

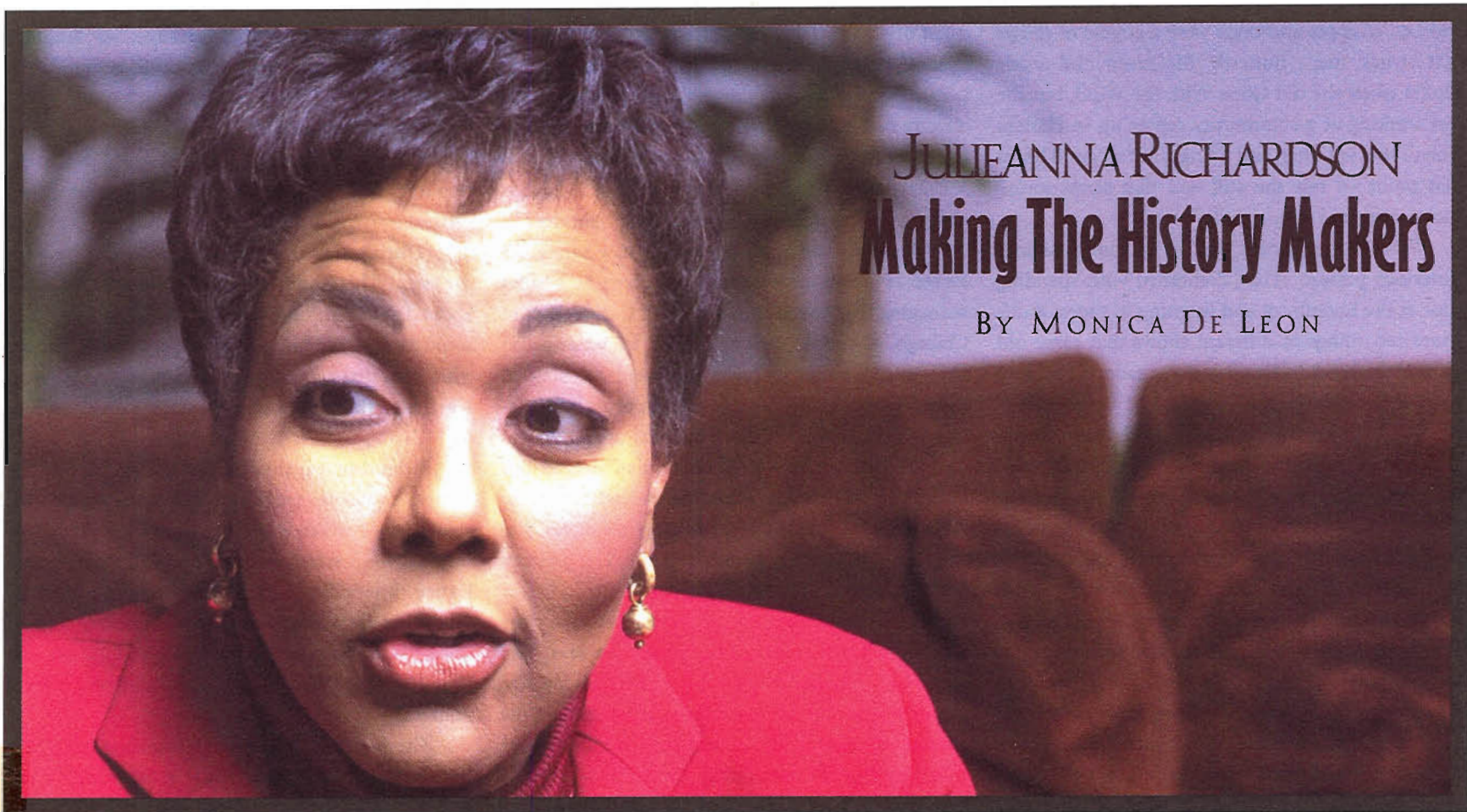
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"Success is defined broadly because it doesn't mean people have led perfect lives, but they have made contributions in many ways."



JULIEANNA RICHARDSON Making The History Makers

BY MONICA DE LEON

On November 2, 2000, I — and hundreds of others — sat in the audience at the Art Institute awaiting the launch of The History Makers project, one of whose first initiatives was to be a live interview of performer/activist Harry Belafonte by actor Danny Glover.

As the evening got underway, there was much discussion about the creation of the project and details on what was in store by various participants, including the Mistress of Ceremonies, Channel 7 news reporter and anchor Cheryl Burton; guest announcer, Channel 2 reporter John Davis; a representative of one of the project's major contributors from Northern Trust Bank; and the project's founder Julieanna Richardson.

With so much talk about the contributions made to ensure the launch and success of the project, we all became excited and felt as if we were going to be a part of history being made that very night.

The sensation heightened as participants of the project were introduced on stage to the audience and as highlights of the lives and careers were announced of such noteworthy people as Etta Moten Barnett, Margaret Burroughs, Vernon Jarrett, Senator Emil Jones, Congressman Bobby Rush and Dempsey Travis.

The stories of people whose history I was already familiar with through books and other liter-

ary and media sources had come to life as they stood before me on the stage.

Amidst the excitement of the presentation, before "the interview" got underway, anticipation built as dozens of questions raced through all of our minds as to what exactly was about to take place. The most central question every guest had was, "What exactly is The History Makers project?"

That question was frequently asked of the project's creator and director Julieanna Richardson, while she plotted the development of her first-person narrative archive during its incipient stages.

WHAT'S THIS WHOLE THING ABOUT?

"I remember when I first had the idea, my friends asked, 'What are you doing? An archive? You must mean a cable channel Julie,' and I'd tell them no, and they'd say, 'A documentary?' and the documentary was absolutely the opposite of what I wanted to do because people already make beautiful documentaries," explains Richardson, describing the meandering road she took that led to The History Makers' growing success.

The History Makers at its conclusion will be a compilation of video interviews of well known and unknown leaders in the Black community. Each two hour interview is structured so as to present a conversation between the History Makers and the viewer. The conversation is videotaped, put on audio

cassette, sent out for transcription, archived, encoded. Each tape is catalogued with a Library of Congress subject heading and then digitized so that the interview can be sampled at The History Makers' website.

The general theme of each interview is what really has made each person successful. Richardson elaborates, "Success is defined broadly because it doesn't mean people have led perfect lives, but they have made contributions in many ways."

In addition to celebrities, Richardson also looks at people who have played a role in significant organizations like the Pullman Porters, Urban League, NAACP and The Links. She has already scheduled an interview with the remaining Negro League baseball players. Newly completed interviews include Alvin Pousaint, Katherine Dunham, Gordon Parks, and a special on the 111 African Americans who have served in the Illinois General Assembly.

Richardson planted the seeds for the project over 20 years ago when she was doing independent research on members of the Harlem Renaissance while she was an undergraduate attending Brandeis University.

"In 1973, I was doing independent research on the Harlem Renaissance, and that's really when I became aware of the (Arthur C.) Shomburg Library

Photo by Reginald Raydon