

A TEI Project

Interview of Ernest Smith

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1. Transcript

1.1. Session 1 March 15, 2007

Stevenson

Good morning. I'm conducting an interview with Dr. Ernest Smith on Thursday, March fifteenth. I'd first like to ask you when and where you were born, something about your parents, grandparents, and your siblings.

Smith

Well, I was born in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, St. Luke's Hospital, and that was November ninth, 1931. My parents were Carolinians. My mother was from North Carolina, a little town called Oak City, and my father was from South Carolina, from Yemassee. He belonged with that Gullah-Geechee group. And she was mixed race in terms of the southern--her grandfather was actually the son of the owner of the slaves, etc., etc. you see, but acknowledged. We have a picture of him with his family, so it's not one of those out-of-the-cracks kind of things. Very unique for North Carolina, because the picture was taken probably around 1900, and he stands with his wife so-called, and children, see, and they're grown.

Stevenson

That was unique for that time.

Smith

Very unique for the place and time, right. But it also gives a concept of the background in terms of the structure and outlook, two very independent people, and actually coming from perhaps a slave background, but very

independent background. My father tells me, or told me, that his people were in the Revolutionary War, and came out of the West Indies, and fought in the Revolutionary War. That's when they were converted into Christianity, once they got to South Carolina.

Smith

At the time, South Carolina was the wilderness of the United States, and from what I understand, the reason many of them were brought into the United States was because they knew how to plant rice. They came out of whatever country they were in, and they were in rebellion, but they were too valuable to destroy, and so those who were not caught became Maroons, and those who were caught were sold into slavery in South Carolina. So that's kind of like a stance, okay, and then to enter into the revolution, okay, so that there's a fire that burns. My mother's people the same, okay, so that when I came up in Pennsylvania, then the very most important point, especially being male--and I had two brothers, one year apart each of us, that they didn't want any replica of the South. So no fears, no masters, no bosses, independent thought, independent consciousness, both seeking education.

Smith

My mother finished high school in 1928, was born in 1903, so then she was twenty-five years old when she finished high school. Her mother and father died early, and so she went and stayed with her sisters, and whatever was going on with--the sister was about eight years older than she, and then finally ended up with an uncle in Newborne, North Carolina, and was able to finish high school. But she'd been at school and then out, work the fields, back to school, work the fields. She went to a Bricks Boarding School. I don't know if you've ever heard of that.

Stevenson

No.

Smith

But there was a boarding school in North Carolina called Bricks. The campus still exists. I don't think it's anymore a boarding school. It was mainly for black children, and I think it was a [Julius] Rosenwald endeavor, okay.

Stevenson

Yes, I'm familiar with that.

Smith

Right. But none of that--she was fired up for education, finished West Street High School in Newborne, which at that time was segregated. She was in the third graduating class, which meant--at that time they didn't have high schools for black children, okay. So when they did begin to initiate high schools, that was like a move across the South, and I think Martin Luther King [Jr.]'s father was very much involved in Atlanta, although they didn't get their high school until about 1917 or 1918, and he had to fight for that.

Smith

The reason I raise that is because the idea of educating African Americans was a no-no, and that's the background of African American education, that it's not to happen. I think that's very important, because we're still fighting the fight, because it's still not to happen, especially when you take UCLA with ninety-six blacks in the freshman class. It's not to happen. Well, the point being that this was a struggle and a fight back to antiquity, so to speak, of African Americans seeking education, and this was what was fired into my mother and father.

Smith

Now, my father was in South Carolina, where they were only given an opportunity for school for three months of the year. So like in December they had to pull in the crops, and then they could go to school, but by February they had to start planting, and so they were out of school. So for three years, that was the sum of his education. He left South Carolina at fourteen, because his father had died, and his mother had moved to Paris Island to work. He was staying with his grandmother, and he was the only child, so that it was a struggle then which direction was he going to go.

Smith

So he got a job on a boat in Charleston, and sailed up and down the coast from Charleston to Boston, got fired in Philadelphia for sleeping. His mother had by that time moved to Philadelphia, so he then hooked up with his mother, and worked on a bridge, on the Coney Palomar Bridge, that was being built in Philadelphia at the time. When that job was over, then he walked to Bethlehem, and that was about sixty miles. He had an uncle that was in Bethlehem, so he walked to Bethlehem because they had the steel mill. And he got the job at sixteen--I think he lied about his age, but at sixteen got the job working in the Bethlehem Steel, and that's where he stayed.

Stevenson

Now, what year would that have been?

Smith

Oh, that would have been like 1924, something like that.

Stevenson

Bethlehem Steel, then, was that the name of the company?

Smith

Oh yes, oh yes.

Stevenson

Had they had a record of hiring blacks?

Smith

Yes, yes. Bethlehem Steel was very instrumental in the First World War. In fact, it's rumored that the Kaiser said that the First World War is not a war against the United States, it was a war against Bethlehem Steel. So in other words, it was very much in action at the time. At the time that they came into Bethlehem, there was a lot of change occurring within the city. There

were three boroughs. There was the Borough of Bethlehem, of West Bethlehem, South Bethlehem, and the Borough of Northampton Heights, and in 1917 or '18 they unified. So one of the things they did in unification was to start building a bridge across the river that could unite the boroughs. In fact, they used to call it the Seven Way Bridges, because there were seven ways to enter, you know.

Smith

Then they also had started constructing a high school, so they could have one high school for the three boroughs, and from what I understand that was interrupted by the First World War, and completed in 1922. It was called Liberty High School in honor of the young men that died fighting the First World War, so that was my high school, Liberty High School in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. Now, it was interesting because Bethlehem was also a Moravian town, and the Moravians are a religious sect coming out of I think Czechoslovakia or Germany, and they had done mission work with the Indians. They were pacifists, and they also had done work in the West Indies, in the Virgin Islands, and I think in Nicaragua. But nonetheless, they set a tone also for the city, so it was a very religious town when I came along.

Smith

Prior to that, there was a lot of prostitution, gambling, because of the steel mill, but that was cleaned up in 1930, '31. The small African American population had a lot to do with cleaning it up. In other words, they swung the vote that brought in the mayor that brought in reform, okay. It started off with a town at that time, around 2,000 African Americans. Then the depression hit and that was reduced down to about 700, or maybe even between 400 and 700, so there was a very, very small African American population.

Smith

Now, what we had in that place--it was called the Lehigh Valley, where the Lehigh River came through, and so there were cities that spotted along that river. The major cities would have been Allentown, Pennsylvania, Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, and Easton, Pennsylvania. Easton, the river led into the Delaware [River], and that meant then that if you crossed the Delaware you were in New Jersey. So there was a little colony of blacks in Washington, New Jersey, that we considered a part of the Lehigh Valley. Now, what that meant was that we used all of the blacks in that whole--in those primitive cities, as almost like one community, so that if there was something of importance, that something important was going to happen, then you had to then contact Allentown and Easton to come to Bethlehem, or Allentown, Bethlehem, and Phillipsburg went to Easton, but it was one city, and this was unified by the ministers, so that they had what they called a ministerial alliance, and they met once a month from city to city, church to church, and that unified the city.

Smith

So what it meant then is that as a child growing up, you were very much cocooned, okay. You were very precious, because a lot of the folks had come to the mills to work. Some had families, and a lot of them were single, so that meant then that if you had children, the children were shared with everybody in town, okay. So we had, for instance, growing up as kids, on Sunday we went visiting. It was not an obligation, but it was kind of like something that we learned to do, and we went to visit the people who didn't have children, okay. So it was like they would receive us and spoil us in that respect.

Smith

In the same respect, we also went to visit all newborn babies. Thirty days after they were born, then we kids would go visit, and it was almost like incorporating them into the child arena, you see. On the first day of the year, which is New Year's Day, the boys would visit single women, or women's homes where there were no men, because I don't know if you're familiar with that idea with African Americans, where on the first day of the year, New Year's Day, if a woman comes to your house as the first visitor, you will have bad luck for the rest of the year.

Stevenson

Oh no, I've not heard that.

Smith

You've not heard that.

Stevenson

No.

Smith

Therefore, it was upon the boys to go and be the first visitor in the home as a male, which then got rid of the idea that some lady would come in and destroy your luck for the year. Yes. So those were the kinds of things that were our learning trees and responsibilities, community responsibilities, growing up within the community. We mixed in with whites, so there was no segregation generally, in terms other than there was no African American community as such, geographically, so that we were raised around Eastern Europeans, all steel workers mostly. So we early were introduced to people speaking other languages, you know. We didn't understand the language, but we could tell that was Russian or that was Polish or that was Ukrainian, even though you didn't understand what they were saying, you see. And you learned to expect that, you see. So that meant then that right off the bat there was nobody superior, there was nobody inferior, and there was a lot of difference, and people tolerated the difference, so that you were in and out of other people's homes, regardless of their race, that you played with the children, they chastised you, you chastised them, whatever. You see what I mean? And it was a free growing-up experience. In other words, we weren't in the city, so to speak. There were a lot of fields. There was the mountain

that you could explore, so the kids were turned loose. We were very free, you know.

Stevenson

All right. Well, a couple of questions. This is a very different experience than that of a lot of the interviewees who came up in the South. Obviously, it's almost a 360-degree difference. Were you aware of how different your experience was at the time? I mean, you still had relatives in the South.

Smith

Yes, but we didn't visit. We never went to the South as children. My father would go. My father went when his best friend died. The best friend lived in Bethlehem. In fact, he was responsible for them coming to Bethlehem, and when he died at a kind of early age--we were in elementary school--my father went to the South with the family. We didn't go, okay. My mother [Della Annie Grimes] didn't go back to North Carolina until 1947, so we were in high school. So when she left in 1928, it was almost twenty years before she got a chance to go back.

Stevenson

I see.

Smith

Now, relatives would come to see us, but they didn't start that until somewhere in the forties, so it was like after the depression. So we had aunts that would come up from the South, or uncles that would come up from the South, either South Carolina or North Carolina, and so we got to know them. My mother's brothers and sisters had also moved to Bethlehem, so I had a lot of cousins in town, and some in Philadelphia, and that was the sum total. Now, we knew what the South was, because they would tell us, okay. We knew about the brutality and the meanness and all this kind of thing. We also knew, even after we got to a certain age, that we weren't going to be going south, because they didn't feel that we could adjust to it. Now, this is before Emmett Till.

Stevenson

Part of being cocooned.

Smith

Yes. But the idea was that we were also, we were taught to speak our minds. We weren't subservient, and you push me and I push you back, you know, kind of thing, and so it was dangerous, and so they thought that it was too dangerous for us to go south. And we weren't about to curb our behavior, so we were just cut off.

Stevenson

Okay. Can I get your parents' and your grandparents names?

Smith

Yes. My mother's name was Della [mother], Della Annie Grimes, maiden name. Her mother's name was Della Cotten, C-o-t-t-e-n, Grimes [maternal grandmother]. Her father's name was Thaddeus Nathaniel Grimes [maternal

grandfather]. He was part Indian. She was half white, he was half Indian. Her mother's name was Priscilla Cotten [maternal great-grandmother], and her father's name was Edward Cotten [maternal great-grandfather], and he was white. She had been a slave, okay. His father's name was Ollie Cotten [maternal great-great-great grandfather].

Stevenson

O-I-I-i-e?

Smith

Yes. And his mother's name was Louisa [Cotten] [maternal great-great-great grandmother]. Interestingly enough, his mother had twins, twin boys. My grandmother, which would be Della, which would be the granddaughter, she died birthing twins. So in other words, her grandmother had twins, and she died having twins. So there was a claim also that they were related to Cotton Mather in Boston. Now, Cotton Mather is spelled C-o-t-t-o-n; theirs was C-o-t-t-e-n. But now he, the old man, from what I understand would maintain that he was Anglo-Saxon, and came out of the Anglo-Saxon line, so that was his group.

Smith

Now, my father was--Thaddeus Grimes, his mother, Thaddeus' mother was named Tincey, T-i-n-c-e-y Grimes [mother of Thaddeus], and his father's name was Frank Grimes [father of Thaddeus]. Now, they were slaves. Tincey was Indian or part Indian.

Stevenson

Okay. I see your--

Smith

Now, my daddy's people, his mother's name was Emma Tolbert Smith [grandmother], and her mother and father's name was--father's name was Stepne [Smith] [paternal great-grandfather], and his mother's name was Molcy, M-o-l-c-y [Smith] [paternal great-grandmother]. His father's name was James Smith [paternal great-grandfather], and he was one of seven sons, and his father's name was Moses [Smith] [paternal great-great grandfather], and he was married to Annie Johnson Smith [paternal great-great grandmother]. Now, according to somewhere along the line, the name Washington Smith comes above Moses, and he was named after the general of the revolution, because they thought they were fighting with Washington, but I don't believe it was Washington. I believe it was probably Francis Marion, but that was the impression that they had, you know. And I think they thought they were going to be freed as a result of fighting, and they were told to go back and serve their masters quite well, okay. Now, Washington came out of Benjamin [Smith]. Benjamin was the one that was in the war.

Stevenson

Okay. So I know that your father was a steel worker. What did your mother do?

Smith

My mother worked in a dress factory. Now, she was prepared--when she left high school, she was supposed to be teaching school in North Carolina. Like once they graduated from high school, then usually they went and became school teachers. But she chose to come to Pennsylvania, see, and so that never materialized. And in my hometown, they wouldn't hire blacks as professionals, so not that she had a bachelor's degree, but even the idea of hiring a black teacher didn't manifest until 1963, and that was with the Civil Rights Movement.

Stevenson

Right. And did she ever teach?

Smith

No. No. So now, the important point is that a lot of ladies in my hometown finished Virginia Union [College] and West Virginia State [College], but they worked in the kitchens, right, so there was no employment for professionals. And they had to move the amount of time to educate the children, the young people, so most of us went on to college with the idea of knowing we would never be able to come back, so it was almost like a one-way ticket. Once you went to college, you couldn't come back, and things didn't change till about '62.

Stevenson

Okay. Could you tell me a little bit--you told me, I think, a bit about your neighborhood and growing up. Could you tell me about what some of the social activities, other social activities that you enjoyed growing up?

Smith

Yes. We went to [unclear], High Y [phonetic], the recreation points, the Boy Scouts and other kinds of things, which were kind of like within the neighborhood, so that was mixed. You know, we went to camp, the YMCA [Young Men's Christian Association] camp, and we went to the Boy Scout camp, and that was all mixed. You know, sometimes we'd be the only black kids there, me and my brothers, you know. But then the black people had programs, because they were concerned that we were becoming too white, so that in other words, you know, there was nothing for--especially, we had one minister, the Reverend A. Johnson--it was nothing for him to have the sermon for the Sunday morning, he and us, meaning he preached about the kids and our behavior.

Smith

A lot of times, for instance, like we were from the Heights, so we were the boys from the Heights, and then there were black kids living downtown, and they were some of the guys from downtown, and sometimes we'd get in a little fight, right? Well, when he would look at it, it was black on black. He didn't see the white boys. How could this black boy be fighting this black boy, when we weren't looking at it like that. We were looking at, he's downtown, we're uptown. You see what I mean? So that required a Sunday

sermon, okay, but so constantly drilling that whole idea, that there was affinity of selves and color, and difference, okay, even though you're mixing amongst the others. They were very concerned about our manners. Like a lot of the white children, they talked back to their parents, which that was intolerable as far as we were concerned.

Smith

Now, starting with that, then when we got into like junior high school, then they started socializing at parties, okay. So that means that various parents would have house parties, and all the kids would be invited to it, and the protocol was that the parents would be often in one room, and the kids would be in the front room or wherever they're having the party, and the lights would be on as long as the chaperones were there. Then when they left, we'd turn off the lights, and we never knew how they knew, but they'd always wobble in and get that thing going, you know, so that we had a lot of things going on just with general parties.

Smith

Then we had a club called the Coed Club, and there were a couple of interesting ladies who organized that, and we'd meet at the YMCA [Young Men's Christian Association]. The girls had Girl Scouts, and there was a lady who got very interested in setting up a Girl Scout troop. There was another woman that was interested, Mrs. Lula Washington, was very interested in our Boy Scouts, so she organized the Cub Scouts, and that was very instructive. She was from North Carolina and could have been a teacher in North Carolina. She went to the Hampton [Institute, now University] for about three years, but she had so much of things that we learned from her. The first time that we learned about how to use a hammer and nail, she taught us; how to use a saw. When we went for Halloween, we made our costumes out of papier mache, so we made like lions and bears out of papier mache, and then used the long johns as the uniform, dyed them and whatever, so we learned all that. And then how to make a hooked rug, I remember her teaching that. So we met with her during that elementary period, you see.

Smith

When we got into the socialization, then we had another club called the Scholarship Club, and the Scholarship Club was organized by a doctor Goodwin, Dr. James Goodwin, who had come to Bethlehem as soon as he graduated from Howard [University], but couldn't practice because he couldn't admit patients to the hospital. So he moved to Redding, Pennsylvania, but he had organized this Scholarship Club in Bethlehem, and then organized a chapter in Redding, and the whole idea was to encourage black kids to stay in high school, and then beyond that going into college. He would then drive them down to Hampton, or drive them to the black colleges. Then we would meet for debates, music, all kinds of things, you

know. So in other words, it was very, very scholarshipped. So we had that area.

Smith

The Coed Club was the party area, okay. Of course, the house parties. Then there was interaction from city to city, so that meant then like if the Scholarship Club in Redding was having something, then we'd go to it. We'd have to stay overnight, okay, so we'd sleep in a chair in somebody's house, right. Or if we got caught in Redding--a lot of times we'd go to Redding and the last bus left--then we'd stay with a person, and now the protocol was, whoever's home it was you were in, that parent called your parent. What they really called was to let them know that you were there, and to get permission, which it didn't make any difference because you couldn't get home no how. So that was the general way that it worked.

Smith

So a lot of the parents then met each other from other cities through their children, you see. But that was part of the socialization. So it was very good, and very enriching, because you had the white world that you socialized in, with the high-school band and all this kind of thing, and then the black world that you socialized in, and this would be socialized black; this was being socialized universal, so to speak.

Stevenson

Okay. What was the name of your elementary school?

Smith

Brodhead, B-r-o-d-h-e-a-d. It was an eight-room school. When I started it was three grades, when they first started. Then when the war came, the Second World War, then they moved us to the junior-high school. They used Brodhead School as a recreation center, you know; before the war came they moved it. But when the war came, there was an influx of people. They put us back in Brodhead, and it was increased into six grades. So that was the school that we detested. All the kids hated Brodhead. I don't know why. I think it was a stage of growth, you know.

Smith

But the other thing was that it was right next to Bethlehem Steel and the drop forge, and the drop forge was a tall building about ten stories or more, and there was a big forge that fell down on the steel to shape it. It took a minute to go up and then drop and hit, so you had this massive boom, which we never heard, but all the teachers heard, and it used to disturb them because they couldn't get used to the noise, and we'd wonder what was the matter with them, because we didn't hear what they heard. We had blotted it out. But that was the Brodhead School.

Smith

[George] Washington was our junior-high school, and it's supposed to have been the worst junior-high school in town, which we didn't think it was. But see, there was a lot of prejudice, class prejudice, and the whole idea was

that most of the kids in Washington, their parents were from the old country, so to speak, or didn't speak English quite well, so they were looked down upon by the Anglos. It had nothing to do with blacks.

Stevenson

Okay, interesting.

Smith

Yes. So there was an attitude that the kids in Washington had, a defensive attitude, okay? Now, the other thing was that we lived in this area called Northampton Heights, which at one time was a borough, which everybody stuck together very closely, very tightly. So Washington was that binding force for that Northampton Heights. The kids always met behind Washington School. They had the basketball courts, the baseball diamond, etc., so that was kind of like your clubhouse, you see. So everybody would meet, especially the boys. The girls would come in the evenings sometimes, but they had their little section that they stayed with, and then the interchange, exchange, you know, and it bonded you that we were from the Heights, we were Heights people, and we were from Washington. Wherever you went in town, we stuck together, so if we were in town, sometimes as a black person you'd be in downtown and you'd meet a white person who's kind of trying to give you a little trouble, and the next thing you know, there's about three or four white folks standing alongside of you, wanting to know is everything all right. Meaning, if there's going to be a fight going on, hey, you've got it covered, okay. So that was the--

Stevenson

Camaraderie.

Smith

--camaraderie and tightness that we had with that Washington Junior High School. Then we went to Liberty High School, which was the senior-high school. Interestingly enough--and I didn't find this out until our forty-year graduation--we fitted in Liberty High School. In other words, like, we made a point, and it was out of the Scholarship Club--everybody's going to join something at Liberty, okay. So you're going to be in some kind of activity. Well, we had met a lot of kids in camp. We had gone to the Boy Scout camp and the YMCA camp, so when we went to Liberty we had a lot of kids we already knew from junior-high, and they were usually more middle-class-type children. We also played in the band, which gave us the entree to another set of kids, so it's easy to rule in, right?

Stevenson

Right.

Smith

But for the other kids coming out of Washington, they didn't fit. I didn't realize this until the fortieth-year reunion. I was asking, "Well, where's so-and-so from Washington? Where's so-and-so from our Washington class?" And they told me, "Are you kidding? They wouldn't be caught dead here."

And I'm saying, "Why?" They said, "They hated these people." So I met one guy, an Italian fellow, [unclear], "How come nobody from Washington is coming? What's this business that they're very angry?" He says, "You don't even understand what we went through. You know, I was a football player and I was very popular, and I was probably until my junior year. Then I had [unclear] for English. She had everybody stand up and give their name, and where their parents were from, and my parents were from Italy." And he says, "Once I stood up and gave my name, and told them that my parents were from Italy, I was no longer popular."

Stevenson

Very interesting. It's very interesting, coming within the white dynamic. That's very interesting.

Smith

That's right. Now, sitting at one table here was this one girl, and she had a very nasty attitude, and she was picking at all these kids sitting around at the table for what they did to her in junior-high school. And I'm sitting there wondering, well, what's her problem? I mean, that's like fifty years ago almost. She was Jewish, and she was still carrying the scars of what was happening to her as a Jewish kid in school, see. That was, in my mind, to the class struggle. You see, because we were saying that we had attitudes about being black, and we were fighting the black thing, but we had no idea that the folks were going through a class struggle in the midst of all this.

Stevenson

So that gave you a new perspective.

Smith

A whole different perspective.

Stevenson

What, some forty or fifty years later? I see. So in your elementary, middle, or high school, were there teachers that stood out--

Smith

Yes, there were.

Stevenson

--for you personally, as you look back?

Smith

Both positive and negative. Let me start with this. When we were kids, we used to play school, right? Now, the older girls would always be teachers, and they'd round up all the little kids, and they would be in their class. My first kindergarten would have been that. That's how you learned to spell rat and cat and all that stuff, right. But they would imitate their own teachers, and they would take on the persona of whatever teacher they had. Now, there was one teacher that was very, very nice, Miss Schovie [phonetic], and Mrs. Kahn [phonetic]. Oh, they loved it. Then there was another teacher that they hated, Mrs. Newmier [phonetic]. Now, the girl that played Mrs. Newmier acted out Mrs. Newmier, and so she would imitate slapping our

face, she'd imitate batting us around, okay. Now, that meant that by the time I started school, the very first day I was on guard for Mrs. Newmier, and she was a first-grade teacher.

Smith

Now, they learned something. In one room they gave us what must have been a [unclear]. So I'm standing there with none. Every other one has one. So here comes this lady in, a very young lady and speaking very nicely, and I said, "That must be Miss Schovie." I learned that from playing school, right? I noticed that everybody that has this card like in their hand, she's pulling it out. I don't have a card. But before she gets to me, I grab the card from the girl standing next to me, little Mexican girl, right, and so I'm standing there and I've got a card. So when she comes down and she grabs my card, she looks at me and she says, "You're not Sara Coiler [phonetic]." And I said, "But I don't want to be in Mrs. Newmier's room, she's mean." So she took the card and went and got my card, and pulled me in her classroom. That was the very first day, and I think that made all the difference in my approach to education, because had I gotten this other lady, there would have been a lot of conflict, and that's why the kids that were teaching us as kids were acting out that conflict that they had with this teacher, you see.

Stevenson

Interesting.

Smith

Yes. We had another teacher in those early years, my third-grade teacher, Mrs. Korn [phonetic], and this was when we had moved over to Washington. I became her pet, and that made all the difference in the world, okay, because then you had a friend in the classroom almost like your mother, and very encouraging. The fifth-grade teacher was a Mrs. Miller. She had come in, and she was very, very middle class, and I remember we used to laugh at her, because she had all the attributes of a Northsider. She was thin, which our parents were fat, and that's white and black, okay? If you had a mama, you know, she was kind of buxom. This lady was skinny, so to speak. She spoke in a very soft voice. She never got angry, and no matter how she chastised you, it was always an even tone, and that used to freak us out, because nobody was screaming and nobody was hollering, you know. But she also obviously had used a lot of her money to supplement materials in the classroom, because some of it, like geography, she made it very interesting. Other subjects she made very, very interesting.

Smith

In junior-high school there was a Mrs. Houlihan [phonetic], who's an Irish teacher. She was very important. Most important was a Mr. Weaver, Carlton Weaver, who was a musician, the band director and the glee-club director. He recognized talent in both me and my brothers, and he began to bring that forward, you know what I mean? So we did a lot of performing with

him. There was one teacher in eighth grade, Mr. Kelleher [phonetic], Irishman. He was also one of the coaches, but he was kind of radical. We didn't call it radical then, but he would give you ideas, like, for instance, the steel strike, he'd put that in a context from the workers' perspective, the union from the workers' perspective, okay. So there were a lot of things going on from the workers' perspective that he would put in our heads.

Smith

For instance, the one thing I remember he always said, "The rich are rich because the poor allow it." Okay? And that never left my mind. In other words, this man has power. No, he has not power. He thinks he has power and money. He only has power and money because the poor allow it. That came up strongly for me when the Hispanic population [unclear] in the street as illegals. Who put them out of the country? Okay, you follow? In other words, when you get a mass of poor people, they could do whatever they're pleased to do, because your money can't help you in that respect. That's what Jack Kelleher told us.

Smith

Now, there was another teacher in the ninth grade who I just couldn't get along with at all. I'm not going to call his name. But he was kind of prejudiced, and so we locked horns. Now, one thing he did that was just a no-no. In my eighth-grade year we had to do what we called a monogram, which was you picked what you think you want to do in life, then you research it, and then you turn in like a term-paper type thing. And I did, and I wanted to go into music. So I did all this research on the music, but when I bound it, I bound it into a cover and I used colored chalk, and I wrote all the name of my project and my name in colored chalk. I took waxed paper and I taped over that so that the chalk wouldn't smudge, okay? So I thought it was pretty snazzy.

Smith

Oh, he ridiculed that. Oh, he just thought that was terrible. And I remember I was out in the playground, and [unclear] came up to me and she says, "What did you turn into [unclear]?" I said, "I turned in my monogram." And she says, "Well, he certainly doesn't like it." I said, "How do you know?" And she said, "Because he's up there laughing at it." And I said, "Who's he laughing at it with?" She says, "Oh, a number of the kids." She named a number of the kids that were up there, and he's laughing at my monogram. I walked in--this is after school. I walked back up into his room and kindly removed that monogram out of his hand, and took it home, never turned it in.

Smith

But the next year, that's when we had--I didn't speak in the class. If he called my name on the roll call, I wouldn't answer. If he called on me for any discussion, I would not answer, okay. As far as I was concerned, he didn't exist. So he tried to make friends again, but it was past the point. Now, he

stands out in my mind, okay. I had in senior-high school teachers that would take your grades, so that if you made an A they would drop it. And there were two particularly that did that.

Smith

One I really got so mad at her I could have struck her. I went to see her about it, wanted to know why she changed it, and her answer was, "I don't know." "Well, here I showed you my test papers," and this, that, and the other, "so how does that come down to the B, and I made the A?" "I don't know." "The question is, if you don't know, who does?" "I don't know." Okay? And I was getting very angry, so I said, no, cool down. So from that point on in her class, call my name and your answer was, "I don't know." "Ernest Smith?" "I don't know." Whatever it is, "I don't know." Okay?

Smith

And government class, do a lot of participation, do all kinds of things, come down to get a B, right? So, I looked at that guy and said, that's the game he's going to play. So I got him on two things. He had a group of students that came in from Moravian College, which is in Bethlehem, to observe; student teachers, right? He had about three people that he depended up to carry that class in terms of back and forth. So every time he called my name, I'd just go stupid. "Oh, what? I don't know." After class he says to me, "Well, you know what you did to me, don't you?" I said, "What are you talking about?" He says, "You know what I'm talking about. You didn't participate. You just let me down." I said, "No, I wasn't letting you down. I was just earning my B." I said, "Let your A students do that, okay?"

Smith

When it came to graduation, and I stood [unclear]. My boys from Washington, they're about three of them, they weren't the brightest. So we're taking the government exam, and he's [unclear], and I hold my paper up so that he can copy. It was our senior final, right? So next day we go to the Spanish exam, and he walks up to me and he says, "You did very well in the government exam, Ernest. And so did you, [unclear], and so did you, Bill, and so did you. And I see you plan to do well in Spanish." I said, "God willing." And when I got through with my paper, I held it up. Now, what I wanted him to do was challenge me, because I wanted to talk about, "You stole from me," but nothing, never discussed, okay?

Stevenson

So what was the government exam, and what would be the equivalent now?

Smith

We had to take government. You had to take as a course either government and sociology, or government and economics. That was the course for all seniors, and so you just studied the United States government. That's like politics, really, and the whole idea of voting and what it was all about, who was the lieutenant governor and all those kinds of things. So it was quite

different from history, you see, because it's all about that work of the government.

Stevenson

Right, more like a civics.

Smith

It was deeper than civics, because it was all about politics, you know, law and politics. When we had civics in eighth grade, that was more like general, more widespread, you know. But the government course was a bit more involved.

Stevenson

Okay. Could you give me the name of your brothers and sisters?

Smith

Yes. I had one brother, deceased, Isaiah, a sister Geneva, she's the baby, and a brother James. Getting back to teachers, two others. There was Mr. Recapito [phonetic], Italian. He was in charge of band and orchestra, very high-level music. He was very instrumental in our lives in terms of working with the band. See, now, prior to my brother, who was one year older than me, getting to high school, blacks were not allowed in the band, all right? And the reason for that, they claimed, was that when the band would travel to other cities, other cities were not receptive of African Americans. Then my brother finally was coming in, and Mr. Weaver had done a lot of work with us in Washington. Mrs. Clark, who was in charge of our Scholarship Club, happened to be serving the dinner over in one of the very wealthy Westsiders from the Steel, and the superintendent of schools was invited, and the director of the band was invited, and the whole discussion was my brother coming into the band.

Smith

And the superintendent and the band master wanted him in, and they wanted to make sure that the guy from [unclear] had to just go along with that. So that was the first black in the band.

Stevenson

What year was that?

Smith

He would have gone in there in 1946. Now, when '49 came and [Harry S.] Truman was running as president, he came to Bethlehem on his barnstorming, and the band met him at the station. Now, at that time my three brothers were in the band. After he left Bethlehem, the word comes out of Washington that they want our band to march in his inaugural parade. And you know, we were a good band, there's no question about it. But when I got to the inaugural parade, I understood why, because we probably were the only integrated band in the parade. They had either all-black bands or all-white bands, but we were a mixed band. In fact, it was so that they had us--I was a trombonist, and I was on the pivot line, on the edge--they

moved me inside to the inner part of the band, because they didn't know how the crowds would take it, you know.

Stevenson

So you were invited, the band was invited for political reasons, do you think?

Smith

Well, no. It was more than political. I think that first of all it was a good band. It was an excellent band. At one time it was called the best band East of the Mississippi. You know, they used to go to New York with [unclear] Bowman yearly, and he was, I guess, conductor every year. No, I think it was partly our music, and partly the appearance of the interracial group. So I think that Truman, you know, he's the one that integrated the army, okay, so I think that he would have been looking at that as a workable [phonetic], okay. Because the train was there a long time before he came out, so he may have been observing us and the interaction, because you know how kids are. So we were just horsing around. But obviously we were getting along or whatever it was, so I think that may have given him an idea that it could work, I don't know.

Stevenson

Okay. Can you tell me what part religion played in your--

Smith

Oh, one more person. Is that okay?

Stevenson

Go ahead.

Smith

My music teacher, my piano teacher. I had two outstanding piano teachers. One was Mrs. Kisson, Lula Kisson, who was in my elementary school years. She introduced me to piano. I took it from her, from the time I was in the fourth grade to about the eighth grade. Then I had another teacher, Mrs. Lucille Driver, at the Bethlehem Conservatory of Music, and she was just a star. Now, the reason that I liked her so much is she was from West Virginia. She had a strong southern accent, and when I walked into the room and she met me, "Hullo, Ernest," immediately I went, what is this cracker doing in here? So my point was, I was kind of cold to her, from my own prejudice. She overlooked it, okay, and she would get right down to the point, the music, and then very often we'd deal with the race thing, you know what I mean, and she would be straight out, what you must do and how you must overcome, and learn full well what the attitudes of white people are. You see what I mean?

Smith

Then the other point was that she thought I was very talented, so that she scheduled my lesson, a half hour, at her lunchtime, and then she gave me half of her lunch hour, so that I had an hour lesson with her. So I was supposed to go into music when I finished high school, and I was going to go to Temple [University]. I started matriculating and everything else, you

know, and I got a scholarship to Lincoln [University], and I took the scholarship to Lincoln. There was a reason I did that. I don't know if you're familiar with Lincoln.

Stevenson

A little.

Smith

Yes. Lincoln's all male, and at that time all black, the first university, first school for blacks in the United States, okay. That's Thurgood Marshall and [James Mercer] Langston Hughes and that group. I didn't know that at the time. But when my principal came into the auditorium one Saturday evening, we were having a talent show, and I was playing for a couple of girls in the freshman class. They were freshmen, and I was playing for them for the talent show. I was sitting in the back of the auditorium, because I was above them. They were all freshmen. But he walked in and asked me, "Would you be interested in a scholarship?" I said, "Yeah." He said, "A scholarship to Lincoln, Pennsylvania." I said, "Well, where's that?" He said, "Well, why don't you come to my office on Monday morning?"

Smith

So I went home and looked in the encyclopedia about Lincoln, all male, all black, in Pennsylvania, okay? Jack Kelleher had mentioned that back in the eighth grade, which I had forgotten at the time. Then it dawned on me he had talked about this black school for black males in Pennsylvania, and he was looking at me, telling me that's something that I needed to look into. Well, here it comes, right? So I said, "I think I'll take that," because my brother James was coming out next year, and then my brother Junior was in the service, but he'll be coming out in another year, and my sister's about two years behind that. She'll be coming out, so we can't afford all of that, and for me to go down to Temple [University], then take all the money, so I said, "No, I'll take Lincoln."

Smith

So I matriculated at Lincoln, and I just let Temple go. I show up at Lincoln's campus the first day of school, with a trombone in one hand and a big satchel of [Johann Sebastian] Bach and [Ludwig van] Beethoven in the other hand, and everybody would ask me, "What you going to read?" and I'd say, "Music." And they'd just break out laughing. So this football team was practicing, and all the seniors were down there, they started calling me J.J. Johnson, first day. I didn't know who J.J. was. J.J. was the jazz trombonist that was very popular at the time, so they'd talk about me as J.J. "Here comes J.J. with his trombone," okay? And they want to know what's in the bag, and then they open the bag and it's nothing but Bach and Beethoven. They just broke out laughing, and the joke was this. There was no music department there. Okay? So they told me, "Did you read the catalog?" Well, what do I know about a catalog? "Yeah, I looked at the catalog." I didn't know what that meant, okay.

Smith

So my mother was with me, and so she said, "Well, now, here's what we're going to do. The bus for me doesn't leave to go back home until five o'clock. It's now about eleven o'clock in the morning. You go around and meet and do whatever it is you're going to do. Then about four o'clock you meet me, and then let me know. If you still want to go to Temple, you've still got time," because Temple hadn't yet started. "We'll matriculate you in Temple. If you want to stay, then you stay." And five o'clock I was so intrigued, I had never seen that many black people in all my life, okay. I'd never anything that was all black in all my life, and so I had mixed emotions. Does it work? Can it work? Do they know as much as white people?

Smith

Then I was meeting all these young black kids from the South and all over, and they were so filled with themselves, so strong, you know. Like they walked up and, "I'm going to be a doctor, I'm going to study this," and I laughed at them. "You ain't going to be no doctor. Whoever heard of that?" You know, "I'm going into law," "I'm going into dentistry." We had one black doctor that traveled back and forth maybe twice a year. That's the sum total of what I saw of a black doctor. And we had one black dentist who didn't have many patients, okay, and that's all the professionals I had seen. I had one cousin who was a social worker, but I didn't see her but once a year, and all these people were walking around talking about what they were going to be, and to me that just didn't make sense, okay. So that I was being brought into a new world, okay, quite different from what was in my mind.

Smith

I met, "Now, here's Dean so-and-so." He's a black man. "Here's another Dean so-and-so." He's a black man. "Here's a guy, he's an instructor." He's a black man, okay? Something's weird about this. Then I decided I'm going to stay, because I was intrigued. The language was different. I didn't know what they were talking about. They talked the slang; I didn't understand it. You know what I mean? I had a classmate from Bethlehem, he went down with me, Billy Lee. He was worse off than I was, because he was raised in a pure-white section of Bethlehem, okay. It was so funny, in fact, when the upperclassmen, sophomores, jumped and asked us--there were five of us together--"Are you a faggot?" And everybody said, "No," and got defensive. They all just asked him, "Are you a faggot?" He said, "I don't know." He didn't know what the word meant. I hunched him and I said, "You've got to say no. Say no." Okay? But that's how far off we were.

Smith

We sat down to pick teachers, and we looked at the names, and what we went through was first to pick every white teacher that was listed, and then we would pick black teachers because we had no choice.

Stevenson

Really. Why was that?

Smith

Because we didn't trust them. I'd never had a black--not even seen one, okay. That was the whole idea of black inferiority.

Stevenson

Right.

Smith

Okay? Now, one of the teachers in English was Roscoe Browne.

Stevenson

Roscoe Lee Browne?

Smith

Roscoe Lee Browne was a teacher in English. My roommate, from Wilmington, Delaware, who had come out of a black education all the way through, picked Roscoe. We picked another guy, a white guy, and he didn't have it, you know. He just didn't have it. And every time I'd come home, this guy would be telling me what went on in his English class, and I mean, they were really getting down with it, and it made me so angry with myself. I'd picked this guy, who was definitely inferior, over against Roscoe, okay? So that's when we had to begin to learn to be black.

Smith

The one thing that also came to me was that the campus was very dark, okay. It looked like the trees were dark, the buildings were dark, everything was dark. And it was maybe around Thanksgiving before I got a color eye, meaning I got used to seeing black people in the setting. Okay. I went home for Thanksgiving. That was the bus in Philadelphia, changed to the bus going to Bethlehem. I'm the only black person on the bus. Now, there's no trees, there's no leaves on the trees, and I'm looking at all these white people, and they look like they need blood transfusions. I mean, there's something wrong with this. And so it dawned on me, you've been down there now, and have gotten used to seeing black people, and now you come and now you're seeing white people, and they look funny, just like the black people look funny to you. So I understood then how when white people look at black people, they see them with a white eye, okay. And when black people look at white people, they see them with a black eye. So Lincoln was very dark for a long time. The leaves were just deep green, and the barks were deep brown, because we were looking now in the color consciousness, until we got used to it and adjusted to it. And that was a strong lesson.

Smith

The other lesson was when the choir sang, and before we were admitted to it as freshmen, there was a wedding in the chapel and they had the glee club come and sing, and all male. I had never heard a powerful sound in all my life like that glee club that opened up, okay? So we're in college now, and this is college, okay. The other thing was when you started taking the exams, these kids come out of Georgia, who didn't have the benefit of

laboratories, and who we had been reading in Life magazine and Time magazine about the abysmal education, these kids are leaders of the class. Okay? You had to step up on it, so that taught you a lesson. So the guys from New York and Philadelphia, they were being left behind by the kids from North Carolina and Georgia, so they had to say, hey, you'd better rev it up. So that's what then you had to get a respect for black education and black educators, and the whole shot, and a pride in that, okay.

Smith

So that's that transition then from being in a white world, coming through all-white high schools and all this kind of thing, moving into black education and a black consciousness, you see, and a pride associated with it. So that was my educational point, you know.

Stevenson

Okay. Let me backtrack just a little bit. Could you tell me a little bit about what role religion played in your upbringing?

Smith

Oh, very deep, very deep.

Stevenson

Elaborate on that.

Smith

Oh, my. How can you say it? It's from the very minute you open your eyes in the world, you were as aware of that as well as anything else, okay? And being southerners especially, and there were two churches that we had, two Baptist churches and one Methodist church, but the Methodist church we didn't go to. My mother belonged to the Second Baptist Church downtown. My father belonged to the St. Paul's Baptist Church down on the Heights, which was a couple of blocks from us. Now, most of the people that lived in that neighborhood, the black folks in the Heights, went to St. Paul's. A handful went to the Second Baptist. Over across the way, some families were Methodist. They were the strange people.

Smith

The people that went to the Second Baptist generally worked with the homes of the steel owners, see, so they would be the private-family chauffeurs and maids and this kind of thing. The people on the Heights mainly worked in the steel, or in whatever rough way they were. Most of the folks that came from Second Baptist were out of Virginia and North Carolina and Maryland, and had a step up in education. The others at St. Paul's in my area came out of North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, and the lower South. Now, the church service at Second Baptist was anthems and hymns, okay. Yes, they did shout, but it had to make sense, it had to build to it, you know what I mean?

Smith

But at St. Paul's, it started right off with a whoop, okay, very rhythmic, very mysterious, you see what I mean? Now, we weren't allowed to go to grown

people's church at first. We went to Sunday school, and then you kind of got old enough to go in on the adult church. The reason was because they were so much into--they took care of business. So they'd be shouting and screaming and carrying on, and a lot of times that scared young children, so gradually you had to get used to that. Now, one of the ways we got used to that, we used to play that, we used to imitate it. So we'd play church, and the girls would start screaming and hollering, and you start acting like you're preaching and the whole shot, but that's how you began to get used to this whole point.

Smith

Now, the important point, too, was the spiritual. Now, my father was from South Carolina, and that was very important to him. So he used to sit us in his lap, especially when my mother went to work. Like on Sunday she'd go to work, and he'd babysit us. He'd sit us in his lap and rock us, and sing all these spirituals, you know what I mean, and Come By Here [My Lord, Kum-Ba-Yah]; Oh Lord, Show Me the Way; It's Me, Oh Lord, and Standing in the Need of Prayer. This is preschool, okay? So we knew all those songs, being rocked, and what they meant. He'd explain all of that. My Lord is Writin' All the Time, that's good. Don't tell a lie, don't steal, God is writing down, and we'd be singing, "My Lord is writin' all the time," you know.

Smith

So like it was interesting, because as black kids, if you saw a black kid that was doing something wrong, we'd start saying, "My Lord is writin' all the time." If the white kids were doing something wrong, and the white kids saw them doing something wrong, they'd say, "Oh, avi [phonetic], avi, avi." So there were two different cultures in terms of how they'd look at one thing and the other. "Oh, you did the wrong thing. Oh, you're going to get it, you're going to get it." Whereas, "God's going to write and get you," in the black culture, because he's writin all the time. So we were very much steeped in that.

Smith

Now, in the church is where you also learn your age group. Seemed like the group that was in your Sunday school class was the group that you were following through the rest of your life, okay. So that you started off in the little baby class, and then there were a little older kids around you, and then they moved on and you moved on, and moved on until you finally ended up in the choir, so that by the time you were in fourth and fifth grade, then you had a little choir, okay. Then you could sing maybe once on occasion.

Smith

If I went down to my mother's church at Second Baptist, and we didn't go that often, but whenever we went down there, then we were brought into a whole different concept. I never saw a baptism until I was at Second Baptist. I didn't understand that. I was about four or five years old, five years old, and the church was dark compared to St. Paul's, okay, because it was a

bigger church, it had a balcony, etc., and they were singing these hymns which weren't what they sang in St. Paul's. All of a sudden everybody--they moved everything away from the pulpit, and all of a sudden this girl with head wrapped in white, copper-tone skin in a white robe, rose up out of the floor dripping wet, and I was shocked. She was beautiful. And everybody stood up and started singing, and they started singing Hope of Bertha [Hope of the Earth], and Precious Name, Oh How Sweet Are You. Are you familiar with that hymn?

Stevenson

Yes.

Smith

That's the hymn they were singing. I hooked the hymn up to the lady. The words said, "Hope of Earth." I said, "Hope of Bertha," and I said, "That's Bertha." I fell in love with Bertha, because I had never seen that, and they were explaining to me about it's a baptism. I don't know when she went in the water. All I knew is she came out the water, okay. And so we had the hymn at home, and I used to play that record over and over and over, and they would tell, "Oh, he's going to become a preacher." "No, you don't understand. I'm [unclear] about Bertha." And it was until I got older, it wasn't Bertha, it's Hope of Earth, you know.

Stevenson

Okay. When would you say as a child you first became aware of the concept of race?

Smith

That would have been, I would say, at four years of age, five years of age, and that came from the older black kids that were going to beat up this little Mexican boy, and because he was my age I was supposed to fight him. I didn't know why, and the only explanation they had was because he was Mexican. Do you follow? Now, we started fighting, and his mother broke it up, and she came and spoke to my mother, and suddenly I was in trouble, and I didn't know why, because the kids had said, "Fight because he's Mexican." And the parents had said, "No." And it was the wrong thing to do, okay? So that was the first introduction, I would say.

Smith

Now, the kids used to fight on the Heights a lot, coming along, and it would be ethnic fighting. It didn't start off as that. They had somebody they didn't like, like she's the teacher's pet, so they beat her up, but she happened to be Russian. You know what I'm saying? Or this one, they happened to be Italian, but it's for some other reason. But it would always be one thing against another, you know.

Smith

Now, the word nigger didn't come in until I guess I would have been about third or fourth grade, and it was interesting because in the third grade my brother had come home from school and was shocked about the concept of

slavery, because he had just learned in school--Miss Sturk [phonetic] had talked about slavery, and that the African American, the black folks had been in slavery, which he couldn't accept that, because he was the only black in the class. That made him different, right? So he sat down and my mother went over that with him, okay. So I picked that up.

Smith

The next year I was in fourth grade. A kid came to Miss Sturk, same teacher, and reported another kid who called some [unclear] a nigger on the playground, okay. And I didn't connect that with black. But Miss Sturk took issue with it, okay, and then she berated the class and berated that boy, and the whole point about punishment if they ever used that term. That's when you begin to connect, you see what I mean? Now then, after that, then you were more aware of the word nigger, because a lot of times a kid would throw it at you. You always had to fight, whenever that word came up, okay? But as we got older, we also knew you just can't fight every time you hear it.

Smith

One of our friends who lived next door to us, Chickie [phonetic], a Ukranian boy, whenever we'd jump in a fight because somebody called us nigger, he was right in the middle of the fight with us, right. Sometimes he'd throw the first punch, and so we had to tell him, "Chickie, we don't fight every time we hear the word." The other technique we learned was, every time somebody called us a nigger, we called them that back. Yes, yes. So if you call me a nigger, I call you a nigger. They'd say, "I'm not a nigger." I'd say, "I'm not a nigger." "You're a nigger." "You're a nigger." And that would go on until the got tired, and they'd get very angry, because first of all, they'd get angry because we didn't get angry. Then they'd get angry because they had to defend the fact that they're not a nigger. So that's the way we did the armchair fight on that one, you know, and let that go, you know.

Stevenson

Okay. What were your parents' political views?

Smith

My mother was a Republican, and my father was a Democrat, and they never talked about what that meant, and they didn't tell you how they voted. We lived in a Democratic neighborhood, so we presumed everybody voted Democratic. That was what grown people did. We would get involved in political campaigns, not knowing what they were about. In other words, like so-and-so was going to be elected, and he needed people to march, so they'd get a lot of kids together, we'd march down the street and get buttons and voting cards they used to have in those days, but it didn't mean nothing, really.

Smith

Roosevelt was the president, and there just couldn't be another president. So that whenever an election came, it had to be Roosevelt. Who's the mayor

didn't even matter, so we weren't into that. The people running for city council, whatever that was, that didn't matter to us either, so we weren't that political, you know.

Stevenson

Okay. So you're at Lincoln University now. At what point did you decide to pursue a medical career? And were there some roots in that decision before you got to Lincoln?

Smith

There might have been. Let's see. I was in the hospital in 1943. I was eleven years old. I had gotten hit by an oil tanker, and had a broken leg. I stayed in the hospital from August twenty-sixth until about November fourteenth, and that was my first introduction to nurses and doctors, and when I came out of the hospital, I was going to be a doctor, for a minute. For a minute, okay, and that passed. When I was in high school my senior year, and I was getting ready for college, my father wasn't too swift about me going into music, okay. And so he said to me, "You should go and be a doctor." And I laughed at him, and my thing was, he doesn't understand, okay. You know, three years of education, three months per year, and he doesn't know about black doctors. I mean, that doesn't make sense.

Smith

I had a cousin who was a social worker, master's from University of Pennsylvania. She came to visit me, and that was Maybelle Cotten. She said, "You should go into medicine." And I said, "No. That doesn't even make sense." She says, "Well, you shouldn't go into music, because," she said, "your temperament is not going to get you too far with music. You need to be your own boss. You need to be, you know, on your own." But she said, "You're doing well, and I feel you should go into medicine." That's the second one that said that. My father had said that, you know what I mean? And he also had said, "I can't see you working for anybody," okay.

Smith

Now, when I went to Lincoln, and I'm meeting all these guys who are going into medicine and dentistry, they were taking two major courses that would kind of thread you out. That was general chemistry and general biology. You had to take a science, so every school you had to take one of those. Now, my roommate went chemistry. I went biology. He was leading chemistry from the top of the class. I was very high in the class with biology. So as the year moved on, the premed majors were saying to me, "You should be the one majoring in medicine. You're doing so well." Okay?

Smith

Well, what I had decided then during that year, because when I found out there was no music there, I decided to go into teaching, and so what I was going to do then was maybe major in romance languages or whatever, you know. But I was going to teach. But I went home and my father shot that down. He said, "I can't see you teaching." He says, "You'd make a good

teacher, but I can't see you working in no school district. Hot tempered as you are, you wouldn't last but six months. You still ought to go into medicine." So at the end of that year, I switched into premed.

Stevenson

Okay. And what year was that?

Smith

At the end of my freshman year. But with my roommate and observation, and my father and what they had been saying, you know, what it was I had to open up the consciousness, see, because in my mind there was no such thing as a black doctor. Seeing Dr. Goodman was just, he was sort of a freak, but it wasn't a real thing, you see what I mean, so Lincoln opened that consciousness. I think a lot of the inner-city kids don't have a consciousness of what they could do, and they don't have the image of what they could be, so they have to have images of what it is, as well as the consciousness of it, you know.

Stevenson

Okay. So you graduated from Lincoln with what degree?

Smith

A.B.

Stevenson

Okay, A.B. in?

Smith

In biology.

Stevenson

All right. And then--

Smith

Cum laude.

Stevenson

Okay. And then could you tell me about where you matriculated further, and what degree then?

Smith

Yes. I applied to Howard [University] and to Meharry [Medical College], okay, and none others. Now, the reason I wouldn't even think about applying to any of the white schools was based on the experience I had in high school and junior-high school. If I'm going to go and study medicine, I don't intend to major in white people. I want to study medicine. I don't want to be fighting this fight, and fighting that fight, and I know I had grades robbed, and they would twist things. Now, if I'm in medical school, I would kill somebody behind that. I mean, I've got money invested and you're going to try to mess with me? No, that ain't going to work. So I said, "No, I ain't going that route." Okay?

Smith

So I applied to Howard and I applied to Meharry. I got accepted to Meharry, and then I got accepted to Howard. I had to go down for an interview at

Howard, and it was very interesting, too. In the interview they asked you all kinds of questions, and me and one of the interviewers got into a hot argument, and everybody afterwards told me, "Oh, why were you arguing with him? You shouldn't argue with him. He can cut your chances of getting in." And my point was, well, I couldn't let him say what he said and not challenge it, because it just was wrong in my mind.

Stevenson

And what was that?

Smith

I forget what it was about, but it was just wrong in my mind, so that it ain't got nothing to do with getting into medical school, if I never get in, you know. Another individual said, "I see where you majored in biology, and we required this number of hours of mathematics, and you didn't take them. So how do you expect to get through here?" I said, "Well, first of all, I was going to only be in undergrad school for four years. If I get into medicine, I'll be in science the rest of my life. I will never have a chance to take philosophy. I'll never have a chance to take music. I took those courses, all right, and now I can concentrate on science when I get into it." "Well, how do you expect to pass?" So I think I said, "Do you use textbooks here?" He said, "Yes." I said, "That's how I expect to pass."

Stevenson

Interesting.

Smith

Okay? Now, when I went home, everybody said, "Man, you blew your chances." I said, "Well, if I did, that's just too bad, but I didn't, okay?" Now, you had to send fifty dollars in to hold your chair, okay. Well, I was a senior at Lincoln. My youngest brother was a junior at Lincoln, and my oldest brother had come back from the service and was a freshman, I think. My sister was just graduating from high school. She was going on to Freedman's School of Nursing. Now, that meant that money was tight. I didn't have fifty dollars. So I had to call home, and then my parents didn't have the money right then and there, so my brother Isaiah, who was a veteran, had gotten a check to pay Lincoln for his tuition, right. So he gave me the fifty dollars off his tuition, and said, "Well, I can always owe them, because I'm already here. You get the chair." And my brother's the one that secured my chair for me at Howard, you know.

Smith

Then I graduated from Lincoln, and I can remember distinctly, we had no money, okay. We had come back from Lincoln from the graduation, and we were sitting down in the family talking, "What are we going to do for money, because you're supposed to go to medical school in September. Your sister's going down to Washington to Freedman's School, and two boys at Lincoln." And my father was just sitting there holding his head in his hands. And I remember my mama saying one thing. She said, "Well, there's no need of us

talking about it now, because you can't make money talking." She said that each one of us go out and work for the summer, and then come back in September and see where we are. Lucky enough, the Bethlehem Steel was hiring, okay. So we were able to get into the steel company for the summer, and I had more money that year than I ever had after that, okay. So when we came back in September, everybody was secure, and we went on to school.

Smith

So me and my sister were in D.C., she at Freedman's Hospital, I at Howard, and my two brothers were at Lincoln at the same time, okay. I can remember one time, what my sister used to do, they used to give a stipend to the nursing students. She would give me the stipend to eat, okay. My mother would then send money down for the room, the dormitory, on a monthly basis, and then send me money to eat with on a weekly basis. Then when the steel went on strike and everything in Bethlehem shut down because of a strike, they didn't have anything to send. And my sister had given me what she could, and I remember I had run out of powdered meat [phonetic] and all that. And I remember this one day I'm sitting there, I don't know what I'm going to eat today, for the day or even for tomorrow, because I'm just stone broke. And I couldn't borrow from anybody, because all the students were just as poor.

Smith

So the door of the anatomy--we were in the anatomy lab, and the door opened, and a couple of guys walked in from Lincoln. And I said, "Well, what are you guys doing down here?" They said, "Oh, we're having a soccer game this afternoon with Howard. Okay, Lincoln's playing Howard, and your brothers are here." I said, "What?" "Yeah, they're on the team." So the next thing I know, my two brothers walk in the lab, and I'm sitting there and I'm so glad to see them, you know. And so I was saying to him, you know, you'd always confide in my older brother. He was the kind like you'd tell everything to him, and then he'd get it together. And I was telling him, "Junior, I ain't got no money. I'm stone cold broke, don't even have enough money for food." And he reached in his wallet and pulled out five dollars. He said, "Mom gave me this in September, and told me to hold onto it in case anybody needed it, and then you could see that they got it." Okay? So here's the five dollars, okay. And I said, "Wow, man, that was a miracle." That was really a miracle.

Stevenson

Yes.

Smith

Now, another thing when I was in Howard, I got a job playing an organ at the First Baptist Church in Warrington, Virginia, and that was an interesting thing. It was my sophomore year. I had a cousin that had come to Howard from Bethlehem. She was a junior student. She was going to a church right

behind Carver Hall, which is where I was staying. So she and her roommate were working with the young people in that church, and they were preparing a Christmas program, and they needed an organist, okay. Now, my cousin liked to do music, so she called me and asked me if I would help her get this thing together, which I said, "No. You know, I'm busy, and that's not what I'm into." So she kept harrassing me and harrassing me, and I'm like, okay. I went out and rehearsed them one time, and then I said, "I'll play for the service." So I played for that Christmas service, okay, and then I went back to Bethlehem.

Smith

Now, when we were sitting down talking, my mother was saying, "It'd be nice if you could get just a little something to add some money to the pot here, you know. I know it's rough in medical school, but if you could do something." Well, when I went back to Washington, my cousin was having another meeting, and the kids wanted to give me a little certificate for playing for them. So she asked me if I would come to the church that Saturday afternoon, so I said, "Okay, I'll come out." So I went to the church and I'm sitting there with the kids, and all of a sudden the minister happened to walk by. He said, "Oh, there you are. I've been looking for you." He says, "There's a church in Warrington, Virginia, that needs an organist, and I remember how well you played for me on such-and-such before Christmas. And I told Reverend Bass [phonetic], I said, I know somebody." And I said, "Yeah, I'd be glad to do that." So he says, "Well, meet Rev. Bass at 13th and I Street tomorrow morning," Sunday morning, right?

Smith

Sunday morning it starts snowing. I didn't have a hat, didn't have no rubbers, just had an overcoat, right? And they don't know me, and I don't know them. Now, I can't stand in the store, because they'll miss me, so the only thing I could do was stand out here in the snow. So I'm standing out there in the snow, and all of a sudden I hear this horn tooting after a while, and I ran to--they rolled down the--"Mr. Smith!" And so I ran to the car. And so then I said, "Well, how did you know it was me?" after I got in. Then his wife said, "Well, we figured that there'd be no other fool standing out in the snow this time of the morning, unless there was a reason," okay. So I got that job with Warrington, and that made all the difference in the world. And I played the organ for them right up to the time I graduated.

Stevenson

Okay. Tell me about the origins, your interest in music, and also your brothers' as well.

Smith

And sister, yes.

Stevenson

What was the origin of all of your interest in music, and your proficiency in playing?

Smith

Family. It was the family. My cousins, you know, and from what I could understand, like with my mother, they did a lot of singing when they were kids, before their family broke up because the parents had died. The one uncle played an accordian, and he would accompany them when they sang, you know. She played the piano, she could read music. Her sister played the piano by ear, okay, so the music was in the family, and if you went around to any of the cousins, they were always singing, and then some of the older cousins, they had started taking piano lessons. My mother, in fact, started them on the piano. Then she got a piano, and with the idea of starting us on the piano, which we wanted to do.

Smith

My father used to love to sing. Like I told you, he'd sit us on his lap and sing to us, you know, all the time. So music was just as much as a loaf of bread; music was always around you. The church that we went to was a musical church. They just sang all the time, and the neighbors sang all the time. And the other thing, too, it wasn't just blacks. The whites were just as musical, you see, so everywhere you went it was just music. People sang. People walked down the street singing. You don't hear it now, like it used to be.

Stevenson

No.

Smith

You see? The glee club in the school, in elementary school they taught you music, how to read music from first grade, see, so music was just a part of you.

Stevenson

Part of your lifestyle.

Smith

That's right.

Stevenson

All right. So could you tell me about the beginning of your medical education? You know, you've done your undergrad; where you did your medical education and so forth.

Smith

My medical education was funny. I was scared of dead people, very frightened of dead people.

Stevenson

Any particular reason why?

Smith

Yes, I know. I have a reason. It started off when I was a child. In the room where I slept there was a lamp on the alley beyond our yard, and it cast a shadow across the wall. A man used to come out of that shadow at night

and tickle me, and play with me. I kept telling people about this man, and they kept telling me about nightmares and all that kind of stuff, and I'd be about three years old or four years old. I'd wake up in the morning and my armpits would be sore, okay. One night he comes and he brings pigeons, and the pigeons are flying all over the room, and that freaked me out. My mother came in the room, my father came in the room, my brother woke up, and everybody's telling me about my nightmare, and I'm looking at pigeons. I'm wide awake looking at pigeons, and one of them landed on my father's shoulder. I hollered to him to watch out for the pigeon, and he just kept talking about my nightmare, and it dawned on me they don't see them, okay. Somehow I connected that with another space, another place, okay, and I just knew that there's where the dead people are, okay, and they can come. So I didn't want that. So I didn't like night to come, okay, and if somebody died that freaked me out, because I didn't want to see them.

Smith

I would walk down the middle of the street rather than walk on the side of the pavement, because it was too dark on the pavement, okay? I would never go in a room where there was no light, especially if somebody had died. My biggest point was that I'm going to see them, okay, and I had that feeling, and I still do have that--

Stevenson

I was going to say, has that continued?

Smith

--that you can reach over there and touch--yes. Okay? Now, it's interesting because it was like you're pushing that away, push it away, push it away. You don't want to see that. When I went to Howard, everybody was placing bets in Bethlehem that I'd be back in two weeks, because of the cadaver, right? When they brought in the cadaver in the lab, they started in the back of the lab. I went to the back of the lab when I first went there, figuring that they'd put them in from the front and going to the back, and I'd get used to it. The very first day I went to the back of the lab, there were no cadavers, and when I was ready to leave the lab they had a man dissected in a jar, right from the torso up in the jar, and legs and arms in another jar, and this cat's looking at you through water. So I had to figure out how am I going to get out of this lab without passing a dead man? So I had to walk like so, you know.

Smith

But it took about thirty days before the final cadavers came in, and I was table hopping. So this day Dr. Cobb said, "All the cadavers are in, and I expect everybody to get to work." My point was, he's talking to me. I don't know what's going to happen, and I figured that lightning's going to flash or whatever. None of the girls have fainted or passed out or whatever, so I made up my mind. Now, I had heard that--my mother had told me, "They're taking bets on you," okay, and I said, "Now, I ain't going to even worry

about that. But if I leave here, I don't get my money back." Okay? I said, no, that ain't going to happen. That ain't even going to happen. So I just got up from there, walked down into the lab, and laid over the dead man.

Stevenson

Really.

Smith

Just laid over him.

Stevenson

So was that to sensitize you?

Smith

My point was, whatever is going to be is going to be. So hit me, kill me, shoot me, whatever, and nothing happened. And I got very angry, because I'd been scared of dead people all my life for no reason, okay.

Stevenson

Did that cure you of that?

Smith

Not really, because yes, I got over that. I was able to work on the cadaver. In fact, I got very brazen with it. I remember I was behind in my dissection, and one night I decided to go in the lab, and I was going to be working under the armpit and that kind of thing. So I went into the lab and I'm cutting the cadaver, and was working, you know, they have them on a cross. When I'm sitting in the cross, working like so, and then I decided I was going to do some more down in this area, but I propped his arm up with a stick. And I'm sitting there now like so, and I'm working down here, and I made a move and I knocked the stick out, and this man's arm came right down over my shoulder. And I walked myself through that. I said, now, you know you knocked the stick out, and you know it's the arm, but in the meantime I'm packing up. And I left that lab with the lights on, with the cadaver uncovered, okay, because hey, I ain't quite over it, you know?

Stevenson

Oh yes.

Smith

I had brought the heart home from the cadaver I was working with, and I wanted to do some dissection not in the lab but at home, so I had snuck the heart at home in my room. I had worked on it in the room, and I went to bed. And I dreamed about that man, and dreamed about that man. I just picked that heart up and put it outside the door, okay? Now, here's the interesting thing. When I went home for Christmas, my mother now wanted to know how things worked at Howard, and she said, "Let me tell you what your cadaver looks like," and she described the cadaver right off--a light-skinned African American with no teeth, okay. And I said, "Well, how'd you know that?" She said, "I dream about him."

Stevenson

Wow.

Smith

Yes, she did. "I was standing on your campus, and he walked up to me and he asked, 'How's your boy doing?'" And she said, "I said, 'He's doing fine.'" He said, "Tell him I asked about him." Okay," she says. "Well, who should I say is asking?" He says, "Just tell him the old man, the old man." Okay? So then she said, "Now, this is what he looked like, and I'm telling you, he asked about you." Okay?

Stevenson

That's very interesting, interesting. Okay. All right. Why don't you continue telling me more about the progression of your medical education.

Smith

It was good, it was very good. We made a nice group of guys and girls. Howard was very, very different from Lincoln. Lincoln was out in the country and it was all male and raucous, you know what I mean? But Howard was more classy in that respect, so that you had to get used to the coed and urban. I'd never been in a city that big, you know. Now, one thing that was different, it was a southern school, okay, and I say that meaning that it was, "Yes, sir, no, sir," and all that kind of thing. Coming from Lincoln, that was a no-no, okay. So we looked at everybody as being kowtow-ish.

Smith

Now, one of the things that--they were very strict, and they kind of ruled with so-called fear. Respect didn't work. I didn't like that at all, and sometimes you'd come to words with that. I remember the night I was in the anatomy lab, i didn't get a haircut, because I didn't have money. So I decided I would not get my hair cut as routine, okay. Now, at Howard everybody is dressing well and have got a big front. Well, I'm not going that route. So I remember sitting in the lab and one of the instructors, Dr. Lloyd [phonetic] said to me, "You need to get your hair cut. At Howard, we're very concerned about our appearance, and if you're going to stay at Howard you're going to have to do better," okay, etc., etc.

Smith

So I looked at her and I said, "I'm not about to get my hair cut." I said, "Now, if you've got a problem with hair, and you've got a hair jones, I'll get it cut as often as you can pay for it." She said, "I'm not about to pay for your haircuts." And I said, "And I'm not about to get it cut." And she said to me, "Well, you're not going to last long here at Howard." And then I looked at her and I said, "Well, now, just exactly what year is this class supposed to graduate?" And she said, "1957." "Well, I can guarantee you one thing. If Ernest Smith ain't graduating in 1957, ain't nobody going to graduate." And she said, "You're crazy." I said, "There's two of us that know that." So that was the first set in, you know.

Stevenson

Okay. Could you talk a little bit about, you know, you mentioned it about class differences. This is an all-black school; class differences. Could you also talk about colorism on the campus?

Smith

On the campus. Well, see, at our level we were in grad school. That didn't come through, but you could observe it on the campus.

Stevenson

Yes. Could you talk more about that?

Smith

Yes. You could observe it. The queen, and most times when you looked at the more popular students, undergrads even, they happened to be light-skinned and of color of hair and that kind of thing. If you looked at the dark-skinned kids, they were quiet a lot of them, non-expecting, okay, and I wouldn't say a chip, because I think a lot of them were beyond that, but at least very aware, very aware, you know. Now, I didn't go for a frat or anything, and that would have happened at Lincoln, and in an all-male society you didn't have that color thing as you would find when you bring the coeds. But I did notice that--I'd heard that you could look at the Deltas and the AKEs, and they had what they called a paper-bag test. Are you familiar with that?

Stevenson

Right. I am very much so.

Smith

Yes. And then the others were just kind of fly by night, and the Zetas and everybody else, they just didn't count in that respect, as far as they were concerned, because they were more democratic in who they took in, you know.

Stevenson

I see.

Smith

As far as the teachers were concerned, in the medical school I don't think that race made a problem. We had seventy people in the class. Almost ten were women, and close to ten were white, okay. Now, the whites were kind of squeamish at first, until they got used to being amongst us, you know. The teachers did not show any prejudice one way or the other, not favor towards them or against them, okay, so that everybody was in the same boat, and it was a fear boat. You know what I mean?

Stevenson

Right.

Smith

But no, so I wasn't aware of that in the medical school, but as I said, we were in the grad school, so that was quite a bit different, you know.

Stevenson

All right. Could you talk a little bit more about completing your medical education there, and also about maybe begin to talk about, I guess, your residencies?

Smith

The one thing, when we were in Howard going through medical school, we would go to D.C. [District of Columbia] General Hospital, and that's where we did pediatrics. At that time, Howard was breaking into D.C. General, because it was very racist at that time. I could remember that when we would go for pediatrics in our senior year particularly, you'd go to pediatrics, and we'd share the lab with the Georgetown students and the George Washington students. The cases that were being admitted, one would go to Howard, one would go to Georgetown, one would go to George Washington, around the board. Now, you're on a pediatric ward, so there's no separation of patients. I can't tell you what any one of those Georgetown or George Washington students looked like, okay. We shared the same lab, and the only time we even looked eye to eye was when we were having a confrontation, and our confrontation as Howard students was that they were sloppy, and they would spill stain, and they'd leave everything dirty papers on it, and we'd clean up. And it dawned on us, they act like we're the maids here.

Stevenson

Right.

Smith

Okay, so we've got to get this straightened out. So then we'd have a confrontation. Now, that's eye to eye. They weren't looking at us, and we weren't looking at them, see, and that was the thing about racism, how it can be side by side, the racism be side by side, and there's absolutely--you can't even smell the odor of it. You see what I mean? And so that was something that, you know, we noticed at D.C. [District of Columbia] General [Hospital], and then every now and then one white kid would try to test you, come up to ask you questions, see if you know anything, okay. And our point was, get lost, okay. So if you ask me a question, I'm going to give you any wrong answer I can think of. That will prove your point, so get lost, because we have nothing in common, you see.

Smith

Most people don't understand what that Civil Rights Movement did in terms of breaking down barriers, because we were sharing buses and sharing streets, sharing, but not communicating.

Stevenson

In D.C., or?

Smith

All over the United States. You could sit next to a white person in the North, but you didn't speak.

Stevenson

Right.

Smith

If you got up and you say, well, what did they look like, you couldn't say, you see what I mean? So there was no human interaction.

Stevenson

It was like a coexistence.

Smith

Coexistence, with somebody with an edge, because they had the say-so, you didn't. You see what I mean?

Stevenson

Okay. Now, the D.C. area, was it as largely black as it is today?

Smith

No, not like today. There's large areas of D.C. that were absolutely white. You're talking about 16th Street and those areas, they were white. You had Northwest Washington and Southeast [Washington]. Georgetown had become white. It had been black, but it had become white, you know.

Stevenson

Interesting. Georgetown area was--

Smith

Yes, Georgetown at one time was black.

Stevenson

Historically?

Smith

Yes. In fact, the word is out, but the folks say and I don't know how true it is, that George Washington would send all his bastard children over there.

Stevenson

Okay, so hence the name George?

Smith

Yes. They say that's why they call it George's town, Georgetown, all his kids. So it was a black town. The church was Catholic. The bishop or whoever it was with the Georgetown church there was a black man, and the one who's supposed to have founded Georgetown was a black man, okay. And then Georgetown became white, you see.

Stevenson

Interesting.

Smith

Just like what's going on right now all around Howard University is becoming white. Okay, U Street, Broad Avenue and that area? Yes.

Stevenson

Really? Interesting.

Smith

Yes, that's changing.

Stevenson

Interesting. That's been very recent.

Smith

That's very recent, and the important point, see. Howard and Meharry were the two worst medical schools in the United States; that's what everybody would say. You see what I mean? Those were the only two black medical schools in the United States, so what does that mean, you know? Now, the interesting thing is, when they integrated and things began to change, then suddenly now Howard students could come amongst white students, and Meharry students could come amongst white students, and suddenly you're getting smarter, okay. So the more that they then allowed blacks to interact with them, the smarter you got. But when you were off by yourself, you're the dumbest thing in town.

Smith

In fact, when we started [Charles R.] Drew [Medical University], and we had a mixed faculty, the majority were Howard-Meharry grads, the white guys in there would say, "Well, we're not going to make this another Howard-Meharry as we go through." That's an insult, okay? Now, the blacks would sit there and wouldn't say a word. This is the difference between North and South. So I made mention to the fact, "I would like us to be clear, Drew to be the worst medical school in the United States, and I would like to say that no one has that prerogative but us," meaning that if Meharry is the worst, they no longer are that. "We will declare it, we will announce it, and then we'll forget it," okay, and be on with building this university." "Oh, he's crazy, he's crazy." "No. See, this is the kind of thing we met with Georgetown and G.W. You're stupid, okay. You don't do this and you don't do that." My point, "Why you play into that?"

Smith

When we graduated from Howard, the last two weeks going from one rotation to another was a pep talk on going into these internships in white hospitals, and how they're going to treat you, and how you've got to be better than, and all those kind of things. And you kind of resented that, but it was true, okay. When you went to take the boards, don't take any books with you, okay, and don't be looking around when you're sitting there taking the test, because they're going to swear you're cheating or whatever it is, okay. We took the Maryland boards, okay. We go to Maryland, Baltimore at that time. You take the test all that morning. Now it's time to go eat, and there's no place to go eat. So we walk around. They say, "You can go down to the railroad station," wherever that is, "and get served." But we walk around Baltimore looking for a place to eat, and we can't find a place, so we finally pass a delicatessen, and one of the Jewish guys in the class takes our orders and goes inside and orders the sandwiches for us, and we sit out on the curb in Baltimore eating, right?

Smith

We're sitting around taking an exam on a big round table like this, and you're writing in a blue book. You happen to look up, and you happen to be

looking up and across the road is one of your classmates. Immediately you avert your eyes, okay, so that when you're sitting there writing, if you want to do so you just put your head down, but don't--if I look at him, they're going to swear I'm cheating. But in the meantime the proctors, with all these guys from University of Maryland and Johns Hopkins, they could be reading, looking up their book as they read, and say [taps], "No, you know I taught you better than that." That's not quite true. And we're afraid to look at each other, and this kind of cheating is going on, okay?

Smith

See, in other words, in the white world they do what they do, okay. You can see it, but you didn't see it, okay. And in the black world, you'd best not try to do what I do, you see. And that's what we were seeing acted out at King-Drew, and now these were the so-called missionaries that were coming to help rebuild, with an attitude, you see what I mean? Now, that just wasn't going to fly.

Smith

I'm trying to think of--the other thing at Howard, I had a teacher, OB/GYN [Obstetrics/Gynecology], and she was very vindictive. She was angry with Dr. Ross, Julian Waldo Ross, you know. You see that building down there that's named after him.

Stevenson

Yes. Yes.

Smith

Right. He was a real scholar as far as I was concerned, and he was a Lincoln man, so I had a lot of respect for him. She wanted his job as chairman of the department, so every time she had a chance she'd just knock him down, you know. And one day I'd had enough of that, and I just read the riot act to her, okay. Now, we're not supposed to do that, right? So we go into the oral exam, and she's going to get me. So she asked me a question, "What is Carcinoma in situ? Now, what is the first stage of cancer, or zero stage?" or whatever, and I started giving her the pathological description, and she tells me I'm wrong, and I don't think I am. So then she goes to the next person, and so she starts to ask her a question. I said, "No, no. Ask her the question you asked me." And she asked this lady, and she started saying the same thing I said. Wrong. I said, "Then go to the next one." I made her go through everybody, right? And they finally concede, "Well, we thought they were right." "Well, they're wrong. So we're going to the next question." I said, "No, no, no," because I'm getting a little upset here. I said, "No, no, no. What's the answer?" So she gives the word carcinoma in situ, which is exactly what I defined. And I lost it. I flipped. I laid into her as an ignorant woman, and, "I gave you the descriptor, and you give me the Latin term, and you don't know the difference between the two? Okay, and then you're going to sit here and say I'm wrong and then condemn the whole row? Oh, boy."

Smith

So then the next interviewer tried to stop us. "No, let's get on, let's get on." So he says, "Let's start over." So he throws a question at me. I said, "No, no, no. No more questions, not today." So I didn't take my oral, okay. So after it's over, "Kid, you didn't take the oral. You're going to flunk." Okay? Try it. That was my point. No, there ain't going to be no flunking me. I'm not going through that, okay? When it came down to graduation, I had organized the choir in the medical school. We had a medical-school chorus. It was pretty good, you know? And so I had been to a concert down at my church in Warrington, Virginia, and this was my senior year, and we were getting ready to graduate and all this, and I wanted this for imagery. It's forty-five miles out of Washington, D.C., and it's a segregated city. The kids were brilliant kids in Warrington, and I was the medical student, and they would look up to me as a medical student and not understand quite what that was, okay, and then I wanted to bring the choir down. I wanted to bring all the medical students who were singing in the choir, "Because some of you guys need to think about going into medicine, and especially you're only forty-some miles from Howard, you know?"

Smith

So I'm the director of the choir, and all of a sudden I sit down at the organ and I'm playing, and all of a sudden I look in the mirror on the organ, and in the back in the church who do I see sitting but the dean of the medical school. What's he doing here? Okay? So I had to acknowledge him, you know, and so I told the mistress of ceremonies that the dean of the medical school is here, and maybe you might want to have him have something to say. Well, they were very impressed, okay. And so he stood up and what he said was, "Mr. Smith didn't know I was coming. I had to surprise him, but I just had to find out where it was he went when he said he was on the board in the afternoon in his blue suit." And [unclear] in the office said he was down here or whatever it was, that I'd be cutting, going to play a funeral, okay, and I didn't know he knew that, or I didn't know that they knew that. They let me do it, okay. In other words, when my class would be calling the roll they'd say, "Where is Smith?" And then one would say, "Oh, I saw him down on ward thirteen. Let me go get him." And they'd go stand out behind the door for a minute, say, "Oh, I couldn't find him. He's over there," you know, because that's the game we played. Well, they knew, and they never said a word.

Smith

And so here we were now getting ready to graduate, and the dean stands up there in a Warrington, Virginia church and says, "I just had to come to see the place where he came when he said he was on ward thirteen and he was not." But I'd get five dollars extra for playing a funeral, you see.

Stevenson

All right. So could you tell me about some of the challenges as you're doing your residencies? You did more than one?

Smith

Yes. The internship was beautiful. I did that at Fresno County, okay. That was a surprising thing. I'll give you that story.

Stevenson

Yes.

Smith

When we left Washington, and I had a classmate, Dr. Sarah Huell [phonetic], she was going to do her internship in Sacramento, at Sacramento General [Hospital]. I was on my way to Fresno. I had written the head of the hospital in Fresno County that I was coming, and I had a steamer trunk. I told him the time my train would get in, and I'd need somebody to meet the train so they could carry the trunk from the station to the hospital. So we traveled across the country by train. We both stopped in Sacramento, so I've got the day to spend with her as she gets acclimated to Sacramento General, right? There's one black resident now whom we knew, because they came out of Howard, who was an intern for one year, and was now doing his first year. He's the only black physician in Sacramento.

Smith

So Sarah is a little nervous. We all are nervous, because we're going now to interns from being a medical student. We practiced doing knots all the way across the country, you know, surgical knots. But anyhow, we were sitting down eating, and my train was going to leave in about an hour or so, and I was going to have to run to the train station. So we're sitting here eating, she and I, and behind us are a whole row of residents and interns gathering, and you can hear the conversation. "What are they doing here?" "Well, it doesn't matter to me. I'll work with them." "I don't want to work with them." "They have no right to be here," okay? And she just broke down and cried, okay. And I said, "Sarah, it's too bad but," I said, "you're going to have to fight. That's all you're going to have to do, right?"

Smith

I get on the train, I go down to Fresno. I get there around two o'clock in the morning. The assistant administrator of the hospital meets the train, okay, Dr. [unclear] Gonzales, and he says, "I came to pick you up and to pick up your steamer. I got my orders to come and pick you up, and pick up the steamer." I said, "Well, you didn't have to come." I said, "There was no need for you to come." He said, "Well, the way we got the letter, it seemed like we were ordered to come. So we had to come to see his highness." And my point was, "Oh, cool."

Stevenson

Sure.

Smith

But it's certainly a different reception from what Sarah had gotten.

Stevenson

Right.

Smith

I went to the interns' quarters, and it was early in the morning, and a knock comes on the door, and the chief resident in pediatrics happened to see the light on in the room, and came to welcome me to Fresno County Hospital, okay. The next day I get up and I meet new interns who are coming in from Iowa, and everybody's glad to meet me, a completely different experience from what Dr. Sarah Huell had, you see. And that was one of the best years I had in medicine, was that year I spent at Fresno County.

Smith

Now, from Fresno County I had to pay the government back two years. At that time, you know, every male had to go into the service at eighteen, you know. If you were in college, you could postpone it, and medical school had an eight-year postponement. So now you have to pay them back. So during my internship year I had met a classmate of mine in Seattle who was in the Public Health Service. And he's saying, "Smitty, you need to go into the Public Health Service to pay the government back, and get that off your chest. Then you can go into your residency and not have to worry about that." And I said, "Well, I've got to think about that, because I might want to just go into my residency right now, while I'm here in Fresno."

Smith

I had a dream, and in my dream I saw helicopters and fire and rope ladders, and little ladies with babies on their backs, with conical hats and pantaloons-

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Stevenson

Vietnam.

Smith

--trying to get into that ladder. Now, this was 1958.

Stevenson

So this is pre--

Smith

Very much pre.

Stevenson

Pre-Vietnam.

Smith

Right. And I woke up that morning and got right on the phone and called Seattle. "Dick, how do you get into the Public Health Service? There's a war coming, and I am not going to get in it." I had made that vow, too, in eighth grade, that I would not go fight in no war. See? So I saw the dream, I said, there's a war coming and I won't get in it, so I joined the Public Health Service, okay. So right from Fresno, then I went on the Indian reservation and I worked for three years there. Then when I finished that, then I went into the residency program, okay.

Stevenson

Okay. I'd like you to tell me about your time on the reservation. Was it the Cheyenne?

Smith

Cheyenne River.

Stevenson

I'd like you to tell me about that.

Smith

That was very interesting.

Stevenson

You know, what years it was, and how you were received by the Native Americans, and just some of your experiences there.

Smith

Oh yes, that was interesting. That was very, very shaping, you know. When I went there, it was interesting because I was going to South Dakota, which no one goes to South Dakota. I had no idea of where it was I was going. I met--there was one nurse in Fresno who was from South Dakota, and she was telling me how desolate it would be, but I didn't understand what she was--I couldn't believe it, you know what I mean. So I went to Aberdeen, South Dakota. My orders had taken me to Aberdeen. And so I'm in Aberdeen, which is a very good-sized city in South Dakota, a very small town by D.C. standards, you know, even Bethlehem standards, and so I'm sitting there wondering, how am I going to live in a town like this? Okay? Because it's just so small. And I don't see no Indians, really. You see, it's this funny reservation.

Smith

So I'm sitting there and they're talking in the area office that I sign in, and they kept talking about this man coming, "Mr. Shopkees [phonetic] is coming to pick you up, and this, that, and the other, so I figure, well, maybe they're going to take me, maybe it's about two blocks down the street, or three blocks down the street, or whatever it is, you see what I mean? So all of a sudden he shows up later that afternoon, and I get in the car and we drive, and we're driving out of town. So I said, "This is peculiar. Where are we going?" And we're still driving, and it's getting dark and we're driving, okay, like more than a hundred miles, two hundred miles, or whatever it is.

Smith

So the next thing we're at the Missouri River. I said, "Well, where are we going?" He says, "Well, we're going to the reservation." I thought the reservation was in Aberdeen, and there's nothing out here but just brown grass and blue sky. And when I get to this little dusty town with a dusty road, this is the agency? Oh, my god. Now, that was something that took getting used to, okay. So then the first person I met, and I knew something was wrong--in the area office they were talking about my medical officer in charge, Dr. [Moses Alfred] Haynes, and they kept talking about Dr. Haynes,

said he's a wonderful man, and Dr. Haynes this, and I said, well, damn, he must be--in my mind I said he's either black, or else he's dead.

Smith

When I get there, Dr. Haynes is a black man.

Stevenson

His first name?

Smith

Moses Alfred Haynes. That's the same Dr. Haynes that became president of the group, okay? So I met Dr. Haynes and his wife, Hazel, and their little daughter Teresa, and that was my introduction to the reservation. Now, when we first came, I thought that the Indians were very demanding, you know what I mean?

Stevenson

In what way?

Smith

In other words, like whenever they felt like they should be seen, they came to be seen, and no matter what you were doing, drop everything you're doing and let's go. Okay, now that didn't matter if it was late at night or whatever, you see. So my point was, but we have clinical this hour to this hour, and you should make it to the clinic. I'm thinking like this, not understanding that this is a reservation that's 120 miles long, okay, and maybe about ninety miles wide, and that you're dealing with absolute poverty, and most times no transportation, so people do what they have to do when they can, okay. But I don't quite understand that, you see. So it becomes a bit of a clash there, and it's a cultural clash, you see? And the clash being that I'm looking at you should do, because this is the hospital and this is what we're trained in a medical way of dealing, and here's the reality, which is poverty based on it being an Indian and the amount of space and all the stuff that came down on you.

Smith

I know all about that history in the back of my mind, but not how you live it, you see what I mean? So it took a little while. Now, there was a little something I detected in there. There were two groups of people. There were the full-bloods and there were the half-breeds, so to speak, and they would divide themselves according to what percentage of Indian blood they had in them.

Stevenson

Now, you said half-breed, so meaning they were Cheyenne and what else?

Smith

White, French, a lot of times French ancestry, some English ancestry. There was a lot of French trade that came up and down the Missouri at that time, see. Now, there were a lot of them that were fair-skinned. I detected that some of them had an attitude, okay. The full-bloods were kind of reticent, okay. Now, these were the ones that a lot of times you had a conflict with,

because that's where the real culture was in terms of trying to deal with time and this kind of thing. So I met one or two of them that kind of rubbed me the wrong way. Now, these were more of the full-bloods, and they were like giving me orders, okay. So I said, "This ain't going to work." So I had one of the nurses, Miss [Marcella] One Road, take me to Aberdeen.

Stevenson

One Road?

Smith

Yes, Marcella One Road. She took me to Aberdeen to the sporting-goods store. I bought a baseball bat, and she said, "I didn't know you liked baseball." I said, "I don't." She said, "Well, what's the bat for?" I said, "For the people," I said, "because I can see that this is going to come to blows if they think they're going to push me around." And a lot of times what they would say with Dr. Haynes, they loved him because he was so malleable. I think they took advantage of him, that's the way I looked at it. You see what I mean? Okay. And then because you're dark-skinned, then maybe then you should be grateful that they're even speaking to you. You know what I mean?

Stevenson

Yes.

Smith

And I was just coming out of Washington, D.C.? Come on now, that ain't going to work, okay. So I had my baseball bat right behind my desk, okay. I used it one time. This one guy came in, very, very fair-skinned. He didn't look like he was Indian at all. Brought in his son; son didn't look Indian. He comes in at eleven o'clock in the morning and demands that somebody see his son, okay? Clinic's going to open at one o'clock, and we're in a staff meeting, we've got a lot of things going on before one o'clock. So I step out trying to be nice, to explain that this can't happen, okay? I'll be glad to see him at one o'clock. And, in fact, I'd even try to get there by twelve-thirty, but I can't see him now. Oh no, he's going to be seen now. Okay? He's got an attitude.

Smith

Now, he's standing up there, going to face me off, right? I said, "Wait a minute now. Let me just let you know, you're not going to be seen before one o'clock." "Well, I'll go to Gettysburg to the white doctor, because they know what they're doing." "Okay, that's fine," I said, "go wherever the hell you want to." I said, "But by the time you get to Gettysburg, it'll be one o'clock. But I can assure you, you ain't going to be seen in the United States nowhere before one o'clock." So I started walking away from him, and then, "That's what I say about letting all these niggers come in here." I said, "What'd you say?" "Yeah, all these niggers coming in here," this, that, and the other. So I started walking, "Oh, I see," I got real soft, walking towards my bat. I went in my office and grabbed that bat, and I just came out--I

chased that man out that hospital, and I winged that bat. I thought it caught him--if it hit him, it would have killed him. I said, "No, we're not going that route," okay, cut that right then and there.

Smith

The tribal chairman had an attitude, okay. He had felt--he was of mixed-blood--he had felt that the Public Health Service--here there were only two black doctors in the Public Health Service in that area, right, me and [unclear]. Both of us were at the same installation. There was no other doctor there besides the two of us. He had felt that his reservation had been cheated, because he had the two niggers.

Stevenson

I was going to ask about that.

Smith

That's right. The rest of the reservations had real doctors, okay. So every time you turned around, he was just nibbling and nicking, and nibbling and nicking, okay. So this one day he sent orders in that there's a cow that fell into a pond in Bridger [phonetic], ninety-some miles from the reservation, and he wanted my community worker to go out and pull the cow out of the pond. It didn't make sense. So I called the community worker, and I also called his office and said, "Let whoever is going to get the water pull the cow out of it." Now, that water was used for drinking, and it was very polluted. Okay, this was conditions on the reservation. So my point is, "But I'm not sending a man ninety miles just to pull an animal out of the water," okay? So he calls Washington, D.C., to his congressman, Senator E.Y. Berry, I think that was his name.

Smith

I get this phone call, and I'm getting cursed out. "What in the hell do you mean by--," whatever. And I just started cursing right back at him. "You can't curse me." I said, "Well, you started it." I said, "If you want to have a civil conversation, I can do that. If you want to have cursing, I can do that, too. Okay?" And he said, "What do you mean that you did this to Mr. so-and-so, and you didn't do this, and you didn't do that? And what do you think we're paying you for?" I said, "Well, let's get that straight. You ain't paying me. You can't afford me." I said, "What you're giving me is a token of appreciation, okay, so forget that." I said, "The next thing, the money you're using comes out of my check, my mother's check, my father's check, and my brother's check. It ain't coming out yours. Don't [unclear] at me that I'm being paid for a service, okay. And the next thing, let me let you know this, that this man--," we didn't use the terms then about racists, "this man doesn't like black folks, okay. And he thinks he's going to shove me around like you're trying to shove Haynes around?" I said, "It is not going to happen." Okay?

Smith

And so I told him, too, that, "You're calling up here from what he told you, without even knowing what the story is, and you're going to jump on me?" So we went round and round. When he found out I was black, then he's going to let me know he marched with Martin Luther King and the whole shot. He stayed on the phone a long time, pretending to be--because I was getting on his case about they were racist towards the Indians, you see what I mean, and the conditions are that bad. We wouldn't have a problem if there was a different attitude, and he wanted to let me know he was not a racist, okay, so it worked out fine.

Smith

I went right back to my typewriter and typed a letter, had my secretary type a letter to the chairman. "The reservation isn't big enough for both of us, okay, obviously. Meet me on the main drag at twelve o'clock, noon. If you whip my ass, I'll pack my stuff up and go. If I whip your ass, I don't want to hear no more from you." I sent that to him, and I cc: copied to every governor of the United States, so you can't report me, I'm reporting me, you know. Now, the interesting thing was my secretary, she was Indian, a full-blood, she got the letter and she laughed, and she mailed it to his secretary, who was also Indian, and they read it over the phone, and they just--it was hilarious. And his secretary cleared his desk and put the letter there for him to see. Then she went and sat at the typewriter, and she says, "I'm ready to take your dictation on the letter for Dr. Smith." "What letter? I'm not going to answer anything like that."

Smith

So the day that I said I'll meet you downtown, I went downtown. He didn't show, and that was very important. People were watching that. He didn't show. He didn't save face, okay? The reservation was on my side from there on.

Stevenson

Let me ask you one more question before we close. You mentioned having some challenges, clashes with the Cheyenne, your patients or clients. How much of that was due--you did mention cultural. Now, does that mean because they had their own, historically their own medicinal, their own cultural practices related to healing and things like that, any of that?

Smith

No. We were overcoming that. Yes. They didn't come--and that was like before I got there--they didn't come to the Public Health installation, and the reason was because the army, the United States Army had just left the reservation in 1917, and many of the folks that were on the reservation remembered that. There were some even that had been in the Battle of Wounded Knee.

Stevenson

Really.

Smith

Yes. I remember one man had still a bullet in his leg from that battle. He was a child then. So there was a lot of hostility and distrust of the United States government. But then they had such bad medical stats, high mortalities and high morbidity from infectious diseases and that kind of thing, so the government was trying to elevate the standards, you know, of care. So they had to do a lot towards bridging the cultural gap, and getting people to accept Western medicine.

Smith

So one of the first things they had to do--we couldn't wear the Public Health uniform, so they got rid of the Public Health uniform, so we didn't stand there looking like the army, okay. So we could wear street clothes; that was the first cultural change, okay. Then they had to do a lot of going out to speak in the various communities, to do health education, see, and then there were a lot of little things you had to do in order to first get them to trust you, and then begin to teach. Then there were some others--they had a lot of Indian workers, and there were some of these who were volunteering to work on tuberculosis grants, so that they would hook up with you, and they could interpret for you, okay, and teach. So there was a lot of things that came in an interaction.

Smith

The biggest thing that came was, I came to understand them, and they came to understand me. Do you follow?

Stevenson

I see.

Smith

So it didn't mean that they had to change or I had to change, but there were some things we just had to understand. And one of the things we understood is mutual respect, mutual respect, okay. I'm coming from a minority, and you're coming from a minority, both of which have been mistreated. I've got a chip on my shoulder, and you've got one on yours.

Stevenson

So that helped bridge things, you think?

Smith

Yes. So my point was, leave my chip alone and I'll leave your chip alone, but ain't nobody knocking those chips off my shoulders, okay. That helped to bridge, do you see what I mean? And then what I realized then, what we'd do is we'd get rid of--and Dr. Haynes was bearing [unclear]. Let's get rid of the time barriers, and all these other things like that, do you see what I mean? That means that if you can make it, you make it in time for delivery. We look at this, the estimated date of confinement. At the time that we think you're due, you get the ambulance and you come into the hospital, whether you have labor pains or not. So you don't until you go into labor to come to the hospital. You come--pack your bags and live here. So we had a lot of women living in the hospital waiting to have the baby, okay? And that

way then, you didn't have to be playing that ambulance trip. They'd call up and say, "She's having the baby, send the ambulance." And by the time we'd get the ambulance there, it's all happened. You see what I mean?

Smith

So those were the kinds of things that you had to work out, you know. We had some excellent Public Health nurses, and Public Health nurses always were Anglo.

Stevenson

They were.

Smith

Yes, they were Anglo, but very good. I remember the first two, they were Catholic, very deeply Catholic, and the other girl that came, a young girl out of Maryland, University of Maryland, was very deeply Methodist, and they were nurses, but their religion was very important to them. So it means then in how they approached, they gave the extra mile, and they were very, very, highly sensitive. And you know, nurses always train doctors, so that there were a lot of things they taught me in terms of public health and looking at and dealing with, you see.

Stevenson

All right.

1.2. Session 2

March 23, 2007

Stevenson

Okay. I'm continuing an interview with Dr. Ernest Smith on Friday, March twenty-third. I have a follow-up question. You mentioned your family's participation in the Revolutionary War, and that they had been converted to Christianity. Do you happen to know, converted to Christianity from?

Smith

Not from. No, but you know, the thing that was peculiar, for some reason it brought out that the Smiths in South Carolina, in that little area of Yemassee, had a degree of education, it seemed, more than the average person living in that community, but nobody knew where they got it. Okay? In fact, my great-grandfather, Moses Smith, played the piano and directed the choir and taught music, but nobody knew where he learned it. He was also, they thought, a little psychic, because he would be telling them about things that were to come. So I believe that they may have come out of the Muslim tradition in the West Indies, where there would have been more access to books and whatever, see.

Smith

But this was something that was stated by a social worker, and that was when they were looking at my grandmother in New York City, because she had a drinking problem, and that was the one who was part Indian, and in

looking at the background they went back to the South Carolina, and that's one of the things they picked up, was that the educational level of the Smiths was a little higher, but nobody knew where it came from, because they didn't go to school, you know. Even like my father went three months out of a year for three years, and he could just barely read and write, you know. And whenever he did anything formal, we had to do it for him, so he would dictate his letters to us. By the time I was in fourth grade, we'd be writing letters for him, you know, and correcting his English, because he spoke that--we call it Geechee, but it's kind of the Gullah, you know, that South Carolina Gullah accent.

Smith

And the biggest thing there, they couldn't get tenses straight, and timing, you know, so like there was no such thing as plural, so an S would pop up anywhere. So like if he'd been speaking for a while and he hadn't used an S at the end of a word, he'd put it on there. And so you wonder, you're talking in the singular, why did you put the S on? Then he wanted to know, are you picking at me? But he was speaking another language really.

Stevenson

Okay. All right. I'd like to--

Smith

There's another thing, too, that he mentioned. There were two things that go back to that period. At the end of that war, and they thought they were fighting for George Washington, they thought they were fighting with George Washington, and it was stated that they wanted to know if blacks could learn. So then they had a little experiment to teach the slaves. Now, these would be the male slaves, and they found out they could, and so then the point was to make sure they don't, so that it was then established that you are not to learn, so that made learning and education clandestine.

Stevenson

Right.

Smith

The other thing was, they thought they were fighting for freedom, and at the end of the war they were told to "Go back and be good to your masters." Now, that's word of mouth that passed down. So the concept of deception and freedom is deeply engrained in me, you know. So when I meet--and it's not nice, but it is true--when I meet white people, I always look for the hidden meaning. I firmly believe one of the reasons why black kids don't do well on tests is because they don't believe the question, and therefore they spend more time trying to look for the hidden question, instead of answering the question that's obvious. So it means it takes twice the length of time to do the exam, because they're suspicious of the exam, you know.

Smith

And it doesn't matter what level you go to. In other words, like if you come to UCLA and they're taking the exam, or if you go to kindergarten and

they're taking an exam--not the kindergarten, maybe about the third grade, that hesitancy begins to come in, see, and it's taught, I believe, because based on the whole slave experience.

Stevenson

Interesting. Do you know, has anybody actually researched that?

Smith

No. No. No one has researched that. And see, that's what I was trying to tell Ernie [Smith] some years ago, "We ought to look at, for instance, the medical students, and do a series of questions, and then find out from them what do they think, write down what you think this question is asking, and then ask, what possibilities do you think this question asks?" You know what I mean? And time them, you see. And to see, then, what processes are going through them that they're not even aware of.

Smith

I know one of the things that used to stymie me, not uncommon, and I still get angry when I see it, because I think it's very deceptive, "not uncommon." It is common or uncommon, but what's not? You see? So the concept is, you have to cancel out, but that's deceptive, and in the African way you say it is or it isn't, but it's never twisted. And a lot of times you meet these kinds of things in questions or even in studying, and they stop you, because then you have to reinterpret and put it in its perspective.

Stevenson

Right. So that would account for poor performance on tests such as SATs and this sort of thing.

Smith

Yes, yes, that's right. And especially when there's no signals. Like, for instance, I think we look at the individual who's speaking, and then get body-language signals as to what they might mean is what they ask. But when you're reading paper, there's no signal, so you have no clue as to which way this question is coming from, you see. So all these just are time-consuming.

Stevenson

Okay, very interesting. Okay. You spoke a good deal about Lincoln University, which you said was the first historically black college. Is there more that you would like to say about Lincoln and its significance?

Smith

Yes, yes, I would, I would, very significant. It was an all-male school, and I'll tell you when it really dawned on--it had been significant all through my life, meaning everything that I've done has been based on Lincoln, more so than Howard [University]. Now, the biggest point was that when I went to my class reunion, somewhere around the forty-fifth reunion, and met the guys that had come back, but you could see then the young people, and it's a coed school now, okay? And what we noticed mostly was that the girls are out front, and the boys are in the shadows, so that as you walk through the

campus, you didn't get that bravado and all that punch that you used to get when it was an all-male school, of male meeting male. But you had almost like on a street corner in an urban city, the black male had already retreated, you see?

Smith

And it dawned on me then, I said, "You know, the thing that was most important about this school was here's where we went from boys to men." We're out in the country, meaning that there were no cities around us, and the only town was four miles away, which was a white town which you didn't go to, and the only images you had were your professors, half of whom were black, okay, and each other. And a lot of talking. We didn't have television. If we had it, nobody went to see it. It was mostly what we called rabbiting, and the idea was you just talked. So hour after hour after hour, we were just talking it out on all kinds of subjects, and with the various disciplines, so that if you went into a room and they were studying history, and you just happened to be in the room, well, you'd begin to learn history, and then you'd start rabbiting over about what it was they were talking.

Smith

So there was a lot of enrichment as a male, coming from males, that gave you a perspective of being an African American male in the United States, uninterfered with by trying to relate to women, trying to relate to whites, trying to relate to anybody. It was simply dealing with going from a black boy to being a black man, okay, and Lincoln was that cocoon place. When I went back I said, "Now, that's what is not here now." So I look at these young black men who are on this campus, which produced Langston Hughes and Nkrumah, you know, and Thurgood Marshall, and I look at these young men and I said, "You go from boys to boys here," you see, because there's not that intensity of bringing you as a black boy into a black man in a system that despises black men, and a world that despises black men. And the girls are still being able to function at a better rate.

Smith

Now, the other interesting thing, too, that I found, the valedictorian--I went back twice. It was my forty-fifth and then my brother's forty-fifth, back to back. The valedictorian the first year was a white woman who was about forty-some years old. Went back the next year, and the valedictorian was a white man who was forty-some years old. They're in their second careers. And I thought, now, when I came along, whites didn't even come up on the campus. In fact, they used to shoot up on the campus. They'd try to gun you down with the automobiles as you walked the highway, you see.

Smith

I said, now this is a microcosm of what's going on in society. If the black girl is stepping out in front of the black boy, she steps back in front of the white man or the white woman. That's America. So what then is the essence of what you really need to know that you can get now at this institution? It isn't

there. You see what I mean? Now, we wouldn't even look for it here at UCLA. I look at the black kids, and they look at you like they're the invisible man. They walk around invisible to each other. And I look at the students. They stare at each other and walk right past each other, never nod their heads, never say a word. A black boy looks at a black girl, doesn't see her, okay? I walk past as a black man, they don't see me, and I'm not talking about whites, I'm talking about black to black, okay.

Stevenson

Yes, I understand.

Smith

You know what I'm talking about?

Stevenson

Yes.

Smith

I said, well, now, if I take you down to Compton that wouldn't happen.

Stevenson

Right. Right.

Smith

Okay? And yet if you go to Compton, you're supposed to be ignorant. But you come to UCLA, you're supposed to be intelligent, and you're not even a person. That little Frankenstein monster walking around, you see? Well, see, that was what I didn't realize until I was at Lincoln. I must have realized it that very first day, because when I found out there was no music department, and my mother gave me the option, "Come back home, we'll go to Temple, and then you'll get back into music." And something drew me to Lincoln. When I looked and saw all this blackness and all these black boys, I said, "No, this is where I need to be," not knowing what I needed was finding myself first as a person, and then whatever instruction that was to come.

Smith

The thing I enjoyed about both Lincoln and Howard was, no matter what response I got from my professors, it was because of me the person, not me the color, whereas in my previous education, in the white schools it was more me, the color, than me, the person. So then I could begin to find out, well, maybe there's something wrong with me in the black situation, and I can correct me. In the white situation, I never thought it was me, other than it was my color, so I never dealt with me. You see?

Stevenson

I see.

Smith

And I think with the kids here, a lot of times they're so involved with their color that they don't have a chance to deal with themselves. So they don't grow as a person, they grow as a racial thing, you see what I mean?

Stevenson

Right. Okay. All right, so a couple of questions still about Lincoln. The all-male, all-black dynamic when you attended the school, do you think that is still needed today--

Smith

Yes.

Stevenson

--and do you think it's just in that time period when you were going there, it was a much more, what shall I say, racist, particularly towards the black male; but explain to me why you still think that is needed today.

Smith

It's because racism against the black male still exists. If you look at the discussion with [Barack] Obama, they're not discussing him in terms of the truth of his intelligence. They're discussing him always in the truth of his blackness, or lack of it. And the fact that he's an African makes him not black. Now, see, they don't even know what they're saying. He doesn't bring the luggage of slavery. No. What you mean is that he is more like a white man, meaning that he's freer, or for whatever political reasons you can't mess with him, because he has a nation that can back him. He can go to the Kenyan people and they can go to the U.N. and back him. But if you take the African American like Jesse [Jackson], if [Al] Sharpton don't help him, and if, excuse the expression, the niggers don't riot, he's just got nothing to go with, right?

Smith

So the point being then that when you look at the way they're treating Obama, they're still trying to make him somewhere between that African free man, so to speak, and the American nigger, okay.

Stevenson

Right. Right.

Smith

And they can't quite get that balanced, you see what I mean? That is the top of the pile. But for the bottom tier, you don't even get into that. You just have no value. So if I go to the young black kid that's in Centennial High School or Compton High School or Lott [phonetic] High School, don't even bring me any of that discussion. "Why ain't you in jail? And I know you're on your way, so let me search you." Okay? "You took the test, I don't even need to grade it. I mean, I'm going to ask you, what grade do you want, below a C?" Did you follow my point? There are little subtle things that are still there. So there's not the point then that you can take this I.Q., undeveloped, green, maybe not even stimulated, and put it in a nurturing environment, and just simply deal with it, separate and distinct from everything else, cocooned.

Smith

We didn't have to get on a bus to go to class. We didn't have to see anybody who was not on that campus, and the campus only had--when I first went

there, it was 600 students, and when the Korean War came and cleaned it out, 400. So 400 kids on a daily basis, that's all you dealt with, okay, nobody else. Well, that means then that you were just spoiled brats, so to speak. But every little nuance of self was investigated. Your roommates and your friends would pick at you and strip you and put you back together, and all kinds of things.

Smith

We had what we called a rabble. The rabble was when, for instance, like after dinner there was a rail outside the dining room, and people sat on the rail, and they made commentary about everything that passed by. So when you walked by, you knew that they were going to wipe you out, and you don't even have to hear it, okay? But you know the rabble's going to get you. Maybe something you're wearing, maybe something how you're dressed, it may be just simply because there's nothing else to talk about, okay? And in that respect then, they'd pull you apart, put you back together, but then you'd sit on the rail and you'd do the same thing, you see.

Smith

Everybody had a little nickname, and the nickname was something that was peculiar to you. My roommate had a big nose, so they called him Nose. So when we'd dump on Nose, that's what we'd talk about, you know what I mean? So you had all kinds of little nuances that made you interact with each other, you see. That's very much needed. Now only the kids in the gangs are looking for that kind of thing, but it doesn't exist because there's no intellect that's coming into the gang from well-meaning people. There is intellect coming into the gangs from above the gang, but it's white, and it's federal, okay, so that's the wrong shaping, you see.

Smith

But the youngsters gravitate to it, because they're searching for something, very much needed today, you see. When I came along in the racist society, you didn't get molested by white people. You could walk the streets in peace. The police didn't bother you. The kids today don't have that freedom, you see, so there are more racial incidents occurring on a day-to-day basis, especially in the northern cities now than there would have been fifty, sixty years ago.

Stevenson

What would you attribute that to?

Smith

I think that the whole idea is the Civil Rights Movement. When the blacks begin to break the cocoon of what blacks should be, and begin to stretch out to become whatever God made them to be, that's a threat, and so that you begin to put that in its context. In other words, the nation puts that in its context. And the question comes, what are you going to do with the slaves? The question was asked at the end of the Civil War, "What are you going to do with the slaves?" For a hundred years they seemed to be quiet, and so

second-class citizenship, P&H [phonetic], that's okay.[Martin Luther] King [Jr.] comes along, Malcolm [X] comes along, the Black Panthers come along, upset the apple cart, and the question again comes, "What are you going to do with the slaves?"

Smith

Now, affirmative action implies that we're going to integrate them into our society, and they're going to become one of us. Okay? And that goes back to almost like the first book of Genesis, "If you make the man, he's going to become like one of us," the gods. Do we really want to make this man, okay? And then the question is, if you do, what are you going to do with the slave, you see? That's why I think then things become more intense. Affirmative action occurred, and people kind of forgot it. And suddenly it festered, and it festered, and it festered.

Smith

And the thing that bothers me about that affirmative-action challenge, they had Ward Connerly [phonetic], the in-house spook, he's sitting outside the door and makes sure nobody can get in. Baake was the first one. Baake was Jewish, okay? The lady at Michigan, Gratz [phonetic], I would imagine she might be Jewish. It was not the Ku Klux Klan that attacked affirmative action, it was our Jewish allies. I can't deal with that. Now, the question that they have ask--don't tell me about excellence and every man standing on his own two feet, because if that was true, we'd still be chopping down trees in America, right?

Stevenson

Right.

Smith

And the folks that would probably have most of the land would be the Africans, because they could chop down more trees, okay, so that's not the issue. The issue is competition, and once you get the slave class moving, what's going to happen to your child? Every time a black child sits in the seat in medicine at UCLA [University of California Los Angeles], that's a white child that didn't get the seat, okay. Don't mind the Asian, because for some reason or other color coding, and I think that's imprinting, the closer they are to white, the less intimidated you feel. The darker they are, the more intimidation you get. That's boogie-man stuff, like being scared of the dark type thing, you know, at night.

Smith

So my point then is that the African American becomes a threat, and it's the yardstick, and once you begin to move him in, he's going to take over, so you've got to put him back. So what you going to do with the slave? Enslave him, okay. I look at the campus, even--did you go to UCLA?

Stevenson

Yes, I did.

Smith

When you came to UCLA there was a spirit, let's get this moving, let's go. What's this zombie thing now I'm looking at? Okay? Twenty years later, so we open the doors, it's open, and here it is a dead spirit. Better that we were thirty years back and alive, trying to get in, than in and dead, okay? You see? So that's backtracking as far as I'm concerned.

Smith

Drew was very important, and King was very important, for resurrecting that spirit. That's why it doesn't exist today, okay. When we came to King, we came, and I brought that Lincoln thing, okay. We're going to stay. You want to do something new? You want to try something different? Okay, I can bring you something new and something different. Let's break down the walls here. The people who come in here are sick unto death. What I need with that? I go out in the street and they're just sick. If I go out in the street, I can resurrect them. If I come in here, I've got to pray for them. Meaning that we pride ourselves with dragging people back from the brink of the grave, and we lock ourselves into that because that's easy, but to go out and catch a young child who looks like he's moving in that direction, and turn him around, and try to convince him that he's sick when he's not, that he's not aware, and then begin the healing process.

Smith

Well, where do you have to go for that? Kid comes in with a gunshot wound to the chest and he's in the emergency room and he's going to die with a bullet wound in his chest, and everybody wants his kidneys, they want his lungs, they want his eyes, they want everything. "Why, he's the healthiest specimen in America. What's he doing dead?" Okay? So my point was, well, we don't need to worry about what's going on in the emergency room, that's too late. We should have been in the classroom, okay?

Smith

That's why then I created the Community Division of Pediatrics, and started it around school health. And the whole issue of school health as I developed it was about gang violence, and I had to veil it with immunizations for the babies, and all kinds of subterfuges, in order to get access to the teenager, and deal with him in terms of that gang violence that was going to kill him. So you immunize this child at five years of age, and you do all this money that you're pouring into this being, and for eighteen years you're pouring all kinds of money--groceries, lights, you know, the whole, whatever you make in your family as a husband and wife goes to your child. And then to have all that go in the grave at eighteen years of age? Okay, and nobody's looking at them in terms of the money wasted, okay?

Smith

And then to top it off with a big funeral, because of guilt, and the mortician is making big bucks off it, too? You see what I mean? That's then where we are as African Americans, and then the kind of medicine we practice, and what we deal with has got to be different. Resurrecting the dead, preventing

the death, getting the living dead, you know, and the human being in the street, that was what Drew was supposed to be about, and that's what it was trying to be about, and then they dinged it for that. "Oh, we can't find that. They're not in the hospital." Of course not. They told you when they came they weren't going to be in, okay? "Oh, well, they have a high death rate. They were dead when we saw them." What you should say, "What about a resurrection rate?" Okay?

Smith

So when I look at, how many kids did we impact that went into medicine? I met a girl that was entering into the physician-assistant program at King-Drew [Medical Magnet High of Medicine and Science], and she came up to me and said, "You don't remember me. You can't remember me. But you came to my elementary school on a career day, and I was given the opportunity to introduce you to my class. They groomed me, and I had prepared my speech, and I gave my speech on you." And she said, "And I've been looking forward to meeting you ever since, and I was in third grade then." Okay? Now here she stands as a young woman going into a physician-training course, and that experience in the third-grade classroom was that vivid to her, okay. Well, see, that's very important. That was part of our programming, but that's part of the African American experience.

Smith

You know, it's like when the dean came to Warrington, Virginia, with my glee club, and everybody saw that the dean of the medical school was in this little hick town, so to speak. You see what I mean? That's what we were bringing to King and to Drew and to South Central Los Angeles. That's not what's needed in Westwood or Beverly Hills. That's not what UCLA needs to do. Do you follow? But what UCLA needs to do is understand that. But if UCLA has in its mind, what are we going to do with the slaves, then we ought to stop that, okay. And that's what happened at King, and it's what happened at Drew.

Smith

And that's why I'm organizing a picket march, to picket the L.A. Times, okay, because they're the ones that made sure that kind of thing happened. So South Central has been flipped back fifty years by virtue of that kind of thing, see? But Lincoln was the thing that gave me that push. These are the kinds of things we talked about in our rabble sessions.

Smith

When the sit-down movement, the such a Graha [Movement] they called it-- we were studying that in Religion 101. You had to take religion in Lincoln. That's part of the A.B. degree, different from the B.A., you know, so there were certain things that were required. But the such a Graha Movement of Gandhi was the big thing going. That was in 1950, '49 or '50, and we had been discussing that right and left, okay. Now, I know if we were discussing

this in the Lincoln campus, then in all the theological schools they were discussing it, right?

Smith

Then the NAACP [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People] at Lincoln decides to pull that movement on Oxford [Pennsylvania]. The Oxford bus terminal was segregated, the movie house was segregated. It was a very segregated town in Pennsylvania, okay. It's a border town. So they organized sit downs in the bus terminal, in the movie houses, at the lunch counters, in 1949 and '50. The professors from Lincoln went and sat down. Dr. [Horace Mann] Bond, [Horace] Julian Bond's dad was the president. His car almost got overturned in Oxford, because he had been sitting down in Oxford Square. Now, this is 1950. King was still in school, okay.

Smith

Now, this was their tack [phonetic] on segregation in Oxford, and then from that, they begin to pull students from all around the colleges, like Bryn Mawr [College], Swarthmore [College], and attacking the whole idea of fair employment in Pennsylvania, and the racism in Pennsylvania. And so the NAACP from Lincoln then attacked the State of Pennsylvania on fair employment, and pulled a march on Harrisburg, and got all the students from Bucknell, Franklin Marshall [College], Bryn Mawr, Swarthmore, University of Pennsylvania, all of them marched on Harrisburg in the summer of 1950, '51, to push for fair employment practice. That came through in 1953, I think, the year I graduated from Lincoln. Pennsylvania passed it.

Smith

The Civil Rights Movement hadn't even started yet. Do you follow? Now, that was Lincoln, okay? Now, at the same time I'd be at commencement, and who should be walking down the lawn but Thurgood Marshall, meeting his classmates and going into rabble session with them. Who should also come down? Here comes Langston Hughes. You see what I mean? I didn't know about Langston Hughes until I went to Lincoln, okay, and then that's when we were looking at black poetry, because we never had that in high school, you know. So looking at black poetry and all this kind of thing, so you studied it and then all of a sudden here comes it living in the flesh.

Smith

In my sophomore year, who should come and is going to be the commencement speaker but Kwame Nkrumah. He comes in his jailhouse garb, and we had to study the whole issue of what was going on in Africa in order to even understand what this meant to our alumnus who was coming back to do the graduation. But all of this was also giving you imagery of black males.

Smith

There was another one, Hildrus [A.] Poindexter. He was with the United States Public Health Service. Graduated from Lincoln, also finished Howard, and was a top man in tropical medicine, and suddenly he shows up on the campus, you see. Now, when I came to Lincoln to study music, and looked at picking my professors by color of skin, looking at all the white professors who I picked, and having that concept that there can't be anything really that blacks know or could teach, and then suddenly in that course of learning, learning material, I'm getting images of successful black males, highly recognized, highly educated, okay. This then gives me the path in terms of which I need to go, but then understanding how they had to fight to get where they were, which also let you know then, you've got to fight. So no matter what it is, you're going to have to fight to get into it, you see.

Stevenson

Okay. Before we start talking about the beginnings of King, I have a couple of last follow-up questions. How did you make the decision to pursue pediatrics?

Smith

There's two things. I've always worked with kids, okay. Now, that goes back to like in high school, junior-high school, when I got the job playing for the church. I had to play for the Sunday school, regular church service, if they had an afternoon service, and in the evening service, and I got two dollars a Sunday, right. Now, if I played for the kids for Sunday school, then you got to know the kids, and then one of the things that I began to notice was that they couldn't sing. I mean, they could sing, but they babbled, you know. So I started organizing a kid choir, right, and then I organized a junior choir with the teenagers, because they were kind of on the fringes. You know, teenagers are kind of rebellious. And I remember when I said, "I'm going to organize the adolescent choir," some of the old folks were [unclear], "Don't get into that. Those kids are just unruly, and you ain't going to be able to handle them." Well, I was able to handle them, okay?

Smith

And then I just kept working with kids. When we would go to different dances or whatever it was, there's few black kids in town, so every black kid is important for the dance, right? So that means then that if the boys are going to a dance, the girls have got to go. But the fathers are not necessarily interested in their girls going out to the dance, want to know who's the chaperone and all this kind of thing. So what we would do then, I would do particularly, is I'd go to each one's house and sit down with the father and have a talk. And I'd do this like Wednesday, in preparation for Saturday.

Smith

And then what I would get from them would be, "If you take the responsibility, I'll let her go." So I'd have about four or five girls that I had to pick up and take to the dance, and then round up and bring back from the

dance. And so I'd get my little brother, my younger brother, he'd take one half, because they lived in one part of the Heights and I lived in the other half, and we'd go round up the girls and, you know, bring them back. Now, the thing was that I had the authority, by virtue of the fathers.

Smith

I remember one time the boys from Reading had come, and the girls were just going giddy. We had a bus that we had to catch at quarter to one. If we missed the bus, we had a seven-mile walk, and then you had a whole lot of angry parents waiting for you, okay, and some of them probably would meet you on the way with their sticks, right? So it's time for the kids to go, and I'm going to the girls, "Look, we've got to go." And all of a sudden the guys are telling me, "Who's that telling you what to do?" Right? And so the next thing I know, the girls have got an attitude. And one of them put her hands on her hip--now, she was older than I was--"You're not my father. You can't tell me what to do." I whipped out my belt and I beat those girls down the hill. [laughs] You can't give me that kind of crap. I was a sophomore, and they were seniors, a couple of them were seniors. But my point was, "No, you're not getting me in trouble, and you are getting on that bus." So I had that kind of experience.

Smith

When I finished medical school and I was thinking about what to major in, and I liked psychiatry, I was putting that around in my mind; I liked OB/GYN [Obstetrics/Gynecology], I think everybody likes that, and I was putting that in my mind; and my sister said to me, "You should go in peds, because you've been working with kids, and you have a natural bent towards that, and kids kind of gravitate to you." And I thought to myself, no, I don't think I want that. But when I went on the Indian reservation, and the sickest group we had was pediatrics, and the problem was pediatrics--in other words, trying to find out what's going on, looking at trying to cut down on infant mortality, all the challenges, right, and that's what I felt least secure with, and that pulled me into peds, you see. So when I left the Indian reservation, that's what I wanted to learn more of, and so that put me into pediatrics.

Stevenson

All right. Yes, just judging on what you've said so far, it would seem to me that you had a very nurturing childhood, and so maybe you in turn want to nurture children. Yes?

Smith

Yes. And there was a lot of emphasis on us as children, and the value of us as children. And as I begin to look at the racial problem for African Americans, the value of the children, you know, it just screams at you, you see, and the lacks that are coming out, particularly now, more so than even when I started in pediatrics, the lacks that our children face today screams at you, you see.

Stevenson

Okay, great. I was wondering if you could take a few minutes to talk about Dr. [M. Alfred] Haynes and your friendship with him. You talked about meeting him on the Cheyenne reservation, but talk more about Dr. Haynes.

Smith

Dr. Haynes is a very unique person, and very unappreciated. Dr. Haynes had some very novel ideas then. He had just finished an internship, and had never done a residency. In fact, none of us had done a residency at that time. And yet he had a lot of novel ideas. And so when I came to Aberdeen, as I told you, everybody kept talking about Dr. Haynes and Dr. Haynes, and that's why I said, he must be black, because they kept mentioning Dr. Haynes, Dr. Haynes. Well, the reason they kept mentioning him was because of the novel ideas he had, and especially because he was a black man with novel ideas, okay.

Smith

So when I got to the reservation--and he's very quiet and soft-spoken--the first thing I noticed was what I thought, that the people were taking advantage of him, because he was giving, always giving, and no matter what they wanted, he'd give, you see. And some of the things they asked for were ridiculous, you know. The other thing was that I think they took advantage of his color, which also upset me, you know. So we'd deal with that and talk with that.

Smith

But the thing that I noticed was this, that for all that he had done, and all the praise he was getting from the area office, when he applied for a residency in the Public Health Service, he couldn't get it, okay. My point would be, now, there's no reason why he shouldn't be getting a residency in public health, as well-spoken as they are of him, and as unique as he has been in terms of the programs, preventive-medicine programs that he established on the reservation, the bond he made with the Indian people that the government couldn't make, in other words to get them into Western medicine and still continue with their Native American practices, but take advantage of Western medicine, and Dr. Haynes was a bridge for that, okay. They trusted him.

Smith

And then he comes to get a residency and he can't get it? Then we'd have investigations that would come on the reservation, looking for trouble, okay. I remember we had one group that was coming in from Washington to investigate, and I figured that that's just a lot of jive, okay. And being a Lincoln man, I ain't going to sit back on that one, right? So I said, "Okay. But we're going to have an investigation." So I got my community worker. "You put a microphone in the plant in the corner of the room," and ran the wire down in the basement, and he sat there with a tape recorder and taped everything that was said. Okay? And the whole idea was, now, take

whatever reports you give in Washington, it better fit with what we have on tape. Do you follow? And we would challenge right on down the bend.

Smith

But Dr. Haynes thought, oh no, you can't do that. Oh, that's a terrible thing to do. And my point is, see, well, you ain't doing it. I'm doing it, okay. But if war is what they want, war is what they get, you see. But that was his nature. So from there he went to University of Vermont, okay, and he got his MPH [Masters in Public Health]. I think he went so far as to get a Ph.D. in public health, as well as his M.D. Then he worked with a number of government programs. He went to [The] Johns Hopkins [University] and worked at Johns Hopkins, always innovated, and when they were going to open up Drew, that was about 1968. He called me--I was in Detroit. He called me long distance, and we were talking on the phone and he says, "You know, I'm about to go out to Los Angeles, because they're going to try something very different and very unique. And what they want to try out there is exactly what we were doing on the Cheyenne reservation, and that's in terms of getting to the people before they get ill, doing the preventive, establishing the programs, and all those programs that you had in the field health, and that I had, that's what they're going to do."

Smith

Well, my point was, "Well, I'm practicing in Detroit, and I'm also at Ford's Hospital, you know, on staff, and I'm not ready to go back to California." I'd been there for my internship. He called again. He'd been there and he started working with Spelman [College] and everybody out here, and he was going back to Baltimore, and he and his wife, they called me again. That would have been like in 1970, and still telling me about, "You need to think about coming out to Drew. You know, they're in the process of building. They're breaking the ground," and on, yakety yakety yak, right?

Smith

And then in 1971 I got a letter from Dr. Greenberg, who had already been chosen now to be chairman of the Department of Pediatrics, and he was saying that Dr. Haynes had given my name and insisted that he contact me. That was 1970. I took the letter and threw it in the drawer. You know, it's just ridiculous, I'm not even thinking about that. And it wasn't until I think sometime in the early part of 1970, Dr. Haynes called me again from Los Angeles. "You really need to think about this," right? And I did, and I had a dream about it, and based on that then I decided to go out and look at it. And once I came out and looked at it, and looked at what they really were trying to do and it was real, I mean it was just not pipe dreaming, then I said, "Yes, then I'll come and join."

Smith

And when I came, I stayed with Dr. Haynes. So I stayed with him for a couple of weeks, almost a month, to get on my feet and then gradually come into the Drew school. Then he was under a lot of attack at Drew

school, okay. I don't think people understood him, because he was just too far above them, especially in looking at community outreach and public health and preventive, and then he was soft-spoken, okay, so people tended to intimidate, you know. But he wasn't appreciated. There was a lot of peculiarities going on.

Smith

The question, what are you going to do with the slaves, is inherent in the founding of Drew and King. So that means that if you've got somebody sitting in the center always watching to make sure that the slaves don't get out of order, they spotted Dr. Haynes right off the bat, okay. So no matter what he tried to do, they cut, they cut. Even to the point, he told me, that they had insinuated--he had bought a home out in Palos Verdes, and somebody had insinuated that he stole money from Drew, and was robbing Drew blind, and had him put under a severe FBI investigation. Now, he had taken a sabbatical, I believe, and was in Washington, D.C., working in the government, doing some very good things, I understand, and here's this kind of thing comes to Washington, okay. Malicious, you know?

Stevenson

Would that have been part of the whole COINTELPRO [Counter Intelligence Program]?

Smith

Yes. Exactly.

Stevenson

Okay. The same one that was watching the [Black] Panthers.

Smith

That same thing. And the whole question is, what are we going to do with the slaves, okay? And to say, the natives are restless, but they never say the natives are brilliant, so is a [unclear] natives just as bad as a restless one, okay? And Dr. Haynes happened to be one of the brilliant natives, so everything he tried to do was undermined. And the poisonous way it was done was that, you know, you didn't have to have but maybe one or two white people in the mix, but they were always able to get to the rest of the black people, and that's the slave thing, so that they could very easily sway their power. "Look, we're here," [unclear] and then get the black folks to come at you and do the dirt, you see what I mean? And this is what I noticed. And then they were folks that would claim to be his friend, that were also in the mix of slitting the throat, you see.

Stevenson

Okay. So elaborate more on his novel ideas, if you would.

Smith

Yes. We had a field-health unit. It was in name before he came, and he established clinics. They would go out and do a couple of clinics, but you know, just hit and miss, okay. But he's the one that started, "Well, let's look at the hypertension program, okay. What are we going to do with

tuberculosis? What we're going to start doing now is looking at what we would consider to be our three or four most deadly diseases, and then we'll pick one and eradicate it, so that this then will be our theme." For instance, Tuberculosis was a heavy hitter. "So we're going to go heavy on Tuberculosis, and we're going to put a lot of energy on Tuberculosis, not that we're ignoring anything else, see, but we're going to see if we can make an inroad with TB." So that means a lot of education, community organization, getting people involved, getting money set aside for indigenous people who could speak the language, and you know, a lot of them did speak Sioux, so that you had to have Sioux people who could speak to the full-blooded Sioux, and have an understanding which you couldn't do as an American, as an American-speaking native regular English, you see.

Smith

He worked with the diabetes program, obesity, and those were not really-- those were never singled out as problems. He established a clinic in the boarding school, because he knew that the adolescents were going to come into the hospital, and then that clinic was just kind of like flopping, because nobody could pick that up. When I came, I incorporated that into the real big program, but he dealt with that. And he also make linkages between the various groups in the community, the police, the schools, the chiefs, and pulled everything together. So he had, as the medical officer in charge of the reservation, he had really organized the reservation, you see, around health, and preventive medicine being the most important point, rather than worrying about what was going on within the hospital itself, see. And then fighting for the budget, you know, and then making sure that enough of the budget went into the preventive, as well as went into the in-patient area of the hospital.

Stevenson

Okay. Those programs sound like they predate programs that the government tried to take credit for as being innovations.

Smith

That's right, exactly. And there was no money for them, okay.

Stevenson

I see. Okay. So you came to Los Angeles, to King-Drew, in what year?

Smith

[19]72. I first came for the site visit in '71. That was interesting, because-- and I brought a young fellow with me. I had kind of adopted a young guy who was supposed to be a student at Wayne State [University]. He was seventeen at the time, and he was going with a patient of mine who was in high school, but the mother and father were very, very good friends, and the mother kept telling me about this young man who she was concerned about, because he was traveling around with some pretty rough dudes, even though he was just beginning to be a freshman at Wayne State.

Smith

I had a house, four bedrooms. I lived there by myself. "Doc, take him in. Doc, take him in. Give him a room, give him a room, give him a room." She added motive to the madness. I said, "Okay, I'll give him a room, but that's all." I brought him into the house, and I just noticed that something was not quite right. He'd be reading the book, but he never turned the page, you know. He just spaced out, just staring into space, okay. He'd work part time, go to school during the day, and when he'd come home he'd just be worn-out tired, falling and stumbling up the steps. I said, the boy's on drugs, you know. That's when I had the lady from the lab come and sniff the room, okay, and that's when it dawned on me, you know, this is a psychological problem, so we've got to really look at this.

Smith

Well, when I decided to come to my site visit, and I'd been working with him, I could just see [unclear]. And the question is, "What's going to happen to me?" So I said, "Well, you come with me, but these are the criteria that you have to come." So we brought him out here. We came, and the joke was, we came to Los Angeles, but we never got to Los Angeles. We landed at the airport. Dr. Haynes picked us up, took us to Compton, and from Compton we'd go to the site at King Hospital and the trailers, and back to Compton, and then they would take us around to different places, but we never got to Los Angeles, okay?

Smith

But anyhow, what I was seeing and hearing I couldn't quite believe, and I was being inundated, you know. When they have your every minute scheduled, and you're meeting with all kinds of people, and some of them are community people, and at that time the radicals were present, so you had to meet with them, and they were contentious, you know.

Stevenson

Who were the radicals?

Smith

Well, they weren't quite Black Panthers, but they were a lot of folks, pan-African and community folk that were still in that riot mode, you know what I mean? And when they'd have a site visit with you, they wanted to start--they'd come at you full force. And I'm coming out of Detroit, and I ain't playing behind that, okay? And I'm a Lincoln man, too, so you'd best [unclear], bam, bam, bam, you know what I mean? So, in fact, I'd been here about four or five days, I said to the young man, "I can't take any more. I've got to get out of here, so I'm going up to San Francisco and chill, so be ready, okay?" And that's when I met the kid from my hometown, the guy from my hometown. If I could meet him and find out really what's going on in Los Angeles--and that's when I was able to meet him, sit in the airport and talk to him for a whole hour, and get a better perspective.

Smith

And so when I came back, then I could approach this whole thing differently, you see. But that was the important point. Then Dr. Greenberg came to Detroit to interview me, and then he came back in October, and it was very interesting because I was having a block-club meeting that night, and me and the block club, we weren't getting along, you see. And one of the reasons was because I'd cut my lawn at midnight. I was on the corner house, and they had the lamppost there. I was very busy, because I was trying to do a private practice and also--so when I get home, it's time to cut the lawn. I'd been putting it off for a couple of weeks. The neighbors are talking about, "Your grass is this, your grass is that." So I cut my lawn, but I cut it at midnight. Well, you know, whatever. So we were fighting.

Smith

I had the block-club meeting. Dr. Greenberg was coming by, and then from there we were going to go to dinner after the meeting, and so my house was set up for the block club, but nobody showed up. And so when he comes, he's sitting there waiting. "I thought you were having a meeting here tonight." I said, "I thought so, too." So that let him know something wasn't right. I said, "Well, me and [unclear] getting along very well, you know." So we talked about coming and my signing up. He came back in November, in December, and at that time then I had agreed that I'd come to Los Angeles. Then he wanted to know, what will you do?

Smith

"Well, I'm pediatric cardiology." And beyond that he wanted, you know, the community thing we're going to try to do, and the preventive. I said, "Well, I'd like to work with adolescents, okay, and deal with adolescent issues, and certain things with the community, because of my public-health background." "But what will you do?" And I told him, "Well, I can't tell you what I'm going to do, because I'm not there yet." Okay? And I had trouble trying to get across to him is, I'm making no plans on doing anything until I get there and see the lay of the land.

Smith

And so when we started talking around then, it was two different cultures. When he got back to Los Angeles, he had told a group of people, "I just came from Detroit and I just signed a kook from Detroit." [laughs] So when I came, everybody was looking at me as though I had a tail, you know. And I guess I hadn't been here about maybe nine months, when somebody finally comes up and says, "You know, you're not a kook. You've got a lot of things going, but you're not a kook." And I said, "Well, I don't know what that means." Then they told me what the first impression was. So that lets you know how that initial event was, my signing in, see.

Stevenson

Okay. Could you talk about the Watts rebellion and how that was a cause or an impetus for thinking about opening the King Hospital?

Smith

I wasn't here at the Watts rebellion. I was in Detroit at the time. I remember that--if I can just digress a little bit--

Stevenson

Sure.

Smith

In 1960, '61, I was on a plane coming into Philadelphia, and I was sitting next to a guy named [Dr. Paul] Ylvisaker. He was at that time very high in the government, and I think he also was on the staff at Harvard [University]. He came to be on the staff at Harvard. And he happened to sit down in the seat next to me, and he did that deliberately, because I was the only black kid on the plane, black guy on the plane, in my twenties then. We were talking, and he was talking about things were getting better and all that kind of jive, you know. And I was telling him that it wasn't. This would have been about '60, '61. And then I was telling him about Philadelphia, that's where I was going, and I had been going back and forth making observations. And I said, "No, that town is in trouble, and it's going to explode." Okay?

Smith

So my brother picked me up at the airport and then we happened to be driving to his house. We passed Columbia Avenue, and I said, "Junior, stop." And he stopped the car and I said, "This is where your riot's going to start." "Oh no, no, no, no. You don't know nothing about Philadelphia." I said, "This is where it's going to happen, man." Okay? So I'd been telling everybody, "Riots going to hit Philly." [19]63 we were in Washington. We were at the March on Washington, August, right? The Philadelphia, WFIL, Philadelphia television program newscaster is walking all through the audience and interviewing all the white people. I called him over. I said, "You're from Philly. We're from Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. We call ourselves refugees from Bethlehem, and the reason we call ourselves refugees is because we had been to college, professionals, but you couldn't get a job, so that was like putting you out of town, so to speak." I said, "You're only interviewing the white people. Why don't you interview us?"

Smith

So he did, and he says, "Well, isn't this a wonderful thing?" I says, "No, it's not wonderful," I says, "but it's very important," I said, "because Kennedy is down in the White House, and he isn't coming because he's afraid he's going to get shot, okay. But mark my words, this is the most peaceful place he could be. But we will be back here in six months with candles, okay." Then I said, "The next thing," I says, "what this marks is this is the end of peaceful demonstration. From this day forward, nobody in America can say they didn't know what the issue was with black people, and what the black people suffered. And from this day forward, the blood's going to flow, okay, and the fires going to burn."

Smith

And he looked at me, "Are you psychic?" I said, "I don't know if I'm psychic, but you mark my words, right?" Now, that was '63. I go to Detroit in '64. I pick it up. Now, Detroit was far ahead in civil rights of most cities, right. They were very proud of it. Mayor Jerome Cavanagh was right up there. He's the little shining young mayor, you know, like Edwards kind of like, you know? Everybody just loved him, blacks and whites and everybody. And everybody's doing the "We shall overcome," and da, da, da, you know. And I sat down, and I was with a group of people, and, in fact, the guy that really was instrumental in me going to Detroit was a young white guy, a graduate of University of Michigan. He was a student at King, and did a three-month program at Cheyenne River, and we became very good friends.

Smith

When he graduated from Michigan, he went and did his internship, and he was doing residency at Fords Hospital, and he kept telling me, "You ought to come to Detroit. You ought to come to Detroit." So when I finished my residency in D.C., and I went back to Pennsylvania and stayed for six months at home, then I went to visit, and I went to visit him and some classmates in Detroit, and he kept saying, "You need to come to Detroit," and that's how I came to Detroit, okay. Now, we're sitting around talking, it's a mixed group, blacks and whites, and they're talking about this about Detroit, and this about Detroit, and I said, "But you're going to have a hell of a riot here." I said, "This is going to be one of the real--a bloody place. The blood's going to roll out into the streets, and it's going to be this, that, and the other." And they told me, "You're crazy," right?

Smith

Within a year, Watts explodes, okay. Now, Philadelphia had a riot in '64, just where I said it was going to be. New York had their riot, okay, and it was just kind of like news. But '65, Watts hit it, and that was different, okay. Now, when Watts hit, it started a chain reaction for bloody riots, meaning like Detroit went in '67 and Newark went, etc., etc. So that means then that when the Watts riot hit, I followed that very closely, Life magazine and all this kind of thing, because I said, this is what I've been seeing over the years. So then when Dr. Haynes calls me, I'm very aware of Watts and the riot and the import of it, okay?

Smith

The important thing about the Watts riot was this. It embarrassed the United States, okay. The world did not cover the Philadelphia riot or the Harlem riot. That was like they had in '43? You always had riots in those cities. But the Watts riot was a war, and it brought reporters from every nation, Japanese, not Chinese, whatever, Koreans, Germans, you name it. They came to Watts and covered that riot. It embarrassed the United States. And when they uncovered the riot, it wasn't about a bunch of communists upsetting the balance of power here in the United States. It was about what

was happening to black people, and the misuse and abuse of black people, and that was going around the world.

Smith

Now, when they came down to saying, "Now, how are we going to save face?", the biggest thing that was glaring was the health issue. The fact is that people were dying because they couldn't get medical care, and they were being abused. That's even more gripping than police brutality, okay? Now, when it went around the world that people are dying from a lack of healthcare, including babies, you've got to do something about that, okay. So they go and get [John Alexander] McCone, CIA [Central Intelligence Agency], and they get a whole lot of other folks, black folks who they can speak to and understand, in other words, those who do not get confused with not uncommon, okay. [laughs]

Smith

So they get them together, and then they begin to write the issues, right? And so that's when they come up with King Hospital. Now, the people in the black community in the negotiation, that's the Drew Medical Society and the community, say, "Okay, if we get the hospital," now you concede saying that you need the hospital, "we do not want USC or UCLA in charge of that hospital, so we want to create our own medical school," okay, and they concede to that, okay. Mr. [Kenneth Frederick] Hahn goes out and raises the money for the hospital, and gets the bond moving, because the people in Los Angeles County voted it down. In other words, no money for no housebroken--no black folks in South Central, right? But this is a government thing. This has nothing to do with the citizens of Los Angeles County. This is about international, right?

Smith

So the money comes. They concede the hospital, they concede that they're going to have a medical school. Then the black folks say, "We don't want to have a traditional medical school. We want to have a different medical school." We concede that. "We want to have a medical school that's outside the valley." And Haynes, I'm sure, had a lot to do with that, in terms of looking at the problems and dealing with the issues. Concede to that. "And we want to bring in the best of our black doctors that we can bring." Concede to that, all concession, all concession. And then you come to get King-Drew Hospital, and there's a number of whites, and they were meaningful whites, meaning that they came in answering, "What can we do to help?" And you couldn't have had a hospital without them, because we didn't have certain subspecialties that we had not yet gotten into. And they came to help.

Smith

But then there was also J. Edgar Hoover's boys in the middle, that everybody was rocking that we shall overcome. Okay? And you know how we are as a people, we're very forgiving. So once we realize that you

understand, and understanding means understanding, so we trust everybody, okay? Well, we don't realize that the snake is in the middle, and so right from the beginning the boat just rocks. My first inclination was, when I went to the staff meeting and some of the whites--and they were in charge of some of the departments--were reaffirming, how would you say it, that fear, what you going to do with the slaves? We're not going to have another Howard-Meharry. Well, you don't even know anything about Howard-Meharry, okay? "No, we're not going to have another Howard. We're going to have an excellent medical school." Okay? "Well, what do you know about Howard-Meharry? And the room is full of Howard-Meharry doctors. So why would you come here and work at a hospital with inferior doctors that's going to ruin your reputation? So obviously, you're not thinking it through." You don't think they're inferior. Then what is it that you're saying? You're afraid they'll kind of take over, or you won't even cut the mustard, okay? So you slip the shoe off on the other foot.

Smith

That's when I made the recommendation to the faculty to declare ourselves to be the worst in America. So we'll be the worst medical school, okay, and we defy anyone to push us out of that position. And once we make that declaration to everybody in the world, we'll forget it and get busy about building a medical school. You see what I mean? Well, then everybody, "Oh, that's preposterous," that's, you know, whatever whatever. But they missed the point. How are we going to build if you don't trust each other? And that distrust was there from the beginning.

Smith

Then the next thing, there wasn't enough money put in that institution, right from the very beginning. So even though they amen'd everything you said, and everything was fine, they didn't support it, okay. A good example, private-practice plan. The monies that they offered to come to King and to work at King were just nothing, okay. When I first came, and I didn't even realize it when I signed up, I couldn't even move my furniture from Detroit to Los Angeles. My furniture stayed in storage for two months before I could afford to get it out, okay, because I didn't realize that you had to work almost a whole month in the county before you got paid, okay. And the Drew school, when I was in Detroit they said, "Well, we'll sign you up with Drew in October, and they pay twice a month, so you'll have four checks when you get to Los Angeles, and this is supplementary to your regular salary." So when I get to Los Angeles I have four checks, \$144 each, okay, and that's what I'm going to live off? Okay? So when you looked at the salaries that they offered, they were so small that you had to go out into a private practice.

Smith

In Los Angeles County, at Big County and Harbor and all the other hospitals, they have a practice plan, so the physicians who work in the hospital are

allowed to have so many hours per week to practice. What they have is on premise they have a building, a health building where these doctors practice privately, on the campus at Harbor and at Big County. There's no such thing at King. Now, they would then tell the physicians at King, "Oh yes, you're going to have so many hours per week for private practice." Where? So that means that if you're going to do private practice, you have to go out into the city and find a place and establish yourself in a private practice, and you're only allowed so many hours a week to do that, plus you have to practice at King, so you're finding a lot of the black doctors right off the bat start working around the clock, okay? That was a part of the trap, okay.

Smith

Now, the people from Norway and Germany don't know that, and the ones from Japan that came with the pencil and paper, they don't know that. All they can see is a big, gleaming hospital, and it's open now, and we've righted that kind of wrong, right? Now, when we identified the problem of hypertension, diabetes, gang violence, and infant mortality, and none of that is going to be having its roots in the hospital, but in the community, not one dime was established to go out there and deal with that. So where are you going to find a Black Panther laying on a stretcher unless he's dead? Where are you going to find a Crip walking around in the hospital unless he's looking for trouble?

Smith

So my point is, well, how are you going to get a doctor out to a young man when he has no automobile that you're supplying? If he goes out there on his own gas, on his own whatever it is, he's got to find his own time, so it means that he's got to work around the clock just to satisfy everything. I came in as the cardiologist, pediatric cardiologist. I'm the only pediatric cardiologist, which means I'm on call 365 days a year, twenty-four hours a day, meaning I can't even go to the toilet, you follow my point? I went out and organized--and that's from my understanding. I got Dr. Hines, I got Dr. [Clarence] Littlejohn, and I got Dr. [Josephine] Isabel-Jones. Dr. Isabel-Jones was on the staff here at UCLA. Dr. Hines was private practice, but he also was on the staff here, and Dr. Clarence Littlejohn. They were all pediatric cardiologists. We formed a consortium.

Smith

They believed in the King thing. They wanted the King thing to work, and when they found out I was here, they just swooped right around me and they then said, "We will work with you, so that means we will cover, so we will go on schedule with you, which means that you will only be on every fifth night, and each one of us will be on every fifth night to cover King Hospital." And then when I started getting involved in the community, and dealing with things like gang violence and all those kinds of things, then they're saying was, "That's very important. So we'll even help out during the

day, so you can be free to come out of that hospital and do the other things that other folks can't do."

Smith

So between those four people, I was able then to do a lot of things out in the community, and get all kinds of things together, and that was the essence of that Civil Rights Movement that we understood in our generation of how to come together and work together. And they got not one nickel, not one dime for all that one, and not one certificate of appreciation, okay. Now, that's how we locked up the pediatric cardiology, and were able to get that continuing to move, okay.

Smith

When we looked at the issues of surgery, at, no, we don't have that kind of surgery here at King for kids. You know, pediatric cardiology is pretty intricate. So they need top-flight surgeons. There's nobody down at Harbor that's top-flight. So my point was, and that's what I told Dr. Isabel-Jones, "The best place for our kids to go is UCLA, and you're the head, and so everything we get we're shipping to you." Okay? That way then we can lock in that the kids in South Central are going to be accessing the best of care, okay, and the best of care in Southern California is UCLA, as far as I'm concerned, okay.

Smith

So it means then we had a very low mortality rate, morbidity rate with our cardiac patients, you see? So those were the things that started out. Dr. Betty Jo Warren was on staff when I came. She was one of the first of the pediatric people that was hired at King-Drew, and she lived in Compton at the time. So she had met with people in the Compton School District, and understanding what I wanted to do, then she introduced me to the principal of Centennial High School. She set up a meeting with the principal of Centennial High School and the parent group, PTA, the booster club. We went over there one afternoon when school was in session, and when we came up on the campus, had her park and started walking up on the campus, I saw all these men jumping the fence, leaving the campus.

Smith

When we get on the campus, I see kids running in all kinds of directions, and the principal is walking around with a bullhorn begging the kids to go back to class. When we get up in the office, there are kids just laying on the floor moaning. Those were the gangs. That was the so-called Crips or whoever it was, had jumped the fence, beat those kids, and then jumped back over the fence. And I said, "But those weren't kids that we saw. Those were grown men." Okay? So Dr. Warren and I--the hospital had not yet opened. We went into that office and triaged kids. Some we sent home. Some we sent down to Dominguez Valley Hospital. The sheriffs were out there in the front, okay, and no parents had showed up for the meeting.

Smith

So the principal apologized, and he let me know that the parent group was having a pancake breakfast, and they were planning for that, and they were meeting that evening, and we were welcome to come. Well, I decided, no, I'm not going to do that. I went home and I was sitting down, and something said to me, but this is what we came to do, you know. In other words, kind of break the wall down, we came to do this. So I went back out there, and I went to the meeting and I'm sitting there, you know, having had all this drama in the afternoon, I thought that would be the discussion. No, this was the meeting about pancakes for the pancake breakfast, and they continued to talk about it. And then suddenly it was over, and then the principal introduced me as a new doctor, you know, from King Hospital when it opens, in pediatrics, and had me address the group, to introduce me, right?

Smith

So I did. I met them. But my concern was, how could you sit here and talk about bacon and sausage, and your kids had been beaten half to death this afternoon? And I really started laying them out, you know, about they needed to be more attentive. And the big fat man in the back row said to me, "Who do you think you are?" Okay? Then he said to the lady who was president, "Throw him out." And I looked at him and I said, "Why don't you subject your verb?" And he said, "What you mean?" I said, "Who throw? Why don't you get up off your big fat ass and you throw me out? Why do you ask the lady to throw me?" So we got in a big, hefty argument.

Smith

Then the principal mediated it, and then we said, "Now, what should we do?" And that's when I said, "Well, first of all, I don't know what those grown men were doing on your campus, and I don't believe you know who they are. So you need to find out who goes in your school, okay? And what we need to have is a community meeting to really discuss what's happening here at this school." And I had only been there--that was my only day at Centennial [High School], first observation, so we set the Sunday up for a community meeting, and the principal said, "Well, since you suggested it, you handle it."

Smith

That Sunday afternoon, here's a big auditorium filled with parents, and that organized the Concerned Citizens of Centennial High School, and then the community division was born, okay, and school health was the point. So we started then with doing physicals on athletes, and also with some of the senior class members, and when Compton High School found out, they wanted us to do physicals on their athletes. They contacted Dr. Betty Jo Warren. She brings me over to Compton High School one afternoon. They have the basketball team. It seemed like the whole high school was going out for sports. So I'm in the gym starting to do physicals, and I turn around

and Dr. Warren had to go back to the office, and I was there till six o'clock that night, from one o'clock to six o'clock, just you know.

Smith

Then Dominguez High School found out, and they wanted physicals. So the next thing you know, we have an athletic program now, between Compton, Centennial, and Dominguez High School. Then the superintendent at the time was Aaron Wade, who then says, "Well, do you mind if we make a contract and have your department do the exams, because the exams you do are far above what was being done with our kids when we had private doctors come in. They'd just stick a thing in their mouth and on the chest, and that's the end of that." You see what I mean? So that was the beginning of how things began to evolve.

Smith

When I went to the Watts Festival, Dr. Phil Smith came to me and said that they have a tent at the Watts Festival, a first-aid tent, and now that the hospital is open--this was in August of '72--now that the hospital is open, they want the hospital to man the first-aid tent. "And since you're already out in the community doing things, I thought you would do this." Now, I'm in pediatrics, but you know, I'm used to adult medicine, too. So I met with the Council of Black Nurses, okay, and they introduced me to a group of social workers called Project HELP. So here then I get together meeting with them, and end up in the tent, managing the tent while they actually do the work, but being in charge and meeting a whole battalion of social workers, and a whole battalion of black nurses, and the next thing I know I now had some allies in the community, hooked to the community division.

Smith

You see? Step by step by step, then you begin to pull the community thing together, see. Now, the important point was this. This was in the minds of the African Americans, in terms of practicing medicine, and what they wanted out of King Hospital and Drew school, which was conceded by the Caucasian Americans, based on embarrassment, international embarrassment, with no concept of what it was they saying aye-aye to. And then proceeding for the next thirty-some years to dismantle, from that very first time, okay? Not giving enough money, then pick, pick, pick, pick, pick, until finally you bring it down. But that's what came out of the riots.

Smith

Now, there were other things that came out of the riots. They had all kinds of money being pumped in, and everybody was organizing clubs. There was a black book about yay thick--I think the black social workers put it together--of all the organizations in South Central Los Angeles, black organizations and what they were working to do, right? So you never saw so much buzzing and humming--the Mafundi Institute, I don't know if you're familiar with that?

Stevenson

Yes.

Smith

Right. And if you go there now, the book would probably be about five pages. What happened to all those organizations? Young men, women, the Parents of Watts, the Sons of Watts, the parents of what--"Sweet" Alice [Harris] has a group of parent, Sweet Alice Harris. I don't know if you know her?

Stevenson

Yes.

Smith

Yes. But there were all kinds of organizational groups, you know? And it all disappeared. And one of the biggest things that helped that disappear was the gang violence, okay, and the money was just quietly being withdrawn. More money withdrawn increased police presence, okay, increased gang presence. More kids going to jail, but less social workers, less community workers. That whole group of young men, they called themselves the Sons of Watts, very, very active, okay; the Watts Poets, for instance, came out of that group, you know? They were working with young people. Everybody disappeared, okay.

Smith

See, so that the COINTELPRO program was operative from the beginning, but the question I raise is, when did they declare actual overt war on the African American community, okay? And that's what happened, as far as I'm concerned, and it wasn't just in Watts. That was across the country. And little by little you begin to have a substitution of problems. It was no longer about integration. It was no longer about better jobs. It was no longer about all the issues of the sixties. It was now about gang violence, police brutality, lack of jobs, I mean, all kinds of things had begun to now surface, and it's all problematical, nothing was solution.

Smith

People that were beginning to work on solution kind of disappearing, dropping out, but whatever it was I'll tell you, if you went for anything, you had to go to the people to get it. The money's coming into the police department. They're determining your statistics. They're determining everything, so this is a frank war. The Vietnam War hits, so a lot of the young men go out into the Vietnam War, so for that little period that they're out you say, "Well, we'll be glad when they come back." The girls are going to college, the boys are going to war, and I would be telling the young ladies, I said, "You don't realize the problem you're going to have, because you're advancing and they're not, and when they get back, they're not the boys you sent off to serve to war. They haven't grown." It was worse than that. They came back drug-addicted, angry, okay, and the girls then were stuck out here, so you couldn't get marriages, you see. So there's all kinds of social problems that came.

Smith

But that's, to me, because the promises of that Watts riot were not realized, okay. The government reneged on them, and then made sure they undermined in a very systematic way--that was the killing of the Panthers, wiping out the Panthers, and once they wiped the Panthers out, then substituting the leadership, and ending up with the Crips and the Bloods and everybody else, you see what I mean? And then if you look at what they're doing now, resurrecting that same gang, so it's about two generations of black boys particularly, destroyed, going to jail. The jail is so crowded they don't know what to do with them. Black girls now are going into the same prison system.

Stevenson

Yes. Yes.

Smith

That's genocide, okay? Now, the roots of that start with the Watts riot, and it goes back to the Civil War. "What we going to do with the slaves?" When we went to East L.A. over the brown-black killings, and started the Brown-Black Coalition, they were talking in the car on the way back about the fact that the Mexicans had a program that they were going to repopulate California, you know, just through reproduction, and everybody thought that was funny. And my point, I said to them, "No. For every black man working in the United States, there's going to be four brown or yellow men replacing him," okay.

Smith

Now, the more you saw that happen, then the question I would pose to everybody, and we'd raise it and discuss it--you can't have two dependent minority populations. And you could see that the Hispanic population is growing, and doing what you used to do. You are unemployed, okay. Now, you're not going to sit here and eat up the profits while these folks do the work. One of you has got to go. So my point is then, if you begin to look at what's happening to us, from the point of a genocidal point of view, then you will see then that as we go down that it's a very programmatic downslide. So it's very obvious now--we're not doing well in school, we're not getting into the graduate schools, we're not getting married, girls if they're birthing babies, they're not able to take care of them, you don't have a welfare net to support, your drug thing is wiping out the mothers. At one time it was just the men with the problem, but that crack cocaine wiped out the black woman. I said, everywhere you turn, it's very obvious now that you're in a state of genocide. You see what I mean?

Smith

But the roots of it started with that Watts riot, and it was a very programmed event, and while it made you think that you were advancing, like building the King Hospital and building the Drew school, and bringing everybody in and setting them on their little tasks, that there was an

undermining. And like I used to say, for every dollar that we saw that was coming to build, five were being brought in that we didn't see, to undermine. Okay? And the other thing, and I've been telling people this in the last couple of years, the last year or two, King was built by fire through the riot. It was destroyed by the pen, meaning that it was the L.A. Times and their pen that brought down King Hospital, and it proved the adage, "The pen is mightier than the sword," okay?

Smith

But the hope is the people. The people are mightier than the pen and the sword. And then that is what the Watts riot was about, and somehow or other that kind of thing has got to happen again. I'm not saying it has to be a burning and a tearing down, but there must be a people force that begins to demand righteousness, you know, in the university system, in the healthcare system, in the jails, the political system, etc., etc., and it's going to have to be a unification of African Americans. Nobody else is going to join in that, you see what I mean? And once you get it started, then there will be others coming if there's money, okay. But even if there's not, it's got to be a movement that starts with black people. It's got to be built more around righteousness, what King was into, you see what I mean? That kind of thing has got to come back.

Stevenson

Okay. So could you tell me if you were a member of, or if you attended any meetings of the Black Congress when you came to Los Angeles?

Smith

The Black Congress? I never heard--

Stevenson

The Black Congress, which was an umbrella organization, it only existed for a couple of years in the very late sixties, early seventies.

Smith

No. I wasn't here in the sixties. No, I hadn't even heard of it.

Stevenson

Okay. All right. So the King Hospital opened in what month and year?

Smith

March of 1972.

Stevenson

Okay. And in terms of some of the programs you've already talked about, in terms of prevention and in terms of linking with the community, how much of that was Dr. Haynes' vision?

Smith

A lot of it. A lot of it. He had a community-medicine program when he started, and he was dealing a lot again with the hypertension and the obesity and that kind of thing. I think if you look at the preventive issue, that's him, okay. Now, a lot of folks would mouth it, but they had no experience with it. So that he's the one, then, that looked at a consumer. I

think he had gotten into teaching them how to go shopping and that kind of thing. That came through his department. Just a whole lot of everything stemmed with him.

Stevenson

Okay. So who were some of the other key players, in terms of the beginnings of the hospital?

Smith

Joe Alexander was the chief of surgery. He's dead now, but he was very important, I think. Joe Alexander, he came out of [Major] Walter Reed [Hospital], and he was the first chief of staff. Phil Smith was very important. He was coming out of the Drew Medical Society. There was a Dr. [Julius W.] Hill. They named one of the buildings after him. He's dead, too. I forget what his first name was. He practiced here a long time. Then the other physician, he died [unclear]. I'm trying to remember his name, played the violin. Oh, I forget his name, but he was very important with the Drew Medical Society, and also he was a good liaison between the politicians and the school, did a lot to save the school, an occasion. I'll pick his name up a little later on.

Smith

A lot of the nurses were very important in terms of putting that hospital together, and that's the unsung hero.

Stevenson

Okay. You've talked a little about that now.

Smith

I can't give you--Blanche Ross was the first director of nurses, but it's just the average nurse that responded to coming to King. When they decided to open up King, the first group of people that they started recruiting were nurses, and it was the nurses that set up the wards and set up all the clinics and did all that kind of thing. So they were instrumental in really getting the guts, the nuts and bolts of that hospital put together, okay. And they mother-henned the hospital, okay.

Smith

And one of the first things I thought I noticed when I came here that was unique and different from other hospitals, that they had more power in that hospital than you would find nurses in other hospitals. In other words, a lot of times the physician toed the line according to how they set it up, and that isn't to say they were bossy, but they were protective, okay. So they weren't going to allow the hospital to be given away or taken away, and so the continuity thread in that hospital was the Department of Nursing. So that meant then that if you're going to take down the hospital, one of the things you had to do was take down the Department of Nursing, okay.

Smith

Now, what does that mean? It means like if you went there, it looked like King might have been matriarchal. It wasn't like the black cook in the

kitchen, but the strength of that matriarch was what you saw, you see. And then when you stop and think about it, around the clock you had the nurses, okay, twenty-four hours a day. The physicians come and go. The residents come and go, so the continuity is with the nursing department. Social service with Tessie Cleveland, they were very important. They were troubleshooters, okay. And the thing--there was another one, I thought very much of her, Inez Robinson. She died. She was a pediatric social worker. They were the calming influence, so that when things looked like they were going to erode, you can bring the social workers in, and they just always had a way of calming it down, and opening it up a little wider, and giving a different point of view, you see. So that social service was almost like a glue between the physician and the nurse and the custodians and everybody else, and it was a strong department, and again, that was matriarchal.

Smith

So I think that the important point is that we think of the hospital in terms of the physician, but we never think of the hospital in terms of the nursing staff or the social work staff, okay, and when you erode those two, you really eroded the core. I think when Tessie Cleveland died, and she was kind of like young, not expected to leave, but when she died there was a change in the hospital, see. There was something missing. Now, they, of course, replaced her, but they weren't there from the beginning, and they didn't have the whole thing pulled together, you see.

Smith

When Inez Robinson died, she couldn't be replaced, you see. In terms of Dr. [Robert] Greenberg would be another important person in the beginning. He was in charge of the Department of Pediatrics, Robert Greenberg. Ezra Davidson was in charge of the Department of OB/GYN, and he built a very strong--and he was black--good department. The Department of Medicine kind of wobbled. There was Dr. David Almer, and I think that they could have been stronger, you know, in what they needed to do. They didn't have that much outreach, and I think that may have been budgetary, that they didn't get the budget that they needed to function in that capacity.

Smith

Mr. Delgado, I think it was William Delgado, he was, to me, the most outstanding administrator we had, hospital administrator. He was there--they removed him about 1990. When the L.A. Times did a series of knock-down articles in 1989, and they tried to lay out the same thing they laid out here in the last couple of years, King was strong enough to fight that off. So they brought in JACKO, and JACKO could find nothing wrong, and they brought in the group that had been like the CMS with the Medicare money, and they could find nothing wrong, so the articles didn't do anything.

Smith

But what they did then, the county blamed Delgado in some kind of way, and removed him from being the head of the hospital, and promoted him to

a downtown job. But it was obvious that he was being promoted upward to be promoted outward, you see, and the hospital then started going down. Now, the point was, why did they do that to him? Not because of what he didn't do; because of what he did do. He kept it intact, okay, and it was because he was a good, strong administrator that the L.A. Times articles did not work, okay. So they got rid of him and then brought in a series of administrators that just didn't have it, and the place was able to go down, and then suddenly [Zev] Yaroslavsky jumped. I blame him as the supervisor as being the cutthroat.

Smith

And then there was a Dr. Garthwaite that he brought in, and between the two of them, they engineered the downfall, okay. [Yvonne] Braithwaite-Burke sat there like a robin in the springtime, okay. She just had no clue. She had two hospitals that she had to be in charge of. That was the first trap she was in. She had Harbor and King. Now, which one are you going to gravitate to? Then they threw open the fact that if we're going to do a budget cut, then we're going to have to sacrifice Harbor. No way, okay? Now, that means you have Jane Harman, the representative, she comes to the aid of Harbor Hospital. She's in Congress, right? Now, she's a white lady in Congress. Now, we've got black ladies in Congress, but certainly a black lady in Congress ain't like a white lady in Congress, okay. And our hospital sits in the black lady's district in Congress. [laughter]

Smith

Now, there's two black ladies, right? But my point being that here is Yvonne now, got to make a decision. Are they going to close down Harbor and let King fly? And now you've got to talk to Juanita [Millender-McDonald], who's black, and talk to Jane, who's white. Which one is going to face you down? And I'm saying that you kicked in to Harbor. Now, everybody starts picking at King and saying, this happened and that happened. Yes, it happened. But go around to all the hospitals and find out what happened. And like I told them in 1989, is King Hospital responsible for the high medical-malpractice insurance in the State of California? In other words, why is the medical-malpractice so high if King is the only problem? Okay? So obviously, King is not the only problem. So what's the point?

Smith

Now, my point would be, did UCLA closed its morgue? No. Well, why do they have it? They practice excellently. Okay? So my point being that you've got crowded morgues all over the United States, and everybody in the morgue didn't die naturally.

Stevenson

Right.

Smith

Okay? Now, if you're going to do an expose on physicians killing people, do it, but don't single King out, okay. And then when you take all the money

out of King, and then we have to reach into our own pockets and do all kinds of things to keep the thing going, then you're going to jump us? Now, the expression I used comes right out of the steel mills, and if you don't mind if I use it?

Stevenson

No.

Smith

We got shot with shit, and kicked for stinking. That's the best way I can tell it. You smeared me up, now you blame me, do you follow?

Stevenson

Yes.

Smith

And that would be the sum total of the history of King Hospital, okay, starting with the COINTELPRO, and ending with Yaroslavsky. And I couldn't put it no clearer than that.

Stevenson

Okay. Well, let me backtrack a little bit. Before the hospital opened, someone or some team must have gone out into the community to determine what the critical healthcare needs were, and what were those?

Smith

Yes. Now, again you come back to Dr. Haynes, okay? In those years that he was calling me and saying he was going to Los Angeles, that's what he was doing. He was getting with JPL [Jet Propulsion Laboratory], I think he had a contract with the JPL to do an assessment.

Stevenson

The Jet Propulsion, you mean?

Smith

Yes, in Pasadena. And they then looked at the health stats in the community, and they prepared a report. That was long before they even started construction. And they prepared a report of what were the leading causes of morbidity, and leading causes of death, in order to project what we would need in terms of programming, you see. I remember when I first came, Dr. Haynes gave me a couple of stats on the teenagers, and especially the homicides, because I was very concerned about that. They had done that study in the sixties, but they had projected into the seventies, and I think that the homicide rate had even gone beyond their projection by the time we came into King. But that had happened, and Dr. Haynes was primarily involved with that, and with the JPL Study. That's why you need to talk to him, yes, and his wife, too.

Smith

And the reason I think that it would be good to talk to her is to find out what happens to a family, and what is the price that a family pays. Okay, she did not work at King and she was not hired by King. She did a lot of

volunteering. But every time he got kicked, she got kicked, and I don't mean he kicked her, but she had to feel his pain.

Stevenson

Right.

Smith

And she wanted to yank him out of there so many times, because it was just unfair, not only to him but to the whole family. So that's why, you know, you want that perspective.

Stevenson

Okay. So what were some of those critical healthcare needs, before King Hospital?

Smith

The same, the same, the cardiovascular, stroke, hypertension, diabetes, obesity, asthma, okay, infant mortality, excessive infant mortality, homicide, particularly starting in the teens, and becoming almost the first cause of death right on up to about fifty, in males, and second for women up to that age. Those were there then, and they're there now. In terms of unemployment, that unemployment rate, the broken families, single-parent homes, poverty, all of those things were there then; they're there now. So in other words, everything that they're identifying today was identified. The question is, how much change, and the point being, very little; maybe more increased in some instances, okay.

Smith

The asthma has increased, especially with children. Nobody understands why, do you see what I mean? Infant mortality may have dipped down a little bit, but it's still not in relationship to the other racial groups. The stroke from--I can't give the statistic on the stroke, but from my observation, I see many more young people with strokes than I saw when I first came here, okay. Now, there's a lot of young folks that you see war-wounded, as I call it, in the wheelchairs from the gang violence, but there's a lot of bona fide stroke victims, okay. In fact, I know a young man we worked with from junior high--he's about forty-nine now. He had a severe, massive stroke two years ago, a year ago, and he's in a rest home now, and he's been in a rest home once he came out of the coma, bedridden at forty-eight, forty-nine. That's just unusual.

Stevenson

Do you have speculation on the increase in the younger age group? Any speculation on the reason for it?

Smith

Yes, there's a couple of things. Drugs, for one thing, okay, and I think stress, diet. You know, the diet changes. When you have a stable home, they eat one way. When people are on the run, they eat another way. I don't care how much bad food they bring into the house, like for weight gain. It's not as poisonous as what they get in the street. In other words, like if you go to

a fast food, the amount of salt you're picking up is way out of whack, versus if you're home cooking, and even if you salt your food, it's not going to match what you're picking up in the street. You see what I mean?

Stevenson

Right.

Smith

And even if you get to overweight at home eating, it's different from the kinds of fat you're using as against the trans-fat from everything else, you see. So I think that there's more poison in the younger generation, systematic poison from food, than we had even when we first came here. People were more in the home, and if you look at--let's say it's like this. There was a time when you went out and you looked and you said, "Nobody's cooking." I'm looking at just black people. And then suddenly I go down and I don't see them in the fast-food restaurants like I used to, and the reason is, they don't have any money. I'm looking at the Hispanics, and they're at the point where the black people were. It's almost like they are going to a four-star restaurant by going to McDonald's. But that means that she's not cooking, okay.

Stevenson

Right.

Smith

So she's become Americanized, and we can look for the same trends of hypertension and stroke to occur with that, see. But the stress thing is the other thing I think that with so many of the young people, in terms of just trying to make a living, and it's getting harder and harder. The young girls are doing two jobs, three jobs, especially if they used to be on welfare, and the young men with no jobs, you know. The other thing that I'm concerned about are the homeless, which no one is keeping a record of, so we never know how many of them disappear, you see. So I think that just the stressful living conditions and the changes in the economy have really put a bite on the young blacks, you know.

Smith

The older black women, particularly, knew how to cut corners, because they came from poverty, so they know what to do. They'd know how to can food and make things work. Younger black women don't know that, you see what I mean, so a lot of them have been trying to maintain that lifestyle of what they're eating, which they shouldn't be doing, you know. But they just don't know how to turn corners, you know.

Stevenson

Yes. Okay. So King Hospital is open now. What was the impact of the hospital in those first years, in terms of impact on some of those critical healthcare needs?

Smith

It had a heavy impact. Number one, just take my area, in terms of cardiac disease, and more for Hispanics than blacks are general problems, you know. But we had, first of all, diagnostics picking it up, meaning you had less sudden deaths and less deaths at home, because you're picking these babies up in the nursery, you're picking them up in the schools, in terms of being out in the schools doing the CHDP [Child Health Disability Prevention Program] exams in the kindergarten with the Head Start Program, so that you could then pick these kids up and then get them into therapy.

Stevenson

Right. And that test was called a C--?

Smith

CHDP, the Child Health Disability Prevention Program. It's funded by the state. We did that in Compton, and in the housing projects, so that every kid that was about three or four years of age could get a physical and immunization free. So when we went into the Compton [Unified] School District, what we would do then is like we would examine all the kids when we had a full battalion of workers. The Hispanics were not eligible, because many of them were illegal, okay. But because we came out of King, we got reimbursed for the African American kids that were able. It was a program. I was salaried by the country. The people that worked with me were salaried by Drew. We had a little grant. Therefore, we weren't depending on that money, okay. Then Drew allowed me to take that money and put it in a special fund that we called the Compton Pediatric Schoolhouse Organization, nonprofit, and we were able to use that money, and we used that money to run other programs.

Smith

But in the meantime, we could do the physicals on the Mexican children who didn't have access, and who weren't able to qualify. So it meant then we could examine every kid in the kindergarten, okay? And that's when we picked up--a lot of them had a lot of congenital problems, you see. Then you could bring them in, and once you got them into Crippled Childrens, and then with Dr. Isabel-Jones being here, we could just--okay? And we had no problem getting them operated, when they got operated, and the operations were successful. So that program was a very successful program, you know, in terms of looking at congenital heart disease.

Smith

When we started working with young adolescents, we didn't work with gangs, because we would not honor that term, okay, because to me that was part of the I-Spy. I credit the gang with the federal government, so that's part extension of the army. But the boy is an extension of his mother, so when I meet you, I meet you as coming out of your mother's house. So whenever we met with anybody, we know they're gang members, but we're not honoring that, so we're dealing with you as a person, and just this

working with, we were able to do a lot of things with turning them around, getting them into a different kind of area.

Smith

I had a very excellent community worker, youth worker, and he was good with our Adolescent Emancipation Program in terms of getting them into community colleges, armed services, a lot of them in the armed services, into jobs, you know, so there's a lot of things that we would do then in terms of giving direction for these young adolescent males. The girls were not that much of a problem, because they had more concepts, and things were much more open to them. Working with families, especially with mothers, and mothers of sons, particularly, where they get to the point, they don't know what to do, and so there's a lot of counseling that you would do, and a lot of times we would do this at the kitchen table. So, you know, there was many a time we were in [William] Nickerson [Jr. Gardens] at night in somebody's home, okay, or in Compton at somebody's home.

Smith

We introduced the hypertension program. We had a hypertension grant, and we hooked that up to our athletic program, so we're examining all the athletes, and looking at how--we had high blood pressure. If we found any kid that had high blood pressure, then we went and checked the family, and we went to the house and checked everybody in the family to find out if there's any hypertension with the parents. Then Dr. Greenberg had an aspect of that grant where he wanted to look at cause, so he was looking at renin [phonetic] and these kinds of things. We'd have to go to the home in the morning while they were still in bed, and draw blood. And we had worked to such a point, being trusted to this degree, that we could arrange with the family, "Leave your door open, because in order for you not to disturb the blood, we can't have you getting out of bed to answer the door. So when you go to bed tonight, leave the door open, and we're coming in at five o'clock."

Stevenson

That's a high level of trust.

Smith

It is a very high level of trust. So at five o'clock we're standing over your bed waking you up so we can draw your blood, okay? Well, now, imagine the impact when they tell their neighbors. Do you follow my point?

Stevenson

Yes.

Smith

So in other words, see, so we're teaching hypertension and this kind of thing. In the schools we worked with the teachers, so we were allowed to go into the classrooms. So like if we decided that--and once a month we would have in-class lectures. We'd go through the English class, okay, and we would then have--we'd just stick a resident or a medical student. "You're

going to take the topic of hypertension, you're going to deal with these high-school kids, and each class comes in all day, it may be five classes, you're going to talk about that subject to five classes of kids, and they're going to interact with you." You see what I mean?

Smith

We established lectures at Centennial, all-school lecture, girls one day, boys another day, and then deal with the health problem, okay. So we were able then to open up, and that was in the early years, and the teachers and the principals were just glad to have us in there, okay. So from the athletic program, then we were able to work into the gang violence, and from that we were able to get into adolescent emancipation, we were able to do counseling with the parents, we were able to do the hypertension, but all that we called school health, okay?

Smith

Occasionally we'd meet, especially in the elementary age, when you'd find some of the Hispanic families coming in, they didn't have money, and we had the CHDP plan, then we could buy groceries and deliver them to different families, okay? We started a camping trip at the camping program. We noticed that--and this was for gang violence--that the kids from Imperial Courts, down the street from Nickerson Gardens, were fighting each other. Jordan Downs was against all of them. So everywhere you turned, these guys, these folks were fighting-- black kids--but they never had a chance to interact.

Smith

So what we decided was, why don't we--and this came from a Japanese resident [unclear], who talked to us about camping, if we would be interested in getting some of these kids to go to camp. So introduced us to the Methodist camp, and so we said, "Okay, we'll try that." So what we said then was, "What we'll do is we'll pick a certain number of kids from each of the housing projects, and we will send them to three sessions, and we'll mix them up." So our camping program then is we begin to mix up kids from all the housing projects, so that if we send a busload out, they all came from various housing projects. That's where they met each other. So then what we found was then that these kids were actually working out certain things, because they were shocked, the fact that they were getting to meet each other and getting along together when they're supposed to be enemies. But the reason they could do this is because they were now mixed with white kids and Mexican kids, and they were not black kids. They had to stick together, okay? Whereas when they were in their own turf, they were under the police jurisdiction and all that venom that was being fed to them, and they just kept them as enemies, okay?

Smith

When we started another program, and then we got into this camping program, there was a young man from Nickerson that joined our group. We

called ourselves the Watts College, you know; we organized the Watts College. That's the story of how we met him, but it's through him that he opened up the gangs in Nickerson and all these other areas, not that we met each one of them, but they let us go through. In other words, "You can come in," okay? But he's the one then would get the kids for our camping program, so we put him in charge of the camping program. Couldn't pay him, okay, just an ordinary dude. I called him my in-house social worker, okay, but he could organize the kids for basketball or whatever was going on. Now, that was how we began to get into getting into the gang violence.

Smith

Then we decided to have a memorial program, and that's the Watts College, because we were discouraged. With all the lectures we'd been giving, and we have our annual conference, it's not making any dent. And so one lady said, "Well, it's a spiritual problem." Well, of course we know that. And then we started talking, talking, talking, and then thinking about it. Yes, it is a spiritual problem. I says, "You know what? These kids act like they never heard the commandment, 'Thou shalt not kill.'" So we batted that around. Then I asked, "Has anybody in here ever told a kid, thou shalt not kill?" So we did a poll around the room, specifically, "Have you ever told a kid, thou shalt not kill?" No, thought he knew that. What if he doesn't know that?

Smith

I said, "So why don't we go into Nickerson and have a memorial program, with a communion service, and it's one message, thou shalt not kill?" And so we went in, and said, "Greg, we'd like to go in." "Yeah, bring it to Nickerson." So we went into Nickerson Gardens with our memorial program, okay?

Stevenson

Did you have a minister involved?

Smith

No. Yes, we finally got one, but at first no. We got a Reverend [Huey Phillip] Rachal, from Greater New Unity Baptist Church. He died just this past Christmastime. He had a worker, Ella Andrews. She joined our Watts College, a very strong member of our Watts College. Anything she wanted, he told her it was at her disposal, so if she wanted to bring the junior choir, fine. Sometimes he'd have me come to his church in the pulpit, okay? So he was very supportive, okay.

Smith

Now, when we went to the service, the communion service, he didn't come. But he might send one of his ministers, or we would just find somebody to do it. There was a young kid at Compton High School, Leonard Primus, who was a minister. He was our first celebrant for our first memorial service, okay, and we called it the Service of the Golden Thread. In fact, we held that first at [John C.] Fremont High School. But anyhow, when we went to Nickerson, the people of Nickerson wanted to know, what was this sideshow

coming in, okay? Well, we had our little service. People sang. We brought in the organ, the piano. We put flowers all around the place. We had our own candles going, etc. The kids roller-skated up to the table and took the communion, and when it was over they wanted to know if you had any more punch and cookies, okay. But the point was that we realized, hey, this is where we need to be, so every year we'd go back.

Smith

Out of that, see, then came Greg being able to get the members for the camping, our being able to do that communion service. Then the next thing we said is now--he brought it up to the point is that, "You know, a lot of these kids need to be immunized," he says, "because they have Medicare, but their parents ain't doing nothing about that." So I had a very good nurse, Mrs. Boraboom, from Thailand, and that's a story in itself, too. Yes. So we would go to the housing projects and set up our little tent--not tent, but create a desk like that, get to working. I'd do the physical exams and she'd do the immunization, okay. So then that was hooked to our camping.

Smith

So if we're going in to do camping exams, we might as well do the immunizations while we're here, okay? So then we'd go to each one of those housing projects in preparation for camping, and yet we were accomplishing the physical exam and the immunizations, and dealing with the parents in terms of talking, okay? Mrs. Boraboom was assigned to me by the Department of Nursing. They had a nurse--when my grant was stolen from me by the chairman of my department, Dr. Schlegal, and that got rid of all my workers, so my community worker was gone, my clerk was gone. The only person left was me and Dr. Hines.

Smith

Dr. Ernie Smith, Ph.D., volunteered and would come to my office, because we had an extern program where kids from the high school would spend their afternoon at the hospital, out of our office. He would sit in my office and run the extern program, and answer the telephones. We didn't have anybody to answer telephones, okay? So in other words, I was being stripped down. It was supposed to destroy the program. Well, then I got my Watts College group, and they pulled in behind me, okay. So then the community in volunteering, ran that office and we kept it going, okay.

Smith

Then the nursing department sent me--they had a nurse that was having little mental problems, and so they said, "Well, we don't want to get rid of the sister, so we're going to slip her over to you." I said, "What am I going to do with her?" They said, "She could sit and look at people, and make the people think you've got something going, even if you ain't." But she was able to function, you know. But they said, "Well, listen. Just take her. Trust us. And as soon as we can, we'll get somebody for you." Okay? So I worked with her for about maybe a year, and then all of a sudden the lady, the head

nurse in pediatrics calls and lets me know she has a nurse that she wants to send to me. So I asked who it was, and she said, "Mrs. Boraboom." I said, "But she works down in the peds outpatient. She's in charge of the evening shift." I said, "She can hardly speak English." I said, "Are you kidding? You think I'm taking her out to Nickerson Gardens in the projects, and she can hardly speak? The boys will scare the hell out of this lady."

Smith

"Trust me." That's what they said, okay? Mrs. Boraboom comes, you'd have thought she was back in Thailand. It made no difference to her one way or the other. I mean, she was a stone-hard worker, okay? And the people couldn't pronounce her name, so they called her Mrs. B. And so you could go anywhere in the housing projects and ask, "How about Mrs. B?" "Oh, she's mean, she's mean." "No, she gets things together," you know? But we could be out to midnight. I remember we were in Compton College doing physicals in the dark, and her husband got concerned, and he called to find out, "Where are you?" "I'm at Compton College. We're just finishing up," at midnight, you see what I mean?

Smith

But anyhow, that's the kind of thing that we were able to finally establish. So we were doing the physicals on the athletes at Compton College. They had the program for summer youth workers and recreation at Compton College. We did the physicals for them. We'd go into the housing projects and do physicals and immunizations. We were doing the athletes at Compton Senior High School, and then we finally branched out to do the junior-high school, and we were doing the elementary school until Compton got their health program together. But all of that was being done by me and this one nurse, and if we could hire a clerk periodically, we could, and we got no money from nobody. And with that little bit of money we got with the CHDP, we used the CHDP for camping, we used the CHDP for supplies, we used the CHDP if somebody needed some food. Occasionally somebody would have a funeral, and they needed a little help with the funeral, we'd use the money for that.

Smith

One of the kids, one of the girls was going to go for an interview for college, and it was on the East Coast and she had no carfare; we used the money for that, okay? Sometimes if a kid needed something for tuition, we used the money for that. In other words, that CHDP fund became a slush fund, but it allowed us then to be able to economically decompress certain areas of the community. I learned that, after I got here, that you can't even as a medical person be of any import to the problems of the community if you have no bank, okay? You've just got to have cash. People, you know, it's all right to go to church and they say, "We'll pray." But when they come to you, they want tangible, okay?

Smith

Now, they sit down and they tell you, and it's obvious woe. If you had said, what was the pressure? Their head is about ready to blow off. The medicine is part of it. She needs a solution to her problem, okay, and the solution to the problem is maybe \$500 in one-dollar bills, okay? And once you give her that, then you can pray all you want to, if that's what you need to do. But \$500 is what she needs, not the pills. You see what I mean? So you can give the medicine and the 500, and you come back next week and everything seems to be straightened out pretty good. See, that aspect is not taught in medical school.

Stevenson

You mean affecting quality of life.

Smith

Quality of life, that affects health. Money is what runs this country, okay? And a lot of times when people are looking for resources, they don't exist, and they come to the doctor. Now, if he's a foolish doctor he will take his own money. Well, he's going to be on that side of the table next. But there needs to be some way that he has slush-fund money, okay? And so when we were able to earn that money with the CHDP, that became our slush fund, which made a great difference of relief within the community, you see?

Smith

Now, for instance, we don't have that now, and I'm not practicing. But we started this Easter thing at Nickerson, Easter-egg hunt. That's coming up. So they're looking at me and saying, "Do you think you can get anything to help us with the Easter-egg hunt?" Well, what they really mean is, "We can't have it if you don't," okay? Then I've got to go out and raise the money, and generally raising the money is just from the right pocket to the left pocket, you follow? But these are the things that are missing in the African American community. This is why you have angry young men and angry young women, who hit people in the head, okay, who are on drugs, who can't learn or won't learn. You see what I mean? Because it requires more than an understanding; it requires money. Okay? Mothers who just don't have it, you see what I mean?

Smith

I remember this one lady had a whole lot of children, and she'd run out of money before the end of the month, and then they went to sugar sandwiches and lard sandwiches. But she had them so trained that you couldn't take them out to dinner, okay? Because they wouldn't betray their mother, okay. So if you asked them, "You want a hamburger?" "No, no." "Would you like to have this?" "No, no." You know, no implication that we're poor or something's wrong, you see what I mean? So you had to kind of have a way to slip it to them. "Do this for me," and then you'd slip a little money. "Do that for me," you see what I mean? So that's an aspect in all the poverty programs, medical programs, health programs, that's an aspect that has to be added, a slush fund, okay, and then how to learn how to

discern it, meaning, you just don't give it away to everybody, and certainly you don't steal it, you see what I mean? I had that little problem, too, where some of the folks that we had hired to work with us, professional, didn't know the difference between county checks and CHDDP, you know what I mean?

Stevenson

Okay.

1.3. Session 3 April 13, 2007

Stevenson

I'm continuing an interview with Dr. Ernest Smith, on Friday, April thirteenth [2007]. I have first some follow-up questions. In the early days of King Hospital, who were the elected officials other than Kenny [Kenneth Frederick] Hahn, who were supportive or who were key players?

Smith

Schabarum, [Los Angeles County Supervisor] Pete Schabarum, was a very important key player, not necessarily in favor of the King Hospital.

Stevenson

Well, either way.

Smith

Yes. There was a Hayes, I believe, [Los Angeles County] Supervisor [James A.] Hayes, and I think he was killed in an auto accident. I think he was a supporter of King. Those three I can remember. Now, [Los Angeles County Supervisor Michael D.] Antonovich, who is president now, he came later, but he was with Schabarum. They were buddies, okay, and so he still maintains his conservative stance. I guess that's the word they use now?

Stevenson

Right.

Smith

In his anti-stance, you know, yes. Now, the interesting thing to me is that [Los Angeles County Supervisor Yvonne] Braithwaite-Burke, [Los Angeles County Supervisor Gloria] Molina, and [Los Angeles County Supervisor Zev] Yaroslavsky came in the nineties, okay. I think they came around '94, and then, of course, Braithwaite-Burke replaced Kenneth Hahn. And [unclear] was still there, okay. What it would imply with five supervisors, that you have a very liberal board, and that's who sunk the ship. Okay? And Yaroslavsky led the attack. Yvonne went to sleep at the switch. I don't know whether she thought that it was a debutante's ball or just what, you know what I mean? But she didn't do what she could have done, I don't feel, okay, and Molina, of course, was moving for her people, and taking her cut out the middle.

Smith

But the important point is, it wasn't conservatives that did this. It was the so-called liberals that did this, or allowed it to happen, and I think that's an important thing to me. Everybody gets down on these class lines, and like Democrat-Republican, liberal and conservative, and when the deal goes down you're always looking for somebody with a hood that's bringing you the knife, when it's actually the priest who has the knife hidden in the chalice. You understand what I'm saying?

Stevenson

Exactly.

Smith

See, and that's the thing that I think that catches people off guard. That's why everybody at King was so slow to mobilize, you know. We're having our march now, it's after the fact. It's after the physical fact, but not after the moral thing, you know, and that's the main reason why we're going out. But during the time, we were just paralyzed, because you didn't know which way to go with it, because you're looking at sheep, but they're wolves, okay? And it's not until after the meal that you realize that these were wolves and not sheep.

Stevenson

Right. Did that surprise you, that it was the liberals?

Smith

Not really, not really. There's a book out, City of Crystal, or something like that, and it talks about the two machines that run Los Angeles, and Los Angeles County I think it is. One is being out in the east end of the county, the other is on the west end. So one is Jewish and one is Anglo, and they are the ones who are the shot callers. So it means, then, that if you look at the Board of Supervisors or the city council, or anybody who's going to be in politics, they're going to come out of one of those two machines. There are not enough black people in California to really be effective, so it means in Los Angeles we don't elect anybody really. So if we don't get cooperation from the Hispanics and Anglos, then you can't win. But you're not just going to go out there and be a lone cannon, and then say, "I'm going to run." No, I think you're going to hook up with a money machine, and then to a great degree you're going to follow their policy.

Smith

Now, the biggest policy in Los Angeles is making money, by hook or crook, and the biggest thing going now is development, so it means then that it's the developers that are calling the shots, okay. And in that respect, everything that we have as a people, whether it be South Central or Compton or West L.A., is on land, and it's up for sale--not for sale--it's up for grabs. Therefore, then, these folks are going to do whatever they can to make the land available, and that means then that the people that you think are on your side were not hired by you, and really not voted in by you, and owe you absolutely nothing. Okay? And they will continue to do whatever

they do, because if I'm a politician, that's what I'm going to be until I die, I hope. And if I'm going to be elected, I want to keep being elected, so I have to then not bite the hand that feeds me, and I think that's the history of King Hospital.

Smith

Kenneth Hahn becomes a martyr, as far as we know, because he seemingly was out there on his own fighting for that hospital. Now, the question is, was he really on his own? There had to be some kind of financial backing for him. Until that's revealed, you don't know, okay? Now, if he was not in one of those machines, then there was a third machine, and whatever that third machine is, it hasn't made itself known at present. You follow what I'm saying?

Stevenson

Okay. Since we're talking about Kenny Hahn, can you talk a little bit more about his legacy in the community, even beyond King Hospital?

Smith

Oh yes. He was very well loved, there's no question about it, and it was generational. I think he came in--it's an interesting thing. When he came in the fifties I believe it was, I was an intern at Fresno County [Hospital]. I remember there was a nurse, a white lady, who was very friendly, and they were of the same church, and she's the first one that began to tell me about this young man in Los Angeles who the church was behind, who was pushing him to get into the city council, I believe it was, and then she was saying that they were going to be some great changes if he got in, especially for black people, because his whole point in getting in was going to make changes that were pro-black. And the church he came out of was a black church, and that's what she let us know, that [C.O.G.I.C.] Church of God in Christ, the one that was from Azusa Street? Yes.

Stevenson

So he went to that church.

Smith

I think he was a member of that church, yes, yes.

Stevenson

Okay, yes, the Azusa Street revival and all that, okay.

Smith

Yes. And I think his mother was a very strongly involved Christian woman.

Stevenson

That explains a lot of things.

Smith

Oh yes. Commitment, commitment, and you can see it in the daughter particularly. Now, everybody was asking, what happened to the son? And coming from Northampton Heights in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, I have to give that slant to it. He's the only white boy in the midst of a black community, because his father was--they lived in a black community. He

must have got his butt whipped every damn day, so that as a personal point he'd be very angry, okay? So my point is that if he ever had a chance to pay back, he needs to pay back, so I look at that as payback for an experience that probably hasn't been expressed, of what it was to be the son of in a black community where the children of are not representative of their parents, meaning, your father is working and very much involved with black folk, and the black folk very much appreciate him, but the children of the black folk don't understand that, and they see a white boy and they just beat him, and he can't do anything about it but represent his dad, you see what I mean? So I think that may have had a lot to do with him distancing himself. He'd have to write his own memoirs.

Stevenson

Right. Okay. You talked about a camping program and some other programs, I think adolescent emancipation in conjunction with the housing authority.

Smith

Not the housing authority, with the housing project.

Stevenson

Housing projects. Who were the people on the institutional side in the housing project administration who were supportive of all of these programs?

Smith

Never met anybody.

Stevenson

Okay. So I mean, was there anybody on the administrative side that had to give any approvals?

Smith

Yes, they did. They gave approval, but silently. How would you say it? When we wanted to use the gym, then we got permission. We didn't seek the permission. The guys we were working with at Nickerson, they got the permission, and if we needed tables and chairs and things in the auditorium, they got that, okay. So we never had to interface with the administration.

Stevenson

So it's silent approval.

Smith

It was given to the young men, and it was legal. I mean, they had signatures, but we didn't get into that, see, so we didn't have to go and prove nothing, or anything else. And these were the Bloods, I imagine, of Nickerson, you know, who were very much involved with any kind of program we could bring to Nickerson. That was another thing that people don't understand. They use a term, gang. That's a police term. And when I lecture on adolescents, the idea of peer grouping is divided by money, okay? If your parents make over \$50,000 a year, you're peer group is called a club. If your parents make under \$50,000 a year, then your peer group is

called a gang. A club never does wrong, and a gang never does right, so that you can pick up any kid who's going to be in a gang and automatically put a crime on him, and he can't disprove it. And you go to anybody in a club, and you have to find a way to prove they had a crime, but you can't prove it as a police officer. You get what I'm saying? So it's a class-divided system, but it's also dependent on money and color, you see?

Smith

Now, the important point is that when you go into the housing projects, as we did, there were no social workers. We didn't deal with social workers. We didn't deal with anybody from the county, so none of the people that worked for the county. We didn't deal with any police officers. We didn't deal with anybody. The very fact that we got into Nickerson came from one of the gang members who had organized a basketball team, and they had a basketball team between Nickerson and some other projects which these young men had done. Well, to me that's high-level social work. Yes. And so we met them at [David Starr] Jordan High School. We had a parade with our Watts College, and we were having our Week of the Child, and we started off with having a fair at Jordan High School, where you'd have the Pop Locking, and the kids had a chance to perform at a talent show and the whole shot. This is the introduction to our Week of the Child.

Smith

And this young man came up to us, because he was shocked to find out that we were there, and we were from King Hospital. So he said to us he had this basketball team that needed to go to Long Beach to play a game, but they had no transportation. We had a van, okay. So I told my community worker, "Take them to Long Beach." It's a Saturday afternoon. "Take them to the game, and bring them back." And the young man was astounded, because my community worker stayed there at the game and waited for them, and at whatever time it was that they had at their leisure, then he brought them back to Nickerson.

Smith

Then we also told him about our program, and he wanted to know, "Well, who are you, and what do you do?" So I said, "Meet us at such-and-such a hotel Monday morning," and he did. And when he saw that we had this whole week lined out on issues dealing with black children, about gangs and the whole shot, he was astounded that we were even dealing with their problems. You know what I'm saying? In other words, they didn't realize that there were other black folk very much concerned about the poverty, very much concerned about gangs, and they don't live in the housing projects or even in your neighborhood, but they're working on it. You follow? Well, he said, "How do you join--?" And we called ourselves the Watts College.

Smith

"How do you join the Watts College?" And I says, "You show up. We meet on Monday nights. Now, what we find out is, do you have anything to say? You've lived on Earth twenty-some years, so you ought to know something, and if you know something, teach it. That's what the Watts College is all about." Well, he joined us. But I think that first year we were going to either Centennial [High School] or Compton High School for our memorial program, and he wanted to know, "Can't you bring it to Nickerson?" I said, "Yes, we can bring it." So the next year we took it to Nickerson. He arranged all of it, with his buddies. All we had to do was show up. The chafing tables, the chairs were set up. We set up a communion table, okay. We rented an organ and a piano. We marched from King Hospital, the parking lot, to Nickerson.

Smith

Now, within our Watts College group there were a lot of folks who just simply would not be going into Nickerson, okay, and they were angry with us for even contemplating. Now, they weren't afraid of the gangs. They were angry at the gangs, see, because in other words, like when you take the murders and the killings, that has ramifications in the black community, so there are people that are rankled because they've lost sons and they've lost relatives behind the gang violence, you see. So my point was, well, we're going to go anyhow.

Smith

Then when we went into Nickerson, what we always did, what I called we pulled chits. If I went to speak for you, I don't want your money, but I need your presence, okay, so when I have a program I want you to come. So we had a lot of promises to go into Nickerson with us. So half the Watts College stuck with us. When it came time for our caravan, we had six carloads of senior citizens who couldn't walk, so we had to drive and ride in cars. And we had two motorcycles with Mexicans, and that was it. Now, all the folks that promised didn't show. But we went into Nickerson and we had a communion service. It shocked everybody in Nickerson, okay, and that's when the kids rolled up to the communion table on roller skates, and the ministers wanted to know what them kids are doing at the communion table, you know, [unclear]. And my point was, hey, that'll do it.

Smith

When it was over, they wanted to know if we had any more punch and cookies, so they didn't even get the sense of what we were doing. My point was, well, how can you begin to talk on a moral principle when you're not on the same page, okay? So who's teaching the children the morality? You don't get that in school, okay. So then I went and told a young man, I said, "Hey, we'll be back next year." We came back the next year and he had names--I wanted names of the kids that have gotten killed. He had names, so we read those off in the service. We came back the next year and these names were on plywood, okay? And what we found out was that a lot of the people in Nickerson couldn't relive a funeral, so the idea of coming to the memorial

service, they just couldn't do that. But they came to the plywood the morning of, and they would sit and have their own little thing with whoever's loved one it was whose name was on the plywood.

Smith

We came back the next year, and the names were painted on the doors of the gym. And now if you go down to Nickerson and look at their gymnasium, you'll see this massive memorial on the front, of names, "Gone but not forgotten," okay? That was the program, translate the numbers into the names. It was not a hundred people killed. It was John, it was Jim, it was Mary, it was Mrs. Brown's boy, it was Mrs. Smith's kid, you follow my point? And once you humanize these things, then the people become cognizant. We're not shooting rabbits, okay? We're shooting people.

Smith

Now, this is the thing that doesn't come out in the L.A. Times. It doesn't come out like that. The human aspect, even of the gang member, doesn't come out. They're painted with this brush of how bad they are, but they're not painted looking at how good they are, okay? So no matter what we wanted at Nickerson, they were there for it. When we started getting the kids together for camps, they got the kids together for us, okay? When we wanted to give immunizations, they found a place in Nickerson for us to have the immunizations, okay. So in other words, they did everything they could to make sure our program worked.

Smith

Now, suppose that we had the money and the wherewithal to repeat that in every housing project? Do you understand what I'm saying?

Stevenson

Right. Right.

Smith

The kids--the spirit of the children is good, but the circumstance of the children is bad. Everybody wants to change the spirit without changing the circumstance. It cannot be done. The sermon on the mount--Jesus knew he had a bunch of hungry folks there. They didn't come to hear him, they came to eat, okay, so he had to feed them. Once they got a full belly, they could sit, listen, and criticize, okay? But the point was, they had to be fed first, take care of their human need. That's the thing that was not done.

Smith

That's why when we got in the camping program, you know, these kids need to be in an environment of play, peaceful play. Now, camp is a good place for that. How did we get it? We tried camping. We had one member of our college who had been in the armed services, Mr. Francis, and he was good at camping, you know. So he would organize the camping thing with the boys, and then with the girls, and we'd go out to the [William S.] Hart Ranch and this kind of thing. But then there was a student from UCLA, the medical students who were rotating through King, and they would rotate through my

division in pediatrics, and they were very much involved with that. They loved it. And he's the one that said, "Why don't you send these kids to one of the major camps, like the Methodist camp, All-Nations [Camp]?"

Smith

I said, "Well, I don't know if we have the money." He says, "Well, I'll look into it for you," which he did. So then when we sat down he said, "Well, it's within our range to send at least--we could send a hundred kids," okay. Then we said, "Well, let's make that into a program." In other words, what will they learn from that? Well, we want them to learn how to get along with each other, even though they have to learn how to get along with others outside of their group, outside of even their ethnic group. They've still got to learn how to get along with each other. So what we said we'll do is we will take a number of children from each housing project, and always mix them up, and send them to camp, okay? And those kids, they were shocked. The biggest thing they got out of the camp was, the people from Nickerson met kids from Jordan Downs, who were their enemies, and at camp they were not their enemies. You follow?

Smith

So then our camping program became a part of the programming on gang violence, okay, to give the chance for the Bloods to meet the Crips, but on neutral territory and within a mix of other people that their little program was just too small. You can't tear up All-Nations Camp with your little problem. Then we would send them to the UCLA Camp, okay? So as we'd find these different camps we'd send them to, and that's when they would begin to get along and meet each other.

Smith

Then the young men that were in the housing projects, especially in Nickerson, they were very helpful with these young people, so that we had volunteerism coming from them, where we couldn't afford it if we were to look for money, you know. I'm not one for grants, and the reason I'm not one for grants is because the grants control your program, so you then tailor your program to suit the availability of the money, which is not what you started out to do. So my point is I don't want the grant, because I want to do what I want to do, and then we just have to find the wherewithal. The main thing I found was all the programs we did, we had some CHDP money, but it was mostly volunteers, and it was through the volunteers in the community that we were able to move.

Smith

Now, you'd have something going on now, and there'd be a group that volunteered for that. That didn't mean that they wanted to volunteer for everything you do, okay? But they'd volunteer for that. Then they give you that amount of time, and then that's the end of that. You go on to something else, there's another group of people. But when you put the sum total together, then you have a workable program that's very viable, see.

Stevenson

Okay. Is there anything else you would like to say about the crucial roles played by the nursing staff at King Hospital? And also, in the documentation you gave me you mentioned the arrest of black nurses in 1972 upon the hospital's opening. Could you talk a little bit more about that?

Smith

Yes, right. Oh yes. When the hospital opened, there was a lot of negativity. I'm not saying it was a general negativity in the white community, but like the police and those people, they were very, very negative. Number one, the hospital looked too good. It was a beautiful hospital. That's too good for black folk, okay? Number two, it was black, because we didn't have a Hispanic population, you know, at that time, within the community. The other thing then, to see especially the nurses, because they'd come to work in their uniforms, and to see these nurses coming in, and predominantly black, dressed as nurses, that meant education, that was a negative, you follow? So anyway you could demean them or harrass them, that you did, okay. So that would mean you stopped them and you'd have them go lean over the car. You know, you'd pat some of them down, and then you know how feisty black women can be, and they'd get to mouthing off at you, and the next thing you've got quite a little bit of thing going on, you see. Those are the kinds of things that were going on, you know?

Smith

I remember even when we took a bunch of kids, and these kids were from the Pueblo Projects [Pueblo del Rio Housing Project]. We took them down to Dr. Schlegel's home in Palos Verdes. He was the chairman of the department, and he had a swimming pool. So we had kind of like a cookout at his home. His wife had hot dogs and that kind of thing, and they were able to use the pool. We rented a bus to take them down. Afterwards, we delivered the kids back home, but there were about four or five boys that wanted to go to a movie. So then the community worker and I piled them in the car and brought them up to Westwood. Now, the reason we brought them to Westwood is because they had never been to UCLA. So we wanted them to see the UCLA campus, understand that this is a university, this is what you ought to be tuning into, you follow my point? And then you'd go to the movie.

Smith

Fine. So we did that. Then when we finally delivered those kids home, and I went and took the community worker to his house--that was on Jefferson [Blvd.] over near La Cienega [Blvd.], and then as I drove off from his house and I went around the corner, two carloads of police stopped me, okay? Made me get out the car, and had me up against the fence, and they were all black, okay? And he suspected that. He looked and saw those cars jump down behind me, so he came back out and he started screaming and talking right from the corner. "You'd better not touch him. He's a doctor, and he's at

King Hospital," and he just interfered, and they all had to back up. What we figured out was they had been trailing us ever since that bus left Pueblo Projects, okay? And the whole idea was that when they pinned me down and whatever was supposed to happen, that was to discourage our working with those kids, okay?

Smith

Now, what we found out in general, you were not to be working with the gangs, okay? So what we understood then was that if we go out as a department and decide we're going to work with gangs, somebody is going to get killed. And we have the medical students that we're responsible for. We can't afford that, okay? So we're not going to work with gangs, but we're going to work with kids, okay. So we would then work with John and Joe and Bill. Maybe you don't need to know what church he goes to. We don't need to know where he prays or where he plays. We don't need that, okay? So if you say, do you work with gangs? No, we don't. Okay? But we do have guys who might be members of gangs, which we would not even be interested in knowing per se, you see what I mean? But my point being that we then realized that we're not going to flag whoever organized these kids, to think that we're going to break into their thing.

Smith

And their thing was all about money, and it's all about the land. How do you clear the African Americans out of the inner-city? How do you get them out of Compton? You scare them out. You shoot their children. You destroy their dreams. And everybody ran; the middle class in Compton ran to Palos Verdes. The poor ran to Moreno Valley. And so when you look at--and they say, "Oh, Compton is 56 percent Mexican." Yes, that's obvious, and if you go into the schools you see that it's predominantly Mexican. Do you mean to tell me that all these poor black folk that we came to see in the 1970s suddenly got a big pot of gold, and they're able to go out and buy a house somewhere? No. What happened to them? They're still poor. They were displaced, physically displaced, okay? Whose program was that? That's not spoken as a program, okay?

Smith

Here's your developers, okay. Your politicians don't even know, perhaps, that they're a part of that, okay. And little by little you had this dispersal. So this is when we said, "No. If we show any sign of interfering with the gang organization in Los Angeles County, we're dead." Now, there are a lot of folks working with gangs, Project Heavy, etc. We will work with Project Heavy, and what can we give them? Lectures and understanding and discussion as an academic group. People had never looked at King Hospital as an academic institution. We did a graffiti study. We studied those young people. We studied the gangs, okay. We didn't publish anything.

Smith

See, there's a difference between being an academic black person and being an academic white person. You have academic freedom if you're white. You don't have that if you're black. Now, if you want academic freedom as a black person, you've got to get a white person to sponsor you, okay? Now, you wrote and had an article with a white man's name first, and your name followed, that's okay. Well, that isn't about to happen with Smith, okay? So my point is then, give me a podium and I'll speak, and whoever can hear me heard something, and if you can't hear me, then that's tough, come back tomorrow. But I ain't writing nothing. You follow? And I'm not coming under anybody's domination, because that's what's wrong--we had the problem in the first place with the gangs.

Smith

These kids are not organized by their daddies, and by their brothers, or by their uncles. They're organized by the police, and they're organized by other adult Caucasian people. Right? Straight on back to Washington, D.C. So there's nothing about them that's black, see. So my point then is, then we have to make sure how we move in there. We're snatching these black children back into our nest, okay? And we realize what problems they have with them. A lot of the kids that work with us ended up being harassed by the police, you know? We had one young man that they even planted drugs on, and tried to get him for drugs.

Smith

So one of the programs we had to immediately get as soon as we got some money was a bail-bond program, and that was because we knew that some of the young folks were going to be attacked by the police, and we'd have to get lawyers for them. And lucky enough, we got some volunteer lawyers. Gordon, Earl Gordon was one. He was excellent, that all we had to do was pick up the phone and he'd be right on the case. There was Iris Johnson Bright. She'd call on the phone, and the money they took was nowhere near what they could have gotten, you see? It was just a little pittance to help a little something. And every time we got them on a kid, the kid served no time, and, in fact, many of them didn't even have a court trial. They just dropped it, you see.

Smith

Now, when they stopped and looked at them and said, "Now, if the kid--," the way kids presented their case to us, they were bound for jail for sure. Yet when you got the lawyer, there was no case. Now, how many kids went to jail, or went to CYO [California Youth Authority] over fake cases, because they just couldn't explain themselves, and you had a glib detective, a glib police officer who knows the jargon, and stands up and looks all spiffy, you know, glowing red and believable? And here's a little black child can hardly handle the language, and the black mother who doesn't know whether to believe her child or not, and no father, you see what I mean? See, so those are the kinds of things that we ran into.

Stevenson

Okay. How did you in your division at the hospital, which is the pediatric cardiology--I was again reading some of the documentation you gave me--how did you balance compliance with the American Academy of Pediatrics standards with your refusal to comply with the standards because those standards were based on racism and harming the well-being of black children? Talk a little bit about that.

Smith

My point was this. I have to go back to my residency training. First of all, I went to the Indian reservation and I saw the mistreatment of Indians, okay. And I looked at the death rates. I mean, it's ridiculous. The average age at that time was thirty-nine years of age, okay? In other words, they got thirty-nine years to live and then they're dead. And you looked at what was going on with the kids. Now, no matter what you tried to do to improve that, you couldn't, okay?

Smith

My area commander in Aberdeen [South Dakota] and I fought, because it's always budget, you know, and this always irks me. The reason it irks me I guess is because we were the budget at one time, as African Americans. Slavery is nothing but budget. We're property, money, right? And there never was any money for us. There's never any money for people that needed it, but there's always money for the folks that have foolishness. You know, wearing dresses that dragged the ground, and trains that would be four-feet long, and all that excessive waste of money. And yet if you would have said, "Give me just one piece of fatback," "There ain't no money." Okay?

Smith

Now, when I would go around, I'd say, now, everywhere I look, there's never any money, and there's always a rule and regulation. But I see the child, and I see the problem, and I know the answer, and I know what I can do. Why am I consulting with this person? Okay? Because he made a rule? Because he set up something? I didn't come into medicine to follow his rules. I came into medicine to treat the people. Now, what's to interfere with my treating the people? Nothing. Okay?

Smith

Now, when I went to do my training, I wrote to Johns Hopkins, I wrote to Mayo Clinic, I wrote to the University of Minnesota, and I wrote to Children's Hospital of Philadelphia. I heard from Mayo. I think they must have rode it on a bicycle, because [unclear] I'd get almost a letter tomorrow, right? And they talked about the fact that they had picked their classes for a couple of years now ahead, and that I might be more willing to go ahead and find another place rather than wait that long. You know, in other words, they couldn't tell you that, hey, go away and drop dead, but they did answer. I got no response from the others, none. Okay?

Smith

So somewhere around March I wrote each one. I wrote the University of Minnesota, I wrote Johns Hopkins--no, it wasn't Johns Hopkins, it was University of Maryland. I wrote University of Maryland, and I wrote Children's, and my major point was simply this. You didn't answer my letter, and that's a point of etiquette, okay? You have a right to refuse me. You don't have to accept me. But I don't think you have a right not to answer. And my major point, but if your mother didn't teach you any better than that, then you're kept to respond according to how your mother taught you. Okay? But I would refer you to Emily Post or Amy Vanderbilt, and that was my letter to each one of them. Okay?

Smith

I got a letter from Maryland about the fact that they had picked their class. I'd gotten a letter from Children's about the competition was too keen, okay. And then I got a response from University of Minnesota for an interview, and the reason I got the response was one of the young men that came to work with me when we were on the reservation, he was a graduate of the University of Minnesota Medical School. He's from Minnesota, and he couldn't believe racism as we would explain it, so like what we'd tell him, he just couldn't believe it. Then he's the one telling me, "Why don't you apply to Minnesota for your residency?" which I did, and after he left the reservation he'd keep checking. "Did you hear from them yet? Did you hear from them?" "No, didn't hear from them."

Smith

So then I wrote them and he called them, and that's how I got the appointment to Minnesota. When I go to Minnesota, and it's a Saturday morning--we drove all night long from South Dakota--the head of the department is just apologetic. So he showed me this picture of his residents' class, and there were a number of blacks there, and he told us that he an arrangement with Meharry [Medical College] to train physicians coming out of Meharry, and they would go back to the Deep South, you know? And then he had this young black girl come in, and she had come in to deliver a paper that he had given her to read, and she happened to come in that morning to give it to me. You know who that young black girl was?

Stevenson

Who?

Smith

[Minnie] Joycelyn Elders. She was a resident, a first-year resident at Minnesota, okay? Now, the thing about it that got to him, he asked me then, "Well, where are you from?" And I said, "I'm from Pennsylvania." Now, he was feeling very guilty, right? And he's a real nice dude, too. So he said, "Well, why doesn't Pennsylvania educate you?" I said, "Wait a minute. I'm not a sack of corn, sack of beef to be passed around, okay? Wait a minute, you've got this all wrong, dude." Okay? Nobody has an obligation to educate

me, okay? I applied, and you either say yes or no, but you've got to say something. And that's my major point, you said nothing. Okay?

Smith

All right, either way. Comes May, I get this telegram from Children's Hospital of Philadelphia. They have an opening in the second-year program. Now, I'm sitting there saying, wait a minute. I couldn't get accepted in the first-year program because the competition was too keen. Now, how do you accept me in the second-year program, which is a year in advance? Okay? So, don't bite the hand that feeds you. I went on to Children's, and I talked to Dr. [Joseph] Stokes [Jr.], who was in charge of the hospital, and he says, "Well, we pushed to get you in because we're going to give you credit for the time you spent on the Indian reservation, the three years you spent on the Indian reservation." Hmm. Okay, okay.

Smith

Now, Dr. Stokes was a Quaker, and I believe that's what happened, okay. Well now, when I went into Children's, it was very negative, you know, I mean, compared to like Fresno, which was, if I put it on a scale of one to ten, my internship at Fresno was plus eleven. And then I go to Philadelphia, and I'd say my two years I spent in Philadelphia in training would be minus ten, okay. I've never met nothing that bad in all my life.

Stevenson

Well, why don't you elaborate on that a little bit, about what made it so?

Smith

The attitude, the attitude. It was veiled racism, okay, and it was just a cold-- how would you say it? You're bumping up against a wall. Some of this was racial, some of this was just simply class distinction, you know what I mean? First is a good thing. If they were making ward rounds, they would talk about the university. Now, here would be residents from Women's Medical College, from Jefferson Medical College, I'm from Howard. From all over the country you've got residents, and you're talking about the university, and, of course, you know who they're talking about, University of Pennsylvania. Well, now, automatically you made a distinction between any of the graduates from Penn as against the rest of your residents, okay? And then when they'd begin the discussion, the haughtiness, where it didn't matter what you said; it's almost as though you didn't speak.

Smith

Now, one of the things I used to do, they would always talk about, they would say something and they got it from a journal. I said, now, you know, I don't believe that. I don't believe that. This is just talking. So I would say something and they would say, "Well, where'd you get that from?" I said, "Oh, I read that in the Delaware Medical Journal." Well, did you? No, I didn't read that in no medical journal. But my point is, this the kind of games you're playing here. Okay? One-upsmanship stuff, okay, and that to me was--I just couldn't deal with that.

Smith

Then it came down when I talked to Dr. Stokes--well, even before I talked to him, I talked to Dr. [William] Rashkind and Dr. [Sidney] Freedman; they were Jewish cardiologists. R-a-s-h-k-i-n-d, and Sidney Freedman, William Rashkind and Sidney Freedman, and Rachel Ash. Those were the three cardiologists, okay. I had gotten into a little problem with the chief resident. He had called me in to speak, right? And he's sitting at his desk, playing the role of that, you know--this kid is maybe a couple of years older than me, if that. And he was saying that they were disappointed in me, right? So I said, "Okay, that's interesting. Let's go on with that." And then he walked around and says, "You're haughty, and you act like you're better than everybody else, and this, that," all that kind of garbage, you know?

Smith

So I said to him, I says, "Wait a minute, wait a minute. Before you go any further, okay," I said, "there's not a lawyer in Philadelphia that's going to take this case, and there's not a judge that will hear it, because you haven't said anything of value, and I'm going to take you to court, you know that." "Oh no, no, we don't mean that." I said, "What do you mean?" Well, he couldn't explain it. I said, "Let me tell you what it is." I says, "You've been told to come down on me, and you really have no reason to it." And then I said to him, I says, "And you--," and his name was Rosenberg [phonetic]--I said, "You of all people should be the last person to do this. You just came from the furnace, and you still smell like smoke, and you haven't learned a damn thing." [laughs] And that hit him.

Smith

He went to Dr. Rashkind and Dr. Freedman, because they were going to say that my term at Children's went from July first to June thirtieth, and then they're through. In other words, I filled that second-year slot. I learned later that the person that was in that second-year slot had been drafted for the Vietnam War, and they had an opening. That's how Dr. Stokes slipped me in. That's nice, but that's not the way I play the game. I don't owe nobody anything, and I don't want no favors, right? So then when I jumped him with this, and he knew what was coming down the pike, he went to Rashkind and Freedman, and then they offered me a fellowship in cardiology, okay? And then they sat down and told me, "Who told you that you only had to do this one year of pediatrics and you'd be eligible for the boards?" "Dr. Stokes told me that." Well, everybody knows Dr. Stokes is high in the field, right? They said, "You'd better write the board and find out if that's true." And I did, and it wasn't. Okay?

Smith

I did the year in cardiology, which meant that I was in their face in spite of. Then there was a black girl that was applying to become a resident in Children's at Philadelphia. They couldn't tell her yes or no until they found out what am I going to do, okay? And when I got that game, I strung them

out for almost a whole year, okay, with, "I don't know yet. I don't know yet." Well, I applied to D.C. [District of Columbia] General [Hospital] to finish the first year. I called her and told her, "Don't accept a residency at any other place, because you're going to get Children's. I'm going to leave, but I haven't told them, and once I leave they're going to let you come in, but they're not going to have both of us here together. So okay, so there won't be no two black folks here, but there's going to be one, and I'm getting ready to leave, but I will finally let them know, see?"

Smith

Now, that was an interesting point. When I finally went and talked to Dr. [Alfred M.] Bongiovani, Italian, B-o-n-g-i-o-v-a-n-i, I go up to let him know that I'm going to leave and this is my last year, you know. In fact, it's like I've got two more months and I'm out of here, you know. And then he's going to give me a lecture. "Well, you know, you walk around with a chip on your shoulder. I'm Italian, and I understand that you have to do sometimes more than is required," etc., etc. And that pissed me off. I said, "Wait a minute. Let's get this straight. I do not have a chip on my shoulder. I have a tree on my shoulder, okay? And it takes a lot of effort to knock a tree off my shoulder, and that was done, okay?" And I said, "And don't you sit here and lecture me about racism in the United States. I want to let you know something. My parents were here when your father was pushing bananas up and down the streets of Philadelphia. My parents met the boat when your daddy got off, and sprayed him with DDT to get rid of the lice. So don't you tell me about being black in America."

Smith

And I said, "I'm going to tell you another thing. As an Italian, the only reason you're here is because they can't find an Anglo to replace you, and the minute they do, your butt's going out of here so fast you ain't going to get splinters in it." And you know what he said to me? "That's true." See, my point was, dealing with that kind of subtle racism. So I left and went to D.C. General. I went to D.C. General as a first-year resident, having had second-year peds at Children's, and a year of cardiology at Children's. Now I'm doing a first-year residency at D.C. General, okay? That's cool. After I get through, then Reichelderfer [phonetic], who was in charge then, wants to know if I'd stay on. And I said to him, I said, "Well, now, I've done first year, I've done second year, I've done a year of cardiology." I said, "What do you want me to be, the chief resident?" "Oh no, no, no." [laughter] See, but by now you can see, I'm formulating concepts, okay? Meaning, who else went through a residency backwards?

Stevenson

Right.

Smith

Okay? And who is still ineligible to continue in another level? Okay? So when I left D.C. General, I went home and stayed six months. I went and revisited

the reservation people, and I went and stopped in Michigan, and when I stopped in Michigan there was a young student from Michigan who had come to the reservation to do a three-month program with the Public Health Service as a senior medical student, and we remained friends. I went and stopped to see him and his wife, and he kept telling me, "Why don't you move to Detroit?" Okay? Then I had a classmate in Detroit, and I took him by to meet her, took the family by to meet her, and then he called the classmate after that, and she let him know that there was a pediatrician in Detroit that was looking for a partner. So he says, "Well, what I'll try to do is get him to come by and meet her."

Smith

Well, he made sure I missed my plane the next day, and he just happened to be traveling by that office, and he just happened to go in, and he just happened to meet the lady who was waiting for me, because the two of them had set up the appointment, and it's through that appointment that I finally went to Detroit. When I went to Detroit and I worked in her office, she was dying of lymphosarcoma [phonetic] at the time. When I met her in that November, she was saying that she would be able to work in the office a couple a days a week, etc., etc. But when I got there, she couldn't. She tried but she couldn't. She was that ill, you know.

Smith

But anyhow, I worked in the office, and then one thing she said, "I would like to see Henry Ford Hospital integrated." That was a very racist institution, okay? And she says, "And I'd like to see that happen before I die." Now, she said, "You have one year of cardiology in Children's. You need to go and finish the other year of cardiology, so why don't you call over at Ford's, and there's a Dr. [Robert F.] Ziegler who's in charge. Now, a lot of folks say he's mean and cantankerous, but he's top in the field," okay. So she bugged me. I came in December of that year, and she bugged me almost every month. "Did you talk to Dr. Ziegler yet? Did you call Dr. Ziegler yet?"

Smith

So one morning I woke up and I said, "Let me call Dr. Ziegler's office at Ford's." I called Dr. Ziegler's office, the secretary on the phone wanted to know who was calling, and I told her who I was. "And what would be the nature of your visit?" And I asked her, "Are you Dr. Ziegler?" And she said, "No." I said, "Then I'll tell him what the nature of my visit is when I talk to Dr. Ziegler." Well, she put me down and gave me an appointment. I came down the hall that day of the appointment, and there were a lot of black folks working in the lab, etc., etc. They were all standing in the hall, and I was wondering, "What's all this about?" And as I walked down the hall, then this white dude walks past, across going to his office, and looks up and the broadest smile you can imagine. "You must be Dr. Smith, I presume." I said, "Yes, I am." So we went and had the meeting.

Smith

His secretary was a black girl. She recognized my voice as a black man. She penned me in for the appointment and caught hell for it, because she was not supposed to do that unless he knew. But she did it anyhow, right? That's why they were all standing in the hall, to see the fireworks.

Stevenson

Oh, okay.

Smith

Now, when I went and met Dr. Ziegler it was just--you knew right from the beginning, here is a fair person, okay. So he sat down and he told me, "Yes, I have an opening. I have a fellow in it right now. He's French Canadian. He may be going back to Canada. We do not know yet. If he goes back, the position is open, okay, and we want you to apply." Then I looked at him and I said, "Now, let me just ask you this. If you know in advance that you do not accept black people, say so. Don't have me writing all over the United States for this, and writing over for that, and you know already, okay. And you have that right, you see." And he looked at me and bristled. He said, "I am not that kind of man. I am not that kind of man." He says, "Now, if I see that you have the credentials or whatever, I'll take you. If not, no. But other than that, no. I am not that kind of a man."

Smith

Then I says, "Well, let me shake your hand, because at least I met a man. First time now in years, I met a man." Well, we became very good friends. I accepted. He took me in, and then I did the year and he asked me to stay another year. Then he asked me to stay another year. And what he had as a little thing in his mind, to integrate that hospital. They had begun to take residents and fellows, but there was nobody on the staff. So then he finally pushed to get me on the staff, and that's how I got into the staff at Ford's Hospital.

Smith

Now, when I got on the staff, when I got into Ford's Hospital, there was a little fight I had to have there. I'd been there three days, I'd been writing orders on patients, and the kids ain't getting no better. And I'm changing orders and changing orders, and finally one nurse came up to me, a very nice nurse. She says, "Dr., can I tell you something quietly?" She says, "The children aren't getting any better because they're not being treated, because we've been told not to take your orders." I said, "Oh, is that right?" "Yes. We've been told not to take your orders."

Smith

So I got a couple of them together, I says, "Well, let me talk to you." I said, "You really have a problem. If you take my orders, you're going to get fired. And if you don't take my orders, I'm going to kill you." [laughs] Okay? And so they made a decision, we're going to take his orders, and that's when things began to change, right? Now, once things began to change, now

Ziegler was observing. He didn't know that was going on. He was noticing improvement in the children, and that's why he asked me to stay, okay, because of the improvement. Now, when it finally came down to the time--I had to fight some surgeons. There was a lot of racism, but, you know, we had that under control, and especially when you had a chairman that was in your corner, okay.

Smith

He'd send me down to the head office for employment on staff, and they would try to find if there's any way they could help me leave. Like, "Would you like to go to private practice? We can help you get into private practice," etc., etc. "No, I'm not interested in that," you know? And then the last blowout I had was with one of them. He called me because he wanted to go through the review we go through every year, and about, "Do you want to leave?" etc., etc. So I set the appointment for five-thirty, because I knew everybody would be out of the office. I went to the office, sat there yak-yakking, and he was telling me about pediatricians were complaining about this, and the pediatrician complaining about that, and my point to him was, "I don't think that the pediatricians have any right to complain about me, because I'm a cut above them, and a lot of the stuff I'm doing, they don't understand." In fact, I said, "Sometimes they go look in that bassinet, and they don't know whether they're looking at a baby human or a baby ape, I mean as far as I'm concerned," you know.

Smith

But anyhow, we went on talking and went on talking, and finally it got very insulting, okay. And that's when I told him, I said, "You know, just the attitude of you sitting here at that desk at this time of night--" it's about six-thirty in the evening--"I'm sitting at the door, and I made a point to sit at the door, and we're two floors above the ground. You're sixty-some years old; I'm thirty-some years old. And the only way you can get out of this room is out that window or out that door. And you've steadily insulted me, and I can make sure you don't get out this door, okay?" And he turned beet red, pulled his leg off the desk. I said, "But you thank God I'm a Christian." I got up and left. Okay?

Smith

That's when he called Dr. Ziegler and said, "You know, he really raked me over the coals," but then he acquiesced and said, "Yes, but I think I deserved that," and that's what cleared the way. But Ziegler was the one that was important in causing that to happen.

Stevenson

Okay. All right.

Smith

Now, that goes back to your original point.

Stevenson

Yes.

Smith

Having gone through all of that, and I come to King and they wanted to start something new, right?

Stevenson

Right.

Smith

"We want to find a new way to practice." I have had enough experience in all kinds of ways. Now, if I'm coming here, what are you going to tell me? Okay? So that means then, if I can do what I'm going to do, I'm going to do what I'm going to do. If I need you, I'll ask for it. But I don't need you to tell me what to do, when you don't know what to do. Do you follow my point? And as I begin to discern what we need to do, the first thing I need to do is to surveil this community and understand it. So I've got to be out in the street, and I've got to be looking, I will be talking, that's when I begin to meet--I went to Nickerson--it was only three blocks away--and talked to kids after I'd been in town about a week. I met with the South Central Welfare Planning, that's how I met your dad [Alfred S. Moore], and I met all kinds of people. I went to the churches, I met the people at the church. I was getting a feel for Watts, okay?

Smith

And then once I listened and listened and listened, then I came to conclusions, and that's when I began to build a program. You follow? So it took all of that. But that was experience coming from the reservation, coming from all these other places in the country. And then when I looked at the gangs, to me, hey, that's no different than dealing with the Ku Klux Klan. I'm not about to go to a Klan rally, so I can't go into the middle of a gang rally. Meaning, you've got to give them their propers and work accordingly, and you start other ways of doing things, you see.

Stevenson

Right. Okay. You've talked a little bit about the Watts College. Now, it's called the Watts College of Child Development?

Smith

Of child development, yes.

Stevenson

Could you discuss how the concept for that came about, what the genesis of it was, and just talk more about it?

Smith

Okay. It didn't start off as that, as such. It evolved into that. It started off with Mrs. Ablyn Winge during the bicentennial. She was on the board of trustees at Drew, one of the original members of the community that was on the board of trustees, and she had an idea that for the celebration of the bicentennial, the Drew School should put on a series of health lectures for the community, so that each department then gave a week of lectures, you see what I mean, something dealing with their field. For instance, pediatrics

would do it with children for a week, and internal medicine would deal with the problems of internal medicine, orthopedics etc., etc. Then there'd be a lot of community education going on as Drew's commitment to the bicentennial.

Smith

Well, nobody did that. I thought it was an excellent idea, so I said, "Well, we'll do it." Okay? So then I got my little group together, and I think by that time we had become a division, and I said, "Well, we're going to put on this Week of the Child." So we called people, and I had met people in the school district, having worked with them with the gang thing, this kind of thing, and this was in '76, so I had met your dad, I think, in 1973, okay? So then I began to call people together, people from Second Baptist Church, and, in fact, Reverend [Thomas] Kilgore's wife came to the meeting, because she was in child development, and different people with the various Head Starts, had the auditorium full of people.

Smith

The residents decided that he had come--there was one resident, [unclear] Chilumbo [phonetic]. I had said that what we need to do, we need to formulate an annual meeting, an annual program, and what we need to do, since we're all working with children, some in education, some in social work, whatever, we need to assess every year, are we making any progress? And if we did this for a twenty-five-year period, that would be over a generation of children. Then we could see if we were really impacting, because King was new, a lot of the teachers who were coming into teaching were new, okay. Everybody was enthusiastic, okay?

Smith

So we sat there in the auditorium and so one of the residents says, "Well, if you do it in twenty-five years," he said, "twenty-five years from now will be 2001," and at that time the movie was out, 2001: A Space Odyssey. He says, "Well, why don't we take as a theme 2001: My Child's Odyssey?" I said, "That's a good idea." And then there was a young man in the audience, he was staying with his cousin, who was a P.A. at the time, he said, "I can draw you an emblem for that." So we said, "Okay, that'd be great." So at the next meeting, he came and presented this whole emblem--I think you've seen the picture of a little boy running with the torch?

Stevenson

Yes.

Smith

And "2001: My Child's Odyssey."

Stevenson

Right, right.

Smith

Okay. That was for the bicentennial. So we did the bicentennial and it was a beautiful week. Now, one thing we wanted to do, we wanted to have a

bivouac of Boy Scouts on the front lawn of King Hospital, and this would have been like saying, "Why don't we use the Boy Scouts as an antithesis to the gangs? And if we can get these Boy Scouts to put pup tents up, and even blow their trumpet for revelie in the morning, and taps at night, the people in the hospital can look out the window and see all these kids on the lawn, orderly." Do you follow? We want to have a carnival over in the Drew School parking lot. We had an art show in the halls of the hospital, and we had a talent show. When we came down to the idea of the bivouac, the head of the hospital says, "This is not a circus. No, you can't have it. This is not a circus."

Smith

We went over to Drew School and said, "Well, we're going to have this truck that's coming up, and we're having some rides and all this kind of stuff, and we need electricity." "Well, we can't afford it. The budget won't stand for it." Okay. So that Saturday we broke into Drew, okay? [unclear] you know, gang-infested area? Okay, we broke into Drew and plugged it up, and we had our carnival, okay? That was the beginning. The next year we said we were going to do it again. By the third year--and we were getting people to volunteer, and we had a whole week of lectures, one hour each, and it didn't cost us a nickel. People volunteered, okay?

Smith

Then I said, "You know, this is a college, because people are teaching, and everybody has a perspective." So then we began to bring people together as a lot of folks were beginning to drop off from the initial bicentennial, but a lot of the people stayed, and a lot of them were community people, no degrees, right? And so I began to plug them in. "You've got to give a lecture." "Well, I don't what to lecture about." I said, "You've been around here for thirty years, you ought to know something." You know what I mean? So then I says, "What you have to understand is that you are a teacher, and that you teach children, and children are constantly learning."

Smith

So we had certain models. Wherever two or three children are gathered, school is in session, okay? Meaning, you need to teach something when you see two or three kids in a row. Then I was sitting in the office with a nurse, his name was Sashan [phonetic]. He just had one name, Sashan. We were looking at the logo, as we called it, with the boy running with the torch, and we had about three good years of our lectures, you know, our annual program, and we were planning for the next year of the annual program, and we came up with the words, said, "You know, we ought to call this Watts College."

Smith

And then Vivian Weinstein walked past the door, and she's in charge of child development, and I said, "Well, let's do better than that. Let's call it Watts College of Child Development," okay? And that's how we came up with the

name, and we were about in our third year, and we had already committed for twenty-five, okay, and that's how it came about. What we then looked at is the fact that this is a spiritual college, not a physical college, right? Now, why did we say that? Angela [Yvonne] Davis had given her papers to Mafundi Institute, and the Mafundi had a lot of programs going on. I don't know if you're familiar with the Mafundi. Your dad could tell you about that, you know.

Smith

But anyhow, they were collecting papers. They had the Watts Writers Workshop. Eartha Kitt [born Eartha Mae Keith] would come and work with them. What's his name, Schulberg, Budd somebody--

Stevenson

Budd Schulberg?

Smith

Whoever was with the movie--he was working with them to develop skills. I mean, they had a lot going on, right? Then the thing burned down, and I think we found out somewhere around '79 that that was done by the FBI [Federal Bureau of Investigation], because the person that did it finally confessed that he was on the payroll of the FBI, and that was his assignment, to burn that place down. And all those things got burned up. So our point was this. Then why would we then seek a building or a place that can be molested? So that means then the Watts College has no address, and it has no place. So people say, "Well, where's the Watts College?" We say, "It's in your heart." Okay? And so that's how it existed.

Stevenson

Okay. Could you also tell me, who were some of the lecturers you had during its existence?

Smith

Oh, my goodness.

Stevenson

Or just a few of them, maybe the ones that stand out.

Smith

Wade Noble, Asa [Grant] Hilliard [III]. We had the one lady from Sesame Street that played the guitar. I forget what her name is [Loretta Long]. Marla Gibbs, the young man that was on Love Boat, [Theodore William] Ted Lange, right. Your father was one. There was a lawyer, last name was Barbaro [phonetic] I think. We had some from the [Fuller] Theological Seminary in Pasadena, Fuller. Stevens I think his name was. He may have been at one time--no, he was on the faculty at Fuller. Then there was the president of L.A. City College, L.A. Trade Tech [College] was a lecturer. Oh, there are so many. We used to write them down. Not to mention members from the [Los Angeles Unified] school district itself, you know. One of those brochures has a list of names of people that lectured.

Stevenson

All right. Okay. Could you discuss your involvement with the Compton School Health Association programs?

Smith

Now, we organized--when we organized school health, and we were going into Compton to do physicals, and they would give us a little bit of money, and we started off just simply dealing with Centennial High School. Then when we got involved with Compton High School and Dominguez High School, Dr. Wade, Aaron Wade, was the superintendent, and then he pulled the contract and said, "I'd like you to take care of all the athletics in Compton, and we'll give you a stipend. Whatever we have for our athletic fund, we'll give that to you." And that came to something like seven or eight thousand dollars, okay.

Smith

So then once we got the \$8,000, then we had to find a way of, what are we going to do with that money? Now, if we send it to Drew School, it's just going to get slopped up. In other words, that's the end of it. So I wrote Dr. [David] Satcher--at the time he was president--and I asked him if it were possible that we could manage our own money, okay, in other words set up the corporation. That would be important, that we could manage the money. Then we could use that money for programming, okay? And he gave permission. So then when we incorporated, then we incorporated as the Compton Pediatric Schoolhouse Association, and that's how we got the association.

Smith

Now, the purpose of the association was that we'd go out and do the physicals and do all the medical, and collect the money. Then the money would then go to the Watts College. So it means then that if we were doing a program, all the programs came out of the Watts College, but all the collection of money came through the Compton Peds Association, and that way you didn't mix the two. Okay? And then as the CHDP program came into effect, where you could then bill kids directly, then every time we billed a kid, then that money went to the Compton Pediatric Schoolhouse Association. Then if we had our feeding program, our camping program, whatever it was, the money then would be shifted from there into the Watts College, and then that would be the way we managed the Watts College.

Stevenson

Okay. Could you talk a little bit about your involvement with medical students at King Hospital, and any programs? I notice in your c.v. you talked about I think setting up pediatric rotations for medical students. Talk a little bit about just your involvement overall with medical students.

Smith

Yes. The medical students, the Drew medical students particularly--well, we started off before they had Drew, so these would be youngsters from UCLA, and especially the black kids. They would then take an elective with me in

community peds, and it was in the UCLA catalog, so that these young people then would rotate for one month. They'd report to me, and then I would take them through the community. So in that we would deal with doing physicals in the high schools, attending meetings at night in the community, going downtown to see various points, you know, and Dr. Smith joined in with us, because we could always use him. Then we would go down to his store. He had a store downtown. I don't know if he told you about that.

Stevenson

Right, he did.

Smith

Yes. And it was right in the midst of the Bowery, I mean, Skid Row. And so we would take them down to meet with him, and then he would sit and lecture to them, and then we'd go out on a walkaround. We'd look at all of the missions, and we'd look at the folks on the pavement, and get a good idea of what Skid Row was about, so when these kids were talking about, "We want to practice in an underserved community," here it is, you see. And the point was, hands on, meaning that he could get any of those guys to come into his shop and sit down and talk to medical students, okay?

Smith

Now, when Drew finally got its medical students, and then so anybody who was coming into the peds rotation in the department, they had to spend a month with me in the community pediatrics. We'd get some students from Dartmouth [College] that would do electives at King, and they would spend a month's rotation, you see. We had one youngster who came up from University of North Carolina. In fact, he stayed. He came back as a resident. Dr. Xylina [D.] Bean, who started out doing an elective from University of Pennsylvania, she was finishing her third year of medical school. She came out and did a summer with us, spent a couple of weeks with me, and as she will tell you, she got off the plane and the next thing she knew she had a picket sign in her hand, and she was down at the board of supervisors, picketing for summer youth employment. She came back after her senior year as an intern, and she had been there ever since. She just left this year. In fact, they got rid of her programs through that mess they did at King, and so she's down at Nashville. She's in charge of the pediatrics department at Meharry, okay. But she started off as a medical student from Penn and stayed with us.

Smith

But the medical students, there were a lot of excellent students, and as the program evolved, it was just simply black kids. There were a lot of kids that wanted to come to King-Drew, so you had Japanese Asians, you had whites, you had Hispanics, so they all wanted it, and so we had no problems getting enough students to come through. There was one year when, I think, the most impressive year was when we had gone to Dr. Smith's store, and they were sitting in the back room and he had talked to them, and they had met

some of the young men that came into the store and talked to them. Then it was time for us to go out and walk around the streets, you know. So we went around and I showed them different hotels. I showed them where the kids were, and what was not available for children, and the various Jordan Centers and those kinds of things, and then we came back to the store.

Smith

When we came back to the store, it was nothing but yellow tape. We couldn't go into the store, okay. One of the young men that had been in that store and had talked with the medical students, and had gone back out in the street, had gotten stabbed. He ran back to Dr. Smith's store and was on the phone, and he called his mother in Indiana or another state, and he was on the phone talking to his mother and just dropped dead right there, okay? And so when the police came, of course, they had the police tape, and we couldn't come back. Now, that really shook the medical students, okay, like, "We just talked to him. We were just in there." That's how things happen in these crowded areas. In other words, it's always going like that.

Smith

Now, imagine a child who's growing up. There's no leisure. So he's got these kinds of things just bombarding him all day long, and then you expect him to learn something? Bullets are flying over his head and he's got to hit the floor, and still get up in the morning and go to school? You see? So this kind of brought them face to face with the realities of being in the urban center, you know.

Stevenson

Okay. Maybe this would be the juncture to start talking about [Charles R.] Drew [Medical] University, and chronologically, where does that fall in terms of the opening of King Hospital? Maybe you could talk a little bit about that.

Stevenson

When King was proposed, I think the important point that people miss is, that came from the [John Alexander] McCone Commission and their understanding that there were a lot of problems, one of which was health, okay? There were problems, for instance, like causing the riot-- transportation, employment, unemployment, the stores that took advantage, all of these. But the McCone Commission kind of zeroed in on health. I feel that they zeroed in on health because it was very visible. In other words, whatever you did would be tangible. To me you should have jumped in on education, okay? But you jumped in on health.

Smith

The reason--when the riot occurred, you had people from all over the world that came with their cameras and their pencils, and they sat down and got a true picture of what caused the riot, and they went back to their respective countries. It was an embarrassment to the government of the United States. The McCone Commission, I feel, was called from Washington. McCone also had been in charge of the CIA [Central Intelligence Agency], you know.

Stevenson

Right.

Smith

They set up that commission in Los Angeles as though it came from the governor. Then they end up having the hospital established. Well, then, the people said, "Fine. You can establish the hospital, but we do not want UCLA, and we do not want USC to be in charge of that hospital." The law in the county is that the county hospital has to have some academic oversight, so we said, "We have to create our own." So in 1966 I believe it was, they chartered the Drew School, and that came out of particularly the Drew Medical Society of Los Angeles, okay. So from that point then, the concept of Drew School being created as a historically black school, a postgraduate school that was going to train mostly residents. At that time they weren't talking about medical students, but in order to get off the ground it would be under UCLA and USC as the birthing parents, so to speak, and then you'd deal with the residents and interns that are going to handle the hospital.

Smith

Then from that point then you can begin to talk about a medical school, and in dealing with the medical school it would be a two-year medical school at UCLA, and two years at Drew, so that the pre-clinical would be at UCLA, and then the clinical would be at King, and then they'd get a combined degree, the UCLA-Drew medical degree. We spent all the time in the seventies laying the groundwork for the medical school, developing the programs and running the pilot programs. Like when the UCLA students would come through my department, that was like a pilot for what would happen when we began to get our own medical students. Then finally we were able to get a class of medical students, about twenty-five chairs, and then graduate--I don't remember the year, '84, '85 we were graduating the first medical class, and then it went on from there, you know.

Smith

Now, the interesting thing was that the medical students always did well. They had good internships. Many of them got excellent residencies, so that means there was never a question of whether they were capable. Now, the point would be folks would say, "Yes, but they're really UCLA students." They spent two years at UCLA, 'tis true, but they were also dealing with King at the same time, and then they spent the two years with King. So it had to do more than just simply be at UCLA. It had to do with the whole package, you see?

Smith

Now, no one wants to admit that, that those graduates over that period of time from 1985 whatever, or even before that if you look at the residents, that those graduates have done quite well. No one wants to admit, for instance, that when we brought in Third-World physicians, so to speak, from the Middle East, from Asia, that these were the physicians who were coming

with their population, so that if their populations were coming into the United States, then their professional classes were coming into the United States. So a lot of them then came to King and we trained them, and they went back to practice with their people. Now, to me that's unique, because even UCLA will train foreign graduates, but not with the idea that these are going to be people who are going to be the hands-on for a population of immigrants that are coming into the country.

Smith

Now, that's what King was doing, okay, and there was a great loyalty to King of those people that trained at King, okay. Every race, every ethnic group that you can imagine took their training at Martin Luther King Hospital and did well, okay. Now, the question is that when you look at how much money did they have to invest in that, how successful could that be? We didn't have the money we needed, okay, and that's because we were fighting the county, and you know, in the last number of years, no matter what our budget was, the hospital administrator was kicking back a million dollars a year back to the county.

Smith

I remember before I retired, we couldn't get pencils, okay. You didn't have notebook paper, because the budget was that tight. But that's inexcusable, you know. So what was happening was this hospital was being choked gradually, choked gradually, choked gradually. They jumped us in 1989, the L.A. Times did, with a series of articles by Claire Spiegel. They tried to take us down then, but we were strong at that time, and we were able to fight that down. From that point on, they took the hospital administrator and moved him downtown, promoted him, because they couldn't have him there and keep that strength. They took the medical director and moved him in another slot. Then they brought in people that weren't really up to snuff, and the place started going down. This was important.

Smith

Now, when these people came, and that would have been like in '90, in '91, '92--but if you look at, as I told you, the change in the supervisors at about the same time, so it means then that as Kenneth Hahn passed off the scene, our hospital administrator had been changed, our medical director had been changed, a lot of things had changed. Then you have these people coming in, and the budgetary crises and all kinds of things, so it was a downhill slope. If these three new liberals came in, then they should have been able to understand, we need to turn this in an upward direction. They allowed it to continue, and then abetted it in a downhill slope.

Smith

And finally in 2002, that's when Yaroslavsky is talking with [Thomas] Garthwaite, because they'd gotten rid of a lot of people that were in charge of the Department of Health Services, he was talking with Garthwaite at one of the supervisors' meetings, and they kept talking about going into a new

system of how to deliver care using USC as a tertiary hospital, the biggest hospital, and then having Harbor and perhaps King as secondary hospitals, with Harbor particularly mainly clinics, not so much outpatient. King, the main thing was that they had to bring them back up to snuff. There were a lot of problems with the medical management, etc., etc., but not necessarily that we're going to get rid of it, okay?

Smith

But in the midst of all this discussion, Yaroslavsky kept saying, "There are two medical schools." And that was a glaring discussion. Everybody knows there are three. So he kept saying it, and then Yvonne finally spoke up in a very meek voice and said, "There are three." And he still persisted. Now, my point was saying, either he's a prophet or he's got a plan, okay? 2003 we're fighting a budget crisis. "Oh, it's a big budget crisis." They're saying that, "We didn't make this amount of money," and this is way down, so all the physicians were busy trying to prove we were making money. Pediatric cardiology was down as having made no money and seeing no patients for the whole year, when, in fact, we had brought in a couple hundred thousand dollars which were not credited to us, you see?

Smith

And all the departments were showing the money we earned was not credited to us. There was a magazine that put out the fact that we had earned \$600,000 at King, just Medicare, the highest-paid in the country, okay. And then you tell us we didn't have any money? When you looked at the amount of money it took to run the hospital, like \$400 million, they left something like \$200 million in profit. It never came to us, okay? See, so there was a choking of getting rid of King. It was not on mediocrity, okay. But once you got it choked down to a certain level, it was impossible to keep up certain things. The nursing department, they didn't have nurses. One R.N. was sometimes trying to run two wards simultaneously. At night you couldn't--the place wasn't covered properly. You brought in traveling nurses. You don't know who these people were, okay. So there's all kinds of things that led to the deterioration, and the L.A. Times jumped right on it, okay?

Smith

What I'm saying, I could see this was Zaroslavsky, because he said there were two medical schools. As they jumped on King, they then jumped on Drew, and then the next thing you know, they're talking about getting rid of Drew. They cut all ties with Drew, which Drew was supposed to sink, okay? When this happened, the dean at UCLA pulled all the medical students out, right?

Stevenson

Right.

Smith

He wasn't supposed to do that. The medical students and their being at King was dealing from University of California, so they put them right back at

King, so the medical students are back at King, okay? So Drew didn't dry up and go away, but that was the plan. I say it was a plan because Yaroslavsky said it in 2002, and the issues with the Times didn't come out until 2003. When they took 500 people, almost 500 people out of that hospital in June of 2003, then the first articles about the hospital in terms of the monitors started coming in August of 2003, and it never stopped. And they'd write the same thing over and over and over.

Smith

I asked a question. Was there an angel of death in this hospital? How many times can the monitors fail? Every time it seems like you have a crisis down at the board of supervisors, and you need something about King in the paper, it's another monitor failure. Did anyone do any tissue cultures? Did anybody check to find out, were these people poisoned? None of that was done, you see? So there was a whole lot of things then that began to come at us at one time that finally took us down. Five-hundred-plus beds in 1965; two hundred and maybe fifty beds in 2004; and forty-eight beds in 2007. No pediatric beds whatsoever now, okay?

Smith

I got through scuttlebutt I heard just yesterday, there are a lot of lawsuits going on from the E.R. because of mismanagement, because there's nobody down there, you see? So it's been taken down. But the one thing that they're doing, they're remodeling surgery, and I mean, it's right up to snuff. They're doing remodeling in Augustus Hawkins. Now, if you brought the hospital down to that point, why are you remodeling, okay?

Stevenson

Exactly, if you don't expect it to be around.

Smith

That's right. "Oh, we're going to open it back up." "Well, why'd you tear it down to this point? No, you planned to give it away, or sell it to private industry, and you plan to change the whole community into a middle-class gentrification," or whatever. And they don't need a county hospital, and this would be a private hospital that can serve a middle-class community. That's the way I look at it, you see?

Stevenson

Okay. Going back to Drew University when it was being developed in the early days, who were the other key players pushing for it?

Smith

The first president was Spelman, Mitchell Spelman, and he was followed by David Satcher, and he was followed by Dr. Haynes, Moses [Alfred] Haynes, and then he was followed by--I think there was an interim, one of the board presidents took over for a minute. But Dr. [Walter F.] Leavell was the next president, Walter Leavell. Now, he was getting ready to turn the university around. He had some good things going, you know, and he got into an auto accident, which we feel was contrived. Yes, he was hit by a car; his car was

hit by a car on Western Avenue and 120th Street, broadsided, and he was unconscious. I mean, when they brought him into the hospital, it just happened that one of the nurses in the emergency room recognized him as the president of Drew, and then she put in the alarm for [Dr. Samuel L.] Biggers and [Dr. George E.] Locke, the neurosurgeons, and everybody, and they all swooped on him. Had they not jumped on him, then he'd have been dead. He stayed in a coma for weeks, and maybe a month or more, and when he came back to Drew ready to go to work, he still had some problems. They wouldn't hire him back. They released him, and they thought that he wasn't medically able, okay?

Smith

And my point was, that was a serious mistake. I questioned--you know, my point was, well, he survived an auto accident; he just wouldn't die. So they had to get rid of him. But he was, I think, on a scale of one to ten, he was ten, and would have made the real difference in that school had he stayed, you know. After that, it was downhill. [Reed V.] Tuckson came, Dr. Tuckson, yes. I wasn't impressed with him at all. I think he was all show. And then the last one that they had, he was just like, how would you call it, the invisible man? Yes.

Stevenson

Okay.

Smith

Now, they had a lot of key community people.

Stevenson

Okay, yes. Please tell us about the community people.

Smith

Well, you had--the [Charles] Drew Medical Society was very important. Dr. [Richard Allen] Williams, his son [Dr.] Bart Williams is the chairman of the board right now, but he was there from the very beginning.

Stevenson

This Dr. Williams' first name?

Smith

I forget what Williams' first name is. But he was there from the beginning, from the sixties, and he went off the board, I think, somewhere in the late nineties, and his son then came on as chairman. His son, I think, leaves a lot to be desired.

Stevenson

And his son is Bart?

Smith

Bart, yes. He's a lawyer. But I think he's--my complaint with so many of his generation--they're white kids, and they don't understand their own history, do you follow? And they understand--any glib person can turn their head. I would find a kid from Nickerson with more common sense, you know what I mean?

Stevenson

Yes.

Smith

But anyhow, they're there. There was Ablyn Winge, of course.

Stevenson

Right.

Smith

There was Kathy Green [phonetic], Lillian Mobley, and she's still on the scene, Mary Henry, who is now stroked out. She's almost like a vegetable. There was a Betty Clifford, Rory Kaufman [phonetic]. He was one of the first student members of the Drew board. There's some others, I can't remember their names. I can try to get them for you, but they were very important in terms of liaisoning, you know.

Stevenson

Right. And so the community activists as far as Drew University were probably some of the same people that had been advocates over the years for the hospital?

Smith

Yes, exactly.

Stevenson

Like Lillian Mobley, for instance.

Smith

Right. Then there was [Dr.] Sol White, Dr. Sol White, who was advocate for the hospital, and there was a Birdell [Chew] Moore, she used to call herself the Mother of Watts, Birdell Moore.

Stevenson

And--

Smith

Tommy Jacquette with the Watts [Summer] Festival. Tom with WLCAC--

Stevenson

Ted Watkins [Sr.]?

Smith

Ted Watkins, yes. He was very instrumental. He was with the union.

Stevenson

Right, the United Auto Workers [UAW, The International Union, United Automobile, Aerospace and Agricultural Implement Workers of America], okay.

Smith

Then you had some people like Mrs. Gladys Russell from Compton, Sylvia Williams from Compton, Leonard Buckner [phonetic], Joseph Buckner [phonetic], Maggie Trimble [phonetic], a lot of these were from Compton, very, very strong, and they were people you could [snaps fingers] call on the phone and get something pulled together, you know what I mean?

Stevenson

Right, okay. Maybe you could--

Smith

Grindell [phonetic] with the hospital, I forget his first name but put Grindell down, him and his wife. It might have been Dan Grindell, yes. They were from the beginning. It was a strong warrior group that was behind that hospital, and then when they broke up the community, that's when all that fell apart, see, and there's a whole generation that never connected.

Stevenson

Okay. Maybe you could talk a little bit about when the association with UCLA started, in terms of the university?

Smith

Oh, the beginning. It was the very beginning.

Stevenson

Can you talk a little bit about what you know about that, and maybe if you remember any of the key players out of here.

Smith

Dr. [Sherman M.] Mellinkoff, Sherman Mellinkoff. [Robert] Tranquada is a name that came up. I think he was from USC. Tranquada; I don't remember his first name. See, and when it came--the people from USC and UCLA were meeting with the Drew Medical Society to formulate the Drew School, and it required them, because they were bona fide medical schools. So then the whole idea was that the chairs that were given to Drew I think were actually given to UCLA, in order to get any kind of University of California monies, you know. So they were there from the very beginning, very beginning. There was pipe dreaming up until that time that you got the cooperation of UCLA and USC, you see, and I think that's the reason why the dean jumped and pulled the medical students, because he thinks he's still in charge of Drew. They're still stuck in the sixties.

Smith

Now, they have this new president, Dr. [Susan] Kelly, and she's hooking up with the state, and so they're working to get complete autonomy, okay. So now they can't use the hospital that no longer exists, but they want to see if they can purchase that hospital for a dollar, maybe, and recreate it for the Drew School. So in other words, the idea is not dead, and people are still working to maintain that there would be a Drew Medical School, and hopefully a King Hospital. Now, the one thing that is in the back of everybody's mind, you know, they tried to change the name of King years ago to Cesar Chavez, and the concern now is that, will they try that again? You know, it seems like they're refurbishing and doing all kinds of things. Are they going to change that name?

Smith

The one name that they proposed back in the seventies was, not community, universal? No. It was a nondescript name for university, and that came up again in the 2003, and that would wipe out the King name,

and that would wipe out the Drew name, okay. That was proposed in '77 when Satcher was there, and it was proposed again by Garthwaite in 2004, okay. The question is, is that going to come up again, you see? So if they can get the King label off the hospital, and the Drew label off the hospital, then you've removed all the African American claim to the hospital.

Stevenson

Okay. So could you talk a little bit about naming the university after Charles Drew and how that came about? Did it just seem to be a natural, or was there discussion about it?

Smith

I think so. See, the name of the medical society in Los Angeles was the Charles Drew Medical Society, and I would imagine it was just a natural flow to go to Charles Drew, and especially when you look in the field of medicine, he'd probably be at the top of the pinnacle as far as African Americans are concerned. I think the Martin Luther King, I think that came from Hahn, because that was not the original name. I forget. I think the name was something like Southeastern or Southwestern Medical Center, or something like that, but Hahn I think is the one that brought in the Martin Luther King name.

Stevenson

Okay. Something else I wanted to talk about is just your involvement with the beginnings of the [King/]Drew [Medical] Magnet High School [of Medicine and Science], or alternative high school, which I think was later. How did the idea come about?

Smith

That was my idea. Now, I'll tell you, that came from my mother, really. It's not that she had that idea for King, but she used to talk to us all the time when we were growing up--she went to a boarding school in North Carolina called Brick's, and that was a Rosenwald school. What it did was it was a high school that went to the high school level, but it was private, okay. And you had black kids coming from New York and other places, coming to Brick's School. At the time, there were no high schools in the South for black kids. Eighth grade was as far as you could go, okay? So then this was kind of a place that you could--it was kind of elitist, you know.

Smith

Now, her complaint, her concern was that black males always got a short shrift, okay? Now, her parents died early, and she said she noticed that with her, she had no problems. Anybody was willing to take her in. But her brothers, nobody wanted, okay, and as a result she could see that over the years no education, no education, no education, okay, but there were no opportunities for education. So then hearing her talk about the Brick's School, and then she talked about the young men that were at the Brick's School as well as the young women, and how they were then moved out into

the society, but it was a boarding school, and even had Africans and Liberians that would come to Brick's.

Smith

So when I came here and I looked at the lay of the land, and I looked at all these gang guys, and coming from broken homes, and the other thing that was absent was there were no older men. And when I say that, I'm not talking about men their father's age. The generation just above them had been pulled into Vietnam, so there was no transference of a youth culture from the guys that were in their early twenties, nineteen to twenty-five you'd say; there was nobody to sit that down to the teenagers. So then the gap from a kid that was fourteen and fifteen was thirty-five. That's too wide a gap, okay? So now if you take that group that's like saying, these are male orphans, meaning that their daddies are dead, meaning that generation of daddy is dead, big brother, then a boarding-school situation would be the place for them, okay? And in that respect then, you could unify their instruction, the culturing, acculturation, all kinds of things could happen in a boarding school.

Smith

Now, my concept of the boarding school was not to make it a medical or science boarding school, but a general boarding school, and I got that from her, because she would tell me about the condition of a lot of the kids that came to Brick's from out of the country, and had absolutely no knowledge of anything. And they had to be brought even how to use silverware, okay? And she'd talk about the fact, you know, like people used to say, black people don't get lice, and she said that's not true, because after she had been there a year or so, one of the things she had to do with young women coming into the boarding school was comb their hair and get rid of the lice. She said you'd put newspaper down and just get lice drop out all on the paper, and it wasn't until Madame [C.J. Charles Joseph] Walker came through with the hot comb that got rid of the lice thing, you see what I mean? So this fallacy of saying that black folks don't get lice is not true, you know what I mean?

Smith

But anyhow, when she looked at how then these kids coming out of the country were brought so far because they were in a boarding situation, to me that would have been the natural thing for this area. So my point was, we need a school attached to King Hospital and the Drew School, and it can be one that feeds into the Drew School with the idea that the Drew School would actually expand to become a university, and the reason being that there is not a black university between the Mississippi and the Pacific. And Drew School being a medical university, it's not complete enough. So my point would be that if Drew started off as a medical university, it's become an undergrad university, and you'd have kids in the boarding school that fed to it.

Smith

The boarding school would have one of the strengths would be music, because so many of these kids come out of Louisiana and Texas, where they have a strong musical background, so it's a good foundation-building for them, and especially with Hollywood up the road. So that you'd have the School of Music, then you'd have these kids in the arts, English, etc., etc., and the sciences, but not primarily the sciences. So we're using King and Drew as a [unclear] to create that university, and start the high school as a boarding school to feed it, okay?

Smith

Well, when we started off then, we tried to see how we could bring that together, and we would meet and we would meet, and we met with people from the L.A. Unified District, and we thought, well, now, if we start off as an alternative school, which we would have to come to the boarding school at a later point, but if we can start off as an alternative school, maybe we can get funding from Los Angeles School District for the alternative school. But if it's going to be an alternative school, it's going to be black-oriented, okay, because we can't afford to be universal, you know what I mean? So we're trying to retrieve the black kids going down the tubes. But we couldn't get any money. We couldn't get anything going with that. So we had to kind of just let that go.

Smith

"Sweet" Alice Harris, do you know her?

Stevenson

I do.

Smith

Yes, and there was another lady, and I forget her name, but they were instrumental in resurrecting the idea. They met with Dr. Ronald Bloom from the Department of Pediatrics, and he went with his group, the American Jewish Federation or whatever, I don't remember which one, and they began to work with Alice Harris and this other lady, and they then began to come up with the idea of the Drew High School. And they put it together, okay? And from that then you got the Drew School. Now, when Bloom put it together he told me, he said, "Well, we're going to get your high school. We're going to move towards getting your high school," you see, so that's cool. It was good, see. And then that's where we are now.

Smith

But we're still limited to the science orientation, and not the broader orientation. I think that you need the broader orientation, you know. Kids can't just learn science. They've got to have some culture, and they've got to have some reasoning power. In other words, you have to read literature and get into understanding history and these things, so that you don't misuse your science. But if you just come up with ped-level science, for

instance, like what's going on now with transplant--I don't know if you saw that article in the paper yesterday with Fresno?

Stevenson

Yes.

Smith

Where this woman's father was declared dead? They got two people to declare him dead, and the third person said, "He's not dead." But the transplant people were waiting to snatch the organs?

Stevenson

Yes.

Smith

The senator or whoever it is down in South Carolina proposes that black men or men in jail, if they want to shorten their sentences, can give up an organ for like kidney transplant, to get some time knocked off. Now, see, if you have scientists that haven't had good backgrounds in other areas, the kind of science they practice is going to be sinister, what Hitler did, do you follow? And so that's my point of that's why you need more than just a science school, and you never get kids off in science without giving them a broader base of humanity and that kind of thing, see?

Stevenson

Okay. Let's see. In the 1970s you identified Watts and I think South Central in general as a, quote, unquote, "community under seige." Now, why did it take the wider or the powers that be and everybody else until the time of the Second Watts Rebellion, and even until today to recognize that fact, and do they recognize it?

Smith

They don't recognize it. They don't recognize it. I'll tell you how you know they don't recognize it. When we started off with community under seige, we were talking about the failure, and documented failure, of African American people. If you come to today--now, this is two riots later--and if they were talking about a community under seige, the first thing they'd tell you is the community has changed. Once you tell me the community has changed, that means that the whole discussion is changed.

Smith

Now, when we talk about what do we need to do, we're really talking about how do we get the Hispanics integrated into the American economy? We do not talk about black babies dying. We do not talk about black kids in gang violence. We don't talk about the excessive incarceration of black men and women, so in other words, all the issues that were raised in the sixties that were predominantly African American, all the stuff that we were dealing with at the Watts College is washed out. Now, every time you speak anything about an African American in our community, it has to have a hyphen behind it. African American-and-Hispanics, African American-and-women, African American-and-gays. In other words, you have to be contextualized, okay?

Stevenson

Right.

Smith

See, so that means then, you still haven't understood that African American part is still under seige. You see what I mean? Now, when there's a movement now to try to do something about that three-strikes law--I was at a meeting last night, and someone was showing me a pamphlet concerning the three-strikes law, because these people are being arrested for no reason. One woman was telling me about a lady whose husband was given twenty-five years. He was in a store, and he allegedly removed the tag off a dress, and they arrested him, saying that he had taken a tag off a dress because somebody else was coming along to steal it, and for that he got twenty--that was his third strike, you see?

Smith

Now, my point is that if we look at the number of black males and the number going to jail, you can't talk about that in a global sense and then talk about 18th Street [Gang], and MS 13, okay? And you're talking about El Salvador, and you're talking about the border, okay? That's not the community that's under siege, you see what I mean? It's just like I'm having a march on Monday, and the community is afraid to attend, okay? If I go to King and say, "Well, let's have the march," they ain't coming out there. "Oh no, no, no." And then others that have lost their jobs, "Well, I've got a case coming. I can't be seen." I can't be, whatever. You follow my point? My point is that fear still dominates that community. But if you look at one million aliens, who feel strong enough to come into a country, a foreign country, and demand, that's strength, you follow? And that's what you call courage. That's part of our siege, that we've been reduced to that point, you see.

Stevenson

What can black Angelenos learn from that, from the immigrants that feel strong enough?

Smith

If they will learn; what they're learning is anger. They're getting angry at the immigrants, as though they were the enemy, and they miss the lesson, okay?

Stevenson

Which is?

Smith

Which is that these are your replacements, and it's been thirty years getting them here, and they didn't walk in because they're strong, they walked in because we wanted them here. We opened the borders for them. Now what we're trying to tell them, "That's enough. We have enough of you," that we have to balance forty to fifty million African Americans, and we've done that. Now, the next stage is now we've got to get rid of the forty--the African Americans, so we're ready to go to the new program, and you've got us

hanging onto the old program. No, no more come in; stop. Okay? How many amnesties are we going to have? You had it in the seventies, you had amnesty in the eighties, you know, you keep having amnesties. Now that you've got your number, now you're ready to close the border. Right, fine.

Smith

But what was the purpose of bringing them here? For work. What happens to the African American, the community under siege? What happens to them? What happens in a siege? The people die. You choke them to death. Now, the African Americans can't deal with that concept. It scares them to death. And so they then just get more praiseworthy, and they're in church screaming and hollering, and they're praising. It's a fear thing, you see what I mean, "Deliver me, O Lord." You see what I mean? So we're still under siege, but we don't know that we're under siege. We're not using the parameters to see that we're under siege. We don't understand it.

Smith

I'm at the point of saying it's beyond under siege now, it's genocide, okay? And my question I raise to people, "Well, what are the criteria for genocide? When do you know you had it? Now, don't tell me that when you see the smoke coming out the furnace, that that's when you know. That's too late." What about when they built the railroads to take you to the furnace? Okay, and all the infrastructure that's being built now? Okay, the prisons, okay, the concentration camps that were used for the Japanese that are still being maintained--

Stevenson

Have not been torn down.

Smith

--that have not been torn down, okay? So my point would be, at what point do you blow the whistle? Now, that's up to you. You've got to use your common sense, and look at things, and get rid of your fear, and blow the whistle, you see? And that's when I brought that community-under-seige conference, and then everybody just went, "Oh no." Olivia Mitchell walked out of this group, and [Robert] Bob Farrell walked out, everybody began to walk out of South Central. Ask your dad, he can tell you about it. They all walked out of South Central Welfare Planning. The poor man who was in charge almost had a heart attack, but he did end up with a heart attack, and he blamed Mrs. Winge for it.

Stevenson

Now, who was this?

Smith

Oh, what was his name? It'll come to me in time. He was very scary, and he was close to retirement, and he swore that we were going to cause him to lose his job and lose his retirement, okay. And Mrs. Winge just kept things going. She just kept fighting. I guess he wanted to know, "Well, why use my organization for the fight?" you know? But we haven't made any progress

since then. You know, the same issues that were raised then are raised now. We had that press conference. Your father was on that press conference, and the media met us, and we lined out, unemployment, education, the organization of the gangs. We questioned who organized the gangs, who brought them the guns, and all this kind of thing. Media's sitting right out there. They were angry because we called it a community under siege. The police were angry, it's a community under siege.

Smith

And then bottom line, after we laid all that out, then they jumped us. "You're always blaming others for your problems, and your real problem is you don't raise your own kids." Okay? That's the same message we're getting today, you see what I mean?

Stevenson

Yes, yes. Okay. Again in material you gave me, in the eighties you identify issues of grandparent childrearing, high black incarceration rates, the crack-cocaine epidemic. Again, why is it taking so long to recognize and acknowledge these issues? I mean, you seem to identify them light years before--

Smith

Yes. We were called rabble rousers. We were vilified for having done it. How would you say it? It's like saying if you found a mother that's raising six children, and she has nothing to eat, and she knows it and she's feeling guilty, and she don't know where to turn, and she sits around and all of a sudden one of the kids hollers, "Mama, we ain't got nothing to eat," and she slaps the hell out of him, because she knows we don't have it, and you just opened up her biggest problem. In other words, you touched her nerve, you see. When we touched on those things, we touched on their nerve, and I'm not talking white people, I'm talking black people, because if you admit that what we said is true, you have to do something. But if you don't admit it, you don't have to do anything. So then they'd tell you, "Stop stirring up confusion." In other words, the confusion is you're stirring me up in confusion, not the man, because he knows it's true, you see?

Smith

But we couldn't get anybody to move on it, and especially not the politicians. They would run from us, okay. I remember we presented--I had this young Jewish resident, Dr. Michael Weinraub, and he stuck with me even after he finished his residency, you know. He finished in somewhere around like '74 or '75, and he worked with us in the Watts College right on up to '86 or '87, you know? But we presented the graffiti study at city hall one Saturday afternoon, and the majority of the people that were in that room were white, and mainly from the West Side. There were two black politicians that had spoken before us, and they made sure they were not in the room when we spoke. And when you looked out the door, you could see them running back and forth outside in the hall, but they wouldn't be caught inside. They didn't

want to hear it, they didn't want to be able to answer no questions, okay? They was like, see no evil, hear no evil, and they wish you'd hurry up and shut up and get out of here. Okay?

Smith

Now, they were in a position to be able to do something, but they denied it. I took the graffiti study down to the National Medical Association meeting in 1982, okay? It blew their mind, because what we did was we showed that the symbolisms were not African at all. They were all European, they were all Druid, okay. It was beyond the purview of ignorant boys to be writing this stuff on the wall. I had to go to the library, and Weinraub, we had to go to the library and get books to understand what was going on, see?

Smith

Now, we presented this to the National Medical Association on their seminar on violence, okay. Everybody thought it was something. "Oh, that's brilliant." "Oh, that's great. That's right, right now." We're here in Atlanta, they're killing all the boys, you've got a big thing going on, and I'm saying, "If you see this, you can see that maybe that Wayne did not kill these boys, that what's going on is very Druid, okay, so that we could even make a resolution here and get something done, right?" No. They were just--it was like entertainment, do you follow? And then they're going to look at it academically. "Well, how'd you figure that out?" They were so detached, like it was not their problem. See, that's fear. That's fear, okay.

Smith

So then that taught us this, that when we would show the graffiti study, we wouldn't make a big to-do out of it. We would never publish it. We'd show the graffiti study, and then we'd go underground, and somebody would say, "We want to see the study." "What study? We don't know what you're talking about," because we know that you're not going to do anything about it. It's just entertainment, you see? But you can get killed behind this, you see. So that's the issue.

Smith

Even when we went to the public schools in L.A. Unified District, we were frozen to Watts College. We had done about a year or two of it, and we were on our third year, and so we invited the teachers through COBA [Council of Black Administrators] to join us, and we'd make this a unified education-medical week. No. What they did was they created their own program. So COBA then began to sponsor a conference, maybe it was like three days on the weekend. They had a lot of money and all kinds of things, and they went and did that thing from the educational perspective, but it had nothing to do with reality. You're taking how to teach better English, how to teach English better? You know, what is it about English you don't understand? Math, how you teach math better? What's so difficult about one and one? You follow me?

Smith

You have a different--there's a bigger problem. Here's Hispanic kids have no problem with this, okay? The Asian kids have no problem with this. Why is it black people have a block that they can't get this? Okay? They practice physics. Let me put my car out there in Nickerson, and I come back in a half hour and I ain't got no tires and got nothing. I mean, all the physics stuff is going to be done to my tire, okay? Yet I put them in a classroom and try to teach them physics principles that they already use, can't get through. It's a bigger problem here. We need to come together, okay. So I don't need to tell you all the ins and outs of streptococcal infection. I need to tell you how to prevent it, okay? We don't need to try to find a new way to speak English or teach English. We need to find out how to get the kids to understand it, you see what I mean, and come to the reason why they need to learn it, or whatever it is. But we need to have new ways of coming together, but we go in our separate ways.

Smith

I think one of the things that bothered them was the gamut of our program, like on the week. We went from soup to nuts. We did a lot of indictment. For instance, on Wednesday we had the University of the Streets, with the pimps and the prostitutes, okay. So Wednesday afternoon, and that was through Dr. Smith, you get the pimps, they present about pimping. The prostitutes would talk about prostitution, okay, and you'd have all this [makes sound] in the audience. Ooh, they're bad people, bad people, okay? And teachers bristling, okay? One time the audience ladies had such a reaction that we almost had to think that they were hysterical, okay? And what I tried to get across to them, "Look it. You're teaching at Crenshaw High School. What percentage of your class are going to end up being prostitutes and pimps? I'll tell you this much, you'll have more of them than you'll have physicians, okay? And you have no idea how to teach a child that's going to become a prostitute or a pimp. You've done nothing to prevent it, because you don't even understand it. And you can't even stand to be in the same room with the people, and you don't even want the subject discussed." Okay?

Smith

And it was very enlightening because, you know, what would you know about that? You're not in that life, you know? But when you take COBA, they couldn't deal with that, because that would be like we're endorsing it, you see what I mean, that kind of thing. So there were a lot of reasons why we couldn't go beyond where we went. So what we did was we said, one of the things we will do, wherever we can tape we will tape, and distribute the tape. So if we had a session that five folk were in, we need those five folk in order to have the reason to have the tape, so you've got to talk to somebody, okay? And once you talk to somebody, then you can distribute, you see? So that was all the methodology in terms of how to get information around and still persist in the subject, you see.

Stevenson

Tell me a little bit more about that University of the Streets, and who came up with that idea?

Smith

Whenever we sat with the Watts College--we'd meet every Monday night--we'd just rap, and in the course of discussion with all around the table, we'd come up with ideas, you see. So when we were filling out, like looking at what we need to talk about, I had one day, I said, "Wednesday is going to be our community day," okay? So in the morning we had the community under siege. We kept that thing going. So Wednesday morning is community under siege. I said, "Now, in the afternoon I'd like something that deals with the community, but I don't want to hear about the church, and I don't want to hear about what we all know about. We need to know about the underground community, okay? So we need to get into the idea of what's going on in our community that is really impacting our community, but we don't know anything about."

Smith

So then Ernie was saying, "What we need to do is maybe bring in some of the pimps and the ho's, you know." I said, "Well, we'll call that the University of the Streets. Okay? We'll bring them in and get enlightened on that, and maybe later on in some other years there might be another area that needs to be brought in and dealt with," you see. So that's kind of how we evolved it. But we used to sit on Monday evenings. We'd start around seven o'clock or eight o'clock, and stay till about ten or eleven at night just rapping, you see what I mean?

Stevenson

Okay. And one last question for today's session. Why do you think it is, I'll say black professionals, and also you mentioned those two legislators that absented themselves from the room during that press conference--why this, I don't know if gun shy is the right word, reticence to really deal with reality?

Smith

I think because of the machine politics. If we had enough black people to elect an official, they could deal head on with our issues. I believe when they have to be voted in by other people, they walk a chalk line. And then if they're getting their money from big business or whatever else, they could be cut loose so easy. Then it would become a matter of them, whoever the politics people are who have the money, they can buy what they want, and they can always find the black person to represent that. So the point then, you'd have to always say, between the two, let's say the two that were not dealing, what are the attributes, okay? Given that as a weakness, what's the saving grace? And then you're understanding then, if what they're doing is walking the chalk line, then they have to show me the reason for that. What did we gain from you walking the chalk line?

Smith

With one I can see there's a lot of gain; the other I'm not so sure. The other one is out of politics now. Only one is still in; a lot of gain, okay? One of the things I learned, and maybe others did too, we learned about the chalk line, and then once you understand that, then you don't be so critical, and you don't put people in a position that you know they can't work with. But my point to them was, "Then you have a lot of contacts with people that you can use to substitute for you. You can pull coattails," you know?

Stevenson

Right, right.

Smith

The ministerial group, which did nothing--in fact, one of them threatened to beat me when I went to talk to one of the ministerial groups about King Hospital in 1989, when they were about ready to take it. And I still believed in the power of the church, that, "Y'all could mobilize and really get some things going if you get up off your duff," okay? And I was very angry with them, because I went to their Monday-afternoon meeting, Monday-morning meeting, whatever, and they were there with the rings, the gold rings and gold jewelry, and big crosses hanging around their neck, I mean just like pimps. [laughter] Dressed like pimps, okay? And I think I had an attitude. So I laid them to rest.

Smith

And then I said to them that the church went to sleep. I said, "The bullet they put in King's head was put in your head. They blew your brains out when they blew his out, because you haven't done a thing since. And I lay the gang violence and everything in your lap as the cause, from your inaction." Oh, they got mad with me.

Stevenson

I bet.

Smith

Oh, they got mad with me. And Brother moderator, that was another thing. "Brother moderator, Brother moderator." Brother moderator wanted to let me know we could go out in the alley and finish this, okay? [laughs] That's the level of antagonism, the point being that when you pushed them up against the wall, that fear is so deep that they would come off that wall fighting you, but they never fight the enemy. That's from the whiplashed Ku Klux Klan, that's hundreds of years of oppression that creates--it's almost genetic fear, you have to understand that.

Smith

When I have a new march, I don't expect a big crowd. In fact, I say in advance, "I don't need no big crowd, because I'm not going to ask people to come and jeopardize their own comfort," you see what I mean, because I know my people. I know what they're up against, and they're all afraid they're going to lose their jobs, and that's rightful. They're all afraid that some retaliation's going to come to their child; that's true. You see what I

mean? So you don't press on them. But somebody has got to understand, nothing's going to change unless you get out there and make the change, you see what I mean?

Smith

We need King and we need institutions, in order to be able to have people have a forum. You can't be a loose cannon, okay? So if you have one person out there trying to cause something, it's just not going to work. But if it comes from an institution, it protects them, and it also bona fides what they're trying to say, you see.

Stevenson

All right.

1.4. Session 4

April 27, 2007

Stevenson

Good morning. I'm interviewing Dr. Ernest Smith on Friday, April twenty-seventh. You've brought a picture of your history, of your family and your grandmother. Could you elaborate on what this picture represents, and about her background?

Smith

Right. The picture has my grandmother with her two sisters sitting alongside of her, and then her father, who is white, her mother, who is a pure African slave, and her brother and his wife. What the picture really depicts is a father, mother, and children. An important point is it's taken in North Carolina, eastern North Carolina, and it must be somewhere in the 1890s from looking at the dress, and that's unusual because it was against the law for intermarriage between blacks and whites. So the idea of relationships between blacks and whites was obviously happening, but never admitted to. And he went into a studio with his family and had a photograph taken of his family in North Carolina, even though it was against the law.

Stevenson

Yes, certainly illegal, could even get you killed.

Smith

That's right. Now, when they used to face him up about him living, being with this black woman, he would always answer by saying, "She has her house and I have mine." Now, when he looked at his children, he could not come to grips with the fact that his children were black, even though they were mulattos, and so with his oldest daughter, which he felt she had no options in North Carolina--in fact, he felt none of his girls did, because no matter who the black man came to court, and he could be even whiter than the master--you know how it was in those days, blue-eyed, blond-haired black men--they were never white enough.

Smith

So he sent her to Baltimore to his brother, and she lived with his brother for two months, and she left and went back to North Carolina because they treated her as though she was the maid. And the way she was raised, she was raised as a daughter, and she was not raised to be a servant to anyone. So she went back to North Carolina.

Smith

Now, the other interesting point is that the brother that she went to was a twin. In other words, the white brother had a twin white brother. She died, my grandmother did, in childbirth, birthing twins, so it's very interesting then that the idea of the twinning came from the white side of her family, rather than from the black side of her family, and usually people would expect the reverse of that, that more often they'd expect to have twins in the black side rather than in the white side.

Smith

And she lived and literally took care of him--he lived to be in his nineties, and she was the daughter that was just crazy about her dad. But he was crazy about my grandmother, and she was the rebellious one. Now, he taught all of them. He was kind of a school teacher, and they became the first generation of teachers in North Carolina, so that his two daughters would board in whatever little town they were in, and teach for the winter, and then come back home for the summer, and very often go down to New Bourne to the West Street High School and do summer school. That was the kind of educational system that was evolving in North Carolina at the time.

Stevenson

I see.

Smith

It was interesting, because my mother tells me that when she was trying to get her education together, especially as an orphan, living one family to another, when she went to New Bourne to live with this uncle of hers--that would be my grandmother's brother--the one thing he insisted was that she go back to school. Now, she had been at the Brick's Boarding School. I don't know if I ever told you about that.

Stevenson

Right, you did.

Smith

Yes, right. She'd been at the Brick's Boarding School, but she had to leave because of a fire that her sister had, and burned up everything. So when she went to New Bourne, and she enrolled in the high school, her aunt was there in a summer school, and she had--they were at the point that she was a little darker than her aunt, and her aunt had to come to grips with the fact that her niece was not quite as white as her generation. See, that was the changing.

Stevenson

Right, right.

Smith

Now, the point being that her sister, which would be my grandmother, being rebellious didn't marry into that white-mulatto caste. She married a man who was half-Indian, and that was not looked on as a good genetic construct. Number one, they weren't tall, they weren't tall people. They didn't have the presence of the other group that had intermarried with the whites, so that was part of the structure in terms of determining which way the family was going to go, so that if you looked at that Grimes-Cotten group, that the Grimes were beginning to pull back into the African area, whereas the Cotten were trying to maintain the white area. And when they come together, there was almost like a little strain that was present.

Smith

Then my mother's brothers and sisters, and she, married very, almost pure-black people, and that really pulled it in two different directions. So if we were looking at our cousins on the Cotten side, there was a distinct difference between them and us on the Grimes side.

Stevenson

Right. Okay. So could you restate your grandmother's name, and also her father's name?

Smith

Yes, okay. My grandmother was Della Cotten, C-o-t-t-e-n, sometimes o-n, depending on the records, and her mother's name was Priscilla Cotten [great-grandmother], and I'll tell you about Priscilla in a minute; and her father's name was Edward H. Cotten [great-grandfather]. He was very proud of being an Anglo-Saxon, and he would let you know that in no uncertain terms. His father's name was Arthur Cotten [great-great grandfather], and his father's name was Ollie Cotten [great-great-great grandfather], and they were supposed to have come out of Liverpool, England. He claims to have been related to Cotton Mather.

Smith

Now, my grandmother came as a slave, her and her mother, and another young man who she claimed as a brother, but was not really a brother. They were captured, and they were captured, according to her, by red cloth. In other words, that they would bring red cloth to the village, and they'd be on the boat, and then they would entice them to come on the boat to get not only the red cloth but other things. Then the gangplank would go up, and they were gone.

Smith

Now, the three of them stayed together in slavery until somewhere around the 1850s, 1840s. Her sister had a baby by Ed Cotten's father. In other words, Arthur Cotten had a baby with Mandy. His wife insisted that they be sold. He refused to sell the baby, but Mandy was sold into slavery, away, and her mother then insisted to be sold with Mandy, because as she stated, "I know where Priscilla is, but I don't know where Mandy is going, so sell me

with Mandy. Then I'll know where Mandy is, and I'll know where Priscilla is." So Mandy and her mother were sold; the baby was given to Priscilla.

Smith

Now, Priscilla was born in 1838, and I think the baby was born in something like 1852 or [185]3, and she had that responsibility of raising her. Then following that, she had her own children by the son of Arthur--

Stevenson

Okay, complicated.

Smith

--so it's quite a complicated--that's America.

Stevenson

Right, right.

Smith

That's America, that nobody wants to talk about or whatever, you see?

Stevenson

Right. Okay.

Smith

But the other point about that whole story I think is the honor that he showed. When he died, he walked, as they say, something like ten miles, walking to the courthouse to declare the property to be heir's property, and the reason he had the picture taken was to give a connection between him and the property and his family, such that I have the picture as a great-grandson that connects me back to Ed Cotten if ever something came up about the land, which, of course, I don't think we own anymore, but whatever, whatever. We're there.

Stevenson

Right, there's documentation.

Smith

Yes. That was his concept.

Stevenson

Okay. All right.

Smith

There was another thing I was wanting to look at. I wanted to look at the King, and looking at the destruction.

Stevenson

Okay. Yes, we can work that in. I have actually--actually, this is probably related to what you're going to say. What I was going to ask you is, could you further discuss your current role in keeping King Hospital a viable community institution, and who are the other community activists that are currently trying to keep it open and keep it viable, and keep it serving the needs?

Smith

Well, yes. I'm working partly independently, partly with the Black Health Task Force, and then with Maxine Waters, who's working very diligently with

the community in trying to keep it open, and, of course, Juanita [Millender-MacDonald, who just died, who was working from the congressional level. You've had a lot of response from people but they weren't in the leadership, but they would be willing to follow. Now, within the hospital there's been such a dispersion of the workers that there's no continuity with them, and those who are left are so fearful of losing their jobs that they really don't want--they don't even want to be seen with you, okay? That's that divide and conquer, okay. And the hospital has been really reduced to nothing, forty beds or so, and they're still firing people.

Smith

So I think the whole idea is privatization, and it's a dishonest thing that they're doing, and it's an immoral thing that they're doing. So what we're doing is quietly picking, and continuing to pick at the immorality of the behavior of Yaroslavsky, who is the supervisor, and Molina, who talks out of both sides of her mouth, and her big point was working for her people against another people, and his problem is working for his people against another people. Then you have Yvonne Braithwaite [Burke], who slept at the switch, and then, I think, trying to get along, and trying to be the ultimate American, as most blacks try to be, you know, and you understand too well everybody's point except your own, okay. She slept at the switch.

Smith

And then Antonivich, who never wavered from the fact that he was not for King Hospital, and he was for privatization and kind of from the big business. He didn't even have to open his mouth hardly, during this whole period from 2000 on, because these liberals fought the fight, okay. And I put Zev Yaroslavsky as being the King fighter over the Department of Health Services with Garthwaite, and engineering that whole issue. Now, the thing that's interesting about that to me--in 1989, when Claire Spiegel [Los Angeles Times] did her articles against King Hospital in the L.A. Times, and everybody felt that that was really a crowning victory, you find that Yaroslavsky wasn't on the board at the time, but this hospital was strong enough to overcome and fight.

Smith

You had the president of [Charles R.] Drew [University of Medicine and Science] School, who was really getting it together. The minute he got hurt in his auto accident, the dean at UCLA [Medical School?] jumped down at King and said he was in charge, which meant that Drew was now a part of UCLA.

Stevenson

And who was the person at UCLA?

Smith

I can't remember his name, and I don't want to call it if I'm in error, you know. But he was the dean of the medical school of UCLA, and I mean, the faculty had to really put him in check. When Zev and Molina came on the

board, that was in the early nineties, then things began to change, and one of the things that there was change in terms of the directors of the hospital. I think I mentioned that before. There was a change in the budget, and the nursing shortage, because nurses were being pulled out of that hospital little by little. In fact, in one instance the nurses went on strike, because we just had too many patients to take care of, and couldn't take care of them. So that you're finding there's just a nipping away, and a nipping away, and a nibbling away.

Smith

Then finally in around 2002, when Yaroslavsky met with Garthwaite at a board meeting, and then talked about there being two medical schools, and brought in a whole new plan of how healthcare was to be delivered in Los Angeles County, the Big County being the big hospital, and then Harbor [UCLA Medical Center] being a tertiary hospital, King remaining the same, because it had such a heavy load. It was running a heavier load of trauma and other problems, and then Olive View [UCLA Medical Center] becoming a hospital that would be more clinical than inpatient, Antelope Valley being just wiped out completely.

Smith

So when we got involved, we were told, "Don't worry about it. You just have some things to clean up." But when it finally started moving along, it flipped the script, and it was done with chicanery. Now, when the others went into lawsuit, King was talked out of going into lawsuit. And from my observation of the way courts work, they never work at the trial; they work before the trial. Okay? The lawyers get together with the judge, and they decide which way it's going to go, and that's the way it goes, okay?

Smith

That means then that when King was talked out of the lawsuit, it had already been decided that Harbor would remain the same and intact, and that Big County would remain intact, and Olive View would remain intact, and so if there was a budget cut, it was over the backs of the people at King Hospital. So that you could say then, the plan was white versus black, and I'm one, because I'm not into this Democrat-Republican thing, you know, because we were enslaved by the Tories and the Whigs and the Democrats and Republicans, and whoever is to come. So my point being that I see it as whether it was Antonovich the Republican, or Yaroslavsky the Democrat, that they were both white, okay. And the victim was King, which was predominantly black.

Smith

Now, the important thing about that, and that's a little bit of what I want to talk about today--when King started, it was really looked at as a black hospital, and that was a negative, okay. Now, when they started bringing people in, the first thing that it seems to me they were beginning to find out, how are we going to bring this to a halt? So when they recruited us, we were

recruited with problems already had started. The salary, for instance. When I came in, you know, and not knowing what the California economy was, I made a deal with the chairman that I would be enrolled at Drew in November and December, and the salaries I would get--and I wasn't even in town then--would pay for my moving from Detroit into Los Angeles.

Smith

Now, when I came into California in January of 1972, and I worked two weeks and I found out that, no, the first two weeks County keeps, so your first check from the county will be at the end of January, which is the twenty-fifth of November. When I got here on the first of January, I had four checks waiting for me from the Drew School, for November and December. Each check was worth \$144. My cost to move was something like \$1200, so those checks didn't even cover the moving, so I had to keep my stuff in storage. I had to borrow pots and pans from Dr. Betty Jo Warren, and a sleeping bag. And I had brought this young man from Detroit who I was working with, so we had to borrow two sleeping bags and pots and pans. We first stayed at a ratty motel, because I didn't know anything about Los Angeles, down in Hawthorne, and as soon as I could get the first check in January, then I was able to rent an apartment.

Smith

In the meantime, the bills I had in Detroit I couldn't pay, so I was getting calls from Detroit about payments that hadn't come, plus I'm with no cash here, and I wasn't about to borrow any money from anybody back East, so that the first three months were really rough. Now, I'd put the young man in college. His father paid for that. But the whole thing about sleeping on the floor and trying to eat and all that, that was really a hardship. But see, now, I was single, so I didn't have a problem, but some of the married physicians who came in under those circumstances, and especially they were young, and a lot of them coming out of training, you see, that made them have to find other means of support.

Smith

Now, if you went to Harbor and Big County, they had set up private practice on campus with their physicians. King didn't have that. So if these guys then were going to try to supplement, which was legal, they had to then build a practice, find a place, which meant more expense, okay? Now, that's like a person falling down the stairs and trying to catch their balance as they fall, and the more they try to catch their balance, the faster they fall. And then thirty years later you come down and talk about King doctors moonlighting, okay? And then use that as a means for pulling the hospital down, when you set them up in that, okay?

Smith

Then the idea of what you call "bad jacketing." In fact, I had been there I guess one month; January I came in. We met with members of the Compton [Unified] School District in February, and that's when they let us know about

the things that had been placed on cars, warning the people to beware of the nigger doctors. We hadn't even opened yet, and that's when they started calling it Killer King. Now, that bad jacketing was then placed on the community center, "Community calls it Killer King." No, that came from the police, okay, who were eager to target all the cars, you see? So then when the hospital opens, then you have a community that's looking at you with a jaundiced eye, okay, that we've got all these black surgeons and all these black doctors, "Now, I don't know if I'm going to let them do this to me." You follow what I'm saying?

Stevenson

Right. So it was a propaganda campaign.

Smith

It was a propaganda campaign. Now, L.A. is already segregated, so that meant then that we came in as an isolated core. We had not any contact--even though we were connected to UCLA, we didn't really have contact with UCLA. We were supposed to be connected to USC, but we had no contact with USC, and I don't think that--as far as I was concerned, [unclear] complaining, you know what I mean? But there was medical isolation, but there was social isolation. So it means then whatever is going to happen in Watts or at King Hospital was going to be kept in Watts, and kept within the borders of King Hospital, so that with that isolation, then you couldn't defend yourself in terms of any misinformation or disinformation that would be put out. And there was a lot of it quietly being disseminated. Sometimes the L.A. Times would throw it out, sometimes the Herald Examiner would throw it out, the police would throw out a lot of it, and on down the line.

Smith

Then when we decided that we were going to become community-oriented and try a new way of doing medicine, which was like coming out of the walls of the hospital, well, one of the first things I had said I was going to deal with was the adolescent violence, being a pediatrician, and my point, even though I'm a cardiologist, my point was, we are not getting that much cardiology coming into the hospital, okay, and I'm not going to sit here and twiddle my thumbs, having had a lot of experience with adolescents and working in the community.

Smith

Then I said, "Let me deal with adolescent homicide." Well, the first thing I studied was the gangs, and I'd studied that from afar, getting information, doing a study, and it was very obvious that the kids did not organize the gangs. They had nothing to do with that, and that this was not organized by black people, that the whole structure was outside of the black purview, and according to the police, with 90,000 gang members, that if you looked at the black segment of that, that was larger than any black church in Los Angeles. And the point being that these kids had not the ability to organize that large a structure.

Smith

So then I began to teach. So I met with the South Central Welfare Planning organization, that's the one where I met your dad, and we decided to have a press conference, after I had begun to talk about adolescent behavior and actually go to the blackboard and lecture, and show them wherein this behavior just didn't fit adolescents. It was more adult, see? Then we decided to have the Community Under Siege Conferences, okay. Now, we had the first newspaper conference, media conference, which they looked at us and laughed. In fact, they told us that our problem was that we didn't raise our children, okay?

Smith

Then the next thing we decided to do was have a community conference, which was the Community Under Siege Conference, including the police department being involved in it, South Central Welfare Planning, the L.A. Unified School District [LAUSD], Martin Luther King Hospital, so what we were doing was bringing institutions together, okay. Now, this was not happenstantial, this was planned.

Smith

Now, in this we had position papers that were being worked on. I wrote three position papers. One was on the land, and the whole idea was an economic thing, that urban renewal is what the issue was as far as L.A. was concerned, and the gangs were instrumental in that, okay? Then the next thing I looked at was, I wrote a paper called "The New Indian." And when I compared the community to everything that happened with the Indian people, in terms of the drugs, the alcohol, the diseases, the reservation isolation on down to the murders, etc., and finally to genocide. Then I wrote another paper called "The New Jew," and I made comparisons of the African American community in Los Angeles to what happened to the Jewish people in Germany, and even before the Holocaust how they were scapegoated, they were fired from their jobs, all kinds of things, then finally herded together and destroyed. And I saw the same patterns in South Central Los Angeles.

Smith

But immediately I became a rabble rouser, and one of the first things they did was said, "Your writing is terrible." I didn't write a thesis. I was writing for the community, and broke it down to a level that they could understand. I was not trying to impress anybody. So they used that concept. "Oh, your writing is bad," etc., etc. And it dawned on me, they're angry not with the writing, but with what I said, angry enough to do damage. So one of the first decisions that I made was, no more writing. So I didn't write anything, and spent thirty years speaking, so that this whole idea of organizing oral conference, going off and speaking, lecturing in the school district, and lecturing in the community, and lecturing all over the state, that was okay,

and it caught them off guard. Illiteracy is what a black person is, so then I played the role of the illiterate black man, and was able to get through.

Smith

Now, one of the things that we suffered a lot of, house entry, breaking and entry. In other words, you come home and you find things missing, and at first I would blame the young man that was staying there, saying that he was bringing in his company, and they were going through the house and doing this, that, and the other. And he was denying, denying, denying, and it took me a while before I realized that he's telling the truth, okay? And then as I began to meet other more radical people in the community, then they began to educate me in the fact that the police will come in your house or whatever.

Smith

And then later on, I guess it was Frank [Forrester] Church that brought out the Senate investigation inquiry that talked about the breaking, what they called the "black-bag burglaries" that the government did. So that when you looked at it, then I said, well, now, the cutting of the automobile hoses, taking the gas line and opening it so the gas drips over on your motor, cutting up your seats, coming into your house and stealing one sock out of a pair, all kinds of little foolishness, you see what I mean? That's what we were subjected to. Some of the young folks that we were working with in the gangs and the projects were going to jail, so we had to get bail people for them, the whole idea being that we were under such a microscope as African Americans, even as physicians, that if you stepped in any direction outside of being in that hospital and giving medicine to the sick, then you came as an enemy to the state, okay?

Smith

Now, no one wants to talk about that, but that was a very important point, because when the interns and residents got moving, and that was about 1975, they went on strike. This was about a year after we had our Community Under Siege Conference. So the first thing they wanted to say was, "Smith did that," which I had nothing to do with, okay. But these are youngsters that were into their own generational point. They went into strike. They were threatened with being fired. I stepped in then, because I had more community contacts than others on the faculty, and was able to get the physicians and the black physicians in the community to come to their rescue, okay. Now, that was a no-no.

Stevenson

Who were some of those physicians?

Smith

Oh, I can't remember the names, but Dr. Weekes, Leroy [R.] Weekes [Jr.] was one of them; Littlejohn, Clarence Littlejohn; Henry Hines; a number of them down in--Ross Miller, a number in Compton. There were a number of them. So anyhow, they were able to put that down. But the next year there

were very few black residents, and then from that point on you began to see more Asian, Middle Easterners, and fewer blacks in terms of the residency program. So one of the things they did then was they began to weaken the black influence on that hospital, and that was as early as 1975, '76, okay.

Smith

Then the other thing they did was they would then get the black faculty kind of separated from each other, divide and conquer. So they would label you, say, "He's a rabble rouser, so you don't want to be seen with him." Or, "He's not competent, and [unclear], so don't worry about what he says." Okay? So then you had the black faculty not really dealing with each other from an Afrocentric point of view, okay? Then as you looked at the residents and interns who were being trained, then there was pressure being put on them if they were leaning too far into any of the black faculty. So then you found that then you couldn't role model, so they interfered with the role modeling of the older faculty and the newer interns and residents that were coming. That's the same thing that happened in slavery, when the children were sold from their parents.

Stevenson

Right.

Smith

It's the same point I made with the gang violence, in that the black men were not the fathers of the gang, and that the paternity of the gangs was a white father, and he brought a European model of destruction to the gangs, which caught us off guard. That's why we started with the Community Under Siege in the first place, because our children were not acting like they were our children, okay? But the same thing was happening at the level of intern-residents training. I would raise the same point about, what about young teachers going into the system in Los Angeles Unified? So the idea then, continuity was destroyed, so discontinuity became a pattern. That's the same thing with slavery, okay.

Smith

So thirty years then you watch this discontinuity, the destabilization, the isolation, the disinformation, the whole COINTELPRO model, which was established in institutional levels, it was in the family level, the breakdown with cocaine destroying the mothers of the family, and the fathers being in jail, etc., so this discontinuity puts us in a position like in 2007, of exactly what I had written about in 1974, the new Jew and the new Indian, and that's exactly who we are. And if you'd substitute cocaine for alcohol, okay, you substitute the fact that you're no longer in your own community, and you don't even have a ghetto anymore, okay, a reservation that's been under distress, the fact that you can't even educate your children, because they're not learning anything, okay, there's no difference. So we're there, we're at that point.

Smith

Then the question I raise, and this is why I still fight with King, fight for King, there's only one step left, and that's genocide, and that's what no one wants to speak to. The seven-billion-dollar budget that Schwarzenegger signed in for the prison system, and everybody's talking, "Oh, the jails are overcrowded, and we want to do more about that." Why are you telling me about overcrowded men in a space when you have families who are overcrowded? In other words, if you look at the Hispanic population that's coming into Los Angeles, and how many of them are crowded into a room, okay? So why don't you alleviate that? Then you're going to alleviate the father, okay? You've got rid of the welfare, but you're going to feed the father. I don't think so.

Smith

So then the question is, well, what is all this money for? Well, one thing they tell you is, we're going to move prisoners out of state. Once you begin to move these men out of state, they lose contact with their families, they lose contact with their communities. You're moving them into areas where blacks do not exist, so there's nobody to watchdog them, and those people can disappear without anybody knowing what is happening. So the question I'm still raising is genocide, okay? And the only institution we have left is King Hospital.

Smith

Compton [Community] College, I was at a meeting last night when they're trying to save their college that they already lost, and if you look at the disinformation around that, a 600-page document from FCMAT [Fiscal Crisis & Management Assistance Team], that's an agency that looks at the money, and they wrote a 600-page document on what is needed to refix the college, but everything that's needed to refix the college they had caused over a period of about six years or more, and brought it down, okay?

Smith

So the point is, you can see where that's not going to happen. King is gone, Southwest is struggling, the church is asleep, the school district has long been lost, so there are no institutions to shepherd this African American people. The churches are asleep, and been bought off in high loans for rebuilding, so the banks control them. So that means then that you're really at the stage where genocide could very easily occur, okay? You have another replacement people who have come in, and they're not highly educated people. They're under the church, the Catholic church, and the Catholic church didn't do that in the Civil Rights Movement as I understand it, as I witnessed it. So I don't know what they're doing in terms of teaching their flock, brotherhood, in spite of poverty. So you have a hungry people, okay? And the issue then is, you can now bring up black and Hispanic relationships and fighting, and no one is really understanding how to step in on that, meaning, it's not traditional, it is a false thing, and you can't look at them as the solution, you've got to look at the people who are causing that,

and everybody's afraid of the people that's causing it, okay. Which brings you back to the governments, the police, etc., etc., okay?

Smith

Well, that's the thing that will lead towards effecting genocide, so I keep with the King Hospital as at least hanging on as though they were an institution, in other words so we can have a gathering point, okay. If I go to the ministers, I have to then go denomination. So you have to go to the black ministers, and they're split, and then you have to go to the Methodists, and they've got to go to their bishops. And then you've got to go to--I mean, you're into nothing. The NAACP needs to get money. Therefore, they can't antagonize their donors, and their donors are usually white. The Urban League is a white organization, okay. The [Los Angeles] Sentinel has to get ads from white people, okay. So that means that you have no organ, you have no way of expression as a people, okay? And if we don't have something to rally around, then the genocide is going to occur much quicker than we know.

Stevenson

Okay. I've got a few more follow-up questions that you haven't covered. One is your involvement in Head Start, and I was particularly interested in a program with Pacific Oaks College, where parents could work on a degree in child development. Could you tell me how that came about?

Smith

Yes. Well, we were the only university that had a Head Start, in terms of being a medical school with a Head Start. The community was looking for a grantee, and they hit upon Drew School, and that came through Vivian Weinstein. She was the one that initially brought that in to talk to the department. Well, we accepted them. She worked with them, and it was just a mess. They just squabbled and fought, squabbled and fought, squabbled and fought. Then they had the program director, he was not in synch with his policy council. So then they finally got rid of Vivian Weinstein; she couldn't deal with that.

Smith

So then Dr. [unclear] Greenberg came to me and asked me if I would oversee the Head Start, which I said, "Gladly," okay. Well, when I walked in, and I'm one that I always go and observe first, and see what I'm looking at, and then get an idea. The thing I noticed was this was just a backyard-fence fighting, you know. I'd come back one week, they'd be arguing about what they said last week, and denying that they said it, so the meeting was nothing but about denial about what you said, and you know you said it, so what I did, I hired a Kelly girl, and I had her come in and take down every word that was spoken in this room. So the next week she would read back what they said. Well, little by little it dawned on them that they'd best check out their speech.

Smith

Then I dignified them in terms of self-image and this kind of thing. So the first thing I had to do was teach them that, you know, come off the ground level. You're ladies, okay? You're mothers. There's no such thing as a single-parent family. All families are single parents, successful ones, because children don't deal with two people at once, okay? Now, when they find out that y'all can't get together, then they pit you against each other, so they will deal with the mother and not the father, or deal with the father and not the mother. Now, if you're the mother in the house, then they're dealing with you. So what are you talking about, the absentee person? That's got nothing to do with you dealing with that child, do you see? So we had to begin to get rid of some of those concepts, you see.

Stevenson

Right. Those are like mindsets.

Smith

Mindsets. In other words, poverty. You have to learn how to be poor. You just can't be poor, okay. [Richard] Nixon was poor, you learn that. Now, he got a lot of money, but he never stopped being poor. These greedy people, these developers that were poor, their mindset is poor. There'll never be enough money for poor people. And then there are poor people who don't have a poor mindset, and they don't need money. Do you understand what I'm saying?

Stevenson

Right.

Smith

See, so my point was to get these people out of this concept that dollars determine poverty. Mentality determines poverty. Okay, a poor mind--Jesus was trying to say this, poor in spirit, you see what I mean? So we had to begin to build on that. Now, as I began to get them to come along with me, okay, like I made them throw a dance at a big hotel, and I wanted them in gloves and gown, okay? And then I had them do a tea, and I wanted them in big hats just like, you know, the big ladies do, with a tea set and the whole shot. Then when I finally got them into that vein, then I said, "Now you need to do something about your own education. You're all mothers, and you're all raising children. Child development is just natural to you. You are the original child-development specialists of America. They called you mummies. You raised all the white children that could afford you, okay, so my point is that you taught white women how to raise children. Now, they put it in institutions; now they'll teach it to you, meaning you have to have a credential if you want money for raising children, or you can be a mammy and get two dollars a day."

Smith

So then I said, "Now, let us look at how we can begin to do a credentialing process." I was doing a lot of lecturing, and I happened to be lecturing at Pacific Oaks College in child development, okay? And there were a couple of

black ladies that were teaching at Pacific Oaks, and they would keep me coming back. So I sat down and I approached them, I said, "This is a master's-level college," I said, "but couldn't y'all work like with the teaching point with Head Start people, and this could be like a laboratory for your students, that they could begin to come in and start working with some of the Head Start mothers, and couldn't some of our Head Start mothers begin to learn some courses that would give them entry into bachelor level?"

Okay?

Smith

So then we set up a point where then students from Pacific Oaks would come down to Compton, and then teach a course in child development. Then that course was honored with credit by Pacific Oaks. Now, that was working. The mothers had changed. They were doing things. My parents had started organizing parents in Head Start up and down the State of California, and once a month they would either meet at Monterey or San Diego, or whatever it was, so they were becoming powerful. I had a Head Start graduation with cap and gown, all the Head Starts coming together, so we'd have anywhere between--well, at first we started off with like 600 kids, but we ended up with a thousand, and you'd have all these thousands of children, but each of them had parents [unclear]. So Compton Stadium would be packed with family, but these were white families, Hispanic families, Samoan families, and black families, and they had one common interest, and that was their children. So once they each realized that my interest is my child, and your interest is your child, we were friends. And then we'd come together and have a [unclear].

Smith

So the Head Start level was moving up and becoming too political, okay? And, psst, it was cut and cut. The chairman of my department had a lot to do with it, and there was a dean at Drew School, they worked together, and the first thing they did was accuse me of mismanagement of funds, and all kinds--see, that goes back into that COINTEL-type thing, you see what I mean? So then they had an investigation, which I refused to even honor. I just wouldn't speak to that, okay. And then they said, "Well, now, what we're going to do is take the Head Start away from you. Now, what we'll let you do is you can do the physicals on these kids, and the medical, with none of the rest of it." And my point was, "Now, what I would like you to do is to take an enema, and then fit the Head Start in place of what it is you evacuate." You get my point. My point is, no, that's slavery. I'm not doing that. So that's when I cut myself loose from the Head Start, okay? And then Head Start became just an ordinary kind of program. They're still kind of out there.

Stevenson

Okay. Also, could you discuss your work with foster-parent programs?

Smith

Yes. They had a foster-parent grant. Dr. [Robert] Schlegel had a foster-parent grant right from the beginning at King Hospital. But he was way up here as an Anglo researcher, and the foster parents were way down here. They didn't understand a word he ever said, and they'd have meetings and they just didn't understand what he's talking about, okay. Now, there was a Dr. Rasheed [phonetic]. She came to me with the problem, and she said, "I'm going to lose my foster-parent group. Can you come and lecture quietly to them, and talk to them?" And I did, and then reconnected, okay.

Smith

Then the word got out--now, this was the black foster-parent group in Compton--the word got out into other parent groups, the one in Torrance. So they called me and wanted me to come and lecture. Then the word got out, and another group called me. Now, these were parents calling me to come and lecture. Then that word spread to the social workers, who were in charge of those programs, and they began to call me to come and lecture. So the first thing I knew, I was doing a lot of work with the foster parents beyond Compton and beyond Los Angeles, but just in general, okay?

Smith

Now, I would work with the foster parents, then the Children's Home Society had come to one of the conferences, and they heard me lecture, and then they had me come and lecture to various guilds of the Children's Home Society, and the next thing they wanted me to come on the board of the Los Angeles branch of the Children's Home Society. Now, as I worked with them and then continued to lecture, then I began to lecture statewide to the Children's Home Society, and then the next thing I know I was asked to come and join the state board of Children's Home Society. So it was like staircasing, staircasing.

Smith

Now, the important point, I think, about all of this--we started out saying we're going to be a hospital without walls, and the minute we stepped out of the walls then you found out that human misery and bad health is beyond bacteria and viruses and twisted guts or gunshot. There's a whole lot of head stuff, and institutions that are twisted, so that if you wanted to then look at all of that, then one thing leads to another, leads to another, leads to another, and that's what my [unclear] kind of shows, you know. It's just one link, somebody talks about it, and then they make a contact and you talk about it.

Smith

I'll tell you what it came down to me, and that dawned on me when I was sitting in church in Pennsylvania, and the choir was singing, and there was an inscription across the front, "If I be lifted up from the Earth, I'll draw all men unto me." The choir happened to be singing a hymn that was based on that. But one of the headlines said, "The world is hungry for the living bread," and it dawned on me, that's why I'm being called around. The

teachers are hungry, the parents are hungry, the kids are hungry, everybody's trying to find a truth in the community in a society, and it's not being answered, okay? And this is why you're having so much crime, so much drugs, and so much other things, because the living bread isn't being spread around.

Stevenson

Right. Okay. What was the gist of what you lectured in general to the foster parents?

Smith

Child rearing. I would deal with parenting, and the whole concept I would get across to them, there's no such thing as a foster parent. A parent-- children only see adults as parents, or children, okay. Now, my major point would be this. If you approach a child, you're going to approach a child one of two ways, three ways really. You're going to approach him as a parent, which is a giving. You're going to approach them as a child, which is competition, or you're going to approach them as disinterested. And when children come to you, they're going to test you in one of three ways. The first thing they're going to do is to move up close to you to be petted and touched. That's parental. And then if you don't do that, the next thing they're going to do is bring you a toy and see if you'll play with them. If you don't do that, then there's nothing you can tell them. They will not listen to you, they will not abide you, and they will not like you. Okay?

Smith

Now, you as foster parents have to decide, do you come in a giving manner? Do you come to play? Or do you come in indifference? Okay? Now, if you come as a parent, you're giving, okay, and you're the one that's giving, then you are the parent. Then my next point would be, the most successful parents in America are the drug pushers, okay, because the children who sell the drugs will not squeal on them. They will do everything they ask them to do, and they will even turn in their own mothers and fathers. Why? Because the drug pushers are excellent parents. Do you follow? And it's the technique of what do you do for parenting?

Smith

The other thing I let them know is, if you are a parent, the position that you have your hands always is with the palms facing downward, releasing, constantly releasing. If you are a child, your hands are faced with your palms facing upward, receiving, grabbing, grabbing, grabbing. If you are indifferent, your hands are in your pocket, okay. So my point would be, now which way do we want to go as parents, okay? So get rid of the foster label. Now, some of you, you shouldn't even be with your own children, okay? So that would be my whole point, you see, in terms of looking at it.

Smith

The other thing I would look at is break down looking at adolescents' behavior and looking at various stages of child-development behaviors that

would open insight. And then we'd always talk about, you can tell me problems and issues that are raised in your little home there, and what you're trying to do. Then we walk through that, kind of like that Dr. Phil thing he's doing now. But that's what I was doing then, you know?

Stevenson

Right. Of the groups of foster parents you talked to, were they pretty racially mixed? Did you, for instance, speak to any all-black foster-parents groups?

Smith

Oh yes, depending on what community. See, they were organized more by community, and so if I went to a community, some I'd find all white, or I'd find all black, and you'd find some that were intermixed, and then if they had bigger meetings then they'd bring groups of parents together, which would be interracial. And then if you got into some foster-parent associations, then it would be just national or statewide, bringing everybody together, like the PTA [The Parent-Teacher Association], kind of like, you know.

Stevenson

All right. Is there anything more--you talked quite a bit last week about adolescent health, school health and the various programs you've been involved in; is there anything further you wish to say about your involvement with improving child-and-adolescent health? That seems to be a major portion of your life's work, and improving their quality of life. I notice you've had involvement with programs related to teen-pregnancy prevention, teen sexuality, and anything else you'd like to say about the annual Week of the Child Conference.

Smith

Yes. We don't have the annual Week of the Child Conferences like we did. We don't have the money for that. And then you don't have the school organization like you did. But it was very important, because it did one of two things. Number one, it gave us a chance to deal with subject material, and just the idea that as the little group we called the Watts College, we'd sit down on a Monday night and we'd take one word. We'd call it the word. Then just talk about it, that one word in relation to children. Like that one bulletin I gave you on fire, and we began to look at fire in terms of looking at growth and development, and that's when we started talking about the different colors of flame, okay, and looking at fire. When you're smouldering the fire, the fire breaks out, and how does that fit with age groups and problems of children? Then we'd build that into a discussion point.

Smith

Now, the important point being that when you begin to teach the people in the community, you begin to use something that they are aware of and can see, rather than a lot of gibberish. Then it's easy to get a mother who had raised four children to talk about some aspect of child rearing based on fire, which she can relate to. Now, she can teach, because she has a modality

that she can use, rather than trying to come out of a textbook, you follow, so that was one important point that we did. Then when we brought different people together, and most of the folks that lectured were volunteers, so that we were able to get a lawyer, we'd get real-estate people, we'd get various people in the community who would give us an hour, and they'd begin to come into the schools and dealing into the adolescent population, as well as to understand what King Hospital was about.

Smith

Then when we went into the schools, like if we went into a school, like Washington High School was a good example, we went into the schools, number one, we had two things working there. We had the student body, and the faculty. Now, the faculty, you know, one thing we learned, faculty is very, very territorial. They resent your coming in, because they're supposed to know how to handle the kids, and all of a sudden somebody, "So what are you going to tell me?" Okay? So one of the things we'd find is that our presence on the campus was intimidating to a lot of faculty, and Washington High School there's only one member of the faculty--now, we were there for five days, eight hours a day. One member of the faculty showed up at any one of those conferences, okay, and he happened not to be black, okay.

Smith

When we went the first day, the kids were just unruly. Now, my whole point of bringing them together was that black children have got to learn to be with each other, okay, and you just can't worry about going to church, because most of them don't go, right? So the schools then have to teach the children how to assemble, okay? And it would just be wild, you know. So we had to then get crowd control, you know. Now, I remember we were in the midst of a lecture, and we had one of the parents that was with our group, and she was Watts, okay, ordinary parent, and she stopped the program right in the middle, from the back of the auditorium, and she had just been cursed out by a couple of girls, and she wasn't going to take that. So she had a dialogue going with them girls that they want to step outside that aisle, and come on, let's go down with it right now. Okay? Now, I'm not your teacher, and so I don't have to worry about being fired, okay, and that brought all the kids up short, you know, because this was a wild woman. [laughs] And so behavior began to come under it.

Smith

Then we began to involve the kids in a discussion, and we had one day, they had lesson day, when it was nothing but adolescents talking, and we brought adolescents from other schools in to be on panels, you see? Now, one of the things that it taught--and George McKenna was the principal at that time. He wasn't on the campus one hour during that whole period--

Stevenson

Interesting.

Smith

--just between you and I.

Stevenson

Speculation on why?

Smith

Well, let's say it this way. If there was an eruption, he was on legitimate business somewhere, and we were the cause of that.

Stevenson

I see. Okay.

Smith

That's the way we figured it, okay? But what it did teach him was that you can assemble these kids, those kids. By Friday those kids were eating out of our hand, and one of those kids became an assemblyman from Imperial Courts, okay, something like ten years later.

Stevenson

And who was this? [Future member of the Assembly?]

Smith

Oh, I can't remember his name right off, but I can get that name for you. He's probably listed in one of those brochures I gave you on [unclear], yes. But he was one of the young men that was in the Washington High School. The other thing we did, and see, in the Department of Pediatrics you had a couple of levels. You had the Division of Child Development, the Division of Inpatient, the Division of Ambulatory, and that was the medical point, right. Then you had a lot of people working within those divisions. Now, we were the Community Division, of which cardiology was a part.

Smith

Now, when I began to do certain things, different people from the various divisions would help me do it without the division knowing they did, and most of them were black folks that were working as secretaries or this kind of thing, so that really from the Community Division I had control of the whole department, in terms of black folks who wanted to deal with the problems of black folks, especially at a grassroots level, rather than the faculty. Now, when we'd have our Week of the Child program, we would not have one faculty member come, okay? The only way I could get them to come was to schedule them to lecture, and a lot of times they wouldn't show, okay? See, that was that discontinuity, that separation of rabble rousers, okay?

Stevenson

Right. In the lectures that you did it seems to me, and I think this sort of ties in with why, say, faculty, administrators weren't there, is it because you were speaking in a language people could understand, or was culturally relevant, as opposed to, say academic?

Smith

Right. Exactly. But the other point was truthful, truthful. When I would get up and say that the federal government organized the gangs, and I'm not biting my tongue on that, and they did it through the police departments, and I'm not biting my tongue on that, and I would get on the radio, KJLH, and I would say it, okay? And if you could bring me to lecture and ask me the question in church, I will say it, and if I get in the pulpit I'll take that scripture and open up the Bible, and Daniel was a good one for that, and open up that Bible and show you wherein, and they would have me here for Black History Month? That is juicy, because, see, again I'm showing you wherein is the difference, you follow?

Stevenson

Right.

Smith

So my point is that if you can't take history and see its relevance to your life now, you're wasting your time studying it. And you think that because you have a different coat on, or a different kind of pants, that makes you different from the slave who's in tatters and overalls? And you're being battered and bruised and don't have sense enough to know it? At least he was smart enough to know it, okay? And he tried to get out of slavery. You're getting deeper in it. Now, people didn't want to hear that.

Smith

And then I'd be in a boojie [phonetic] church, you know what I mean, and everybody's, you know, teachers and all this kind of thing, and they don't want to hear that. They want to have a distant discussion, a reminiscence of what they heard their grandmother say, but not relative to their own lives. So that was another point that kept a difference, you know what I mean? And so then a lot of folks would say, "Oh, he's crazy. Don't listen to him." Now, in the last ten years, what did they say? "He's a prophet. Everything he told us has come true." No, it didn't come true, it was true, and that's the difference.

Smith

See, the difference between a politician--and this is why I get on the preachers. I said, [unclear] led by politicians. Politicians are voted upon. You claim you were called. From what I understand, coming out of slavery it was to your calling and your direction that we came out. Then when they shot King, they shot you. Okay? Now you don't want to hear nothing that is relevant, other than I can tell you how to get a loan to build a senior-citizen highrise, okay. Then you want to hear that, okay? But if I tell you let's go out on the corner and rescue a bunch of adolescents who are about to go into gangs, you don't want to hear that. Do you follow my point?

Smith

See, so it was a matter of what was the message? The message was the truth through observation, okay? I worked with some of the very radical pan-Africanists, okay, and I was going to stand my ground. They were going

into Egypt, and they were talking about Africa. I said, "Why don't we just go to Richmond, Virginia? And why don't we go to Atlanta? Okay? Georgia? When we stepped on American soil, the game changed. Now, it's hard for you to get from Los Angeles through your genealogy to Savannah. You get lost somewhere in Iowa. You don't know your grandmother, you don't know your great-grandmother, you don't even know your name, and you're talking about princes of Egypt?" It ain't there yet. And our children don't have any idea--can sing a spiritual, and now they're trying to act like Kunta Kinte, and try to do the South African dances? You follow my point?

Stevenson

Right.

Smith

Now, my point was, I'm going to hold on that, and I'm not going to condemn you for that, but my point is, but we've got to get back to Savannah, we've got to get back to Philadelphia? You follow my point? And once we understand that, then we can move and venture on. They can accept that, they accept that, you follow? So I was able then to deal with all of the disparate groups within the community, and not be an enemy to any one of them, okay? And it still is present today. In fact, one of the young men says, "You should be out there speaking, because you're the only one that the whole community can rally around, and you don't have the garbage that so many of them have," you see what I mean?

Stevenson

I see. Okay, could you talk a little bit more--you've talked about this before, about how the church, or let's say the black church over the years has been maybe a detriment, or held things back, even though I know there are some church leaders, congregations that have been supporters; could you talk a little bit about that, and you know, bring it up to the present day, particularly when you're talking about healthcare issues and the quality of life, the well being of the community?

Smith

The church has worked on two levels. The one level was actually the spirituality of the people, and that was I think very honestly dealing with the spirituality of the people. That's a Christianity thing. The other thing was the subduing of the people. That's political. So there's always been that point of trying to make you subdued in order not to be destroyed, and then using Christianity to be the method by which you were subdued.

Smith

I spoke Saturday to a group of people, and I was talking about--I did a lecture on Uncle Tom's Cabin, and the whole lecture was the status of black children, using Uncle Tom's Cabin, based on Harriet [Elizabeth] Beecher Stowe's observation. And I went through and showed how she had--looked at her book--and had divided black people in four major categories, okay, and they stand today. The mulatto caste, the quadroons and the mulattoes,

who had white blood. You had the quadroons first, then the mulattoes; they were stepped down. Then you had the blacks that they liked, like Uncle Tom and the subservient blacks. Then you had what they called the miscellaneous blacks, okay, and if you look at how she gave the caricatures, she explained that the quadroons were just gorgeous people, but they were all white, aquiline noses, thin lips, long hair, okay? The mulatto was there, but [unclear]. So George was crossing the ice, you know, mulatto, he could think. Then you had Uncle Tom and the various servants that were just nice people. Then you had Uncle Tom's children, who they didn't give you any description, just wooly-headed black kids. Another lady, she was the African-featured. Another boy, he was well built, but nothing that gives you an idea of what he looked like, so he didn't count.

Smith

I said, "Now, Harriet Beecher Stowe listed those four." And so I said to the audience, "Which one of those categories are you in now? Okay? And there is no other category." Meaning that our race is divided into those four categories that Harriet Beecher Stowe described in the nineteenth century, and here we are now in the twenty-first century, and it still stands, and we don't even know that. Okay? And then I went on to show the different things that happened in the nineteenth century, then brought it to the twentieth century in looking at education, looking at health, looking at all these other things in terms of racism that really knocked us down, and how, like, we have more children in the California Youth Authority than any other group. More of our young people have the AIDS than any other group. More of our women have the AIDS, more than any other group, on down the line, see?

Smith

Then I brought them to the twenty-first century and showed them wherein everything that we're seeing in the twenty-first century is detrimental, meaning we're on a downhill slide. Then I gave what I call a Smith Box of time, that if we were to take a square box and enter each race at some point in the box, and then meet at a point in the center, and then find out which direction is that race going when they hit the center, the African American race would start at the top of the box and be on a downhill movement to the point of the center, still to go further down. The Hispanic population would be at the bottom of the box, moving in an upward projection, meeting at the center, and still moving forward. And the Anglo Saxon would be at the center of the box, moving straight across, meeting at the center.

Smith

Now, the important point is, at that point of intersection all three races appear to be at the same point, and therefore they mistake their direction. And therefore, because we're sitting alongside of Hispanics and Anglos, we don't realize that we're in a downhill trajectory, while they're in an uphill trajectory, or even on a flat trajectory. So my point is, in the twenty-first century it's time for you to understand where you are on that point, and

what direction are you moving on the point, do you follow? And that was the essence, then, of Harriet Beecher's Stowe's Uncle Tom's Cabin, taking it across three centuries. You see what I mean?

Smith

So this is the thing that I'm very much involved in, in terms of getting the teaching to make that one point. We're on a downhill slide and we're out of here, unless something's changed, you see.

Stevenson

I see. Going back to something you were talking about, the government's role in gangs in our community, I want to run something by you. There is an HBO movie, I don't know if you've seen it. It's called Bastards of the Party.

Smith

Yes, I know about that.

Stevenson

And what's your take on that, the filmmaker's premise that modern-day gangs are actually a result of the black nationalists? What do you think about that?

Smith

I'm going to tell you about that film. That film started with Randy Holland, H-o-l-l-a-n-d. He put out a documentary called The Fire This Time. I don't know if you have seen that? Right. In fact, we should get a copy to you, and that's a good documentary on South Central. And I was the one who kind of hooked that up with him, in terms of opening that up. Then he started this one with the gangs, and he told me about it. I wanted to know, "Well, why are you doing this, and who are you doing it with?" So he had me come to this library on Vermont, it's the Socialist Library.

Stevenson

Yes, the Southern California Library [for Social Studies and Research] on Vermont.

Smith

Yes, okay. And there's where I met this guy called Bone, a little beady-eyed gang member, right? And I talked to him on a lot of stuff he talked, about the gangs undermining the black race. I talked to him about the fact that the gangs had come not from the Black Panthers, but that the government had wiped out the Black Panthers, who had organized young people in order to do their breakfast programs, and they were Panther members. And when they destroyed [Alprentice] Bunchy Carter and the rest of those leaders, you had organized children with no leadership, and they substituted the leadership. These were no longer Panthers. These were bloodthirsty gangs. And they were turned against the community, and they served about three or four purposes.

Smith

Starting out first, to stop the Civil Rights Movement, which they did, okay, because we stopped looking at the issue of racism, and started worrying

about our children in terms of being shot, killed, maimed, or whatever, right? Then out of that came urban renewal, because then the middle-class parents who were able then began to leave the community. When we started the Civil Rights Movement, that was not an intention. In other words, we were going to build the community, and nobody was going to leave the community. But those who were able ran to save their children. So urban renewal then was the second plank following the civil-rights point.

Smith

Then when the drugs came in, that had to do with the politics. In other words, when the Congress cut off the monies going to [Oliver Laurence] Ollie North and [George Herbert Walker] Bush and Reagan, then they raised the money through drugs, and the inner-city became the center point of those drugs. So that means that the crack cocaine, which was sold mostly to the inner city, and the regular cocaine went to the white people, but the young black folks in the inner-city were the ones dispensing it, but not making the money from it. Okay? So it meant then that you began to destroy the black child by having them deal with this cocaine. You also destroyed his mother, because that's who he sold it to, and his sister, that's who he sold it to, and for the first time you had the crack in the black woman and being the strength of the black community, and so that's when you began to see more fathers raising their sons and daughters, because their mothers are wiped out, okay?

Smith

Then the next thing that came from that was the prison system, because out of that then comes the RICO law, which was supposed to be with the Italian Mafia. But that was against the [La] Cosa Nostra, and the Mafia, but it ended up being applied to the black gang members. So that meant then with the twenty-five strikes (sic) and you're out and the RICO law, all of our young men went to jail. Now, if they went to jail, all of the young white men were hired to watch them. So then you had the prison system, which is an industry, and that industry is hooked around, they say, blacks and Latinos, but you must understand the Latino is new in the country, okay? So the system wasn't built on him. The system was built on blacks. Now, it was there for him when he came, okay?

Smith

Now, then when you've gotten rid of the industry in America, the steel mills and all this kind of stuff, what do you do with unemployed white people, because that's the dangerous group, okay. We have a little riot and then, you know, whatever. But you take a manure truck and blow up a whole building and kill everybody in it, that ain't us, right? So my point is then, you've got to do something about unemployed white people, and so you give them a job watching black people. So that whole prison economy is white men sitting down looking at black men for the rest of their life, okay, and that's a job. But that's money.

Smith

Now, the black men just don't sit there. You put them in the fields, you put them in factories, and you get this cheap labor where they make twenty-five cents an hour, or five cents an hour, and then you charge them for the soap, you charge them for this, that, and the other, so they get no money. Do you follow my point? Which is slavery. Now, all of that is predicated on the gangs. Now, that's what I was talking about. Now, what happened, from what Randy tells me is, Bone took that film from him and dared him to even show his face in South Central. And if you were to speak to Randy Holland, now he don't even want to talk about it. Bone scared him to death. If he comes down to South Central when the sun starts going down, he's getting out of there. Okay?

Smith

Now, he'll come to Nickerson projects, and he knows a lot of folks that he's met in the housing projects, but when the sun comes down, he's not sticking around.

Stevenson

Interesting.

Smith

That's because of this boy stealing that, and then twisting things that I had said in his own words, and I don't believe they--

Stevenson

In this film?

Smith

In that film. And I don't believe they're his words, okay? I'm going to try to get a copy of that film for you.

Stevenson

Okay, why don't you go ahead and continue your discussion?

Smith

Yes, okay. In Compton they had a camp called Factor Brookins. Factor was Max Factor from Hollywood, the wealthy man [John Factor] in cosmetics, I think, and [Reverend H.H.] Brookins was the bishop. They created this camp for inner-city, like summer relief, you know, how at that time these kids are in the ghetto, so we take them out and they spend a week or so out at, etc., etc. Okay. Now, what some of the teachers said, "Yes, they left here as ignorant kids of the inner-city, and came back as marxmen. They were taught to shoot," okay? And out of that came the gangs in Compton.

Stevenson

What year was that, approximately?

Smith

Oh, this would have been like '70, '71. Now, the interesting thing is, when I organized that Community Under Siege conference, [Stanley] Tookie [Williams III] stayed in a certain place in Compton, and he worked there, and there were a lot of gang kids that were living there, okay? When we

started this Community Under Siege, and we were focusing mainly on the gangs, and I had already had that press conference that October with your dad, and now we're going to have our conference in March, right, I'd been down to the school board, because they had a big meeting of the police and the district attorneys and the attorney general from California on, "What are we going to do with gangs?" and they had Sid[ney] Thompson of Crenshaw High School, and one of the students there talk about how bad it was at Crenshaw, and that was the only input that was coming from black Americans, okay.

Smith

I went down with Darnell Dean [phonetic] to the school district and complained about the fact they were going to have that conference with no blacks speaking, and I was able to get Darnell Dean to speak as a parent on that conference. But the issue being, they fronted the black kid and the black principal, and they didn't need blacks anymore. And then their white police and district attorney, they began to talk about the plan they had for the black kids. Did you follow? Now, when you looked at that whole concept, you began to see the picture and the pattern of how the government was involved, or the police were involved with the black gangs, but the black folks themselves were not involved in the black gangs. And everything that they were learning about the gangs was coming from the police department, but not that they themselves were involved in that at all, or even knew what was going on.

Smith

So out of this Compton issue, and here's this, what's his name, Tookie and some other people staying at his house, right, the night before the Community Under Siege conference, or maybe two days before the Community Under Siege conference, I get a call from a person who's working with Kenneth Hahn, deputy, and wanting to know if I know what I'm doing, and wanted to know if I'm out there talking about this gang thing, do I understand what that is, and do I know that I could get myself killed? And I'm standing point blank to point blank. I said, "Well, whoever it is, tell them they don't have to bushwhack me. Do it to my face." Okay? Then the person said, "Well, you seem like you know what you're doing. Where are you from?" "I'm from Philadelphia." Well, I'm not really from Philly, but you know, it's near me. And [unclear], "We presume you know what you're doing, then that's okay." So that's like I'm getting a pass.

Smith

Then I get a call the night before the conference is going to start, like eight o'clock that morning, and a broadcaster calls me, and I go to her home--I think it was around like nine o'clock at night--and trying to dissuade me, "Don't have that conference the next--," don't have it.

Stevenson

A broadcaster?

Smith

Yes. I'm not going to call no names. "Don't have that conference. Now, if you're looking to be on television, we can organize with Brookins and [Thomas] Kilgore and," they gave me all the leaders, the one with the Urban League, "and we can have a press conference on the steps of city hall, and you can then express--."

Stevenson

Something safe.

Smith

I couldn't get out that house until three o'clock that morning, and the biggest thing that was told me, "You can get yourself killed, you can get yourself killed." These people were connected to the supervisors. These are politically connected people. But they were hand in hand with gang people. Do you understand what I'm saying? So my point is I'm saying, "Yeah, we're going to have the conference. There's no question about that." Which we did. Now, the interesting thing, within a month or so of that conference, maybe a couple of weeks, I get a call from Mrs. [Ablyn] Winge that the police want to talk to me, because at the conference some of the parents at, I think it was Avalon Gardens, had testified to the fact that they had seen a blonde woman drive up with a van on a couple of occasions, but particularly one occasion, and leave the van, and the kids would break in. First time they'd get diapers, and they'd get all kinds of goodies, right? Next time they break in, gangs are breaking in now and getting guns. Even they said they saw bazookas, all kinds of guns coming out that van.

Smith

When they called the police to report it, the lady showed up and the van disappeared. When the police finally came, there was no van, and when the people began to confront the police about it, they didn't even get a call. They denied they had ever been called, okay? Now, this is the kind of thing that was being discussed at that Community Under Siege conference. So then I get the call to come to your father's school, okay, and we go to the back there and have a meeting with Mrs. Winge--

Stevenson

And what school was that?

Smith

Oh, F. Scott, was he the principal of?

Stevenson

He was at--elementary?

Smith

Yes.

Stevenson

He was at Hooper [Avenue Elementary School], and then at Ninety--

Smith

May have been Hooper, one of those schools. He might remember, I don't know. But anyhow, who were we meeting with? The head of the bomb squad, okay. McCray his name was. He wanted to know, what did we know about the bazookas, what did we know about all this gunware that was reported. And my point was, "Why is the bomb squad here? Okay, now, Ed Davis was the chief of police. Seems to me another department should be handling that, okay? We don't know anything about that. We only were the ones who held the conference, okay?" But in the meantime, Mrs. Winge was talking to him, and they got to talking. He was a nice dude, very nice person, and he began to let us know about some of the things that were going on, like the Nazis, and how he said that they had mounted a machine gun on the back of a pickup truck, and they were going to go into the Pacoima housing projects and just shoot black people. And then he talked about all these guns that were going to be shipped down to the Teen Post, and the police department had to break that up, because they were coming in to bring guns to the Teen Post.

Smith

And my point was, "Well, if you knew that there were people going to bring guns into the Teen Post, then why are you so surprised to find out that there was a truck that drove up with some bazookas and guns in it in Avalon Gardens, and that the kids were armed not because they bought the arms, but the arms were delivered?" Okay? So here now, all we did was, as a pediatrician looking at adolescents, looking at gang violence from a truthful point of view, and not going in to try to do--and I used to tell people, "It's not the West Side Story, so we're not dealing with Officer Krupke and all that kind of stuff, okay? This is different and serious, and non-adolescent."

Smith

Now, if we were going out here now dealing with adolescent violence from what we as medical people, using a medical model, can discern, because we're used to looking at disease and trying to find out what's the cause, getting the effect and then trying to find the cause, so then I'm looking, now we see the effect, now we're trying to find cause, and the cause is leading us in this direction--now suddenly we are the enemy, okay? Now, that hardly makes sense. And that's when then various people again say, "Watch your car. Don't park in the same place every time." And I couldn't--I'm from Detroit, it's supposed to be a bad city. I never heard that. "Now, you've got to watch the police. They're going to do this, they're going to do that." Well, it came out to be true.

Smith

So my point then is this only verifies the role of the federal government and the police department in this destruction of the African American children, you see? Now, when you come along with somebody like Bone, who's a victim sometime later, and he's trying to find out the why of it, he doesn't really understand that the first thing is to be honest about it. Now, if you

want to be a producer, say so, or if you're manipulating the data, say so. Okay? But to take that man's project and foist it off as your own, and then some of the thoughts that you present are not your own, then I have to question which is, who are you? You see what I mean?

Smith

Now, the thing that comes through to me, and I saw it twice, and I had to see it again, and I have a copy, too--you don't have a copy?

Stevenson

No. I'm going to get it from my son.

Smith

Oh, he can get a copy?

Stevenson

Yes.

Smith

Okay, good. You look at it good, and if we get this other copy and you see the two together, okay?

Stevenson

Yes.

Smith

My point would be that one thing that comes through loud and clear, he doesn't intend to stop gangbanging. He's thinks it's a wonderful institution, okay? And he doesn't know if he's even going to stop murdering. If somebody bothers his homeboy, he might kill. See, now, from what you've spoke during the film, that doesn't fit with what you believe in, you understand what I'm saying? And then what you presented, which was very dangerous to say, that the Slausons and the [Black] Panthers created the black gangs, would make it a continuity, starting with kids in the fifties, and the forties actually, protecting themselves from white kids, coming all the way down through to today, where black kids are killing each other and that's part of a natural progression? No, that's not. And to put that out like that is the generation that's coming after him is going to believe that's the truth, and then they're going to believe that we're like the Italian Mafia, that we've been here ever since we stepped on the land, and that's not true. We're not that kind of people, okay?

Smith

And that was my major point. Don't push this off as this is black. This is not the black method. This is not our thought. This is Anglo Saxon. This is European. That's their history, not ours. And now you're teaching our children that that's our history, and it's not our history, okay. We come out of slavery, and we come out of a more pacificistic group of people, and we don't find anything wrong with that. And that's the thing you want to teach your children. As a young black man, I had to learn that. You know, the first thing you want to go to war. "You can't do that to me." And then the older men had to teach you, "No, that's the wrong thing to do." And then to be

dignified in that, and feel that that's okay, you see what I mean? That's who we are. You can't teach that now, you see? So the bastard at the party was the bastard, you know.

Stevenson

Okay. Let's see--

Smith

The other thing, too, not to cut off--I didn't get all of the discussion on his mother, okay? Apples don't fall far from the tree, if we look at that. In other words, who shapes the child?

Stevenson

Right.

Smith

So if you look at then all this murder and killing and attitude, you have to go back to the generation that raised you, okay? In that film he admits that he was not poor, middle-class, okay? And I'm saying, according to my definition, no, you're poor. It's not about money. The anger, okay, that your mother has over the death of her husband was transmitted to you. There's anger not at the gang across the town; it's in your own home. Do you follow? And so many of the children that have been dispossessed by their parents, especially with mothers, and now are part of a gang, which means that anybody in the system can mold and shape them to do anything that unleashes that anger, you follow? If you don't deal with that anger, you still have a monster, okay? And so what I'm left with with that film is, just making a film does not release the anger, and just having somebody preach to you doesn't release the anger. And to superficially embrace what is right doesn't release the anger, so you're a dangerous person, okay?

Smith

And I think that when the students look at the film, they should look at it as students, not as what you call people looking for entertainment. Do you follow? Now, what I was saying, and you can tell your son that I'm saying this, that if they're psychology majors they should look at it from that point of view. If they are sociology majors, look at it from that point of view. If they're theologians, look at it from that point of view. Don't sit there as a black kid--I'll put it straight out--don't sit there like a nigger and look at a film like you're being entertained, okay? Look at it as an African American student, so you can learn and discern, okay. And then you look at other things until you get the discernment. But look at it from the perspective of what you're studying now, okay? Now, go back into the libraries, all those kids, and look up black gangs, and look up white gangs, and try to put it together, okay? Look at West Side Story, okay, and say if that's what gangs were like, which it was not, okay--that was written by Jewish people whose children didn't get in gangs, okay, but who had an idea of what gangs were like, which is what these kids would be like, wannabes, and think that what we had with the hip-hop and all that is a good thing, and think that's called

for, see. So there's a lot that these youngsters could learn if they approach it as students. You see what I mean?

Stevenson

Right. Okay. We've talked extensively about King Hospital, about Drew University. Could you discuss--I noticed in your c.v., in your resume, that you did lectures, taught at colleges and universities. Could you discuss college-university-level instruction, with which you've been involved?

Smith

Yes. I taught at Cal[ifornia] State [University] L.A. [Los Angeles], and also at Cal[ifornia] State [University] Fullerton, and I did a course on the psychology of African American people, and it was a bogus course.

Stevenson

In what sense?

Smith

In the sense that if you're a slave, you should be looking to be free, and everything you do should be in that vein, and that's not a psychology, that's just the way it is. Okay? Now, I wanted them to think that they were coming to learn some big Freudian discussion about black people, okay, and what I did was just took them and made them read certain books of literature, like Uncle Tom's Cabin was one, Manchild in a Promised Land was another, and a whole lot of other novels written by blacks or written about blacks, and then begin to get the pattern of behaviors that were put out. Native Son, why did they behave like they did, and what is the thing that was eating at them, the anger? The Invisible Man, running up against a wall and nobody seeing you, okay? And then you respond to it, okay? So it means then that everybody's experience brings out a behavior. It isn't because you're black. It's because of the problem given to you as a black person. Okay?

Smith

So that means then what you're fighting, it may not be what I'm fighting. In a truer sense, the thing that makes me respond to what this man said is not the thing that made you respond to what that lady did. Then I'll condemn you for your response, and you condemn me for my response, and then both try to invent a response that is irrelevant to the discussion, okay? Like when this [Don] Imus comes out and talks about a nappy-headed ho, okay, and then he flips the script and says, "Well, the black rappers say it." Come on. It'd be different if you said the black ministers said it, because they'd be a little bit more wholesome, okay. But the black rappers tell you, "I'm sick," okay, and why is he calling it a nappy-headed ho? Do you know what happened to my mama?

Smith

In other words, my mother was on crack, and I didn't get the nurture I needed, and I'm mad at her, okay. And I translate that to my sister and to all the ladies. It's my anger at what happened to me as a virtue of this person. That didn't happen to Imus, it didn't happen to Jesse, okay, so how

can Jesse or anybody speak to this? This is totally irrelevant to the discussion. Do you follow? Now, if you talk about a nappy-headed ho you're a racist, and you talk about it from your own experience and whatever it is. You see? But you can't rap that on somebody else, you see?

Smith

So the major point I was doing with that discussion with the class, and I was leading them to the truth very [unclear]. I made them go to the library and look up Frank Church's Senate investigation. There are seven volumes. Then I made them write papers, okay. I broke the class into little discussion groups, and each group was assigned a novel, okay. The Harriet Beecher Stowe was going to analytically look at that. The Brave New World group was going to look at that, and you know, Manchild was going to look at that. Then they presented. Then I would make a comment afterwards, okay.

Smith

Like, for instance, the one comment I made about the difference between a slave and serf. It's a very simple thing, a very simple difference. The serf goes home to his wife and family, and the slave does not, and that's the difference. Now, the point is, it's color coded. The slave is black, and the serf is white and brown. So all of you serfs sitting in here trying to get the psychology of the slaves, look in the mirror. Read Dickens, okay? So then at the end, a couple of the folks rebelled, and it was interesting because these were some of the kids whose parents were in the police department. They accused me of being anti-government, and anti-police, and I had done this and I had done that. And I said, "Wait a minute, wait a minute. Back up, back up, back up."

Smith

"The way the course was structured, you read, you commented, you presented, and you wrote. And anything you heard was what was presented by you to you, based on what you read. And the little commentary I gave afterwards had nothing to do with the relevance of what you said in the classroom, because if there was anything said about anti-police, you said it, anything said about government, anti-, you said it. Okay? So go back to the mirror." That was how I treated that course, okay, and my whole point was because there's so many things going on in the university level that they sound erudite and they sound academic, and they're just bogus. And they don't teach the children to think, they don't teach them how to look at things analytically, they don't teach them how to discern. You follow my point? And as a result then, you have the most ignorant levels of the society guiding and leading.

Smith

Bush is outsmarting the lawyers and the teachers and the doctors. In other words, this ignorant boy has got the whole nation eating out of his hand as though he was an educator of such a high level and degree, there's nobody

in America that could think like him. See, there's something wrong with the universities and the pattern. So that was one of the courses that I taught.

Smith

I taught at Cal[ifornia] State [University] Long Beach with the nursing department, and I dealt with that with adolescent behavior and child development. And I taught a little bit on cardiology, pediatric cardiology, with some of the nurses at Cal State, and also with some of the nurses in L.A. District, and also with Compton District. With the nursing departments at these various school districts, then we'd do more medical kinds of subject material.

Stevenson

You had mentioned over the course of your work at the hospital and in the community, working with pan-Africanists or black nationalists. Could you discuss, maybe give me an overview of working, and how--were there any particular individuals who were very supportive of your efforts?

Smith

Well,[Queen] Nzinga Ratibisha [Heru]. You know her?

Stevenson

No.

Smith

You'd enjoy meeting her.

Stevenson

Okay, and her last name is?

Smith

Ratibisha. She's one. Legrand [H.] Clegg [III], who's a lawyer in Compton had a lot to do--years ago with [Maulana] Karenga when he first started going to Long Beach. Amen Ra, you know, from Compton. Let's see. There's a whole lot. Sylvester Rivers, he's a newscaster at KPFK, but he's on target. There's so many people. Hard to remember all the names, but that gives an idea.

Stevenson

And I don't know from speaking with you with these few sessions, would you say that your overall philosophy of, you know, healthcare delivery, of advocating preventative medicine, particularly for adolescents and youths, does that come from an Afrocentric viewpoint, would you say?

Smith

I would say so. Yes, I would say so, because you know, we couldn't afford medicine. We couldn't afford to be sick, so you had to always be careful. I remember some of the first health lessons I learned, the first one, you don't eat behind anybody. Okay, that was taught strongly in the home, okay? The next thing I learned was, you don't play where you see bloody sputum, okay. So before we'd sit down and start playing as kids, we'd look at the ground to see what's laying there, because that was tuberculosis, and you die from that. You didn't step on rusty nails, and you had to be very careful,

and then in those days there were a lot of things laying around, see, so you had to be very careful about that kind of thing. You were very concerned about blood poisoning in any kind of way, in terms of the food that you ate. See, all these things were being taught, and this would be preschool, preschool.

Smith

So you had a lot of responsibility in terms of how to live in your environment, how to play in your environment as a child, and the parents didn't stay with kids in those days. When they let you out of the house, you're on your own, and older kids would take care of you, and you took care of yourself or whatever, but you didn't have scheduled programming as parents do with kids today, you see. So we were left to a lot of exploration. You know, like I was telling a lot of folks, I had my own Head Start, me and my brother. Then I was about five years old and we would go to the babysitter, and she was busy doing her thing, and so we'd slip out the house and just do things, almost got killed in some of it, but we were exploring the environment. Tried to set a boy's house on fire and didn't know how to do that, didn't do that right, you know, all kinds of those. I think I told you about those things.

Stevenson

Right.

Smith

See, but my point being that see, there was a lot of things you had to know before you could get out in that yard, or go out in that street, in order to protect yourself. There were certain things you didn't eat. There were a lot of things growing on trees, okay. Green apples you didn't eat. That'll give you appendicitis. You didn't sit on concrete; that'll give you the piles. So you put loose paper underneath, or sit on your legs, you follow? But all these kinds of things were preventive, and these were being taught to you in terms of how to get along, okay? Walking in the woods you looked for snakes, okay. Any time you went into anywhere where there was a lot of leaves or whatever, watch for snakes. You see what I mean?

Smith

If you went into, like going into Elix Mill [phonetic], which was an amusement park, and they had a mill which I guess they called it the tunnel of love. But the kids used to like to ride on the boat in the water, and there was a lady that got bit by a copperhead in one of those boats. There was a nest, and they didn't know that. So then once we heard that, and the parents drummed that into our heads, we never stepped into a boat without looking. We didn't--forget the tunnel of love. We ain't going in there anymore, you see what I mean? But all these things were being taught, and that was very important.

Smith

Getting hit by a car, one kid getting hit by a car, all the kids learned. Then another thing they would do--kid gets hit by a car. Now, in the neighborhood everybody knows all the kids, right? Guess where you're going? You're going to view the body. And guess what's not going to happen? Ain't going to be no psychologist to help you through that, okay. And if you're going to the funeral, you can wail and waller and scream and holler with the rest of them, okay, and then for the girls, who I pitied, guess what you're going to do? You're going to carry all the flowers, okay. So you see a little girl with all the flowers out here, you know. You couldn't get me to get near a dead person's flowers, you know.

Smith

My point was that you were learning then the realities of life, so that if you say, "Don't do this, because it will cause this," you follow my point, then blood poison brings this, not looking when you cross the street brings that funeral, okay. So-and-so has tuberculosis and died, that's the bloody sputum, so you always had cause and effect and that was the parental thing, and you didn't have to go to the doctor. Now, when we did go to the physician, usually it was because you had flu, and a severe flu, okay, or a cough that just wouldn't go away, see. I guess I went to the doctor preschool, for my school exam, got my blood taken, got my immunizations, got a smallpox that didn't take, and I had to go back that year to him again to get it, and it didn't take. And then I saw him in my second-grade year, to try to get the smallpox vaccine.

Smith

The next time I saw a physician was when I got hit by a car in sixth grade. I was eleven years old, okay. And the next time I saw a physician I was in the tenth grade, and I had an asthma attack, okay? So in other words, those were the points I'm interfacing with physicians. In the meantime, all the medical points you had to take care of. And I almost killed my brother when he came home with a stomachache, and I gave him Ex-lax, because I thought he was constipated. Really he had appendicitis, okay. But see, there are little things that you learned to do on your own, you know.

Stevenson

Right. Okay. I'd like for you to discuss a little bit the rebellion of '92, and could you discuss that in the context of whether you think it is at all related to the first rebellion, the root causes of it, your involvement in the response to it, etc.

Smith

Let's say it this way. There was a lady, Birdell Moore, she called herself the Mother of Watts, very outspoken, to the point. She maintained that the first rebellion was structured, and she said that the police had been piling rocks on different corners, and they instigated that because it was supposed to happen. She also said that Mayor [Samuel William] Yorty was in San Diego at the time, and he was giving a speech, and he announced the riot had

started an hour before it actually did. Okay? So she maintained that whole 1965 rebellion was a structured event, okay.

Smith

Now, I wasn't here then, okay. Now, when I came into town, as I learned that from her, heard her say that, and others were talking about the riot itself, the actual riot, but not cause other than what was said, the two causes that the people spoke to was the racism of the police, and the gouging of the Jewish merchants. That's what they complained about. The McCone Commission brought out the other issues. Now, when I looked at over the years all the areas that were burned out remained burned out, okay? And my point was, now with all the building that's supposed to occur, why are you leaving these sore spots all over town?

Smith

Then I started working with welfare planning and found out that the freeway had taken out the whole middle-class community down there. I forget what the name of that area was called, but it was mostly professionals, beautiful homes, and they were dispersed. That left the housing projects, okay, and a caste system, so to speak, deliberate. And it stayed that way until somewhere in the 1980s, when they then started building the freeway, okay. By that time the gangs had already cleared out so many of the middle class, and you could see changes were beginning to occur. They didn't put a shopping center across from the hospital until somewhere in the late eighties or the nineties, so they began gradually to start rebuilding.

Smith

Then '92 hits, okay? [19]92 hits and takes out corners. Fires just boom, boom, boom, boom, boom, okay? And then when you began to go around and look, here's an empty lot here, an empty lot here, here's an empty lot here. Then we're going to rebuild L.A. And then you say, "Okay, let's rebuild L.A." So here comes the money. Where's the money? Well, rebuild it where? I don't see no rebuilding. Okay? Then suddenly now, here comes, what is that organization that has to do with community redevelopment, CRA [Community Redevelopment Agency]? Here they come now with the idea that we've got to now do something about the housing problem, we have overcrowding, or we don't have enough affordable housing, and now we need to start looking at new structures, like on Vermont Corridor, where you have the stores on the bottom and the houses on the top, like the slums of New York, and the big cities, okay?

Smith

And so all of this begins to be talked about, and then suddenly here's the influx of all these folks coming into L.A. They begin to make the automobiles available to all of those folks, like overnight. That was about two years ago. Previously it was such that you can't use them. And suddenly now you drive up and down the streets of the urban city and you see these, what I call anthills, new apartment buildings cover up almost a whole block, one

entrance in and one entrance out. If you go inside there, it's almost like you have the outer core of apartments and the inner core of apartments, and if ever a fire broke out in those apartments, they're trapped, okay? The future slums of America. The developers are having a field day, okay?

Smith

Now, I say that to say, the reason they're able to do this is because the land had already been cleared by the riot, okay? Now, when you look at the riot and say, well, it was about Rodney King. Fine. But it was a riot that occurred with white folk, black folk, and Asian folk, and a lot of the black folks sat back and didn't do anything, and let the others do it, okay. Why? Because it was almost like it was programmed, looking for the opportunity and then it happened. So the question I raise about both events, while they had truth as the bottom, there was an ulterior motive behind it. So I don't know that Birdell Moore was that far off, okay, and urban renewal may have been one of the reasons that it occurred.

Smith

Now, the important point, too, to me is that when these buildings were destroyed by fire, then the insurances could kick in. If they just deteriorated from misuse or not being used, that's on you. So then the whole idea is then if you have a program burning, and the insurance companies are in on it, so that the whole issue of redevelopment is restructuring a whole community, without the community even realizing they've been restructured, okay? And this is what makes me believe that that was planned. Out of that we lose King Hospital. Here are the housing projects, [unclear] buildings. I don't think they're going to tear them down, but here's the land that's already bought, so you could restructure that land with condominiums, and certainly the people that are going to rent the condominiums are not there now, because the folks that are there now can't afford them.

Smith

If that's true, you don't need King Hospital. You need a private hospital, okay? So that that whole area of South Central may be undergoing redevelopment in a planned way, with a destructive device in the center, okay? Now, if that's true, then the death of children is not important. The excessive death of African Americans from disease is not important. The lack of healthcare is not important, and none of those issues that we are concerned about as African Americans is important to the evolution and the development of Los Angeles.

Smith

When you look at this whole influx of workers from Central and South America displacing American workers, and the discussion treats them as though they are the citizens, and the displaced people are the aliens, so that means then they are wondering why they don't have the rights of an American, and an American is wondering why they don't have the jobs of the aliens? See, so it's a flip of the script. So I'm concerned then that the African

American people are people without a country, okay? If you don't have jobs, which we're losing very much, the churches haven't yet bitten the bullet, because as their congregation loses their jobs they lose their money--a lot of them have mortgages that are pretty steep. They lose their property, do you follow? This is no different from the stripping of the Jews in Germany during the Second World War, and I think that's what we're looking at when we look at these riots, what they call a bi-literal cycle.

Stevenson

Okay. Let's stop.

1.5. Session 5 ***July 18, 2007***

Stevenson

Good morning. I'm completing an interview with Dr. Ernest Smith on Wednesday, July 18, 2007. First of all, I'd like you to elaborate on some of the material that you gave me, which talks about gangs, with the evolution of gangs, the tie-ins with the local black-liberation movement, the [Black] Panthers, so that we can get that on the record.

Smith

Good. If we can go back in our mind to 1968, that's the key year. That's the year Martin Luther King was killed, as well as Robert Kennedy, but the thing is that Watts had already happened. Detroit had already happened, and Newark had already happened, so that you had then in that Civil Rights Movement the peace movement that Martin Luther King led, which really peaked in 1963 with that March on Washington, then it kind of like plateaued and almost went on a downslide. Then you had the fires and the riots, and then out of this comes certain leaders like [H.] Rap Brown and Stokeley Carmichael, and then from there you end up with the Black Panthers, so you're talking the whole black people from a subservient, kind of pacifist stance, into a militant stance. But that militancy is what the United States has always been afraid of from slavery, because this is no more than slave rebellion.

Smith

And you only know about Nat Turner and Denmark Vesey, but they don't talk about the hundreds of slave rebellions that occurred in the United States. We aren't even aware of that as black people. Therefore, when we did these things from 1965 on up to 1970, we did it without being aware of our own history. So we thought it's like the workers, the port workers and the union going on strike. We didn't realize that it was one nation going against another nation, so we didn't see the severity. Now, when it got to the point that the President of the United States was sitting down with the FBI director to talk about, "What are we going to do with the black people?", and then talking about, "Well, it's about leadership, so let us co-opt the

leadership," then that puts Martin Luther King's death in context, puts the Black Panthers in context, puts everything into context.

Smith

Then it also defines the enemy. Now, what does that mean? It means that nobody wants to say that most of the problems that emerged in the black community after 1968 came from Washington, D.C., and that means that it's the federal government and individuals in the federal government who begin to determine policy, in terms of what direction the black people are going to go. So out of this you had all these young people organized by the Black Panthers, doing the breakfast-club meetings, looking after senior citizens, all kinds of good benevolences that were coming out of that group. You wiped out the leadership. That takes you back to 1967 with Lyndon [B.] Johnson. Then you substitute the leadership.

Smith

Now, the leadership that comes in are black men who are being paid by the federal government to take over the organized young people who were Panthers, who now become Blood and Cuz and Crip and Brim and Bounty Hunters, and everything else. And if you look at that period from 1970 to about 1974, there were so many black gangs fragmented, flying all around. Every little kid in his peer group was getting a name. All of that began to be coalesced, until you finally came down to two major groups, Blood and Cuz. If you look at what happened, we then began to become aware that something was going on with the black young people.

Smith

I was in Detroit, and we were reading Jet magazine and Ebony magazine, plus getting the word that something strange was happening in Los Angeles. The black boys were killing each other. That was news. Now, we act as though that's usual. No, that was news. There was another thing going on in Chicago. Black men were being killed and thrown in Lake Michigan. In Chicago they said, "The police are doing this." My point was that if they're killing black kids, black kids doing it in Los Angeles, or killing black men in Chicago and the cops are doing it doesn't matter. Black men are being killed. So some singular person is orchestrating.

Smith

So as you begin to look then, changes begin to occur that then this group called gangs begin to change the tenor of the discussion. We're no longer talking about civil rights. We're no longer talking about what goals we have as a people. We're not talking about the upper crust of poor people helping the lower crust of poor people. We call them middle-class; there's no such thing. That whole thing was gone. Where we had planned to go, where King wanted us to go, where Malcolm X wanted us to go, that was all over.

Smith

So we were then now dealing with, what do we do with these kids? So one of the first things is, if you have a child and you have the money, run. So

the middle-class left. They weren't middle-class then while they were in the ghetto, because there was no such thing. Once they went to Palos Verdes or Baldwin Hills, they became called middle-class. They were separate and distinct. That's a division. So that means then that the civil-rights struggle is over, finished. So by 1975 there was no more civil rights. Now, we still try to act like it's there, but it died.

Smith

Then the next thing you saw, out of that came the urban renewal. The viable blacks, the ones that could uplift the community, removed themselves from the poorer blacks, who needed to be uplifted. So as a result then, you didn't have the Blodget Tract [phonetic] running through South Central Los Angeles, next to Nickerson Gardens and Imperial Courts, so that if you go to Centennial High School or Compton High School, or even to Jordan High School, you'd have the doctor's child sitting right alongside of the child on welfare. That was the community we had. Now there's such a division, and you bring in this busing, and you take the black child out of the Baldwin Hills and send him out to the Valley, and the best teachers, you send them out to the Valley, and then you make them sitting on top of the hill think they're getting an education. Down in the valley you took all the good teachers and students away, there is no even pretense of it, so that whether it's down in the valley or on top of the hill, the black child is not being educated. So if you'd give the test at UCLA, he's the bottom of the pile; if you give the test in Watts he's at the bottom of the pile. In other words, there is no difference between the middle-class black child and the poorer-class black child, because they were all confused.

Smith

So out of this urban renewal then the next thing you have is you bring in the drugs. Now, bringing in the drugs had nothing to do with the black people. It had to do with Central America, control of Nicaragua, control of whatever, not Mexico because Mexico is already in the camp, but El Salvador. So what you then had was the white right and left governments or whatever at war, with the United States central to it. Congress refused to fund that war once it found out, so what did they do? That's Ollie North and President [G.H.W.] Bush, and Ronald Reagan, and Caspar Weinberger, what'd they do? They then got drugs from South America, sold them to the inner-city, and from that money went and bought guns from the Jews in Israel and other people, and brought the guns to Nicaragua for the war, and exchanged it for drugs and bring it back to the inner-city. In other words, we were back in that same slave triangle.

Smith

Now, they try to deny that. Now, they say, "You can't prove that." Of course I can't prove it. My point is, I prove it by proving it. Meaning, I see it, I know it. I know the history of it and I know where it comes from. It's another triangle. Out of this then comes the destruction of the black family, the

denigration of the black woman, this so-called hip-hop culture, which is actually young kids screaming for some kind of relief or help, and that becomes our culture. Out of that comes the prisons, and in the prisons then you have white employment. You put the wool over their eyes, and they think they have a job, and their job is to sit and watch niggers for the rest of their life? And you call that a job, when you used to have meaningful employment? So you can see the downward trend of the black people.

Smith

Now, the thing that's the most important, the depression that has been placed within the black race, which we did not see before, okay, and as a result then now we see young people committing suicide just off the top of their heads. You find refusal to get married. Young black boys don't even know how to date a black girl, feel very uncomfortable with a black girl, don't even want to hear what she has to say, and then go to the white woman as though she were their mother. You understand what I'm saying? In other words, these are hurting young men who are of use to no one. So they have a white wife, but she knows that she's got a cripple on her hands, and here's the black woman that don't particularly want the cripple on her hands, and he won't rise to the occasion. Well, what do you have here but genocide? So that when you look at it you can go step by step by step by step to be where we are today.

Smith

Now, if you go down to the Martin Luther King situation, which is a tragedy, because here on that property you had some of the highest-educated black people in Los Angeles, all clumped together, scientists who could not see the science of their own demise. And as they began to pull that hospital apart, and that's what I had been written and showing you, how we were being attacked, I knew that it was the government attacking, but I couldn't say it. I could allude to it, and those who were hip would understand it. Then we found a way to get around it, but we understood who we were fighting, okay? But we were isolated from the black community because, as they would say, "They'll get you killed." See, that fear model. Or, "He's crazy. He doesn't know what he's talking about."

Smith

And so you sit there and you say, "Well, let's go through the mechanics of preaching in the churches, going to the schools and talking to the parents, and all this kind of thing," throw it out there and be the crazy man, and see if there's anybody that in one way can pick this up and begin to move with it. So when it came down to attacking the hospital, which we've been talking about for thirty years, it's a matter of the modus operandi. At one time, every time they would jump I would jump. Press conference, okay, challenge. But then you found that you became the pariah within your own hospital group. Your own chairman, who happened to be white, begins to attack, and you get into a face-to-face confrontation, even to the point when

I wouldn't even allow him in my office. Now, you're my chairman, but I don't care about that. In other words, you're coming in here wrong, you're not coming here at all. This is supposed to be a black institution, and the agenda has to be black. So I don't need to hear about other people and other things. Let's deal with what we're dealing with, okay?

Smith

I did my study on graffiti, that opened my eyes to a whole lot of things that were going on, took me all the way back to Druidism and England and France. On the walls in the black ghetto that didn't even make sense. And then you're going to come to me as a white man and try to tell me what's going on with my people in my home? That can't be allowed, okay. So we fight. Now, when we fight then I alienate myself from black people, okay. In other words, picking on that poor white man. Do you follow my point? So as a result then, the hospital begins to tumble.

Smith

You had [Peter F.] Schabarum and [Supervisor Michael D.] Antonovich, who were right-wing people, at least the media says they were. They were attacking the hospital from the beginning. They weren't in favor of it. They let you know that from the beginning. Hahn had to fight them tooth and nail to get money for the hospital; that we knew. Then here comes [Supervisor Zev] Yaroslavsky, who is Jewish from the west side, liberal, and here comes [Supervisor] Gloria Molina, who is Hispanic from the east side, liberal, and between the two of them they engineered the downfall of King Hospital. And we have to sit back and say, no, it's incompetent physicians, it's nurses that don't care, it's this, that, and the other, when the fact was that they stripped you until you'd trip over your own feet.

Smith

When they had the NPR [National Public Radio] broadcast about four or five months ago, and they had all these people, Chernoff in charge of the health services, [Supervisor] Yvonne Braithwaite Burke, the lady who's in charge of the hospital now, a whole string of folks telling the same lie. "Oh, the hospital's fine." "Oh, everything is going on, and we're going to be building up." Well, we heard that for four years. I got up and had one minute to speak, and my point was this. I ran a hospital in South Dakota on the Indian reservation with forty beds, okay, and two physicians, and one who didn't even like Indians, and we served a population of 5,000 people. And now you bring here a forty-bed hospital to serve a population of two million? Impossible. And what you're going to do is force the physicians who are there trying to treat people to overreach and do what they cannot do, and that's going to cause a problem.

Smith

Suddenly we get the Rodriguez case, where this lady dies on the floor in the lobby, and then we try to say it's incompetence of the hospital. No. That was a setup from the county. You put that in Chernoff's lap, and you put that in

Yaroslavsky's lap, and Yvonne Braithwaite's lap, Molina's lap, that you not knowing what it takes to practice medicine, or how medicine is structured, you went along with just a concept, forty beds for two million people, and an emergency room that had all of the personnel that worked for years there removed overnight. Friday they have a job at King; Monday they're no longer at King. A whole new private group comes into King to deal with a population that they know nothing of, in a system that they had never tested, and now they're going to blindly go on trying to deal with this two-million-person population. Then you're going to trip and fall, and that's what they did.

Smith

Now, they'll blame that little black nurse, because the issue was that the woman was misdiagnosed, and nobody talks about that fact, and the reason she was misdiagnosed was because the doctor who saw her was overreaching. He was out of his field, okay? Now, when the nurse sees what the doctor diagnosed, she's going to go according to what was diagnosed. This is a gallbladder. So the lady's back again. We know that she has a disrupted history, so that I'm then saying that a gallbladder is not sick unto death, and she don't act like a dying gallbladder, okay? So then we treat her accordingly, and it's a misdiagnosis that starts the whole thing. So as a result then we fall flat on our face, but we blame the black physicians, we blame the black community, etc., etc.

Smith

But the proof of the pudding--knowing what the hospital was to start with, in other words, the poorer the morbid statistics and the mortality statistics of the black people in South Central Los Angeles, thirty-four years of working with that, and end up with the same statistic, and then you know that you didn't give the money, or you didn't support that hospital, and that statistic and that lack of change doesn't bother you. And then you shut the hospital down without trying to say, "We still have to change the statistic." No, we don't change the statistic. We blame you for thirty-four years of not changing the statistic. So the statistic is not a problem to us. The problem is the cost it is to maintain the statistic, or even change the statistic. So as a result then, we then say, "Cut the hospital out and let's move on." Well, what about the statistic? It doesn't matter.

Smith

Once we understand that, and the young folks here at UCLA, the young folks at Howard, that you are despised people, and until that sinks in your head, then everybody who runs in your face crying friend and brother is not your friend and is not your brother. But by their works you shall know them. By the fruit you shall know them. So put them to work and see what the labor brings, okay? And that was the same contention I had with my chairman. You're down here where the work is. What is the fruit of your labor, picking at me? That's the fruit of your labor? Then you can't be my friend.

Smith

So I think that this is something that's going to be very important for the young black kids, especially with this idea of diversity, bringing in people from all parts of the world who are poverty stricken, who have their own interests in mind, but are sailing under your flag, that they are not despised, you are despised. They shall rise off your shoulders. Your grandfather could have told you this about the Hungarians, and about the people that came out of France and Spain over the years, rising off your shoulders. Because you remain in that despicable condition, they will suck you dry and then cast you aside. When you have nothing left to give, there ain't but one thing left for you but that is the furnace updated, okay, whether it be multiple sclerosis or some other kind of viral disease that they inject in you, but either way you've got to go.

Smith

This is what's facing the young people. So they need to reunite to the masses. They need to restudy what is the real problem, and then they have to define the enemy and be brave enough to challenge the enemy. That's what Martin Luther King did, okay. It got him killed, okay? My point, too, with that is that it didn't have to happen that way. I think that he had a lot of sorry black folks around him that helped to get him up, okay? See, so that to me is where we are in our history, but we've come thirty-four years, and you put 1968 as the critical date.

Smith

This is the reason why from the very beginning I said that we should as a people celebrate April third for Martin Luther King, not January fifteenth or whatever that date is. Every man is born; that's not even important. Every man dies, but what did you do between the time you were born and the time you died that would make us celebrate you? And I think Martin Luther King should be celebrated, but it was his death, okay? And once you understand that, the young people to understand then, and keep the question in front of them, "Who killed him, and why was he killed?" Once you understand that, then you begin the new history of the African American, beginning in 1968 with all those multiple murders of leadership, and then end up with such hand-picked mediocrity as we see walking the streets today calling themselves black leaders.

Stevenson

Okay. You've answered some of this. You talked about King Hospital and the state that it's in right now. Just for the record, could you talk about where the hospital stands at this moment?

Smith

I think the hospital was supposed to have been sold, okay. I think that the hospital is to be closed, because of urban renewal, that the population that is going to be in that area is no longer going to be poor people, so that when they get rid of the housing projects like Nickerson Gardens and whatever,

and through their gentrification, that you'll have a middle-class person coming in, white or black or brown. They will need a hospital, but they'll need a private hospital, so that there would be probably a privatization of King Hospital into a different model altogether, but it will not be with the same goal of worrying about mortality and morbidity amongst the poor, and all the other attenuating circumstances around that. That'll be gone.

Smith

I think that they thought they'd have gotten rid of the hospital long before now, but because of certain things that have happened in the community, like with Maxine Waters fighting, other people coming to the forefront and fighting, that they delayed them. I think that once this lady died here a couple of months ago, that also put a clinker into the direction. But I think that the main goal is to get rid of that hospital, and for the county it would be a savings of money, because the health dollar is not that extant. So the whole point would be then that if you got rid of King, then you'd have a whole lot of money saved, because you can then disburse the monies to the other existing county hospitals, and they call that the Metro Plan, which has never been tested and it's half-baked. It doesn't make sense.

Smith

But the whole idea would be that you have County and Harbor as the major hospitals, and then clinics all around, and a good transportation system, where you can refer and transferring and all this kind of thing, which it doesn't make sense.

Stevenson

What do you think about the proposal that Assemblyman [Mervyn] Dymally was advancing, which I believe proposed that the hospital be taken out of county hands, and administered by, you know, some other entity?

Smith

Yes, that's fine, except whose hands would it be in, and who'd do the administration? Now, if it's just simply--this could be a veil of the privatization. Okay, now if he had said, "I'm going to put together a group of people who will be able to take that hospital off your hands," that would be one proposal. But just to throw it out there, "We need to take it off your hands," I'm saying that was the original plan to start with. Now, I don't like to criticize people, and I don't like to call down on folk. However, I've got to look at Mr. Dymally in light of Compton College. Now, he's the one that introduced all of the legislation that finally ended Compton College. In other words, had he not introduced the legislation in the Assembly, we would not be in that position that we're in at Compton College.

Smith

Now, we lost an institution, a black institution in South Central Los Angeles, very important to the people in Compton and Carson, etc., etc., and all of that money and everything else now goes over to El Camino. It was through

Dymally that that happened, so I'm a little anti-Dymally at this point in terms of his looking out for the welfare of despicable people.

Stevenson

Okay. Since we're on the subject of Compton College, if you would, talk a little bit about the history of that institution and where that stands today.

Smith

Yes. Compton College actually was one of the first community colleges in the United States, and I think they say that it's somewhere in the seventy-some years old, or even maybe somewhere near eighty years of age that it's been in existence. President Bush Sr. took classes at Compton College at a period of time, but Compton College was a lily white situation. Compton was a lily white situation. At one time, Compton was the head of the Ku Klux Klan. The California Klan was based in Compton. That was a city where black folks had to be out of town by five o'clock, okay? Now, through the NAACP [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People] and a lot of working, especially Maxie Pyle [phonetic], who nobody talks about, who worked very hard and got that city integrated. Once he did so, then blacks began to move in and whites began to move out. As whites were moving out, they built Dominguez High School in Paramount as a last stance for whites, but finally that went.

Smith

Now, with the taking over of the black folks of Compton, then Compton College automatically became a black institution. Now, however it ran, it ran. Then suddenly now it comes down to a point of some problems going on financially--it was stealing, actually, going on with the college, more than likely continuing. In other words, nothing new, okay. Now, when you look at what was going on, there was a bill that was voted upon by the people-- [unclear] call it a bill--but they put a thing on the ballot, and that gave some \$150 million or so to Compton College for various buildings, etc., etc. It's at that point that Dymally came in, and if they voted that ballot in on November, then Dymally had already created a bill to have the legislature oversee Compton College, and see what was going on with it, actually accusing them of malfeasance. And it's from that point on that Compton College then began to be looked at very finely, and accused of, and the board of trustees was removed, and they had people coming from Sacramento to run the college. In fact, what little surplus money they had, they ran that into the ground, and they finally had the state take away the accreditation of the college. They found nothing wrong with any audits they had with the instruction, with the teachers, or whatever was going on in terms of curriculum, but because of mismanagement within the business offices and administration, they removed the accreditation.

Smith

Now, the accreditation was not based on the business. To me it should be based on the level of instruction, etc. Well, that's not so. They got rid of the

accreditation based on this, without really having real open discussion. One man went to jail over a pittance of something, no real attack saying that, "We investigated and found this fraud, this fraud, this whatever, whatever." None of that was done, and as a result then they took the college, changed it into an educational institution, which means they give you a certificate but you don't get a diploma, and you could get courses then at El Camino College, and they would be under El Camino College that these courses will be recognized. So that means then that you really don't have a college in Compton. You have an institution that gives you a certificate. That's like taking the thirteenth grade of high school.

Smith

But for young people, especially poor young people, who need to be trained with skills to get out into the job market, that opportunity is gone. Yes, you can go to El Camino College, but if you can go to El Camino College, why go to El Camino? Why don't we go to Monterey, Mexico? Meaning that once you have to leave your home and pay carfare, it doesn't matter where you go. See, if you can't afford the carfare, it doesn't matter where you go. So that means then for poor people, going to El Camino College from Compton is quite an expense, see. So the point would be, don't say that you gave them El Camino College. The idea is not to give them something that's hanging in front of them, but to give them something that allows them to have the wherewithal to complete what they're doing, or to at least try to do something about elevating their lives.

Smith

But when you put that mileage between them, that's a stumbling block. But for middle-class people who have never dealt with poverty, they don't see those things. They don't understand that, or they don't care. And even then you go up to Sacramento and look at the people in charge of the whole community-college system, which is the poor-folks' system, then if you can't understand the nature of poverty and the things that poor people face, then you shouldn't have anything to do with the system. But you act like a University of California wannabe, because you think you're up there with the rest of them when you're not. Okay?

Smith

And I think that's one of the things that happened with Compton College. It got ground up with these wannabes, who didn't understand the nature of things, and then just moved right on in and did what they wanted to do, didn't regard the citizens in discussion whatsoever, okay. Discouraged any lawsuits, okay, just took advantage all the way around the board, and I don't know how long they'll continue this. They give the people to believe that at some point in time they'll get their accreditation back.

Smith

I have never seen anything return--I'll put it this way. When the federal government gave us the bureau, Freedman's Bureau, from 1865 to about

1876 or so, and there were a lot of things that were set up. After the Hayes-Tilden election, then that whole issue of the Freedmans Bureau was destroyed, and a lot of the things that they had accomplished were destroyed. The health services--the only one hospital that came out of the Freedmans Bureau was Freedmans Hospital in Washington, yet there were supposed to be hospitals all over the United States for the freed men. Didn't happen.

Smith

Now, my point being, if it didn't happen and if they eradicated it, when did they bring it back? Never. Never. So my point then is that whenever they tell you, "Oh, you'll get your accreditation once you earn it," means it'll never happen, because the tradition in the happening is, once we take it away from the black people we never return it, because the reason we took it is never the reason that we give. It's not about accreditation; it's about the power. It's about money. So if we took it from you, why would we give it back to you? I've never seen a bank robber send a check back to the bank, you understand? See, so that's the situation going on with Compton College.

Stevenson

Okay. Back to King Hospital. What will it take in realistic terms to revive it, to get it back to its promise? You know, just what will it take?

Smith

It would take a massive movement by the African American people. Not the Hispanics, okay? And it would have to take a movement of accepting the fact that the hospital was stolen from you, and that much of the charge was bogus and unproven, and that the idea of the workers' inabilities are stated but not proven, believable because they're black, but not because of what they've done. So one of the things then is you have to identify the enemy, and indentify the problem. The enemy, and I start with Zev Yaroslavsky, and he's just a middle man in it, goes back to your builders, the people that are doing your redevelopment and what they had in mind, using these flunkies, okay. Then jump the one you see, which is Zev, and Gloria, who goes along with him, put Yvonne to task, because as a black woman she should have been overseeing for us. She was asleep at the switch, okay? She needs to know that, okay? And there needs to be a demand by the black people that that hospital be reconstituted, and that many of the people that they fired be rehired, and not only reconstituted, but reconstituted at a higher level than it was when they finally crippled it.

Smith

So the whole idea is, back them back in time, okay, but don't buy into, "We need to improve." No. What we had was fine. Back to that, then we talk about improvement. But before we get to improvement, see, that's like admitting that something was wrong, no. You created that problem, so take us back to where it was when we were in charge. Now, the next point would be that when we do get leadership for that hospital, that they be free to be

leaders, and not be tucked away with whatever is going on downtown, too frightened to make a decision.

Smith

We had Bill Delgado [phonetic] as the hospital administrator. He fought them. They removed him, promoted him out of there, okay? But they couldn't have him down there, because he was getting that hospital into tip-top shape, and really doing some good things, so he had to go. Bill Smith, when the hospital first opened, as a medical director was moving in that direction. They had to get rid of him. So that's one thing that we have to also say. If you do bring this hospital back, it's got to be back on our terms. We have got to get rid of these so-called black people who are fighting for the hospital, who have no knowledge of the hospital. You've got Connie Rice, and you're got Earl Ofari [Hutchinson], and you've got Najee Ali. These people never knew that King Hospital was in Los Angeles until the tragedy. Now suddenly they're going to rise to the occasion, without getting a history, without having any knowledge. That's no different from a white person coming out the Valley who wants to do do-goodism, okay, or wants to get his name in the paper, but doesn't know the subject. See? We've got to move that aside.

Smith

We have not heard from anybody that works at King Hospital on the issue of King Hospital. We have not heard from the previous administrators, medical or hospital, or any of the surgeons that were relieved, any of the doctors that were falsely accused, never have had any discussion on that issue, okay? The other question I raise is this. I look at--and this is what I marched about. I looked at Yaroslavsky. Now, from his background, he was in charge of a Jewish organization on this campus when he was a student. Just as you had like the Black Student Union, I think they must have had one for the Jewish kids, too, right? Now, that's fine, and I think that's a great thing. Now, if he's fighting for causes that are particularly related to Jews, he then has a relationship which I would think would be national, okay?

Smith

I looked then at the people who had begun to come in at K [King Hospital], and they swooped down here like buzzards, okay? They jumped on surgery, took away that; orthopedics, took away that; jumped at neonatology; jumped at all these directions, and then they came in the name of accreditation. Now, how many of them were Jews, okay, and how many of them are linked? Then I look in the newspaper and you're writing every nasty thing that you can write about King Hospital, and no matter what people told you, none of that is written. You're writing your own agenda, and I looked at all the writers who are coming in, and they're Jewish. Then I looked at what's going on in the national world, where you look at who attacked in Michigan on affirmative action. I look at Baake on affirmative action. I begin to look and say, "Now, wait. There's something wrong here,

okay? You used to be our allies. Now it seems like you are our enemies. What is going on, okay? What is the issue here?"

Smith

My point is then, there needs to be a discussion, a serious discussion. You can't back us in a corner because of what Jesse Jackson said, or what Farrakhan said. Look at the stats and show me wherein it is not so, okay? So I think that the black community should demand an explanation from the Jewish community on that behavior. Now, don't tell me about excellence as they try to talk about, and every man is equal. No, no, no. When you didn't come to the cotton field on Wednesday afternoon, that I can go shopping in slavery, right, then you can't get in this discussion. Okay, the issue of affirmative action had nothing to do with leveling a playing field. It had to do with what you did in slavery, okay. And no other person can get into that discussion but white folks and black folks, okay?

Stevenson

Yes.

Smith

So my point is, so don't bring the affirmative-action argument that you have. That doesn't pertain here, and you know it. You know it. So my point is then, we need to discuss this whole scene. Now, why do I say this? Because the next generation doesn't have the information that our generation has. We don't have the full generation of the other generation. My generation has more information than your generation, because we were connected to the slaves. But there's a schism that occurred in 1968 that separated that generation that was in their forties and up from the generation that was below, okay, and as a result then, they have to now create a new way, and try to find their way back to what was the old way, you see? Now, that has to happen. That has to happen, the continuity, so that we can begin to continue in the direction and the goals that were set up by Fred Douglass, but Harriet Tubman, the folks on the boat, the Middle Passage, who came with the idea of freedom. That has still got to be the agenda for the African American.

Smith

Now, that means then if you have to give up your job making \$500,000 a year, based on the fact that it is contrary to your people, then you've got to do that. Do you follow? So until we start getting in that direction, it's a hopeless future.

Stevenson

This is a follow-up question. I notice in your long list of lectures that you've given in the community, there have been many on the issue of stress. Could you elaborate on the issue of stress, and could you also talk about the tie-in between racism and stress? There's been a recent study looking at stress and the correlation between stress and certain diseases and conditions

among African Americans, particularly women, so if you could talk a little bit about that.

Smith

Right. Well, yes. The whole idea of stress is that's what makes the world go round. And actually, the term should not be stress, it should be distress, stress being the positive, and distress being the negative. Stress is what makes you aware of the environment that you're in, and if you look at yourself as saying that I end at my skin, and everything beyond my skin is foreign, and potentially an enemy, then I have to be aware of everything that is beyond my skin. So that's why if I'm sitting here and I see something moving out of the corner of my eye, I turn my attention to it, because it could potentially kill me. I don't know what that is, okay? But the very fact that that thing I saw came across my eye made it a stress. That means my eye became aware of something changing in the environment outside of self, and therefore then I have to decide whether I must do one of two things to it. If it's going to hurt me, I've got to kill it, okay? Fight it and kill it, or I've got to run from it.

Smith

Now, in order to do that I have to engage certain biochemical responses within my body, and the first response I'm going to give is I'm going to go into shock, because I wasn't thinking about that, okay? When I saw it come across and I looked down and saw that it's a rat, for instance, then I go into shock at the idea of it, which means that I'm at a point where nothing is happening in my body, and I'm very vulnerable at this point. Then I have to mobilize. Now, what I have to determine first is that's a distress, okay. I can't let that be. Now, I have to mobilize. I've got to either kill it or run from it, but I can't do it in the state I'm in.

Smith

Number one, before I saw him I was in the use state. Now that I saw him, I went into a negative state, a distress state, okay, alarm state, and my biochemistry is not conducive to my living. Now then, what I do is I get pumped up with epinephrine that begins to do certain changes with muscle tissue, with the glucose, lock down the bowels and the bladder so I don't have to worry about that, and all kinds of things, and I'm ready to either fight or flee. Now, I get that sudden burst of epinephrine, and then I hope to contain the problem. Now, after I think I've contained that problem--either I ran from it or I fought it--I will begin to come back towards my use state, but I'm never getting to where I was. I'm going to maintain now a different level of awareness.

Smith

Now, until I'm fully satisfied that there'll be no more rats and everything is gone, I will come back down to my normal state. Now, if I'm not satisfied that everything is gone, I will kick in cortisone, and once I kick into cortisone, that's the adrenal gland, that's the heavy gun. Now, what I'm

going to do is I'm going to keep that cortisone level moving, because I have to be in a constant state of awareness, okay. I can't let down my guard. Epinephrine is a short-term burst, okay. But I can't rely on epinephrine to carry me for days and weeks, so I up my steroids, and this is what now will carry me on an alert basis.

Smith

So what does that do? I move what we be my norm. I raise it up another level. And what does that mean? The cost of living for me has increased, so it means that I have to take in more carbohydrate, more protein, more fat, because I'm now burning more energy just to maintain life. But the point being that what is around me is considered to be a norm for others, but it's not a norm for me. So I'm the only one walking through this environment on a cortisone basis, on a steroid basis. Everybody else is walking around maybe with a little burst of epinephrine or none at all, because they don't perceive any problems, right?

Smith

Now, as I continue with this cortisone, it begins to make changes in my vascular tree, in my vital organs, that then begins to put me in a point of exhaustion. So one of the things I'll start going into is I'll start showing evidences of disease, what we call disease. So one of the things is I might become asthmatic. My heart starts to give out. Diabetes begins to come in. My mind isn't quite as sharp as it used to be. All kinds of things are happening, and I think that's normal, okay?

Smith

Now, when you look at the African American people, we have the worst of everything, okay, which almost looks like the immune system is not where it should be. The point being then is that even though we were walking in a free country as free citizens amongst free people, that we're not perceiving that, okay? So in the back of our minds, and even the way we're taught as children, that if you're going to succeed or if you're going to survive in this country, you'd better wake up. You know the expression.

Stevenson

Oh yes.

Smith

When I was a kid, they'd take the knuckle, the boys, and maul their head. "Wake up, boy!" meaning be aware of your environment. You're walking around in your sleep. Now, white people don't have to tell their children that. They're at home. But for an African American parent, you've got to wake that child up to what is in your environment, and being aware of what's around you, okay?

Stevenson

That's right.

Smith

Well, that child is being pumped up on steroids, okay, so that child then is becoming a cortisone creature, so to speak. Okay? Now, the question is, can we survive like that? No, because it begins to take its toll on you in years to come. Then what must you do? Then you've got to then raise your norm in terms of what alarms you, okay? So something runs across your feet, say, "What's that?" "Oh, it's a rat." And then you say, "Well, how can you sit there and just say that?" "Because I learned not to be upset about it, because I can't do nothing about it."

Stevenson

Yes, exactly.

Smith

You understand what I'm saying?

Stevenson

Right.

Smith

So I sit here with a normal blood pressure in the midst of filth. I'm sitting here in a normal blood pressure just content with nothing, okay? But I'm healthy. But if I'm anxious and upset about it, here I'm sitting in Beverly Hills with everything I need, and don't even have a mortgage, and I've got hypertension, because I know this can't be real. So I walk around, I have five bedrooms, I know they're going to come and get them, and I walk down the street, I know they're going to arrest me. In other words, I have more worry being in this state of luxury, because of the condition of being an African American, or an African in America, okay?

Stevenson

Right.

Smith

So being black is a stressful, a distressful situation. If you take these young kids here at this school, that little handful of black kids that are here, they talk like UCLA students, they act like UCLA students, but they're skittish. You follow what I'm saying? [Slaps hands] Bam, they'll jump, because they have to be on guard. When they left home, their mama put that knuckle in their head. "Wake up, boy. You're going up to UCLA. You'd better wake up. You go to sleep up there, you're going to get wiped out." You dig what I'm saying?

Stevenson

Yes, yes.

Smith

So these kids then don't even know that they're set up for hypertension. Now, they're going to go into high-stress jobs, meaning like if they get into corporate America they have to prove themselves as African Americans, because you know that people say, "We just brought you in because of affirmative action." The stress level increases, okay? So it means then that if you don't get some kind of way of decompressing the stress, you're going to

die in your forties or in your fifties, you see? And blackness is the central point of that.

Smith

Now, no one in America wants to connect distress, stress, and blackness and disease, because if that were so, then you would have to change your whole way of dealing with African Americans, and the whole cost of maintaining their health. So what you do is you blame the victim. "Your hypertension is because you eat fatback," okay? "And the reason you have this disease is because you don't exercise." Or, "You're too fat, and that's why you have diabetes." But they never say, "The reason I'm too fat is because I'm sitting here eating in order to survive," meaning because I feel that as long as I eat I'm alive, and every time something threatens me, then my method of flight is food. You see?

Stevenson

Yes.

Smith

And then I suddenly blow up, and then you accuse me of being greedy, or not having this, or not having that, but the actual point is, no one will sit down and put me at peace. No one will sit down and put me at rest. So that you find the ladies in the housing projects with babies that they have to feed that they can't feed, and folks that disrespect them, and blame them for every crime going on in America, and they're all heavy and fat, and you wonder why? Because of the distress that they're living under. Okay, now you say, let's relieve that.

Smith

One of the programs we had, because we knew that there was a depression amongst a lot of the parents, we had the fashion show for the large and the lovely, okay? And so you had to be overweight to be in the fashion show. Now, the whole point of the show was, "We want you to be comfortable with your weight, and we want you to come to love yourself as you are," meaning, there is a beauty in you that you have to find. So we want you dressed up and walking on that catwalk like you're somebody, okay? That was one of the most popular events we had. And even some of the high-school kids, and we had one or two of them went on to be models for the large and lovely, and the whole idea was because we know that it's stress that's got them eating, and depression, and in order to go on a diet or to get anything, loss of weight, you first have to get them to accept and then relieve the distress consciousness, and then we're able to move on into any kind of positive movement. So that was the point of our whole issue of the large-and-lovely fashion show.

Smith

But so what we're seeing then is the distress of being black in America is a heavy toll, and it comes early in the life of the child. Now, if the child stays in a black community and never sees white people, they don't feel that

distress. But once they begin to get on the cutting edge, okay, where they have to interface, there it goes.

Stevenson

In some sense, is blaming the victim here really a diversionary tactic away from talking about the real issue--

Smith

Yes, right.

Stevenson

--of white privilege and of racism?

Smith

Right. And if you notice the discussion [unclear], there is no racism.

Stevenson

Right. Color blindness.

Smith

Right. And the most racist people in the United States are black.

Stevenson

Talk a little bit about that. What do you think about people like Ward Connerly comes to mind?

Smith

Pitiful. Pitiful.

Stevenson

But there are some others, and even there's a couple of talk-show hosts. Locally there's Larry Elder. There's another gentleman--

Smith

Armstrong.

Stevenson

Armstrong, yes. What's your take on these individuals?

Smith

Well, they've always been with us. These are the people you find in the yard, you know. My theory, you had house blacks, and folks will talk about house niggers, right? And you had the folks in the field, that they would refer to as the field niggers. Nobody ever talks about the people in the yard, okay. Now, the yard folk were like the in between, the go-between from the house to the field. They take news to the house, take news to the field. But the master put them in the yard, okay? So the whole point would be then he would first give them the information to take on the news they're carrying, and then if they went to the field they carried the master's message. "Y'all need to straighten up out here. He goin' get you. Y'all didn't pick no cotton this morning. I know it and he know it, too." "Yeah, you ate up all the steak in the kitchen. You think he don't know that steak you ate? He goin' get you." Do you follow what I'm saying?

Smith

So my point is that you're the go-between to make sure that the people in the field and the people in the house understand what the master's wishes

are, and what he wants, but it's what you did wrong, and so all I know is master's mad, and I'm here to let you know what you did wrong. Now, if you straighten up, master won't be mad at you, okay? So what the elders are going to talk about, if you straighten up and stop making master mad, life will be better for you, okay? So my point is, they pick the yard folk, and what was going on in slavery ain't no different. They get choice pieces of the meat, they get choice pieces of--you know, the man can throw them a hambone and throw it on the floor, and they'd take it off the floor and eat it, you understand what I'm saying? See, so those people like that are always then seeking for their own benevolence, and they will then use you in order to do so.

Smith

These are ones that will, for instance, if Nat Turner's going to have his revolution or rebellion, these are the ones that let the man know that that's what he's going to do. And they'd expect a little piece of gingham, or a little piece of bread as a reward for what it was they've done, you see. And we have many of those with us. That's who they used to replace the Panthers to create the gangs. This one dude I'm looking at that did that [unclear] at the party, allegedly. The name, B-o-n-e. If you looked at my graffiti study, if you take the B away and you have the o-n-e, we see a lot of that on the walls. That means number one. And o-n-e-, number one, is the same as the alpha, so that's the white supremacist. If you look at the B and break it up, you have a thirteen. That's a coven. So it means then, if you go into Druidism, you always had twelve plus one, the leader plus the twelve in the group. Even the Christian church did this, twelve disciples plus the leader, Jesus, you know. So the whole point is, when you see that, then you're looking at clan, Druid discussion.

Smith

Now, here's somebody with the name Bone, which is really one, three, one. That's number one of the number thirteen, meaning that of the thirteen coven, that's our boy, okay? Now, if this individual now comes and speaks, he speaks in the name of, as though he's speaking of. But then he's also organizing those around him to do that bidding, do you follow? That's a dangerous person, okay. Now, this is what we picked up off the wall in terms of looking at the graffiti, you see. So if you look at many of the folks that begin to work with the gangs, many of the folks that would work on this campus even, they will belong to number one, and they will do their bidding, okay. And you will go to them thinking you can trust, okay, because they should be on the same wavelength, and they're not. They're in the yard. Okay?

Smith

And that's what I'm looking around Los Angeles, and we're full of yard folk running around at this point, and it's critical now, because there are too

many irons in the fire of problems that need to be dealt with seriously, and they're being dealt with by yard people, see. And that's not good.

Stevenson

I'd like you to talk about your participation in local churches, whether that be as lay minister, Sunday-school teacher, or even as a musical performer. If you could talk a little bit about that, I want to--

Smith

Well, I don't do the music anymore. When I go home in Pennsylvania, I will sit and play at a service, you know, but otherwise no. Most of what I did here was in terms of being invited to church pulpits, and the whole idea was to weave the message within the scripture. So then I look at gang violence, and I'm not looking at condemning the child or their parent, but looking at the overall story, who's in charge, you know.

Smith

One of the things I do a lot with Jeremiah, the Book of Jeremiah, and the northmen. He talks about the northmen, okay, and to me that's very, very critical in terms of looking at where we are in our community, so I could say then, "It's the northmen that have come." But then there's a curse that goes to the northmen for what they did, but they were directed to do what they did because of the behavior of the people. The whole idea of looking at the dream that Jeremiah had, where he saw a cracked pot and he saw a rod, and he saw the pot where the manna was in, but he didn't see the commandments. So my point was that in looking at that pot he saw that these were people that were no longer dealing with their law. That was gone, okay, and they had the manna that they were worshipping, that fed them, and they had the rod that chastised them, but the law that guided them they no longer kept, and that was what was the judgment against them.

Smith

And my point is, that's a correlation with what's going on with us as a people. You can't come from Martin Luther King and that spiritual law, and then suddenly we're in this unruly period that we're going through, where we're looking for the manna and we expect the man to bring the chastising rod, but we're not being guided by the law. Do you follow? And there's a point then that says that the northman's coming, and that's part of the punishment, you see? So that's one way I get across to them the condition we're in, and what the future was going to bring you if some certain things don't change, you know?

Smith

So I could deal with gang violence, I could deal on Men's Day certain subjects that deal with parenting, with mothers, things that deal with parenting, with children, things that come on education and uplifting, so I use the pulpit to do the lecturing that I would do in the weekday in an academic way, to bring it back into a spiritual way, or Christian-doctrine kind

of way, see. And usually it's a matter of my being invited to the church. So in other words, as a church will invite me, then I come and speak. I have a longstanding engagement with the Athens Baptist Church. Every February they look for me, you know, and that's been going on now almost fifteen years, you see. So that's mainly how I interact with the church now.

Stevenson

Do you see the local black church being a catalyst for change, particularly right now with all of the issues that we're dealing right now, employment, economic development, healthcare issues?

Smith

The local church is off base, and it's not local, it's national. Like I tell them--I used to tell them, I don't say it anymore--the bullet that they put in King's head killed the church. In other words, you ministers were blasted out by that bullet, because you have done nothing since. And I blame them for the condition, meaning that when these young kids were beginning to go astray, you didn't do anything. You didn't in your pulpits give advice to the parents. You didn't go out on the corners and deal with these young kids. You didn't go in the projects and work with them. You did nothing, okay? You were just as afraid of them as you were afraid of the man. Then you got off into some tangents that you couldn't speak, because some of them did some dirty things, you know what I mean? And if they opened their mouth they'd go to jail, so their mouths are sealed. You see?

Smith

Then the others, what I say, went after the false prophets, so wherever there was a dollar, a grant, now we're going to do some housing for the senior citizens. But why don't you do some housing for the poor mothers, and they'll take care of their mothers? So Grammy will live with her daughter, who's taking care of her son in a good house. You follow my point? See, but you're off trying to get a nice, middle-class housing project for when you get old, had nothing to do with the poor, you see? So the church is off base, much off base. The wealthier the church, the worse.

Stevenson

The megachurches.

Smith

Yes, the megachurches. Meaning that they're dealing with wounded people, and they're in there hooting and hollering and trying to get their heads straightened off, when it's very clear what's wrong. You do this and you get that, okay? You can't blame nobody for that. Now, you stop doing this, this might improve. Now then, since you did this, you use energy. A lot of energy has to be used to bring it back to a norm. Now, you think God's going to wave a wand and then it's going to get back to normal, you don't have to do anything, and that's what you're preaching? You see what I mean?

Smith

No. My point is that there has to be a repentance and then absolution, and move on, you see. Church isn't dealing with that. They're dealing with the money thing, okay. The megachurches, big money, big money. I went to [T.D.] Jakes' Church in Texas a couple of years ago. You get locked in there. They tell me, "You can't get out once you get in there. When the service is going on, you sit in there." Okay?

Stevenson

Interesting.

Smith

Yes. When I went to church in Detroit, I almost had a big fight in the vestibule. The church service is going on and on and on and on, and I had to get out of there, okay? So when I went to get out, the niggers at the door told me I can't leave.

Stevenson

Interesting. I've heard a variation on that, where a person visiting a black church said that the doors were locked during the taking up of the collection, and you could not leave during when they were taking up the collection.

Smith

I didn't know about that one.

Stevenson

Yes. Could you discuss your involvement over the years with other community organizations, such as NAACP, SCLC [Southern Christian Leadership Conference], CORE [Congress on Racial Equality], SNCC [Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee], any that we've not already discussed?

Smith

The NAACP. When I first came here and we started doing our Community Under Siege conferences, and your father was involved with that, we worked with the NAACP, and especially on the second conference. The first conference was with the South Central Welfare Planning organization, and that kind of--they got rid of them. But then we did it with the NAACP. Now, the local chapter went right along with what we were saying. It was Mrs. Ablyn Winge and myself and others, and they went along with what we were saying. But when you tried to get the state chapter involved, they flipped, because it was too--how would you say it--it was too dangerous for them. See, it was going to interfere probably with their money collections or whatever it was, and we were dealing then with the gang violence, and the whole idea of questioning where the origins of the gangs came from, and they couldn't deal with that.

Smith

And even after they changed leadership, it still was a discussion that just couldn't happen. So in my mind then, they weren't relevant, okay? They were traditional, but just at that point not relevant. SCLC, I never had any dealings with them. I don't remember them doing anything, so from the time I was in Los Angeles--I know that they have a banquet regularly, but I

don't know nothing beyond that, okay? CORE, I had worked a lot with Celes King [III] as a bail bondsman, and so any time we had any kids in trouble where we had to bail them out of jail, we would go to Celes, and we had a working relationship, using my house as the bail. I could just pick up the phone and call, and then he'd get to work and do everything to get that kid out as soon as possible, see. But that was more Celes being Celes, I think, rather than being CORE, you see.

Smith

A lot of work with the teachers was COBA [Council of Black Administrators] particularly, and the members of COBA, and that was good. That was an excellent relationship. It went on until they started yanking COBA around, and that was when you saw black administrators being kind of dismissed and that kind of thing. Then COBA became weaker, and then they didn't have the--how would you call it--the wherewithal.

Stevenson

Right. So that was like the late eighties, early nineties?

Smith

Yes, early nineties, right. And I blame one superintendent that started that. He's dead now, Handler. I noticed as an outsider that once he came in as superintendent, things changed. It took a while before you could see what the change was, but as it happened you could see the black administration and the black agenda being pushed aside. So I worked with them. Then I've done a lot of lecturing with the foster parents, and that was good. We got a lot of things accomplished.

Smith

Now, I began to fall off from dealing with some of those as we got into the nineties, and that was because of the fight I was having with the chairmen. See, in other words they were beginning to interfere with my dealing with those organizations, and they would talk about, "Oh, the fact is, well, you're not in the hospital," and then whatever. I said, "But according to what we're trying to accomplish, this is the way it has to happen, right?" But that wasn't the issue. The point was, I was getting too strong, okay, and that had to stop, okay. But we had a lot of work with the foster parents, both locally and nationally, you know, as a result, see.

Smith

And then we had the Head Start, which I was very much involved with, still am, with the Drew Head Start, the Urban League Head Start. So there are a lot of grassroots organizations, but my major point was still trying to get that message across, okay? And did a lot with parenting, and the whole idea with parenting, like this discussion of single-parent homes, which I don't like that discussion, okay? Then you begin to take the mother and make her feel like she's an idiot, or the worst woman in town, okay, because she won't have some man hanging around the house, okay? And my point is, that's the wrong message. You have her thinking that because she's a lady, she can't

be a father, okay? And she's going to have a job every day, and bring home a check every day, and she's not a father?

Smith

So we have to begin to teach them--my point being, teach them the roles of parenting that an individual does, and the basic point being the child cannot have but one parent at a time. And when he understands that the two parents don't know how to [unclear] to him, he puts one against the other, okay? But when he's dealing with a parent, he can't deal with two. He deals with one. Now, if the other one is never home it makes no difference, if the one that is dealing with him is competent. So that would be the major point of my lecture with parenting is be a confident parent, okay? No such thing as saying, "I have a single-parent home." No, you've just got a house with no man in it, okay, and that may be a blessing, okay. See, so we had to go into those things.

Smith

So I worked with the PTA, sometimes with the churches and different groups within the church. That would be my kind of lecturing, with parents on parenting, and trying to make it conscious skills, skill-oriented. What are you doing? How are you approaching this business of childhood? You can't raise a boy? That's ridiculous. Okay? Who do you think raises boys? Who has ever raised boys? Women. Men don't. Men give the boy one whipping. If you keep talking to the father about the child, he's just going to let it pile up. Then one day he's going to go off on the kid, and then you've got to stop him, okay.

Stevenson

Right. Yes.

Smith

That isn't parenting. You see what I mean? So there were a lot of things we had to lecture on and teach. That's what I miss most about King Hospital, and that's what I think the community is going to miss most about King Hospital. There was a lot of information that came pouring out of that hospital, with programs, with [unclear], with the Drew Medical School, the Department of OB/GYN, all kinds of instructional things out in the community, which, you know, there's no way of making a record of it, but it was very powerful. Okay? Now, I do believe that the government knows that, and that's part of the reason why they had to shimmy it and shake it down, you see.

Smith

We went into the housing projects, especially in the Nickerson Gardens, and we were able to work with the gangs there, and we did that on a spiritual basis, simply that thou shalt not kill. That's just wrong. And then I can go beyond that point. So I don't need to go into no big sociology on that. You know that and I know that. Okay? And we got a good response from that, you see. So when we were able to make money, then we could send kids to

camp, and do a whole lot of things to embellish the lifestyle of the people within the projects, to give them an upward view, make them feel life is worth living, make the kids feel like they're validated, you see what I mean? So all of that is gone, you see. And it's going to take years before the community realizes what they lost, in terms of the real magnitude of that King Hospital, you see.

Stevenson

Going back to the NAACP, what is your take on what's happening with the organization nationally now, with offices being shut down and what seems like downsizing, and also your take on the resignation of the national president? I think his name was Bruce Gordon.

Smith

I haven't kept up with that. I know Julian. Julian was a youngster in Lincoln when I was a student on the campus. I'm sure that the NAACP doesn't get the money that it used to get. There's a lot of competition now for funds. Black people also are not as important as they used to be, and I think that's one message that is not being--

Stevenson

So in terms of the changing demographics nationally?

Smith

No, in terms of the whole idea of why the demographics changed, meaning that we are no longer the workers, okay, and we're no longer to be placated. So we don't really care what you do. We now have a people that are coming in, that business goes on as usual, and we will not allow you to interfere with business, and you're not getting into it, right? Now, when you're still involving off the same old issues of the last century, racism and this, that, and the other, and you want us to give you money in order to fight us, no. Okay? So the money is coming down. Then as a result of that you find with the new generation, they're quick to fight each other. See, there's a quick-- there's what I call the Crip-Blood consciousness. There's always a warring of black against black. Black-against-black crime is not just with gang bangers, it's with black people, okay? So that you find this one's in leadership, and this one is nipping. This one is nipping, see?

Smith

From what I understand, if I may, I think there's a little confusion between the president and the board of the NAACP, which might have led to his resignation? Yes, right. My point is, why couldn't they come under one accord? When did that happen before? Why now? At the most vulnerable time in black history, why you going to pull off with this thing? Then other people are going to sit back and say, "Well, if you're going to war, why am I going to kick money over there?" You follow? What Julian Bond says in attacking Bush is perfectly correct, but you can't do that cold. You just can't wait for the national meeting and then blow him out. You've got to be doing that all along, so folks know that's where you're coming from, okay?

Stevenson

Right. Exactly.

Smith

Now, when you just do that, then people begin to wonder, well, what is your problem, and if it's a personal problem or whatever it is, then they begin to dry up their money, you see. So I think that, again, leadership is not what it should be in terms of being able to see the whole picture.

Stevenson

Right. Okay. I think we may have covered this somewhat before, but could you discuss in particular your teacher inservice training sessions? I saw a lot of those on your c.v. What was the scope, and what were your goals?

Smith

Okay. The teacher-inservice training, the major point was looking at how to reach the black child, and to also admit that the black child was in trouble educationally. And my major point with them was that I'm not going to give you anything about how to teach and what to teach. That's not even important. But the basic point of teaching being that children only relate in a parental sense, okay, that anybody who wants to deal with a child must either father or mother the child, and if you don't do that, nothing you say is of any value. Then if you come into the black community as a white person or Oriental, and you can't see yourself as the mother or father of that child, you can't teach him.

Smith

Children will approach an adult with a test, okay. The first thing they do is they begin to rub up against you. Now, what you're supposed to do is pet them, touch them. That's what mothers do, right? If you don't do that, then they back away from you. The next thing they do is they come up to you with a toy, and they want to play, and if you don't do that they back away, because you're not a mother and you're not a playmate. There's no other interest I have on Earth. Now, here you come trying to make a conversation, and who are you? You don't count, okay? So the point would be, you flunked my test. So many teachers don't realize that just as you test the child, he tested you. What he found out was you don't like me, you don't care for me, you won't parent me, you won't play with me, you're not like a child, okay. What do I need with you? Okay?

Smith

But that doesn't mean that the child doesn't need a teacher, okay. They're looking for a teacher. That's why they're in school. But they can't find a teacher, and the person at the head of the room is not the teacher. So my major point then was that teachers had to begin to reevaluate their processing, and that if you were able to teach a child, you first had to parent the child. And I think the best example I used to use was the lady that taught the blind lady. What was her name? Ann Sullivan? Ann Sullivan.

Stevenson

Who taught Helen Keller.

Smith

She taught Helen Keller, right. She parented her, and that's how she got through. And she refused to allow that child not to be parented, okay? The parents of the child yielded to the child, so the child became the parent of the parents, and they made no progress, okay. And that was my major point with teachers then. That's what we want to get into, the concept. Then you have to have some background on African American history, and African American children. So we have to go into that concept, okay? Then we have to also look at how to approach parents, and what not to do with parents, okay. Then we also have to look at you in terms of where you're coming from, in terms of your own stress and distress. So I used to do a lot with the teachers in terms of the fact that you're so distressed when you step out of your car in the parking lot, you should go home. Okay? You've got enough problems that have nothing to do with the child, and had nothing to do with the school, you see. Those have to be dealt with, see. So we used to go into all kinds of session, role playing and whatever, in that respect.

Stevenson

Is there anything else you'd like to add?

Smith

The one thing about Julian that makes me always say that I give him the benefit of the doubt. Back in the seventies when he was very popular, and he was a senator in Georgia, and we had written him on a number of occasions to try to get him to come to speak, and we wouldn't get any answer. And we would call the statehouse down in Georgia, and we couldn't locate him. And then we'd get the package that we had mailed to him would come back to us, "not at this address." And the address was his office in the State of Georgia statehouse, in the capital. Well, occasionally I'd bump into him, or into some friends, and they'd say, "No, that's the proper address." Well, then, he needs to know that the government is not allowing him to get his mail.

Smith

Then the point would be, well, what was he doing and what was he saying that put him on that list? Well, to me, he had to be doing something favorable for blacks, something that they didn't like, which at that time would have been something that was good. That means that he's on a list, you follow? Now, when I look at him now in the NAACP, I can understand very well that there could be a lot of badmouthing going on around him, based on whatever it is he stands for, and whatever he has done in his past, so I always give him the benefit of the doubt.

Stevenson

Okay, Dr. Smith. Thank you.

Smith

Okay.

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