

Interview with Mrs. Laura Smalley, Hempstead, Texas, 1941

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Mrs. Laura Smalley: Mrs. Adeline, our mistress, you know. And just caught her by her wrist this way, you know. Both of them pushed down in a rocking chair. And when she, Mrs. Dapheny, come home she was crying. And Mrs. Dapheny asked her what was the matter, you know. She told Mrs. Adeline that Martha Albert hurt her, hurt her wrist. And ah, and she ??? asked her then, [then told her (?)], "What you doing in this house here hurting old mistress?" Say, she wasn't hurting old mistress. She used to old mistress, when "I [help her she started down (?)]." But, but the thing that old woman, poor old woman carried her to the peach orchard and, and whupped her. And, you know, just tied her hands this way, you know, around the peach orchard tree. I remember that just as well, look like to me I can. And around the tree and whupped her. Well, she couldn't do nothing, but just kick her ??? . Just kick her feet. But they, they just had her clothes off pull her to her waist, you know. Yes, didn't have her plum naked. But they had her clothes down to her waist. And every now and then they'd [whup her (?)]. You know, and then, snuff the pipe out on her, you know. Snuff the pipe out on her. You know, with embers in the pipe. [I don't believe we (?)] ever seed [seen] the pipe smoking.

John Henry Faulk: Blow them out on her?

Mrs. Laura Smalley: Hmm. Hmm.

John Henry Faulk : Good god.

Mrs. Laura Smalley: ???

John Henry Faulk: Did she scream?

Mrs. Laura Smalley: Yeah! I think she was. I think she did. But you see there was we was daring to go out there, where it was, you know. Because ah, our old master would whup us and then, Uncle Saul, Uncle Saul would whup us. You see, that is the overseer, Uncle Saul. Her papa was a overseer but he had to whup her. He whupped her too. He really sure did whup her. Well, he ah, he ah whupped her so that at night they had to grease her back. Grease her back. I didn't know what kind of grease we had, but they sure greased her back, at night you know, that way. We just grease her back. And ah, so after him, after so long on them, so, whupping being so long, that way they quit. They quit and give her her dinner. Late that evening they give her dinner. Late that evening of course she been

whipped so bad then, you know, she didn't want to eat, you know. If for they whipped you half a day, you ain't want to eat, ??? you know.

John Henry Faulk: *[laugh]* That's right.

Mrs. Laura Smalley: Because a little child, you can whip a little child here now, he'd get mad, you know, and don't want to eat nothing. *[steam engine blows whistle]* ??? he won't eat. So Uncle Saul, and him, he, he was going whup my momma, who had a brother, oldest brother named, Cal Heck. And he was going whup my, my mother's boy, pack water, and she was going fight them. *[laugh]*

John Henry Faulk: Is that right?

Mrs. Laura Smalley: Yes, sir. She was going fight them. You see, one portion of the people belonged to Mr. Bethany, and one portion, you know, belongs to, belongs to his wife. Wife, you know, just like, you know, you have a lot of niggas, you know, and they give you a portion of them, and your wife a portion of them. Her people give you people, people for them and your people give you some. Well that makes two parts. You got a part and your wife got a part, you know—

John Henry Faulk: Uhmm. Uhmm.

Mrs. Laura Smalley: —of colored folks that way. And, so Mrs. Adeline wouldn't let my, let ah, Uncle Saul whup her. That was her side, you know. That wasn't her nigga, she wouldn't let Uncle Saul whup her, that way. But it call her a sassy nigga. That's what they call wouldn't let Uncle Saul whup her. Now if the boy packing water, you know, you pack water, you know?

John Henry Faulk: Hmm

Mrs. Laura Smalley: All day and if Uncle Saul stayed late, you know, when they got to the water where Uncle Saul was, those field were, they was pitching out them. Was pitching out, as fast as children couldn't get to them. You know. And she whup them if they let them.

John Henry Faulk: Hmm.

Mrs. Laura Smalley: Yeah, she whup them if they let them. Now, and ah, and ah, and so, Uncle Bethany, you know, he wasn't, he my daddy, he wasn't, wasn't ah—

Unidentified Woman Interviewer: He's your daddy?

Mrs. Laura Smalley: Ummm. He wasn't, now don't let me ??? . He, he wasn't born, he wasn't, he wasn't [married (?)] to Bethany' niggas, you see. He was a Pane.

John Henry Faulk: Pane?

Mrs. Laura Smalley: My old stepdaddy, yeah. He was a Pane. Ummm. He was a Pane. And ah, he'd do everything, you know, he, he would, they couldn't whup him. [Tha' man (?)] couldn't whup him. And his head, his head was red and he was red.

John Henry Faulk: Well, where'd he come from?

Mrs. Laura Smalley: Well, I think he come from at Louisiana. Somewhere. Anyhow, he come from somewhere. Couldn't exactly care where he come from. Because my momma come from Mississippi. And ah, well, he, he, he back up, you know. I don't know what, all I ever seed was corn ??? .

John Henry Faulk: Yes, he was rail thin.

Unidentified Woman Interviewer: Rail thin.

Mrs. Laura Smalley: Yes, sir. Yes, sir.

John Henry Faulk: Yes.

Mrs. Laura Smalley: Well, he back up and ??? and they wouldn't, they wouldn't whup him. You'd give a stick and carry him off. Yes, sir. And ah, he's a giant big old man, you know [what I mean (?)]? Made, he wouldn't let them whup him, you see. And the master wouldn't let them hurt him, because he let the, the ah, you know, the ah, overseer, you know, they whup you. The master make him whip you, what overseer, when you see him. And they wouldn't let overseers whup him at all, oh no. And their old master told him, run in the ??? , or something like that, don't hurt him. You know, don't ??? . Don't whup him. He wouldn't whup him. Well, I tell you something, no he wouldn't whup him.

John Henry Faulk: *[laugh]*

Mrs. Laura Smalley: No, sir. He wouldn't whup him.

John Henry Faulk: Well, how would they, how would they punish him then?

Mrs. Laura Smalley: Give him a ear of corn. *[laugh]* Give him ear of corn. Just like, you know, you take a, you know, you give me a ear of corn and ah that'll do for my dinner, or my breakfast. You come

home to dinner, he say you give me ear of corn. Say, you going shed it off him ??? . ??? and eat it. ??? on and eat it. Night come and they give him ear of corn, and ah, tha's the way they fed him, you know. Punishing him, you know. Wouldn't give him nothing to eat. Until he look like he was moving along too slow, too fast with that, you know. Too good.

John Henry Faulk: *[laugh]*

Mrs. Laura Smalley: Too good for that, you know, just giving him corn. And he's eating it and all and drinking water go on just the same. That's so they wouldn't give him none. Give him none.

Unidentified Woman Interviewer: [Hmm (?)].

Mrs. Laura Smalley: They wouldn't give him nothing, you know. But they let them drink water, you know. And ah, he lived just the same. And you, and he, he lived with mamma twenty, thirty-two years, that before he died. Before he died. And, and he never did have a scar on him, my father, that old boss put on him.

John Henry Faulk: What approximately they paid for this, this ah, your stepdaddy? How come ah, ah —

Mrs. Laura Smalley: No Pane, you know. Just, just, he wasn't a Pane. They said [Prade (?)] but he was [what you call them (?)]? But you see, I don't know what they paid for him; they paid for him, you know.

John Henry Faulk: And, I guess he was worth so much they didn't want to hurt him.

Mrs. Laura Smalley: Didn't want to hurt him. And ah, he ah, you see, he had belonged to two, two sets of folks. Two sets, of people, you know. And he had, he, he would belongs to a Pane, then he belongs to a, some people, you know, in [Brenwood (?)]. They all stayed with the, you see he wouldn't, wouldn't do right and they'd sell him. They'd sell him, you know. Just like, you know, out here old nigga, you know, I wouldn't act right sell me to somebody else. And wouldn't act right what they would be a for not in good hand, you sell him to somebody else. That's the way they would do that nigga.

John Henry Faulk: I see.

Mrs. Laura Smalley: They traded down ??? .

John Henry Faulk: Well, what about getting married? How did they go about marrying the slaves?

Mrs. Laura Smalley: Well, they told me they jumped over a broom backward. [*laughter from all*]

Mrs. Laura Smalley: I don't know. Said, they told me they step over a broom backwards. I don't know.

John Henry Faulk: Well, did they have church? Did the slaves have a church?

Mrs. Laura Smalley: Oh, oh, I, I never remember no church. Momma said, we're all in church, I didn't remember that part of it. All in church. And would have be a tub, tub of water, sitting just like this thing is, you know, and that would catch your voice. And they would, they would have church around there tell them all to get around the tub. Get around that tub.

John Henry Faulk: Old master didn't want them in the church.

Mrs. Laura Smalley: We don't have no church. No. We didn't have no church because. And um, old master come along in one of them, one was ah, was there, having church around the tub and we was down praying. And say he's down and he prayed and just a prayed and old master come in and just a prayed and he come in and he gave me all of them, "Get up from there." We didn't get up, we just a praised him. And old master couldn't ??? . We [kept (?)] prayed in him and asking the "Lord have mercy on my master. Lord have mercy on old master. Lord have mercy on old master." Say, "I sure is getting my butt whupped."

John Henry Faulk: Hmm.

Mrs. Laura Smalley: That's how you have mercy on old master. I'm dealing with master. Folk didn't even care for him wouldn't get up, you know. Just flinch, you know, flinch. Got a person, you know, when person hit you, you know, you flinch. You just pray for old master. Old master step back and fell dead in line and [kick you (?)] naked. Dead in line and [kick you (?)] naked. When ever you stop praying, you know, he, he [said (?)], "Go on [head (?)] and pray."

John Henry Faulk: Hmm.

Mrs. Laura Smalley: Said, "Go on head and pray." Because we wouldn't stop. And ??? that was for the Lord, you know, that because of that.

John Henry Faulk: Yeah, the Lord works a lot of things.



Mrs. Laura Smalley: Yeah, sir. Because the Lord will suffer him stay down there get that whupping where he prayed. You know, just keep up praying. You know, I think I jumped up. I didn't know. S-no way for me I jumped up. Because a whupping was—

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