

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with The Honorable Kenneth Smith, Sr.

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## Overview of the Collection

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| <b>Repository:</b>           | The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616<br>info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com  |
| <b>Creator:</b>              | Smith, Kenneth B.  |
| <b>Title:</b>                | The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Kenneth Smith, Sr.,   |
| <b>Dates:</b>                | November 9, 2000   |
| <b>Bulk Dates:</b>           | 2000   |
| <b>Physical Description:</b> | 6 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:40:19).  |
| <b>Abstract:</b>             | University president The Honorable Kenneth Smith, Sr. (1931 - 2008 ) was the first African American to serve as president of the Chicago Theological Seminary. Smith was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on November 9, 2000, in Chicago, Illinois. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview. |
| <b>Identification:</b>       | A2000_036  |
| <b>Language:</b>             | The interview and records are in English.  |

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

The Reverend Dr. Kenneth B. Smith, Sr. was born in Montclair, New Jersey, on February 19, 1931. He was very active in social issues affecting the greater Chicago area.

Smith completed his undergraduate degree at Virginia Union University in 1953. He earned his M.A. degree from Drew University in 1954 and a degree in divinity and ministry from the Bethany Theological Seminary in 1960.

As a minister, Smith guided the congregations at the Congregational Church of Park Manor, Trinity United Church of Christ and the Church of the Good Shepherd. Smith retired as the president of the Chicago Theological Seminary. Over the years, he was involved with the Community Renewal Society.

Active in the community, Smith served as the chairman of the Chicago Community Trust, the president of the Chicago Board of Education, treasurer of the United Way of Chicago and a trustee of DePaul University. Smith also served on the National Trust for Historic Preservation and the National Center for the Humanities.

Smith passed away on January 21, 2008 at the age of 76.

Smith was interviewed by The HistoryMakers on November 9, 2000.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with The Honorable Kenneth Smith, Sr. was conducted by Julieanna L. Richardson on November 9, 2000, in Chicago, Illinois, and was recorded on 6 Betacame SP videocassettes. University president The Honorable Kenneth Smith, Sr. (1931 - 2008 ) was the first African American to serve as president of the

Chicago Theological Seminary.

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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, Kenneth B.

Richardson, Julieanna L. (Interviewer)

Bieschke, Paul (Videographer)

### Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Smith, Kenneth B.--Interviews

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African American ministers--Illinois--Chicago--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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Chicago Theological Seminary

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## Occupations:

University President

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## HistoryMakers® Category:

EducationMakers

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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 The Honorable Kenneth Smith, Sr., November 9, 2000. 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 The Honorable Kenneth Smith, Sr., Section  
A2000\_036\_001\_001, TRT: 0:31:05 ?

Kenneth Smith was born on February 19, 1931 in Montclair, New Jersey to Dorothy Jackson Smith, who was born in 1904 in Tillery, North Carolina, and William Smith, who was born in 1898 in Arkansas. His parents met and married in North Carolina when his father was twenty and his mother was sixteen in 1918, and then moved to New Jersey to avoid racial discrimination and violence in the South. Smith's mother was raised Catholic. His maternal grandparents, Charles and Fiffie Jackson, died when his mother was young, but his mother

grew up with her grandmother, who was from Sierra Leone and sold into slavery. His paternal grandparents, Edith Bishop and William Smith, Sr., were farmers, also from Tillery, North Carolina, and his paternal grandmother lived to one hundred years old, across the street from Smith and his family in Montclair, New Jersey. Smith was one of ten children. He and his family grew up poor during the Depression, but his father was a chef, so they did not go hungry.

Childhood--New Jersey--Montclair.

African American families.

Slavery--United States.

Racism--North Carolina--Tillery.

Depressions--1929--United States.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Kenneth Smith, Sr., Section A2000\_036\_001\_002, TRT: 0:29:04 ?

Kenneth Smith grew up in Montclair, New Jersey in an ethnically mixed neighborhood in the 1930s and 1940s. He went to the integrated Hillside Elementary School and Montclair High School, graduating from there in 1949, but had no black teachers there. His mother, Dorothy Smith, was a homemaker who raised ten children and also worked as a domestic, and his father, William Smith, worked as a chef at a white girl's school, Ms. Beard's school, in Montclair, New Jersey. Smith was raised Catholic, and even though there was no black Catholic Church in Montclair, New Jersey, he and his family attended a Mission church in a neighborhood home. Smith became interested in theology and religion, and he had influential mentors who were ministers of different faiths growing up, including a Baptist minister, Reverend Rice. After graduating from high school, Smith studied history at Virginia Union University in Richmond Virginia, a small school, where he experienced living in the Jim Crow Era South for the first time.

African American families--New Jersey--Montclair.

African Americans--Education--New Jersey--Montclair.

African American college students--Virginia--Richmond.

Spiritual formation.

Virginia Union University (Richmond, Va.).

Segregation--Virginia--Richmond.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Kenneth Smith, Sr., Section A2000\_036\_001\_003, TRT: 0:30:56 ?

Kenneth Smith attended Virginia Union University in Richmond, Virginia from 1949 to 1953, where he was involved with the Student Christian Movement. He was also involved with the Student Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA), and through them, he traveled to Travancore, in Kerala, India in 1952 to attend the World Conference of Christian Youth. Smith traveled around India for four months speaking to student groups. After returning and graduating from Virginia Union University in 1953, he got his Master's degree at Drew University in New Jersey, before moving to Chicago, Illinois in 1954. In 1960, Smith got his degree in divinity and ministry from Bethany Theological Seminary in Gary, Indiana, and became an ordained Congregational Church minister. In 1968, Smith became pastor at the Church of the Good Shepherd in Chicago, Illinois. From 1989 to 1984 to 1999, he served as President of Chicago Theological Seminary.

Virginia Union University (Richmond, Va.).

Drew University.

Student Young Men's Christian Association.  
Bethany Theological Seminary.  
Theology--Study and teaching.  
Chicago Theological Seminary.  
World Conference of Christian Youth.  
Travel--India.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Kenneth Smith, Sr., Section  
A2000\_036\_001\_004, TRT: 0:30:01 ?

Kenneth Smith was president of the Chicago Theological Seminary in Chicago, Illinois from 1984 to 1999. The oldest institution of higher learning in Chicago, the Seminary is affiliated with the University of Chicago, and has a long history of activism in the black community. The Seminary is primarily an academic community, whose graduates include HistoryMaker Reverend Jesse Jackson, Sr. Smith had first moved to Chicago, Illinois in 1954, where he then pastored the Church of the Good Shepherd, and then founding the Trinity United Church of Christ in 1961. Smith's civic involvement in the 1950s and 1960s included being the chair of the United Church Committee on Equal Justice, and working with the Coordinating Council of Community Organizations, which was responsible for bringing Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. to Chicago. Smith also worked with Earl B. Dickerson and the Urban League's Bill Berry. In 1979, Mayor Jane Byrne appointed him to the Chicago Board of Education, where he was elected by the board to serve as its President in 1980 over Mayor Jane Byrne's objection, and he continued to serve until 1984.

Chicago Theological Seminary.  
Political activism.  
Religious institutions--Illinois--Chicago.  
University of Chicago.  
Byrne, Jane, 1933-2014  
Dickerson, Earl B., 1891-1986  
Berry, Edwin C., 1910-1987  
Chicago (Ill.). Board of Education.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Kenneth Smith, Sr., Section  
A2000\_036\_001\_005, TRT: 0:25:42 ?

Kenneth Smith's civic accomplishments include being chairman of the Chicago, Illinois Urban League, president of the Chicago Board of Education in 1980, treasurer for United Way, and serving on the board as a senior fellow of the Chicago Community Trust from 1983 to 1997. He also served on the National Trust for Historic Preservation, and plans on documenting the history of the Illinois Service Federal Savings and Loan. Smith describes his wife, Gladys, his children, Kenneth Jr., Kourtney, and Kristen, and then reflects on his legacy. Smith describes the role of family, faith, and religion in society. He then reflects on the people who have influenced him, including the Reverend Dr. William J. Faulkner from Fisk University's Fisk Memorial Chapel, in Nashville, Tennessee.

African American families--Illinois--Chicago.  
Faulkner, William J.  
Chicago Urban League.  
Chicago (Ill.). Board of Education.  
United Way of America.

Video Oral History Interview with The Honorable Kenneth Smith, Sr., Section  
A2000\_036\_001\_006, TRT: 0:13:31 ?

Kenneth Smith narrates his photographs.

Photographs.