

# Finding Aid to The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with Mary C. Curtis

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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>	Curtis, Mary C., 1953-
<b>Title:</b>	The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History Interview with Mary C. Curtis,
<b>Dates:</b>	May 8, 2013
<b>Bulk Dates:</b>	2013
<b>Physical Description:</b>	7 uncompressed MOV digital video files (3:37:10).
<b>Abstract:</b>	Newspaper editor, newspaper correspondent, and newspaper columnist Mary C. Curtis (1953 - ) former reporter for The Baltimore Sun and editor at The New York Times, was inducted into the Hall of Fame of the Region IV NABJ. Curtis was interviewed by The HistoryMakers® on May 8, 2013, in Charlotte, North Carolina. This collection is comprised of the original video footage of the interview.
<b>Identification:</b>	A2013_156
<b>Language:</b>	The interview and records are in English.

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## Biographical Note by The HistoryMakers®

Newspaper editor and news correspondent Mary C. Curtis was born on September 4, 1953 in Baltimore, Maryland. She was the youngest of five children born to Thomas Curtis and Evelyn Curtis. After graduating from Seton High School in Baltimore, Maryland in 1971, she enrolled at Fordham University in New York City and graduated from there in 1975 with her B.A. degree in communications. In 2006, Curtis was awarded a Nieman Fellowship from Harvard University.

From 1985 through 1994, Curtis served in a variety of editing positions at *The*

*New York Times*, including as editor of “Home, Education, Life” and “The Living Arts,” a section in the National Edition that she helped to develop. She also served as the Features editor for the Arts and Entertainment section at *The Sun in Baltimore*. In addition, Curtis held positions as a reporter and as an editor with The Associated Press in New York, Hartford, Connecticut and with the *Arizona* in Tucson, Arizona. She also contributed news articles to TheRoot.com, theGrio.com, National Public Radio *Creative Loafing*, and served as a national correspondent for AOL’s PoliticsDaily.com. In 2011, she joined the *The Washington Post* as a contributor for the blog, “She the People.” She covered the 2012 Democratic National Convention for *The Charlotte Observer*.

Curtis is a member the National Association of Black Journalists. Curtis received the Carmage Walls Prize in 2005 for commentary in a competition sponsored by the Southern Newspaper Publishers Association. She is the recipient of several Green Eyeshade Awards from the Society of Professional Journalists and The National Association of Black Journalists (NABJ). The North Carolina Associated Press recognized Curtis with the Thomas Wolfe Award for her writing “My Rebel Journey,” an examination of Civil War heritage groups. She received the Clarion Award from the Association for Women in Communications in 2010 and 2012. Curtis was inducted into the Hall of Fame of the Region IV National Association of Black Journalists in 2004.

Curtis and her husband, Martin F. Olsen, live in Charlotte, North Carolina.

Mary C. Curtis was interviewed by *The HistoryMakers* on May 8, 2013.

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## Scope and Content

This life oral history interview with Mary C. Curtis was conducted by Larry Crowe on May 8, 2013, in Charlotte, North Carolina, and was recorded on 7 uncompressed MOV digital video files. Newspaper editor, newspaper correspondent, and newspaper columnist Mary C. Curtis (1953 - ) former reporter for The Baltimore Sun and editor at The New York Times, was inducted into the Hall of Fame of the Region IV NABJ.

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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:**

Curtis, Mary C., 1953-

Crowe, Larry (Interviewer)

Hickey, Matthew (Videographer)

### **Subjects:**

African Americans--Interviews

Curtis, Mary C., 1953---Interviews

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African American newspaper editors--Interviews.

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## **Organizations:**

HistoryMakers® (Video oral history collection)

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The HistoryMakers® African American Video Oral History Collection

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## **Occupations:**

Newspaper Editor

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Newspaper Correspondent

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Newspaper Columnist

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## **HistoryMakers® Category:**

MediaMakers

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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 Mary C. Curtis, May 8, 2013. 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).

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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 Mary C. Curtis, Section  
A2013\_156\_001\_001, TRT: 1:30:28 2013/05/08

Mary C. Curtis was born in Baltimore, Maryland, in 1953 to Evelyn Cecelia Curtis and Thomas Clarence Curtis. Curtis describes her family background, including her grandma, Mary Cecella, her Aunt Della, and her great-grandmother, who was born into slavery. Curtis describes her mother as a smart, hard-working and a devout Catholic. Curtis' father was a talented stationary engineer and entrepreneur. He did not have consistent care-takers growing up, and in turn became a very loving family-man to his own children. Curtis describes her parent's personalities and relationship, and her strong family life growing up in Baltimore. She describes her two older brothers, Thomas Jr. and Tony, two older sisters, Joan and Janice, and details their accomplishments and personalities.

African American families--Maryland--Baltimore.

African American fathers--Maryland--Baltimore.

African American mothers--Maryland--Baltimore.

Siblings--Maryland--Baltimore.

Video Oral History Interview with Mary C. Curtis, Section

A2013\_156\_001\_002, TRT: 2:28:51 2013/05/08

Mary C. Curtis describes her early childhood memories growing up in Baltimore with her parents and four older siblings. She recalls getting her library card at age three, and spending the summers outdoors playing in her neighborhood. Curtis describes the segregated neighborhood in West Baltimore, and the sights and sounds of her home, which included her mother's Southern cooking, and going to the theater with her sister. She also recalls being on the television show, 'The Romper Room,' which gave her and her parent's a lot of joy and pride. Entering Kindergarten around 1959, Curtis attended the predominantly black school St. Pius the Fifth, which was run by the Oblate Sisters. Curtis describes enjoying books, her love of the arts, music, and theater, and her experiences going to various shows. Curtis then shares her impression of her families' involvement in the Civil Rights Movement.

Childhood and youth--Activities--Maryland--Baltimore.

Segregation--Maryland--Baltimore.

African American neighborhoods--Maryland--Baltimore.

African Americans--Education, Elementary--Maryland--Baltimore.

Civil rights movements.--United States.

Video Oral History Interview with Mary C. Curtis, Section

A2013\_156\_001\_003, TRT: 3:31:06 2013/05/08

Mary C. Curtis describes attending an integrated Catholic high school in Baltimore, Maryland, where she graduated Valedictorian in 1971. She describes her experience as positive, but recalls incidents of people underestimating her because of her race. Curtis was editor of the school paper her senior year, and she recalls anecdotes about many of her classmates who she recently saw at her fortieth reunion. Curtis describes attending Fordham University in New York, and she talks about her love of life in New York. She met her husband, Martin F. Olsen, at Fordham University, and after she graduated in 1975, they married in 1976. Curtis then describes the memorable speakers she heard during college, including Gloria Steinem, Ed Bullins, and Mike Wallace, and the many

journalists she admired in the 1970s, including Robert Maynard, Melba Tolliver, and Ed Bradley. Curtis also reflects on her family's upward mobility through the generations leading to her educational success.

Fordham University.

African Americans--Education, Secondary--Maryland--Baltimore.

Racial discrimination.

Marriage--United States.

African American families--Social mobility.

Video Oral History Interview with Mary C. Curtis, Section A2013\_156\_001\_004, TRT: 4:28:28 2013/05/08

Mary C. Curtis describes her first job after Fordham University as a journalist with the Associated Press. She then reflects on her experiences as a young black female reporter in the 1970s and 1980s. From 1977-1981, Curtis took a break from journalism and worked for insurance companies in Hartford, Connecticut. Curtis then returned to journalism when she applied for the Maynard Institute for Journalism Education on 1981, a program for minority journalists. Curtis describes the positive experience of the Maynard Institute and the sense of community she found with journalists there. She also describes her love for Tucson, Arizona, where she and her family stayed after she completed the Maynard Institute during until 1983. She returned to Baltimore, Maryland to work at 'The Baltimore Sun' from 1983-1985.

African American journalists--United States.

Associated Press.

Robert C. Maynard Institute for Journalism Education.

Baltimore sun.

Tuscon (Ariz.).

Video Oral History Interview with Mary C. Curtis, Section A2013\_156\_001\_005, TRT: 5:33:06 2013/05/08

Mary C. Curtis describes how joining the National Association of Black Journalists in 1984 has helped her to develop a sense of community and allowed her career to thrive. Curtis also talks about diversity in news stories,

and bringing different voices to all sections of news organizations where she worked. After leaving 'The Baltimore Sun' in 1985, Curtis moved to 'The New York Times', where she stayed for nine years. Curtis describes the positive experiences she had covering the arts and lifestyle stories, her move to the 'Charlotte Observer', and the vibrancy of the city. From 2005-2006, she went to Harvard University with a Neiman Foundation Fellowship and talks about the experiences she had while in Boston, the classes she took, and the writing she did there. Curtis then talks about the many influential people she had the chance to work with there, including John Hope Franklin and Charles Ogletree.

National Association of Black Journalists.

New York times.

Newspapers--North Carolina--Charlotte.

Harvard University.

Franklin, John Hope, 1915-2009.

Ogletree, Charles J.

Video Oral History Interview with Mary C. Curtis, Section  
A2013\_156\_001\_006, TRT: 6:29:22 2013/05/08

Mary C. Curtis recalls returning to Charlotte, North Carolina after completing her Neiman Fellowship at Harvard University in 2006. She describes several of the award winning and memorable stories she has written, including a story on Confederate heritage groups, which won the Thomas Wolfe award in 2004. Curtis describes the aftermath of that article, as well as another story on the desegregation of Charlotte schools. Curtis then describes her coverage of the 2007-2008 primary elections. In 2008, even after winning four national awards that year, she was laid off and began working numerous freelance journalist positions at NPR, NBC 'TheGriot.com', and 'Politics Daily'. She covered a wide range of topics, including politics and the arts. Curtis then describes how she aims to report on the intersection of politics and culture, as well as a diverse array of political stories. Curtis describes her journalistic philosophy.

Journalism--North Carolina--Charlotte.



Political campaigns--United States.

Freelance journalism.

Politics and culture.

Video Oral History Interview with Mary C. Curtis, Section  
A2013\_156\_001\_007, TRT: 7:35:49 2013/05/08

Mary C. Curtis describes her hopes and concerns for the African American community. She hopes that the community continues to work toward the goals of the Civil Rights movement, and that young people take advantage of what has been done by the previous generations. Curtis recalls a memorable interview she did with Franklin McCain, as well as the desegregation of North Carolina's Agricultural and Technical State University in 1960. She then discusses how being a part of several different journalistic groups, like the National Association of Black Journalists and the Neiman Foundation at Harvard University has helped her develop a sense of community. She talks about her legacy and her hope that she has touched people in a positive way. Curtis ends her interview by sharing numerous photographs from her life and the people important to her.

Civil rights movements.

McCain, Franklin, 1941-2014.

Segregation in education.

National Association of Black Journalists.

Photographs.