

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Bev 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, Bev, 1943-
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Bev Smith,
<b>Dates:</b>	June 9, 2014
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2014
<b>Physical Description:</b>	8 uncompressed MOV digital video files (3:34:13).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Radio talk show host Bev Smith (1943 - ) hosted the nationally syndicated talk show "The Bev Smith Show" from 1998 to 2011. Smith was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on June 9, 2014, in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2014_154
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Radio talk show host Bev Smith was born March 4, 1943 in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Smith is the eldest of six children born to Isabel and John Sloan. She was raised in the Homewood neighborhood of Pennsylvania, and graduated from Westinghouse High School. In 1961, Smith entered beautician school, to raise money for college, and a year later enrolled in Clark's Business School. In 1963, she took classes at Robert Morris Junior College.

In 1969, Smith was appointed office manager for the National Conference of Christians and Jews, under Ralph King. In 1971, she was named Pittsburgh's first African American consumer affairs investigative reporter for WPXI Television. She was then hired as news and public affairs director for Sheridan Broadcasting in 1975, and hosted a talk show on Sheridan's flagship station, WAMO. In 1977, Smith became the director of consumer affairs, as well as energy coordinator of her county in Pennsylvania. That same year, she moved her radio show to KDKA, where she also hosted a television show called *Vibrations*. Smith then became a radio host for Miami's WGBS (now WNMS) in 1979, and Orlando's WKIS in 1985. In 1988, Smith began hosting a local radio program in Washington D.C., as well as the national Black Entertainment Television talk show "Our Voices," which she hosted for over thirteen years.

In 1998, Smith became the host of "The Bev Smith Show," on American Urban Radio Networks, which made her the only African American female radio talk show host with a nationally syndicated show in the country. Smith signed off the air as host of her show in 2011.

Smith has received nearly 300 awards and recognitions for her contributions to radio and television, including the Spirit of Democracy Award, the Radio Air Crystal Award and the prestigious Max Robinson Award. She has also been selected by *Talkers* magazine as one of the most important radio talk show hosts in America.

Bev Smith was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on June 9, 2014.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Bev Smith was conducted by Larry Crowe on June 9, 2014, in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and was recorded on 8 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Radio talk show host Bev Smith (1943 - ) hosted the nationally syndicated talk show “The Bev Smith Show” from 1998 to 2011.

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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, Bev, 1943-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Stearns, Scott (Videographer)

### Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Smith, Bev, 1943---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:

Radio Talk Show Host

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## HistoryMakers® Category:

MediaMakers

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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 Bev Smith, June 9, 2014. 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 Bev Smith, Section A2014\_154\_001\_001, TRT: 1:29:46 ?

Bev Smith was born on March 4, 1943 in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania to Isabelle Jones Sloan and John Sloan. Her paternal great-grandfather, Thomas Moore, was an illegal Irish immigrant to the United States, and married a woman of black and Native American ancestry. Smith's paternal grandparents, Molly Moore Sloan and George Sloan, met in Carthage, Arkansas, where Smith's father was born. They later moved to Pittsburgh, where her father helped found the International Hod Carriers' Building and Common Laborers' Union of America Local 11. He also met Smith's mother, who was born in Pittsburgh and lived there until her father died when she was one year old. She was then sent to her maternal family's farm in Danville, Virginia, where she lived until the age of

nine years old. At that time, Smith's maternal grandmother, Katie Thomas, married Lenwood Thomas, and her mother returned to Pittsburgh to live with them. She graduated from Schenley High School, and attended the Community College of Allegheny County.

Video Oral History Interview with Bev Smith, Section A2014\_154\_001\_002, TRT: 2:27:50 ?

Bev Smith's parents, Isabelle Jones Sloan and John Sloan, met at Schenley High School in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and married after her mother's graduation. Their families disapproved of the relationship, as her mother was Baptist and her father was Pentecostal. Around the time of Smith's birth in 1943, her father served in the Civilian Conservation Corps, where he was tasked with maintaining the roads in the city, while her mother attended beauty school. They went on to have five more children. Smith's father worked as a campaign director for a number of black politicians, and helped found Pittsburgh's all-black International Hod Carriers' Building and Common Laborers' Union of America Local 11. When Smith was young, her family lived with her maternal grandparents in the wealthy Sugar Top section of the Hill District, a historically African American community in Pittsburgh. Later, her parents purchased a house in Homewood, which was a predominantly white suburb.

Video Oral History Interview with Bev Smith, Section A2014\_154\_001\_003, TRT: 3:28:46 ?

Bev Smith attended Crescent Elementary School in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, where she developed an interest in art. She also took lessons at the Carnegie Museum of Art in downtown Pittsburgh. Smith enjoyed writing stories, and was an avid reader of the Brenda Starr, Reporter comic series. In her household, she was encouraged to read the Pittsburgh Courier, and often participated in her parents' discussions about current events. Smith went on to attend Pittsburgh's Westinghouse High School, where she was a member of the drama club and debate team. She was mentored by one of the school's two black teachers, Herman McClain, who introduced her to the works of James Baldwin and Zora Neale Hurston. Influenced by her father's activism, Smith remained engaged with politics, and debated in support of John Fitzgerald Kennedy during the presidential election of 1960. Smith graduated from high school in 1961. She aspired to attend college, but needed to help support her family, and enrolled at a beauty school instead.

Video Oral History Interview with Bev Smith, Section A2014\_154\_001\_004, TRT: 4:29:28 ?

Bev Smith graduated in 1961 from Westinghouse High School in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. After becoming a hairdresser, she earned an associate's degree at Duff's Business Institute in Pittsburgh, and went on to take classes at Robert Morris Junior College in Moon, Pennsylvania. During this period, Smith was active in the Civil Rights Movement as a member of the NAACP. She registered voters in Selma, Alabama with Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and attended the March on Washington in Washington, D.C. She worked as an office manager at the Young Men's Christian Association, and was recruited by her fellow activists to join the staff of the National Conference for Christians and Jews in 1969. At this point, Smith was raising her child as a single mother, and volunteered to monitor television news programs for discriminatory reporting in her free time. She later met David Chase of WIIC-TV, who offered her a position as a consumer affairs reporter in 1971.

Video Oral History Interview with Bev Smith, Section A2014\_154\_001\_005, TRT: 5:28:25 ?

Bev Smith was hired as a consumer affairs reporter at WIIC-TV in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania in 1971. Four years later, she became the news director for WAMO Radio, which was Pittsburgh's only black radio station. There, she conducted an investigation of prisoner abuse at the State Correctional Institution

Pittsburgh, and organized a town hall meeting between the black community and local politicians, which Mayor Richard S. Caliguiri refused to attend. After leaving WAMO Radio, Smith entered the Xerox Corporation's management training program. However, her childcare responsibilities kept her from advancing in Corporate America, and she decided to return to the broadcast industry. After a brief stint as the general manager of WYEP Radio, Smith returned her former position at WAMO Radio. She was then offered the role of consumer advocate for Allegheny County, and began hosting a weekend show on KDKA Radio. During this time, Smith advocated for black steelworkers in Pennsylvania.

Video Oral History Interview with Bev Smith, Section A2014\_154\_001\_006, TRT: 6:30:24 ?

Bev Smith was the first African American talk show host on KDKA Radio in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. While there, she was offered a position at WGBS Radio in Miami, Florida, where she moved with her daughter. Later, Smith transferred to a station in Orlando, Florida, where she led a march against the Ku Klux Klan and required FBI protection from the subsequent bomb threats. In 1987, Smith became the host of 'The Bev Smith Show' on WRC Radio in Washington, D.C. She also began her transition into national television. She was hired as the host of 'Our Voices' on BET, and served as a substitute for hosts like Catherine Crier of CNN's 'Crier and Company.' Smith covered issues like the drug epidemic and racism, and interviewed prominent black activists like Mamie Till Mobley, who was the mother of Emmett Till. Smith left BET in 2001. She also appeared on MSNBC and FOX, and filled in for Larry King on 'Larry King Live.'

Video Oral History Interview with Bev Smith, Section A2014\_154\_001\_007, TRT: 7:35:19 ?

Bev Smith's radio talk show, 'The Bev Smith Show,' became a nationally syndicated program on the American Urban Radio Networks in 1998. In 2001, she left BET to focus on her radio program. She hosted guests like Ralph Nader, Dick Gregory, Hilary Shelton and William Spriggs, as well as numerous others her network of contacts for interviews and expert opinions. Smith was heralded as the Queen of Late Night Talk by individuals like Reverend Jesse L. Jackson and Dr. Ron Daniels of the Haiti Support Project. In 2011, Smith left American Urban Radio Networks due to contract disputes, and began producing 'The Bev Smith Show' independently. At this point in the interview, Smith talks about the future of black radio, and describes her hopes and concerns for the African American community. She reflects upon her career and legacy, and concludes the interview by describing how she would like to be remembered.

Video Oral History Interview with Bev Smith, Section A2014\_154\_001\_008, TRT: 8:04:15 ?

Bev Smith talks about her books, including 'A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to Success' and 'Talking While Black.' At the time of the interview, she was in the process of publishing 'Interview with Jesus.'