



SIENAcollege

The Martin Luther King, Jr. and Coretta Scott King Lecture Series
on Race and Nonviolent Social Change
proudly presents the 21st Annual Lecture given by



Bernice Johnson Reagon

“Coalition Building”

For more than 40 years, Bernice Johnson Reagon has been a major cultural voice for freedom and justice; singing, teaching—speaking out against racism and organized inequities of all kinds. An African American woman’s voice, a child of Southwest Georgia, she was born in the struggle against racism in America during the Civil Rights Movement of the 50s and 60s. Reagon’s life and work support the concept of community based culture with an enlarged capacity for mutual respect: for self, for those who move among us who seem to be different than us, for our planet that sustains life as we know it.

Perhaps no individual today better illustrates the transformative power and instruction of traditional African American music and cultural history than Bernice Johnson Reagon, who has excelled equally in the realms of scholarship, composition, and performance. She is Professor Emerita of History at American University, Curator Emerita at the Smithsonian’s National Museum of American History, and served as the 2002-2004 Cosby Chair of Fine Arts at Spelman College in Atlanta, GA. Two of her major works are seminal to the study of this tradition: *Wade in the Water: African American Sacred Music Traditions* and *Africans in America: America’s Journey Through Slavery*.

In 1973 while serving as Vocal Director of the DC Black Repertory Company, Reagon founded the internationally acclaimed African American woman a cappella ensemble, **Sweet Honey In The Rock**. For 30 years she was artistic director, performer, songwriter, and producer of many of the group’s recordings, retiring in early 2004. Among the recordings she produced are: *Sacred Ground*, *Selections: Sweet Honey In The Rock, 1976–1988*, and *Still the Same Me*.

Dr. Reagon became active in the Civil Rights Movement while a college student at Albany State College in Albany, Georgia (from which she was expelled after participating in a demonstration for which she and others were jailed). She was a member of the original SNCC (**Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee**) **Freedom Singers** formed in 1962 by SNCC field secretary Cordell H. Reagon, and in 1966, a founding member of the Atlanta-based **Harambee Singers**.

Her pioneering work as a scholar, teacher, and artist has been recognized with the Heinz Award for the Arts and Humanities (2003), the Leeway National Award for Women in the Arts (2000), the Presidential Medal for contribution to public understanding of the Humanities (1995), and the MacArthur Fellowship (1989).

Thursday, January 24, 2008 at 7:00 PM

Alumni Recreation Center, Siena College

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