

The HistoryMakers Oral Archive Opens Full Range of African-American Experience

Posted on [December 5, 2016](#) by [mgf2j](#)

“Just dealing with prominent blacks is not about history ... We only hear about those who attracted the attention of white folks ...” So said novelist, poet, film producer, and activist Sam Greenlee in November 2001, part of an interview with Julieanna Richardson, Harvard graduate, lawyer, digital historian, and founder of [The HistoryMakers](#)—the newest digital history resource offered by the Library, and the largest database of oral African-American history in existence.

UVA researchers may now hear the late Sam Greenlee’s words on how white society has controlled the African-American historical narrative, words that also explain why Julieanna Richardson—who began by recording stories of famous men and women—expanded the archive to include what she calls “America’s Missing Stories.” She was inspired by the example of the little-known “Golden 13”—black men who were commissioned as Naval officers in World War II; and she set 5,000 interviews as her goal, more than double the number of interviews that the Works Progress Administration conducted with slavery survivors in the 1930’s.

The HistoryMakers’ interviews, however, are not confined to a single focus—slavery. They include African Americans’ “contributions in all areas of American life and culture,” in the arts, the military, in business, in the legal and healthcare professions, in architecture and engineering, in education—largely “untold and unrecorded,” but here told without being filtered through a white perspective.

Subjects who agreed to be interviewed range from celebrated figures to ordinary people. If you want to find the oldest voter in the archive, for example, type “vote” in the homepage search box, then click “Table of Contents” to open search options. A button allows you to select “Birth Year,” which brings up a list of decades. Choosing 1890s yields two names. One, Amazon Brooks, was born November 26, 1897 and was interviewed for the archive in 2004. She voted in 1920, the first year women were allowed to cast a ballot. But She died on February 23, 2007, and therefore did not live to see a relatively obscure Illinois State Senator—interviewed for the archive in February 2001—win a presidential election as the first African American nominee of a major party, Barack Obama.

* Thanks to UVA Librarian Regina Rush for the reference to Sam Greenlee’s interview in The HistoryMakers Digital Archive.

Posted in [Featured Resource](#) | Tagged [African American awareness](#), [Civil Rights](#), [Digital Humanities](#), [history](#), [HistoryMakers](#), [library resource](#), [oral history](#), [research](#)
