

NOTICE

Materials in our digital Oral History collections are the products of research projects by several individuals. USF Libraries assume no responsibility for the views expressed by interviewers or interviewees. Some interviews include material that may be viewed as offensive or objectionable. Parents of minors are encouraged to supervise use of USF Libraries Oral Histories and Digital Collections. Additional oral histories may be available in Special Collections for use in the reading room. See individual collection descriptions for more information.

This oral history is provided for research and education within the bounds of U.S. Copyright Law (Title 17, U.S.C.). Copyright over Oral Histories hosted by the USF Libraries rests with the interviewee unless transferred to the interviewer in the course of the project. Interviewee views and information may also be protected by privacy and publicity laws. All patrons making use of it and other library content are individually accountable for their responsible and legal use of copyrighted material.

Otis R. Anthony African Americans in Florida Oral History Project
Oral History Program
Florida Studies Center
University of South Florida, Tampa Library

Digital Object Identifier: A31-00013
Interviewee: Fannie Coleman (FC)
Interview by: Otis Anthony (OA)
Interview date: September 13, 1978
Interview location: Unknown
Transcribed by: Unknown
Transcription date: Unknown
Interview changes by: Kimberly Nordon
Changes date: December 11, 2008
Final Edit by: Mary Beth Isaacson
Final Edit date: January 7, 2009

Otis Anthony: You have to repeat it over again.

Fannie Coleman: I, ah—we supposedly come to Tampa in 1998 [1898] and I was 2 years old. I was born in Brooksville.

OA: Okay, Ms. Coleman, when you came here, what were the—how were blacks living when you came here?

FC: In a poor condition. Very poor.

OA: Correct. Can you go further in explaining what you're talking about?

FC: How you mean, in what manner?

OA: Just describe it.

FC: Oh. Well, they was—you know, they was poor. And they wasn't treated too good. So, I don't know what else to say. But I'm supposed to be 76 years old if I come here in 1998.

OA: That's right, 1898.

FC: That's right, 1898. And, ah—I know most of the problem of people in Tampa because Tampa wasn't nothin' when I was old enough to know about it. It wasn't nothin'. And the depot was there on Polk, in Tampa. And the Clara Frye Hospital was up on Lamar Street. They had a little hospital up there.

OA: Can you tell us something about the Clara Frye Hospital?

FC: Well, that's all I know about it.

OA: All right. How was the living conditions, like the houses?

FC: Well, the houses was little wooden shacks. And this out here was nothin'...wasn't nothin' out here. Down here by this river. And when they did they were little houses face to face. I don't know—you were too young to know. It was bad conditions to live in, but that's what you had to do. And a average man, they claim, got a dollar and a dollar and a half a day.

I don't know. I thought y'all wanted, ah,like, the first colored doctor was here was Dr. Anderson, to my knowin'. Of course, Mr. Ferrell ought to, could give you a lot of information, A. J. Ferrell, because he was brought up here, too. And the Brumicks, they used to—

OA: Yeah, tell us somethin' about the Brumicks. We heard a lot about 'em, but we—we have no information about 'em.

FC: Well, the Brumicks, they owned a whole lot of property off of Franklin down there on Tyler goin' to the river. And they were teachers. Two of 'em, Miss Viola and Miss Emma, they was teachers in Hillsborough County school. I went to Harlem, the little bit I went to school. I haven't gotten much of a education. But I went to school to Harlem. You know, I don't understand it. Colored people haven't got anything yet today. Got no hospital. They got no nothin'. And I just don't understand it. How do th—what they have get away from 'em?

OA: Well, what happened to all the property the Brumicks owned?

FC: I don't know. But they owned—you've heard of them haven't ya?

OA: Yes, ma'am, we have heard a lot about them.

FC: Yeah. They owned property from Tampa Street back toward the river there on Tyler. Now what become of it, I don't know. And, ah—who else I know owned property? Did you—have you all talked to Emma Mantz?

OA: No, we haven't talked to her.

FC: Well, she's raised here. I don't know whether she was born here, but she was here all of her life when I knowed her. She was on—she's up there on Ola and—I can't think now. I know when St. Paul Church faced Marion Street, a little wooden church.

OA: A wooden church?

FC: Yes, it was. And they turned it round to face Harrison Street.

OA: Oh, that's real interesting.

FC: Yeah.

OA: Okay, Ms. Coleman, how was segregation?

FC: (laughs) Well, you know, you took the back seat on the—you wouldn't dare sit up in the front because you wasn't allowed there.

OA: Well, how did you view—what was your view of it?

FC: At that time?

OA: Yes, ma'am.

FC: I was a child. It didn't worry me, you know, because ain't had nothin' to ride with no how, you had to walk. I lived in West Side Park and I used to walk to Harlem every day, because they didn't have no—

OA: When you became a young lady how did it affect you, the segregation part?

FC: Well, it was—you got accustomed, I guess, to them kind of things. If white man put you in the back you was contented. I guess, you was. And there was the Howards. They owned a lot of property here. I guess you heard of them.

OA: The Howards?

FC: Yeah. It was a—between Spring and Harland there on Scott Street. They tore that house down.

OA: Umm hmm.

FC: 'Cause the project come th—(coughs)—t's a lot of changes in Tampa, today (coughs)—was when I remembered. [To someone else:] Hey, there. Hey, come in.

OA: Do you recall the Tampa riots, a—say, the—in the 1930s?

FC: There was, I hear—

OA: Yes, ma'am.

FC: Down on Central, was they?

OA: In the 1930s when the soldiers was here.

FC: Oh, in 1930?

OA: Yes, ma'am.

FC: Oh, I don't remember. I heard they say they camped here, but for me to know it, to my remembrance, I don't.

OA: How about the Depression?

FC: Hmm. Hmm. Well, the Depression, it was hard. Couldn't hardly get bread.

OA: Can you explain further?

FC: Just knowed it was hard. And there wasn't no work. Or they didn't give it to black, no way, so you just pulled through it. I remember the Depression.

OA: Okay. How about the soup lines? Are you familiar with the soup lines?

FC: No, I wasn't. They say Charlie Moon had a soup line, but for me to know it—I didn't know it.

OA: Okay. Can you explain some of the social events that was on Central? If you—

FC: No. Black had had a restaurant down there. And—I don't know—what you mean by—?

OA: Well, during the 1930s what social events did blacks have to attend?

FC: They went to dances and that's about all. We had a picture show there on Central.

OA: Ms. Coleman have you—anybody told you anything about, say, the shipyards or the railroads as to were blacks really employed in those two areas? Was blacks employed in the shipyards?

FC: Yes.

OA: And the railroads?

FC: Yes.

OA: Did anybody tell you anything about their working conditions?

FC: No. But they—some was employed in the shipyard and in the railroad. I don't know what they done, but they was there. My brother-in-law worked on the—was in the railroad. But I don't know what he done.

OA: Okay. And before World War I? Do you recall—?

FC: Well, what, ah, year was—?

OA: That's gettin' into your thirties.

FC: In your thirties?

OA: Thirties and forties. What were black people doin' in, say, the '30s and '40s in Tampa?

FC: They was workin' public works and things.

OA: Like the WPA?

FC: Yeah, the WPA—

OA: Do you recall that?

FC: —was goin'—did go. I don't know what it was, but anyhow—and the CC camps, a lot of young men went to them, to the CC camps.

OA: What were CC camps?

FC: I don't know. You know, Isabel?

Isabel: The CC camp, I weren't here, but I know what they did. The CC camp was to train young mens how to do different kind of work.

OA: Oh, it was sort of somethin' like a, a vocational education?

Isabel: Yeah. Somethin' like that. And the PWA—it worked 'em—umm hmm—it worked (inaudible). Nobody can't find no job they do what the rest of the work the black men's do—workin' on the PWA—and dig ditches and all that kind of stuff. Anything that—along side of the road—what the, a, prisoner didn't do, that was the PWA.

OA: Oh, I see.

Isabel: They called it the PWA then. See, that was everywhere. Negroes was workin'. They worked farmin', shippin'. They was—

OA: How about the comin' of the 50s [1950s]? How did segregation affect the blacks in Tampa?

Isabel: Sure didn't affect 'em.

OA: How did it—you know, what were your ideas on segregation, you know, in Tampa?

Isabel: Well, in Tampa didn't even know what it is. You couldn't go to the restaurant where white folks eat like they can now. You couldn't go to the same rest rooms. If we rode the bus, why, they didn't put but four on the bus and that's on that back seat back there. They didn't (inaudible) that was black. (inaudible) just everyone in back. (inaudible) We couldn't go to none of the functions like swimmin' pool or nothin' like the white folks do. We couldn't eat in no places. And we didn't have no kind of recreation place where you could be decent. You could go in swimmin' and stuff like that. (inaudible) on bridges and creeks and things and try to swim.

OA: Oh.

Isabel: Because you weren't allowed to

OA: Do you recall what was happening before World War I in Tampa?

Isabel: No, I don't. I weren't in Tampa, but I'm tellin' you what was ah—in general. For, see, I had lots of people that was here and they could tell me what was happenin' during those times. The same thing was happenin' all over the world. Because where I was in Gainesville it was happenin' to me, too. (inaudible) but I do remember. The first time that they started votin' here, I was here. That was in the '30s. When they carried 'em out there—one man was going around recruiting people to vote. When they carried him out there (inaudible) white folks beat him, told him they didn't have nothin' to vote for. They was tryin' (inaudible) and go. And I said, "Well, I ain't goin' (inaudible) this time without me and I ain't goin'." I said, "You all go out there and you're gonna get beat," and that's what's happened.

OA: Okay. Ms. Coleman, do you recall the—did you ever vote in the 30s?

FC: Yes, I, I voted.

OA: Did you have any problems with voting?

FC: No. No I haven't.

OA: Okay. How was the churches in Tampa?

FC: They were—oh, they was more—of course, you know, they was little churches then. Churches always been the same to me. Of course they've made a lot of progress, but they always been the same.

OA: Okay. Ms. Coleman, I thank you for the interview. You helped me a great deal, particularly the time around about during World War I. You gave me some very good information on that. And I also thank you for enlightening me on the—

Isabel: Well, if they (inaudible) for the church (inaudible) and the main thing (inaudible) baseball now and the football. Was (inaudible) and they had Union—what they did with all that stuff—there were masonic halls and everything before when we came in. (inaudible) up the country and all (inaudible) happened to be in that. And I happened to be one of the bookin' agents.

OA: What were they, Elks?

Isabel: Golden Tones. Huh?

OA: Were they—

Isabel: No. They'd go to the Elks Hall.

OA: Oh, I see. Umm hmm.

Isabel: Large a place as it was they would go there in the Lily White Temple and they would sing (inaudible). And so Golden Tones (inaudible) was the main manpower (inaudible) Golden Tones. (inaudible) and that was the thing. When anything happened like that why everyone had somewhere to go. (inaudible) lookin' for the next one to come in. (inaudible) people up north they was just ready to come in here. The singin' and they would, a—what, you know, they'd have contests, you know, one against the other one, like that. And that was a—hat was in those days, that was good times for us.

FC: I've been a daughter Elk.

OA: Oh, you have been an Elk?

FC: Yes.

OA: Were the Elks very important in Tampa?

FC: Yes, they was. And I joined there under daughter Ray Williams Altomes. They named that temple the Altomes Temple. And I guess it's on Const because I don't get out and so I don't know (inaudible) But it's—lots of changes been made in Tampa, that's right.

OA: So, do you think we have progressed to the point that we could feel secure or do you think we have to—there's still more progress needed?

FC: I think until we learn to trust, a—you—the black man, we ain't gonna get nowhere. You knows there are a lot of 'em, "I don't want no 'nigger' doctor." Now to be a good doctor went off and he learned just like the white man. "I don't want some of them down steal my money like—" We've got to get out from that. You trust a white man, you can trust a black man. That's the way I feels about it.

OA: Okay. And I thank you for the interview. And what I will do I will get back—

end of interview