



## **Group Oral History Interview of Cleophas Smith, Hazel Murray, Lawrence Alberti and Jimmy Sullivan, 1980s**

### **Title**

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### **Date**

1980s

### **Location**

Location Unknown.

### **Summary**

In this recording Cleophas Smith, Hazel Murray, Lawrence Alberti and Jimmy Sullivan discuss discrimination in the American armed forces, such as being unable to get treated in Federal hospitals as black soldiers. They also have a lively discussion about politics, including President Ronald Reagan, low voter turn-out of Democrats, and the views of white voters. [Note: the interviewees are not specifically identified within the interview]

### **Interviewees**

Cleophas Smith, Hazel Murray, Lawrence Alberti, Jimmy Sullivan

### **Interviewer**

### **Website**

<http://scarc.library.oregonstate.edu/oh29/smithgroup/>

## Transcript

**Unknown Speaker 1:** Was that the average person that you met that was here for a while had homes.

**Unknown Speaker 2:** And that was sort of unusual.

**Unknown Speaker 1:** It was unusual for me, yeah. See, I lived in one of the little apartments [many voices at once] apartments, one room, and you know there were things that it was a lot of good, a whole lot more good than we're...

**Unknown Speaker 2:** Focusing on? Or

**Unknown Speaker 3:** Well there had to be some good aspects about it, otherwise a brother with as much sense as ya'll wouldn't have stuck around. You all don't put up with that much.

**Unknown Speaker 1:** Well a lot, you know, you walk around a lot, it was just like downtown now. We went to [00:00:54 unintelligible] one night; Wilson, myself and his wife, my wife, six of us.

**Unknown Speaker 2:** You can speak right up too, make sure that the mic pick you up.

**Unknown Speaker 1:** Oh, you want to pick this up?

**Unknown Speaker 2:** Yeah, we're...

**Unknown Speaker 1:** And we went into [00:01:06 unintelligible]—this was in the forties—and we walked into [unintelligible] and the guy met us at the door and asked us what we wanted, and we said "well, we'd like to have a table for six." And he stood there for a minute, and he didn't want to say it, and finally he says "I'm sorry but we can't serve you."

**Unknown Speaker 2:** Mhmm. This is in the forties.

**Unknown Speaker 1:** Yeah, this was in the forties. And we were left out of there, and somebody was driven— [audio cuts out]

**Unknown Speaker 4:** They wouldn't serve us for five years, all over the campaign, the European campaign over there. And now the man is sick, real sick, and she can't get him in the federal hospital. That's a shame.

**Unknown Speaker:** I couldn't get in that either, I couldn't get in.

**Unknown Speaker 4:** No, no, you didn't serve, you can't unless it's an emergency. What can I do if—

**Unknown Speaker 1:** Then as soon as you get to this, [unintelligible].

**Unknown Speaker 2:** And the fact that you've already served in the armed forces is beside the point, then.

**Unknown Speaker:** That's doing nothing now.

**Unknown Speaker 2:** That used to be the criteria, though. [Multiple voices at once.]

**Unknown Speaker 1:** Well him and his family, now this man, our president, remember him and his family and all the big wheels, they go to the best veteran hospitals in the country. Walter Reed, right?

**Unknown Speaker:** And have the best doctors and don't pay nothing.

**Unknown Speaker 1:** That's right. Walter Reed, where they go? And we poor son of a guns the—some of people I have I have never [unintelligible], but some of you fellows have, and then we'll see the folk that dodged those bullets over there, come back in, can't get no care. That's wrong, that's not—that's why I told my boys I'd rather give up my right arm than go in any man's service. That blatant discrimination stuff, I'm so—that's the truth. That's the way I think about it.

**Unknown Speaker:** What I really think now is we better just, when we get ready to vote, don't be "brother, I'm voting Democrat," just don't say that, just go in and [unintelligible] to do, because if them white people find out what you going to do, they going to do the opposite. So if we keep our mouths shut and then a door, this door wouldn't go. Oh yeah, right here's a good guy.

**Unknown Speaker:** Yeah, that's right, "yeah, I think I'll go for him again" [laughter]

**Unknown Speaker:** Uh oh, we don't want to vote with them [laughter].

**Unknown Speaker 2:** That's a strategy.

**Unknown Speaker:** Yeah, let's make psychology on these son of a guns.

**Unknown Speaker 1:** One thing I can't understand, gentlemen, is this: now this man win this last election, he got really caught up, now before any of the fools got in on the Pacific, the whole Pacific Northwest—

**Unknown Speaker:** Yeah, a lot of people there.

**Unknown Speaker 1:** California carries one of the largest electoral votes in the country. Before any of these states got in, Carter done conceded back there and this man was in. Something funny there. How in the world did he get in there by the people's vote? Now somebody tell me that. I don't understand it.

**Unknown Speaker:** Well he had all them eastern bloc states and a lot of them southern states too.

**Unknown Speaker 1:** You know who put that man in there, and who puts them all in there? It's the big multimillionaire, billionaire, there the one puts that man in, got this—they got this thing as rigged as a rigged as as sure as we stand here. That's right. There's nothing but the big money power. That's right.

**Unknown Speaker:** Well he—

**Unknown Speaker:** And let's face it, they control everything that happens anyway.

**Unknown Speaker 2:** They have been. [Voices overlapping].

**Unknown Speaker:** So if everybody who might have voted Democrat when out and voted, he wouldn't have got it, but if you sat on you's tail and said "well, there's no use going, he done won," like a lot of people did, then he had the edge.

**Unknown Speaker 2:** Yeah, yeah they didn't have—

**Unknown Speaker 1:** Well they said that a lot of people hadn't gone?

**Unknown Speaker 2:** That won't happen no more either, because they've learned their lesson that time. The Democrats, whether they like black people or not, learn they own lesson from that, so. That is a good strategy though, thinking about using reverse psychology.

**Unknown Speaker 1:** Well sure. Yeah, if you say "by gosh, I'm going to go, well I think Reagan's going to do it again," they ain't going to like it [laughter]. "You do? I thought you liked"—"no, hell he talking about giving us something, shoot." "When he gets back in here, he's going to give something?" "Yeah, he's talking about giving some black people something." [Voices overlapping each other].

**Unknown Speaker:** Hell no.

[00:05:07]

**Unknown Speaker 1:** Well he ain't stepping on blacks; he's stepping on these poor peckerwoods too.

**Unknown Speaker 2:** See they don't see it that way, so even though—

**Unknown Speaker:** The VWF, I'm going to the VWF and—

**Unknown Speaker 1:** Well he's done made a lot of peckerwoods poor.

**Unknown Speaker:** That's what happened over here, and anyway they don't believe it [voices overlapping], they don't believe we're supporting Reagan.

**Unknown Speaker 2:** They're trying to make believe that you made them poor.

**Unknown Speaker:** It was our fault, right [voices overlapping].

**Unknown Speaker:** We didn't have nothing to do with it.

**Unknown Speaker:** Yeah, we going to have to vote for Reagan, get that card out there. "What did you say?" "We going to go for Reagan," she say "why you going to vote for Reagan?" No, and she said "are you rich?" "Lady, you know I ain't rich," you say "well how in the how in the hell can you vote for a Republican and you ain't rich and go vote for a man that won't work for nobody." Ah, then she say "well, how's Mr. Reagan doing?" "Oh, he's alright." You ain't going to say nothing about Reagan now [laughing].

**Unknown Speaker 2:** You don't talk about it anymore.

**Unknown Speaker:** No, you bring it back, say "how's Mr. Reagan doing?" [Laughs], she'd get on every time she sees a white woman. She saw her walking the other way again; she don't want to talk to her.

**Unknown Speaker:** Look at all the folk who are going to lose their home. And I think it's one of the last things I heard about [inaudible]—

**Unknown Speaker:** Well—

**Unknown Speaker:** Fifty percent of blacks, in other words.

**Unknown Speaker:** I was looking in this Newsweek when they were showing a percentage; I think its thirty-nine states now. It's worse than it was last year. You know, out of all the—they got all the states down where they come up in unemployment, and it's thirty-nine right now, worse than where we were last year. This is this week's Newsweek, says right there.

**Unknown Speaker:** And it said we see a light at the tunnel in the—

**Unknown Speaker:** Well that's just a camouflage—

**Unknown Speaker:** You know what light you're seeing? You're seeing a big train.

**Unknown Speaker:** Yeah, this is dynamite coming the other way [voices overlapping].

**Unknown Speaker:** Well that's the light that he sees at the other end of the tunnel. It's not there for us.

**Unknown Speaker:** Well he's got to keep the [00:06:52 unintelligible] up, keep the [unintelligible] down?

**Unknown Speaker 1?:** And he made a statement today, he was talking to Polish people in Chicago, he said "I got a letter the other day from a lady who had just visited Poland to visit some of her family, and when she left she claims that she was anti-nuclear, and after she went over there and saw how those people were"—you know, this jive letter? "Were being treated and in bondage and the way that they were treating them, she's decided that we need the nuclear bomb now" [murmurs of disbelief]. Well, but you know that letter that he got the last time, don't you?

**Unknown Speaker 2?:** Oh, from the girl, the little girl?

**Unknown Speaker 1?:** No, not the one from the girl, he got a letter and the press run the letter down?

**Unknown Speaker 2?:** Oh, and found out it was phony?

**Unknown Speaker 1?:** It was a phony letter.

**Unknown Speaker 2?:** Oh, he might say anything.

**Unknown Speaker:** He's phony himself, phony as a three-dollar bill.

**Unknown Speaker:** Well I mean you know, when you listen to all that crap, that is supposed to make a sensible person believe what he's saying.

**Unknown Speaker 2:** See that's what I'm saying, that the people, you know, like the poor people you're talking about, in general, it's like poor white people, they're not in the category of sensible people.

**Unknown Speaker 1?:** No.

**Unknown Speaker 2?:** See, they watch TV and they're spoon-fed the news or whatever.

**Unknown Speaker 1?:** Well, if he does one thing; "oh man, he's going to do for everybody, bleh bleh bleh bleh, we'll vote for this son of a"—but I can't see what you say, that like—[audio cuts out].

[end of interview 00:08:14]