

# The Salt Lake Tribune

## 'History makers' visit SLC students

By Rosemary Winters

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The Rev. France Davis, 63, walked with Martin Luther King Jr. in 1965 from Selma to Montgomery, Ala., to demand voting rights for African-Americans. He later helped to make King's birthday a Utah state holiday.

Emma Houston, 54, was one of the first members of her family to graduate from college. She spent her career helping others, including Utah Girl Scouts and Salt Lake County's elderly.

On Friday, the 500-plus students at Jackson Elementary in Salt Lake City's Rose Park neighborhood met these two "history makers" and learned how they could make history themselves.

"Remember that you can be history makers, too, any time you do something to make your life and somebody else's life just a little bit better," Principal Sandra Buendia told her pupils. "I see that every day when I see students who are respectful, responsible and safe."

Houston and Davis are among 2,000 African-Americans nationwide whose life stories have been recorded and digitally archived for a nonprofit project called HistoryMakers. The project celebrated its 10th anniversary Friday by dispatching 200 "history makers" to speak in schools in more than 30 states.

At Jackson Elementary, about 80 percent of the students are racial or ethnic minorities and 86 percent are from homes that are economically disadvantaged. Nearly 70 percent of the students are Latino, 5 percent are Pacific Islander and 5 percent are black, according to last year's enrollment count.

"Schools like this are often overlooked," said Davis, who picked Jackson for the HistoryMakers visit. "We want to ensure that students here are encouraged to go on to college — to not become dropouts."

Davis, pastor of Salt Lake City's Calvary Baptist Church, told kids that story-telling and song can help people from diverse backgrounds — even those who speak different languages — communicate with one another.

He shared the folk tale of Brer Rabbit and Brer Fox and sang "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot," encouraging students to join in on the chorus.

Finally, he encouraged every student to learn to read and write. He said that when King, the civil-rights leader, was in elementary school, he ran out of books to read in his final year because he had read every book in the school library.

"You ought to set that as your goal," Davis said.



Al Hartmann | Salt Lake Tribune Rev. France Davis of Calvary Baptist Church, speaks with students at Jackson Elementary School in Salt Lake City on Friday September 17th as part of the National History Makers program. The program teaches kids about the contributions of African-American leaders in their communities.

Houston, who works for Salt Lake County Aging Services, asked students to think about the possibilities for their lives and write them down after the assembly.

"How many of you want to be a doctor?" she asked. "How many of you want to be a teacher?"

When she asked how many of the students want to be president of the United States, every hand shot up.

"All of those possibilities are already inside of you," Houston said. "In order for us to reach all of our possibilities, we have to study very hard. We have to read. We have to write. We have to tell our story."

Elies Chan, a sixth-grader, was impressed by the assembly.

"It was something that kind of spoke to the soul," she said in an interview. "It really made you think about your life and how many possibilities there are."

Chan, who speaks English, Spanish and Vietnamese, wants to be a photographer when she grows up.

Maryem Weini, a fifth-grader who was born in Egypt, said the message she heard Friday was, "Make your dreams come true."

She wants to be a doctor.

Trish Wade, a music teacher, thanked Davis and Houston after the presentation.

"It's such a great need for our children to have role models," she said. "These wonderful people were willing to share their experiences as history makers. [The students can] see the potential of their own lives."

[rwinters@sltrib.com](mailto:rwinters@sltrib.com)

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Online Video

O To see a clip of the Rev. France Davis' interview for the HistoryMakers project, go to [sltrib.com](http://sltrib.com).

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