

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with David A. 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, David A., 1915-2010
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with David A. Smith,
<b>Dates:</b>	April 19, 2006
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2006
<b>Physical Description:</b>	5 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:12:24).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Real estate entrepreneur David A. Smith (1915 - 2010 ) was one of the first successful African American real estate brokers in Denver, Colorado. Smith was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on April 19, 2006, in Denver, Colorado. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2006_079
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Real estate entrepreneur David A. Smith was born on August 29, 1915 in Clinton, Louisiana. Smith has the distinction of being one of the first African American real estate brokers in Denver, Colorado. His paternal grandfather, Walter Smith, was a contractor and built most of the homes, churches and schools in Clinton, Louisiana. As a child, Smith moved with his mother to New Orleans, Louisiana where he attended a private school, Gilbert Academy, before moving to Denver, Colorado and graduating in 1933 from Manual High School. Continuing his education, Smith attended Arkansas Agricultural, Mechanical and Normal College in Pine Bluff, Arkansas until 1935 before receiving his B.A. degree in economics from West Virginia State College in 1938. Completing his studies at the University of Denver in 1940, Smith received his M.A. degree in economics.

Smith began his professional career as an office assistant to Governor Neely of West Virginia. In the 1940s, he enlisted into the segregated United States Army. Here, he served as an officer in the 477th Bomber Group in Tuskegee, Alabama. He was one of the officers who fought against the discrimination that existed at Freeman Field and was arrested. After an honorable discharge, Smith returned to Denver and started several small entrepreneurial businesses including a liquor store and a real estate agency. He became one of the first African American real estate appraisers and brokers for the city of Denver. During his time, he became one of the most successful African American real estate brokers in Denver.

Smith retired in the late 1990s, and his daughter has continued to maintain his real estate practice. Smith has received several awards for being an outstanding businessman and is a member of several organizations including the Urban League and the NAACP. Smith passed away on January 24, 2010.

Smith was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on April 19, 2006.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with David A. Smith was conducted by Shawn Wilson on April 19, 2006, in Denver, Colorado, and was recorded on 5 Betacame SP videocassettes. Real estate entrepreneur David A. Smith (1915 - 2010 ) was one of the first successful African American real estate brokers in Denver, Colorado.

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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, David A., 1915-2010

Wilson, Shawn (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

## Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Smith, David A., 1915-2010 --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:

Real Estate Entrepreneur

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## HistoryMakers® Category:

BusinessMakers

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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 David A. Smith, April 19, 2006. 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 David A. Smith, Section A2006\_079\_001\_001, TRT: 0:28:57 ?

David A. Smith was born on August 29, 1915 in Clinton, Louisiana to Lucille Silliman Ashford and Henry Smith. His maternal grandparents were sharecroppers, and one of their sons was killed by a white man for winning a construction contract bid in town. His paternal grandfather was a farmer and contractor, and constructed many of Clinton's buildings. Smith's father worked for the Southern Pacific Railroad, and his mother was a domestic. His parents divorced when Smith was young. His mother remarried, and moved to New Orleans, Louisiana, where she worked for a company that transported money for banks. Smith remembers New Orleans' muddy streets, city parks and strict segregation. He attended Gilbert Academy, where he was mentored by Mr. Jones, and aspired to become a doctor until dissecting a frog. He visited his

maternal grandparents during the summers to fish, worked in the garden and picked cotton. While he was in high school, his mother divorced Smith's stepfather, and brought her son to Denver, Colorado.

Video Oral History Interview with David A. Smith, Section A2006\_079\_001\_002, TRT: 0:29:21 ?

David A. Smith recalls returning to New Orleans, Louisiana after attacking a white boy in Clinton, Louisiana. After his mother's divorce, she and Smith travelled to Colorado, unsure of where they would live. A Pullman porter on the train suggested they rent from his mother, who owned property in Denver. His mother found work as a domestic for the owners of the International Trust Company bank. In spite of lending discrimination, Smith's mother convinced her employers to extend a loan to her, and purchased a home. She went on to buy several more properties. Smith attended Manual High School in Denver, and Arkansas Agricultural, Mechanical and Normal College in Pine Bluff, Arkansas. After two years, he returned to Denver, and worked at the Brown Palace Hotel. He saved enough money to attend West Virginia State College in Institute, West Virginia, where he obtained a bachelor's degree in economics, and the University of Denver, where he completed a master's degree.

Video Oral History Interview with David A. Smith, Section A2006\_079\_001\_003, TRT: 0:29:51 ?

David A. Smith graduated from the University of Denver, and he and his girlfriend, Vivian Robinson Smith, moved to West Virginia in search of work. He worked on Matthew Neely's gubernatorial campaign, and in Neely's office after his election. Smith was initially offered a custodial position, but obtained an office job. He worked in West Virginia for two years, and then married Robinson Smith, and moved to Denver. He taught soldiers at Lowry Field in Colorado, and enlisted in the U.S. Army Air Force. After his basic training at Jefferson Barracks Military Post in Lemay, Missouri, he completed Officer Candidate School at Miami Beach Training Center in Miami Beach, Florida. From there, Smith and his segregated unit moved to numerous bases, including Tuskegee Institute and Godman Army Airfield. At Freeman Army Airfield in Jackson County, Indiana, Smith and his fellow Tuskegee Airmen were involved in the Freeman Field Mutiny, a resistance demonstration that led to the temporary arrest of 101 men, including Smith.

Video Oral History Interview with David A. Smith, Section A2006\_079\_001\_004, TRT: 0:29:29 ?

David A. Smith finished his term in the U.S. Army Air Force, and returned to his teaching position at Lowry Field air force base. He worked on the mayoral campaign of J. Quigg Newton, through whom Smith obtained a liquor license. He opened a store; but, after suffering a heart attack in the late 1940s, decided to sell the business to work for his mother, who owned several rental properties. Upon passing an examination, he was hired as a real estate appraiser for the City of Denver. When restrictive covenants on property ownership were overturned by the Shelley v. Kraemer decision in 1948, Smith opened his own real estate business, and became the first African American broker in Denver. Smith remembers civil rights leaders and the events of the movement, including the murders of Emmett Till and Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. He was active as a member of the NAACP and the National Urban League. Smith reflects upon his life; his hopes for the African American community; and how he would like to be remembered.

Video Oral History Interview with David A. Smith, Section A2006\_079\_001\_005, TRT: 0:14:46 ?

David A. Smith narrates his photographs.