and Lane Bryant underwrote her costs to attend the March on Washington in 1963 and Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s funeral in 1968. Also, she was refused service in a dining area in Miami, Florida and subsequently arrested and then released. Smaltz worked at Lane Bryant as a model and buyer. In 1969, she left Lane Bryant, married Dr. Stanley Hughes, and moved to Chicago, Illinois. Later that year, the pair divorced. She began working at Johnson Publishing Company in late 1970 as a commentator for Ebony Fashion Fair and as an editor for the magazine. She remained in New York. Smaltz describes the history of Ebony Fashion Fair and her role as its commentator. She talks about how she discussed her decision to leave with Mr. John H. Johnson and his advice. She briefly imported clothing from Europe before working as a consultant for Revlon and Fashion Fair cosmetics while starting her company, The Ground Crew.

Video Oral History Interview with Audrey Lavinia Smaltz, Section A2005\_060\_001\_005, TRT: 0:28:15 ?

Audrey Lavinia Smaltz describes working as a consultant for Fashion Fair in the late 1970s while beginning her company, The Ground Crew. John H. Johnson hired her as a consultant and paid her five times what Revlon was paying her. The Ground Crew began in 1978 with a small group: Smaltz, along with her stepdaughter and a group of friends, helped stage-manage the Congressional Black Caucus Fashion Show. Smaltz reflects on the company's work and the lack of diversity in the modeling profession. She describes her future plans and her hopes and concerns for the African American community. Smaltz recalls her mother's fashion sense during her years as a Fashion Fair commentator. She also recalls mentoring the daughter of a Kenyan judge and being hired to consult on the opening of the store, Fashion to Figure, by Mike Kaplan, the son of Steve Kaplan, the man who hired her to work at Lane Bryant forty years before. Smaltz reflects on her life, her legacy, and how she hopes to be remembered.

Video Oral History Interview with Audrey Lavinia Smaltz, Section A2005\_060\_001\_006, TRT: 0:14:09 ?

Audrey Lavinia Smaltz narrates her photographs.