

The Clerk's Black History Series

Debra DeBerry Clerk of Superior Court DeKalb County



Eunice Roberta Hunton Carter

(July 16, 1899 – January 25, 1970)

"First Black Woman to Pass The New York State Bar"

Eunice Roberta Hunton Carter was born July 16, 1899, in Atlanta, Georgia. Her parents, William and Addie, were well known educators and activists. Her father was a founding member of the black division of the Y.M.C.A. and nearly single-handedly integrated the nation's YMCAs in the Jim Crow South and was one of the first top Black administrators of the international YMCA. Her mother was active in the NAACP and was one of two women selected to check on the condition of black servicemen serving during WWI in France. In 1906, her father moved his family to New York to flee the Atlanta Race Riot.

Eunice received a bachelor's and a master's degree in Social Work from Smith College. She was only the second woman in the school's history to receive both a bachelor's and master's degree in four years. She married Lyle Carter, one of the first black dentists in New York in 1924, and together they had a son. While working as a Social Worker, she attended Fordham University studying Law. In 1932, she became the first black woman to receive a law degree from Fordham University. In 1933, Eunice became the first black woman to pass the New York Bar. In recognition of her accomplishment, Smith college awarded her an honorary Doctorate in law in 1938.

Eunice began her work in both law and international politics. In 1934, she was nominated to represent New York's 19th District in the State Assembly. She was the first black person to ever gain the Republican nomination for that office. Eunice's platform highlighted the need to reduce the age limit for receiving pension, enforce tenement housing legal compliance, and advocate for the continuation of unemployment insurance. She fought to oppose racially motivated discrimination in public works employment. She lost the election by a mere 1,600 votes. Following the 1935 riots in Harlem, Mayor Fiorello LaGuardia appointed Eunice as secretary on the Committee on Conditions in Harlem.

That same year, Special Prosecutor Thomas E. Dewey appointed her as his deputy assistant prosecutor. Dewey hired a team of 20 lawyers to help him take down the mob and Eunice was the only woman and the only black person among them, making her the first Black female prosecutor in the United States. In the high-profile prosecution of organized crime, Eunice's tireless work and clever strategizing linked prostitution in the city to the work of New York Mafia crime boss, Charles "Lucky" Luciano. Her work was

crucial to the case that proved the mob ran New York City's brothels, and her influence convinced witnesses to testify about Luciano's involvement. The mob kingpin was sentenced to 30 to 50 years in prison in 1936. The case brought national fame for Thomas Dewey, who was later elected as governor of New York. Eunice's work earned her a great deal of respect in the office. In 1938, she was named to Dewey's staff to lead the Abandonment Bureau of Women's Courts.

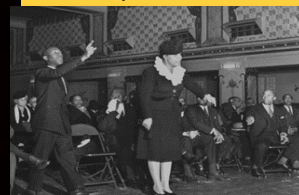
In 1945, Eunice opened her private practice. She immediately connected her work with the NCNW (National Council of Negro Women) to address international women's issues. Two years later, she became business partners with journalist and businessman Ernest E. Johnson to form Carter-Johnson Associates, a public relations firm geared toward minorities and shared office space with her law firm.

Eunice was a legal advisor to the newly formed United Nations, a secretary of the Mayor's commission on conditions in Harlem, and several other national and global organizations. She was also active in the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People NAACP, National Urban League, and Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA).

Eunice Hunton Carter died in New York City on January 25, 1970, at the age of seventy.

In 2019, the grandson of Eunice Carter, Yale Law School Professor Stephen L. Carter, published a book called, "Invisible: The Forgotten Story of the Black Woman Lawyer Who Took Down America's Most Powerful Mobster".

Eunice's story inspired a character in HBO's award-winning drama, "Boardwalk Empire" in 2014. People mocked the depiction as a Hollywood fantasy that a Black woman working as a prosecutor in the 1930s seemed unbelievable, but it was in fact, Ms. Eunice Carter.



Eunice Carter at a meeting of black Republicans in 1944

