

Women's History

Oral Histories

Oral Histories are available at through a wide variety of resources at the museum, from [online exhibitions](#), to [Archive Center collections](#), to the [Smithsonian Jazz collections](#).

Below is a listing of selected oral histories with women illustrating the breadth and depth of the oral histories available at the museum.

Military



A More Perfect Union- Japanese Americans & the U.S. Constitution

During the opening months of World War II, almost 120,000 Japanese Americans, two-thirds of them citizens of the United States, were forced out of their homes and into detention camps established by the U.S. government. Many would spend the next three years living under armed guard, behind barbed wire.

Look for:

Nancy K. Araki

Sue Embrey

Mary Tsukamoto

Morgan Yamanaka

<http://amhistory.si.edu/perfectunion/transcript.html#today1>



Louisa Susannah Wells

Louisa Susannah Wells describes conditions in the North Atlantic during a voyage from New York to London in 1778.

http://americanhistory.si.edu/onthewater/oral_histories/life_at_sea/wells.htm



Maria Isabel Solis Thomas, Shipyard Worker

World War II scrambled American society. Jobs in shipyards brought men, women, and families to parts of the country they had never visited before. In their new homes, they often lived and worked among people of many different backgrounds. At the peak of wartime production in 1943, women made up more than 10 percent of the work force in most of the shipyards. Listen to the story of Maria Isabel Solis Thomas, to gain an understanding of the immense changes World War II caused within American society.

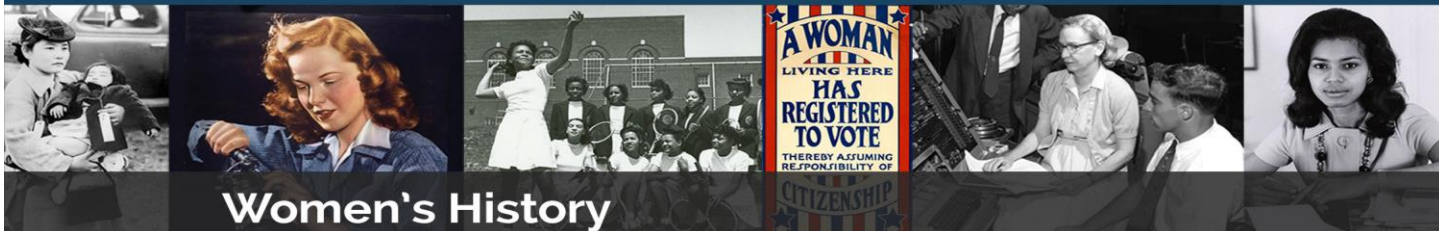
http://americanhistory.si.edu/onthewater/oral_histories/maritime_voices/thomas.htm



What Did You Do In the War Grandma?

An Oral History of Rhode Island Women during World War II
Written by students in the Honors English Program at South Kingstown High School
Transcriptions available

http://cds.library.brown.edu/projects/WWII_Women/tocCS.html



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Music & Musical Instruments



Toshiko Akiyoshi

Pianist, band-leader, and composer-arranger Toshiko Akiyoshi has made a vital contribution to the art of big band jazz. Born in Manchuria, Akiyoshi moved to Japan with her parents at the end of World War II. She came to the United States in 1956 to study at the Berklee School of Music in Boston. In 1973, she and her husband, saxophonist/flutist Lew Tabackin formed the Toshiko Akiyoshi Jazz Orchestra.

<http://americanhistory.si.edu/smithsonian-jazz/collections-and-archives/oral-histories#Akiyoshi>



Carla Bley

Born Lovella May Borg in Oakland, California, Carla Bley is a trailblazing pianist, organist, big bandleader, and composer. Having learned the fundamentals of music from her piano teacher father, Bley is largely self-taught. In 1953, at the age of 17, Bley moved to New York City where she worked as a pianist and cigarette girl at various clubs. She soon began to compose for artists such as Charlie Haden and Gary Burton before branching out to work with big bands, first as part of The Jazz Composer's Orchestra, and later her own band.

<http://americanhistory.si.edu/smithsonian-jazz/collections-and-archives/oral-histories#bley>



A Conversation with Diosa Costello

Often referred to as the original "Latin Bombshell," the Museum collected the oral history of singer, dancer and actress Diosa Costello. The interview was conducted by curators Dwight Bower and Marvette Pérez at the University of Nevada at Las Vegas' Black Box Theatre. Costello, born in Guayama, Puerto Rico, moved to New York's Spanish Harlem with her family in her early teens. Her dream was to break into show business and she eventually did just that, performing with the then-undiscovered conga player, Desi Arnaz. In 1939, Costello became the first Latina to appear on Broadway.

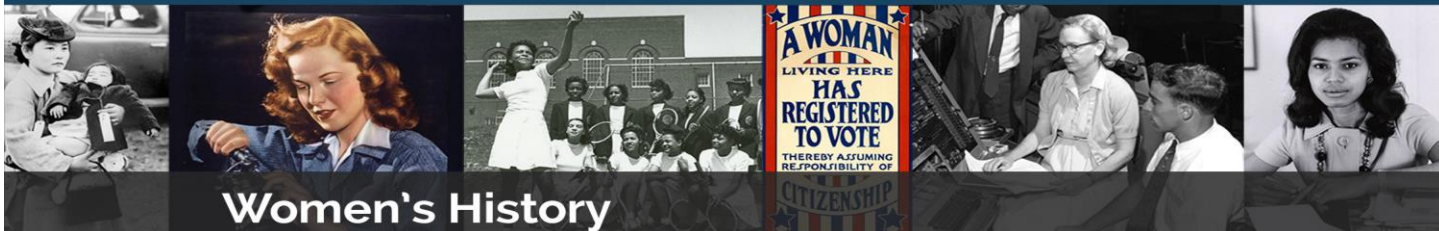
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yT2QKAWnT8Y>



Dorothy Donegan

Pianist, vocalist and educator Dorothy Donegan was fluent in several styles of jazz as well as European classical music. In the 1950s, the Chicago native developed a flamboyant performance style, which at times overshadowed her extraordinary piano playing, deep sense of swing, and wide-ranging repertoire.

<http://americanhistory.si.edu/smithsonian-jazz/collections-and-archives/oral-histories#Donegan>



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Lorraine Gordon

During her early career at the Blue Note record label, Lorraine Gordon helped to record and to promote legendary artists including Sidney Bechet and Thelonious Monk. Together with her husband Max, she later owned and operated the famous Village Vanguard, now the longest-running jazz club in New York City. Her memoir is entitled *Alive at the Village Vanguard: My Life In and Out of Jazz Time*. Lorraine Gordon was born in Newark, New Jersey.

<http://americanhistory.si.edu/smithsonian-jazz/collections-and-archives/oral-histories#Gordon>



Shirley Horn

Shirley Horn began leading her own group in the mid-1950s, and in 1960 recorded her first album, *Embers and Ashes*, which established her reputation as an exceptional and sensitive jazz vocalist. Born in 1934 in Washington, DC, she studied classical piano as a teenager at Howard University's Junior School of Music. In 1990, she collaborated with Miles Davis on her critically acclaimed album *You Won't Forget Me*.

<http://americanhistory.si.edu/smithsonian-jazz/collections-and-archives/oral-histories#Horn>



Sheila Jordan

Sheila Jordan is not only one of the premier singers in jazz, but she is known for her stimulating vocal workshops as well. Jordan, née Dawson, grew up in Pennsylvania's coal mining country with her grandparents, singing in school and on amateur radio shows. Upon moving to New York City in the early '50s, Jordan sang in clubs and at jam sessions with some of the city's jazz giants, including Charles Mingus, Herbie Nichols, and Parker.

<http://americanhistory.si.edu/smithsonian-jazz/collections-and-archives/oral-histories#Jordan>



Abbey Lincoln

Strongly influenced by Billie Holiday and Louis Armstrong, both of whom she met early in her career, Abbey Lincoln's distinctive vocal style, thought-provoking writing, and spirited personality secured her a place among the jazz luminaries. Lincoln was born in Chicago and raised in rural Michigan. She also acted, appearing in the films *Nothing But A Man* and *For Love of Ivy* and on television in *Mission: Impossible* and *The Flip Wilson Show*.

<http://americanhistory.si.edu/smithsonian-jazz/collections-and-archives/oral-histories#Lincoln>



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Melba Liston

Although a formidable trombone player, Melba Liston was primarily known for her composition and arrangements. Growing up in Los Angeles, some of her first work during the 1940s was with two West Coast masters: bandleader Gerald Wilson and tenor saxophonist Dexter Gordon. During the 1960s, Liston co-led a band with trumpeter Clark Terry, and wrote for the Duke Ellington orchestra, as well as Tony Bennett and Eddie Fisher. Her career helped pave the way for women in jazz in roles other than as vocalists.

<http://americanhistory.si.edu/smithsonian-jazz/collections-and-archives/oral-histories#Liston>



Marian McPartland

Best known as host of the weekly national radio program Piano Jazz, Marian McPartland has helped to popularize the genre with a broad audience. Her mother was a classical pianist, and enrolled Marian at the famed Guildhall School of Music in London. In 1963, she worked with the Benny Goodman Sextet, and in 1965 she began her radio career at WBAI in New York. She has received numerous awards, including a DownBeat Lifetime Achievement Award in 1997.

<http://americanhistory.si.edu/smithsonian-jazz/collections-and-archives/oral-histories#McPartland>



Annie Ross

Annie Ross was born in England, and raised in Los Angeles. She began her singing career in Europe, working with musicians such as James Moody, Kenny Clarke, and Coleman Hawkins. Between 1957 and 1962, her group Lambert, Hendricks & Ross recorded seven albums, including the one that put them in the spotlight: Sing A Song Of Basie. Ross also is an accomplished actress and has appeared in a number of films, including Superman III, Throw Mama from the Train, and Pump Up the Volume.

<http://americanhistory.si.edu/smithsonian-jazz/collections-and-archives/oral-histories#Ross>



Nancy Wilson

Nancy Wilson began her singing career on the Columbus, Ohio, club circuit while still in high school, and in 1956 she became a member of Rusty Bryant's Carolyn Club Band. During her years recording as a solo artist with Capitol Records, she was second in sales only to the Beatles. Although she often has crossed over to pop and rhythm-and-blues recordings, she still is best known for her jazz performances. Wilson also hosted NPR's Jazz Profiles, a weekly documentary series, from 1986 to 2005.

<http://americanhistory.si.edu/smithsonian-jazz/collections-and-archives/oral-histories#WilsonN>