

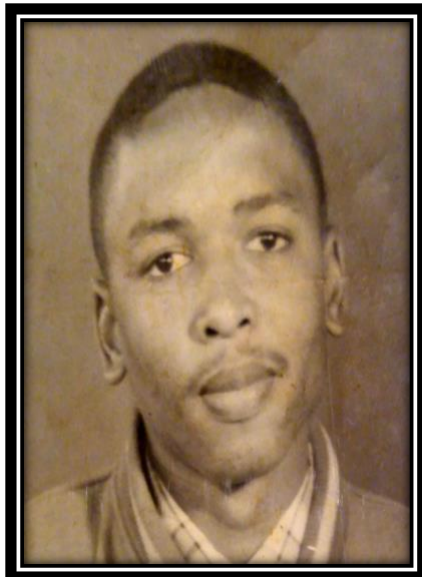
PROFILE OF RESISTANCE

Frank Smith Jr.

organizer, voting rights activist

“We had to do it. You couldn’t wait on somebody to do it. Because, as they say: It’s your turn at bat now. What are you going to do?”

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Background

Born: September 17, 1942

Frank Smith Jr. grew up in Newnan, Georgia. He was aware of racism early in his life. As a young Black child, he was taught to stay away from White people. His parents warned that it could get him into trouble. One day when he was in high school, he politely refused to give up a gas pump for a white man. The racist man threatened to kill him. Smith realized he put his family in danger.ⁱ

Smith graduated from Central High School in 1959. Soon after, he went to Morehouse College in Atlanta, Georgia. While he was in college, he joined the Civil Rights Movement. He left college during his senior year to help Black people register to vote. Later on, he went to the Union Institute in Ohio to earn his Ph.D..

Smith’s Resistance

In the 1960s, Black people faced many obstacles that prevented them from voting. This is because racist White people did not want them to vote. Many families were afraid to even try because their names would be written down on a list that meant someone might try and come after them. Frank Smith Jr. convinced families to keep on trying to vote. He wanted them to be brave. He told them the risks were worth it to make their voices heard. Smith was one of the founders of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. He organized protests and marches to support Black Americans’ right to vote during the Freedom Summer of 1964.ⁱⁱ

Achievements

Frank Smith Jr. continued to support the Black community. In the late 1970s, he served as a member of the D.C. Board of Education. Starting in 1982, he became a member of the D.C. City Council and stayed for 16 years. He also helped to build the African American Civil War Memorial and museum in Washington DC.

