

Voices of Black Chicago Pioneers to Echo On With Help From Public Libraries

By Andrea V. Watson (//www.dnainfo.com/chicago/about-us/our-team/editorial-team/andrea-v-watson) | February 2, 2017 6:41pm

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The HistoryMakers founder and executive director Julieanna Richardson (left) talks with George Daniels (center) and Timuel Black.

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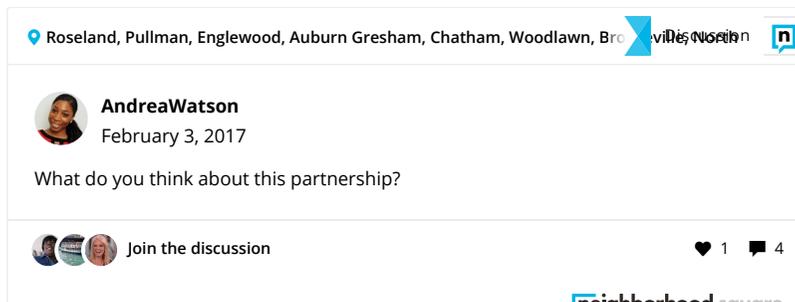
CHICAGO — The rich oral history of hundreds of black Chicagoans will now be available for the entire city thanks to a new partnership between The HistoryMakers (<http://www.thehistorymakers.com/>) and the Chicago Public Library.

The collaboration was announced Thursday at the Harold Washington Library Center, 400 S. State St. by library Commissioner Brian Bannon and Julieanna Richardson, founder and executive director of The HistoryMakers, a Chicago-based organization that records oral histories of African Americans.

Deputy Mayor Andrea Zopp joined in announcing that the digital archive will be free and offered at all Chicago public libraries.



George Daniels (left) and Timuel Black are both included in The Chicago HistoryMakers digital archive. [DNAinfo/Andrea V. Watson]



The Chicago Public Library is the first public library system to offer patrons unlimited access to the extensive HistoryMakers video database of interviews with more than 1,700 African Americans, 500 of whom are from Chicago. Officials reached out to Richardson, who at the time was trying to get colleges and universities to use the archive.

“It’s like a dream because I didn’t know I would see the day,” she said.

The goal is to have unlimited access to the database through the library’s website by this spring, and 2,700 interviews available by the end of 2017, library officials said. A library card will be required.

“I think what’s special about The HistoryMakers archive is that it documents through oral history a really important part of our nation’s history and it started here in Chicago,” Bannon said. “The focus has really been universities and, while they’re a wonderful place to make these resources available to students, they don’t touch the whole community.”

At least 80 Chicago African Americans who have been recorded in recent years were present to celebrate the accomplishment.



At least 80 Chicago HistoryMakers who've been featured in the past celebrated the organization's new partnership with the Chicago Public Library Thursday. [Photo courtesy of Chicago History Makers]

Record store owner George Daniels, 70, was featured in 2007 by The HistoryMakers.

“[Daniels] was hired at a black-owned record store wholesaler on Chicago’s Michigan Avenue,” according to The HistoryMakers website (<http://www.thehistorymakers.com/biography/george-daniels-41>). “In 1968, Daniels started managing one of the wholesale record stores, and in 1969, Daniels assumed ownership of the store, renaming it George’s Music Room.

“Daniels’ business has continually adapted,” the description continues. “He has maintained his popularity in the community with artists’ store visits. These artists have included Mary J. Blige, LL Cool J, Al Green, R. Kelly...”

Former Chicago Mayor Richard Daley offered Daniels a space to open a branch at Midway Airport, where he’s still at today.

Daniels said to be included in the archives was an honor and that the Chicago Public Library's participation is wonderful.

When Daniels’ time is up on this earth and the only thing left is his oral story, he hopes that people bring positive messages back to music. A lot has changed since the 1960’s and not all of the changes have been good, he said.

“When I look at the business I’m in and the blessings I’ve received over the years during my journey I see how technology has really taken over the business,” Daniels said. “Technology has really tweaked our culture more toward the negative than the positive.”

He said he worries that the music contributes to the city's violence and urges parents to pay more attention to what their children listen to.

Chicago historian Timuel Black (<http://www.thehistorymakers.com/biography/timuel-black-40>) was born in Birmingham, Alabama, in 1918, and raised in Chicago. The author of "Bridges of Memory: Chicago's First Wave of Great Migration" said the stories of black achievement need to be told, especially to the younger generations.

"They're lost," Black said, adding that he's trying to be optimistic.

The history of African Americans in Chicago during the Civil Rights era is one that must not be ignored, said Black, a Woodlawn resident.

Zopp, who said she was there on behalf of Mayor Rahm Emanuel, said, "the best way to tell our stories is straight from the source."

"I'm honored to be included in this historic archive alongside so many influencers and unsung heroes," Zopp said in a prepared statement. "I encourage every resident to view the oral history of their favorite author, artist or newfound hero."

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