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Cape Verdean Oral History Project: Interview with Johnetta Cole by Alberto Torres Pereira

Johnetta B. Cole

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CAFE VERDEAN ORAL HISTORY

Tape # 14

Friday, May 18, 1973

Johnetta B. Cole, Associate Professor of Afro-American Studies and Anthropology
University of Massachusetts
Amherst, Massachusetts

Alberto Torres Pereira, Interviewer

000-testing

005-introduction

016-gives home background; southern-born, aware of blackness, race-consciousness. Grandfather started "Afro-American Insurance Company"

032-to college, in sociology. George Simpson, instructor, talks about Jamaicans and fact that they never gave up all their African culture

044-study with Simpson (Oberlin College). Interest increased in African or basic cultural pool for many people.


059-Doctorate based on field experiences in Liberia. 2 years. Married. Crucial, in terms of development in understanding nature of racism outside American culture.

072-first son born in Liberia; does field work in Liberia.

078-return to Pullman, Washington, for 7 years. Discusses Afro-American studies - her help in establishing a program at Washington State

088-to Amherst (Univ. of Mass.) northeast experience. Discusses knowing little about Cape Verde Islands. Discovers Cape Verdeans (students) and connects.

106-tremendous amount of data is untapped; no systematic study of Cape Verdean culture.

109-wants to pursue study. Some disadvantage not being Cape Verdean. Language poses problem. Advantage in not being Cape Verdean: Cape Verdean so much part of culture, is unaware. "Scarcely
Johnetta B. Cole

109 continued...

"the fish who discovers water." Cape Verdians cannot contemplate their water. Being non-Cape Verdian but yet of African people, perhaps more sensitive to cultural phenomena.

126- racial prejudice among older Cape Verdians. She can move between Afro-Americans and Cape Verdian communities, drawing similarities, seeing differences, indicating shared goals.

136- distinguishes between Cape Verdian and Afro-Americans. Definition of Cape Verdian.

160- any people uses their identity in their own interests. Cape Verdians saw little advantage in blackness when first came to America. Now, positive associations bring Cape Verdians into blackness. Parallel experiences between Black and Cape Verdian.

190- right to call themselves what they are. Cape Verdians know what they are. When dealing with oppression, Cape Verdians choose Portuguese identity. What we are (Cape Verdians and Afro-Americans) is not African, but a great part of what we are is.

217- Discusses moves taken to sustain self-interest by Cape Verdians. Realization of African as positive brings positive response from contemporary Cape Verdians.

226- Wants to promote necessity for people to understand who and what they are. Political positions, though personal, should be taken from clear cut information. No information at present, not accessible.

237- Describes her work. First in New Bedford with families of students. Envisions study as "total study". Sites- Cape Verde Islands, New Bedford, and Univ. of Mass. Continuity - people in Cape Verde Islands, New Bedford, Univ. of Mass.

271- Lack of money. Grants not easy to come by. Her work demands different disciplines; team of 4 to 5 people, 5 years.

290- $100,000

293- Hard to get "typical" Cape Verdians; true with any culture. Range from people who identify with Portugal, to those who identify with the Cape Verde Islands, to Black Conservatives, to those who maintain Cape Verdian traditions, and to those who have "americanized" themselves, all the way to radicals. Understanding the intricacies takes long term project.

304- range of attitudes, sensitivities. Cape Verdian Newspaper, PAIGC. Different attitudes wait for what is to be written and are ready to pounce.

310- Cape Cod - research. People asked, say- "New Bedford is the capital of Cape Verde."
Johnetta B. Cole

310 continued...
Large Cape Verdean concentration there.


337- "sitting on the wall" - young people "rapping" discusses tenacity of culture.

353- "Daddy Grace" and "Father Divine" - similarities. Attempt to express admiration of someone who "makes it" in a difficult oppressive situation.

359- large category of field notes, "Africanisms" Cape Verdeans are between Afro-Americans and Africans...to Cole, certainly more Africanisms among Cape Verdeans than among Afro-Americans. For example, paid mourning lingers in Cape Verdean culture, still important part of African culture.


396- Cole, second step: African people share not only heritage and culture but also common oppression. Behavior common to oppressed.

427- Asians "correcting" slanted eyes. Afro-Americans bleach and hair pomade. Chicanos anglicizing names.

442- food: initial response to various Cape Verdean foods was that it was not foreign. Rice, manioc, corn, etc. Attitudes about food. Discusses move to New Bedford apartment. Food as ingredient of hospitality, warmth, friendship, culture.

486- plans research in New Bedford, looking, working, dancing, eating, noticing. Conceptualizes book on Cape Verde, possible cookbook, articles.

540- indicates African and Portuguese heritage. No advantage in denying Portuguese heritage, but must emphasize African heritage.

572- the "godfather" tradition. "salvage anthropology" to save information in all media forms possible.

595- urgency.