



IN THEIR OWN WORDS

Listen to audio excerpts of OSU alumni sharing their compelling life stories and college memories or read their interview transcripts at www.library.okstate.edu/oralhistory/ostate.

Called to Leadership **Bonnie (Emerson) Smith and Patrice Latimer were called to leadership in unique and challenging times. In addition to serving as president of OSU's Student Government Association, Smith was the first female elected to the post and Latimer was the first African-American.**

Patrice Latimer grew up in Tulsa, Okla., and attended public schools until she completed her last two years of high school while traveling across the country with the Up With People program.

With her quick smile, hearty laugh and commanding presence, Latimer was a highly visible student leader at OSU in the early 1970s. During this period of war protest, student activism and streakers night, she participated in many student activities but is best remembered for her history-making triumph in 1973 as the first African-American president of the Student Government Association.

"It was an honor to serve in that position as the first African-American woman," she says. "It gave me the courage to take on some things that I might not have taken on had I not been able to grow here at OSU."

Latimer graduated from OSU in 1975, and after law school and a noteworthy legal career in Oklahoma and later in Washington, D.C., she retired early to "explore life differently." In 2008 the OSU Black Alumni Association honored her with the Trailblazer Award.

Bonnie (Emerson) Smith grew up during the Great Depression in the rural community of Bowlegs, Okla., and attended OSU in the tumultuous times of World War II. The first woman elected president of the Student Government Association and president of the Student Senate, she served two terms from 1943 to 1945. She was also president of several other student organizations, a varsity cheerleader and four-sport letterman. After graduating in 1945, she completed a master's degree in 1946 while working as a secretary to legendary Coach Iba.

Her soft voice rises a little and her eyes sparkle as she remembers her days of student politics and how the Independents routed their opponents, the Representatives: "The [women's] dorms were very active at the time ... and we would kind of hint about how they were all being mistreated and get their ire up. ... And we had a very active town group, too, Tau Gamma, which stood



for town girls." She notes with a mischievous smile, "All we had to do to beat 'em was to show up and vote." 



O-STATE Stories, a project of the OSU Library's Oklahoma Oral History Research Program chronicles the rich history, heritage and traditions of OSU. For more information or to propose interviews, contact Jerry Gill at 405-744-1631 or email jerry.gill@okstate.edu.