



The HistoryMakers

At the Mid-Atlantic Regional Archives Conference (MARAC), I presented in a session with two other people, one of whom was Julieanna Richardson. Julieanna is an vibrant woman who has founded an incredible project called [The HistoryMakers®](#), a national African American video oral history archive. The goal of the HistoryMakers is to videotape interviews with 5,000 African Americans -- well-known and unsung -- in order to capture their personal stories and their views of American life, society and culture.

According to the web site, "The HistoryMakers represents the single largest archival project of its kind in the world, outdistancing the existing video oral history collections of New York's Schomburg Library and the Birmingham Civil Rights Museum. The HistoryMakers is unique among these other collections of African American heritage, because of its massive scope. Like other oral history collections, The HistoryMakers collection hearkens back to the earliest and most authentic efforts to capture the voice of a people, while introducing state-of-the-art technology and increased accessibility. The HistoryMakers wants to provide living proof that African American history did not begin or end with the civil rights movement, that the HistoryMakers number in the thousands and that their names are not just Harriet Tubman, W.E.B. DuBois, Martin Luther King, Jr. and Ella Fitzgerald."

The interviews are each three-hours in length. The interviews are both digitized and transcribed, and then indexed. The wishes of those interviewed are honored, such as not releasing the interview for use until after the person has died. That fact alone demonstrates the sensitivity of the HistoryMakers team. They recognize that some people will tell their stories but only if they don't have to answer questions about them! And for some, the personal stories may be painful; a pain that they want told, but not until later (again when they won't hear them).

One interesting aspect of the HistoryMakers is that the full interviews will not be available on the Internet. First, placing that amount of information that could be streamed (viewed) might be a burden on the servers. Second, if the information were cut into smaller segments, some of the context would be lost. Third, people might use the information out of context, which would be a disservice to those who were interviewed. And lastly, the HistoryMakers would like to control how the information is used. Yes, people will have access to everything, but not via the Internet, but more likely (long-term) through research libraries.

For now, the HistoryMakers archive is available by appointment only. In 2002, the HistoryMakers was designated a special collection of the Illinois State Library system. The archives, which are open to the public, can be visited between the hours of 9:00 a.m. - 5 p.m. at 1900 South Michigan Avenue in Chicago. You can contact Edward Williams at  (312) 674-1900  to schedule an appointment.

People "buzzed" around Julieanna after the session. She captured people's imagination and their need for history. She also talked about a digitization project that is much different than most. It was as if someone screamed, "look at the possibilities" and we did.

posted by Jill Ann Hurst @ 4:28 PM _

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