

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

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[recording begins with a fragment of the Unidentified Woman Interviewer's laughter]

Mrs. Laura Smalley: I didn' know. I know some of the white folks knew it wasn't nice. Way they beat them.

Unidentified Woman Interviewer: Of course they do but they don't want to tell on themselves.

John Henry Faulk: Do you, how long do you lived in Hempstead? Here?

Mrs. Laura Smalley: Twenty-two years. Right here. Twenty-two years.

John Henry Faulk: Do you remember when they had the big race riot here a long time ago?

Mrs. Laura Smalley: No, sir.

John Henry Faulk: When all the, all the colored folks and white folks got in, got in a fight?

Mrs. Laura Smalley: No, sir. I wasn't here then I know.

John Henry Faulk: Do you remember it?

Mrs. Laura Smalley: No, sir.

John Henry Faulk: Did you ever hear of it, I mean?

Mrs. Laura Smalley: No, sir. I didn't hear of it. I stayed though at the [oil, oil (?)], in the oil field. That's before it, I, I been the oil fields, I was there thirty years, in the oil field.

John Henry Faulk: Raccoon Bend.

Mrs. Laura Smalley: Yes, sir. We call, you know, it just an oil field. Right there on, on a, on a place they call, Page's Place. Yeah, we st-stayed right there. Huh?

John Henry Faulk: That's about fifteen miles over here.

Mrs. Laura Smalley: No, ah about, pretty near Bellville. But it's down in the Bottom like.

John Henry Faulk: Ahha.

Mrs. Laura Smalley: Ahh. Any, any time you just say, down at Page's Place, you know. Mhmm. Page's Place. Now there's Raccoon City, though, it's right, there's oil in there now, is that oil field—

John Henry Faulk: Uhmm.

Mrs. Laura Smalley: —called Raccoon City. Raccoon City in oil field.

John Henry Faulk: Well, how many grandchildren do you, how many children you got, and grandchildren you got?

Mrs. Laura Smalley: I'm a see. I got four living children. Four living children and about twenty-five grandchildren. Twenty-five now in [those (?)] years I come in. I think it twenty-five. And I got thirty, thirty-four great grandchildren, think it's that. If I could, if I had time I could count them children. Now, here's one of my great grandchildren. [*Mrs. Smalley appears to be showing the family photos*] I got four, four, four grown grandchildren here with me, four around me where I know. They here one going to the, what I got there? There's Clara. Red. Ollie-May, her brother. And ah, Sunny Man and Bey. Now them, them there is my grandchildren. My, them my great, them ain't my great grandchildren. And this here child, that one, one great grandchild. And my grandson, she got three, and that's four, aint it? Yeah I ??? can't keep up with them. That's three.

John Henry Faulk: That's four.

Mrs. Laura Smalley: That's four? And my, my daughter right here, her son, he got two, he ah, he got two. And my grandson stay in the Bottom, he's got six. Stay down here in this Bottom, he got six. That's my great grandson got six. Yes, ah, my, my grandson, he got six. Well, I got a great grand, got a great grand-s-s-son, great grandson, he got four. That's my great grandson. Got four. Four. At least last time I heard him he had four. And my, and my, my granddaughter, her daughter, she ain't got but one. Ain't got but one, I don't think. Well, my ah, other great grandson, he, I think they say he had nine, great grandchildren. Why, I got about thirty or more or so great grand children, beside the grandchildren. My great grandchildren now, I got each here what I'm counting. Now my great grandchildren got these children. But my grandchildren, you know, they all, they all there too. I got so many of them. Why I got, I got great grandchildren fifty-years old.

John Henry Faulk: Hmm.

Mrs. Laura Smalley: Fifty-years old. Yes, sir.

John Henry Faulk: When did you marry the first time?

Mrs. Laura Smalley: I married before I was sixteen-years old.

John Henry Faulk: Is that right.

Mrs. Laura Smalley: Yes, sir. Sixteen-years old.

John Henry Faulk: Who'd you marry?

Mrs. Laura Smalley: I married a boy named, Ross. Ross, ah, [Beauna (?)]. Him, married, married him.

John Henry Faulk: Where abouts, over in Bellville?

Mrs. Laura Smalley: In Bellville. I think we were married in Bellville, at Mr., at Mr. Thompson's house. Yes. Which the uh, ???, mayor of the, mayor of the town, married me.

John Henry Faulk: Hmm.

Mrs. Laura Smalley: An, [the (?) it to, Nelsonville. That's only, that's seven-miles from Bellville. On the other side. On the other side.

John Henry Faulk: Hmm.

Mrs. Laura Smalley: Of Bellville.

John Henry Faulk: How long did that husband last, ah, live.

Mrs. Laura Smalley: We stayed together ten years.

John Henry Faulk: Ten years.

Mrs. Laura Smalley: Ten years. Before he died. Then after he died, I stayed together, uh, stayed single then about f-four or five years. No it wasn't. I stayed together four years. Single, four years. Then I married another man named, Richard Smalley.

John Henry Faulk: Richard Smalley.

Mrs. Laura Smalley: Richard Smalley. Yes, sir. And ah, I, I, ??? had some three, or four children, by him. Because ah, his, his ah, his oldest, my oldest boy by him, got a letter from him had thought he was dead. And I got one of his granddaughters here with me now. His, his [grand (?)], his, his ah, daughter, granddaughter. Then, I got one of his daughters. Of course they work but they here with me. Oh, I couldn't call the children, grandchildren, I ain't got. The great grandchildren.

[Unidentified Woman Interviewer (?)]: Hmm. What's and now?

Mrs. Laura Smalley: Children, my great grandchildren got, you know. Yes, sir.

John Henry Faulk: Well, what about times here in, have times got any better for the colored folks, or do they still mistreat them here in Hempstead?

Mrs. Laura Smalley: No, sir. They don't mistreat them now here in Hempstead. Don't mistreat them. Now and then, you know, they, here a good while ago, six, seven, years ago, you know, they go out in the country and beat them up.

John Henry Faulk: Mhmm.

Mrs. Laura Smalley: But they done quit that now. They don't beat them up so, so bad now like they used to. But you sure use ??? to them bad.

Unidentified Woman Interviewer: Well, didn't they used to—

Mrs. Laura Smalley: That we, I used to be scared, you know, to set on the gallery. And I didn't know whether they was going bother me or not, I hadn't done nothing.

Unidentified Woman Interviewer: Hmm.

John Henry Faulk: Just bother you whether you done anything or not.

Mrs. Laura Smalley: [*laugh*] I wouldn't know. That they used to call this, ah, Six-Shooter Junction, you know. And I was sure enough scared. But there ain't nobody never have bothered me since I've been here, and none of my children. But you see, we always acts right, you know, and treat everybody right, you know. We had no, no, no keep us coming, you know, to mistreat us, that a way. Now I had a son he get, [*loud noise*] he get drunk. Put him in jail. He get drunk. But then they, they turn him out, they never beat him up. When they turn him out.

John Henry Faulk: They whupped some of them [rawhide on (?)] some of them.

Mrs. Laura Smalley: Yes, they whupped some of them, but you see I didn't know. They whupped some of them. Beat them around, you know, they t-try to act tough and get drunk, you know, and try to act tough, you know, and they beat some them now I tell you. And they did ah, women, some of them around here they kick them and knock them about, sometime. They get drunk, you know, and wouldn't listen at them, you know, what they'd say, you know. They'd knock them put them in jail, something like that. The biggest been doing around here was, when colored folk killing up one another for a while, you know. Was killing up one another for a while. Women killing other women about they husbands, and all like that.

John Henry Faulk: Ummm.

Mrs. Laura Smalley: That was the biggest doing. M-m-men killing wives right there in town.

John Henry Faulk: Is that right?

Mrs. Laura Smalley: Yes, sir. Man, the man killed his wife right there in town. Right there in the streets, killed her.

Unidentified Woman Interviewer: [Killed her (?)]!

Mrs. Laura Smalley: And ah, another man would have killed a woman, but the doctor, you know, kept them from killing her. And then I had a niece cut her husband head off, right down there in this Bottom. A-a-ain't even much more than about five miles down in the Bottom. Niggas was killing up them, themselves.

Unidentified Woman Interviewer: How long?

Mrs. Laura Smalley: Then, and another woman cut ah, killed her, stabbed another woman about her husband.

John Henry Faulk: Good mess.

Mrs. Laura Smalley: And ah, after she killed this woman about her husband, then ah, he went on and married her [*him*]. After she done killed his wife. [*hushes children*] Shh. Shhh. Go on out. Go on ??? .

Unidentified Woman Interviewer: Well, ah, right after the Civil War, well, they used to, the Negroes used to hold office in this town, didn't they?

Mrs. Laura Smalley: [*laugh*] That's what they say.

Unidentified Woman Interviewer: That's what they, that's what is written in the history books. [*hush sound*] That the Negroes used to hold office until they had this big, had a big fight about something, I don't know just what. Then after that they get along [and that they never could (?)]—

Mrs. Laura Smalley: No. That was here in Hempstead. No, that wasn't over, over our side. Well, you knowed I ain't never knowed but the one man, one man that tried to hold office and that is, Handy Smith.

Unidentified Woman Interviewer: Ahha.

Mrs. Laura Smalley: Big old black man, he tried to hold office, you know, over there—

Unidentified Woman Interviewer: Ahha.

Mrs. Laura Smalley: —and ah, but he slept too much. And they take him and had him on the [grass (?)], you know, and he sleep. Just slept. And let him go.

John Henry Faulk: [*laugh*] They didn't, they didn't have any more use for him after that.

Mrs. Laura Smalley: Yes. They put him on a [pantry (?)], you know. Have him up and he just go to sleep. And over here, you know, I only been over here, you know, about twenty-two-years. And I don't know.

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