

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Reverend Dr. J. Alfred Smith, Sr.

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Smith, J. Alfred (James Alfred)
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Reverend Dr. J. Alfred Smith, Sr.,
Dates:	April 6, 2006 and December 14, 2015
Bulk Dates:	2006 and 2015
Physical Description:	6 Betacame SP videocassettes uncompressed MOV digital video files (2:32:30).
Abstract:	Pastor Reverend Dr. J. Alfred Smith, Sr. (1931 -) was the pastor of Allen Temple Baptist Church in Oakland, California. Smith was the author of <i>On The Jericho Road</i> and <i>Speak Until Justice Wakes: Prophetic Reflections</i> . Smith was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on April 6, 2006 and December 14, 2015, in Oakland, California. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2006_066
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Reverend Dr. James Alfred Smith, Sr. was born on May 19, 1931 in Kansas City, Missouri. His mother, Amy Gates Smith, was born outside of Clarksdale, Mississippi and migrated north to Kansas City, Missouri. Smith's father, Clyde Anderson, was born in Shreveport, Louisiana, and worked in the Pullman sleeping car industry. Smith graduated from R.T. Coles High School in Kansas City in 1948 and obtained his license to preach in the same year.

Reverend Smith was called to the ministry in 1951. In 1952, he received his B.S. degree in elementary education from Western Baptist College. Reverend Smith also received his bachelor's degree in divinity in 1959 from the Missouri School of Religion and his master's degree in theology, church, and community in 1966. He also earned his master's degree in American Church History from the American Baptist Seminary of the West in Berkeley, California in 1972. Reverend Smith earned his doctor of ministry degree from the Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary Simi Valley, California in 1975.

Reverend Smith was named senior pastor of Oakland, California's Allen Temple Baptist Church in 1971. He was elected president of the Progressive Baptist State Convention of California in 1979, and president of the Progressive National Baptist Convention in 1986. Smith joined the teaching faculty at the American Baptist Seminary of the West as professor of Christian Ministries in 1992. He is the author of several books including *On The Jericho Road: A Memoir of Racial Justice, Social Action, and Prophetic Ministry*, *Speak Until Justice Wakes: Prophetic Reflections*, and most recently *Sounding The Trumpet: How Churches Can Answer God's Call to Justice*. He retired from the Allen Temple Baptist Church in 2009 and is succeeded by his son, Rev. James Alfred Smith, Jr.

Reverend Smith has received several awards and honors for his work. The Oakland Tribune named Smith the

Outstanding Citizen of the Year in 1990. In 2001, he was awarded the Lifetime Achievement Award by the Greenling Institute, a public policy organization in Berkeley, California. The East Bay Agency for Children awarded Smith the Humanitarian of the Year Award also in 2001. Smith presented the Rev. Dr. J. Alfred Smith Conference on Church and Social Action most recently in 2015 in Columbia, Missouri

Joanna Goodwin Smith, Reverend Smith's first wife, passed away in 2007. He remarried the Reverend Bernestine Smith, Pastor of Allen Temple Arms I and II.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Reverend Dr. J. Alfred Smith, Sr. was conducted by Larry Crowe and Loretta Henry on April 6, 2006 and December 14, 2015, in Oakland, California, and was recorded on 6 Betacame SP videocassettes uncompressed MOV digital video files. Pastor Reverend Dr. J. Alfred Smith, Sr. (1931 -) was the pastor of Allen Temple Baptist Church in Oakland, California. Smith was the author of *On The Jericho Road* and *Speak Until Justice Wakes: Prophetic Reflections*.

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, J. Alfred (James Alfred)

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Henry, Loretta (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews
Smith, J. Alfred (James Alfred)--Interviews

African American clergy--California--Oakland--Interviews

African American clergy--Interviews

Theological seminaries--Employees--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Allen Temple Baptist Church (Oakland, Calif.)

Occupations:

Pastor

HistoryMakers® Category:

ReligionMakers

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 Reverend Dr. J. Alfred Smith, Sr., April 6, 2006 and December 14, 2015. 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 Reverend Dr. J. Alfred Smith, Sr., Section
A2006_066_001_001, TRT: 0:28:20 ?

Reverend Dr. J. Alfred Smith, Sr. was born on May 19, 1931 in Kansas City, Missouri to Amy Smith and Clyde Anderson. Smith's father was born in Shreveport, Louisiana to a family of Pullman porters. His mother grew up in segregated Mississippi and worked in the fields. She and her family left the South and established themselves in the segregated Leeds Addition neighborhood of Kansas City, Missouri, where his mother worked as a domestic. Smith did not have a relationship with his father until adulthood, as he was born out of wedlock. He remembers being read bible stories, riding the Missouri Pacific Railroad and being fascinated with nature. During their childhood, he and his brother attended church every Sunday, watching Kansas City Monarchs games, got into fights and playing music in the Colored Musicians' Local 627 union. He met his first wife, JoAnna Goodwin Smith, after seeing her picture in The Call newspaper. Smith remembers eulogizing his father at his funeral in the 1970s.

African American clergy--California--Oakland--Interviews.

African American clergy--Interviews.

Theological seminaries--Employees--Interviews.

Video Oral History Interview with Reverend Dr. J. Alfred Smith, Sr., Section
A2006_066_001_002, TRT: 0:15:50 ?

Reverend Dr. J. Alfred Smith, Sr. grew up during the Great Depression in the close-knit neighborhood of Leeds Addition in Kansas City, Missouri. He attended Paul Laurence Dunbar Elementary School in Kansas City, where there were close relationships between the teachers, parents and students. Smith strived to please his mentors and family through his schoolwork, aspiring to be as much of an achiever as Odell Sylvester who became the first African American chief of police in Berkeley, California. In school, Smith wanted to become a musician. He was inspired by the music of Miles Davis, John Coltrane and Josephine Baker. Church played an important role in Smith's childhood and community as a place of encouragement, education and as a center of civil rights activities. Smith was class president and student body president at Kansas City's R.T. Coles Vocational and Junior High School. He remembers the teachers and community leaders who influenced him such as Isaiah Banks and his history teacher, Gertrude Bardwell.

Video Oral History Interview with Reverend Dr. J. Alfred Smith, Sr., Section
A2006_066_002_003, TRT: 3:28:58 ?

Reverend Dr. J. Alfred Smith, Sr. played in the Colored Musicians' Local 627 and the K.C. Municipal Band in Kansas City, Missouri, a hub of jazz music frequented by Charlie Parker, Count Basie and other notables. Kansas City was also home to the Kansas City Monarchs baseball team. Smith saw Satchel Paige, Josh Gibson and Jackie Robinson play in the Blues Stadium. In 1948, Smith was called to ministry and gave up playing music. With the help of his church, Pilgrim's Rest Missionary Baptist Church, and pastor Frederick Robinson, Smith attended Western Baptist Bible College in Kansas City. There, he met his first wife, JoAnna Goodwin Smith. He was ordained in 1951, and pastored Mount Washington Baptist Church in nearby Parkville, Missouri. He continued his studies at the Missouri School of Religion and the University of Missouri in Columbia, where he experienced racial discrimination. He describes influential religious leaders like Daniel Arthur Holmes, Emerson Chappelle, Mordecai Johnson and Joseph H. Jackson.

Video Oral History Interview with Reverend Dr. J. Alfred Smith, Sr., Section A2006_066_002_004, TRT: 4:29:29 ?

Reverend Dr. J. Alfred Smith, Sr. describes the conflict between Joseph H. Jackson and Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. at the 1961 National Baptist Convention in Kansas City, Missouri. He studied the theology of Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. and other notable religious leaders such as Samuel DeWitt Proctor and Vernon Johns. In 1961, Smith was invited by the American Baptist Churches USA to work with Cesar Chavez and the United Farm Workers of America in Oakland, California. He attended Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, California, where he studied under Howard Thurman, and obtained a master's degree at American Baptist Seminary of the West. He then became the pastor of Oakland's Allen Temple Baptist Church, which was established by the American Baptist Home Mission Societies and had a longstanding connection to the American Baptist Churches USA. Through his work, Smith had a close relationship with the Black Panther Party and the family of Huey P. Newton.

Video Oral History Interview with Reverend Dr. J. Alfred Smith, Sr., Section A2006_066_002_005, TRT: 5:29:33 ?

Reverend Dr. J. Alfred Smith, Sr. reflects upon the separation of politics and religion. He taught at the American Baptist Seminary of the West from 1976, and served as its interim dean. He was recruited in 1976 by Thomas Kilgore to join the Progressive National Baptist Convention. With the influence of Reverend Wyatt Tee Walker and Charles Adams, he ascended the leadership of the organization from second vice president to become national president in 1988. In this role, Smith raised funds for historically black colleges, established a mission in Sierra Leone, improved relationships with the Korean community, and published several books, including 'For the Facing of This Hour' and 'On the Jericho Road.' Smith was involved in the Free South Africa Movement and spoke to the United Nations along with Reverend Walker and Reverend Dr. Calvin O. Butts. Smith also established the Leadership Institute of Allen Temple and the Allen Temple Housing and Economic Development Corporation.

Video Oral History Interview with Reverend Dr. J. Alfred Smith, Sr., Section A2006_066_002_006, TRT: 6:20:20 ?

Reverend Dr. J. Alfred Smith, Sr. and his first wife, JoAnna Goodwin Smith, had five children together. Goodwin Smith passed away in 2006 from Alzheimer's disease. Smith later married Bernestine Smith who was also a pastor at Allen Temple Baptist Church in Oakland, California. Smith retired as pastor in 2009, and was succeeded by his son, James Alfred Smith, Jr. At the

time of the interview, Smith had recently suffered a stroke that temporarily paralyzed the left side of his body. He describes his hope that the African American community will remain cohesive and mutually supportive. Smith reflects upon his life, religious ethics, being an effective pastor and the rise of mega churches. He concludes his interview by describing how he would like to be remembered.