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4-19-2005

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#### Recommended Citation

University Relations, "Renowned historian, scholar, composer, Bernice Johnson Reagon, to visit UMM" (2005). *Campus News Archive*. 2101.

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**Renowned historian, scholar, composer, Bernice Johnson Reagon, to visit UMM**

*Summary:*

(April 19, 2005)-Renowned historian, scholar and composer Dr. Bernice Johnson Reagon will join the University of Minnesota, Morris as the inaugural holder of UMM's first Distinguished Visiting Professorship in the Liberal Arts. Dr. Reagon will give two public lectures, will guest lecture in classes for UMM students, and will be the guest conductor with UMM's combined choirs during her visit April 26-May 3.

"This is a spectacular appointment, for an exciting new program at UMM," said UMM Chancellor Sam Schuman.

Dr. Reagon, a professor emerita of American University and curator emerita of the Smithsonian Institution, National Museum of American History, is also a composer and song leader in the 19th century Southwest Georgia choral tradition. She founded the Grammy award-winning African American female a cappella ensemble Sweet Honey In the Rock in 1973.

The public is invited to hear Dr. Reagon's lecture at 7:30 p.m. Tuesday, April 26, in the Black Box Theatre of Humanities Fine Arts on the Morris campus. The topic will be "I Decided to Stand": Selected Notes from the 40 Year Journal of a Freedom Singer." She will construct a journey using song fragments to share her experiences and lessons from 40 years of activism beginning with the Civil Rights Movement. The lecture will be followed by a reception in the HFA Gallery.

A second public lecture will be given at 7:30 p.m. Thursday, April 28, at the First Lutheran Church, 200 East 5th Street, Morris. Dr. Reagon will speak on "Lessons in Living: The African American Spiritual Tradition." She will look at that body of song and singing repertoire called spirituals created by African Americans when they were slaves as a way to understand surviving, resisting and moving beyond American slavery.

Dr. Reagon will be the guest conductor during a performance by UMM's combined choirs, under the direction of Dr. Kenneth Hodgson. The

performance, which will feature Dr. Reagon's compositions, will be held at 7:30 p.m. Tuesday, May 3, at Assumption Church, 2nd Avenue and East Third Street, Morris. Dr. Reagon will be working with the choirs in preparation for the performance.

In addition to public lectures and a performance, UMM students will have opportunities to connect with Dr. Reagon. She will be a guest lecturer during three class sessions for students: Classical, Romantic and 20th Century Music U.S. History Since 1860: Civil Rights Movement and U.S. Multicultural and Multiracial Literatures.

"It is our intention to maximize her contact with students, to give students an opportunity to meet with Dr. Reagon, a national and international professional in the field," said John F. Schwaller, UMM vice chancellor for academic affairs and dean.

Dr. Reagon's numerous publications include *We'll Understand It Better By and By: African American Pioneering Gospel Composers* (Smithsonian Press, 1992) and *We Who Believe in Freedom: Sweet Honey in the Rock...Still on the Journey* (Anchor Books, 1993), a book chronicling the history of Sweet Honey In The Rock, for which she served as editor.

Dr. Reagon has served as consultant composer and performer for several film and video projects, including two award-winning programs for PBS, "Eye on the Prize" (Blackside Productions) and "We Shall Overcome" (Ginger Productions). A 1989 recipient of MacArthur Fellowship, she was awarded the Presidential Medal, the 1995 Charles Frankel Prize for outstanding contribution to public understanding of the humanities, by the National Endowment for the Humanities. In 1996, she received an Isadora Duncan award for the score to *Rock*, a ballet directed by Alonzo King for LINES Contemporary Ballet Company.

The Distinguished Visiting Professorship was made possible thanks to a generous Campaign Minnesota contribution by Dr. Elizabeth "Bettina" Blake, UMM vice chancellor and academic dean emerita and professor emerita of French. Her gift was matched by the University of Minnesota's Permanent University Fund.

The public is invited to attend the two public lectures and the choir's performance at no charge.

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