

Gore, Eugene W.: The Smell of Money ^[1]

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Capt. Eugene W. Gore: The Smell of Money

by David Cecelski. "[Listening to History](#) ^[2]," *News & Observer*. Published 6/9/2002. Copyrighted. Reprinted with permission.

Born in 1916, Capt. Eugene W. Gore worked his way up from kitchen boy to become one of the first African-American captains in the great menhaden fishing fleet of North Carolina. I talked with him at his office in the little coastal town of Southport, where the Cape Fear River flows into the Atlantic Ocean.

Menhaden are an oily little fish also known as "pogie," "mossbunkers" or "fatbacks." A relative of sardines, they are not a food fish, but were used mainly for fertilizer, oil and animal feed. Concentrated in Southport, Morehead City and Beaufort, the menhaden industry was the state's largest commercial fishery for most of the last century. Its fishing boats were also famous for having African-American leadership earlier than any other industry in the South.

Menhaden fishermen like Capt. Gore once chased fish from New Jersey to Texas. Nowadays there is only one menhaden plant left in North Carolina, and the tourism business tries to keep its boats as far away as possible. Gore recalls another era, when local people celebrated his boat's arrival in port and referred to the fish factories' rank odor as "the smell of money."



Eugene Gore. Photo by Sher Stoneman, 2002. To request permission for the use of the photo or to purchase a print, please contact the *News & Observer*.

As a young boy I liked to go out on the boat more or less to eat and help out my granddaddy. He was a cook on a menhaden vessel. As long as I was young enough to stay in the kitchen, I liked it. But if a captain is short a man and a boy was the menhaden business was the only industry that they had here. During that time you go fishing or you go work on somebody's farm. Big muscles and strong backs, them are the kind of men they hired. Of course you couldn't go out there before I was a captain I was a mate. The first time I got some experience as a mate was in 1950 or '51. The mate, he's in one of the purse boats that go catch the fish. You got a mate in one and a captain in one, half of the men in this one are We're talking about a mess of fish. If they show that color on the water like a great big red spot, and if it's got any kind of size, I tell you what, hold on. Shooo. You load those old wooden boats down with pogie and then fill the decks up and we I carried a crew from Morehead, some of them from Beaufort, but most of them from right here in Brunswick County. But when men would leave and go home 'cause they weren't making any money, then people come stand around the dock, Oh, I have seen some rough weather, but the only time I really worried about the crew is when the Dewey caught afire. She burnt with me in the Gulf of Mexico right off the Calcasieu River. It was in 1956. She had one of those old donkey engines The boss man, he told me I done right. He said, you didn't lose a man? I said, no sir. He said we can build another boat, but it takes 21 years to build a man. He's the guy who give me a chance to be a captain. You know, God works in mysterious ways, his wonders to perform. I don't care how bad a group you get in, there's somebody in there that sympathizes with black people. I know that from experience A black man as a captain in 1953, '54, that was a high position. A black man in charge of 20, 30 head of men. See, there's one thing the white man learned. He learned to look at money. He ain't going to get the Rotary Club people to do that! Let me tell you a story about what it was like out there. In the fall of '58 it looked like we were going to have a bad season. Nobody hadn't had no fish that fall. The spotter plane would fly way up to the Chesapeake Bay and back and not see a One day I turned around there and all of them fast boats were way ahead of me. See, my old boat, The Simpson Brothers, was slower than a lot of the boats. Well, that evening, them fish popped up! Them big roe pogies! The plane man said, Oh Lord, that's all you want right here! He said The Simpson Brothers and one other boat are the only two boats that can get back there before night and get Oh man, I had 'em on her. Made one set, boy. It was breezing up northeast and fogging up when I passed Hatteras light. I was in the deep, and she had a big hole in her too -- she was a wet boat. But I got her into Beaufort. I was the first one

Additional information from NCpedia editors at the State Library of North Carolina :

Eugene W. Gore lived from December 28, 1916 - March 11, 2013.

Obituary: Eugene W. Gore. *StatePortPilot.com*, March 19, 2013. http://stateportpilot.com/obituaries/article_f530df3c-9094-11e2-9d5a-0019bb2963f4... ^[3]

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