

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Ken Smikle

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Smikle, Ken, 1952-2018
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Ken Smikle,
Dates:	December 15, 2006
Bulk Dates:	2006
Physical Description:	9 Betacame SP videocassettes (4:09:05).
Abstract:	Marketing chief executive Ken Smikle (1952 - 2018) founded Target Market News and co-founded the African American Marketing and Media Association. Smikle was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on December 15, 2006, in Chicago, Illinois. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2006_174
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Publisher and entrepreneur Kenneth Albert Smikle was born on January 3, 1952, in Harlem, New York, to Mary Alice Dobbins Smikle and Dr. Kenneth Raymond Smikle, a college dean. Smikle attended Harlem's P.S. 123 (Mahalia Jackson School), R.A. Vanwyck Junior High School, and graduated from Benjamin Cardozo High School in Bay Side, Queens, in 1970. Smikle, who played jazz trombone and wanted to arrange music, attended Queensborough Community College, CUNY's York College, and Queens College where he took radio and television classes and edited the *Black Eyed Journal*.

In 1974, Smikle, his brother, Dawoud Bey, and Gerald Gladney started *Spirit* magazine, and in 1975, they started an arts publication called *Easy*, which ran until 1978. Smikle joined Harlem's *Amsterdam News* as arts editor from 1978 to 1980. In 1983, Smikle wrote for *Essence* magazine and *The National Leader*, and in 1984, he joined *Black Enterprise* serving as senior editor. Moving to Chicago, Smikle founded *Target Market News* in 1988 where he was editor and publisher. *Target Market News* is considered one of the leading authorities on marketing, advertising and media directed to the African American market. Smikle appeared on CNN, CNBC, CBS News, NBC's *Today Show*, ABC's *World News Tonight*, *The NewsHour with Jim Lehrer*, National Public Radio's *All Things Considered*, *Marketplace* and numerous other television and radio programs. Smikle was frequently quoted in *Newsweek*, *Time*, *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *USA Today*, *The Washington Post*, *The Los Angeles Times*, *Advertising Age*, *Publishers Weekly* and other leading periodicals. In 1991, Smikle co-founded the African American Marketing and Media Association. Smikle was also a member of the National Association of Black Journalists (NABJ).

As a speaker, Smikle addressed the Democratic Caucus Conference of the U.S. House of Representatives; employees of Nike, Pepsi-Cola, Quaker Oats; and organizations like the National Newspaper Publishers Association, the Greater Miami Advertising Federation, the Food Marketing Institute, the National Association of Broadcasters, the National Association of Black Owned Broadcasters, the National Alliance of Market Developers, the United Way and the American Booksellers Association.

At the time of his HistoryMakers interview, Smikle lived in Chicago with his wife, Renee Ferguson, an investigative reporter at WMAQ-TV, and son, Jason.

Ken Smikle passed away on September 12, 2018.

Smikle was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on December 15, 2006.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Ken Smikle was conducted by Larry Crowe on December 15, 2006, in Chicago, Illinois, and was recorded on 9 Betacame SP videocassettes. Marketing chief executive Ken Smikle (1952 - 2018) founded Target Market News and co-founded the African American Marketing and Media Association.

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:

Smikle, Ken, 1952-2018

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Smikle, Ken, 1952-2018 --Interviews

African American businesspeople--Interviews

African American executives--Interviews

Publishers and publishing--Interviews

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

Target Market News Group

Occupations:

Marketing Chief Executive

HistoryMakers® Category:

MediaMakers

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 Ken Smikle, December 15, 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).

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 Ken Smikle, Section A2006_174_001_001, TRT: 0:29:48 ?

Ken Smikle was born on January 3, 1952 in New York City to Mary Dobbins Smikle and Kenneth Smikle. Smile's maternal grandfather, Henry Boatman, was a deacon and general storeowner in West Point, Mississippi; and his maternal grandmother, Mamie Boatman, was a homemaker who died when his mother was seven years old. Together, they had nine children, one of whom died in infancy. Smikle's mother was the youngest of her siblings, and was born in West Point around the early 1920s. As a teenager, she followed her older brothers and sisters to New York City, where she worked as a seamstress; and met Smikle's father, who had also lost a parent at a young age. Smikle's mother eventually moved the family to Queens, New York, as she wanted to raise her children in a suburban area. She was actively involved in the lives of Smikle and his brother, Dawoud Bey, who went on to become a noted photographer.

African American businesspeople--Interviews.

African American executives--Interviews.

Publishers and publishing--Interviews.

Video Oral History Interview with Ken Smikle, Section A2006_174_001_002, TRT: 0:29:34 ?

Ken Smikle's paternal family originated in Jamaica, and had West African ancestry. His paternal grandmother, Pearl Smikle Simington, immigrated to New York City through Canada in the early 1900s. She briefly lived in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, where Smikle's father, Kenneth Smikle, was born in 1921; and later returned to New York City. Smikle's father was an autodidact, and enjoyed mechanical repair work. He served in the U.S. military during World War II, and went on to become an engineer. Smikle's parents met in New York City, after his paternal grandmother saw his mother, Mary Dobbins Smikle, sing in the choir of the St. John's Baptist Church. During their courtship, Smikle's parents took long walks between Harlem and Lower Manhattan. After marrying, they had two sons, Smikle and Dawoud Bey; and fostered three daughters. Smikle also shares his recollections of leaving the hospital after his birth, and of the bakery near his home in Queens, New York.

Video Oral History Interview with Ken Smikle, Section A2006_174_001_003, TRT: 0:30:37 ?

Ken Smikle grew up in an integrated neighborhood in Queens, New York, where his family was one of the few African American households to own a car. Smikle and his family attended Queen's Calvary Baptist Church, which was pastored by Reverend Walter S. Penn, a prominent civil rights activist. Smikle's father, Kenneth Smikle, worked as a television and radio repairman, and refurbished a television for Smikle and his brother, Dawoud Bey. Together, they enjoyed watching television shows like 'The Lone Ranger' and 'The Gillette Cavalcade of Sports.' With the assistance of teacher Hortense Jones, Smikle was permitted to enroll at P.S. 123, which was located outside his district in the Jamaica neighborhood of Queens. At the start of school integration in New York City, Smikle was sent to Queens' J.H.S. 217, where he played trombone in the band. After graduating to Benjamin N. Cardozo High School, Smikle excelled in his art and social studies classes, and was influenced by history teacher Jerry

Olcheck.

Video Oral History Interview with Ken Smikle, Section A2006_174_001_004, TRT: 0:29:18 ?

Ken Smikle developed an interest in magazine publishing at an early age. At home, he listened to the music of Nancy Wilson, Arthur Prysock, Sarah Vaughan and Ray Charles; and read newspapers like Downbeat, The New York Times and New York Journal-American. He also played in a jazz band with bassist George Murray, who later performed with David Bowie. Smikle interviewed musicians for The Verdict student newspaper at Benjamin N. Cardozo High School in Queens, New York, in addition to working after school in the records section of the Mays department store. Upon graduating in 1970, he matriculated at Queens' York College. Smikle talks about the comedic writing styles of Bill Cosby and Redd Foxx; as well as the famous residents of Queens, including Def Jam Recordings founder Russell Simmons, actor Reginald VelJohnson and composer Budd Ellison. He also remembers the March on Washington, and the assassinations of President John Fitzgerald Kennedy and Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Video Oral History Interview with Ken Smikle, Section A2006_174_001_005, TRT: 0:29:24 ?

Ken Smikle attended Benjamin N. Cardozo High School in Queens, New York. Smikle and his peers were politically active; and one group of students, including Smikle's brother, Dawoud Bey, occupied the office of Principal Ben Michelson to demand more African American faculty and a black history curriculum. At Smikle's graduation ceremony in 1970, he wore a raised fist on the back of his gown as a symbol of black power, and the valedictorian gave an unapproved speech about social change. Smikle matriculated at York College in Jamaica, New York, and then transferred to Queens College in Queens, New York, where he studied journalism. He helped start a black student publication called the Black Eyed Journal, and wanted to create a black arts magazine as well. With his brother and a friend, Gerald Gladney, Smikle founded Spirit magazine, which was later renamed Easy. During his sophomore year, Smikle left school to accept a position as the arts editor of the Amsterdam News under executive editor Bryant Rollins.

Video Oral History Interview with Ken Smikle, Section A2006_174_001_006, TRT: 0:28:57 ?

Ken Smikle joined the staff of the Amsterdam News around 1978; and, shortly after being hired as an arts editor, extensively redesigned the arts section. He also helped update the newspaper's internal operations, including the introduction of Compugraphic typesetting technology. After one year, Smikle left to become the black music editor of Record World magazine. He also worked for Reverend Sun Myung Moon, who published a newspaper in New York City's Harlem neighborhood; and with motivational speaker Terrie Williams at the Black Owned Communications Alliance. He followed Williams when she moved to the Communications Excellence to Black Audiences (CEBA) awards organization, and then to the staff of Essence magazine. Smikle later worked at the National Leader, a weekly black publication; before leaving in 1984 to become the senior editor of Black Enterprise magazine. Smikle also reflects upon the legacy of Easy, the black arts journal he created with his brother, Dawoud Bey, and friend, Gerald Gladney.

Video Oral History Interview with Ken Smikle, Section A2006_174_001_007, TRT: 0:28:13 ?

Ken Smikle joined the staff of Black Enterprise magazine in 1984. As the manager of several departments, he implemented new editorial systems to improve efficiency, and worked directly with the publication's founder, Earl G. Graves, Sr. Smikle also wrote stories for the magazine, including one on Oprah Winfrey, who was the host of 'A.M. Chicago' at the time. While working on

Black Enterprise's advertising sales, Smikle noticed the absence of market research on African American consumers, and had the initial idea for a trade publication on the black media industry. Around this time, he met his wife, Renee Ferguson, while deejaying at a media party in New York City in 1985. They initially scheduled a business dinner to talk about Smikle's campaign for the presidency of the National Association of Black Journalists. Soon after, Ferguson accepted a job in Chicago, Illinois, and Smikle followed her there. In Chicago, he founded Target Market News, a black media trade publication that was later distributed online.

Video Oral History Interview with Ken Smikle, Section A2006_174_001_008, TRT: 0:29:08 ?

Ken Smikle founded Target Market News, a trade publication about the black media industry, while living in Chicago, Illinois. He was also instrumental in the creation of the African American Marketing and Media Association, which brought together black professionals from the radio, television, advertising, public relations, newspaper and magazine industries under a single trade association from 1990. In addition, Smikle developed a number of black consumer research publications, including The Buying Power of Black America and the Black Issues Book Review. He talks about the journals' contributors, the African American book market and the importance of consumer responsibility. Smikle also describes his plans for the future, and his hopes for the African American community.

Video Oral History Interview with Ken Smikle, Section A2006_174_001_009, TRT: 0:14:06 ?

Ken Smikle reflects upon his life, including the heart attack he suffered in 2004. He also talks about his legacy and family, including his wife, Renee Ferguson; and son, Jason Smikle. Smikle concludes the interview by narrating his photographs.