

## FROM THE SEA ISLANDS OF SOUTH CAROLINA TO THE SOUTH BRONX TO HOLLYWOOD: FRANKLIN OJEDA SMITH

By Robert Sancho

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New York: Franklin O. Smith was born on the Sea Islands of South Carolina in 1944. The family only spoke Gullah, an African/English dialect. In 1945, Franklin's mother left her family in South Carolina and came to New York City to work as a domestic servant. It took her nine years to save enough money to be able to transport the rest of her family up north to the South Bronx.

In his new elementary school, Franklin was placed in a class with students that only spoke Spanish. The teacher only spoke English. This was where Franklin first met a classmate who would become a brother- Mario, a son of the Ojeda family who had come from Puerto Rico. Franklin subsequently became an adopted member of the Ojeda family. He completed his elementary education at PS 25 located on 149th Street and Wales Avenue, then JHS 52 and Morris High School in the Bronx. The latter two of these schools (JHS 52 and Morris HS) are infamous as institutions attended by former Secretary of State, Collin Powell.

An outstanding athlete, in his senior year at Morris High School, Franklin played the guard position on the basketball team and was named to the 2nd Team All NYC HS Baseball Team. In basketball, he played with and against players whose history is documented in the Disney movie- Glory Road. He played shortstop and his batting average as he recalls was about .440. He also starred on the famous Eastchester baseball team of that era, and was approached to sign professionally. Instead, Franklin decided to pursue higher education at Hampton Institute in Hampton, Virginia.

In those days there were no separate divisions in colleges. There were two regulatory authorities (NCAA for the larger and NAIA- National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics) for the smaller colleges. Franklin won the NAIA National Batting Championship in his freshmen year at Hampton. He modestly says, "My batting average was approximately .542!!!!"

After college Franklin joined the National Teacher's Corp. and earned his Master's Degree; after which in 1969, he became a member of the famous research think tank –The American Institutes for Research.

In 1971 Franklin was back in graduate school at the University of Massachusetts in Amherst where he was awarded a doctorate in 1973. In the fall of the year, Franklin joined the faculty of Richard Stockton college of New Jersey where he has been a professor for 34 years.

Anyone else would have called it a successful career; however, since his elementary school days, Franklin was interested in acting. In the year 2000, at the age of 56, Franklin began taking acting lessons. Since then, he has become a busy commercial actor and has appeared in a dozen films as a character actor, working in films with such stars as Vanessa L. Williams, Andre Baugher and David Morse. Currently, he can be seen in the Mark Wahlberg hit movie, Invincible. Just last week, Invincible was the top ticket seller of all the currently released motion pictures. Later this fall, you can see Franklin in episodes of The Wire on HBO Television.

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