

MGOHP Series: The Great Migration of African-Americans in the USA

INTERVIEW INDEX—SANDRA A. FOOTE

Interviewee: SANDRA A. FOOTE

Interviewer: Crystal Avant (her daughter)

Interview Date: March 13, 2006

Location: Detroit, MI

Tape No.: 03.13.06-SF (audio digital file)

(approximate total length 60 minutes)

Topic: Migration from New Orleans to Detroit

Subject

Headings:

Comments: Only italicized text in is verbatim; all other text is paraphrased, including the interviewer's questions. Counter index corresponds to track times when loaded into iTunes.

TAPE INDEX

Counter Index

Topic

[Audio File Track minutes –No. 02.26.06-AJ]

Note: Counter index corresponds to track times when loaded into iTunes

0:00 The date of the interview was March 13, 2006, the interviewer was Crystal Avant and the interviewee was Sandra Avant Foote; the interviewer's mother. There was an informed consent form signed without restrictions by both the interviewer and interviewee.

1:00 Born January 2, 1941 eighty to ninety miles outside of New Orleans. Mother felt more comfortable giving birth at her childhood home, McComb, Mississippi, instead of New Orleans. Born at grandparents home. Doctor came when mother was ready to give birth. After giving birth they returned to New Orleans. Father, his parents and her great-grandparents were from New Orleans area or Jefferson Parish

3:32 Grandmother was an indigenous: Native American midwife. Mother had great faith in her mother's ability to help her give birth. Grandmother came from the Choctaw tribe, which lived in that part of the country along with the Chickasaw tribe.

6:00 Parents moved back to New Orleans and moved in with or lived near aunt and uncle. Father worked as a stevedore at the French market on the docks and off of the ships that came in. Worked on shrimp boats. Lots of food and produce came in to the port and brought to the French market. Saturday's were spent at the market when she was a child. *It was a lot of fun on the weekends.* Her godfather would haggle the price of food. Everything was fresh to take home for the gumbo. She would stand on a stool and watch her godmother dump live crab in the pot to boil for the gumbo. *I used to feel so sorry for those crawfish and crab.*

11:10 Didn't know anything about prejudice at that time because mother and father did not explain that to her; also because she lived in a close-knit, protective community. The Creole community was a very isolated tight knit community that had different views. She knew to stick together but was too young to understand the idea of prejudice.

14:05 Moved to Detroit at around five years old after parents divorced. First moved to mother's home for a summer so mother could take classes at Jackson State then moved to Detroit so she could enter Wayne State University. Mother came for better job opportunities. Mother already had an older brother and sister that moved to Detroit. She worked at a nursing home. Some of her brothers and sisters "passed" but not intentionally, but it happened. Her Wayne State student ID read Caucasian but she did not tell them that. She felt everyone knew who she was. They thought Sandra was Asian or a war baby. Children pointed at her. She was confused and didn't know what was going on. Was used to her tight knit community where people looked racially like everybody. Didn't know what Asian, African American, or Caucasian meant.

21:15 She felt like a fish out of water; sort of. She spoke a dialect though became ashamed of it. A lady that lived next door tutored her after school with her language skills to help her speak like people in Detroit. She spoke a mixture of English, French, and Spanish. The teachers were nice but the children on the playground would make fun of her by squinting their eyes or slanting their eyes with their eyes with fingers. They asked her if she could see. She wanted to fit in. *In order to succeed here you've got to be better than your peers*

27:02 Explained that the Creole background consists of African, French, Native American, and Spanish. Mother has Spanish, Choctaw, Irish, and French. Father is primarily Native American along with Spanish, French, and African. She thought everybody was just like her. They could be dark, light, or medium complexion. She only spent the school year in Michigan then spent the rest of the year in New Orleans. When she was about 6 yrs. old, she got lost with her best friend when a policeman asked where they lived. The policeman didn't understand them (because they spoke Creole) so he followed them and they led him to their home.

32:27 The first area they moved to people spoke Spanish. Near southwest Detroit. Lived around Mexicans, Native Americans, and Puerto Ricans. Felt comfortable in this area of the city. Earliest memories were of streetcars downtown and mounted police. Going to the Hudson's building and seeing the stately Black doorman in his uniform. Was impressed by the big city but missed home. Did not like the cold weather. Even though the city was integrated the people were not as warm (friendly) as the Deep South.

42:17 Recognized segregation on subsequent visit to New Orleans. Was on a bus in New Orleans with mother and sat down where she wanted to sit because she did not know any better at the time. Mother didn't say anything to her. Went to a water fountain

and mother hesitated but let her drink from the fountain. Blacks and Whites took care of her—she was friends with both. Mother had pride and did not want her to hesitate.

47:12 Mother had an uncle who was a doctor that encouraged her to move where there were better opportunities. He was not in the South at that time. She would have rather stayed in the South but mother understood there were more opportunities in Detroit.

When going on road trips as a family they would sometimes get stopped because she felt like they looked different racially. Going through southern states, the police would stop them and the police did not know what to say *–it did not make me feel comfortable.*

50:42 Felt like she stuck out. Didn't want to be treated differently because of how she looked. She felt that other African Americans looked so nice, she wanted to be more like them and not stand out. Afraid that peers would make fun of how she looked different from her mother and aunts and uncles (they all had blue eyes and fair skin). Thinks that it is part of the African American culture that everyone looks different and have different cultural backgrounds.

54:12 Moving to Detroit exposed her to different types of people. It helped her have a better understanding of people. Feels that there were better opportunities for African Americans in Detroit than in New Orleans especially when she was a child. Mother was able to become a supervisor at Harper Hospital as well as other hospitals. She overall felt her experience here was positive. *You take the good and the bad.* Went back home to New Orleans every year in the summer. She was able to go to the university of her choice and participate in youth activities like CYO (Catholic Youth Organization). New Orleans was a predominately catholic area. She took swimming lessons, art classes, and went to music classes for her betterment. Overall it was a positive experience.

1:00:37 (End of track)

ADDENDUM:

00:00 March 30, 2006---Phrases from New Orleans/Creole speech. If confused, the French would be, *Je n'sais pas*, for *I don't know* but we would say *Me no sais*; Or turn things backward: *Me cher amile*; for my good friend; *Me no go to work today, yes*—that would be a common phrasing. Encouraged not to use Creole; and embarrassed to use in Detroit because it was thought of as a poor language.

03:54