

Bernice Johnson Reagon—In Celebration of Her Eightieth Birthday (October 4, 1942): A Preliminary Inquiry and Invitation to New Generations of Activist Scholars for Further Research

Dr. Bernice Johnson Reagon is a groundbreaking contributor to the field of folklore studies. Reagon's career as a historian, folklorist, ethnomusicologist, founding participant in the Association of African and African American Folklorists, and founder and director of the Smithsonian Institution's Program in Black Culture provides a body of scholarly perspectives and interpretations for folklore studies that encompasses community-based renditions of history, public culture, and deeper theorizing about the construct of authenticity in folklore studies. Her significance to folklore studies is yet to be examined in depth, and this article is a call to the field to do so.

Keywords:

(from the AFS Ethnographic Thesaurus), folk songs, music, feminism, pedagogy, intellectual history, public folklore, Civil Rights Movement, protest, women's rights

Come an' go with me to that land
Come an' go with me to that land
Come an' go with me to that land
Where I'm bound
Where I'm bound
—Reagon (1965a)

DR. BERNICE JOHNSON REAGON'S PUBLIC PROFILE as a singer and civil rights organizer has received widespread national and global public acclaim, while little attention in the academic world has been directed to her major contributions as historian, folklorist, folk festival curator, folk studies theoretician, and folklife educator over many

JAMES COUNTS EARLY is the former director of Cultural Heritage Policy at the Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage and assistant secretary for education and public service, Smithsonian Institution
AMY HOROWITZ is a former acting director/curator at Smithsonian Folkways and a senior fellow and director of GALACTIC at the Center for the Study of the Middle East at Indiana University

Journal of American Folklore 136(539):75–95

Copyright © 2023 by the Board of Trustees of the University of Illinois

The authors would like to give special thanks to the JAF reviewers and the following readers who generously provided feedback on this article: Debra DeRuyver, Niani Kilkenny, Sojin Kim, Sabrina Motley, and Amy Shuman.

decades. Her impressive work and contribution to the world directly intersects with her family and community upbringing, her disciplinary work in history and music, and her social justice activism in national and international arenas. The grounding, scope, and interrelated dimensions of Dr. Bernice Johnson Reagon's work require a paradigm shift—a margin reset—to understand her scholarship within the complex, often disputed field of folklore studies.

To fully appreciate the magnitude of Reagon's contributions requires the reader to “come and go” with her “to that land” of her individual and social formation, personal pursuits, and professional aspirations. It requires readers to come into a holistic inquiry framed by Reagon's congregational approach and pointedly expressed in her philosophical and methodological testimony. In addition to our contribution, we have invited three of Reagon's longtime colleagues in folklore, ethnomusicology, and literature to offer commentary on this essay, published in this same issue of the *Journal of American Folklore* (see Maultsby 2023; May-Machunda 2023; Miller 2023).

Reagon's family and her religious, political, and social life anchored her evolution from participant-observer, learner-teacher, and song leader to an internationally acclaimed historian, activist, artist, and pedagogue. Whether she is introducing a song, a singer, a concept, or a call to action, her worldview and work are consistently grounded in “congregational call-and-response,” as exemplified when she performed with alumni of the Freedom Singers for President Barack Obama at the White House in 2010. After starting the song “Ain't Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me 'Round” before a gathering of a few hundred culturally and racially diverse people, she stopped and said, “I know this is a show, but you have to actually sing this song. You can never tell when you might need it” (Obama White House 2010).

Discerning distinctions and intersections between Reagon's personhood, social justice activism, folklore field organizing and field research, artistic performances of her own creations located in or informed by traditional oral and musical expressive culture, and her professional work in social history and folklore can, we suggest, open a journey that stretches the parameters of the field for a new generation of scholarly and institutional critical inquiry. This proposed path of inquiry might also contribute to reformulations and new formulations about the canonical, accepted foundations and historical and contemporary debates of folklore studies, practices, and productions.

For those of us who straddle, there is a third place we go, and in that place, the rules and structures of both places are suspended. We negotiate a new system, which itself is usually a moving and shifting system. It is a hybrid system. So, we don't move totally from one place to the other, but we construct a new network of rules, regulations, and standards that are a shifting blend. (Reagon 1991:115; emphasis in original)

Reagon's scholarly contributions to folklore studies are rooted in her family and religious-spiritual community upbringing, early childhood personal agency, and teenage social justice activism. These life experiences inform and guide her philosophical and methodological approaches to Black American research, practice, performance, protest, cultural democracy initiatives, and programs in public-space institutions. It

is this composite integration—musician, composer, social justice-organizer-activist, transgressor of official social and institutional norms, innovator, and creator—that warrants deeper investigation and elucidation.¹ Her scholarly activism and activist scholarship as an insistent “call-and-response” raise important questions about the practice of folklore studies and the “mistaken dichotomies” of separating facets of people’s lives. Folklorists are well-practiced at situating individuals as artists or scholars; the case of Bernice Johnson Reagon offers an opportunity for deeper conceptualization of the intersections and the people who “straddle” those categories.

While each component of Reagon’s life invites distinct inquiry, it is the interrelated inquiry that reveals the fuller magnitude of how her work challenges the ways in which we go about folklore studies. One way to think about this form of inquiry is through Reagon’s own theoretical concept of straddling (Reagon 1991). Understanding Reagon’s work in multiple domains is not simply a matter of mapping one onto the other. Instead, her work is continually reaching for that “third place” that is neither stable nor fixed. She straddles and blends art, scholarship, pedagogy, and activism. For Reagon, straddling necessitates precarious balancing and flexible stability, a powerful stance for operating in asymmetrical cultural spaces (Horowitz 2010:66–81).

Our inquiry is structured around call-and-response between the authors, Reagon, and the audience. We hope readers will recognize Reagon’s significant influence and be inspired to respond to our call with their own elaborations of interrelated scholarship, artistry, and activism. It is our intention that this preliminary outline of Reagon’s life and work sparks further in-depth inquiry into where and how her contributions intersect, challenge, and extend the field. This article is not intended to be a deep dive into the “definitive and the final,” but rather an open invitation to current and future generations to undertake future research. The essay as a whole is an invitation, and throughout, we identify some calls to prime further topical investigation. In the words of Dr. Reagon, “you’ve got to leave a trail.”

Congregational Call-and-Response Methodology

Echo

Echo

Echo

Nothing but an echo of the past

—Reagon (1981a)

Methodologically, we approach this inquiry through the lenses of our social, professional, and activist involvement with Bernice Johnson Reagon. Our inquiry is a work in progress that has emerged as a self-reflective testimonial and an analytically co-authored call-and-response (echoing Reagon’s own methodology) between each other, Reagon’s friendship, and our body of work with her. Individually and collaboratively, our relationships to Reagon date back to the 1960s as fellow students, as social justice activists (Early at Morehouse), and to the 1970s as initiators of multiracial women’s arts coalitions (Horowitz with Sweet Honey In The Rock and Roadwork). Both authors maintain intimate family ties. We acknowledge our individual thinking and voices in

conversation with Reagon's work, the potential pitfalls of our own close associations with her, and our caution to avoid hagiographic portraiture (Earlys 1993; Horowitz 1993). The use of Reagon's lyrics as call-and-response sectional introductions is a purposeful choice to foreground her voice.

We chose to publish this essay in the *Journal of American Folklore* because it is the center of serious inquiry in US folklore studies and the foundational scholarly platform for new students and emerging scholars. Our preliminary sketch and call for deeper research are informed by Reagon's publications, which include written, staged, museological, and sonic works; her living texts as founder, creator, and curator of folklife festivals, exhibits, concerts, and symposia; and her living legacy as the founder of related musical ensembles and mentor of numerous graduate students, artists, and grassroots leaders. Our field of vision also includes Reagon's seminars, residencies, master classes, interviews, lectures, plays, and concerts at hundreds of colleges, universities, festivals, rallies, demonstrations, community centers, and sacred spaces around the world.

The interdisciplinary scope and widespread public dimensions of Reagon's work sets forth paradigmatic indicators that are informed, but not constrained, by normative scholarly inquiry and evaluation. In numerous publications, Reagon outlines her own variously configured and elaborated testimony about the "congregational methodological construct and approach" and epistemology. As she told Bill Moyers in a 1991 interview, "the communal singing that people do together is a way of announcing that we're here—that this is real" (BillMoyers.com 1991). Reagon's method insists on textual and sonic expressions that can emerge from "beyond conscious knowing," co-inhabited by living and ancestral congregants who supersede linear time and space.

I create out of a congregational sound tradition, which means I create sound that is very invasive and opinionated, demanding space for its own existence. . . . I am a musician, I am an historian, I am a storyteller—and I bring all of that to any effort I engage in. . . . I do see myself as a historian trained to work in the academy. I am also a cultural carrier—in that I am also trained to work with traditional modes of African American expression. For me this includes songs and styles of singing, stories and sacred and secular rituals created within the African American community. For this project [Africans in America: America's Journey through Slavery], I drew upon knowledge and processes that were intellectually based both in my academic training and in the training I have gained from growing up in my culture. I also opened myself spiritually, mindful that when one calls upon the spirits and the ancestors, they will come if things are in order. As I began to develop original material, I wanted to create work that was familiar, I wanted to stay close to the music legacy we as African Americans have created, and I wanted to be a medium if there was something to be said that was beyond my conscious knowing. (Reagon 1998)

Reagon's distinguishing insider-ethnographic approach demands an embedded positioning; she melds herself with/into the subjects of her research and presentations while also assuming a distinct role as scholar-pedagogue. It is from this sense of community and community-sense that her internal vision and creative voice emerge.

Reagon's Genealogical Testimony

There's a river somewhere that flows through the lives of everyone . . .

—Burris (1976) [new arrangement by Reagon in 1986]

Reagon's congregational, practice-based methodology is firmly rooted in the "river" of her lived experience as a daughter of rural Black southwest Georgia.² To understand her scholarly trajectory we must return to the source of her sound and sensate being, which she maps in this way:

I grew up in a region that developed a strong sacred music singing tradition in a Black Baptist community in Dougherty County, Georgia. It is seven miles outside the city limits of Albany which is located in Southwest Georgia eighty miles north of Tallahassee, Florida, and 176 miles south of the capital Atlanta. For my first 11 years, our church, Mt Early Baptist, located in Worth County, the county next to Dougherty, and my mother's birth county had no piano. Like most of the rural churches in that region, we did all of our singing unaccompanied except for our feet and hands; to this day I am an a capella singer. . . . I still know the songs I sang as a child and have hundreds of songs I have collected as a scholar. (Reagon 1993:13–4)

Reagon began singing as a young child and began social justice organizing in high school in the last half-century of US legalized racial apartheid segregation, which led to the resistance and social justice organizing of the modern US Civil Rights Movement where she encountered grassroots Black women leaders, such as Fannie Lou Hamer, Rosa Parks, and Ella Baker. She entered Albany State College in 1959 at age 16, and in the summer of 1960, she and others formed a junior chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) where she held the role of secretary (Cluster 1979). As a student government representative at Albany State College, she participated in efforts to demand that the administration address safety issues on campus related to white men harassing and soliciting female students, including herself, at the historically Black college (Civil Rights Movement Archive, n.d.). She also became a field secretary for the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and was later arrested and suspended from Albany State College in 1961 for organizing and participating in demonstrations and marches (Reagon 1976). After her suspension, she enrolled in Spelman College, a historically Black women's college in Atlanta, where she studied voice under Willis Laurence James, a violinist and composer who collected African American folklore and folk songs and who was the head of the music department (Hill 2017; Reagon, n.d.).

A student and a civil rights activist, in 1962, Reagon began performing with The Albany Quintet, a SNCC ensemble founded by Cordell Reagon (later to become her husband). The quintet became the SNCC Freedom Singers later that year when the group performed with Pete Seeger at a SNCC benefit concert at Morehouse College (Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee 1962).³ Expanding her personal and social justice work into a wider community of traditional performance artists and cultural workers, including Pete and Toshie Seeger, the SNCC Freedom Singers joined Pete Seeger and other social justice artists at the Newport Folk Festival (July 1963)

and a benefit concert at Carnegie Hall (June 1963) (Reagon 1986b; Digital SNCC Gateway, n.d.). Pete Seeger's wife and producer-partner Toshi Seeger organized the tour. Reagon worked as the Freedom Singers' main contact with Toshi, and the two women built a strong personal relationship. Reagon named her daughter (with Cordell Reagon) Toshi.

The Freedom Singers "brought the Movement vividly alive wherever they went. Using songs 'interspersed with narrative, to convey the story of the Civil Rights Movement struggles,'" Reagon explained, "they became a major way of making people who were not on the scene feel the intensity of what was happening in the South.' She described the group as 'a singing newspaper' that forced the issue of Black second-class citizenship into public consciousness" (Digital SNCC Gateway, n.d.).

One of the early documented recordings of Reagon is on the 1962 *Freedom in the Air* record, a documentary recording about the Albany Movement produced by Alan Lomax and Guy Carawan. A review of the album in the *New York Times* described Reagon's voice as "splendid," saying that she "merits a recording of her own" (Shelton 1962). Just a few years later, in 1965, her first solo album *Folk Songs: The South* was released on Folkways Records followed by *The Sound of Thunder* on Kin Tel in 1967 (Smithsonian Folkways Recordings, n.d.; *Billboard* 1967).

This period of Reagon's life, dating from 1959 to her leaving Atlanta, Georgia, for Howard University in Washington, DC, in 1971, is rich with Southern Black American traditional cultural research, community organizing, and artistic and scholarly collaborations, as well as contact with progressives who provided moral and material support for the Southern Freedom Movement. The connection between Reagon and Dr. Vincent Harding and his wife Rose Harding was particularly notable. Vincent Harding, a veteran of the Albany movement, was Chair of the History and Sociology Department at Spelman College where Reagon received her BA in History. But, more than their academic connection, Reagon and her two children, Toshi and Kwan, and the Harding family—Vincent, Rose, and their two children, Rachel and Jonathan—were intimate neighbors. Reagon and her children lived on the first floor of a home with open stairs to the second floor where the Harding family resided. Vincent Harding, Reagon, and others formed an interracial preschool, The Atlanta Cooperative Pre-School Center, for which she coordinated the first Penny Festival in 1967 as a fundraiser for the school.⁴ It was through her work at the Penny Festival that she and other women formed the Harambee Singers, a "choral Black women collective calling for unity" (J. Jones 2011; Reagon 2014b).⁵

The Harambee Singers, whom Reagon described as singing for "Black Consciousness/Black Studies/Black Power/Black Arts gatherings" (Reagon 2014b), is a topic worthy of further inquiry. For example, to what extent were the Harambee Singers also, as she described the Freedom Singers, a living communal newspaper?

Reagon and Harding also connected via the Institute of the Black World. Founded by Harding, along with Morehouse professor Dr. Stephen Henderson and others, the Institute (originally inspired by the work of W. E. B. Du Bois) was a place where scholar-activists could work on advancing social justice (White 2017). Harding asked Reagon to participate, and she was a member of its founding governing council (Harding 1970). In this ever-expanding web of connections, Reagon and Henderson also

conceived and produced the Soul Roots Festival in 1967 and 1968 (*Great Speckled Bird* 1968). A year earlier, in 1966, Reagon, along with Ann Romaine, organized the Southern Folk Cultural Revival Project—the first interracial Southern folk festival, which Romaine continued for the next 25 years (Thompson 2018; Reagon 2014d).⁶ Reagon's early collaboration with Black intellectual and artist-activists on interracial projects are worthy of further inquiry. For example, Sisterfire (founded in 1982) was another example of a ground-breaking festival collaboration with women community creators that Reagon helped create via her role in the 1978 co-founding of Roadwork, a multiracial coalition devoted to putting communities of women artists (notably lesbian voices at a time when legalized homophobia was rampant) on the road (Wartofsky 2018; Horowitz 1993).⁷

*Personal Community Memory and Activism:
“I Remember, I Believe”*

I don't know how my mother walked her trouble down
I don't know how my father stood his ground
I don't know how my people survive slavery
I do remember, that's why I believe
—Reagon (1995)

Reagon's work with the Smithsonian Institution began even before she moved to Washington, DC. In 1969, while still based in Atlanta, Smithsonian Institution Folklife Festival co-founder Ralph Rinzler invited Reagon to curate the 1970 program *Black Music through the Languages of the New World* (Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage, n.d.). Rinzler and Reagon knew each other from Rinzler's role in the 1960s folk revival and his work at the Newport Festival, and he had previously invited her to advise the Smithsonian on how they could “reach out to the local community, which was largely African American” as they were “concerned about the absence of Black people among the National Mall museums' visitors” (Reagon 2001:71; Abrahams 1995).

In 1971, when Reagon, a single parent of two young children, arrived at Howard University on a Ford Foundation doctoral fellowship, she was already adept at intentionally interweaving academic, artistic, curatorial, and activist projects of research, documentation, and interpretation with compositional, musical, historical, and public program productions. However, she was faced with the challenge (which she successfully completed) of convincing the Howard University History Department to support her interdisciplinary study proposal that combined music, protest, and historical study at a time when disciplinary boundaries were less porous than today.

Within a year of beginning her doctoral studies, Reagon was invited by Gerald Davis, a PhD student at the University of Pennsylvania who was also working as the assistant director of the Smithsonian Folklife Festival, to participate on an advisory board of scholars of African American culture. The board included Reagon's fellow Howard University graduate students James Counts Early and Steve Jones along with senior scholars Jeff Donaldson, Dan Ben-Amos, Pearl Williams-Jones, Halim El

Dabb, A. B. Spelman, and Fela Sowande. The board was charged with elaborating on Davis' landmark African Diaspora concept in celebration of the Smithsonian's 1976 Bicentennial Festival of American Folklife. The program linked US-based African American living cultural traditions with those of Africa, the Caribbean, and Latin America. From that invitation, Reagon emerged as the key curatorial/research/production coordinator of the multi-year African Diaspora Program (Reagon 2001).

Her work on the Bicentennial Festival was important to the development of her identity as a scholar: "I used everything I had and discovered much more than I had ever known before. And when it was over, I knew I had just begun, I had found my work as a scholar in this world. I had found my own ground" (Reagon 2001:72). In 1974, the last year of her doctoral studies, Reagon started working at the Smithsonian full-time, where she founded and directed the Program in Black American Culture at the National Museum of American History. She completed her PhD dissertation, "Songs of the Civil Rights Movement, 1955–1965: A Study in Culture History," in 1975 (Jones 1999; Gamarekian 1988).

While a graduate student at Howard University and working at the Smithsonian, Reagon was also vocal director of DC Black Repertory Theater, from which she founded the renowned Black women's a cappella ensemble, Sweet Honey In The Rock (Sweet Honey In The Rock, n.d.; Reagon 1993).

These multiple roles underscore Reagon's intentional and lifelong interweaving of artistry, activism, education, and scholarship. Her scholarly life unfolded at several institutions: three decades at the Smithsonian (1974–1994) (I. Jones 1999), Distinguished Professor of History at American University⁸ (1993–2003) (Hatfield 2020), and William and Camille Olivia Hanks Cosby Endowed Professor at Spelman College (2002–2003) (Spelman College 2002). The scope and depth of her chronicling, creating, and curating Black American religious, social, political, and cultural history through artistry, scholarship, and activism are immense. A small sampling of recognition for her work includes the Charles Frankel Prize (Brozan 1995; National Endowment for the Humanities, n.d.), two Peabody Awards (Peabody: Stories That Matter 1994; Peabody: Stories That Matter 1998), a MacArthur "Genius Grant" award (Teltsch 1989), the Martin Luther King, Jr. Center for Nonviolent Social Change Trumpet of Conscience Award (Smithsonian Folkways Recordings, n.d.), and the Heinz Award for the Arts and Humanities (Heinz Awards 2003). This abbreviated list underscores Reagon's importance and the need for further in-depth explorations of the magnitude, depth, and breadth of her multivocal, holistic life's work.

For Reagon, being a culture carrier and chronicler of her tradition situates and activates her identities as a creative artist-activist-historian within an intergenerational continuum, as is evident in the following quotes:

My history was wrapped carefully for me by my fore-parents in the songs of the church, the work fields, and the blues. Ever since this discovery I've been trying to find myself, using the first music I've ever known as a basic foundation for my search for truth. (Reagon 1965b)

As a singer and activist in the Albany movement, I sang and heard the freedom songs, and saw them pull together sections of the Black community at times when other means of communication were ineffective. It was the first time that I experienced the

full power of song as an instrument for the articulation of our community concerns.
(Reagon 1983c:28)

I understood how the singing not only pulled us together, but became our articulate collective testimony to all who stood within the sound. (Reagon, n.d.)

The “search for truth,” inextricably linked to her search for justice, constitutes the ground from which Reagon’s inner life and public work grew as an intersecting web of artistry, activism, and scholarship.

Reagon’s Voicing of National and Global Social Justice Struggles

would you know their names . . .
If you had lived during the days of Nat Turner
would you fight his battle . . .
If you had lived with Harriet Tubman
would you wade in the water . . .
If you had lived with Sacco & Vanzetti
would you know their names . . .
—Reagon (1981b)

Reagon’s 1981 lyrics for “If You Had Lived” historicizes, analyzes, and connects a range of past and contemporary social justice issues. The conclusion of the song, written over four decades ago (as were the lyrics “we will not bow down to racism, injustice and exploitation” from “I’m Gon’ Stand”), foreshadows today’s #SayHerName movement, Black Lives Matter, and other national and global justice movements,⁹ asking:

Do you hear them calling?
Are you living today?
Are you fighting today?
Do you know our names?
Do you know our names?
Do you hear our cries?
(Reagon 1981b)

Many of Reagon’s compositions, as well as the employment of folk songs and liturgical genres are, in addition to the power of the musical aesthetics, intentionally presented as history lessons, public education, and citizen calls to action—a poignant commentary expressed by E. Ethelbert Miller: “I’ve watched Reagon teach an entire audience to sing. She practiced Mother Courage and encouragement, leading groups to discover not just their voice, but their potential” (personal communication, n.d.).

Another example of Reagon’s artistic-scholarly range is related to issues of political economy during her time as artist-in-residence with the Institute for Policy Studies (IPS), Washington School, from 1985–1986. While there, she wrote two songs: “Are My Hands Clean?,” based on the article “The Journey of the Blouse, A Global Assembly” written by IPS fellow John Cavanagh for the United Methodist Church Women’s Division; and “Ode to the International Debt,” based on a comic book that IPS produced for the Debt Crisis Network on the Third World Debt Crisis. As Cavanagh shared,

“Bernice came to our staff meetings, and did a series of classes at IPS. She interacted with our work and our research. . . . It was wonderful to learn from her deep wisdom.”¹⁰ The songs describe the struggle for sustainable and equitable trade relationships and the debt crisis in the developing world and were performed and recorded in 1988 at a Sweet Honey In The Rock concert at Carnegie Hall (Reagon 1988b).

I wear garments touched by hands from all over the world
 35% cotton, 65% polyester, the journey begins in Central America
 In the cotton fields of El Salvador
 In a province soaked in blood,
 Pesticide-sprayed workers toil in a broiling sun
 Pulling cotton for two dollars a day. . .
 Far from the Port-au-Prince palace
 Third world women toil doing piece work to Sears specifications
 For three dollars a day my sisters make my blouse
 It leaves the third world for the last time
 Coming back into the sea to be sealed in plastic for me
 This third world sister
 And I go to the Sears department store where I buy my blouse
 On sale for 20% discount
 Are my hands clean?
 (Reagon 1988a)

As Barbara Omolade points out, “unlike white feminist traditions, no black woman can ever limit her vision of liberation solely to herself and other women. Black women as expressed through Bernice Reagon’s songs understand, incorporate and include the oppression of other peoples and the liberation struggles in other countries in their analyses” (1985:7; see also Clarke 1981). Similarly, working and performing with lesbians led Reagon to say that she wrote and sang “about oppression of every kind, including oppression experienced by the homosexual community” (Reagon 1993:33–4).

Every woman who ever loved a woman
 You ought to stand up and call her name
 Mama, sister, daughter, lover.
 (Reagon 1978b)

A Paradigm Shift in Folklore Studies: “There’s a New World Coming”

There’s a new world coming
 Everything’s gon’ be turning over
 Where you gon’ be standing when it comes?
 —Reagon ([1975] 1997a)

Reagon’s entrance into Howard University as a graduate student at the same time that she worked in the public sector as a Smithsonian folklife researcher, curator, and educator¹¹ coincided with a paradigm shift in folklore studies and related fields.

Performance studies was in the air, and text-centered approaches like structuralism gave way to a contextual approach exemplified by scholars like Richard Bauman (1975), Roger Abrahams (1970), Dan Ben Amos and Kenneth S. Goldstein (1975), and Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1975). By the 1980s, advocates of insider ethnography and auto-ethnography acknowledged scholars and practitioner-guides who both studied and performed, as Reagon did, their cultural practices from within (Clifford 1986:9).¹² During this time, Reagon was emerging as an impactful fieldworker, scholar, and festival producer for Smithsonian folklife projects.

Despite this turn toward performance and insider ethnography, some influential academic and public sector folklorists were ambivalent about Reagon's work and other contributions from scholar-practitioners, activists, and public sector scholars. Alan Lomax raised critical concerns about the African Diaspora Program in which Reagon played a crucial role.¹³ Bess Lomax Hawes disputed Ralph Rinzler's inclusion of Reagon's Black women a cappella group *Sweet Honey In The Rock* in the US folk delegation to the First International Folk Festival held in Moscow in 1988,¹⁴ because Hawes did not consider it to be authentically "folk" (Early 2016).¹⁵ The definition of cultural tradition itself was debated, and popularized forms—what Reagon, her Smithsonian Institution public sector folklore colleague Ralph Rinzler, other Smithsonian African Diaspora program colleagues, and scholars like Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett (1988) understood to be the organic evolution of tradition across time and place—were considered to be what Richard Dorson had earlier dubbed "Fakelore" (Dorson 1950).

Reagon offers a direct and eloquent counter to the static scholarly notion of authenticity:

As a singer, I use songs to keep balance in my life. No matter how old a song is when I sing it, it should be contemporary for me, if I am to bring honesty in my rendering of it. Otherwise it becomes a historical relic and dead. (Reagon 1993:14)

An examination of this period of disciplinary debates and changes in folklore studies illustrates that Reagon was part of a new wave of multicultural, ground-breaking voices across disciplines. Notions of objectivity and cultural appropriation were being investigated as racist and sexist, and as having colonial underpinnings. These academic debates were occurring within the era of the folk revival, the modern Southern Freedom/Civil Rights Movement, Black Arts and Black Power Movements, Ethnic Studies, and new iterations of the Women's Rights and Gay Rights Movements. Particularly significant with respect to dramatic changes in folklore studies, and worthy of further study, was Reagon's participation in the 1974 founding of the Association of African and African American Folklorists, 20 years before the American Folklore Society's Cultural Diversity Committee was founded.¹⁶ At its first conference in 1975, Reagon and Roland Freeman were elected to the executive committee of the association along with James Early, William H. Wiggins, Jr., Gladys-Marie Fry, Gerald L. Davis, and Stephen E. Henderson (Wiggins 2001).¹⁷ Notably, several members of the newly formed association worked closely with Reagon in Smithsonian Folklife programs.¹⁸ It is within this social and political disciplinary backdrop that Reagon, with

her insider practitioner outlook and knowledge-producing creative scholarship and artistry, evolved into wider national and global spaces. Her work places her among the leaders legitimizing performance and community-based renditions of history, public culture, and deeper theorizing about authenticity.

The methodology that undergirded her research/curatorial/presentation work at the Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage was then extended into the Smithsonian National Museum of American History where she initiated public presentations and publications for decades as founding director of the Program in Black American Culture. Her study of and interest in folklore along with her training in history is illustrated in the range of oral history and testimonial work that she initiated and literary and theatrical artists she engaged. She invited cultural practitioners—from her mother’s Mt. Early congregational singing group to B. B. King—as historical presenters/interpreters who changed the traditional modes of knowledge production and dissemination as well as the museological educational space itself. She worked with scores of national and international performers, scholars, and community leaders such as literary scholar Eleanor Traylor; actor Avery Brooks; ethnomusicologists Charles Boyer and Horace Clarence Boyer; folklorist Olive Lewin; blues scholar Paul Oliver; blues women Alberta Hunter and Koko Taylor; gospel composer Thomas A. Dorsey; gospel singer Sallie Martin; historian Howard Zinn; The McIntosh County Shouters, a Southeastern ring shout performance group; gospel singer and preacher Dr. Claude Joseph Johnson; gospel singer Marion Williams; Georgia Sea Island Singers, a Gullah heritage folk ensemble; blues composer/singer Willie Dixon; and Leonard Goings, jazz musician and educator, to name a few (Smithsonian Institution Archives 1983–1992).

Reagon’s Smithsonian National Museum of American History programs, conferences, and gatherings turned the patronizing academic notion of “giving voice” on its head. She collaborated with the groups she presented, respectfully recognizing that they already had voice and visibility in their historical and contemporary communities. She and other colleagues from the Smithsonian Folklife program and the Museum of American History provided global forums and curatorial leadership that raised visibility and amplified audibility, expanding the Smithsonian mandate for “increase and diffusion of knowledge” in collaboration with communities that had been, for centuries, excluded from the national museum’s research, collections, and presentations. Furthermore, Reagon’s history museum work further institutionalized collaborative community research, presentation, and interpretation with accountability. It opened eyes, ears, and understanding of scholarly and public audiences. The history museum programs drew upon a congregational method that came out of Reagon’s practice:

It was after some ten years in this kind of activity that I began to think that maybe the culture offered more than data content: that maybe the culture also offered a process, the way things were to be done, the way material was to be collected, assembled, presented; that maybe the culture offered a methodology for these activities, a theory for use, and an analysis of the conditions of Black people in the larger world. (Reagon 1986a:77)

Reagon's articulation of a "theory for use," an applied theory that grows from the ground up out of community practice, out of "an analysis of the conditions of Black people in the larger world," is worthy of further exploration. See, for example, her landmark 1980 *Voices of the Civil Rights Movement* conference, created with Worth Long and funded through the National Endowment for the Humanities (Broussard-Simmons et al. 2019). Notably, one of the characteristics of the conference was its spontaneous call-and-response collective testimonial and oral history process provided by Civil Rights activists in the audience mixed with formal traditional scholarly panel presentations. Reagon's theory of use concept invites new generations of scholars to apply it to their subsequent scholarship in the field.

As we move toward closing this essay, we'd like to offer some additional lines of inquiry worthy of future study:

- (1) Reagon's work goes far beyond her relationship to the field of folklore studies prioritized in this preliminary inquiry. Further inquiry might draw a through-line of theory and methodology from the plethora of citations of her work found in subsequent and related fields to movements of intersectionality; critical race theory; social and labor history; feminist, queer, and womanist discourses; and applied, participatory, democratic research.¹⁹ This line of inquiry could also include Reagon's role (as an example of her philosophy and methodology rooted in her cultural, social, political experiences) in "giving emerging scholars, researchers, and institutions access and visibility in those disciplines" (Niani Kilkenny, email to James Early and Amy Horowitz, July 14, 2021).
- (2) Reagon as a musical and theater artist, an artistic-creative-disciplinary arena in which she developed the concept of songtalk, is worthy of further explanation (Dreyfuss 1975; Reagon 2014a).²⁰
- (3) Another area of pursuit would be a more explicit look at Reagon as a pedagogue. In all facets of her life/work, Reagon saw herself as embedded in a larger community in which she taught, mentored, and showcased the work of the next generation, particularly the work of students and mentees of color. What was her classroom like? What was her vision for teaching and mentoring? How did her teaching differ within different contexts (e.g., stage, university classroom, exhibition)? How did her teaching interact with and further her activism, scholarship, and artistry? How did the 21 singers she mentored through Sweet Honey In The Rock carry forward what they learned?

*Invitation to New Generations of Critical-Activist Scholars:
"B'lieve I'll Run On . . . See What the End's Gonna Be"*

I'm not talking about my particular cause
 Racism, sexism, class, they all need to fall
 If we want to live to struggle another day
 We've got to wake up to this common cause we face
 —Reagon (1978a)

The contested history and present debates in folklore studies, in relationship to what we as authors identify as the liberal and radical applied social justice use of folklore, is replete with examples of Black practitioners, storytellers, singers, cooks, quilters,

and so on, who were viewed as, and who served as, subjects or objects of inquiry in cultural institutions in a race-, class-, and gender-conflicted country rather than as self-directed agents who fought and negotiated their way forward—including their role in proactively changing institutional folklore. While Reagon is undoubtedly a meritorious subject of inquiry, she is also more. She is a self-directed agent—a prolific scholar who has published, presented, and produced for more than half a century, creating and transforming cultural institutions and generations of scholars, activists, and artists as evidenced by her presence in their printed, performed, and produced works.

We look forward to further engaging with readers around this call-and-response essay, the questions raised, and hopefully the sensibilities provoked—including a consideration of next steps toward better understanding Reagon's intersection with folklore studies and the legacy of her boundary-challenging work. Her significance to folklore studies is precisely in the questions that her life/work raises with regard to the methodologies, epistemologies, and ontologies of the field. The reverberations of Reagon's ground-breaking work in the 1960s–2000s continue to challenge the boundaries of the field, demanding new critical ears and eyes on what it means to do folklore studies and what folklore studies means. Until those boundaries are reimagined in a way that embraces Reagon's life/work and others who have experienced displacement and responded with innovations and creations, folklore studies will not be as attractive as it might be to young, critical activist scholars.

Let new generations delve deeper into Reagon's work and move toward multidisciplinary study and related social justice activism that light the way to the future.

It's been a mighty distance,
dangerous journey to be here,
And We'll stand holding to each other,
Fighting and trusting as we go on.
We've Come a Long Way to Be Together
You and Me
(Reagon [1975] 1997b)

Acknowledgments

All Bernice Johnson Reagon compositions listed in the References Cited are copyrighted: Songtalk Publishing Co.

Notes

1. For another perspective on Reagon's impact on the field, see Debora Kodish where she analyzes Reagon's practice through the frame of "public interest folklore . . . grassroots and community-based folklife practice inspired by a vision of progressive social change, addressing inequalities, and working for the common good" (2011:32).

2. To learn more about the context of Reagon's early life, see Bernice Johnson Reagon, interview by Callie Crossley, January 23, 1986, Washington University in St. Louis. <http://repository.wustl.edu/concern/videos/8p58pf97h>. Also see Bernice Johnson Reagon, oral history interview by The History Makers, November 21, 2003, and September 22, 2003, <https://www.thehistorymakers.org/biography/bernice-johnson-reagon-39>.

3. Bernice Johnson Reagon, A Personal Note from Bernice Johnson Reagon on Meeting Pete Seeger, American History through an African American Lens, <https://nmaahc.tumblr.com/post/79971732669/bernice-johnson-reagon-a-personal-note-on-meeting>.

4. According to Reagon, The Penny Festival featured “songs, dance, poetry, an art exhibition organized by Floyd Coleman, chairman of Art at Clark College, of the works of Kofi Bailey; it was a major coming together of that community. We charged a penny so everyone could attend and we asked people to give more if they could so the school could get some funds, it was a success” (Reagon 2014c).

5. For example, for one of the only known videos of the Harambee Singers performing at a rally, see <https://s.si.edu/35RqnEj>.

6. Anne Romaine herself is a worthy subject of inquiry. In addition to her work as a folk music performer, she was a historian who conducted interviews with activists in the Mississippi Democratic Freedom Party (available in the Wisconsin Historical Society’s Freedom Summer Digital Collection, <https://content.wisconsinhistory.org/digital/collection/p15932coll2/id/13817/>) for her master’s thesis at the University of Virginia. She was also Alex Haley’s official biographer. Her papers are available in the University of North Carolina’s Southern Folklife Collection (Anne Romaine Papers #20304, Southern Folklife Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill).

7. See Horowitz (2022) for Roadwork as a multiracial coalition.

8. Reagon’s career as a professor and mentor at American University is an area for future research.

9. See Reagon’s 1983 composition “I’m Gon’ Stand”: “We will not bow down to racism, we will not bow down to injustice, we will not bow down to exploitation, I’m gon’ stand” (Reagon 1983b). Note the call-and-response between the collective “we” and the individual “I.”

10. John Cavanagh, email message to author James Counts Early, September 27, 2020.

11. “The Folklife Festival was ‘originally part of the Smithsonian’s Division of Performing Arts, a separate Office of Folklife Programs was created in 1980. In 1987, the office purchased the Folkways music collection which became the core of the Ralph Rinzler Folklife Archives and Collections, a rich resource for the study of folk culture and music. In 1998, the Festival was renamed the Smithsonian Folklife Festival to reflect its international interests, and in 1999 the office was renamed the Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage to reflect its research, as well as public program functions.” <https://siarchives.si.edu/history/historic-pictures-smithsonian/center-folklife-and-cultural-heritage>.

12. See Behar (Behar and Gordon 1996) for further development of cultural practices from within, specifically her reference to the “politics of authorship” (7) and her introduction (10) where she articulates the terms of the debate as it relates to the anthology *This Bridge Called My Back* (Moraga and Anzaldúa 1981). Also see Behar’s call for expansion of the canon (Behar and Gordon 1996:18).

13. The underlying issues in Rinzler and Hawes exchanges about authenticity warrant further investigation. A starting point for this research might be the Rinzler Archives.

14. For a reference about the general debate around authenticity, see Viewpoint: Bess Lomax Hawes (Viewpoint: Bess Lomax Hawes 1982) in which Lomax Hawes states: “The most critical problem the Folkarts Program faces is the preservation of the authentic. . . . The authentic is still endangered.”

15. More research needs to be done to explore the debate between authentic traditional expression and contemporary expressions of tradition. Written correspondence in the Ralph Rinzler and Bess Lomax Hawes archives would be a good place to begin. See the Ralph Rinzler papers and audio recordings, Ralph Rinzler Folklife Archives and Collections, Smithsonian Institution; and Bess Lomax Hawes collection, Archive of Folk Culture, AFC 2014/008, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

16. The Association of African and African American Folklorists was founded, in part, to highlight the work of Black scholars in folklore studies and continues its work today, gathering at the annual AFS meetings. Unfortunately, the lack of visibility of the work of Black scholars is still an ongoing issue in the field, as in much of academia. Four decades later, Dr. Phyllis M. May-Machunda, Dr. Olivia Cadaval, and others initiated the project “Notable Folklorists of Color: Remembering Our Ancestral Legacies,” which commemorates the twenty-fifth anniversary of the founding of the Cultural Diversity Committee (CDC). These curators “highlight 25 scholars of color, ancestors [including Davis] whose significant contributions expanded research in folkloristics and laid a foundation for folkloristic scholarship by people of color in communities of color” (American Folklore Society, n.d.). <https://notablefolkloristsofcolor.org/about-the-exhibit/>.

17. Roland Freeman, notes from phone conversation with James Counts Early, May 2021:

Freeman: "Ralph Rinzler came up with my title as a 'Field Research Folklore Photographer' . . . I was at the time Photography Editor of the DC Gazette. . . . I asked Gerald Davis why don't more African Americans attend AFS [American Folklore Society meetings]? And he said, 'Because they don't see much relevance to them.' I said, 'Why don't we do something about it?' And Gerald said he had an upcoming meeting with Stephen Henderson, Founding Director of the Howard University Institute for the Arts and Humanities, and he said, 'Why don't you come with me?' The proposal, with Stephen Henderson's input, emerged to form an Association of African American Folklorists.

18. See, for example, Reagon's *River of Life* album cover (Freeman 1986) and Sweet Honey In The Rock Live at Carnegie Hall (Freeman 1988) featuring Freeman's photographic work. These collaborations point to the development of extensions beyond the boundaries of formal institutional folklore.

19. See, for example, Kate Boyd's (2018) analysis of Reagon's "Coalition Politics" (Reagon 1983a) for women's studies and social science scholars.

20. Reagon discussed songtalk as follows: "I used the term *songtalk* for the first time in 1975 to name the genre of a theater work, *A Day, A Life, A People*. It was not a *musical*. . . . Everything was sung, even the prose. I wanted a term that would be closer to the ground than *opera*, so I came up with *songtalk* to describe a music genre capable of all levels of spoken communication" (Reagon 2014e).

References Cited

- Abrahams, Roger D. 1970. *Positively Black*. Hoboken, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- . 1995. Obituaries: Ralph Rinzler (1934–1994). *Journal of American Folklore* 108(429):325–7.
- American Folklore Society. n.d. Notable Folklorists of Color: About the Exhibit. <https://notablefolkloristsofcolor.org/about-the-exhibit/>.
- Bauman, Richard. 1975. Verbal Art as Performance. *American Anthropologist*, New Series 77(2):290–311.
- Behar, Ruth, and Deborah A. Gordon, eds. 1996. *Women Writing Culture*. Oakland: University of California Press.
- Ben Amos, Dan, and Kenneth S. Goldstein. 1975. *Folklore: Performance and Communication*. The Hague: De Gruyter Mouton.
- Billboard*. 1967. New Album Releases. September 9:50.
- BillMoyers.com. 1991. *Moyers Moment (1991): Bernice Johnson Reagon on "This Little Light of Mine."* Vimeo video. 4:34 min. <https://vimeo.com/65413483> (accessed June 14, 2022).
- Boyd, Kate. 2018. Stop Thinking Properly: Feminist Activism and Coalescing with History. *Feminist Formations* 30(2):40–64.
- Broussard-Simmons, Vanessa, Bryanna Bauer, Stacey Coates, Kendra Doyle, Sarah Gould, Ida Jones, Melissa Kauffman, et al. 2019. *Guide to the Program in African American Culture Collection*. Washington, DC: Smithsonian National Museum of American History, Kenneth E. Behring Center. <https://sirismm.si.edu/EADpdfs/NMAH.AC.0408.pdf>.
- Brozan, Nadine. 1995. Chronicle. *New York Times*, October 6:B4.
- Burris, J. C. 1976. *River of Life*. J. C. Burris: *One of These Mornings*. Arhoolie, LP, 1075.
- Civil Rights Movement Archive. n.d. Bernice Johnson Reagon, NAACP, Albany Movement, SNCC, 1959–1965, Georgia. <https://www.crmvet.org/vet/reagonb.htm>.
- Clarke, Cheryl. 1981. Lesbianism: An Act of Resistance. In *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, ed. Cherrie L. Moraga and Gloria E. Anzaldúa, pp. 128–37. Watertown, MA: Persephone Press.
- Clifford, James. 1986. Introduction: Partial Truths. In *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, ed. James Clifford and George E. Marcus, pp. 1–26. Oakland: University of California Press.
- Cluster, Dick. 1979. The Borning Struggle: An Interview with Bernice Reagon. In *The Civil Rights Movement, They Should Have Served That Cup of Coffee: 7 Radicals Remember the 60s*, ed. Dick Cluster, pp. 11–31. Boston: South End Press. <https://archive.org/details/theyshouldhaves00clus/page/n7/mode/2up>.

- Digital SNCC Gateway. n.d. Freedom Singers. SNCC Legacy Project, Duke University Libraries, Center for Documentary Studies at Duke University. <https://snccdigital.org/inside-sncc/sncc-national-office/freedom-singers/>.
- Dorson, Richard M. 1950. Folklore and Fake Lore. *American Mercury* 70:335–43.
- Dreyfuss, Joel. 1975. About a Day in a Few D.C. Lives. *Washington Post*, December 19:C1.
- Early, James. 2016. Epilogue: Reflection-Projection. In *Curatorial Conversations: Cultural Representation and the Smithsonian Folklife Festival*, ed. Sojin Kim, Diana Baird N'Diaye, and Olivia Cadaval, pp. 315–26. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi.
- The Earlys. 1993. Family. In *We Who Believe in Freedom: Sweet Honey In The Rock—Still on the Journey*, ed. Bernice Johnson Reagon, pp. 226–30. New York: Anchor Books.
- Freeman, Roland. 1986. Photograph. *River of Life (Harmony One)*, cover.
- . 1988. Photographs. *Sweet Honey In The Rock Live at Carnegie Hall*, cover.
- Gamarekian, Barbara. 1988. Smithsonian Recognizes Influence beyond White. *New York Times*, June 17:B6.
- Great Speckled Bird*. 1968. The Power of Soul Roots: Black Catharsis. May 10–23, 1(5):9.
- Harding, Vincent. 1970. Introduction. In *The Challenge of Blackness, Black Paper No. 1* [Pamphlet], ed. Lerone Bennett, Jr. Atlanta, GA: Institute of the Black World. [From James Early's personal collection.]
- Hatfield, Edward A. 2020. Bernice Johnson Reagon (b. 1942). *New Georgia Encyclopedia*. <https://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/history-archaeology/bernice-johnson-reagon-b-1942>.
- Heinz Awards. 2003. Bernice Johnson Reagon. <http://www.heinzawards.net/recipient/bernice-johnson-reagon>.
- Hill, Megan. 2017. Willis Laurence James—MBC Visits the Spelman College Archives. *MBC Music by Black Composers*, May 17. <https://www.musicbyblackcomposers.org/2017/05/17/willis-laurence-james-mbc-visits-spelman-college-archives/>.
- Horowitz, Amy. 1993. Some Factors in the Equation. In *We Who Believe in Freedom: Sweet Honey In The Rock—Still on the Journey*, ed. Bernice Johnson Reagon, pp. 133–52. New York: Anchor.
- . 2010. *Mediterranean Israeli Music and the Politics of the Aesthetic*. Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press.
- . 2022. 'There and Back Again': An Audiovisual Journey into Roadwork, 1978–2018. In *A Grassroots Leadership and Arts for Social Change Primer for Educators, Organizers, Activists & Rabble-Rousers*, ed. Susan J. Erenrich and Debra DeRuyver, pp. 492–523. Silver Spring, MD: International Leadership Association.
- Jones, Ida. 1999. Guide to the Bernice Johnson Reagon Collection of the African American Sacred Music Tradition, circa 1822–1994. Washington, DC: Archives Center, National Museum of American History. <https://sova.si.edu/record/NMAH.AC.0653>; <https://sirismm.si.edu/EADpdfs/NMAH.AC.0653.pdf>.
- Jones, Jamila. 2011. Oral history interview by Joseph Mosnier, April 27, Atlanta, GA. <https://www.loc.gov/item/2015669108/>.
- Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, Barbara. 1975. A Parable in Context: A Social Interactional Analysis of Storytelling Performance. In *Folklore*, ed. Dan Ben-Amos and Kenneth S. Goldstein, pp. 105–30. Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton.
- . 1988. Mistaken Dichotomies. *Journal of American Folklore* 101(400):140–55.
- Kodish, Debora. 2011. Envisioning Folklore Activism. *Journal of American Folklore* 124(491):31–60.
- Maultsby, Portia K. Bernice Johnson Reagon, Black Woman Trailblazer: Presenting and Interpreting Black Vernacular and Popular Musics in a White Cultural Institution. *Journal of American Folklore* 136(539):96–8.
- May-Machunda, Phyllis. 2023. Bernice Johnson Reagon: Exemplary Mentor for Folklore Studies. *Journal of American Folklore* 136(539):99–101.
- Miller, E. Ethelbert. 2023. Songs for the Journey and the Mission: The Life Notes of Bernice Johnson Reagon. *Journal of American Folklore* 136(539):102–3.
- Moraga, Cherríe L., and Gloria E. Anzaldúa, Gloria E., eds. 1981. *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*. Watertown, MA: Persephone Press.
- National Endowment for the Humanities. n.d. Charles Frankel Prize. Winners of the Charles Frankel Prize. <https://www.neh.gov/about/awards/charles-frankel-prize> (accessed June 14, 2022).

- The Obama White House. 2010. *The Freedom Singers Perform at the White House: 8 of 11*. YouTube video. February 11. 3:26 min. <https://youtu.be/hhafyl6-Bp0>.
- Omolade, Barbara. 1985. Bernice Reagon Wedding Political Action and Music. *Black Scholar* 16(3):2–9.
- Peabody: Stories That Matter. 1994. Wade in the Water: African-American Sacred Music Traditions. <http://www.peabodyawards.com/award-profile/wade-in-the-water-african-american-sacred-music-traditions>.
- . 1998. Africans in America: America's Journey through Slavery (PBS). <http://www.peabodyawards.com/award-profile/africans-in-america-americas-journey-through-slavery>.
- Reagon, Bernice Johnson. n.d. About Dr. Reagon. <https://www.bernicejohnsonreagon.com/about/>.
- . 1965a. Come and Go with Me to That Land. *Bernice Reagon—Folk Songs: The South*. Smithsonian Folkways Records, FA 2457, 33⅓.
- . 1965b. Liner Notes. *Bernice Reagon—Folk Songs: The South*. Smithsonian Folkways Records, FA 2457, 33 1/3. https://folkways-media.si.edu/liner_notes/folkways/FW02457.pdf.
- . [1975] 1997a. There's a New World Coming. In *Give Your Hands to Struggle: The Evolution of a Freedom Fighter: Songs by Bernice Reagon*. Smithsonian Folkways, SF 40049, 33⅓.
- . [1975] 1997b. We've Come a Long Way to Be Together. In *Give Your Hands to Struggle: The Evolution of a Freedom Fighter: Songs by Bernice Reagon*. Smithsonian Folkways, SF 40049, 33⅓.
- . 1976. In Our Hands: Thoughts on Black Music—*Sing Out!* January 1976. In *The Making of African American Identity: Vol III: 1917–1968*. National Humanities Center Resource Toolbox Library. <http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/pds/maai3/protest/text3/inourhands.pdf>.
- . 1978a. *B'lieve I'll Run On. . . . See What the End's Gonna Be*. Performed by Sweet Honey In The Rock. Redwood Records, RR 3500, 33⅓.
- . 1978b. Every Woman. *B'lieve I'll Run On. . . . See What the End's Gonna Be*. Performed by Sweet Honey In The Rock, Redwood Records, RR 3500, 33⅓.
- . 1981a. Echo. *Good News*. Performed by Sweet Honey In The Rock. Flying Fish Records, FF 245, 33⅓.
- . 1981b. If You Had Lived. *Good News*, Performed by Sweet Honey In The Rock. Flying Fish Records, FF 245, 33⅓.
- . 1983a. Coalition Politics: Turning the Century. In *Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology*, ed. Barbara Smith, pp. 356–68. New York: Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press. <https://womenwhatistobedone.files.wordpress.com/2013/09/1983-home-girls-coalition-politics-bernice-johnson-reagon.pdf>.
- . 1983b. I'm Gon' Stand. *We All Everyone of Us*. Performed by Sweet Honey In The Rock. Flying Fish Records, FF 317, 33⅓.
- . 1983c. Movement Songs That Moved the Nation. *Civil Rights Quarterly: Perspectives* 15(3): 26–35.
- . 1986a. African Diaspora Women: The Making of Cultural Workers. *Feminist Studies* 12(1):77–90.
- . 1986b. River of Life. *River of Life (Harmony One)*. Flying Fish Records, FF90411, 33⅓.
- . 1988a. Are My Hands Clean? *Sweet Honey In The Rock—Live at Carnegie Hall*. Flying Fish Records, FF 106, 33⅓.
- . 1988b. Liner Notes. *Sweet Honey In The Rock—Live at Carnegie Hall*. Flying Fish Records, FF 106.
- . 1991. "Nobody Knows the Trouble I See"; or, "By and By I'm Gonna Lay Down My Heavy Load." *Journal of American History* 78(1):111–9.
- . 1993. *We Who Believe in Freedom: Sweet Honey In The Rock—Still on the Journey*. New York: Anchor.
- . 1995. I Remember, I Believe. *Sacred Ground*. Performed by Sweet Honey In The Rock. Earthbeat! 942580–2, 33⅓.
- . 1998. Composer's Notes. *Africans in America: America's Journey through Slavery*. Rykodisc/GBH Records.
- . 2001. Ralph Rinzler and the Smithsonian Folklife Festival. In *Smithsonian Folklife Festival 2001—35th Annual Smithsonian Folklife Festival* [Program book], ed. Carla M. Borden, pp. 68–72. Washington, DC: Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage. <https://archive.org/details/35thannualsmiths00smit/page/68/mode/2up>.
- . 2014a. A Day, A Life, A People. <https://www.bernicejohnsonreagon.com/2014/12/02/day-life-people/>.

- . 2014b. Harambee Singers. <https://www.bernicejohnsonreagon.com/2014/11/30/harambee-singers/>.
- . 2014c. *The Right to Be*, A Documentary on the Afro-American. The Penny Festival: February 12, 1967. <https://www.bernicejohnsonreagon.com/2014/11/30/right-to-be/>.
- . 2014d. Solo Folk Performances. <https://www.bernicejohnsonreagon.com/2014/12/03/solo-folk-performances/>.
- . 2014e. Songtalker. <https://www.bernicejohnsonreagon.com/2014/09/11/songtalker/>.
- Shelton, Robert. 1962. Folk Crusade on Disk. *New York Times*, December 2. <https://content.wisconsinhistory.org/digital/collection/p15932coll2/id/21018>.
- Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage. n.d. Legacy Honorees: Bernice Johnson Reagon. <https://folklife.si.edu/legacy-honorees/bernice-johnson-reagon/smithsonian>.
- Smithsonian Folkways Recordings. n.d. Bernice Johnson Reagon: Civil Rights Song Leader. <https://folklife.si.edu/bernice-johnson-reagon-civil-rights-song-leader/african-american-struggle-protest-folk/music/article/smithsonian>.
- . n.d. Bernice Reagon; Folk Songs: The South. <https://folklife.si.edu/bernice-johnson-reagon/folk-songs-of-the-south/african-american-music-gospel-historical-song/album/smithsonian>.
- Smithsonian Institution Archives. 1983–1992. Program records. Accession 96–147. National Museum of American History Program in African American Culture. Washington, DC.
- Spelman College. 2002. Spelman College in Atlanta Announces Cosby Endowed Professorships for Fine Arts and Humanities. *PRWeb*, December 4. <http://www.prweb.com/releases/2002/12/prweb51820.htm>.
- Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. 1962. New Directions in the Student Protest Movement, April 27–29, Atlanta, GA. Conference Agenda for Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (1960–1969), Social Action vertical file, circa 1930–2002, Archives Main Stacks, Mss 577, box 47, folder 13. Wisconsin Historical Society. <https://content.wisconsinhistory.org/digital/collection/p15932coll2/id/66680/rec/2>.
- Sweet Honey In The Rock. n.d. About. <https://sweethoneyintherock.org/about>.
- Teltsch, Kathleen. 1989. MacArthur Foundations Honors Achievement. *New York Times*, July 18:A18.
- Thompson, Joseph M. 2018. Nostalgic for Utopia: Anne Romaine's Folk Music Protest in the New Left South. *Southern Cultures* 24(3):45–61.
- Viewpoint: Bess Lomax Hawes. 1982. *Cultural Post* 7(6):12–3.
- Wartofsky, Alona. 2018. Sisterfire, a D.C. Women's Festival from the '80s, Is Being Resurrected This Weekend. *Washington City Paper*, July 6. www.washingtoncitypaper.com/arts/music/blog/21012317/sisterfire-returns-for-smithsonian-folklife-festival.
- White, Derrick E. 2017. The Institute of the Black World and Atlanta as Black Intellectual Mecca in the 1970s. *ATLAS Atlanta Studies*, October 3. <https://www.atlantastudies.org/2017/10/03/derrick-white-the-institute-of-the-black-world-and-atlanta-as-black-intellectual-mecca-in-the-1970s/>.
- Wiggins, William H., Jr. 2001. Association of African and African American Folklorists. In *Organizing Black America: An Encyclopedia of African American Associations*, ed. Nina Mjagkij, pp. 70–1. New York: Garland.

Additional Reading

- Anderson, William M., Bernice Johnson Reagon, Luvenia A. George, David P McAllester, Edwin Schupman, Guohuang Han, Patricia Shehan Campbell, et al. 1991. *Teaching Music with a Multicultural Approach*. Reston, VA: Music Educators National Conference.
- Bagwell, Orlando, Susan Bellows, Steve Fayer, Angela Bassett, Bernice Johnson Reagon, and Charles Johnson. 2006. *Africans in America: America's Journey through Slavery*. Boston: WGBH Educational Foundation.
- Belafonte, Harry, Natalie Bullock Brown, Guy Carawan, Len Chandler, and Bernice Johnson Reagon. 2011. *SNCC 50th Anniversary Conference*. Vol. 36: *Freedom Concert*. San Francisco: California Newsreel.
- Best, Katelyn E. 2021. New Paths for Justice-Oriented Ethnomusicological Research. Roundtable sponsored by the SEM Crossroads Section for Difference and Representation and the Applied Ethnomusicology

- Section presented at the 66th Annual Meeting of the Society for Ethnomusicology, Atlanta, GA, October 28–31.
- Brown, Natalie Bullock, William Barber, Timothy B. Tyson, Carolyn Brockington, and Bernice Johnson Reagon. 2011. *SNCC 50th Anniversary Conference*. Vol. 18: *Ella Baker's Roots: "Give People Light and They Will Find a Way."* San Francisco: California Newsreel.
- Brown, Natalie Bullock, Bernice Johnson Reagon, Judy Richardson, and Donna Coltrane Battle. 2011. *SNCC 50th Anniversary Conference*. Vol. 38: *Closing Program: Bernice Johnson Reagon, "Solidarity of Past, Present and Future."* San Francisco, CA: California Newsreel.
- Ellis Miller, Elizabeth. 2021. Listening to Remember: Bernice Johnson Reagon and Embodied Memories of Civil Rights. In *Feminist Circulations: Rhetorical Explorations across Space and Time*, ed. Danielle Griffin, Jessica Enoch, and Karen Nelson, pp. 135–54. Anderson, SC: Parlor Press, LLC.
- Hamilton, Lisa Gay, Neda Armian, Beah E. Richards, Bernice Johnson Reagon, Toshi Reagon, and Geri Allen. 2003. *Beah: A Black Woman Speaks*. New York: [Distributed by] Women Make Movies.
- Jordan, June, and Bernice Johnson Reagon. 1980. *For Somebody to Start Singing*. Washington, DC: Watershed Foundation.
- Nelson, Stanley. 2005. *Sweet Honey In The Rock: Raise Your Voice*. Harriman, NY: Firelight Media.
- Newcomer, Carrie, Bernice Johnson Reagon, and Holly Near. 2007. *Light of Change: A Concert with Carrie Newcomer, Bernice Johnson Reagon, and Holly Near*. Cleveland, OH: Proclamation, Identity & Communication, United Church of Christ.
- Pellett, Gail, Bill D. Moyers, and Bernice Johnson Reagon. 1991. *The Songs Are Free: With Bernice Johnson Reagon*. New York: Mystic Fire Video.
- Perez, Marvette. 1997. Interview with Bernice Johnson Reagon. *Radical History Review* 68:4–24.
- Reagon, Bernice Johnson. 1965. Women as Culture Carriers in the Civil Rights Movement: Fannie Lou Hamer. In *Women in the Civil Rights Movement: Trailblazers and Torchbearers*, pp. 203–18. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- . 1968. *A History of the Afro-American through His Songs: A Report of a Workshop*. Albany: State University of the New York, State Education Department, Division of Humanities and Arts.
- . 1977. Impressions of Cuban Culture by an Afro-American Artist. *Black Scholar* 8(8–9–10):51–61.
- . 1982. My Black Mothers and Sisters or on Beginning a Cultural Autobiography. *Feminist Studies* 8(1):81–96.
- . 1987. Let the Church Sing "Freedom." *Black Music Research Journal* 7:105–18.
- . 1990a. Foreword: Nurturing Resistance. In *Reimagining America: The Arts of Social Change*, ed. Mark O'Brien and Craig Little, pp. 1–8. Gabriola, BC: New Society.
- . 1990b. The Lined Hymn as a Song of Freedom. *Black Music Research Bulletin*, Spring 1990 12(1):4–7. Center for Black Music Research, Columbia College Chicago. <https://digitalcommons.colum.edu/cbmrnews/30>.
- , ed. 1992. *We'll Understand It Better By and By: Pioneering African American Gospel Composers*. Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press.
- . 1993. "Battle Stancing": To Do Cultural Work in America. In *Voices from the Battlefield: Achieving Cultural Equity*, ed. Marta Moreno Vega and Cheryll Y. Greene, pp. 69–82. Trenton, NJ: African World Press.
- . 1994a. *Wade in the Water*. Vol. 1: *African American Spirituals: The Concert Tradition*. Washington, DC: Smithsonian Folkways, CD, SF 40072. <https://folkways.si.edu/wade-in-the-water-vol-1-african-american-spirituals-the-concert-tradition/african-american-music-gospel-sacred/music/album/smithsonian>.
- . 1994b. *Wade in the Water*. Vol. 2: *African American Congregational Singing: Nineteenth-Century Roots*. Washington, DC: Smithsonian Folkways, CD, SF 40073. <https://folkways.si.edu/wade-in-the-water-vol-2-african-american-congregational-singing/african-american-music-gospel-sacred/album/smithsonian>.
- . 1994c. *Wade in the Water*. Vol. 3: *African American Gospel: The Pioneering Composers*. Washington, DC: Smithsonian Folkways, CD, SF 40074. <https://folkways.si.edu/wade-in-the-water-vol-3-african-american-gospel-the-pioneering-composers/african-american-music/album/smithsonian>.

- . 1994d. *Wade in the Water*. Vol. 4: *African American Community Gospel*. Comp. Bernice Johnson Reagon. Ann. Bernice Johnson Reagon and Lisa Pertillar Brevard. Washington, DC: Smithsonian Folkways, CD, SF 40075. <https://folkways.si.edu/wade-in-the-water-vol-4-african-american-community-gospel/african-american-music/album/smithsonian>.
- . 1997. Vocals, Essay, and Annotation. In *Give Your Hands to Struggle: The Evolution of a Freedom Fighter: Songs by Bernice Reagon*. Washington, DC: Smithsonian Folkways, CD, SF 40049. <https://folkways.si.edu/bernice-johnson-reagon/give-your-hands-to-struggle/african-american-music-protest/album/smithsonian>.
- . 1998. Oh, Freedom: Music of the Movement. In *A Circle of Trust: Remembering SNCC*, ed. Cheryl Lynn Greenberg, pp. 110–26. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- . 2000. *If You Don't Go, Don't Hinder Me: The African American Sacred Song Tradition*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.
- . 2015. Bernice Johnson Reagon Commencement Address 2010. YouTube video. 8:49 min. UNC Nashville. <https://youtu.be/pFcMo0lkDIU>.
- . 2016. The Civil Rights Period: Music as an Agent of Social Change. In *Issues in African American Music: Power, Gender, Race, Representation*, ed. Portia Maultsby and Mellonee Burnim, pp. 423–51. New York: Routledge.
- Reagon, Bernice Johnson, with Robert Wilson. 2004. *The Temptation of St. Anthony*. Songtalk Music. <https://www.bernicejohnsonreagon.com/2014/11/30/saint-anthony/>.
- Roshanravan, Shireen. 2021. On the Limits of Globalizing Black Feminist Commitments: “Me Too” and Its White Detours. *Feminist Formations* 33(3):239–55.
- West, Cornel, Bernice Johnson Reagon, C. T. Vivian, Angela Davis, and Catherine Fosl. 2014. *Anne Braden: Southern Patriot*. San Francisco: Kanopy Streaming.