

Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Edith Armstead Gray

Overview of the Collection

Repository:	The HistoryMakers®1900 S. Michigan Avenue Chicago, Illinois 60616 info@thehistorymakers.com www.thehistorymakers.com
Creator:	Gray, Edith Armstead, 1910-2009
Title:	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Edith Armstead Gray,
Dates:	May 18, 2004
Bulk Dates:	2004
Physical Description:	4 Betacame SP videocassettes (2:00:01).
Abstract:	High school home economics teacher Edith Armstead Gray (1910 - 2009) taught home economics for the Conecuh County Board of Education in Alabama for over forty years. Gray was the first secretary for the Conecuh County chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. Gray was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on May 18, 2004, in Washington, District of Columbia. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
Identification:	A2004_051
Language:	The interview and records are in English.

Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

High school home economics teacher Edith Armstead Gray was born on November 19, 1910 in Galveston, Texas to Millie and Henry Armstead. Although Gray and her family sometimes worked as farm laborers picking cotton, her parents valued education and encouraged their children to attend college. She attended Lamarque Public School and Booker T. Washington School in Lamarque, Texas before earning her high school diploma from Central High School in Galveston in 1930. The following year, Gray enrolled at Tuskegee Institute,

slowly working her way towards her degree. As a member of the Tuskegee 100 Voice Choir, she traveled with the group across the country for six weeks singing at Radio City Music Hall in New York and for President Franklin Roosevelt's mother's birthday in 1932.

In the mid-1930s, when she was no longer able to pay tuition, she returned to Texas where she worked as a seamstress. In 1934, she received her first and only teaching job with the Conecuh County Board of Education in Alabama, teaching home economics until she retired in 1976. While teaching, she completed her studies at Tuskegee and earned her B.S. degree in 1940, nearly ten years after she enrolled. In 1966, Gray joined the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and served as the first secretary for the Conecuh County chapter, where she helped to organize people for civil rights protests and tried to increase the membership.

Gray is widowed and has three adult children, Frederick, Jerome and Phyllis.

Edith Armstead Gray was interviewed by *TheHistoryMakers* on May 18, 2004.

Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Edith Armstead Gray was conducted by Racine Tucker Hamilton on May 18, 2004, in Washington, District of Columbia, and was recorded on 4 Betacame SP videocassettes. High school home economics teacher Edith Armstead Gray (1910 - 2009) taught home economics for the Conecuh County Board of Education in Alabama for over forty years. Gray was the first secretary for the Conecuh County chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.

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®.

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.

Controlled Access Terms

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

Persons:

Gray, Edith Armstead, 1910-2009

Hamilton, Racine Tucker (Interviewer)

Lane, Edgar Carey (Videographer)

Subjects:

African Americans--Interviews

Gray, Edith Armstead, 1910-2009--Interviews

African American teachers--Alabama--Interviews.

Organizations:

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

Occupations:

High School Home Economics Teacher

HistoryMakers® Category:

EducationMakers

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 Edith Armstead Gray, May 18, 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 2/5/2020 by The HistoryMakers® staff. The finding aid was created adhering to the following standards: DACS, AACR2, and the Oral History Cataloging Manual (Matters 1995).

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.

Detailed Description of the Collection

Series I: Original Interview Footage

Video Oral History Interview with Edith Armstead Gray, Section
A2004_051_001_001, TRT: 0:30:50 2004/05/18

Edith Armstead Gray was born on November 19, 1910 in Galveston, Texas. Her mother, Millie Williams Armstead, was born in 1882 in Hawkinsville, Texas. She went to school through the eighth grade and was an excellent student. Gray's maternal great grandmother remembers being kidnapped from Africa and enslaved in Texas. There, she met her husband, who was from the West Indies. He escaped the plantation to Mexico, but when he returned for his family, after he believed slavery was over, he was fatally beaten. Gray's maternal grandmother was raped by the man who owned her. Gray's father Henry Armstead, Sr. was born in Brazoria County, Texas and raised by his grandfather after his father's death. He worked hard on the family farm and was only able to attend school through the third grade. After an initial meeting in Bay City, Texas Gray's parents met again and married in Galveston. While growing up in La Marque, Texas, Gray enjoyed imagining stories, reading, playing games outside and family holidays.

African American families--Texas--Galveston.

African Americans--Texas.

Slave trade--America.

Slaves--Texas.

Juneteenth.

African Americans--Social life and customs--Texas--Galveston.

Video Oral History Interview with Edith Armstead Gray, Section
A2004_051_001_002, TRT: 0:31:11 2004/05/18

Edith Armstead Gray's maternal grandfather stressed education, which led to her uncle Joel graduating from Tuskegee Institute in 1912. Gray's maternal grandmother

lacked a formal education but was very knowledgeable and had a good memory. Gray had seven siblings. She and the older ones had to pick cotton to earn money while growing up. Gray attended elementary school in La Marque, Texas where she excelled, especially at spelling. Her interest in dressmaking led to her later study of home economics. Her family moved to Bay City, Texas in 1919 and she attended Booker T. Washington School from fourth through ninth grade. While there, she made a lifelong friend, was mentored by her music teacher and was hit by an especially mean teacher. Gray lived with an aunt in Galveston, Texas and attended Central High School. Her older brother Otis's decision to run away from home and not attend Tuskegee Institute led to her mother's decision that all the children had to pursue higher education without her support.

African American agricultural laborers--Texas.

Church attendance--Texas.

African Americans--Social life and customs--Texas--Galveston.

African Americans--Education (Elementary)--Texas--Lamar.

African Americans--Education (Elementary)--Texas--Galveston.

Central High School (Galveston, Tex.).

Video Oral History Interview with Edith Armstead Gray, Section A2004_051_001_003, TRT: 0:27:15 2004/05/18

Edith Armstead Gray attended Central High School in Galveston, Texas. Her home economics teacher helped develop her dressmaking skills by allowing her some creative license in her dress designs. Gray saved money by working as a nanny for a year, then attended Tuskegee Institute in Tuskegee, Alabama and studied home economics. Gray took night classes until she was able to rearrange her schedule to accommodate day classes. She paid for her tuition by working at the dean of women's office in the afternoon and cleaning her residence hall. Financial hardships forced Gray to return home to work as a seamstress. In 1934, a contact from Tuskegee Institute arranged for her to teach home economics at Conecuh

County Training School in Evergreen, Alabama. Gray remained in that position until her retirement in 1976. Gray describes the positive impact of home economics classes on her students, the loss of home economics in schools today and the lack of integration in the Conecuh County school system.

Home economics--Study and teaching--Alabama.

African American college students--Alabama--Tuskegee.

Home economics teachers--Alabama.

Tuskegee Institute.

Moton, Robert Russa, 1867-1940.

Carver, George Washington, 1864?-1943.

African American universities and colleges--Alabama--Tuskegee.

African Americans--Education (Secondary)--Alabama.

Video Oral History Interview with Edith Armstead Gray, Section A2004_051_001_004, TRT: 0:30:45 2004/05/18

Edith Armstead Gray witnessed the impact of the Montgomery Bus Boycott in the 1950s, however there were no significant protest where she lived, in Evergreen, Alabama, during the decade. While SNCC was not active in Evergreen, the NAACP became active once it was legalized in Alabama. In 1966, Gray became the first secretary for the local chapter. The chapter pressured local businesses adopted nondiscriminatory practices and many women had leadership roles. Gray describes the change in black students' attitudes after desegregation and the dilapidated condition of the white high school in Evergreen. She was able to impact many students' lives positively by teaching them skills to create a good home life and guiding her own children's success. She shares advice for aspiring educators, and describes her teaching philosophy, her concerns for the African American community and how she would like to be remembered. Gray also reflects upon her life and legacy, and narrates her photographs.

Civil rights movements--Alabama--Evergreen.

National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.

School integration--Alabama--Evergreen.
African Americans--Marriage.