

Black History is American History

Link: [\(113\) Black History is American History | Okalani Dawkins | TEDxYouth@MVHS - YouTube](#)
(Mar 11, 2020 [7 mins])

In this TedXYouth Talk, Okalani Dawkins, a high school sophomore whose father is Black and mother a Pacific Islander, notes that history from a Euro-American perspective can easily be learned in school, while “Black History is an elective.” She highlights the stories of Shirley Chisholm, Lewis Latimer and Jacob Lawrence as among those that are rarely shared, and the ramifications of highlighting certain stories while omitting others. Ms. Dawkins rejects that Black stories are for Black history and points to three high school teachers who highlight Black Americans’ contributions as part of the basic—all year—curricula. “Hearing Black stories not only sparks inspiration in the minds of Black students, it imbues a sense of pride in them allowing them to come home and tell their parents, ‘hey, they look like me,’ when referring to brilliant engineers, writers, doctors, lawyers, etcetera who’ve essentially paved a way for the youth of this generation to live in prosperity and work toward an overall state of solidarity in American culture. Because Black history is American history, this country we live in, the soil we walk on, and even the several devices we use day to day originated from the minds of several Black innovators.” Dawkins hopes for a time when all children can peruse any history book and see their identities incorporated so that they feel pride and see options in their future.

Jean Michel Basquiat Black History Month Digital Story (2019 [3 minutes]) **CRN Rider News**
Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4ELjugsxUys>

Brooklyn bred, Haitian and Puerto Rican, the brilliant Jean Michel Basquiat is highlighted in this video. “Basquiat’s art has influenced modern art and culture in innumerable and subtle ways. He allowed African-American culture to become visible...hip hop, graffiti, clothing styles and that all can be traced back to the Afro-Caribbean and gritty elements within Basquiat’s work.”

The HistoryMakers: Documenting Black history through first-person accounts | 60 Minutes
CBS (February 20, 2023 [13 mins])
Link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zHaWXbpsZ2o>

Julieanna Richardson’s The History Makers, is a digital, first-person account of the “breadth of the Black experience in America, one story at a time.” As Ms. Richardson describes, “In society today... You preserve what has value and you throw away what doesn’t—that’s why the preservation is so important.” Richardson has traveled to capture “America’s missing stories.” There are 3,500 of these interviews and each has been transcribed and posted on-line. Stories include those from Maya Angelou, Anita Hill and Illinois State Senator, Barack Obama in 2001. (Rochester’s William Warfield, Alice H. Young, and Walter Cooper are among the History Maker’s interviewees.) Jerry Rice the professional football phenom describes his background of extreme poverty and why having his story archived was so important to him. “With the younger generation, they see someone who looks like me. That might be that little kick, that little nudge to make them work a little bit harder.”

Richardson grew up on Ohio where, at age 9, “she was the only Black student in her class... [and she] had not been taught anything about Black history.” In college, she learned that a famous song she recognized as part of Harry Truman’s campaign was actually written by a famous Black

songwriting team for Broadway in 1921. This fueled her desire to learn more of the stories she, “had no knowledge of.” Despite her Harvard law degree, she decided in 1999 that she wanted to, “do good in her life” another way: create an archive of Black people’s experiences. She started with a Tuskegee Airman.

In 2012, her collection was so large and imperative, the Library of Congress began to archive it. As Richardson notes, the History Makers now resides in the same place as the stories of persons who were formally enslaved do–powerful and astounding. The database is subscribed to by many universities (including the University of Rochester) and several large school districts subscribe as well—including Chicago and NYC.

Three high school students describe how the same few stories—MLK and Rosa Parks—were repeatedly shared in school before they had access to the archive. Says Richardson, children think there is, “no Black history but it was all around me...So [children] can’t aspire to be what they don’t really see.” Thanks to History Makers, they can learn the breadth of contributions made by Black people. “Now no one can tell me that me and my people don’t have value. No one.”

Additional Resources:

<https://www.thehistorymakers.org/our-people/Julieanna-L.-Richardson>

<https://www.thehistorymakers.org/browse-categories>

<https://www.thehistorymakers.org/biography/alice-h-young>