

**Evaluation of
The Story in History:
Engaging Youth in**

**AFRICAN
AMERICAN
LIVES**

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CENTER FOR CHILDREN & TECHNOLOGY

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Introduction

According to national polling data, at least 6.5 million children are enrolled in after school programs nationwide (Afterschool Alliance, 2004). Although the aims of these programs vary — homework help, childcare, enrichment, arts introduction and technical training are only a few of the labels used to describe their offerings — they all share a common goal: the improved development and well-being of America’s young people, especially those who typically have few resources available to them. At a bare minimum, after school or what is commonly referred to as “out-of-school time” programs give children a place to go when not tending to their formal education. But at their best, these programs give participants a community who cares about their growth, a sense of belonging, a safe space for developing new skills and interests, and, perhaps most importantly, a stake in their future.

It was in this spirit of giving young people opportunities to look beyond their immediate lives that Thirteen/WNET sought to extend and expand *AFRICAN AMERICAN LIVES*. With support from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, Thirteen’s *The Story in History: Engaging Youth in AFRICAN AMERICAN LIVES* outreach initiative was designed to engage Boys & Girls Club members, many of whom are African American living in underserved neighborhoods, in the study of heritage, history and community. Originally aired in February 2006 as part of the PBS national programming schedule, *AFRICAN AMERICAN LIVES* is a four-part series, hosted by Henry Louis Gates, Jr., W.E.B. Du Bois professor of the Humanities and chair of African and African American Studies at Harvard University. With Gates as their guide, the series featured eight prominent African-Americans — Dr. Ben Carson, Whoopi Goldberg, Bishop T.D. Jakes, Dr. Mae Jemison, Quincy Jones, Dr. Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot, Chris Tucker and Oprah Winfrey — as they use genetic, historical and anthropological evidence, such as census records, property documents and photographs, to trace their families’ past. Too viewers, the series is an invitation to peel back their understanding of broad societal issues, such as slavery and economic inequality, allowing them to see how history-making is both an ongoing process and a discipline that involves real people and real families, just like their own.

Although the *AFRICAN AMERICAN LIVES* series was the starting point for Thirteen’s *The Story in History* outreach efforts, the initiative had a wider set of resources and structure. To get young people investigating past events, peoples and places, Thirteen offered implementation grants to seven public television stations and each station formed a partnership with local chapters of the Boys &

Girls Club of America. The LAB@Thirteen, the station's educational outreach department, also developed a set of resources that sought to "help participating youth think like *historians* and explore, through the broadcast and active research, the thematic links across decades of black history and the connections between their lives and the stories illustrated in the national broadcast."¹ And, the New York-based station established a related partnership with Ancestry.com, a commercial online archive of genealogical data and tools, making a second set of rich resources available to participating Boys & Girls Club members and the adults who supported their explorations.

The Story in History initiative had four goals it sought to achieve:

- 1) To extend the themes and ideas presented in the PBS series *AFRICAN AMERICAN LIVES*;
- 2) To engage young people in active historical research;
- 3) To build stronger relationships between PBS stations and local youth organizations nationwide; and
- 4) To encourage underserved youth to express their discoveries and perspectives through creative, media-enhanced projects.

Staff working within the LAB@Thirteen operationalized these goals into the following components:

- An in-person training for PBS stations and local Boys & Girls Club representatives;
- Station-supported kick-off events to engage students and community stakeholders in the project;
- Active support of student research and projects from Boys & Girls Club staff and station representatives;
- Station-supported culminating events to showcase Club members' projects;
- An online gallery of student work hosted by Thirteen.org; and
- An independent evaluation.

With further support from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, Thirteen commissioned the Center for Children and Technology (CCT), a part of the Education Development Center, Inc., to conduct an external evaluation of *The Story in History* initiative. The evaluation, which is the focus of this report, assessed the extent to which local partnerships between Thirteen, local stations and individual chapters of Boys & Girls Clubs fostered youth participation in the initiative in

¹ Thirteen's proposal to the Corporation for Public Broadcasting.

general and promoted historical awareness and engagement among underserved youth in particular.

Because each partnership at the seven participating sites took shape in distinctive ways, CCT researchers initially documented what factors contributed to successful collaborations. Researchers next examined how these partnerships led to opportunities for young people to investigate and understand history — both their own and the broader heritage of African-Americans and other cultural groups with which youth belonged.

The following three research questions guided the evaluation:

1. What are the components of Thirteen’s outreach efforts that help Boys & Girls Club and local public television station staffs develop a project that invites young people into historical investigations that are meaningful to them?
2. What strategies do Boys & Girls Club staff use to implement *The Story in History* initiative for youth within their communities?
3. How do participating youth respond to *AFRICAN-AMERICAN LIVES* at their local Boys & Girls Club and what are youth’s perceptions of history and their cultural heritage as a result of their experience?

This report comprises four sections:

- Initiative Resources
- Profile of Participants
- Findings
- Lessons Learned and Recommendations

Methodology

In the course of this study, CCT used a mixed-methodologies approach to evaluate *The Story in History* initiative, employing the following instruments and data sets:

- Written surveys distributed to participating PBS station and Boys & Girls Club representatives to collect baseline data;
- Interview protocols to guide discussions with public television station staff;
- Interim reports public television stations submitted to Thirteen;
- Interview protocols to guide discussions with Boys & Girls Club staff;

- An interview protocol to guide discussions with young people about their multimedia productions and overall participation;
- Copies of youth productions, including, PowerPoint slide shows, videos and images of displays; and
- A site visit to one station's culminating event.

Section I: Initiative Resources

To reach the goal of having Boys & Girls Club members engage in historical research, Thirteen supplied participating public television stations with an array of resources and support. In addition to implementation grants, Thirteen provided each site with face-to-face training, an online toolkit of materials assembled solely for *The Story in History* initiative, free, one-year accounts to Ancestry.com, and ongoing phone and email support from Thirteen Outreach staff.

Training

In late February 2006, Thirteen's Educational Outreach Department, the LAB@Thirteen, held a one-day training session at its offices in New York City. Attended by representatives from participating public television stations and Boys & Girls Clubs, the training was Thirteen's opportunity to provide an overview and articulate their expectations for *The Story in History* initiative.

While Thirteen encouraged stations and their partner Boys & Girls Clubs to tailor their implementation of the initiative to the needs of the young people they were serving, adjusting to the local context when necessary, the basic structure of each implementation remained constant. Thirteen staff announced during the training that each site was required to do the following:

- Involve at least 100 young people in their implementation of the initiative;
- Hold a culminating event that would build community interest and link the AFRICAN AMERICAN LIVES broadcast series to the projects club members would be producing. Events could be designed for students, funders, press, relevant historical organizations, or a combination of these groupings;
- Help participating club members create projects that utilized multimedia, were the result of historical research and investigation and respected copyright;
- Maintain communication between the PBS station and the Boys & Girls Club staff with the aim of supporting youth work and monitoring the progress young people were making;
- Submit two progress reports to Thirteen (due March 31 and May 31)
- Identify a History Mentor(s) and identify their role(s) in supporting youth projects;
- Hold a culminating event to recognize youth and partners' participation in the initiative;
- Select one outstanding project to be displayed on *The Story in History* gallery hosted on the Thirteen.org website; and
- Participate in the external evaluation of the initiative.

During the one-day training, Thirteen staff also presented stations and Boys & Girls Club representatives with a general set of guidelines for youth projects. Emphasizing flexibility, they explained the following:

- Students could work individually, in pairs and/or in groups.
- Students were expected to develop media-based projects, ranging from a simple PowerPoint presentation to a complex short documentary, and should be encouraged to let their interests drive their particular topics. Topic possibilities could include researching the history of one's family, exploring a community member's personal history or tracing the history of a place with local relevance.
- Student research could include oral history interviews, online and archival research, site visits and/or an examination of artifacts.

The in-person training also gave Thirteen staff an opportunity to provide a hands-on walk-through of the resources available to participating youth, including *The Story in History* Web Toolkit, information and tools available on Ancestry.com and print copies of the paperback book, *Creating Junior Genealogists*.

***The Story in History* Web Toolkit**

In addition to the educator resources housed on the main website for the *AFRICAN AMERICAN LIVES* broadcast series, the LAB@Thirteen created a set of online resources to help youth participating in *The Story in History* initiative develop media projects about family and community history. (See Figure 1 for a screenshot of the Toolkit's homepage.)



Image 1

Following the in-person training, the toolkit was available online and was structured around four areas:

- 1) *Researching Your History* — a collection of Web and print genealogy resources aimed at youth;
- 2) *Project Resources* — a set of links to organizations, such as Youth Learn and Web Teacher, that have a track record in helping youth develop multimedia projects;
- 3) *Project Ideas* — a description of four potential project approaches (“digital oral histories,” “analyzing the evidence,” “my place in history” and “community photo journal”) as well as links to youth projects that made use of these techniques; and
- 4) *The Gallery* — a space dedicated to Boys & Girls Club project “winners.”

Ancestry.com

During the February training, station and Boys & Girls Club representatives were introduced to *Family History Just for Kids*, a microsite that Ancestry.com developed specifically for Boys & Girls Club members. Trainees also were given an opportunity to begin exploring how they and the young people they would be supporting could use their free, one-year accounts to delve into research that was personally meaningful by using census data, and other artifacts housed within the digital repository. (See Figure 2 for screenshot of the *Family History Just for Kids* landing page.) Along with pointers to family history materials, the landing page featured the following links:

- “Visit the Boys & Girls Clubs of America centennial website”
- “Learn about African-American heritage on Ancestry.com”



Image 2

- “Check out the website for new PBS series, ‘African-American Lives’”

Participants also received a special edition of Ancestry.com’s publication, *Creating Junior Genealogists*, and were told they would receive 100 copies, each with a BGCA logo on the cover, to distribute to club members. During the training, the Ancestry.com representative also described and modeled how a dozen participants simultaneously could use their accounts to conduct research.

Staff Support

Although multiple outreach staff within the LAB@Thirteen were involved in *The Story in History* initiative, one person was designated as the main point of contact for participating stations and Boys & Girls Clubs. Via telephone and over email, this staff person was available to offer advice on student project topics, find answers to logistical questions, give feedback on kick-off and culminating event ideas; and provide general support and counsel throughout the duration of each project.

Section II: Profile of Participants

This section presents a brief description of the public television stations and Boys & Girls Clubs of America that participated in *The Story in History* initiative. (See Table 1 for an overview of each site's implementation of *The Story in History* initiative.)

PTV Stations

In addition to Thirteen/WNET New York, seven stations participated in *The Story in History* initiative. They were:

- Detroit Public Television;
- KETC — St. Louis, Missouri;
- KUHT — Houston, Texas;
- Maryland Public Television;
- WETA — Arlington, Virginia;
- WTTW — Chicago Illinois; and
- WTVI — Charlotte, North Carolina.

According to Thirteen, stations were selected for involvement in *The Story in History* initiative based on their participation in the *AFRICAN AMERICAN LIVES* teacher training initiative, which took place in the 2005-06 academic year and was supported by broadcast funding, or as a result of successful past collaborations with the LAB@Thirteen. Once selected for participation, however, it was up to individual stations to determine where best to house *The Story in History* initiative. For some, such as Maryland Public Television, this meant placing it in the hands of the station's corporate relations department; for others, like WETA, the program was overseen by the station's education staff. Six of the seven public television stations completed *The Story in History* initiative and met the requirements that Thirteen presented to them at the February training. The seventh station, having encountered unavoidable delays, plans to complete the initiative by September 2006.

Boys & Girls Clubs

Founded in 1906, the Boys & Girls Club of America has grown to over 3,900 locations, serving children and teens throughout the 50 states, Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands and domestic and international military bases. Although Thirteen secured the participation of the Boys & Girls Club

of America at a national level, the seven participating public television stations brokered partnerships with individual clubs locally. As a result, following the daylong training in New York City in February, half of the stations decided to collaborate with multiple clubs and the other half chose to work with a single club. Twenty-two clubs chose to participate in the initiative formally, and another 23 clubs indicated they would use *The Story in History* resources informally. In choosing whether to participate, clubs reported they considered a number of variables, such as the opportunity to take advantage of the 100th anniversary of the Boys & Girls Clubs of America, potential fit with existing Boys & Girls Club programs, significant events happening within their own clubs, such as an 80th anniversary of a club, and the appeal of partnering with their public television station either for the first time or based on a strong relationship already in place. Collaborating with a Boys & Girls Club was a new partnership for four of the seven participating stations. Clubs working with five of the seven stations opted to run their *Story in History* projects for their members in spring 2006; likewise clubs collaborating with four ptv stations integrated the initiative into an existing Boys & Girls Club program, such as Imagination Fascination or ongoing athletic program.

Club Members

A majority of the participating Boys & Girls Clubs served young people from either predominantly African American communities or communities with large Latino populations. Consequently, with the exception of a few Caucasian, Asian and mixed or bi-racial participants, nearly all of the youth who participated in *The Story in History* initiative were either African American or Latino, according to club staff. And although many Boys & Girls Clubs are accustomed to running programs for children of many ages, from elementary to high school students, the majority of *The Story in History* participants fell between the ages of nine and 14-years-old. Also, the majority were stand-alone rather than school-based clubs.

Table 1: Site-by-Site Implementation of *The Story in History*

Station	Previous Partnership with BGCA?	Participating Boys & Girls Club(s)	Launch — End Dates	Station Support	Youth Projects	Tied to Existing BGCA Activity?	Use of Resources	Mentors, Partners Collaborators
Detroit PTV Detroit	No	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 4 clubs formally, 1 club informally 35 members at kick-off 15 members completed projects Mostly 10-14-years-old Predominantly African-American, some Latino 	April 10 - June 7, 2006	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mentioned in <i>Signal</i> magazine Created separate webpage on station website Produced participant certificates and keepsake posters Produced 50-second “Be More” spot Involved host of <i>American Black Journal</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Individual projects (Family histories, history of famous people and history of local club) 	No	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ AFRICAN AMERICAN LIVES ✓ <i>Creating Junior Genealogists</i> ✓ Ancestry.com ✓ Story in History Toolkit (1 club) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Burton Historical Collection mentor, Detroit Public Library
KETC St. Louis	No	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 club 110 members at kick-off ~ 25 will participate in group project Ages 10-12 Predominantly African-American 	May 10 - Sept. 16, 2006	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Distributed copies of series on DVD for participating youth and their families Created art work to give youth a visual representation of their research Plan to conduct workshop on basic production techniques Plan to produce collateral material, on-air promotions and t-shirts for culminating event 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Group project (History of a notable African American in the St. Louis community) Individual projects (family trees) 	No	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ AFRICAN AMERICAN LIVES ✓ Ancestry.com 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> History mentor from Post-Dispatch and KMOX Radio St. Louis Science Center St. Louis County Library St. Louis County Library
KUHT Houston	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 3 clubs formally, ~3 clubs informally 300 members exposed 21 members completed projects Ages 12-14 Predominantly African-American and Latino 	March 30 – May 15, 2006	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participated in initial training for club staff 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Group projects (History of a place, arts and crafts and quilt) Individual projects (family trees) 	Yes, Heritage and Folk Life Clubs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ AFRICAN AMERICAN LIVES ✓ Ancestry.com (access issues) ✓ <i>Creating Junior Genealogists</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No mentor Hispanic Culture Center
Maryland Public TV	No	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 3 clubs formally 105 members 15 members completed project Ages 8-15 Predominantly African-American 	March 8 – June 21, 2006	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Produced a 30-minute video of the kick-off event Executive producer will serve on the Board of Advisors for the BGCA Integrated culminating event into job fair for parents and community members 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Group projects (History of club, history of high school) Individual projects (family trees) 	No	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ AFRICAN AMERICAN LIVES ✓ <i>Creating Junior Genealogists</i> ✓ Ancestry.com (access issues) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Baltimore African-American Historical & Genealogical Society Museum of Maryland History & Culture Kuumba African Dance Ensemble

Station	Previous Partnership with BGCA?	Participating Boys & Girls Club(s)	Launch — End Dates	Station Support	Youth Projects	Tied to Existing BGCA Activity?	Use of Resources	Mentors, Partners Collaborators
WETA Wash, DC	No	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 club • 140 members at kick-off • 140 members completed project • Ages 6-18 • Predominantly African-American 	March 30 – June 9, 2006	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participated in initial training for club staff • Attended club events outside of <i>The Story in History</i> project • Published article in station magazine and provided club with copies • Plan to provide station tour for members 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Group projects (history of club, town and county) • Individual projects (family trees) 	Yes, Teens, Ruff Riders, Sharks, Soldiers, Stars, Hawks, Early Discovery; Imagination Fascination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> √ AFRICAN AMERICAN LIVES √ <i>Creating Junior Genealogists</i> √ Ancestry.com (access issues) √ Story in History Toolkit 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Beall-Dawson House mentor, an affiliate of The Montgomery County Historical Society • 2 Field Trips
WTTW Chicago	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 9 clubs formally, 19 clubs informally • 130 members at kick-off • 35 completed project • Ages 9-14 • Predominantly African-American 	July 5 – July 21, 2006	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promoted initiative among BGCA alumni and extended an invitation to judge the final projects • Provided resource bags at culminating event, including books donated by Jewel Foods for K-5 members • Hosted culminating event at station 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Group projects (history of clubs, community members, neighborhood, school) 	Yes, mix of programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> √ AFRICAN AMERICAN LIVES √ <i>Creating Junior Genealogists</i> √ Ancestry.com 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • History mentor, Chicago State University
WTVI Charlotte	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1 club formally • 108 members at kick-off • 3 members completed project • Ages 8-14 • Predominantly African-American and Latino 	April 11 – July 14, 2006	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gave station tour to 28 members • Arranged tour of “Focus on Sports” museum exhibit • Invited Sports Writer to meet with members 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Group projects (history of local basketball teams) 	Yes, Club Basketball Program	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> √ AFRICAN AMERICAN LIVES √ Story in History Toolkit 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • History Mentor/Project Coordinator, WTVI • History Professor, UNC, Charlotte • 3 Local Basketball Teams • Charlotte Museum of History Field Trip • Charlotte Observer Sports Writer

Section III: Findings

By design, *The Story in History* initiative had multiple layers to its implementation: Thirteen used the support it received from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting to provide training, develop resources and award modest implementation grants to seven public television stations. In turn, these ptv stations formed partnerships with individual or clusters of Boys & Girls Clubs, offering additional resources and directing clubs to the materials that Thirteen had created. It was then up to the clubs to take the support they received from their partner ptv station, including content guidance from a history mentor and possibly a local cultural institution, such as a genealogical society, as well as draw on their existing knowledge of effective program implementation in order to engage members in historical investigation. (See illustration 1 for a graphical overview of this chain of relationships.)



This train-the-trainer model, which encouraged development and distribution of resources and support at multiple levels, is important for understanding *The Story in History* initiative and sets the context for the findings that follow. The findings track the structure of the project, from the top level on down, beginning with Thirteen's outreach efforts and resources and concluding with the experiences of club members.

Thirteen's Outreach Efforts and Resources

High levels of support, professionalism and responsiveness characterized the top levels of the initiative's implementation. In general, Boys & Girls Club and public television station staff reported they were well prepared to implement *The Story in History* initiative after attending Thirteen's in-person training in February. And, they said, they remained impressed by the high caliber of professionalism and quick responsiveness that Thirteen staff brought to the initiative throughout its duration. As one station representative commented, "WNET knows what stations go through with some of the outreach projects. They were patient and understanding. Everything that they said we would receive, we received. When WNET sent something, it arrived the next day or definitely within the week. This was nice and not always the case with other grants. We're much more used to having to make multiple requests for something." Or, as a Boys & Girls Club representative described, "WNET always has great support. We were able to get books for all the participants. Our contacts at Channel 13 are readily available for consultation and suggestions."

Having the opportunity to participate in an outreach program that had the AFRICAN AMERICAN LIVES series as its starting point was appealing to station and Boys & Girls Club representatives alike. Before the initiative got underway at the local level, site representatives commonly remarked how the power of the series was its ability to make history personal. Often, it was this quality that drew them to participate in the outreach effort because they felt it would resonate with young people in their communities. All seven sites used the series in their implementations of the initiative, showing video segments to create a sense of occasion at kick-off and culminating events, viewing clips with small groups of members as part of their individual project development and/or distributing copies of the series as a way of bringing families into a conversation about personal history.

Station and Boys & Girls Club staff placed a high value on tangible resources they could place in members' hands. Recognizing how young people respond to actual "stuff" as a way of generating excitement, many station and club representatives said they put a premium on the copies of *Creating Junior Genealogist* books, bookmarks and other items Thirteen could give them to distribute to club members.

Stations were interested in receiving materials they could use to promote the initiative. In addition to the resources that Thirteen supplied stations to help them implement *The Story in History* initiative, several stations said they would have liked to receive materials that would help them generate news coverage and/or build community awareness. To remedy the lack of print materials

developed by Thirteen, stations sometimes developed their own. As one station explained, “I requested print materials, which they didn’t have... With past projects, like Innovation, there were great posters for promotion. I took the template and altered it because we had participated in the teacher professional development portion of AFRICAN-AMERICAN LIVES.”

Ancestry.com offered Boys & Girls Club staff and members a wealth of resources but accessing them often was difficult. From the hands-on tutorial offered at the February training to in-club use among staff and members, Ancestry.com resources were well received and valued. As one regional director explained, “The staff are really getting into the research [on Ancestry.com]. They are looking into their own family history... And when the staff are excited, the kids get excited. It’s really cool to watch because they don’t get excited about much.” And another said, “All of them used Ancestry at some point through the process. We’re very excited that the membership is for a year. It will allow them to continue the investigation.” Unfortunately, login problems prevented clubs working with three of the stations from making full use of Ancestry.com, especially in the early weeks of implementation. “The only problem that our Clubs have reported,” explained one station representative, “is limited access to the Ancestry.com website. As I mentioned, it was conveyed at the New York training that each registered club login would allow 12 members to access the site at the same time. Right now the website is locking out members when only two users are logged in. This creates a problem for the club when they are trying to conduct the ancestry project as a small group activity with approximately 10 members. I have sent an email to the Ancestry.com administrator concerning this problem, but am still waiting to hear back from them.” Because of staff turnover at Ancestry.com — the person who conducted the February training left the company in the early stages of *The Story in History* initiative — the problem was not solved for many weeks. Though club staff devised work-arounds, sometimes having members share names and passwords or moving to Google searches or, more often, working offline, they said they were frustrated with the delays. Once members were able to use the site, though, they said they were thrilled with what they found. As a regional director explained, “The kids were so much more excited about the website and the interactivity than they were in the books.”

The Story in History Toolkit, though appealing to stations and club staff, was used at the outset of the project and then infrequently throughout the project’s duration. Although station and Boys & Girls Club staff viewed the online resources developed by the LAB@Thirteen favorably during the February training, they regularly did not return to them once the youth projects began. And perhaps more importantly, neither did club staff who were responsible for the on-the-ground work with members. For example, a typical interview response from a station representative was the

following, “I don’t know how useful [the Toolkit] ended up being. It was a long address so I linked it from our site. Not sure how much time they had to devote to it.” Alternatively, staff at one club reported the Toolkit was instrumental in preparing them to engage students in the initiative.

Public Television Stations’ Participation

Public television stations were eager to participate in The Story in History project, principally because they could establish or strengthen relationships with local Boys & Girls Clubs. Representatives at all of the stations reported how appealing it was to have an opportunity to collaborate with a local Boys & Girls Club(s). Three of the stations had collaborated with a local club, but for the other four, the initiative served as an entrée into what they hoped would be a long-term partnership.

Requiring stations to support a kick-off event was an effective strategy for generating excitement among potential participants. Because half of the kick-off events brought together members from multiple clubs, and all of the events were infused with excitement and a feeling that this was a “special” program, many Boys & Girls Club staff reported how enthusiastic members felt about participating. They said members liked seeing that they were a part of something connected to other clubs, involved places of great importance in their communities and was worthy of attracting the attention of adults who cared about history. For example, one kick-off event was held at a museum that many members had not visited previously. The club coordinator reported, “They really enjoyed the museum. They didn’t realize there was so much history in [their own state]. Most had not been to the museum before. They said they would like to come back with their mom or grandma.”

While nearly all of the stations approached The Story in History with a spirit of collaboration, they experienced varying degrees of success, often depending on the station and clubs’ experience with and receptivity to forming a real, working partnership. Using the parameters Thirteen established as a starting point, early on stations and clubs had to determine clear roles and responsibilities if their implementation was to be effective both in terms of members’ final projects as well as from the standpoint of forging a strong partnership. They also had to maintain communication in order to build trust and an assurance that they could rely on one another. As one station representative described in an interim report submitted to Thirteen, “[The station] has developed a good relationship with the club. We are in constant contact (email or telephone) about the project. If challenges develop, then we work together to find solutions. Thus far, the staff has been an excellent and responsible group of people. They are motivated, they know how to get the best out

their youth and they understand what needs to be done to make the project a success. I try to support them any way that I can. I attend as many Boys & Girls activities as I can — whether the activity is AFRICAN AMERICAN LIVES-related or not. That seems to make a big difference in their eyes.” Alternatively, if communication broke down — on either the station or club side — then implementing aspects of the initiative became much more difficult. For example, one station, after hosting a bonanza of a kick-off, did not remain in contact with the regional Boys & Girls Club director in a way she found useful. Citing the sporadic nature of when the station would contact her, she explained, “They called when they needed something for a report for Thirteen... but I would definitely work with [the station] again. I understand that they had other responsibilities during this project but we really could have used a project leader from education rather than someone in the development office. I don’t think it was their field. Maybe there would have been better support from the education department.”

Several stations developed and/or provided additional resources to help Boys & Girls Club celebrate local projects at the culminating events. Station involvement ranged from very hands-on to distant. For example, a station representative who also served as the local Boys & Girls Club basketball coach had direct weekly contact with participating youth whereas Boys & Girls Club staff were responsible for all aspects of the initiative with little station participation at another site. Although the degree of involvement in the day-to-day implementation of the initiative varied, six stations identified concrete resources and support they could provide clubs in addition to the materials Thirteen offered. (See Table 1 for a list of the kinds of support stations offered local clubs.) For example, wanting to honor the work members put

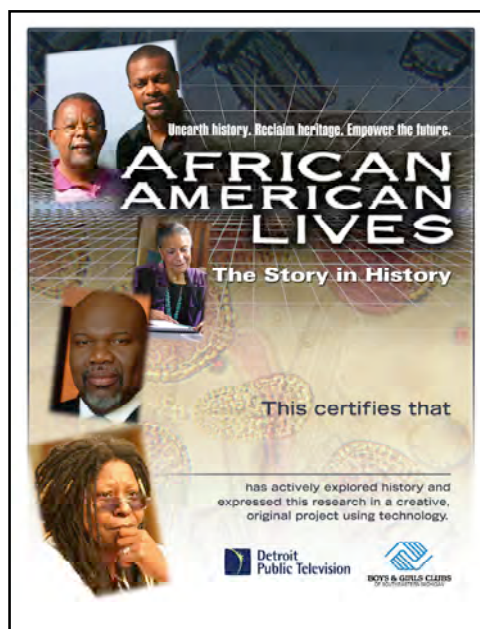


Image 3

into participating in *The Story in History* initiative, a station representative created certificates that mirrored the AFRICAN AMERICAN LIVES series that were distributed at the culminating event. (See Figure 3 for an image of the certificate template.) At another culminating event, the station gave each participating club member a bag filled with the following:

- A bubble pen
- The station’s Kids Fun and Run brochure

- US Mexican War postcard
- Secrets of the Dead postcard
- Egypt's Golden Empire/The Roman Empire postcard
- *Creating Junior Genealogists: Tips and Activities for Family History Fun* by Karen Frisch
- *What Makes You Go?* book
- *PBS Families: For Parents and Caregivers* newsletter
- Cyberchase Know Your Dough flyer
- Bert & Ernie Side by Side cassette tape

Routinely, stations also supplied food at kick-off and culminating events, providing club staff, members and a few parents with catered meals, pizza parties and outdoor bar-b-cues.

Several stations used strategies intended to foster public awareness of the initiative, sending a message about the value public broadcasters place on community involvement. Although parent turnout at kick-off and culminating events was low, stations tried to extend the reach of *The Story in History* initiative. For example, one station used footage it had shot at the kick-off event to produce and then broadcast a 50-second “Be More” spot, featuring *The Story in History* participants. Another station made copies of AFRICAN AMERICAN LIVES on DVD to allow participating members to share the series with their parents and families. And a third station combined its culminating event with a job fair supported by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, in part, hoping parents who were interested both could learn what their children had done and gather job-related information.

Boys & Girls Clubs’ Participation

The opportunity to work with their local public television station was a driving force behind many Boys & Girls Clubs’ participation in the initiative. As noted above, participating stations indicated that building or enhancing a relationship with their local Boys & Girls Club was a principal goal of the initiative. And, for their part, Boys & Girls Clubs were equally interested in working with local broadcasters and were satisfied with the experience they had. As one Boys & Girls Club representative declared, “They are awesome. I saw the potential tie and the collaboration but this was really something. The folks are really impressive. [The producer from the station who spoke at the culminating event] was very great and personable. The kids were really impressed with him and respected what he had to say. I look forward to collaborating with them again. They have a better understanding of us, too, so we’ll be able to build on that relationship.... Really, I’m very impressed with the personal and professional contribution [the station] made. They are classy.” In one case, however, the Boys & Girls Club was disappointed in the support her local chapters

received. After a successful launch she said there was very little follow-through. She said, “I thought we were going to have more support from [the station]. We thought people would come out and see the students’ work and the kids would get to the station to do a tour. We wanted them to learn how TV programming gets made — it doesn’t just appear on the screen magically... Also, we didn’t hear till the end of May that the projects were due last week.”

The majority of the participating clubs wove The Story in History initiative into an existing club structure, taking advantage of natural groupings of youth who were already accustomed to meeting on a regular basis. Before deciding where they would fold the initiative into their calendar of programs, Boys & Girls Clubs first had to decide whether they could take on the requirements of *The Story in History* in general. As a regional director explained, this typically happened as an opt-in process in the four of the seven sites that had multiple clubs participating. “We have 12 locations,” she said. “When I got back from New York, I gathered the 12 directors to see who would want to participate and three clubs said they could complete the whole project with all of the follow-through required. Many planned to informally do the program — promoting the documentary, using the ancestry website — but only three said they could do the whole thing.” Once a club chose to participate, they next took on the task of figuring out what participation would look like programmatically. Because club members often were organized into groups by age and interests, club staff usually plugged the initiative into programs already underway. Some also took cues from Boys & Girls Club of America national themes as well. “March is ‘Education’ month,” explained a station representative, “So that’s when the research started... and April is ‘Technology’ month so they watched the documentary, using it for a launching point for discussion.” A third way clubs integrated *The Story in History* into their clubs was in how they approached project “winners.” Nearly all of the sites resisted or downplayed the notion of a “winner,” describing how their culture was to cultivate participation over competition. They discouraged stations from making special recognition of a single project and instead aimed to create a celebratory atmosphere that involved all participating members.

The two strategies Boys & Girls Club staff used to recruit members — self-selection and required participation through an existing program — resulted in younger members participating than those envisioned by Thirteen. Although Thirteen originally had teens in mind when conceptualizing *The Story in History* initiative, elementary and middle school students tended to participate much more often than high school students. Because teens typically held jobs and pursued other interests outside formal club activities, it was “tweens” and younger kids who gravitated toward *The Story in History*. As one station representative explained, “I talked with our BGCA contact about the ages

of the kids and even though WNET is focused on high school, it depends on the interest of the kids. The younger kids tend to be interested in this sort of project.” Another regional coordinator made a similar remark; she said, “It’s hard to get teenagers to do anything and to stay motivated. The younger ones love to be on the computer and love to complete the work themselves and to be able to show it off to others.” Consequently, concerned that it was “too advanced” for elementary and middle school-aged members, Boys & Girls Clubs made limited use of the broadcast series in the day-to-day development of youth projects. Several sites reported that the AFRICAN AMERICAN LIVES series itself was too advanced for younger viewers.

Depending on the regional structure of the Boys & Girls Clubs, collaboration with the local station was either direct or diffuse. Several station representatives reported how they had difficulties finding a way into their partner clubs’ implementation of the program. In these cases, communication between a regional director and local chapters promoted an autonomous culture where individual club staff were accustomed to working independently. In these instances, clubs had little experience relying on an outside partner. As the Thirteen staff member overseeing the project summarized, “This has definitely been a learning curve. Many of the clubs tend to stay very insular, not asking for help... They really wanted to do it on their own.” Alternatively, in other clusters of clubs where collaboration was the norm, a strong regional director could more easily define a clear role for the station to play.

The degree to which Boys & Girls Club staff were prepared to take advantage of the issues raised by AFRICAN AMERICAN LIVES and The Story in History initiative largely depended on their existing training and skills. The pedagogy beneath the initiative was project-based learning, and club staff either understood this going into the project, having the knowledge and training to guide members’ historical inquiry, or they did not. Thirteen’s February training as well as the orientation meetings that individual clubs and regional directors held introduced the initiative’s goals and resources but they were not designed as full-fledged courses in project-based learning. Consequently, some of the staff were better prepared than others to cultivate members’ interests and curiosities, making use of the materials in the online Toolkit and segments from the four episodes of the broadcast, for instance. For example, at one club, each age group was assigned an individual counselor who was charged with providing guidance and leadership. The teen counselor, for example, was the one who initiated contact with the local museum and arranged two field trips to historical sites. The counselor working with the first-through third-graders, on the other hand, walked younger members through the process of making a family tree where the objective was to learn the importance of knowing family. This sort of awareness of what was

developmentally appropriate was not consistent across clubs. Summarizing the challenge that some club staff faced, Thirteen's main point of contact for the initiative said, "A lot of the leaders are not educators."

The use of history mentors and cultural institutions varied considerably across implementations, but, when used, added a rich dimension to the initiative. Although Thirteen required all participating clubs to identify a history mentor and strongly encouraged them to collaborate with a local historical or genealogical society or alternative partner, station and Boys & Girls club staff had various levels of success finding suitable partners. As noted above, *The Story in History* partners included historical museums, genealogical associations, sports teams, individual historians, a science center and performing artists, all of which brought unique perspectives on their domains of expertise. Among the most successful partners were those that members were able to visit and/or with whom they were able to have a first-hand experiences. According to club staff, field trips to sites with historical significance, museums with rich collections and kick-off event speakers who embodied a passion for their own heritage allowed participating youth to deepen their exploration of history.

Each Boys & Girls Club's technology infrastructure contributed to, or in some cases hindered, the kinds of projects members were able to develop. Most of the participating clubs had some level of technology in place prior to *The Story in History* initiative — computers with Internet access, digital cameras and access to a video camera were common — but the reliability of existing equipment was sometimes shaky as members developed their projects. When glitches happened, club staff improvised both technical and non-technical alternatives. For example, in one club, where the members did not have regular access to computers, club staff arranged for participating members to visit another club's computer lab. At other clubs, staff used initiative funds to acquire new technology tools, such as laptops, that would allow members to conduct online research, and audio recorders to support oral interviews. Grateful for the new equipment, club staff said it would be well used during *The Story in History* project work and after the initiative ended. As one regional director remarked about the laptops, "Absolutely we will be able to use those [once the project is over]. We're a skills-based program and one of our core projects is technology. We do our best with what we have... The benefit is far-reaching, well beyond the life of this project."

Despite Boys & Girls Clubs' efforts to introduce parents and other family members to The Story in History initiative, very few attended the kick-off and culminating events. According to staff, the lack of parent involvement is a chronic challenge across Boys & Girls Club programs, and was not unique to *The Story in History* initiative. As one station representative explained after noting the low

parent turnout at the launch event they had held, “We tried discussing this with the club. They said they have a hard time getting parents involved. They are very busy and there are a lot of single-parent families.”

Many Boys & Girls Clubs were committed to integrating historical research into their programs beyond the formal end of The Story in History initiative. Because of the visible nature of many of the culminating events, such as pizza parties, certificate ceremonies and community gatherings, club staff thought they would have greater interest if they were to program a *Story in History II*. No longer an abstraction as it might have been, non-participating members saw the videos, displays and arts projects that their peers had produced and began to wonder what they could make. Aside from the final events, some club staff and members said they had caught the “genealogy bug” and planned to keep learning what they could about their clubs and neighborhoods as well as themselves. As a Boys & Girls Club representative said, “Though the project is officially done we will continue to work with Ancestry.com. We’ll even continue to do a second culminating event. It’s pretty cool.” Also, having gotten past the kinks of Ancestry.com and knowing the accounts were good for one year, staff said they intended to take advantage of the online resources.

Members’ Experience

According to reports from Boys & Girls staff and public television station representatives, all of the young people who participated in *The Story in History* initiative had a worthwhile experience and they hoped the skills they began to acquire over the course of their participation would continue to develop — in other club programs and beyond. Having received wide latitude in the development of their projects, members’ explorations took many forms, from a game show based on one members’ family story to a documentary highlighting a club’s history to an oral history of a notable figure in the community. (See Table 1 for a list of youth projects and *The Story in History* Toolkit’s online gallery of “winners” hosted on Thirteen.org) Though every participating member did not experience all of these, what follows is a list of the kinds of beneficial experiences they had.

Participants made meaningful personal connections with events and people in their past, which left them feeling proud of who they are. As a result of their explorations, members learned more about their families’ histories and by extension themselves. For example, after listening to members share the discoveries they had made in the course of developing their projects, such as a boy who learned his great grandfather was one of the first black firefighters in Washington, DC, a station

representative said, “The projects seemed to make the kids feel pride and centered them.” Another club staff echoed how powerful the explorations into personal pasts were. “I think it was pretty awesome,” the regional director explained. “I knew our kids would do really well but I was so impressed. Some of the details that were put into the project were amazing. These kids really took a lot of time. One member traced his family back to 1770. And the stories were



Image 4

phenomenal. He went back to his great, great, great, great, great, great-grandfather, who bought his freedom out of slavery. He also saved money to buy the freedom of two of his children.” (See Image 4 for a screenshot from the member’s video.) And these discoveries were not limited to genealogical research on Ancestry.com. For example, an 11-year-old member had created a mixed media art piece as her Heritage artwork. In her description of the piece’s composition and meaning she stated, ““My Heritage Project artwork is made with paint on canvas and pastels on paper. It is a painting of my grandfather. He was a rancher and he saved his money so that my family could come to the United States. We are very proud to be from Cardenas, Mexico. My painting shows my grandfather uniting the two countries because now my family is both Mexican and American. The title of my art is ‘Mi Abuelito que Ayudo’ which says ‘My Grandfather Helped Me’ in English.” (See Image 5.)



Image 5

The hands-on nature of The Story in History initiative provided a hook into historical inquiry in a way that previously had escaped participants in more formal studies. Members’ understanding of historical issues relevant to their lives and communities was influenced by their participation. As one regional director explained, “One of our clubs got motivated to conduct research about why their club was named what it was. Very often, clubs are named after people so these kids wanted to find out this person’s claim to fame. Now they are going back and researching all of the clubs. They want to know what made these people important and significant enough to have a club named after them.” Similarly, another club staff summarized, “With this project, it was more personal, the members had a personal connection. They got into ancestry and doing research about themselves. As a result, they are more interested in research. They don’t see research as boring

any longer. We're not talking huge numbers but a few individuals have caught this research bug." Likewise, although several projects focused on the history of the club, one group had access to the club's archives. Being able to mine old camp photos, rations left over from the war when the club served a different community purpose, and other primary source materials was something the members had not done before. Staff said the members' decade-by-decade investigation of the club's history and the display they produced brought their building to life.

Digital media, popular culture and celebrities propelled members' projects. Hitting a wall of disinterest in what was perceived as stale topics like "people from the past" and "historical investigation" some staff used members' fascination with television and people in the media as a way into *The Story in History*. In addition to the eight noteworthy people featured in AFRICAN AMERICAN LIVES, Ancestry.com highlighted resources linked to other well-known people, making it possible for members to begin exploring questions that were top-most in their minds, such as "Am I related to somebody famous?"

Participants had the opportunity to practice a variety of information and communications technology skills in the course of making projects, including multimedia production and digital authorship. Although the development of ICT and digital literacy skills was not the primary goal of *The Story in History* initiative, members were asked to produce their final projects using multimedia, which gave them a chance to play with new tools. As a result, many members had an opportunity not only to make historical discoveries but to translate what they had learned into electronic forms. PowerPoint was one of the most common formats members chose but a few members experimented with digital filmmaking and audio recording as well. For example, one group of members produced a 20-minute news report, featuring on-camera interviews, b-roll and journalistic introductions and cutaways.

The culminating event brought recognition to participating youth, celebrating their accomplishments among a community of peers and adults. Whether held within a club or a partner station's production studio where one of the speakers was a genealogist featured in AFRICAN AMERICAN LIVES, the culminating events served as public showcases, giving members an opportunity to see themselves as belonging to a larger community of historians and artists.

Section III: Lessons Learned and Recommendations

Attracting young people from traditionally underserved communities to participate in an initiative like *The Story in History: Engaging Youth in AFRICAN AMERICAN LIVES* initiative is no small undertaking. Recent research has found that, as a general trend, youth from lower income and less educated families are less likely to participate in school activities and community-based groups. There are difficulties both in getting young people from underserved communities to attend these programs and further challenges keeping them involved once they have shown an initial interest (Bouffard, 2006). Nevertheless, despite the myriad barriers, out-of-school-time programs can have tremendous social, emotional and academic benefits for their participants (Mahoney, 2000; Mahoney, Larson Eccles, 2005). And the seven public television stations and the scores of Boys & Girls Clubs that took part in *The Story in History*, both formally and informally, certainly witnessed some of these benefits. Members' level of engagement in their individual and group projects, their willingness to withstand technical glitches and persist with the tasks they had set out for themselves and their drive to learn more about the families and neighborhoods that shape them, all were testaments to the strength of the initiative.

As the Corporation for Public Broadcasting and Thirteen develop future outreach initiatives, they may want to consider the following as powerful lessons learned from *The Story in History*.

- ***Use a distributed model of outreach — such as Thirteen supporting a cluster of public television stations — as it is an effective strategy for taking national programming into local communities.*** As a “flagship station” within the public broadcasting system, Thirteen is well established as a producer of high quality programming. It is equally experienced in providing educational support and services to classroom teachers and professional developers, having directed the National Teacher Training Institute for many years. This newer model of developing a discrete set of resources around a single series and collaborating with multiple stations and community partners can be seen as a form of *Outreach 2.0*. It is a way to generate enthusiasm among communities that public broadcasters want to reach, and, give meaningful experiences to young people who may not have had a way into national programming.
- ***Continue to support partnerships between public television stations and community organizations serving young people.*** There is a natural fit between the missions of public broadcasters and after-school programs: both seek to promote learning. Although it takes

time to establish working partnerships that go beyond two logos sharing space on a banner, these partnerships are worth the effort.

- **Recognize the value local stations place on receiving acknowledgement from their communities by building in PR supports.** In addition to reaching people who are targeted as participants, in this case Boys & Girls Club members, outreach functions as a means of generating good will in the larger community. This is where the impulse to release something to the press came from on the part of several stations. There is an inevitability to want to grab attention when doing good — it is tied to membership development and longevity — and should be a regular part of any initiative.
- **Encourage stations to offer tours to young people as well as an introduction to the mission of public broadcasting whenever possible.** While not the main goal of the project, any outreach effort has as a potential undercurrent the force of public media. Stations, and to a lesser extent clubs, had the impulse to introduce members to professional production and other public broadcasting activities but rarely followed it. Future initiatives, regardless of topic, would do well to emphasize the role public media play in delivering rich, educational content and services and how stations are strong community members.
- **Hold tightly to the notion that learning is personal.** While it is a pedagogical truism that learning tasks that are authentic are some of the most potent, too often students are asked to engage in activities that are removed from their interests and curiosities. Not so with *The Story in History*. Boys & Girls Club members' desire to participate — to start and complete projects — was tied to something very real: their personal histories and clubs. Whether they started with the query, "Am I related to Oprah?" or ended with the insight, "You should listen to some of the stories your elders will tell you," members were involved because the answers to their questions mattered to them.
- **Arm young people with tools of expression.** Digital media gave *The Story in History* initiative its muscle. Time and time again, the initiative put Boys & Girls Club members on the web, gave them cameras and microphones to hold and said, "Make something. Tell your story." This allowed young people to digest historical documentations in ways that were compelling and habit-forming.

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