



COMMUNITY VOICES

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The HistoryMakers: An idea that changes our world

BY DOROTHY JENKINS FIELDS
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An idea is not enough! Having an idea is just the starting point for taking action and making a change. While many people have ideas, for some it is idle chatter — they talk, but never act. It is the planning and implementation of an idea that can make it real.

The New York Times bestseller, “What Do You Do With An Idea?” written by Kobi Yamada and illustrated by Mae Besom, explains to children and adults the process and joy of bringing an idea into the world, nourishing and growing it.

A prime example: Julieanna Richardson, a black woman who has executed numerous ideas. The idea with the most impact for students, researchers, documentarians and scholars is The HistoryMakers, a national nonprofit educational institution. Based in Chicago, it is committed to preserving, developing, and providing easy access to an internationally recognized archival collection of thousands of black African-American video oral histories.

ADVERTISING



From the Jim Crow era to the present and from Barack Obama, the first black president of the United States, to the oldest living black cowboy, The HistoryMakers helps to educate and enlighten millions worldwide with a more inclusive record of United States history.







Dorothy Jenkins Fields

A Pittsburgh native, Richardson finished high school in Michigan and college at Brandeis University in Massachusetts. After earning her J.D. degree from Harvard Law School in Cambridge, Massachusetts, she worked on corporate, commercial, banking and copyright law at her first job with the Chicago law firm Jenner & Block.

In the 1980s, her career evolved through activities related to cable television including establishment of the Chicago Cable Commission, the city's regulatory body; founding a regionally based home-shopping channel, and starting her own production company. It was in 1999 that Richardson launched The HistoryMakers. The founder, executive director and president of the board of directors, she conducted the first interviews in 2000.

With a 2004 federal grant from the IMLS (Institute of Museum and Library Services) a digital archive was created in collaboration many years with Carnegie Mellon University. Like many other nonprofits, The HistoryMakers is dependent on collaborations, public and private funding, as well as individual donors. The digital archive went live with users from 51 countries.

A decade later in 2014, The HistoryMakers transferred to the Library of Congress, 9,000 hours of video interviews with 2,600 black Americans who define the black experience in America.

This first-person testimony is made available to users worldwide via The HistoryMakers Digital Archive, thanks to a \$1.6 million grant from PriceWaterhouseCoopers Charitable Foundation and 16 years of donated efforts of the Entertainment and Technology Center under the leadership Professors Howard Wactlar and Michael Christel, and IT head Bryan Maher. This is the same content that is housed permanently at The HistoryMakers archives at the Library of Congress.

A large grant from the National Science Foundation provided an opportunity for 211 of the nation's top African-American scientists to be interviewed. Among them were oceanographer Evan Forde and mathematician Katherine Johnson. A NASA pioneer who helped send Americans into space, Johnson was portrayed in the film, "Hidden Figures."

The oral video history platform, funded by grants and donated time, provides access to first-hand information about the lives and accomplishments of black people living in the USA during the 20th and 21st centuries. The power of this collection adds value with the interviewees telling their stories themselves. They are the primary sources and eyewitnesses to the era in which they live. It is noted that collectively their stories of struggle and triumph are otherwise unavailable.

The HistoryMakers idea changed our world with images, text and inspiration. As a result, we can see ourselves ageless and in a variety of colors. It can inspire us by presenting known careers and careers once not available to us. Also, showcasing the accomplishments of black people to other communities may help dispel some historical stereotypes.

The HistoryMakers shares its collection through signature programs including an education institute, speakers bureau, live public programs, curriculum guides for school districts, an annual back-to-school program, and its interactive website, www.thehistorymakers.com.

Currently Richardson and staff are traveling to various cities interviewing individuals for inclusion in the archive. A fundraising reception held in Miami on March 9 in The Hoffman Board Room at the Perez Art Miami Museum, was successful. According to Richardson, "it was held to honor Miami-based HistoryMakers and to further establish roots in the South Florida area."

One of the attendees was Miami native and scientist Evan Forde, an oceanographer. A product of Miami-Dade County Public Schools, he earned his B.A. in geology with an oceanography specialty, and his M.A. degree in marine geology and geophysics from Columbia University in New York.

In 1973, Forde became an Oceanographer at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) Atlantic Oceanographic and Meteorological Laboratory (AOML) in Miami. The first African-American scientist to participate in research dives aboard a submersible, he completed successful dive expeditions in several submarine canyons utilizing three of these vessels. To read his biography and others, visit www.thehistorymakers.com.

The HistoryMakers interviewed Forde in 2013. Recently, I asked him what it means to participate in this program. His reply: "Being a HistoryMaker means I am recognized as someone who has made a difference in the world. I believe that along with this honor and acknowledgment comes a responsibility to continue to be a positive role model for youth."

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