

NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE HUMANITIES
FINAL REPORT

THE HISTORYMAKERS 2012 SUMMER INSTITUTE FOR TEACHERS
*AFRICAN AMERICAN POLITICAL HISTORY: FROM RECONSTRUCTION TO THE
PRESENT*

From Sunday, July 8, 2012 to Friday, August 3, 2012, with funding from the National Endowment for the Humanities, *The HistoryMakers* held its 2nd NEH Summer Institute on the subject of *African American Political History: From Reconstruction to the Present*. Designed as a rigorous, month long immersion program, *The Institute* was developed to examine the political development of African Americans from the period of antebellum America through the presidency of Barack Obama defined by four major eras: 1) African-American Politics from Reconstruction to the First World War (1865-1917); 2) African-American Politics through Two World Wars and Its Aftermath (1917-1954); 3) Black Freedom Movement (1954-1975); and 4) Post-Civil Rights and the New Generation of Black Politics (1970 to present). The 2012 *Institute* was directed by Julieanna Richardson, Founder and Executive Director of *The HistoryMakers* and a noted oral historian. Loyola University Assistant Professor of African American History, Loyola University, Dr. Ashley Howard oversaw the daily administration of the Institute.

In a competitive process, teachers from across the country applied for 25 openings as NEH Summer Scholars. These Summer Scholars spent the month studying about African American history under the instruction of nationally recognized scholars including: Bruce Laurie, Charles Payne, Christopher Reed, Eric Arnesen, Rhonda Williams, Cheryl Greenberg, Michael Dawson, and Adolph Reed. Pulitzer Prize winning journalist Leon Dash and noted oral historian, Founder and Executive Director of *The HistoryMakers* Julieanna Richardson conducted the oral history methodology training. This Institute, which was first held in 2010 had been funded again by the National Endowment for the Humanities due to demand and because of its contributions to the humanities. The goal of the Institute was to assist Summer Scholars in becoming "Master Teachers" and in developing curriculum for use in their classrooms.

INSTITUTE CONCEPT AND DAILY FORMAT

The Institute was based on the theory that there is a huge gap in what is being taught in American history and civics courses in the nation's schools. The purpose of the Institute was to bridge this gap and improve the quality of history, government and civics curriculum by having middle and high school teachers directly interact with academic and scholarly specialists in African American political history. The Summer Scholars were also to be trained in the disciplines of oral history while having unique access to primary source material. Instead of simply teaching the history of prominent African Americans and their accomplishments, the Institute's focus was on building contextual knowledge of each historical period or topic and placing prominent individuals within a spectrum of contemporaneous movements, institutions, and political contexts in order to broaden the teachers own understanding of American political history and hence, in turn, their students' budding interests. The topics covered in the *Institute* reflect seminal moments of social change and institutional development in black American

politics. By participating, *Institute* teachers acquired the necessary contextual knowledge and skill sets to explain and discuss such sensitive issues as economic and political inequality, racial oppression, and political violence.

Typically the Institute followed a two part daily schedule. Mornings were dedicated to academic instruction. Presenters were asked to speak for an hour and then participate in an hour of student led discussion on the assigned readings. This approach was an improvement over *The HistoryMakers* 2010 Summer Institute in that it created an instruction period that was dialogic as well as collaborative. In most cases, the Visiting Lecturers spoke on their assigned topic only for the morning sessions. In some cases, two days were reserved for a particular topic. Summer Scholars were also encouraged to eat lunch with the visiting lecturers and continue discussions of the day's topic. In the afternoon, visiting lecturers presented clips from *The HistoryMakers'* digital archive, which complemented, contextualized, or challenged ideas presented in the morning lectures while using a primary source that was being made available for the teachers to use when they returned to their classrooms.

In the afternoon, Summer Scholars collaborated in small groups to design lesson activities which reflected the lecture's content. The topics ranged from integrating primary source materials in the classroom to teaching critical writing skills. Institute participants were divided into small groups allowing for interdisciplinary, across grade level collaborations. The success of these sessions was mixed. Originally, conceptualized as "Master Teacher" training sessions, some felt that the sessions were a mix of intensive pedagogical instruction and instruction for novice teachers.

LOGISTICAL CONSIDERATIONS

FACILITIES AND LODGING

The NEH Summer Scholars were housed at The Hyatt Regency McCormick - an upscale hotel that was within close proximity of *The HistoryMakers* offices and the Glessner House, where daily instruction occurred. Furthermore, the Hyatt Regency Hotel was located close to downtown shops, entertainment, running trails, the Chicago lakefront and public transportation. Due to the recent slump in the hospitality industry, and a previous working relationship with the Hyatt, *The HistoryMakers* was able to reserve a block of single occupancy hotel rooms at the same rate charged for double occupancy dormitory room at the University of Illinois-Chicago. The hotel equipped each room with free internet and a refrigerator and microwave at no additional costs. However, some Scholars still wanted to live in dorms and this will be explored in future years as *The HistoryMakers* is currently exploring the option of collaborating with the University of Chicago's Center for Race, Politics and Culture for future Institutes. Scholars also wanted to be able to have morning and afternoon snacks provided.

LECTURES

The organizing framework of the Institute sought to demonstrate the continuity, as well as the evolution of, African American political history. More specifically, lectures revolved around two central themes: shared fates but divergent approaches to change and the influence of African

American political socialization, culture, and protest as well as formal politics. Most Visiting Lecturers accompanied their presentation with a Power Point slide show. The Visiting Lecturers arrived well-prepared and more importantly had previous experience teaching educators. Dr. Rhonda Williams, Dr. Bruce Laurie, and Dr. Cheryl Greenberg were particularly adept at bringing in primary source materials, learning activities, and intellectual frameworks that were well suited for junior high and high school classrooms. Unfortunately, a few of the lecturers failed to adequately tie their presentation to the readings or reference the readings at all. Although the co-directors discussed the Institute's academic expectations prior to the visiting lecturers' arrival at the Institute, the lack of careful interrogation of the assigned reading could be attributed to two factors. First, towards the end of the Institute many Summer Scholars did not adequately prepare for class, limiting the amount of genuine discussion that could take place. Second, many of the visiting lecturers assigned readings closely mirrored the content of their presentations. Thus many Summer Scholars felt they had nothing else to contribute to the discussion.

On Friday, July 13th and Saturday, July 14thm Summer Scholars participated in an intensive two-day oral history training with Pulitzer Prize winning journalist and *HistoryMaker* Leon Dash. On the first day participants listened to Dash describe his own experiences with oral history and how he arrived at his immersive method. The next day, each participant practiced this method by interviewing their colleagues on their earliest childhood memories in school, church, as well as inside and outside of the family. Although the NEH exit surveys showed that many Summer Scholars had negative personal feelings about Dash; their final unit plan presentations and weekly synthesis demonstrated how influential and well-received his oral history method was.

FIELD TRIPS

Institute Scholars participated in three field trips in order to supplement their classroom experience. The first week, the Scholars visited the Carter G. Woodson Branch of the Chicago Public Library for a tour of the Vivian Harsh archival collection. Following the tour, students ate lunch at a Chicago institution, Captain Hard Times Dining. They learned that his black-owned restaurant long served as a meeting place for African American politicians within the city. Inside, the walls are lined with photographs of African American political luminaries including Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Mayor Harold Washington, and local aldermen. This trip was particularly exciting because it tangibly demonstrated the influence African American culture and socialization has on formal electoral politics.

Participants also toured the Chicago History Museum and traveled by tour bus to see important African American history in the Bronzeville and Hyde Park neighborhoods. Although the Summer Scholars enjoyed the tour, many recommended walking tours be incorporated for future Institutes.

GROUP INTERACTION

The HistoryMakers devoted a great deal of time and attention to establishing the criteria for selecting Institute participants. On the whole, the Summer Scholars represented an excellent mix

of teaching experience, regions, student populations, and a broad range of academic interests. Of the total twenty-five participants 48% (n=12) identified as black or African American, 32% (n=8) as white, 12% (n=3) multi-ethnic, one Asian-American, and one as Latino. Additionally, 72% (n=18) reported that the highest level of education obtained was a Master's degree and one Summer Scholar had earned her Ph.D. Fifteen (60%) of the participants indicated that they teach or recently taught in public schools. Of the remaining Summer Scholars four (16%) taught in charter schools; three (12%) in private schools; and three (12%) in alternative schools. Most of the participants (n=14, 56%) taught in high schools, followed by junior high school (n=7, 28%), and middle school (n=3, 12%). One participant indicated that she works as an administrator for an elementary school. Although the majority of Institute participants teach courses in social sciences and history, we were pleased to have educators who specialized in literature as part of the Institute.

A number of the attendees had participated in previous NEH Institutes. Plus, Institute Summer Scholars took the lead on coordinating evening and weekend activities. These included other historic sites as well as more social activities like Thursday night trivia at a local bar (where the Institute group sealed the win due to a final question on Rosa Parks); a Cubs baseball game, weekly religious services, and a variety of neighborhood festivals.

During the Institute, two unfortunate incidents occurred, however. One of the Summer Scholars, Tiffany Mitchell suffered a death in her family and left to return home during the first week of the Institute. Her place was never filled. The second episode occurred over the course of the Institute. On several occasions, one participant advanced "anti-white", racist comments that several other participants found offensive. The situation escalated when co-director Julieanna Richardson addressed the issue privately with the participant. The Summer Scholar interpreted this discussion as threatening and contacted several individuals within the National Endowment for the Humanities. After consulting with our program officer, Jinlei Augst, she recommended that we extend an invitation for an exit interview with the participant. Our initial offer was rejected, and no such meeting took place. This was especially disturbing and chilled some of the camaraderie of the previous Institute. *The HistoryMakers* had taken great pains to implement the NEH's Code for Civility. This isolated incident mushroomed out of control and really was due to the bombastic character of the Scholar. The other Scholars attempted to quash some of the fallout by brainstorming conflict management strategies. None ultimately were implemented as it was decided that it was better to provide an opportunity for the Scholar to meet privately with Institute Director, Julieanna Richardson. Julieanna Richardson made the offer after several calls with NEH staff, but the Scholar declined Ms. Richardson's offer.

Aside from this unfortunate occurrence, the remaining Summer Scholars were enthusiastic, dedicated, and hard working. Several Institute participants stood out for their outstanding scholarship as well as their creative curriculum development. The aforementioned unit plans developed ranged from community activism, civic responsibility, the Black Arts Movement, and the intersection of formal politics and racial violence. Additionally these educators incorporated not only oral history elements into their curriculum but also visual arts, literature, as well as global perspectives. These lesson plans can be found on the educational website Edmodo (www.edmodo.com). Furthermore, Institute Summer Scholars committed to disseminating the information learned at conferences, in-service trainings, and further

collaboration with their Institute colleagues via *The HistoryMakers*' group on Edmodo. Also, several Summer Scholars have maintained their contact with *The HistoryMakers* organization throughout the year.

LESSONS LEARNED

After careful reflection, there are areas where we will seek improvement for future Institutes. We have already begun conversations with Professor Michael Dawson, the John D. MacArthur Professor of Political Science for the University of Chicago, in order to collaborate on a black political history institute housed at the University of Chicago's Center for the Study of Race, Politics, and Culture. It is our hope that this possible partnership will address the issues raised by some of our Summer Scholars.

Future Institutes could also be improved by be more careful selection of our Summer Scholars and taking cues sooner when certain issues arise instead of letting them simmer. Future Institutes will feature more interaction with African American politicians so as to encourage civic engagement and highlight the relevance of black political thought today. The first week could also be better utilized with better integration of Core Curriculum and Understanding by Design instruction.

HISTORY AND EDUCATION

From its inception, the Summer Institute was designed to have a life beyond the month long immersion program. *The HistoryMakers* has continued to build a vibrant online learning community with the assistance of Edmodo. The Summer Scholars use of Edmodo during the Institute was impressive. The mere mention of a book, website, or method during afternoon discussions resulted in the immediate posting of the resource link on the Edmodo site. As an institution, we also utilized this website to collect the weekly assessments and final unit plan. We are very excited to see the continued discussion that has taken place on our site.

The HistoryMakers will continue to seek to create and teach history that is broader, deeper and more accessible for the twenty first century and beyond. *The HistoryMakers NEH Summer Institute on African American Political History: From Reconstruction to the Present* represents a significant step in our educational initiatives. In reflecting on the issues presented with this Institute, we remain committed to resolving any and all issues and improving the credibility of our institute with further collaborations. However, it is our belief that we have remained true to our original objectives and vision. As one Summer Scholar stated "I will completely change the way I teach history" Another Summer Scholar remarked in their final survey "I feel prepared to tackle difficult subjects like race, slavery, and Civil Rights from a place of empowerment rather than portraying African Americans as victims." We hope that as we move forward and adjust based on the needs, inputs, and critiques of the Summer Scholars, that the NEH will fund additional and future Institutes of this kind with *The HistoryMakers*.