Michael Honey, best known for his scholarly research on the history of Martin Luther King Jr. and labor unions, received a 2011 Guggenheim Fellowship “on the basis of his prior achievement and exceptional promise,” according to a statement from the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation.

Honey is professor of humanities at UW Tacoma, where he is one of the university’s founding faculty members.

The Guggenheim Fellowship, awarded this year to 180 individual scholars, artists and scientists chosen from among nearly 3,000 applicants, will support Honey’s oral history project called, “Sharecropper’s troubadour: the narrative, songs and poetry of John Handcox of the Southern Tenant Farmers Union.”

Handcox was “an important but little-known figure in African American and labor history,” Honey explained. He joined the Southern Tenant Farmers Union during the Great Depression and wrote songs, poetry and stories about the tenant farmers’ lives. Some of his songs were recorded for the Library of Congress and later sung by Pete Seeger and Woody Guthrie.

“I had the pleasure of interviewing him at length before he died in 2002, and I have collected his songs and poems, as well,” Honey said. The songs and poems will be published in the Palgrave Macmillan oral history series.

“I feel both humbled and encouraged to do my best in writing about the life and times of John Handcox,” Honey said. “It is an effort to make his work known to the African American musical world, and it will provide the first lengthy black narrative of the STFU.”

Honey is the Haley Endowed Professor of Humanities at UW Tacoma. He previously served two terms as the Harry Bridges Endowed Chair of Labor Studies at the University of Washington’s Seattle campus. He will also be a fellow at the UW Simpson Center for the Humanities this fall. Last year he was honored with UW Tacoma’s Distinguished Research Award.

He has written three award-winning books on the history of labor and civil rights in the South, most recently, Going Down Jericho Road: The Memphis Strike, Martin Luther King’s Last Campaign (Beacon Press, 2011), which won the Robert F. Kennedy Book Award in 2008. In January he published a book of King’s labor speeches, All Labor Has Dignity (Beacon Press, 2011).

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