

# Biographical Description for The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Jessie Carney Smith

PERSON

Smith, Jessie Carney, 1930-

**Alternative Names:** Jessie Carney Smith;

**Life Dates:** September 24, 1930-

**Place of Birth:** Greensboro, North Carolina, USA

**Residence:** Nashville, Tennessee

**Work:** Nashville, Tennessee

**Occupations:** Librarian; Author; Educator

## Biographical Note

Librarian, author and educator Jessie Carney Smith was born on September 24, 1930 in Greensboro, North Carolina to James Ampler and Vesona Bigelow Carney. Smith attended Mount Zion Elementary School and James B. Dudley High School in Greensboro. She graduated from North Carolina A&T State University with her B.S. degree in home economics in 1950. Smith pursued graduate studies at Cornell University and then received her M.A. degree in child development from Michigan State University in 1956, and her M.A.L.S. degree from the George Peabody College of Vanderbilt University in 1957.

In 1957, Smith was hired as an instructor and head library cataloger at Tennessee State University. In 1960, she enrolled in a Ph.D. program at the University of Illinois, and worked as a teaching assistant from 1961 to 1963. Smith then returned to Tennessee State University, where she was hired as an assistant professor and coordinator of library services. In 1964, she became the first African American to earn a Ph.D. degree in library science from the University of Illinois; and, in 1965, she was hired as a professor of library science and the university librarian of Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee. She was named the William and Camille Cosby Professor in the Humanities at Fisk University in 1992, and appointed dean of the library in 2010. Smith has also lectured part-time at Alabama A&M University, the University of Tennessee and the George Peabody College of Vanderbilt University.

Smith served as consultant to the U.S. Office for Civil Rights, the U.S. Office of Education, the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS), and the American Library Association.

She directed three institutional self-studies at Fisk University, resulting in the institution's reaffirmation of accreditation by SACS. In addition, Smith has directed multiple projects funded by NEH and the Andrew Mellon Foundation, and served on several Fisk University campus committees.

Smith has published numerous research guides and reference books. In 1991, she released the award winning, *Notable Black American Women*, and went on to publish *Notable African American Men* in 1999. Her other books include *Black Heroes of the Twentieth Century*, *Freedom Facts and Firsts: 400 Years of the African American Civil Rights Experience*, and *Black Firsts: 4000 Groundbreaking and Pioneering Historical Events*, among others.

Smith received the Martin Luther King Black Authors Award in 1982 and the National Women's Book Association Award in 1992. She received the Candace Award for excellence in education, Sage magazine's Ann J. Cooper Award, and distinguished alumni awards from both the Peabody College of Vanderbilt University and the University of Illinois. She was named the Academic/Research Librarian of the Year from the Association of College and Research Libraries in 1985; and, in 1997, received the key to the city of Oak Ridge, Tennessee. In 2011, Smith was awarded the Global Heritage Award from the Global Education Center and the Outstanding Achievement in Higher Education Award from the Greater Nashville Alliance of Black School Educators.

Jessie Carney Smith was interviewed by The HistoryMakers on April 22, 2014.

## Related Entries

**Mt. Zion Elementary** [STUDENTOF]

[from ? to ?]

N/A

**James B. Dudley High School** [STUDENTOF]

[from ? to ?]

Diploma

**North Carolina Agricultural & Technical State University** [STUDENTOF]

[from ? to ?]

B.S.

**Cornell University** [STUDENTOF]

[from ? to ?]

None

**Michigan State University** [STUDENTOF]

[from ? to ?]

M.A.

**University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign** [STUDENTOF]

[from ? to ?]

Ph.D.

**Tennessee State University** [EMPLOYEEOf]  
[from 1957 to 1960]

**Head Cataloger and Instructor**

**University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign** [EMPLOYEEOf]  
[from 1961 to 1963]

**Teaching Assistant**

**Tennessee State University** [EMPLOYEEOf]  
[from 1963 to 1965]

**Coordinator of Library Services and Assistant Professor**

**Fisk University** [EMPLOYEEOf]  
[from 1965 to 1993]

**University Librarian and Professor**

**Peabody College of Vanderbilt University** [EMPLOYEEOf]  
[from 1969 to 1979]

**Lecturer**

**University of Tennessee** [EMPLOYEEOf]  
[from 1973 to 1974]

**Visiting Lecturer**

**Peabody College of Vanderbilt University** [EMPLOYEEOf]  
[from 1980 to 1984]

**Visiting Professor**

**Fisk University** [EMPLOYEEOf]  
[from 1993 to 2010]

**University Librarian and William and Camille Cosby Professor in the Humanities**

**Fisk University** [EMPLOYEEOf]  
[from 2010 to ?]

**Dean of the Library and William and Camille Cosby Professor in the Humanities**

**National Endowment for the Humanities** [MEMBEROf]  
[from ? to ?]

**Consultant**

**U.S. Office of Education** [MEMBEROf]  
[from ? to ?]

**Consultant**

**Office for Civil Rights** [MEMBEROf]  
[from ? to ?]

**Consultant**

**American Library Association** [MEMBEROf]  
[from ? to ?]

**Consultant; Member**

**Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority** [MEMBEROf]  
[from ? to ?]

**Member**

**Beta Phi Mu** [MEMBEROf]  
[from ? to ?]

**President**

**Links, Inc. - Hendersonville Chapter** [MEMBEROf]  
[from ? to ?]

**Member**

**NAACP** [MEMBEROf]  
[from ? to ?]

**Member**

**Pi Gamma Mu** [MEMBEROf]  
[from ? to ?]

**Member**

**Tennessee Library Association** [MEMBEROf]  
[from ? to ?]

**Member**

**Southern Association of Colleges and Schools** [MEMBEROf]  
[from 1968 to ?]

**Consultant**

**Clark Memorial United Methodist Church** [MEMBEROf]  
[from 1970 to ?]

**Offertory Steward**

**Spelman College** [MEMBEROf]  
[from 1980 to ?]

**Consultant, Visiting Committee**

**Tennessee Humanities Council** [MEMBEROf]  
[from 1992 to 1995]

**Authors' Committee, Southern Festival of Books**

**Gammon Theological Seminary** [MEMBEROf]  
[from 1995 to 2006]

**Board of Directors**

**Ladies of the Hermitage** [MEMBEROf]  
[from 1997 to 2000]

## **Board of Directors**

**Clark Memorial United Methodist Church** [MEMBEROF]  
[from 2004 to ?]

**Member, Archives and History Committee**

**Clark Memorial United Methodist Church** [MEMBEROF]  
[from 2005 to ?]

**Chair, New Members/Fellowship Friends Committee**

**Clark Memorial United Methodist Church** [MEMBEROF]  
[from 2009 to ?]

**Chair, Library Committee**