

# TELLING OUR STORIES

## SCHOLAR BRINGS BLACK HISTORY TO LIFE

BY // CLARENCE WALDRON

Julieanna Richardson wants Black children to know their history—all of their history. “It has to go beyond just learning 10 to 15 prominent names in Black history,” she says. “That’s fine, but we have to broaden it.”

Richardson founded The HistoryMakers 10 years ago to tell the story of the Black experience. The HistoryMakers, based in Chicago, is a video archive featuring first-  
***“We are interested in the collected stories to show a new, true version of our history.”*** // JULIEANNA RICHARDSON

person narratives of Black history makers, the well-known and the unsung.

“We use people’s stories to give us an inside view of real Black history. You can’t get that just by interviewing famous people. People come from someplace. We are interested in the family background, what formed them? Who inspired them?”

The nonprofit organization has videotaped interviews with well-known history

makers as Dionne Warwick, Smokey Robinson, Russell Simmons, Diannah Carroll, Harry Belafonte, Ruby Dee, Ossie Davis and Eartha Kitt.

There are 2,000 taped interviews, and the goal is to have 400 of the anticipated 5,000 interviews available online at the-historymakers.com by 2011.

“I wanted videos so that you can see the twinkle in people’s eyes. You can hear their voices. You can see them,” Richardson said. “You have a real view of that person.”

Richardson says the idea of a historical video archive library came more than 30 years ago when she was a student at Brandeis University, majoring in theater arts and American Studies. She was conducting independent research on Langston Hughes and the Harlem Renaissance. “I was running around Harlem, discovering a whole new world of history that I did not know.”

As a theater major, “storytelling and being creative” was part of her being, she says. At her father’s urging, though, she decided to become a lawyer, earning her degree from Harvard Law School in 1980.

The HistoryMakers has given her life a certain balance, she says. “I really wanted to leave a legacy. I don’t have children. You get to a point in your life where you want your life to stand for something more than yourself. The HistoryMakers provides me with that.” //

TOYA WERNER MARTIN



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