

Inducted November 29, 2016



John Smith, Sr.

John Smith, Sr. was born and raised in LaGrange, Georgia, and graduated from Morehouse College in 1958 with a bachelor's degree in mathematics. He briefly served in the U.S. Army and began his work with The Atlanta Inquirer in 1961, just months after Herman Russell, Jesse Hill, Julian Bond and others helped create The Inquirer to fill a void that other news outlets were not covering – the fast-moving and crucial campaigns of the burgeoning Atlanta Student Movement. John quickly became the Advertising Manager, then Vice President, and later Publisher and Chief Executive Officer.

During this critical time, young people, led by students from Atlanta University, Morehouse, Spelman, Clark College and Morris Brown Colleges, organized sit-ins, freedom rides and other acts of nonviolent protests. Many were arrested to protest the Jim Crow laws and customs that segregated the U.S. along racial lines.

Those participating in the Student Movement were barely able to attract even minimal news coverage. The Atlanta Inquirer began to tell the city and the world about the dangerous, courageous and history-making demonstrations. It was news that much of Atlanta did not want to hear, but it was news that powerful leaders in the city and state could not ignore, thanks to John Smith, Sr. and The Atlanta Inquirer. The Inquirer shed light on the truth and helped lead Atlanta toward integration without the violence that erupted in, and damaged, other cities across the country.

Under Smith's leadership as publisher and CEO, and as a leader in the National Newspaper Publishers' Association, The Atlanta Inquirer continues to cover news as it did in the beginning, as the paper proclaims in its masthead, "To Seek Out the Truth and Report it Without Fear or Favor."