

## HistoryMakers and Afro Illinois Keeping our story alive

**T**he HistoryMakers, Inc. and the University of Illinois have formed a unique partnership coordinated by the Department of African American Studies at Urbana and aimed at supporting the development of a significant research tool to advance an awareness of African American achievements—on campus, in the State of Illinois, across the country, and around the world.

The HistoryMakers is an independent non-profit organization and an oral history archive that has chronicled the lives of African Americans since February 2000. With 1,800 taped interviews of more than 7,000 hours of African American testimonies, it represents the largest archival project on this subject in the nation—larger than the oral history collections of New York's Schomburg Library and the Birmingham Civil Rights Museum.

"There is something everyone can appreciate in these stories," actor Danny Glover has noted. "It is about education. It is about our legacy. It also is about telling our story and about correcting American history before it's too late."

The HistoryMakers is an effort to capture the voice of a people. With funding from Carnegie-Mellon University, the organization has introduced state-of-the-art technology to provide access not only to the voices but the visual images of history-making Black Americans.

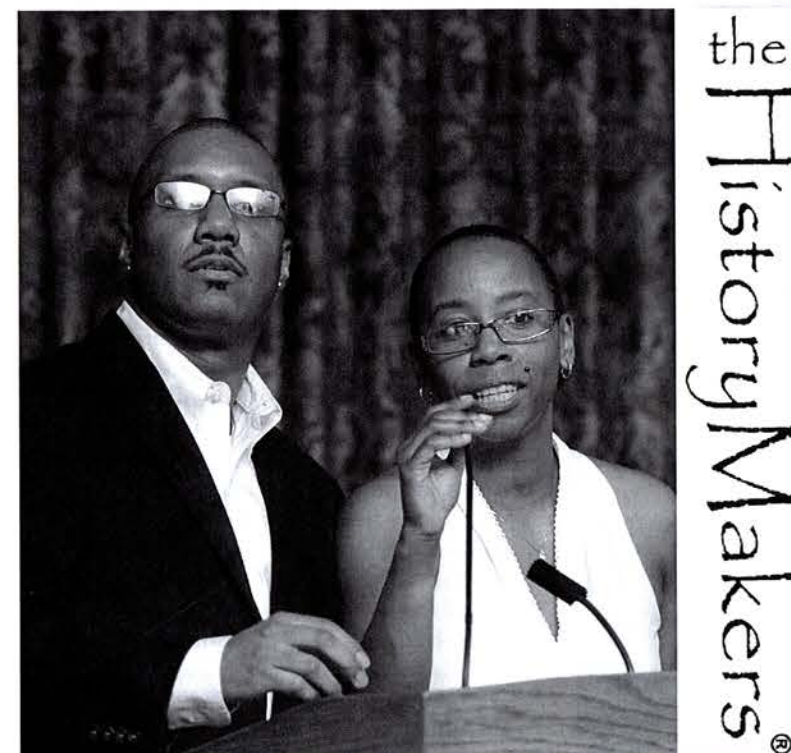
"It is very important for people to have a sense of place. A sense of belonging, a sense of history, of where they came from, notes Julieanna Richardson, an attorney and founding executive director of The HistoryMakers. "Our goal is to report this information. We say that these are America's missing stories, that American history really

will not be completed without this information."

The University of Illinois-HistoryMakers partnership is a unique arrangement for several reasons. "For one thing, it is extremely uncommon for academic units on all three campuses (Chicago, Springfield and Urbana-Champaign) to collaborate on an intellectual project, so that is historic in and of itself" notes Dr. Clarence Lang, assistant professor of African American Studies and History at Urbana. "Second, in highlighting the recovery of African American history, the project has put Black Studies front and center, because African American Studies units are anchoring the work on each of the U of I campuses, and more importantly, forming working relationships that did not exist until a little over a year ago. Third, this project has the potential to help move Black Studies



"Agents of Change" exhibition at Illinois campus (opposite page). At left, Julieanna Richardson, HistoryMakers founder and Executive Director: "It is very important for people to have a sense of history." Below, left, HistoryMakers Illinois Coordinator, Prof. Clarence Lang with Prof. Jennifer Hamer, Coordinator for the three-campus partnership.



further into the 21st century through the use of multimedia technology."

The University of Illinois-HistoryMakers partnership at Urbana-Champaign has three components. The first, and most immediate, is the use of the archive in the classroom. The second is public programming, in the form of such events as a recent HistoryMakers banner exhibit on significant Illinoisans that was mounted across all three campuses. The programming component also includes a speakers series, "The Freedom Makers African American Agents of Change," inaugurated this year at the University of Illinois. This

speakers bureau sponsors lectures by people who have been interviewed for the archive, or are likely to be interviewed. So far, Afro Illinois has hosted lectures by Mississippi labor organizer Sarah White and by Black Migration chronicler Timuel Black.

The third component of the partnership is research, which is aimed at enriching the archive so that it can be a useful tool for professional scholars and graduate students.

"The most concrete thing we've probably done in this area is the HistoryMakers Summer Internship," notes Professor Clarence Lang, assistant professor of African

American Studies and History, and Illinois campus coordinator for the HistoryMakers partnership. "The internship sponsors students in the U of I system to spend several weeks with Julieanna Richardson at The HistoryMakers archive in Chicago working with the archives, evaluating interviews, doing background research and so forth in preparation for future interviews," he adds.

As coordinator for the entire University of Illinois system (Chicago, Springfield and Urbana), the Department of African American Studies at Urbana will play a pivotal role in helping to keep all of the University of Illinois campuses on track, as well as serving as the main faculty liaison to The HistoryMakers. Early indications are that the new arrangement is likely to yield great benefits for faculty and students alike.

"The use of The HistoryMakers archive can be an especially powerful tool in our arsenal, in terms of providing our students with a rich, multimedia classroom experience, especially in the larger survey-level courses where we can really immerse them in these narratives," Professor Lang observes. "And, based on the feedback from colleagues who have already used the technology in their classes, The HistoryMakers archive already has been a great complement to their teaching, allowing them to provide living illustrations, amplify reading assignments, and give more dynamism to student assignments."