

Mixed Media

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Curiosity Never Killed This Cat: The Studs Terkel Radio Archive Brings Studs Terkel into the 21st Century

By Matthew Byrd, Social Media Coordinator, Studs Terkel Radio Archive, WFMT

Ten years ago, the world lost the inimitable oral historian and broadcaster, Studs Terkel, at the age of 96. During his time with us, Studs authored several acclaimed works of oral history, such as *Hard Times: An Oral History of the Great Depression* and *The Good War*—an oral history of World War II that won the Pulitzer Prize for General Non-Fiction in 1985. However, in his hometown of Chicago, Studs was perhaps best known for *The Studs Terkel Program*, the long-running radio show he hosted on WFMT, Chicago's fine arts and classical music station. Ask around Chicago long enough, and residents of a certain age will come bursting forth with warm feelings that might seem more appropriate for a relative than a radio show host they never met, at least it might seem that way if you'd never heard the man talk.



Studs Terkel in the studio

Unfortunately, the inevitable passage of time has meant fewer and fewer people, in and out of Chicago, have a direct experience with Terkel's work. College seniors were not even alive when his radio show ended in 1997, making it imperative that Studs's legacy is not only preserved for future generations, but evangelized to them as well.

Luckily, we at the Studs Terkel Radio Archive at WFMT are doing just that. The story begins with Studs himself, who spent the last 11 years of his life as "Scholar-in-Residence" at the Chicago History Museum. As part of his residency, Studs, along with then-WFMT senior vice president Dan Schmidt, donated over 6,000 tapes from his old WFMT show to the museum for posterity. For years, the tapes were stored at the Chicago History Museum, digitized on an ad hoc basis.

Then, beginning in 2010 with help from a major grant by the National Endowment for the Humanities, the tapes were sent to the Library of Congress to be digitized en masse. Archivist Allison Schein Holmes was hired to figure out how best to catalog and display the digitized final project, which will amount to almost 9,000 hours of audio. The result of the partnership between WFMT and the Chicago History Museum is The Art of Conversation at studsterkel.wfmt.com, the free and accessible digital platform that will host the vast majority of the 5,600 radio programs Terkel broadcast in his years at WFMT. Launched on May 16, 2018, on what would have been Studs's 106th birthday, the archive acts as a kind of living repository of the mid-to-late 20th century, featuring conversations with Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Gloria Steinem, James Baldwin, Dorothy Parker, Cesar Chavez, Bob Dylan, Muhammad Ali, Maya Angelou, Simone De Beauvoir, Betty Freidan, and countless other voices essential for understanding both Studs's time and ours.

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Home page of the Studs Terkel Radio Archive site

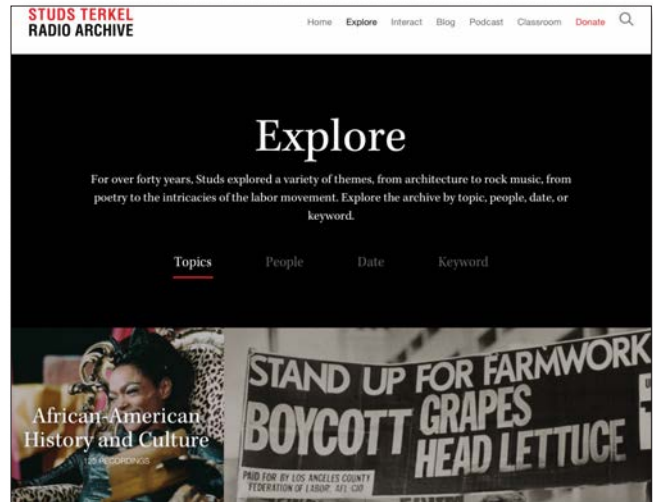
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Becca Smith, Assistant Editor

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Navigating the site is a simple endeavor made possible with a Drupal website developed by Jell Creative. Conversations are categorized by topics discussed, interviewees' professions, and dates of broadcast. Looking for conversations related to the Vietnam War, or conversations with working people? Just click the explore button at the top of the homepage, click on the topic or profession you're interested in, and, voila, hours of stimulating conversation are at your fingertips.

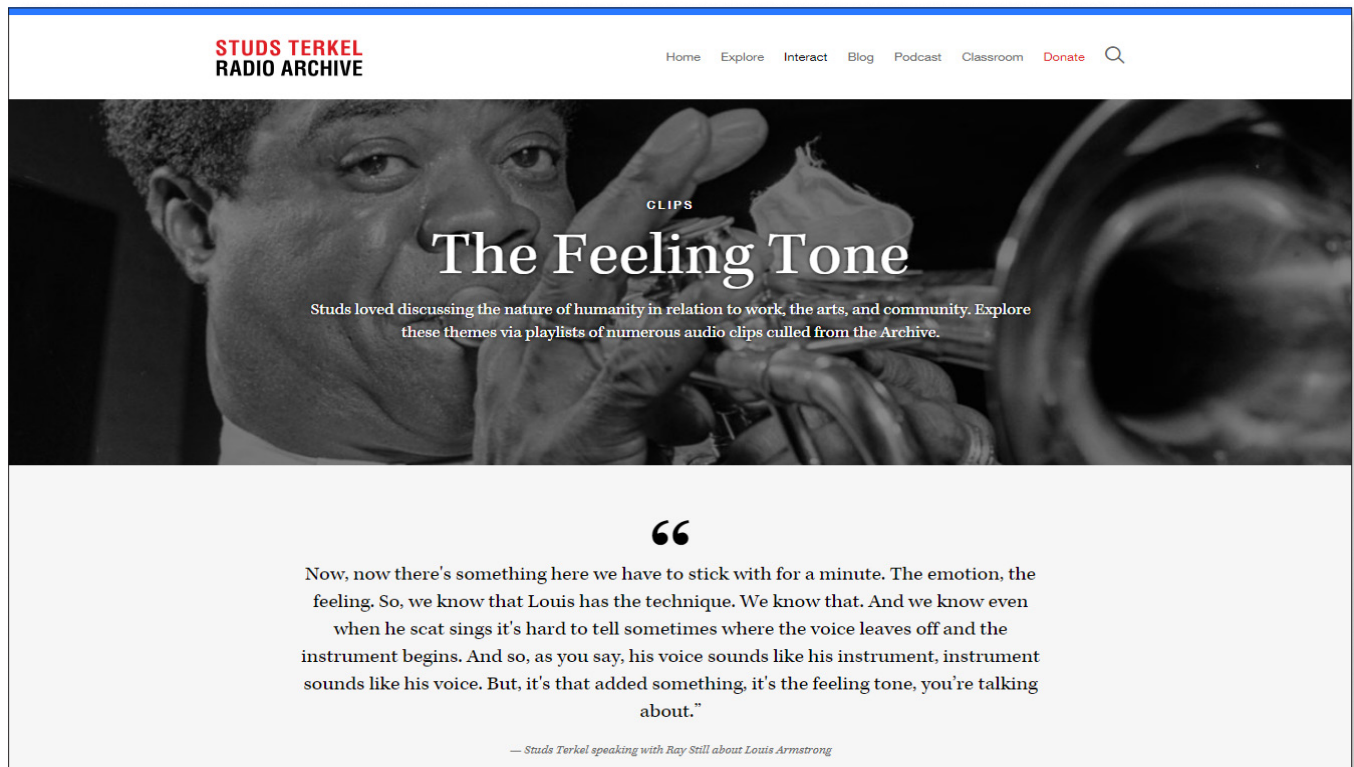
While not yet available for every interview, full interactive transcripts accompany many conversations, allowing users to read along while they listen. See a part of the conversation you're particularly interested in? Just click on it in the transcript, and the audio will jump to that part of the interview. Want to share a poignant moment from one of the conversations with your friends? Just highlight the text in the transcript, and small icons will appear with the Facebook and Twitter logos. Click on where you wish to share it, and the quote, along with a link to the conversation, will be tweeted out or posted to your Facebook timeline.

In addition to full-length interviews, the site also contains a number of "Feeling Tones"—digestible, three-to-five-



The Explore page

minute clips curated from some of the more poignant snippets of conversations from the archive—and categorized into three of the most dominant themes of Studs's interviews—"Arts and 20th Century Social Movements"; "How Communities Are Defined"; and "Searching for a Calling in Life." The "Feeling Tones" provide a good introduction to the breadth and scope of what the archive has to offer.



Where users can interact with the clips



The podcast to connect listeners with Studs's work

As much as the archive acts as a window to our collective past, it does not simply reside there. With our Remixer tool, users can splice audio from several different transcribed conversations and combine them to create their own original piece of audio. Together with the Chicago Public Library and the Great Books Foundation, we have developed a series of curricula based around audio from the archive for students in grades 7–12. Topics, so far, include language arts, history, and the civil rights movement—all are free for download from our site.

Our most ambitious push into the present, however, is our newest podcast, “Bughouse Square,” hosted by Dr. Eve L. Ewing, a prolific author and sociologist based at the University of Chicago. The podcast takes its title from the real Bughouse Square, a park in the Near North Side neighborhood of Chicago that acted as the city’s version of Speaker’s Corner. Dr. Ewing introduces and contextualizes some of the best conversations in the archive, such as Studs’s 1962 conversation with James Baldwin and his 1971 conversation with playwright Lorraine Hansberry. Ewing also interviews present-day writers, activists, and scholars, among others, to reflect on the themes and questions the conversations raise; in a sense, conducting a dialogue across time and space.

Studs Terkel is no longer with us, and the world is much poorer for it. However, through both the preservation of his original conversations and the creation of new ones following his example, we hope to make Studs as relevant to the 21st century as he was to the 20th. Studs once said that he wanted his epitaph to read, “Curiosity never killed this cat.” Thanks to the Studs Terkel Radio Archive, that cat has nine lives.

An advertisement for Lucidea's Archives Collections Management software. The background is a blue grid pattern. At the top left is the Lucidea logo. The main text reads 'Archives Collections Management' and 'OUR TOOLS, YOUR CREATIVITY. UNRIVALED.' Below this is the 'ARCHIVERA' logo and the text 'Built for larger archives' collections management challenges; supporting you today and tomorrow'. Two screenshots of the software interface are shown. At the bottom is the 'ARCHIVESSENTIA' logo and the text 'Collections management you need at a price you can afford'.

Request a free demo – see our unrivaled capabilities for yourself! sales@lucidea.com
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