

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Eugenia Fortes

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## Overview of the Collection

<b>Repository:</b>	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
<b>Creator:</b>	Fortes, Eugenia, 1911-2006
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Eugenia Fortes,
<b>Dates:</b>	August 21, 2004
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2004
<b>Physical Description:</b>	4 Betacame SP videocassettes (1:46:30).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Civil rights activist Eugenia Fortes (1911 - 2006 ) founded the Cape Cod NAACP and dedicated twenty-five years to sending food and clothing to impoverished counties in the Deep South. Fortes was also a member of the Hyannis Port library board of directors for forty years, and was on the United States Civil Rights Commission for fourteen years. Fortes was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on August 21, 2004, in Hyannis, Massachusetts. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2004_137
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Civil rights activist Eugenia Fortes was born in Brava, in the Cape Verde Islands, on November 14, 1911. Her father, Antonio, traveled to America, and Fortes had to wait until she was nine years old before being able to join her father. After a journey of thirty-one days, Fortes arrived in Whaling City, New Bedford, Massachusetts.

In 1928, Fortes found work at the artificial pearl company in Hyannis, and two years later, became a housekeeper for a family in Hyannisport. She remained in that position for the next twenty-seven years, and in 1957, she became a cook at a local school until her retirement in 1968. An outspoken activist for the poor and racial equality, in 1945, Fortes and a friend visited East Beach in Hyannisport, which was then segregated. Asked by the police to leave, Fortes refused. The following year, a group attempted to buy the beach and privatize it, but Fortes stepped forward in a town council meeting and lambasted the idea, telling of the discrimination she faced.

Fortes founded the Cape Cod chapter of the NAACP in 1961, but by then, she was already well steeped in the Civil Rights Movement. One of the tenants who rented her cottage from her was future Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall, and in 1955, Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr., spent Thanksgiving and Christmas on the island. In 1961, when the Freedom Riders came through Hyannis, Ted Kennedy came to get a report from her to be delivered to the White House. As a fighter for the poor, Fortes sent food and clothing to impoverished counties in the Deep South for twenty-five years.

Fortes was a member of the Hyannis library board of directors for forty years, and was on the United States Civil Rights Commission for fourteen years. She also received numerous awards for her civil rights work. In 2004, the beach Fortes refused to leave in 1945, East Beach, was renamed Fortes Beach.

Fortes passed away on Friday, May 19, 2006 at the age of 94.

## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Eugenia Fortes was conducted by Larry Crowe on August 21, 2004, in Hyannis, Massachusetts, and was recorded on 4 Betacame SP videocassettes. Civil rights activist Eugenia Fortes (1911 - 2006 ) founded the Cape Cod NAACP and dedicated twenty-five years to sending food and clothing to impoverished counties in the Deep South. Fortes was also a member of the Hyannis Port library board of directors for forty years, and was on the United States Civil Rights Commission for fourteen years.

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## Restrictions

### Restrictions on Access

Restrictions may be applied on a case-by-case basis at the discretion of The HistoryMakers®.

### Restrictions on Use

All use of materials and use credits must be pre-approved by The HistoryMakers®. Appropriate credit must be given. Copyright is held by The HistoryMakers®.

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## Related Material

Information about the administrative functions involved in scheduling, researching, and producing the interview, as well as correspondence with the interview subject is stored electronically both on The HistoryMakers® server and in two databases maintained by The HistoryMakers®, though this information is not included in this finding aid.

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## Controlled Access Terms

This interview collection is indexed under the following controlled access subject terms.

### Persons:

Fortes, Eugenia, 1911-2006

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

### Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Fortes, Eugenia, 1911-2006--Interviews

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## Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

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## Occupations:

Civil Rights Activist

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## HistoryMakers® Category:

CivicMakers

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## Administrative Information

### Custodial History

Interview footage was recorded by The HistoryMakers®. All rights to the interview have been transferred to The HistoryMakers® by the interview subject through a signed interview release form. Signed interview release forms have been deposited with Jenner & Block, LLP, Chicago.

### Preferred Citation

The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Eugenia Fortes, August 21, 2004. The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection, 1900 S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Illinois.

### Processing Information

This interview collection was processed and encoded on 5/30/2023 by The HistoryMakers® staff. The finding aid was created adhering to the following standards: DACS, AACR2, and the Oral History Cataloging Manual (Matters 1995).

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## Other Finding Aid

A Microsoft Access contact database and a FileMaker Pro tracking database, both maintained by The HistoryMakers®, keep track of the administrative functions involved in scheduling, researching, and producing the interview.

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## Detailed Description of the Collection

### Series I: Original Interview Footage

Video Oral History Interview with Eugenia Fortes, Section A2004\_137\_001\_001, TRT: 0:29:31 ?  
Eugenia Fortes was born on November 14, 1911 in Brava, Cape Verde. Cape Verde is an archipelago off the west coast of Africa which was colonized by the Portuguese. Cape Verdeans are racially mixed and Fortes does not remember a distinction made between white Cape Verdeans and Moorish Cape Verdeans. Her mother, Maria Anicleto Fortes, was born in 1890 in Fogo, Cape Verde and

migrated to Brava. Fortes' paternal grandfather was a native of Portugal and immigrated to Cape Verde. Her father, Antonio Fortes, was born in Brava in the late 1880s. His father had been a fisherman, physician and practiced herbal medicine. Antonio Fortes was a close friend to Marcelino Manuel da "Daddy Grace" Graca, founder of the United House of Prayer for All People. Antonio Fortes migrated to New Bedford, Massachusetts in 1911; Fortes followed in 1920, on a lumber boat called Melissa Trask. She attended Thomas Donaghy School, Thomas A. Greene School and later Allen F. Wood School in New Bedford where she learned to speak English.

Video Oral History Interview with Eugenia Fortes, Section A2004\_137\_001\_002, TRT: 0:29:11 ?

Eugenia Fortes worked as a cook and caterer two wealthy sisters for twenty-seven years after immigrating New Bedford, Massachusetts from Brava, Cape Verde in 1920. In 1936, Fortes joined the Boston, Massachusetts branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). She explains her interest in the organization and describes the racial discrimination she observed "up-south." Fortes contributed to founding the Cape Cod, Massachusetts branch of the NAACP in 1961. Walter Stevenson was elected its inaugural president and Fortes was named president following his death. She talks about her relationships with Senator Edward Brooke and the Kennedy family. Following her domestic work, Fortes worked as a baker in a Cape Cod school. In 1946, she refused to vacate East beach, a segregated beach in Hyannis Port, Massachusetts. The beach was renamed Eugenia Fortes beach in December 2003 in her honor. Fortes is friends with fellow Cape Verdean HistoryMaker George N. Leighton.

Video Oral History Interview with Eugenia Fortes, Section A2004\_137\_001\_003, TRT: 0:29:46 ?

Eugenia Fortes remembers poor Southerners being sent North posing as Freedom Riders, in an effort by the Republicans to embarrass John Fitzgerald Kennedy's presidential administration. Fortes maintained a close friendship with Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall. Fortes remembers Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s visit to Cape Cod while he was studying for his Ph.D. at Boston University. In 1965, Sambo's Restaurant opened in Hyannis and was boycotted because of its derogatory overtones. Fortes, along with activists Kenneth Warren, Margaret Moseley and Judith Barnet, advocated for public housing in Cape Cod. Fortes was a member of the Community Action Committee of Cape Cod and Islands, Inc. (CACCI), president of the Barnstable Council on Aging and contributed to the Mississippi Box Project. Fortes describes her hopes and concerns for the African American community and how she would like to be remembered. She considers what she would have done differently and reflects upon her legacy.

Video Oral History Interview with Eugenia Fortes, Section A2004\_137\_001\_004, TRT: 0:18:02 ?

Eugenia Fortes narrates her photographs.