

**Southwest Virginia LGBTQ+ History Project
Oral History Initiative**

**Interview with Yoedie Cleveland Swain
February 25, 2019**

Interviewers: Elbisa Lindov
Interviewee: Yoedie Cleveland Swain
Sound Check: Haleigh Ardolino
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Transcribed by: Cameron Sammons and Nikki Phelps

Duration: 1:02:17

0:00 – School, growing up in Roanoke, family (c. 1974 - 1992)
3:28 – Local gay community & gay hangouts (1990s?)
5:22 – Knowing his sexuality, not feeling the need to “come out,” relationship with father
7:46 – Romantic relationships, attitude toward relationships
14:32 – Being judged by others, religion, and acceptance
18:51 – Experiences in church: pastor, enjoying attending, how it has helped; Black churches versus gay churches
21:11 – Hatred toward gay people; helping friend after she was raped for being gay
28:39 – Ancestry, race, and identity; responses to racism and homophobia
32:32 – Black LGBTQ representation in the media
34:31 – People coming out today
36:20 – Black role models; reaction to the 2008 and 2016 presidential elections; sexism
39:13 – Attitude toward Trump presidency and the 2020 presidential election
44:33 – Opinions on current political issues, how administration's priorities are wrong
52:19 – Pulse nightclub shooting, and paranoia living as a black, gay man
56:19 – Teaching future generations to combat hatred, defying stereotypes of gay people and black people
1:01:58 – Closing remarks

0:00

EL: Alright, so my name is Elbisa Lindov, and I'm here with Cleveland today. We are in Diva's House of Hair. It is February the 25th at 1:04 pm, and if you can go ahead and just state your name, and where you grew up, and your schooling.

0:24

YCS: Okay, I am Yoedie Swain, called Cleveland, and I grew up here in Roanoke, Virginia. In terms of schooling, I graduated from William Fleming High School, went off to Virginia Western for two years, got an Associate's, and moved to northern Virginia,

where I attended Potomac Hair Academy, and moved back to Roanoke and completed my cosmetology training at Virginia Hair Academy.

1:00

EL: Okay, interesting. So, since you grew up here, did you know what it was like just growing up here in your childhood, like do you have anything that really stuck out to you?

1:12

YCS: Growing up in Roanoke, I'd actually say I'm fortunate. Being African-American and being gay in Roanoke, I've always been gay. I've been gay ever since I can remember. I've never been attracted to females. No disrespect! Only your hair, love playing with hair. I was fortunate in that aspect, in terms of growing up in this area and not being, in my opinion, disrespected, or harmed, or called names, out of my name. I was very successful in high school, very popular in high school. I ran track, and so I was always cool with the athletes. I was always cool with the cheerleaders. I was always cool. I was always the in-crowd. I was junior class president, went on to SGA [Student Government?] president my senior year. Always just so well-respected, but when I hear stories of other gay men and women and how growing up back then during that era, it used to break my heart to hear some of their stories. Especially with family acceptance. My mother, she best put it, "this is not what I would choose for you, but I love you. And so, if you're going to be gay, just remember to love yourself, because I love you," and I'll never... that was something that just stuck with me, that my mom loves me. My mom doesn't judge me, and I was just truly fortunate even with my entire family, very accepting in terms of my lifestyle. I don't have one of those Debbie Downer or Negative Nancy moments to where "oh my word, I was so mistreated, or disrespected, and not loved." So, one of the things I say growing up in this area for me is that I was loved, and that meant a whole lot to me. It meant a whole lot.

3:28

EL: So, would you say there was a big gay community when you were growing up?

3:35

YCS: Yes, yes. You know, believe it or not, I've been fortunate to grow up around gay men and women, even bisexuals, so yeah, the community is big. It's a large community. In my earlier years, of course, I used to go to one of the biggest gay clubs here, The Park. Oh, every Friday and Saturday night I'm going, and I'm gonna dance the night away. And so, again, with gay bashing and all that type of stuff, I never witnessed any of it, but I've heard stories in the area, but I've just been one of the fortunate ones.

4:20

EL: And were there other... so I know The Park is a big one, but were there any previous gay communities or gay clubs that were around that aren't around today?

4:29

YCS: There used to be one called Backstreet, and I don't think that it exists anymore, but it could. I was fortunate to be friends with the owners of The Park. They do the gay Pride [in the Park festival] every year, and that's a big thing, mostly hosted in Wasena Park or Highland Park, and that's where we would go in terms of hanging out, whether it was gay pride or not. Those were the two popular parks for us just to go hang out, walk our dogs, play tennis, volleyball, you name it. And Southwest is generally what they call the "gay community," because a lot of gay families now exist in Southwest Roanoke.

5:22

EL: And you had mentioned before that you always knew that you were gay. So, was that, I know you didn't have any struggles with your family with acceptance, but did you have any internal struggles within yourself? Did you feel conflicted about coming out? When did you come out?

5:36

YCS: Even in elementary school, I knew that I was gay. I knew and I understood what "gay" meant, meaning that I was attracted to the same sex. So, for me, it just seemed like that was my norm. It's just like for someone that is straight, that's your norm, that you're attracted to the opposite sex. I was always attracted to the same sex. I didn't have problems coming out because I was just me, so my personality was always accepted. So, I didn't look at myself as being someone gay, or having to come out, because it was who I was. So, it wasn't like, I know a lot of people come out and then they tell family and friends. Nah, I was always flamboyant. Always what they would consider the pretty boy. I didn't have to come out. I was out. One of the things that I hear so often is "what made you gay?" It wasn't a choice for me. It wasn't a choice. I wasn't molested. I went to school in boy clothes. I played, believe it or not, basketball, football, baseball, track and field. I did all of those things, so there was nothing that made me gay. I just was never attracted to females. I had a lovely mom, a very hardworking mom. My father was there at the beginning of my childhood. I didn't have the best relationship with him, but it was nothing that... I'll say him dealing with my lifestyle was a problem for him, but it wasn't a problem for me. Because I had such a strong support system in terms of my grandmother and my mother and my siblings, it didn't really matter what he thought so much. I'm not one of those ones who I hold onto it or have any type of anger or hatred toward him. I wish him well, 'cause I'm doing well [laughter].

7:46

EL: So, what about your dating and social life? Is there anything different from while you were growing up and now? Have things changed? Have you seen a big movement and change within the gay community?

7:58

YCS: Oh, huge! Here, I would say, growing up, the gay community, they didn't show affection. In other words, if you were lovers, or whatever, you didn't hold hands, you didn't kiss in public because it wasn't accepted. Not until I moved to Washington, D. C., I'll never forget shopping in Georgetown. I was seeing men holding hands and showing

affection, and women and women showing affection and holding hands. I was like, “oh my God!” Of course, that was a metropolitan area. Coming from a small town, where of course it wasn’t accepted. However, even though that I knew that it wasn’t accepted here as much, I never saw anything that was negative. You just knew that you don’t show affection in public.

So, for me, dating, I didn’t do a lot of dating in high school. I got into my first official relationship until I was 30, believe it or not. I’m 45 now. Of course I dated prior to, but no serious, committed relationships. I’m picky, very, very picky. I’ve been picky my whole entire life. And so, for me, dating was... *[long pause]*... how can I put it? Dating was like I would go to dinner with you this weekend, I would go to dinner next weekend with someone else... so that’s what dating was for me. It wasn’t commitment. I wasn’t really sexually active at a young age, never desired to be. But now that I’m older, I was in a twelve-year relationship which ended, this coming November will be two years that it’s been over, and it was so stressful. It was long distance, and was very stressful, so stressful. The long distance itself was stressful. The gay relationship was not. I adored him, and he adored me. And my family adores him. His family adores me. Actually, he wasn’t “out” with his family, and that was a problem for me, because I’m like, I’m not a secret. I’m not gonna be a secret. What made me proud of him was that he first started with his mom, and he told his mom about me. I’ll never forget meeting her for the first time. She stared at me the whole time, I don’t think she blinked. I’m serious, I don’t think this lady blinked. She just stared at me and she said to me “you’re really beautiful!” and I was floored! I was like, “oh my God, his mama called me beautiful!” The whole entire weekend, I was on one hundred. I was like, oh God, she called me beautiful, and she talked to me, she was welcoming. It was a beautiful thing for him because he thought it was going to be so horrible. He thought it was going to be so bad. He just thought everyone was going to just not have anything to do with him. He’s very successful and he has his Master’s, a very educated man, and very independent. Loves his mom as I do mine, and he takes care of his mom because his mom has a lot of health issues. But with all of that being said, when he finally came out to his siblings and his friends, they were like, “okay.” It’s nothing like it used to be when you would come and say “oh, I’m gay,” and they’re like “oh my God, don’t tell anybody! You must live in the closet!” I don’t think that it’s anything like that now. I think that if someone comes out, man or woman, and says that they’re gay, “okay. Let’s move on. Next.” I don’t think that it is as bad as it has been in the past. In the past, so many people were in the closet ... and I respected it. If you were in the closet, okay, that’s fine. I’ll keep your secret. But there’s nothing wrong, look at me, just look at me! But I do know that I am a little special to it because I had the acceptance from family, and friends, and love, and classmates. I just didn’t experience the negativity that a lot of them did in terms of coming out.

12:50

EL: And within that twelve-year relationship, did you have any life-learning lessons? Does that affect who you potentially date later on? Would you want to still date someone who was in the closet, or would you feel more comfortable dating someone who is already out and feels comfortable within themselves?

13:06

YCS: At my age, I prefer dating someone that is out. And when I say "out," you don't have to go around with a shirt plastered "I'm gay." You don't have to announce it when you're introducing yourself to someone, "oh, and I'm gay." That's not necessary. I deal with more professional men. I'm attracted to more professional men, educated men. They definitely would have to be out, that's number one. Number two, and this is just me personally, I don't desire a relationship after being in one for twelve years. But, if it happens, it happens. I'm not looking for it. I have so many clients that are not in relationships and desire to be in relationships, and are out here just dating and are miserable, just simply miserable. Sometimes I feel like I'm truly a counselor when I have them in the chair and then we talk outside the salon. That, you know, "Don't allow a man to complete you." A man does not complete me. A relationship does not complete me. I'm happy within myself, and again, if something happens, it happens, but I'm not looking for it. I'm not one of these ones who are dating multiple people until I find that special one. If it happens, it happens.

14:32

EL: That's a good rule to stand by, actually. Being gay, that's a very strong connection within yourself and how you identify yourself. Is there something else that closely relates to that as well? Did you find anything that... being gay... was that very inspiring for yourself, being so open and out and having such a good community base around you compared to people who don't have that kind of support and love, did you find anything that was very memorable about that?

15:11

YCS: I think so much for me, the best way to answer is people judging you. Not wanting to be around you ... or act like you got some disease because you're gay. I didn't experience any of that. I was fortunate if I met someone, met a client or their families or going to someone's wedding... always well-respected. I was just truly, truly, truly, well-respected. As I talk to other gay friends and listen to their stories, they don't have that same story. They have a lot of sadness, a lot of bitterness. It just floors me, and all I can do is comfort them with my words and share my story that, well, fortunate for me, I didn't experience any of that. So, there are good people out there. There are accepting people out there. For me, it's just knowing the world is just not all bad. Not everyone has this Debbie Downer story in terms of, oh, such a negative experience. No, it's been a beautiful experience.

Being able to share that with other people, I'm known for sharing that with other people, and a lot of people, they're just floored. Especially in African-American families, it's really difficult to come out. They just act like it's just the worst thing ever. You could be a thief, "we love you." You can be a rapist, "we love you." But being gay? Oh, no, never! Especially in what they call the Black church, predominantly African-Americans attending one church. That was horrible. "Oh, it's a sin. You're going to Hell. You gonna burn in Hell!" Again, that was not one of my situations. I had to teach two former pastors when I was younger that I read the Bible and there is no degree in sin. If you are a liar and you think someone being gay is the worst thing ever and it's so unforgiveable,

there's no degree in sin whatsoever. If you're a liar and if I'm gay and if the Bible says those two things are wrong, then guess what, we're both going to Hell. With that being said, I never allow people to judge me. And that's what I would teach Christians and so-called Christians. There's no degree in sin. There's no degree. If you're a liar, if you're a cheater, whatever your sin is, it's a sin. A sin is a sin. But I know that I'm gonna be judged one day, and it's only by God. That's how strong my faith is, that I don't allow men or women to judge me in any way, shape, or form, because I will be judged only on one day. I have a relationship with God, and I don't have to shout it out to everyone. I do, as the Word says, God's thing is, "do unto others as you would have them to do unto you," so I love everybody. I don't hate anybody. I accept anybody, I don't care what it is. I don't care what your situation is, or whatever. Even if you've wronged me, I love you, I'ma pray for you. I'ma pray for you. So that's the type of person I am.

18:58

EL: So, mentioning that you have a strong relationship with God and going to church... I think you still go to church now?

19:05

YCS: Certainly.

19:06

EL: I know there's actually some gay churches around here.

19:11

YCS: Yes.

19:12

EL: Do you go toward churches that are more with the gay culture or do you go with, as people would say, typical churches?

19:20

YCS: I belong to Loudon Avenue Christian Church, and I've been a member there for over 17 years now, and it's not a gay church, but it's an accepting church. They don't judge, they accept gays, there have been gay couples that have joined, gay people that have joined. It's not one of those churches where the ministry is against gays. We don't believe in that. I have a beautiful church family. It's an amazing church family, and I have visited gay churches, and that's okay, but I am more about the Word, about preaching and teaching. You've got to minister to me. I don't go to church just to warm up a pew. I go to church because I want to be preached to and I want to be taught. I want to learn, and that's what I've been fortunate... my former pastor, he was the pastor of our church for over 33 years, and he retired two years ago. Let me tell you something, oh my God, he was amazing. I think he actually taught at Roanoke College as well. Bill Lee. We call him Billy, but it's William Lee. Dr. Lee is amazing! He is amazing. It was Sundays to where I just couldn't wait to go to church. During the week, I "oh, I can't wait to go to church!" If I was having a bad week or challenging week or whatever, I just couldn't wait because I knew that he had a word. I knew that God was

really utilizing him, and so it was fortunate for me. But I don't have anything against gay churches, I just go to a church and I have a church family that I love and adore, and they love and adore me. I served as trustee for four years at my church, so I've had a big position in the church. As them trusting me with keys, the alarm systems, the business and workings of the church, and I loved it. I absolutely love it.

21:11

EL: Okay, cool. That's actually really interesting. I know you said that you didn't personally experience any negativity, but did you have maybe like a close friend that was maybe closeted, or they were out, and they experienced these very negative things? I know you think you heard stories about it, did something ever scare you? Were you ever scared that something was ever going to happen to you, or did you feel like you couldn't be out in public because you were worried about this situation happening?

21:47

YCS: When you... as we know how gay bashing still exists. How people go into clubs, gay clubs and shoot up the club, or they catch you by yourself and beat someone up, and that type of thing. That has always been in the back of my mind. It's always been in the back of my mind that someone would actually harm me because of what they don't understand. And feel like, "oh, we're gonna beat his butt," or "we're gonna kill him because he's gay." Always in the back of my mind. But one of the things in my faith in God [is] that I can't live in fear. So, I can't let that stop me from walking out being who I am because of fear. Even though I know that it happens, I've had some friends that have been beaten up. I've had friends, and not just strangers, family members beating them up because of them being gay. I know of a situation with a female friend of mine that, she was actually raped by a family member thinking that he could make her straight, by raping her. This is what this is about. So sad. I spent weeks with her. Weeks, and when I say weeks, I spent weeks with her making sure she's getting the counseling and the help and bringing him to justice, and she did. You have got to tell your story. Her family, believe it or not, were not supporting her in terms of bringing him to justice. I'm like, "he raped her!" And me having conversations with her family members, I said "I am sorry, I want to support her, and you all should be the first ones that are supporting her, but you're not. But I will." And we're still great friends to this day. Of course, he was found guilty and served a prison sentence for raping her. It has empowered her now. She is one of the strongest women that I know now, because someone was there to support her, letting her know that there's nothing wrong with being gay. And what he did to you, first of all, not accepting your choice in terms of your sexuality... and she was a child, so he raped her, but it was molestation because she was a child. But you overcame that, and you are fabulous now. She's always singing my praises in terms of me being there for her because she was suicidal at one point. She was thinking "maybe I should just kill myself." I'm like, "kill yourself for what?" I said, "then you won't be here. We won't be friends. I'll be minus a friend." So, I'm always throwing a little humor in there. She's always telling the story now. She can speak on it now. She has no problems with it, it doesn't bother her anymore because she overcame

it. I was glad that I was there because if I was ever going through something like that, I would want some type of support system. I would need some type of support system.

So, with a lot of the stories I've heard over the years, in terms of whether it's family, friends, coworkers, whatever, not accepting someone's sexuality, I think it is absolutely horrible. Horrible. Why do you care about what I do behind closed doors? Or, even if I'm in public and I show affection to my partner, why do you care? You should not care. I think that people need to start focusing more on self and not others in that respect. I think if you focus on self a whole lot more than worrying about who's sleeping with who or who's in love with who, you'd be a whole lot better person. You'd be a better person.

26:07

EL: So, talking about that hatred, because I personally would always be curious, where do you think this hatred toward people who are interested in the same sex came from?

26:19

YCS: It's been taught. It's just like racism. We are all born pure. We're pure. It's what people teach us, and what we grow up learning that is wrong. If you have this family that doesn't believe in someone being gay, it's just horrible... you were taught that. Someone taught you that that was wrong. Even as Christians, the Word says that being gay is a sin. I don't argue that Word. I don't argue that Word. Because I have a relationship with God and God knows who I am. They say, "well, do you feel that God made you gay?" I'm not going to say that either. It was a choice. It was a choice. I can't help that, you know, for instance, in terms of colors, like if I'm going to go buy a shirt. I'm not partial to blue, so I'm not going to buy a blue shirt. I can't help that I prefer a white shirt or red shirt over blue. It's my choice. So, I make choices and I'm responsible for my choices. Again, I don't think it's a choice of being gay, I am gay. So, with all of that being said... wait a minute, what was your question, because I got on the topic of clothes and shopping, 'cause I'm a shopper, honey *[laughter]*. I'm sitting here thinking to myself "wait a minute, I do like red! I do like white! Ooo, spring is coming, I need new clothes!" *[laughter]*

27:58

EL: Just about where you think this hatred is coming from.

28:02

YCS: Taught. It's taught. The hatred comes from people teaching that. It's just like in terms of racism. You're taught, white supremacists, KKK, all of that stuff is taught. If we stop putting that negativity into our children, it will die, it will go away. But as long as we have people teaching their children to hate, whether it's race, or whether it's someone being gay, or whether it's someone being poor, whatever the situation may be. As long as people are teaching that, it's not gonna go anywhere.

28:39

EL: I know you said that people weren't being judgmental of you being gay, and you brought up being proud of being gay and being African-American, so did you see more

racism because you are African-American rather than gay? Did that affect you in any way in how you presented yourself as well?

28:58

YCS: It was a double thing in being black and being gay. It was like, "oh, I'm black. And I'm gay." Growing up in America, being black and gay was just like two of the worst things. Where I was so fortunate, as I would educate people, my great-grandfather was Caucasian, and my great-grandmother was a full-blooded Cherokee Indian. My grandmother was Caucasian and Indian. No African-American bloodline. My grandfather was a full-blooded Indian, so my mom is actually Caucasian and Indian, but my mom looks like an African-American woman. My grandmother did not. My grandmother looked like a Caucasian woman. But my mother identified herself as an African-American woman, even though there is no African-American blood in her, but because of her skin color, this is how crazy, what we grew up in... because of her skin color, she identified as a black woman. And my father, of course, that's is where the African-American bloodline comes in for me. So, I have African-American, Caucasian, Indian, so all of that is in me, so I didn't really care that, "oh, I have white in my family. Oh, I have Indian in my family. Oh, I have black in my family." I just identified myself as being black and I was fine with it. I'm an American first. I am an American first. That's what we were taught in our house, that we were Americans. We weren't black. We weren't poor, or rich, or middle class. We are Americans, and that's what we were taught.

I was fortunate, and that's what I teach a whole lot of people. Even growing up in this community, I really didn't experience racism. If someone was being racist towards me, I didn't know it, 'cause I would have confronted it. I was that type, I was confrontational. That's why a whole lot of people love and adore me, is that I'm confrontational. I will let you have it. I mean, I will let you have it. I'm the type of person that if you whispered the F word towards me, "what did you say?" I was the type of person to be confrontational. Never physical, thank God, never got to be physical, but I would confront you on your ignorance. Why do you feel like you didn't hurt my feelings by calling me that F word? You know, you're fat. You're ugly. I didn't have that mean spirit. It was not necessary. I just wanna try to help you help yourself. Why would you think that you're gonna have me to cry or crawl up under a rock because you said that name calling? Or if you use the N word. I never gave words that type of power. I think that if people, in general, would stop giving words power, like if someone was to call you the N word, yes, it's disrespectful and I know what you mean behind it, and if you call me the F word, I know what you mean behind it, but guess what, words do not hurt me. I hate to see that you're hurting yourself and living in such, you know, misery in terms of thinking that being ugly and mean-spirited to someone that you're gonna break them, you're gonna break their spirit. Never happened with me. Never happened with me.

32:31

EL: I guess I kinda wanna go in this range, since like you know we are very, you know, I think people are very influenced by social media and stuff like that. Was there anyone in Hollywood that was maybe a role model for you coming out? Do you think there should

be more representation especially in the African [-American] community and being gay, do you think there's something that we could do to just represent that community more?

32:58

YCS: I think that like social media and television, it's coming out and we're seeing it now. You're seeing that... on shows where people, they come out. And I will never forget, I think it was last Monday I watched, I think it was *Chicago MD*. It was the first time I've seen it. An African-American intern. He was an intern and a gay patient had come in the ER and he was sick... and he was actually flirting with a straight physician. He was flirting with him and the physician kept it very professional. And him and the intern, the African-American intern, talked later about the incident. And so he was like "you know that man was just so disrespectful and dot dot dot dot dot," and he's like "and I'm not gay and I can't believe that he would do that, he thought that I was gay." The African-American intern says to him, "Well, I feel the same way when females are hitting on me." And the doctor looked at him like, "what are you talking about?" He says, "I'm gay." And the doctor's like, "oh I didn't know, I'm sorry. I didn't know." He said, "what are you sorry for? That's just who I am." He didn't look gay. You would have never thought that he was gay. He didn't have no gay mannerisms. He looked like he would be into women, but no, he was gay.

And you have a whole lot of people now coming out and living, you know, their life. One of, I have a new stylist and he's been with me now for a little over two years. And one of my clients she says "ooh, I have a granddaughter that I think that you need to meet. She would... I think you all would hit it off." So he said to her, "oh I'm sorry. I'm sorry, I'm gay." So but, but she didn't hear that [*laughter*]. She did actually did not hear him say that he was gay. She was like "oh, you're in college and she's in college and I... just you know, I'm gonna get your number. Is it okay if I give her your number?" He says "ma'am, I am gay. I'm not into women." "Oh! Oh! [*shocked*]" Then she turned to me, "oh he's like you!" [*laughter*] And this is an older client. So with that being said, people now don't mind telling you, "oh I'm gay. I don't have to be in the closet."

And I think that in terms of like Hollywood, social media, it's out there now and it's really out. I don't think that it is bad now because one of the things that... I have several clients that are principals and teachers and one of my teachers, she was like, "Lord. Child. All these gay kids in school! They're coming out in high school. They're coming out in middle school. They're coming out even in elementary school." So but it's now it's more accepted. I feel like the times have truly changed, simply because of people and on television in the media that are openly gay and don't mind talking about them being gay. So I think it's gotten a whole lot better.

So, no one really [who]] I looked up to, because I look up to men and women, whether you were gay, straight, or whatever the situation, and I don't even care what your color was. I had several role models growing up. I'll never forget one of the biggest, I would say, growing up was Oprah [Winfrey]. A black woman on television. A black woman with her own talk show?! A black woman giving money away like that?! A successful black woman?! So Oprah, if I had to pinpoint anyone, was Oprah. As an adult, it would be

Barack Obama. I'll never forget when he won, I was in my home, I built a home down in Vinton from ground up, and I'll never forget going home and watching his accepting speech. And I stood in front of the television crying and sobbing like a baby. You would have thought that somebody had died but I was just so... for the first time, I was so happy to really, truly be an American. That we have come this far. That finally there is a man of color in the White House. Now, there's still work to do, because I feel like that a woman should have been in the White House years ago, and of course I'm a hardcore Democrat. I really believed that it was Hillary Clinton's place. For some reason, God seemed differently. And a lot of people say, "oh you think that God put Donald Trump in the White House?" Yes, I certainly do believe he put him in the White House so that we could recognize that there is still a lot of hatred and a lot of ugly in this world and it needs to be addressed and we need to work on it. So, with that being said, it is now time for a woman to be in the White House. It's time. She should have been. Hillary Clinton was more qualified than any candidate that has ever ran for president. Why? It's just like the same thing with women in churches. To where, "oh, I can't have no female minister. Can't no woman preach to me. I don't want no female minister." Why not? And my reply to that whenever I hear that negativity in terms of a woman shouldn't be a president or a woman shouldn't be a minister or even when women shouldn't be a doctor, dot dot dot dot... Why, when we all came up out of women? We all came up out of a woman. So how can you be so negative about women? So that's the same thing with, you know, being gay, being black, being a woman, dot dot dot dot dot. We just need to get better. We need to do better. We need to know better. We need to act better and teach better than what we've been doing in the past.

39:13

EL: So you talked about the current administration. I know Trump and Pence, they have vocally [expressed] where they stand on gay issues and gay rights. Do you feel like we went backwards in a way? Do you feel like this coming up next election [in 2020], do you feel as Trump, do you think he'd still be in the office or do you feel that we would get a woman president, as you said? Do you see a more positive movement? Because I know recently, when we talk about Democratic [Party] issues they're like, "Hillary shouldn't have been the candidate, it should have been Bernie Sanders." What do you feel?

39:48

YCS: I feel, first, I do feel that again, Hillary was more qualified. That's number one. Number two, I feel that Bernie Sanders and his followers failed Hillary. He didn't get behind her. He didn't motivate his people like Hillary did when she lost against Barack Obama. She was very positive. She worked in the administration. She was very vocal. Bernie Sanders is not. I think that because now that Bernie Sanders is back in the race and his followers, it's going to cause us to lose the election again. You know, Bernie Sanders, you know, God help him. You're too old! Sit down. And then you know a lot of people are behind Joe Biden and want him to run. You too old! Sit down. I'm tired of the old people being in office. We need youth, and we need a woman representative. So I want to be behind a woman regardless. I'm going to back a woman no matter what because I think it's time. Not because she is so much a woman, if she's got great issues

and she wants to turn this country around, I'm going to be behind a woman, period. Because this country needs to be turned around because we did go backwards with Pence and Trump. We did. Their backwards way of thinking, and I always have said that if President Obama did an ounce of what Trump has done, they would have impeached him by now. He wouldn't have gone as long as he did in terms of two terms. He would've been gone day one. And it wouldn't have taken two years to do no investigating and all of that type of stuff. He would have been gone only because he was a black man. Period. So yes, the current administration is trying to take us back. But the thing about it was trying to take us back in terms of being racist and anti-gay, dot dot dot dot dot... You're not going to win. There's too many of us, there's too many of us, there's too many of us, we're too fabulous, we're too successful. So it's not going to happen when it comes down to Blacks. We're too successful, honey. We're rich, honey. There's Black billionaires and millionaires and a whole lot more educators. So you're not taking us back in reference to, you know, "oh, we should be slaves and on some plantation," that's not going to happen darling. In terms of gays, you're not going to beat it out of us. You know you're not going to kill us all. It's... we're here to stay. And if America just focuses on being Americans no matter if you're a woman, you're a man, you're gay, you're straight, you're black, you're green, orange. We would really be the best country, and right now I don't think that we are the best country. I'm not really proud to go somewhere and tell someone that I'm an American.

I was in this, in terms of being an American, I was in Canada. I was in Toronto and I was getting a manicure and pedicure done. And so the lady said to me, "oh my goodness, where are you from?" I said, "I'm from the U.S.," and she said, "don't tell nobody that." [laughter] She actually told me to tell people when I met them to say I'm from Trinidad, I look like I was from Trinidad. "Tell people you're from Trinidad." I said, "oh no I'm from the U.S.!" Now I think if I go back to Canada I will tell them I'm from Trinidad or somewhere else, some island somewhere [laughter], because I'm not proud of how America is currently, and who our leader is, you know, who our Commander in Chief is, and how he lies, and cheats, and is just, he's just a mess. He's just simply a mess. We have gone back as Americans. We've taken a step back, so we need to not only clean up that mess, and we must move forward, and we must teach, and we must preach, and we must do a whole lot better than what we are currently doing.

43:46

EL: I think for me personally... were you, were you shocked? Because I know I was shocked to find out the election results with Obama and such a forward movement that he had, you would think we're going on a right track and everything like that. Do you feel as, for you personally, did it affect you in who you are and how you represent yourself with them? I know you said you haven't encountered any negative people, but if you did encounter someone who supports Trump and his values and everything like that, how would you think you would overcome that or show your representation, show why his pathway to leading our country, like doing things good for our government is the wrong way to do it?

44:33

YCS: I actually have clients that are Trump supporters. I'll never forget one, I had a male client and he's a strong Trump supporter, and he's a black man on top of that [laughter]. So for me, it's one of those things where they say "oh you're black and you gay. Oh my God." So with him, "you're black and you love Trump? Oh my God!" So of course, that was my first, "oh my God. Oh, another Trump supporter. Jesus Christ. This is gonna make an interesting visit while he's here," because my ladies started pouncing on him. "How could you support him? You're black. How could you support his racism?" And he does not believe that Trump's racist. I really believe that his followers, not all of them are racist. A lot of them they believe in him and that's why he's still there. And so it goes to show that America still thinks like Trump. And Pence. They support them, they're behind them. I don't know how we can be behind something like that. It was devastating to me when Hillary lost. I kept saying it was stolen. And now to know that Russia had interfered in the campaign. It was taken from her. It was stolen. So we've now got another country interfering in America. How dare. We're supposed to be the best. We're supposed to be the best. And so when he says that "I'm going to make America great again." America was great before you. That's another lie. You've made America worse, [rather] than making America great. It's like with the wall that he talks about building and immigrants are not just coming through across the border. They are flying into America. They come by plane, train, you know, highway. So it's just not the border. You want to spend all that money on the border when we have college students, such as yourselves, in debt, in severe debt. I've got this one client who owes over 90 some thousand dollars. I know that some may owe more, some may owe less. I'm like, "ninety thousand dollars for a Bachelor's? Girl, bye! You've got to be kidding me!" And so it was just stories like that. And when you have the elderly that have to make decisions on healthcare or their bills. "Well, I got to keep a roof over my head, but I can't afford my medication." I think that's horrible. And we want to talk about building a wall. And you have still homelessness that exists. You know, people starving. Then with the border alone and you're separating women and men from their children. Girl, let me tell you something. I think I would've lost my mind. When I look back on that I was never taken away from my mom or housed, in cages and whatnot. I could not imagine that. Could you all imagine, something like that happening to yourself? I never lived through these times; when I would hear about stories about segregation and slavery... dot dot dot. Well thank the Lord I wasn't, you know, I didn't live through that era, but now I'm living through this era to where you're separating children and their parents. How devastating. That's going to stick with that child for the rest of their lives. I pray that they overcome it and be productive. But look at what we're doing. And it's like every day in the news something crazy. It's just like the football player—

48:27

HA: Kaepernick?

48:28

YCS: No, the owner of the football team that just won the Super Bowl—

48:39

EL: The Patriots?

48:41

YCS: Yes. Yes. The Patriots owner, running a prostitution ring... what in the world? Girl. Give me millions, honey. I will show you what you do with millions and that's not what you do with your money, running prostitution rings and even during the Super Bowl. I learned on the news. I didn't even know this in terms of the human trafficking, but especially children, you know they're using these young girls as prostitutes. Are you sick? I'm like, I was floored. Oh my God, are you serious? Make America great? America is sick. You all are prostituting children. Letting one man after another man take advantage of a woman. What is this? And you want to build a wall. In terms of building the wall, no they don't want to address gun control. I don't have a problem with someone owning a gun. Maybe two. But I don't, what do you call [it], the automatic... the automatic rifles, you know, that keep on continuing to shoot. I can't think of the name. This just shows you how much I'm not really into guns. But I think that it's crazy for you to own stuff like that. What are you going to kill? Even for hunters who are out there hunting deer. I'm against that... but hunt yourself on. But hunters out there, you don't need all automatic weapons and what not. For what? No one's doing anything. So with gun control, they're going in and shooting up churches. They're shooting up schools, clubs. You know, what about that? That's the real emergency. If we want to talk about emergency, that's the real emergency. Research in terms of diseases. I've got one of my clients who's battling Alzheimer's and it just breaks my heart. It really breaks my heart to what her family is going through because it has really turned her family upside down in terms of the disease. That's an emergency. Why not put more money into research? So I go on and on and on about that Trump. Number 45. *[Laughter]* But no. It really pains me that possibly he could get another term and that the hatred, and the rise in racism and anti-gay could possibly be growing. And I don't worry about myself so much because at my age I don't worry. But I'm worried about our young children having to come up and grow up with this. Now, it's like "oh, girl you gotta be in the closet. Boy you better stay in the closet. Oh, you oughtta be ashamed of being black. Oh, black is horrible. It's a horrible thing to be of color." No, no it's not. So I'm praying to God. I'm praying, praying, praying, praying that America will get back on track. We need to get back on track because we've been doing, we have grown as a country in terms of racism, in terms of anti-gay, and dot dot dot. But I just feel like with this current administration, we're going backwards, and we shouldn't. We shouldn't.

52:09

EL: So you focused a lot about gun control and you talked about shooting in schools and clubs. Especially, I think it was in Orlando, was it the Pulse shooting?

52:18

YCS: Yes.

52:19

EL: When you heard about that, did you think there was something, with our administration, do you feel there was something affecting that? Or do you think there

was a reason why this guy chose this club, a gay club, to shoot up, and how did you feel watching and hearing the news about that?¹

52:40

YCS: First of all, that is heartbreaking. No matter where it is, whether it's at a club, whether it's at a church, school, it breaks my heart. Up under this current administration, I think that they are giving them the okay card to come out. Be a white supremacist. Be a Ku Klux Klan member. Charlottesville was a perfect example that now this current administration is teaching "y'all come on out. You all don't have to hide, and you don't have to... you know... Do what you want to do." I'll never forget when Trump was even running before becoming president, that he was like "punch him in the mouth," or do this and do that. Oh my, are you serious? And to see people when someone like a white supremacist, when they get in trouble when they get caught how people do a GoFundMe page to raise money for them to have legal representation. Are you serious? It makes me more, now, paranoid than I have been in my whole entire life, up under this administration. I am now paranoid in terms of I don't think I really want to go a gay club. Going to church, I'm a little paranoid even being in church. Like, is someone going to shoot me in the back of the head because one, I'm black and I'm in a black church? To actually live this way, now, it's sad. It saddens me that I'm a little bit more paranoid, but it's not going to stop me from living. It's not going to stop me from going to a gay club. It's not gonna stop me from going to church. I can't live in fear. But, I'm more paranoid than I've been growing up, believe it or not. And so that's sad, that I've been on this earth for 45 years and in the last past couple of years I'm now more paranoid than I have ever been.

54:52

HA: If I may, do you have any hope? Do you think that we can move together, in the next whenever?

54:53

YCS: It's gonna take a while. Yeah. Oh yes, I do believe in it. I do believe that we're going to get better. America will become great again. You know, because when he says he's going to make America great. Not the way that you're going about it. That's not making America great. I do believe that at some point in time it will get better but it's going to take some time, because as long as right now, we've got people teaching their children hatred. You know. It's gonna take a minute. It's going to really take a minute. We may not see it, our generation... you all are a whole lot younger than I am. You all may not even get to see it, until you're a senior, you know, at some point. But it's gonna take some time. But I think that we're capable. I think that we're better. We're better than hatred. You know we're better than the racism and anti-gay. We're better. We're better than that.

55:47

¹ Note that the Pulse nightclub shooting occurred in June 2016, prior to Donald Trump's election to the presidency.

EL: And how do you feel like we could combat that? I know you say that it would take a long time and I believe you. I think it would take a long time just to have this equality that everyone should have. What do you think, we as a society now, like someone my age and your age, what do you think that we could do here to promote gay awareness or the African-American community? What do you think that we could do to show positivity, counteract those negative thoughts that people have?

56:19

YCS: I think that one is teaching. Why is that because of the color of my skin that I'm better? Yet I'm not. You're not. We're equal. So first, is teaching in reference to race. In terms of the anti-gay, why should it matter who I love, who I choose to love? Why does that matter to you? Because you don't agree with it, why does that matter? You know. So we need to teach, we need to teach those things. And if we teach, I do believe that if we teach, especially our children, now, and forever, that it will get a whole lot better. But it's in terms of teaching. In terms of "why is this little black girl less than this little white girl. Why?" Because of the color of her skin? That's ignorance. It's a lot of ignorance. And I actually will, in terms of the N word, that believe it or not, if you know what the N word means, it's ignorance. So there's a lot of Caucasians that are the N word, so we need to flip it, because you are the Ns, because you're so ignorant. Not all of course, but those who think that way. So you are the Ns. So I turn it around. Oh, you N. Oh you are the N. And you're so ignorant, so ignorant. So that in terms of race.

In terms of sexuality... a lot of times, we gay people were stereotyped as pedophiles. That was attached to us. Oh, I can't leave my child alone with... because he's gay. Can't leave my son there, or I can't leave my daughter with so-and-so because she's gay, she might try something with my child. We're not pedophiles. I'm sure there may be gay pedophiles but being gay does not make you a pedophile. I have never. I think that's one of the sickest things, adults taking advantage of children. Thank God that didn't happen to me. I'm so grateful. But I know of people that it has happened to. Thank God it did not happen to me. But it's not just gay people. Again, I'm sure there's gay pedophiles. But, that's been one of the things that's been grouped with us. You know, I have raised two nephews and currently still raising a niece. I've got a nephew that graduated last year from college has his bachelor's and has applied to three law schools. I've been there since day one. His father was not. But I was. Day one and this is what a gay man did. I got my nephew through college and without owing one dollar because there's money out there. That's another thing I tried to teach. I have got now a nephew that is graduating as a senior, who's graduating not only as a senior but in having his associate's because he did dual enrollment. Now I have a niece that's graduating from kindergarten and she's reading novels. She's currently reading novels.

So that's what we do. So we're not pedophiles, you know. Even though I don't have any children, but I am a role model. A positive role model. And my nephews, you know, growing up, they're very macho. They're like, "that's my uncle. That's my uncle." When we moved him in... because again, I'm very flamboyant. So, when I was moving him in, some of his friends was like, "is that your uncle?" He was like, "yeah that's my uncle. What about him?" "Oh is he gay?" "Yeah, he's gay. He sure is. Been gay his whole

entire life.” And so he’s teaching them, “yeah, I’m not ashamed of my uncle. You don’t know, my uncle’s really been my father.” And so he has to teach those because of the little macho guys that, you know, have been taught, that, you know, being gay is wrong. So that’s just letting you know this is where we need to be in terms of teaching our children that it does not matter that I’m gay. I’m successful. He will tell people in a minute, “my uncle has owned his business for over 22 years.” You know, and I have. I’ve been in the industry now for 25 and I’ve owned my own business now for 22 years. I’m very successful. I’ve been very, very successful. Being a black man and owning a business versus selling drugs. Oh, he’s a black man. If he’s driving something this, if he’s driving something that, he’s got to be a drug dealer. When I moved into a predominantly all white neighborhood and built my home and I moved in, both neighbors on the right and the left to me came to me, and it’s like “can we ask you something without offending you?” I said sure. “What’s your nationality?” I said I’m black. “Oh.” I said why? “We just thought you was something else, we didn’t know that you, we didn’t think, neither one of us thought you were black.” Are you serious? I’m like oh God, where did I move to? God. Lord. Where did I move to? So the ignorance, it’s the pure ignorance. Why does it matter what my nationality is? If you prick me, I’m going to bleed the same color that you would.

1:01:58

HA: Well, we’re at the 60 minutes.

1:02:00

EL: Oh wow. Okay. I just wanted to thank you for sharing your story with us and taking the time to sit down with and talk with us about this.

1:02:07

YCS: You’re welcome. Certainly, certainly.

1:02:10

HA: It was fun. I loved hearing you talk.

1:02:12

YCS: Come by anytime.

1:02:14

HA: I do need a haircut!

[END]