

INTRODUCTION TO NOLA RESISTANCE

Grades 6–12

LESSON 3: Integrating McDonogh 19

Leona Tate Oral History Transcript

Tate was interviewed by Mark Cave at the Lower Ninth Ward Living Museum in New Orleans on February 21, 2018, for the NOLA Resistance oral history project. Below is an excerpt from their 62-minute interview.

CAVE: I know you've told the story many times, but walk us through very slowly and in detail that first day.

TATE: When I woke up that morning my house was—family members was all over. You would have thought it was a Christmas holiday and everybody was getting ready and preparing the food for the dinner. But they were there to help my mama prepare me to leave, and I remember everybody having a task. There was somebody when my mom combed my hair. Somebody got me dressed. It was a happy moment, I remember, but when a car pulled up, a black car which was the marshals, the house got real quiet. I can remember that silence. I remember it like it was yesterday.

My mother and I left with the two men. It was two white men. Not that I knew they were white then, but it was two white men with the hat and the banner on they arm. I do remember that. Got in the car, and I can remember Mama telling me, "Sit to the back. Do not put your face to the window and look straight ahead." Still not thinking of anything. Still not thinking. So we drove to the school and once we made that turn—we came

in from the back of the school, and once we made that turn on St. Claude, masses of people were there. And anybody from New Orleans would have thought the same thing we thought, that we were about miss a parade because we had to go to school. I could hear the yelling and screaming. I couldn't make out what they were saying and had no idea all of that was focused on me. I remember seeing the police on horseback holding the people back, and I'm thinking, they're holding them back so the car that I'm in wouldn't hit them.

So we got in the building. We walked up the steps that morning and went through the door. The principal's office was straight ahead. I guess we were asked to sit outside the office. We sat out there for a long time. We were out there long enough for the three of us to play hopscotch in the blocks on the floor, so I'm sure we were there quite a while. Once we did get placed in the classroom, I can remember trying to speak to a little girl and it was like I was invisible. She didn't even—it was like she didn't even hear me, and I know we were like almost shoulder to shoulder. She didn't look my way. She didn't move. She didn't do anything. No response at all. It was like I didn't even—I wasn't even there. But in a few minutes all the students that were there when we got there were gone. By the end of the day, we were the only three in the entire building, and that lasted a year and a half.