

ORAL HISTORY T-0031
INTERVIEW WITH DR. ALICE SMART
INTERVIEWED BY DR. RICHARD RESH AND FRANKLIN ROTHER
BLACK COMMUNITY LEADERS PROJECT
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RESH: This is the second of our series of oral history interviews with prominent black St. Louisians. Our subject today is Dr. Alice Smart, retired professor of history and geography at Harris Teachers College. This interview is being conducted by Professor Richard Resh, University of Missouri, St. Louis with the assistance of Franklin Rother. Dr. Smart, could you tell us something about your own background, where you were born and educated?

SMART: Yes, I'll be happy to. I was born in Missouri, at Festus, Missouri, just thirty-seven miles from here. And attended the public schools than and went to the University of Illinois for my Bachelor's degree, to the University of Chicago for my Master's degree. And I did some graduate work at St. Louis University, the University of Michigan, and the University of Berlin. And finally taking the Doctorate from Washington University here in St. Louis. Since that time I've done some seminar work with Kent State University in Ohio and with Hamlin University; I worked there in African history and geography.

RESH: When did you come to St. Louis? Did your family migrate to St. Louis?

SMART; No, just I came here as a teacher at the opening of the Vashon High School. And believe it or not, that was in 1927.

RESH: Do you have any recollections of your early life in Festus? What was it like to grow up in a community like that? What was the community like?

SMART? It was an interesting community for this reason, that it was a segregated community as we know it and yet there were privileges left to the noblesse oblige, you might put it. Our family was a family that was well-known. And the amusing thing, I look back over it now, that when I went off to school and returned home, I was always the subject for the newspaper columns, which was unusual in that day to write up a black girl who was off studying and came back home. But what happened is that every thing that pertained to us, and so it was with the colored families that were regarded in that community as prominent. They received write-ups in the paper, and they received some privileges that the others didn't get. Well, I never worried too much about the separation of and the segregation of races in the town, because there was a certain amount of mixing and mingling.

RESH: Could you tell us something about your family, your father and your mother?

SMART: My mother was a housewife, but she had an interesting history, too, I think. And one of these days, I have in my mind to write something about my family, because I realize

that so many black people have lost their history. I'll be writing it just for the sake of the family that's left. But my history goes back to my great-grandfather on my mother's side. He had been a slave in Missouri he save the Gasconade River up here near Jefferson City and saved the life of his two youngest children, saved their lives. And he was granted his freedom, his wife's freedom, and the freedom of these two children. The man who was his boss died and he was, the two children were sold into slavery. At the time the Civil War broke out, he was suing this person for recovery of damages because of the selling of these two children. Well, the Civil War came and when it was over they were ready to go back to the case. But my great-grandfather had a hemorrhage and died. And then, too, the courthouse burned. That was in Washington County in Potosi, Missouri. The courthouse burned and those records were lost and there was no one to follow through, and so that bit of history was gone. I suppose there's no one now that even remembers it except me because I'm about the last member of my family. I thought that was very interesting.

Now my mother's father was not a slave in the sense that he could be bought and sold. He lived on the plantation with his boss who was also his father. And he lived with his half-brothers on the plantation. And he was called "Free Pete" even though it was during slave times. They called him "Free Pete", his name was Johnson Matthews, and he rode a horse and stayed in the big house just like the half-brothers did.

RESH: What about your father?

SMART: My father came from a little town up here in Missouri. He was born up at New Florence, Missouri. And he came to Festus, well, he went to Potosi and married my mother. And he worked there. One of the first jobs he had was to help clear the ground on which the Pittsburg Plate Glass Company was built in Festus, Missouri, Crystal City. And then he worked in a grocery store and sent us to school. He believed in school, and we all went to school, all of us practically, as long as we wanted to go.

RESH: So you always had encouragement then to pursue your studies after high school?

SMART: Always. I remember very well at the time that my mother died I was studying for the Master's Degree at Chicago. And when I went home, one of the things that she said, almost the last moment before she died, was that she wanted me to go on back to school and to get the Master's Degree and not only that, but to get every degree that I could get in an college or university. And so, though she didn't live to see it, that degree which I was awarded from Washington University in 1952 was the culmination of her desires for me.

RESH: What made you choose the University of Illinois and the University of Chicago?

SMART: I'd be ashamed almost to tell you why I chose the University of Illinois. Well, of course, you couldn't, black people could not attend Missouri University at that time. The universities in Missouri were not open to us. I had a friend in Illinois who lived in Illinois and by going to the University of Illinois, I registered from her home and went in as an in-state student and so I could afford the tuition, which my parents couldn't have afforded otherwise. So, that's why I went to the University of Illinois. And, of course, naturally being a mid westerner and at that time having traveled very little, why I was at home in the middle west, and I let turned to Chicago. Now at Illinois I took as much geography as they had to

offer at the time that I was a student. And I wanted some more geography and I went to the University of Chicago, I particularly wanted to take geography courses offered by certain men. Barrow and Tower who were there at the University of Chicago then, and I wanted some work with Professor-Barrow in geography. So I went to the University of Chicago. Just life later I went to summer school, I wanted to have some courses with Professor James who was an authority in the field of geography. And I went to the University of Michigan and took geography under him.

RESH: This seems to have been 6 fairly common patterns; I know I've read biographical sketches of a number of black teachers in St. Louis. A number of them had taken work in many midwestern universities, so this then, do you think, was apparently a common occurrence?

SMART; I think so, particularly in Missouri, because Lincoln University hadn't reached the standing that it has today. And so if you wanted to get a higher education, really you had to leave the state. And also there was this law that at times when the legislature provided it, you might get a little bit of your tuition paid out of state. There was a bill to pay out-of-state, well, whenever you wanted to take a course that was not offered at Missouri U., if you went away to some other state to take it, why then the state would pay your tuition. And I did collect some tuition for going to Chicago University.

RESH: When you had your Master's Degree from the University of Chicago, what did you do then? Did you go to St. Louis?

SMART: Yes, I taught here until...

RESH: And that would have been in what year?

SMART: In twenty, well, I got my Master's in '29. And I taught here until...After I got my Master's Degree, I wanted to travel some and some geography first hand. And I really began traveling in the 1930's. I wanted to see Germany before the war, and so I went to Germany in 1938. And I decided I'd go to the university, I thought it would be a better way to get acquainted with Hitler through the university. I didn't see Hitler once.

Anyway, I went over there. That was really interesting, too, because everyone was afraid for me when I got to the East Coast; they said, "You are going to Germany, Nazi Germany during Hitler's time?" Well, of course, back here those things are so far removed from us that we don't think too much about them. And I was not too upset over the thought that something might happen to me. But my friends were afraid for me. Of course, later on I realized that perhaps I hadn't done the wisest thing, but I went on anyway. And I enrolled in the university to take German,' because I planned to use German as my language for the doctorate. And I did take German. I met with no unpleasant, oh, one or two unpleasant circumstances only. And I never, it was nothing. But I was glad that I did go at that time because the very next year the war broke out, and so I got to see that part of Europe before the war hit it.

RESH: So your first job then in St. Louis was at Vashon,

SMART: At Vashon.

RESH: What was it like? It was a new school.

SMART: Yes, it was a new high school, and it was over-crowded, and as I recall, there was students everywhere. Even in the dark rooms they had. There was so many students that they had to take all the dark rooms from the laboratories to use them for the students. And there was students and more students. But it was a delightful experience. The students were lovable and a whole lot different from what they are today. I really enjoyed it. And I was teaching the subject that I liked; I was teaching geography. And I really enjoyed it.

RESH: The creation of Vashon came after a great deal of work and commitment on the part of many black leaders in St. Louis. There was quite a Struggle to get the high school established.

SMART: Yes, it was. And I remember when they were building it, and I was standing in someone's home that's been torn down since, and I looked across, and I said to the people, "You know, I'm going to teach in that school." I hadn't even thought of that, but I started in Vashon, and I taught right on through until 1944. At that time I was invited by the President of Liberia, he wasn't president then, he was to be inaugurated that year. And in 1944, I was invited to come to Liberia and do some work with them in curriculum. I was granted a leave of absence during the war in 1944, and I went out to Liberia and worked under President Tubman, Dr. Shad Tubman. He's still president incidentally. And I went back there three years ago to his inauguration, I was invited back the year Vice-President Humphrey was also a guest at that time. And I went back to Liberia that year for the inauguration. So after I was out a half a year or so, I decided I could get married and could do without working. So I did get married because we had a law then that married women couldn't teach. So I got married. Then they asked me to come back as a substitute teacher to help them out in the geography department at Stowe. And I went to Stowe. And I worked a couple years at Stowe as a substitute teacher and in the meantime I had been studying at St. Louis University, had started on my doctorate there. But when Washington University opened, which was in 1948 before Washington University opened to black students, I went in immediately that summer they opened and said they'd accept students and I enrolled. I enrolled for the doctorate at St. Louis University, but I was not a Catholic, and I was indifferent about having to take all the Catholic theology. I was just using it to mark time, because I wanted to go on. So as soon as Washington University opened, I went out and enrolled there. I enrolled in 1948, and I did my year of residence that year, and I took my degree in January of '52, 1952.

RESH: When you were at Vashon, was it your ambition then to teach at Stowe some day?

SMART: Well, I did teach at Stowe. I went over there for a half year and taught. I didn't particularly think in terms of just it teaching at Stowe; my ambition was to teach, I only wanted to teach and I wanted to teach geography. I wanted to teach it on the college level that was why I started traveling and believe it or not, I have made about twenty-five trips abroad. On that basis I started traveling, because I wanted to see all these places that I was teaching about firsthand. And I have seen much of the world firsthand. Every summer when I'd have an opportunity, I would go some place, revisit some places and go back again and again.

RESH: In your years at Vashon, what were some of the problems that you faced there? It

seems to me in recalling some of the history of the early '40s, the Board of Education; of course there was always the problem of funds and discrimination of funds being applied to Negro high schools and white high schools.

SMART: Oh, there was always a problem in the funds. And there was a problem with which discrimination took place in a very subtle way, especially when it came to the question of salary. There were so many ways, so many loopholes that they had to get around before you could get an increase in salary. Now discrimination took place along that line. On paper, it was a beautiful paper job that we were paid equal salaries, but in practice, it was an altogether different story. I remember I think I worked about ten years before I ever, and I came in practically at an increase in salary and a schedule that was almost maximum. I had about two years to work before I would reach the maximum. Well, I stayed there for about ten years. But what you had to do, only maybe one or two would get a promotion in salary for this year. And if for some reason you didn't happen to be one of those that were just it. Well, I was alone, nobody but me with no dependents or anything like that, so I guess it didn't make much difference whether I was raised in salary or not; I guess that was the rationale that was being used.

RESH: Well, during the, did you see any marked changes in the kinds of high school students who came in during the war period?

SMART: Well, now, I did not get an opportunity to see them during the war period, because after I left the high school, when I did go back, I went into the college. So, the students that I saw in those days were certainly not like the students appear to be now from what I can hear. And in fact, I used in my Master's thesis a study of the geographical factors in education. And I used some other areas. And the Vashon students were very, very lovely students. They came out of the ghetto, they were in the poor, part of the town. At that time we had the distinction between East and West St. Louis. East of Grand and west of Grand. For the Negro community, if you lived east of Grand it meant one thing. There was a tendency for the people west of Grand to look down on the people east of Grand.

ROTHER: That's still true.

SMART: Is it still true?

ROTHER: Somewhat, yes, or even West End, too.

SMART: Well, I didn't realize that. Well, those children who went to school came from, most of them, east of Grand; that was where the line was drawn for the school district. They were much pleasanter to work with, much finer to work with, I always found. And even when apprentices would come into the building, I've heard them say they dreaded coming to Vashon. But when they have come there and stayed a day or two and worked there and substituted, why they don't want to get on any other school. And we've had so many fine people, I students can students that have finished who were Vashonites like Judge McMillan for example, there's just one, and Lionel Newsome who was head of Barber Scotia College In North Carolina, then Johnson C. Smith University and Morehouse College In Atlanta; and they wanted bin, for a president of Lincoln University, but he didn't come here. I'm just mentioning some, but those are the types of students that you got. And by and large, many of

those students tried, they did lift themselves above their environment.

RESH: How was the morale of the teaching staff? Was it high?

SMART: It was very, I though it was high. I thought it was rather high there. The teachers took pride in what they were doing, and you didn't always feel like they were just working for a day's pay. Because I remember, and they would do this at that school, they would go out of their way, they'd visit the homes; I visited many a home there to see about the children. And we would collect clothing and things like that to help the children who didn't have clothing. We had a regular bag, a place where we would store clothing and give the clothing to children. Incidentally, you could talk to Dudley G. Mosley who was a principal of Vashon, have you talked to him?

RESH: No, I haven't. That's a good suggestion.

SMART: You might find it interesting to talk with him because he could I meeting students who are saying to me, and they know me, "Oh, you used to teach me at Vashon."

ROTHER: Did you teach at the time that Henry Armstrong was there?

SMART: Yes, oh, yes, he remembers me quite well.

ROTHER: I work with him now up at the Boys' Club.

SMART: Oh, you do, I'm on the board down there. Did you know that?

ROTHER: Yes, I know. He was our first interview.

SMART: Oh, yes, I worked with him and I taught him.

ROTHER: How about Captain Tom Brooks? Do you know him, too?

SMART: I don't remember Brooks. I think I knew him in the school, but I don't remember him as a student. But Brooks and Doctor Augustus Low left here. Oh, many, many outstanding students. C.L. Smith who is the head of the HDC, some part of the HDC over here on Delmar, has that office in the fifty hundred block of Delmar; he was one of our students. Clyde Cahill who is head of HDC, Clyde Cahill was one of my, he was a member of my stamp club; I had a stamp club. Yes, those students were poor but they were striving and trying and, I don't know, the teachers who worked with them seemed to have been able to have done something for them. They gave them encouragement and hope.

RESH: Was there any profound split or debate when you were teaching at Vashon between those Negroes who believed in vocational education and those who believed in going ahead and getting as much education, particularly of a liberal arts nature and going on to college, professional type orientation? Was there any deep split at all?

SMART: No, there was no split that I could see. I don't think so.

RESH: Because earlier in the century that had been quite a debate between Booker T.

Washington and DuBois.

SMART: I don't think it reached that proportion. We offered some trailing in industrial arts and so forth and those students that wanted that course took them and the others took liberal arts curriculum.

RESH: What about prominent black organizations. I noticed when I came in your home, on the wall there is a plaque indicating that you're a life-long member of the NAACP. When did you join the NAACP?

SMART: Oh, I've always belonged I guess, ever since I've known there was a NAACP. But I just took out a life membership about three years ago, completed a life membership of the NAACP.

RESH: Were you active in the local when you were a teacher?

SMART: At times I was. My activities as a teacher had more with the United Church Women, Church Women United it is. And I've worked in the Methodist Church quite a bit. Right now I'm on the Methodist Board for Higher Education, the Methodist Board for Campus Ministry, the Board of the Children's Home, the Methodist Children's Home down in South St. Louis on Jamieson. I teach a Sunday school class, and I am secretary of Missionary Education of the Women', Society 6.f Christian Service. I work with those organizations within the church. But now we have another organization that I am most proud of, and that is the St. Louis Progressive Teacher's Credit Union. It was the first credit union, teachers' credit union that was established here and it was established for black folks by black people, because at that time when you came into St. Louis, the black people had a difficult time getting credit. And we've been able to build that institution up til now; in fact, we just had a meeting last week where the institution is valued at more than five hundred thousand dollars. We have our own building at 2846 Union up there. And I've been president of that credit union now for a number of years. I've been on the board since about 1933 or 4. And I've been the president for the last eight or ten years, and I think I'm proudest of that. now did you see a plaque from the Seventh District? I worked with the Seventh Police District in better community regions. Bob Barton, have you run across his name? I worked with, in fact I used to be program chairman and vice-chairman of the Seventh District. I've just been away from there a year. My son, incidentally, is with the police force; he's a detective. And after he became so very active, well, I gave up some of my work with the police, not that there was a conflict of interests. Bit I have been in other activities, too, I just gave it up. And you might have noticed one of the plaques out there, believe it or not, I was the first black woman to be honored by the Globe-Democrat in being selected "Woman of Achievement."

RESH: When was that?

SMART: 1961. There was a number of write-ups in the paper and so forth. Of course since then some six or seven black women have been selected. But I was one of the first ones.

RESH: You mentioned something a couple minutes ago. I wonder if we could go into in a little more detail. You mentioned two very important institutions for the black community, first the church and second the newspapers. And probably those two institutions are about as

important as anything else. What about the impact of churches and church work for blacks when you were in St. Louis in the 1930's and '40's? What did the churches do? How did they help people?

SMART: Well, I would almost say that their help that they gave was just spiritual help. Although the churches and what the Greek letter organizations, which we shouldn't neglect at all, particularly you had one Greek letter organization, the Alpha Kappa Alpha sorority that has had just dozens and dozens of projects on to help the black people, the black community. They've even had a project where they worked on behavior and decorum, they used to run a column in the black newspaper. The Argus, encouraging the people how to act.

RESH: Oh, the "Better Behavior" column.

SMART: "Better Behavior" column, they had all that. And they gave scholarships, numerous scholarships. We also have the federated clubs, and then you have a lot of private clubs, I mean social clubs that have made contributions; the Acme Art Club is a club that gives music scholarships. And the Links have given scholarships and given to mental health and so forth I think a lot of times the people say that the college people, the educated people will make a little contribution, but the point is that they contribute without any fanfare and it doesn't get noticed, written up. But many things that they do, well, take in the securing of the YWCA. Incidentally, when I came to St. Louis and you went to 1411 Locust Street and wanted to go above the second floor, you had to use the freight elevator if you were black. That is true, use the freight elevator. I didn't go up many times. But that has changed, and I was among the first group to serve on the board of the downtown YWCA. In the '40's they elected black women to the board, and I was selected on the board, in fact I was a delegate to the first national YHCA meeting that they had after the war.

RESH: The Pine Street YMCA was very important wasn't it?

SMART: It was. Oh, it was very important. That was the center for life together. They had basketball games and the like there. It was very, very important. Now the YW had become more important. I served on the Wheatley Board, that's the YWCA, and I was on the Washington University Y, the YWCA board there quite a while.

RESH: When was the Wheatley Board founded?

SMART: Well, it was a branch when I came to St. Louis; it must have been in the 1920's. We moved to the building on Locust Street at 2709 in the '30's, because I remember going out and getting subscriptions and all for the YWCA.

RESH: And then, moving on to the other institution I mentioned, the Negro press. What are your comments about The Argus during the '20's and '30's and later on the St. Louis American? Did you know any of the editors' columnists?

SMART: I knew Mr. Mitchell the original owner, I knew him and as a matter of fact, there was a group of students at the University of Illinois we edited a little paper among ourselves and I got help and inspiration from Mr. Mitchell here. I was on the staff of that little paper we put out. I don't even remember the name of it now either. I saw a copy of it about a couple of years ago. I've forgotten what we called that paper but we got out a little paper and

I got help from Mr. Mitchell, J.E. Mitchell of the Argus who thought it was a fine undertaking for us, and we got that out. But I think the press has contributed just as I feel that the Urban League has contributed. You didn't mention the Urban League, but I think it has helped.

RESH: Did you know Mr. John dark?

SMART: Oh, yes, his wife was here as my houseguest in February. She lives in California now, she was a former teacher at the teachers' college.

RESH: He was not a native of St. Louis, was he?

SMART; No, hi-a home originally was in Louisville, Kentucky. But the Urban League has helped, I think all these agencies have helped. The school people, the Vashon people particularly have helped. They were among the first to begin this interchange of programs between the white high schools and the black high schools. And Dr. Mosby, Reba Mosby, you might want to interview her, Dr. Mosby used to help with those programs.

ROTHER: She's on our list.

SMART: I think Ruth Green, I don't know at which school she is, but she used to help with those programs, too. But Dr. Mosby helped in integrating the school system when we'd have exchange programs, they used to bring programs to Vashon and Vashon people would go out with these programs. And I think all those factors have contributed.

RESH: When you were teaching at Vashon then you moved over to Stowe, who, in your opinion, were the most important black leaders in St. Louis? I won't prompt you now with any suggestions.

SMART: Who were the most important black leaders?

RESH: Just throw out some names and some impressions of these people.

SMART: Well, I think Dr. Harris will have a place in the life of St. Louis in some ways. She was associated primarily with Stowe Teachers' College. One of the things that she did especially for the students there was to bring to them a sort of cultural background as was emphasized in no other way, I think elsewhere. She taught the students, she attempted to have things that are a very high cultural level, high plane. She had the artists' recitals, which they brought to Stowe. And Phyllis Skyler was one of them.

RESH: Yes, she played there and during World War II, Langston Hughes.

SMART: Langston Hughes, yes, was brought there.

RESH: And Claude McKay.

SMART: And Claude McKay, yes, they brought them, and coming back, I mentioned the sorority; the Alpha Kappa Alpha sorority was the first group to bring Marian Anderson here. The last time she was here I was talking with her and reminded her of that and she

remembered it. It was the first group to bring her here. And so Dr. Harris did quite a bit culturally for the community, I would say.

RESH: She was a native of St. Louis?

SMART: No, Cincinnati, I believe.

RESH: Do you have any personal reminiscences about her? You must have what kind of person was she?

SMART: I always marveled when I heard her, because she had the most marvelous memory of anybody I ever heard of. She was great in attention to details, meticulous almost, to details. But she had the most marvelous memory. She could sit there and she could say, "I heard so-and-so say this," and the quote, "in 1940 such-and-such a man said this thing at such-and-such a place." And I'm trying to think of, of course, John T. Clark played his part. There was a Mr. Cook of the YMCA and he was pastor also of Antioch Baptist Church, his influence was felt here.

RESH: What about any political figures.

SMART: Well, I think the most, now there was, oh, one of the first Negro men that went to the legislature.

RESH: Was this Kensworth?

SMART: No, no, it wasn't Kensworth. Walther Moore, Walther Moore was among the first. Ted McNeal, he has certainly done outstanding work in the community, we're especially grateful to him as a teacher at Harris Teachers' College. He was the one who helped us to keep Harris going, because Harris was about to fold up. And he's done a marvelous work there.

RESH: During World War II, Mr. McNeal organized the St. Louis chapter of the March on Washington Movement. Do you have any recollections of that?

SMART: Not too much of that. That was associated with, let's see, wasn't Dave Grant connected with that?

RESH: Yes, Mr. Grant was involved in it.

SMART: And Robert Witherspoon, I remember him. And, incidentally, Dave Grant, Robert Witherspoon and Estbe, lawyer Estbe who used to live right across the street there, and lawyer Redmond who does live there, they were connected with the March on Washington, I think. But they were also connected with the suit that was brought by Margie Tolliver to equalize educational opportunities between Harris and Stowe. They engineered that suit. The suit was brought to force the Board of Education to make the Stowe Teachers' College equal to the Harris Teachers' College.

RESH: These lawyers, particularly Henry Estbe and Mr. Witherspoon were active I know in fighting restrictive covenants in housing, too. And that must have been a very prominent,

active law firm. Did you have any contact with Mr. Redmond when he was involved as president of the Local NAACP?

SMART: No, I didn't, I haven't had too much contact with him. Of course, he lives across the street from me.

RESH: Yes, we're hoping to interview him in a couple of weeks. There was a prominent, or at least it seemed certainly at the time, I think in 1940, Democratic committeeman elected in the November elections of 1940.

SMART: Who was that, Jordan Chambers?

RESH: Jordan Chambers, Did you know him?

SMART: No, I just knew him when I saw him. I didn't know him very much. I haven't followed politics very much, I'm an independent voter and so I haven't delved too much into politics.

RESH: Is your attitude on that symptomatic of, or was symptomatic of a lot of teachers at Vashon and Stowe?

SMART: I think of St. Louis in general. I think so.

RESH: That's very interesting that this particular group has not been so involved politically. Because, of course, there are dangers in getting too involved politically, I suppose.

SMART: Yes, well, I don't know. I never failed to vote, but I just haven't been too concerned, I mean too disturbed. I'm concerned, but I haven't been too disturbed.

RESH: What basically was the purpose of your teaching geography and history other than to give people certain factual knowledge in the course of the subjects? Did you want them to come away with anything broader than that?

SMART: Much so. Any student that has had a course with me comes away with certain objectives whether he practices them or not. And one of the objectives that we set up is that in taking this course you should come out of it, if you have prejudices, which I'm sure you do have, you should lose some of them. And if you aren't any more unbiased when you get through with this course than you were when you went into it, then I have failed somewhere along the road. Because in every course I teach, one objective is to help us lose our prejudices and become more unbiased with regard to other people. As we put it, in understanding other people, that's our main objective. To try to understand other people. And we have to realize that as Americans, that other people necessarily have to do things like we do them. We go into an area and if the plumbing is poor or something, immediately we brand those people as inferior. It doesn't mean that they're inferior; many times those people are using just what they have in their environment. And the environmental, or control of the environment is really great when we begin to look at it thoroughly. We used to think, look at the different African tribes that wear little or no clothing. Well, if you've been in that area and you know how high the temperature can get and when it's raining how wet it can be, you can quite understand why they would put off so much of their clothing. In the first place, of

course, too, they don't have it to put on, and they have been accustomed to it and they accept it. And if you're in that area, you just don't pay any attention to it. Babies this high and on up, I've seen a girl, oh, sixteen, seventeen years old it would appear to be with nothing on but pure beautiful headdress and a string of beads around her neck and around her waist, and that's it. And an interesting thing of morals is that you see that girl, and from the standpoint of morality, there isn't a man that would touch her. Would violate her virginity. Because until she ties the lapa, they call it "tying the lapa" at which time the girl will put a piece of cloth around her waist, that's the way they do. They just take a piece of cloth, they don't sew it, and that becomes a skirt, and wrap it around their waist and tuck it in, economy, see? And so until she ties the lapa, which means that when's married, then she's free to go that way. No one would violate her virginity. They have rigid codes among people. We tend to think that all these people and other countries are barbarian, they're semi-civilized and all. We don't realize in Ghana, for example, you have one of the richest civilizations that existed in Africa. The Ghanian Empire, or you can go down to Bulawayo in southern Rhodesia and go out to the Zimbabwe ruins. You have civilizations there that far anti-date anything in Europe. And we're just unaware and go on ignoring the situation. And with those kinds of views naturally we have a distorted view of peoples. And so my objective has been always in teaching to try to get them to understand other people, and to realize that the fact that they're doing things differently doesn't necessarily brand them as either inferior or superior.

ROTHER: This kind of goes with the political set up, too, in different countries being so different. And some countries are democracies, some countries are not.

SMART: That's true. I've always felt that democracy isn't necessarily the best system for everybody. We haven't known anything else and we've come up on it. But you take some group that have never come up on, take the Germans, for example. The Germans have been accustomed to regimentation. They're the most regimented people, and you might call it a democracy, but what they've had in Germany throughout has been the greatest regimentation that you can find anywhere. And the women of, in '38 when I was there, I've been back since, too, but in 1938 they were just as humble as, and subservient to the men as could be. Whatever the man said, that was it, that didn't seem to bother them too much by themselves. And even during the war when Hitler was in power, there were a few who would say to me, "Oh, I wish the Jews had a land of their own." Of course, the ridiculousness of that is that was the only land they knew, just like this is the only land I knew. Now why should I be expected to go somewhere else, I don't know anything, about any other land, and neither did those German Jews know anything about any other land, that was their land. But Hitler used them as a scapegoat just as the black man has been used as a scapegoat. But my philosophy of government is that you don't try necessarily to make all governments alike. If these people want democracy all right, I think democracy is good for me, but I don't think it would be necessarily good for everybody else. I couldn't live in Russia, for example, I couldn't live there, because there's absolute regimentation, and these people that are going about crying for, to be able to do this, take the rioting for example. What rights have you young man to say to me, "I don't want ROTC on this campus"? If I want ROTC, as a student, I have a right to have it. Just like you have a right to take a liberal arts course or take music if it's offered there. Now why, because I don't want to take it, nobody's forcing you to take it, then why should you burn the ROTC building down. Because you don't want to take it. They've lost something in their thinking and their perspective, that's been real sad when they take that position. I have a right to do this, you have a right, but you don't have a right to deprive me

of my rights. Now in securing your rights, particularly some of these rights, you take away the rights of others. Now I can see striking for jobs, I can see how a black man has been in this country and lived here all of his days, he feels that the public places ought to be open to him; he feels that he ought to have an opportunity to get a job and make a living. But I don't see where he has the right to go in and burn down buildings, throw bombs and destroy in order to get his rights, because we have the legal method. And these people who are saying do this and do that, they would no more try that in the Soviet Union than I would try to fly this jet plane across the Atlantic. They wouldn't do it. You don't dare speak out. I was in the Soviet Union, and you don't dare open your mouth against this. If you're a member of the party, all well and good. But I have seen them in the Soviet Union rush into a crowd flaying their sticks here and there separating them. Crowds that had simply for this reason, some Americans were touring over there and they went out to a church out, from Moscow and they had given out some pamphlets to the people, the pamphlets were printed in Russian and all they said was something about God. They were religious sayings taken from the Bible, "The Lord is with you always," expressions like that and all. The police rounded up those poor people, they confiscated all of those pamphlets, and they hustled the tourists who were a religious group that was giving them out, and they hustled them into a bus and got them started back to town and drove those people away, the native people who were there. It was really awful. And I saw several occasions like that. I saw a girl, I talked with her, an American girl who was in Moscow who had been ordered, they had confiscated her car, she had a car and was driving through; she happened to have a Newsweek Magazine on the seat in her car, and someone saw it, and they arrested her and took her before some judge. They wrote up a lot of stuff in Russian which she didn't understand and she refused to sign it, and they gave her twenty-four hours to get out of the country. Now that's the type of freedom that you run into and these people who are clamoring and talking about Communism, Communism, they haven't the slightest idea what Communism is like. Communism is all right if you do absolutely what you are told to do and have no thought beyond what you're told to do. Then you get along fine in Communism.

ROTHER: What about some of the other areas that you traveled to, other nations in either Europe or in Africa? How did you find their systems?

SMART: Well, Switzerland is lovely. Switzerland is delightful. Norway and Sweden are very liberal, very fine systems. India, you still have that division there. In India there's just so much poverty that it's pathetic, you can't make much judgment. But you still have that division of people, they tried to bridge that gap, but they haven't done it fully. I was in Japan before the war, and I was in Japan since the war. Now, Japan, I think, is more adaptable than most of the people. They have taken on Western ways. Now the first time I was in Japan, I felt this about it; that the Japanese have the ability to pick out the best thing that they want in a civilization and take that. They took the best things that they wanted out of Western civilization and adapted it to themselves. But other things they didn't. And when we say that we have, oh, our papers and our press writes that we have democratized Japan; Japan isn't democratized. They are sold on their traditions so far as the government is concerned, and so far as the Mikado is concerned. They're not democratized. They have some freedom, but they were not too unhappy with the kind of regimen that they had. Even before they weren't too unhappy. There's probably more unrest now than there was previously.

RESH: This brings a point out I want to ask you. Youth always chooses, in one man or

another, certain models to emulate among adults. When you were teaching at Vashon and Stowe, what models did the young Negroes choose to emulate? Who were their heroes at that time in St. Louis or in the nation at large?

SMART: Oh, I'm just wondering, I don't know whether I can answer that or not, I wonder. I don't think I can answer it.

RESH: I suppose some athletes who would have been in a prominent position, Joe Lewis, certainly, I've read, at least in some accounts...

SMART: Yes, Joe Lewis. Well, Henry Armstrong was a Negro. But in baseball, it was Jackie Robinson and the catcher, Campanella, and Don Newcombe, they were three idols.

RESH: Because there's such a marked a change now, for one thing, models are so much younger, people in their very early 20's, whether one disapproves of these models or not, but Carmichael, Rap Brown, in other words these are political, prospectively political models now.

SMART: And I don't think they really appeal; I think, they've lost much of their appeal now. That Chicago trial and all the other things that have been going on. I think they've lost. In fact, they can't find Rap Brown.

RESH: Yes, a hero who's invisible it seems now.

SMART: I think they've lost.

RESH: Well, we're running towards the end of the tape. Let me ask you just one more question. Then if there are more things you want to talk about we can turn the tape over. But if you were starting out today, as a high school teacher, or a college teacher, what advice would you give to a young black woman or man? Do you think, it would be harder today, easier today? Would there be advantages in starting today, would there be disadvantages in starting today?

SMART: Well, there's no easy path to success, unquote. But success means hard work. If you want a thing badly enough, go for it. But you have to want it, and you have to work toward it. Everything, if I have achieved anything, everything that I have achieved has been at a price that I've had to pay, which has included sacrifice, burning the midnight oil. I have stayed up many a night all night long studying and get up and go to class or go to school the next day, class or a teacher. And if you want it hard enough and, well, my situation there was a little difficulty, because I was among the first to go to Washington University, and I had a number of hurdles, in fact I was turned down when I attempted to enter. And I was just almost furious and frantic because the only reason for turning me down was a matter of my skin color. But I was first turned down, but I just didn't give up, I: just insisted.

RESH: Who helped you break the barriers there? Was it the NAACP?

SMART: No, I went in. Well, they wrote me, the school said that they were going to take a few people on trial, and I went up asking for the, saying that I wanted to go for the doctorate. So, of course, that was unheard of. You were doing well just to enter the school and I enter

right off wanting the doctorate. And I: was given a number of excuses, they attempted to give me the run around, well, that I was taking work, at St. Louis U. and I was getting along very well, but it wasn't what I wanted. I wanted to work in my field where I could get more geography. And I said, "I met your qualifications, and you're supposed to be able to do research, "• I put my master's thesis on the table for the admission officer, I also put articles that I had written for the old historical bulletin out in the library and I said, "I have the ability to do research, I know that, because I've done it. And I've met all of your requirements, so what now?" And they told me, "Well, we'll have to consider it. You come by tomorrow." And I went home, and I almost went into a fit. I was so angry, I screamed and I...Here I had, they didn't even turn me down in Berlin, I had no trouble entering the University there. And all over the country; and I come here in my own hometown of St. Louis and I'm turned down. Well, you can imagine what that does...

RESH: That was in 1948?

SMART: 1948, yes. Well, I got up the next morning and they said. "Well, we'll call you." They didn't call me. I said/I'm going out there and they're going to have to tell me something." I went out and sat. I staged a sit-in strike almost. I sat, and I sat until everybody had gone and I sat until they finally gave me another interview. Well, the person was none other than Frank Wright on the board, and I said, "Now, do you know..."I called several names, "Mrs... Parkview, Dr. Ernest Cowdry (cancer research)" and I said, "By the way, I am sure you know your wife, Mrs. Wright," I had worked with her with the Church Women United. I said, "So if you want to know anything more about me, why don't you go ask one of those People?" I know what he was thinking. I said, "Go ask one of them if, maybe they could tell you something about it." I wanted to tell him that maybe they can tell you that I know which is the proper knife and fork to use and I don't lick my fingers.

RESH:So you went to the administration building at Washington University and you were determined to get in after having gone to the University of Illinois and the University of Chicago.

SMART: Michigan.

RESH: Michigan^ University of Berlin. And you finally wore them down.

SMART: Yes, and I entered Washington University.

RESH: And how many were there at that time, how many Negroes were there?

SMART: Now, they had been admitting them to the school of social work, but there were very few, four or five. Mr. Smith, the principal here, William T. Smith, was in one of my classes. But there were not very many admitted. Mr. Martin, Meriwether Martin, was on campus at that time, and we were among the first who were admitted in that group. And I think C. Spencer Tocus who has left here and gone to California, he was a former principal. But there were not very many of us in that first group. But once we were in there, there was no problem. I didn't seem to have had any problems. I did have one problem in which I had an instructor who had marked my paper incorrectly. And the first test paper he gave, he handed back to me, and I had a low grade on my test paper and yet he did this, he answered

the questions in class. Well, as he answered the questions in class, I reread my paper and I had found that I had answered the questions correctly. So I waited until after class and I went up to him and I asked him if he would mind looking at my paper again, I had listened to what he said and how he answered, and I felt that I had answered the questions as he indicated. And I thought that the paper deserved a better grade than that. So he said, "Sure, sure, I'll take it and look over it." And I don't know how he managed to mark it but he gave, my paper was an A paper. You know this was my first paper and I didn't want to start out expecting, aspiring to the doctorate. Well, actually he became my best friend, he was on my board and he was so much help to me. And he was none other than the man who used to be superintendent of the schools for the state, Charlie Lee. And he was a jewel when it came to all the hurdles that I had to go over and everything like that. He was my special advisor. And he was really a jewel; he really helped me in getting across and getting through. So he marked my paper and he said, well, you see, my name begins with S and when he got down to that far he was probably tired and he was so disgusted with the papers he just glanced through it and went on.

RESH: He wouldn't be the first teacher.

SMART: I understood perfectly.

RESH: Well, Dr. Smart, I want to thank you very much for sharing some of your experiences with us. This tape was made on June 10, 1970, in the home of Dr. Alice Smart.