5-24-1974

Cape Verdean Oral History Project: Interview with Alexander Tavares by Alberto Torres Pereira

Alexander Joaquim Tavares

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CAPE VERDEAN ORAL HISTORY
May 24, 1974
Alexander Tavares, interviewee
Lincoln, Rhode Island
(State House photographer)

Interviewer, Alberto Torres Pereira

000- Opening comments, Fereira.


035- Educated in New Bedford public school system.

045- Considers Cape Verdeans an ethnic identity separate from Black though acknowledges Cape Verdean Blackness.

056- Father dead when Tavares is 12 years old. Strong relationship between the two makes it easier for Tavares to leave the neighborhood without fear.

098- Father worked aboard whaling ship. In 1917 came to United States. Mother arrived year earlier, 1916.

109- Tavares born at 171 Grinell Street, New Bedford, Mass. Lived there till his father's death (Tavares 12 years old) then moved to West New Bedford, to Sycamore Street. Recalls Grinell Street neighborhood; father was janitor in Hebrew-Day School which has since been replaced by gas station.

140- Racism: mother sheltered Tavares during growing years; helped him by exposing him to epithets and racial slurs to help create immunity. Sycamore Street area integrated about 1943.

196- Parent's education and occupations: father educated in Cape Verde islands; sailed as whaler until 1917. (Grandfather also whaler.) Mother had little formal education in Cape Verdes; attended night school 3 times weekly in New Bedford. Spent two years at Wilson School, Pleasant Street, New Bedford. Prep course for exam for citizenship papers. Classmates mostly Cape Verdeans. Father worked in several mills, also at Goodyear, Firestone, Fisk Rubber factories, during war years and at Pierpoint Glassware. Mother picked cranberries and strawberries in Cape Cod. (Interviewee and interviewer discuss rigors of "picking.")

280- Parents migrated to U.S. because it was "rich country" and if unable to find work, government of U.S. would take care of them. Spoke often of returning to Cape Verdes but never made the journey.

319- Tavares relates story of an uncle who, upon retirement in U.S. went back to Cape Verdes, remarried, sired 3 children.
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continued...

Tavares compares rejuvenation of his uncle with dull lives of elderly and retired American citizens.

336- Discussion of whaling: doesn't recall name of whaler his father sailed on; recalls that his grandfather sailed aboard the "Morgan" a whaling ship now on display at Mystic Seaport in Connecticut.

355- Arrival at Port of Call in New Bedford Harbor; mother met by couple named Duarte. At first did not like U.S., considered it too dirty (too many flies and mosquitos.) Mother and father stayed with friends and, or relatives (separately) before marriage. Father wished for one final whaling voyage; mother rejected idea. The ship Tavares' father would have sailed on went down and disappeared, no hands ever heard from.

414- Father's job aboard whaler: oarsman, harpooneer. Grandfather was whale skinner, sighter (from crow's nest high up mast). Grandfather retired from whaling, worked in mills.

452- Parents belonged to clubs in neighborhood. Father amateur boxing referee.

Tavares describes "conja" a chicken-rice based soup, popular Cape Verdean dish.

492- Tavares considers himself an American of Cape Verdean ancestry; is aware of, and discusses problems Cape Verdeans face. Discusses society conventions and use of those conventions to move up or ahead in life. Insists on right to protest if maltreated from society.

590- Discussion follows on Guinea-Bissau, the Cape Verde Islands, in view of coming independence of both territories.

610- Thinks there are possible positive aspects of revolution in Portugal (the coup). Does not believe the Cape Verde Islands can go it alone (as independent state).

653- Tavares moved to Providence in 1952. Lived in Fox Point section. Attended school of photography. Wife's name, Josephine. Is a hospital aide.

(Interview over as Tavares rushes off to photography appointment.)