

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Alvin Spearman

---

## 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>	Spearman, Alvin, 1926-2016
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Alvin Spearman,
<b>Dates:</b>	January 16, 2003
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2003
<b>Physical Description:</b>	7 Betacame SP videocassettes (3:08:19).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Baseball player Alvin Spearman (1926 - 2016 ) was a pitcher for the Negro Leagues and has played for international teams as well. Spearman was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on January 16, 2003, in Chicago, Illinois. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2003_008
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

---

## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Al Spearman was born on August 26, 1926 in Chicago, Illinois. Spearman was a member of an amateur baseball team when some friends asked him to join Chicago's Negro League team, the Chicago American Giants. He was a pitcher for the American Giants from 1949-51 in addition to serving as an outfielder in a few games for the Kansas City Monarchs. After leaving the Negro Leagues, Spearman played baseball in Mexico, Canada, and Japan- where he was one of four Americans in the Pacific League. Spearman retired from baseball in 1959 to become a salesperson for the 7-Up Bottling Company. Spearman lived in Chicago. Spearman passed away on January 14, 2016.

---

## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Alvin Spearman was conducted by Larry Crowe on January 16, 2003, in Chicago, Illinois, and was recorded on 7 Betacame SP videocassettes. Baseball player Alvin Spearman (1926 - 2016 ) was a pitcher for the Negro Leagues and has played for international teams as well.

---

## 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:

Spearman, Alvin, 1926-2016

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

### Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Spearman, Alvin, 1926-2016--Interviews

---

## Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

---

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

---

Negro American League

---

## Occupations:

Baseball Player

---

## HistoryMakers® Category:

SportsMakers

---

## 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 Alvin Spearman, January 16, 2003. 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 Alvin Spearman, Section A2003\_008\_001\_001, TRT: 0:30:26 ?

Alvin Spearman was born on August 26, 1926 in Chicago, Illinois to Connie Summage and Benjamin Franklin Spearman. His mother was an independent woman who was born in Kiblah, Arkansas on February 8, 1906. Spearman's parents married in Kiblah and then settled in Chicago, Illinois. Spearman has no memories of his father who died when he was very young. After his death, Spearman's mother remarried. Spearman has limited knowledge of his family history because negative aspects of his ancestors' pasts were withheld from him. However, he believes his ancestors worked on a plantation in Kiblah, Arkansas. Spearman met his maternal grandfather, Cornelius Smith, at the age of twenty-three on his way to Baltimore, Maryland to play outfield for the Kansas City Monarchs against the Baltimore Elite Giants. He remembers being impressed by his grandfather's agility which belied his age. Spearman also talks about opportunities afforded by education.

Video Oral History Interview with Alvin Spearman, Section A2003\_008\_001\_002, TRT: 0:30:01 ?

Alvin Spearman was born and raised in the Bronzeville neighborhood of Chicago, Illinois. He has memories of playing sports and exercising in Washington Park. Other memories from his childhood include sleeping outside on the grass to escape the summer heat and going to Riverview Park. Spearman attended Willard Elementary School where his favorite subject was math. He described himself as an introverted and insecure young boy. Spearman's childhood heroes included the Harlem Globetrotters, Jessie Owens, and Joe Louis. Spearman learned to box around the age of thirteen and earned money

fighting in Golden Gloves tournaments. He was an active student at DuSable High School where he played baseball, basketball, football, and ran track in addition to boxing. Spearman also worked at the local post office and in the stockyards. Other high schools in the city at the time included Wendell Phillips High School, the only other black high school. Although he became a professional baseball player, Spearman confesses that he only played sports to earn money.

Video Oral History Interview with Alvin Spearman, Section A2003\_008\_001\_003, TRT: 0:29:25 ?

Alvin Spearman participated in the Negro history program at DuSable High School before HistoryMaker Margaret Burroughs was a teacher at DuSable. He has little memory of the program. Spearman does have vivid memories of Pearl Harbor and the ensuing economic boom after the United States entered War World II. Spearman learned to run and box as a youth to defend himself from bullies in his neighborhood and at school. This paid dividends when Spearman played football for three seasons at DuSable High School, distinguishing himself by his speed. As a multi-sport athlete in high school, Spearman had the opportunity to play with many outstanding athletes from area high schools in Chicago including Nathaniel “Sweetwater” Clifton, who went on to play for the Harlem Globetrotters and Buddy Young, who played in the NFL. Boxers Freddie Dawson and Joe Louis along with basketball player Ted Strong were also distinguished athletes in Chicago at the time. Spearman describes the development of sports safety equipment and the importance of an active lifestyle.

Video Oral History Interview with Alvin Spearman, Section A2003\_008\_001\_004, TRT: 0:31:02 ?

Alvin Spearman played baseball in a Sunday school league and in Chicago’s industrial baseball league against athletes like Buddy Young, Freddie Dawson, Bob Satterfield, and Willie Mays. Many players in the Negro leagues never had the opportunity to play in the Major Leagues including Smokey Joe Williams, Buck Leonard, Hilton Smith, and HistoryMaker Ted “Double Duty” Radcliffe. In 1948, Spearman’s performance in Chicago’s industrial league earned him a tryout for the minor league system with the Chicago Cubs. However, Spearman did not believe the Cubs were serious about hiring black players; the Cubs did not sign a black player until 1953 when they hired HistoryMaker Ernie Banks. Spearman describes his transition to the Negro leagues where he played for the American Giants, the Kansas City Monarchs, and the Houston Buffaloes where he experienced racial discrimination. He also played with the Janesville Cubs as the team’s only black player. In 1953, Spearman played with Satchel Paige on the Harlem Globetrotters baseball team.

Video Oral History Interview with Alvin Spearman, Section A2003\_008\_001\_005, TRT: 0:30:31 ?

Alvin Spearman describes his professional baseball career in the Negro league. Players in the Negro league were not bound by contracts; teams with the most money attracted the best players. Spearman talks about the Major League’s exclusion of black players and how the strength of baseball contracts increased over time. During his career, Spearman also played in Mexico, Canada, and Japan. In 1955, after spending a season with Satchel Paige on the Harlem Globetrotters baseball team, Spearman became one of two imported players on the Hankyu Braves in Japan’s Pacific League. He contrasts his reception abroad to the stigma he faced as a black baseball player in the United States. After returning to the states, Spearman pitched for the Stockton Ports in 1956, 1957, and 1958 before ending his career with the Houston Buffs in 1959. He reflects upon his career and his last game. Multiple factors including Spearman’s experience of racial discrimination and the Houston Buffs’ team manager led

him to quit baseball.

Video Oral History Interview with Alvin Spearman, Section A2003\_008\_001\_006, TRT: 0:27:04 ?

Alvin Spearman talks about life after his professional baseball career. He worked as a driver salesman for 7UP, as a truck driver, and as a courier for IDEXX. Spearman describes different approaches to pitching and details his own pitching strategy. As a pitcher, he identified his opponents' weaknesses to keep them off balance. Although Red Ruffing of the Cleveland Indians was a Hall of Fame pitcher, Spearman disagreed with Ruffing's approach to pitching. He talks about the function of sports as public entertainment and emphasizes the importance of earning a living wage. Spearman reflects upon his hopes and concerns for the African American community, his legacy, and how he would like to be remembered. He also narrates his photographs.

Video Oral History Interview with Alvin Spearman, Section A2003\_008\_001\_007, TRT: 0:09:50 ?

Alvin Spearman narrates his photographs.