

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Dr. Robert L. Smith

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Smith, Robert L., 1936-
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Dr. Robert L. Smith,
Dates:	April 23, 2019 and December 13, 2017
Bulk Dates:	2017 and 2019
Physical Description:	8 uncompressed MOV digital video files (3:48:12).
Abstract:	Professor and physician Dr. Robert L. Smith (1936 -) was the president of Central Mississippi Health Services, Inc. and the first Southern Medical Field Director for the Medical Committee for Human Rights. Smith was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on April 23, 2019 and December 13, 2017, in Jackson, Mississippi. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2017_222
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Professor and physician Dr. Robert L. Smith was born on December 20, 1936 in Terry, Mississippi to Willie B. Smith and Lillie Mae Smith. He received his B.A. degree in chemistry from Tougaloo College in Tougaloo, Mississippi in 1957, and his M.D. degree from Howard University in Washington, D.C. in 1961.

Smith completed his clinical training at the West Side Medical Clinic of Cook County Hospital in Chicago, Illinois and returned to Jackson, Mississippi and founded the Family Heath Center, now known as the Central Mississippi Health Services, Inc. In 1964, Smith worked with the Medical Committee for Human Rights (MCHR) to provide medical services for civil rights workers during the Freedom Summer in Jackson, Mississippi as its first Southern Medical Field Director. Smith later worked as an assistant clinical professor of family medicine at the University of Mississippi Medical School, where he participated in the development of the Family Medicine Program as a co-principal investigator with the National Research Program's Arteriosclerotic Risks in Community Studies. Smith worked as an adjunct professor at Tufts University in Boston, Massachusetts, Meharry Medical College in Nashville, Tennessee and Jackson State University in Jackson, Mississippi as well as professor emeritus position in the department of community medicine at Brown University in Providence, Rhode Island. During his career, Smith also assisted in institutionalizing the pre-health program at Tougaloo College.

In 2011, part of Jackson Metro Parkway was renamed in honor of Dr. Robert L. Smith. In 2014, Smith received the Community Service Award from the Mississippi Board of Trustees of the State of Institutions of Higher Learning, and was also named Diversity Educator of the Year. In 2017, the American Medical Association presented Smith with its Medal of Valor Award for his civil rights work. In the same year, the Mississippi State Senate honored Smith for his community health work. Smith was a charter diplomat of the American Board of Family Physicians and a charter fellow of the American Academy of Family Physicians. He was an active staff member of Mississippi Baptist Health Systems, St. Dominic-Jackson Memorial Hospital, and Central Mississippi Medical Center.

Dr. Robert L. Smith was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on December 13, 2017 and April 23, 2019.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Dr. Robert L. Smith was conducted by Larry Crowe and Randall Pinkston on April 23, 2019 and December 13, 2017, in Jackson, Mississippi, and was recorded on 8 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Professor and physician Dr. Robert L. Smith (1936 -) was the president of Central Mississippi Health Services, Inc. and the first Southern Medical Field Director for the Medical Committee for Human Rights.

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, Robert L., 1936-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Pinkston, Randall (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Smith, Robert L., 1936- --Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Occupations:

Professor

Physician

HistoryMakers® Category:

MedicalMakers

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 Dr. Robert L. Smith, April 23, 2019 and December 13, 2017. 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 Dr. Robert L. Smith, Section A2017_222_001_001, TRT: 1:29:00 ?

Dr. Robert L. Smith was born on December 20, 1936 in Terry, Mississippi to Wilma Porter Smith and Joe Smith. His paternal grandfather, John Smith, was born on a plantation in Charleston, Mississippi. Smith's grandfather fled from the plantation after the owner attempted to shoot him. He hopped a freight train that was travelling south, and settled in Terry, Mississippi, where he worked odd jobs until he was able to purchase a farm. There, he built a house that was an exact replica of the plantation owner's home in Charleston. He hired black farmers to work the land, and helped them save enough money to travel north or build their own home in Terry. Smith's maternal grandparents, Lilly Bingham Porter and George Porter, Sr., also owned a farm in Terry. Smith grew up in Terry with his parents, and often visited his older sisters in Jackson. He frequented the theaters in the Farish Street District, which was the commercial center of Jackson's black community.

Video Oral History Interview with Dr. Robert L. Smith, Section A2017_222_001_002, TRT: 2:29:42 ?

Dr. Robert L. Smith began his education at the Terry Grove School in Terry, Mississippi. The school was funded by the Rosenwald Foundation, which provided education to African American children in the rural South. During this time, black teachers were paid less than whites, so Smith's maternal grandfather, George Porter, Sr., provided transportation and housing for the faculty. The principal was William Henry Garrett, who trained under Booker T. Washington at the Tuskegee Institute in Tuskegee, Alabama. Smith also took piano lessons, and helped his father, Joe Smith, appraise livestock. After reading about the life of Charles R. Drew, Smith was inspired to study medicine, and sought mentorship from a doctor who hunted on his father's land. He graduated two years early from the Utica Institute-Hinds County Agricultural High School, Colored. Smith then enrolled at Tougaloo College in Tougaloo, Mississippi, where he studied chemistry under St. Elmo Brady.

Video Oral History Interview with Dr. Robert L. Smith, Section A2017_222_001_003, TRT: 3:30:03 ?

Dr. Robert L. Smith graduated from Tougaloo College in 1957. There were no medical schools for African Americans in Mississippi, so he received a small state scholarship to study at the Howard University College of Medicine. Smith specialized in obstetrics and gynecology, and began his residency at Cook County Hospital in Chicago, Illinois. In 1961, Smith received a draft notice from the U.S. military, and returned to his hometown of Terry, Mississippi. Unable to complete his residency, he volunteered as a physician for students at Tougaloo College, and worked at the segregated Mississippi State Hospital in Whitfield, Mississippi. Because of his association with Tougaloo College, Smith was surveilled by a local segregationist organization called the Mississippi State Sovereignty Commission. They found Smith was attending NAACP meetings, and tried to force the state hospital to fire him. After being briefly arrested, Smith was inspired to become a leader in the Civil Rights Movement.

Video Oral History Interview with Dr. Robert L. Smith, Section A2017_222_001_004, TRT: 4:30:10 ?

Dr. Robert L. Smith met Medgar Evers while volunteering at Tougaloo College in Tougaloo, Mississippi. During the early 1960s, the State of Mississippi attempted to revoke the school's charter, and alumni donors who taught in public schools were reported to their superintendents by the local White

Citizens' Council. Due to continued harassment from segregationists, Smith left his position at the Mississippi State Hospital and opened a private practice. He voted in elections, and was subjected to literacy tests at the polls. Smith also became a close friend of Medgar Evers. They had dinner together on the night before Evers' assassination in 1963, and Smith marched with the mourners at his funeral. With the National Medical Association, Smith picketed the American Medical Association, and petitioned to end the unequal treatment of black patients and health professionals. In 1964, he cofounded the Medical Committee for Civil Rights, which was the forerunner of the Medical Committee for Human Rights.

Video Oral History Interview with Dr. Robert L. Smith, Section A2017_222_002_005, TRT: 5:28:44 ?

Video Oral History Interview with Dr. Robert L. Smith, Section A2017_222_002_006, TRT: 6:29:00 ?

Video Oral History Interview with Dr. Robert L. Smith, Section A2017_222_002_007, TRT: 7:33:48 ?

Video Oral History Interview with Dr. Robert L. Smith, Section A2017_222_002_008, TRT: 8:17:45 ?