

THE HISTORYMAKERS®

Brandeis University Digital Archive Use Report

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To: Lisa M. Lynch, Provost
From: Karen V. Hansen, Chair, Department of Sociology
RE: Teaching Innovation Grant for “Gender, Class, and Race”
Date: 19 June 2017

Thank you for the Teaching Innovation Grant you awarded to me in order incorporate HistoryMakers Digital Collection into my “Gender, Class and Race” seminar this spring. In response to your request for a report back, I am taking this opportunity to reflect on the semester and take stock of the numerous innovations.

When you offered faculty the chance to bring HistoryMakers to our students, I eagerly opted to write a proposal to redesign my “Gender, Class and Race” graduate seminar. In the proposal I outlined objectives for the course:

- Explore the nexus of inequalities
- Interrogate the meanings of inequalities from different social locations (class, gender, geography)
- Examine oral history as a method, including assessing authenticity; memory; trauma; contradictions; silences
- Understand the production of oral history through use of the HistoryMakers Digital Archive, examining issues such as recruitment; interviewer; setting; transcription; editing

My mission in the reconceived syllabus was to illuminate theoretical intersectionalities by rooting them in African Americans’ concrete challenges and triumphs (see syllabus attached). I incorporated HistoryMakers into the syllabus in multiple ways:

- Learning goals
- Weekly readings
- Nine guest speakers, including a training by Laura Messner, the Instructional Design Specialist who supported the class: Joyce Antler (Brandeis University, emerita); Grey Osterud (developmental book editor, former editor of *Gender & History*); Mignon Duffy (University of Massachusetts Lowell); Maxine Baca Zinn (Michigan State University, emerita); Margaret Andersen (University of Delaware); Henry Rubin (Quincy College); Ted German (Emerge: Counseling and Education to Stop Domestic Violence), and Julieanna Richardson (HistoryMakers Founding Director)
- Assignments—One required listening to and analyzing oral histories, the second gave students the option of deepening their research on a HM subject

In addition, one Saturday morning, March 25, we took a field trip to the Schlesinger Library at Radcliffe. The expert tour by reference librarian Jennifer Fauxsmith gave students a sense of the range of other oral history collections and the kinds of supporting archival materials available.

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Twelve students took the course—from Sociology, WGS, the Heller School, and NEJS. Student papers focused on a vast range of HistoryMakers, including:

- Anne Ashmore-Hudson, Clinical psychologist
- Na'im Akbar, Psychology professor
- Robert Bullard, Environmental activist
- Elizabeth Catlett, Printmaker, sculptor
- Karen DeWitt, Newspaper reporter
- Rita Aliese Fry, Public Defender
- Sgt. Maj. Michele Jones, Noncommissioned officer
- The Hon. Emil Jones, State Senator
- Yvonne Scruggs-Leftwich, Nonprofit Chief Executive
- Serena Strother Wilson, Quilt maker and story teller

Students assessed the merits and limitations of working with oral histories as social scientists. They also made recommendations for improvements to the collection, which I have passed along to Julieanna Richardson.

Over the course of the semester, Julieanna invited me to make presentations at two events to report on the Provost Teaching Innovation Grant and my “Gender, Class, and Race” course: the HM Higher Education Advisory Board meeting in New York (February 8), and the HM Board of Trustees in Chicago (May 9). In those settings my course generated a great deal of interest and I circulated copies of my syllabus. Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, professor of Afro-American Studies at Harvard, examined my syllabus, returned to Cambridge, and promptly incorporated some of its principles in her spring course on “African-Americans and the Law.” In effect, Brandeis has become a pioneering national model for how to use the collection in the classroom.

In assessing the semester, I am pleased with the shape of the course and students’ engagement in the methodological, substantive, and theoretical issues. Students have expressed their satisfaction as well; in their student evaluations they rated the overall quality of the course 4.86 (out of 5.0). One person commented, “The incorporation of the HistoryMakers archive was a really important and brilliant part of the course.” In personal emails, students have told me they found the course “enlightening,” engaging, and challenging.

In the future, I plan to incorporate use of the HistoryMakers into three of my undergraduate classes: “Families, Kinship, and Sexuality;” “Gender and Biography,” and “Comparative Historical Methods.”

Julieanna Richardson has invited me to create a “VJ-Mix Tape” of some of our favorite HM narratives. I have solicited input from students—that is still a work in progress. Short of that, however, she did enthusiastically call the course “phenomenal” in its use of the digital archive.

Please let me know if there is anything else you would like to know. Thank you for making this possible.