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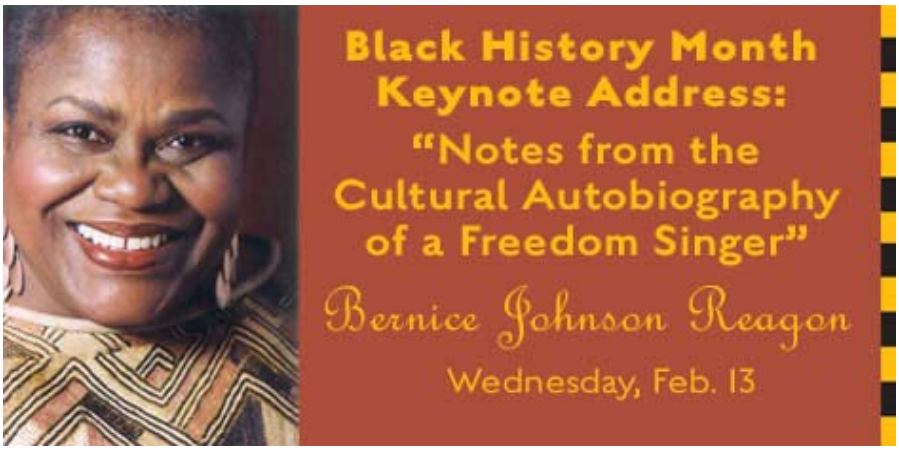

Musician-Scholar Bernice Johnson Reagon to Deliver Black History Month Keynote Address

Bernice Johnson Reagon, a leading figure in the study, performance and renewal of the African-American traditions of music and activism, will deliver the keynote address in Bryn Mawr's celebration of Black History Month next Wednesday, Feb. 13, at 7:30 p.m. in Thomas Great Hall. A reception and sales of Reagon's CDs will follow the lecture, which is free and open to the public.

"Notes from the Cultural Autobiography of a Freedom Singer" will draw on Reagon's extraordinary personal history of activism and education through musical performance and composition. Reagon became active in the Civil Rights Movement while a college student at Albany State College in Albany, Ga., from which she was expelled after participating in a demonstration for which she and others were jailed. She was a member of the original Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee's Freedom Singers formed in 1962 by SNCC field secretary Cordell H. Reagon and has been a major force in the preservation and expansion of a cappella music ever since.

Reagon has excelled in scholarship as well as performance and composition. She is a professor emerita of history at American University and curator emerita at the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History, and she served as the 2002-04 Cosby Chair of Fine Arts at Spelman College in Atlanta, Ga.

Her deep knowledge of the African-American musical tradition has made Reagon the music consultant, composer, and performer of choice for film and video producers. Her credits include the award-winning *Eyes on the Prize*, the Emmy-winning *We Shall Overcome*, and the feature film *Beloved*.

In 1996, Reagon received the Isadora Duncan award for the score of the original ballet *Rock*, created by Alonso King, founder and artistic director of the San Francisco-based contemporary ballet company, LINES. In 2003, she created the music and libretto for the Robert Wilson production *The Temptation of St. Anthony*, which premiered in Germany and was also performed in Italy, Spain, England, and New York. 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).

Related:

Black History Month Calendar (Word document)

Bernice Johnson Reagon's Web site, with audio clips

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How Well Is Your Thesis Hidden?
Publishing Students' Work on the World Wide Web

While the teenage years and early 20s may be a peak time for tennis players, gymnasts, and other athletes, it's rarely assumed that most people have reached their intellectual peaks—or even established their intellectual identities—at such an early age.

Yet as a stream of Internet chatter about Hillary Clinton's "Hidden Thesis" from her senior year at Wellesley College shows, anything is fair game once a person comes under the harsh glare of the media spotlight.

Senior Lecturer in English Anne Dalke is one of a number of professors on campus who thinks students shouldn't be too worried about having their work available for public scrutiny and that making such work public can be a boon to students, academics, and others.

"There's a sharp contrast between the traditional way of producing academic writing and the current way a number of us here go about inviting students to publish their writing on the Web," said Dalke. "Our mode tells students, from the get-go, that they are participating in larger debates on the topics they are studying."

"For some years now, virtually all of my classes have made use of this approach, with student Web papers and online forum participation replacing examinations," added Professor of Biology Paul Grobstein via e-mail. "Students are explicitly told about the public character of their activities and the rationale for it, and required to agree to it before enrolling. Students are generally quite enthusiastic about this, both prior to and following the courses."

Grobstein cited several reasons he thinks science education in particular benefits from "broader public interaction."

- Students take their work more seriously when they feel it is for a public purpose (as opposed to just an exercise or something for a teacher).
- Students gain experience in making things clear to and interacting with a general audience.
- Instructors get greater pleasure and satisfaction reading and thinking about these papers than they would from exams or more traditional papers, and they can respond to them in terms more useful than those coming simply from a local disciplinary perspective.
- The students and instructor are colleagues in a shared educational enterprise.

Rachel Tashjian '10 recently started writing for *The Philadelphia Inquirer's* "College Board" section and has taken courses in which her work has been published on the Web.

"Knowing that the professor would not be the only one reading the paper didn't make me censor myself. Knowing that I would have a potentially wide readership actually made me more eager to write provocative papers," said Tashjian.

"Writing for *The Inquirer* was much the same—I didn't feel the need to 'sanitize' or make my argument more moderate in order to convince readers," she added.

Tashjian also dismisses the concern that something written as a student could become an issue later in life.

"Looking at Hillary Clinton's thesis to figure out her current political beliefs seems ridiculous—her politics certainly haven't been stagnant since 1969. So knowing that I will be able to make the argument that my opinions have evolved since college makes me unworried about my college work becoming public," said Tashjian.

While most faculty members would undoubtedly agree with Tashjian's sentiments regarding trying to judge a person's current thoughts and beliefs by examining

Related:

"Reading Hillary Rodham's Hidden Thesis" (at MSNBC)

Anne Dalke

Paul Grobstein

Hemmeter said she sees some real advantages to making student writing a more public activity but doesn't think having material published online is a panacea for poor writing.

"No one's ever going to become a better writer if they think it's this mysterious talent that you've just either 'got' or don't have," said Hemmeter. "On the other hand, all you have to do is look at 99 percent of the stuff posted online to realize that writing for a wider audience doesn't always encourage more polished material."

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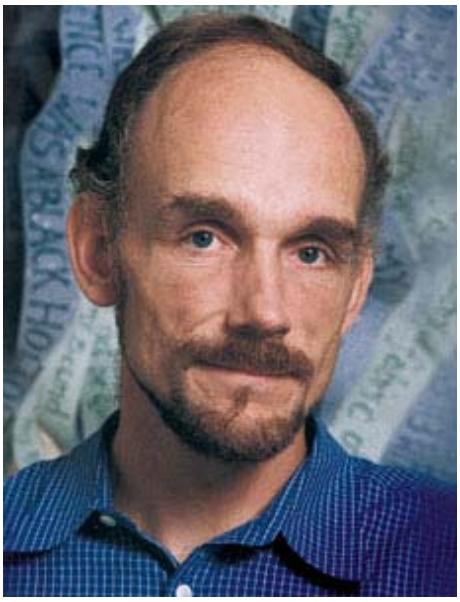
Gail Hemmeter



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BMC Cities Prof Daniela Voith '76 Tackles Philly's Outdated Zoning Code

Philadelphia's new mayor, Michael Nutter, has asked Lecturer in Growth and Structure of Cities Daniela Holt Voith '76 to join the city's brand-new Zoning Code Commission.

The commission, created last spring by a public referendum, has a big, long-overdue job: to overhaul the city's ancient zoning code. The code hasn't been updated in nearly 50 years. Meanwhile, in the last five years alone, 22 of the country's largest cities redid their own codes.

"It's been a long time since the code has been changed, and I think the city has become a very different place than it was in the sixties," says Voith, a partner with the Philadelphia firm Voith & Mactavish Architects.

A city's zoning code determines what kinds of buildings can be built where. Anyone who's played the popular computer game SimCity can name three basic zones: residential, commercial, and industrial. SimCity devotees probably understand that placing a nuclear power plant next to a pizza parlor would be bad planning, and that connecting the suburbs to downtown with light rail is good planning.

Real-life zoning codes tackle the same issues, says Voith. "A huge array of issues goes into a really well-written code. How do we create transit-oriented development? What does sustainability mean? How can zoning impact a city's health and the welfare of its citizens?"

Philly's code is both old and bulky. It's over 600 pages long and includes 55 different zones. The new Zoning Code Commission is made of City Council members, trade leaders, urban planners, attorneys, architects, and real-estate developers.

Voith is one of two architects on the board. After graduating with a Growth and Structure of Cities degree in 1976, she received her Master of Architecture degree from Yale University in 1981. She is a registered architect in five states and a past president of the Philadelphia chapter of the American Institute of Architects.

The commission has a year to present its recommendations—it won't actually rewrite the code, but suggest what changes are needed. The commission is in its infancy, but one thing Voith is sure of is the need to create smart, fair zoning for the city's future. She points to Houston to illustrate why thoughtful zoning is important.

"Houston has no zoning code whatsoever," she says. "Any building type can occur next to any other building type. The thinking was that capitalism should drive all development. You ended up with some very strange juxtapositions there."

Voith says it's also part of the commission's job to point out rules in the current code that are no longer useful. "For example," she says, "it's currently written that if you build a new townhouse, you must also provide parking for that townhouse. On the face, it makes a lot of sense.

"But since most townhouses don't have both front and rear entry, a lot of developers ended up building garages on the first floor. In reality, that just takes away the curb in front of the townhouse, so it doesn't create an additional parking space. Instead it gives the space to a particular family, which isn't good for the pedestrian environment. A garage isn't inherently attractive—it's probably not going to built of brick—and now the sidewalk in front of the townhouse can't have trees, either.

"It was a well-intended rule that actually eats away at the quality of the urban fabric, and runs counter to what makes older neighborhoods of Philadelphia great."

Voith says her Growth and Structure of Cities students can get involved with the Zoning Code Commission by attending its bimonthly meetings, which are open to the public. "We try to get our students to understand the relationship between sustainability and design decisions," she says. "We look at what's allowed and what's not

allowed, and what's encouraged and why. I love when students come down to the city to examine what Philadelphia looks like, up close."

—by Tasneem Paghdiwala '04

Q & A: Political Scientist Marissa Martino Golden on the Primary Process

The 2008 presidential primary elections have generated an unusual level of attention from both voters and the press. Changes in the traditional schedules have generated controversy—and fresh interest in the primary system itself. Associate Professor and Chair of Political Science Marissa Martino Golden offers a few thoughts on the topic.

The primary system itself strikes many people as being very flawed and in many ways undemocratic. Do you see any significant changes to the system taking place in the near future?

First, I would say that the process is hyperdemocratic. But I'll return to that in a moment. As far as prospects for reform, I have two comments.

First, other than the introduction of super-delegates and the abolition of delegate quotas, there has not been any significant reform at the national level since the McGovern-Fraser Commission dreamed up this crazy process in 1972. So I don't see the parties stepping in and reforming the process in any major way.

Second, however, most political scientists think that it is inevitable that we will end up with a one-day national primary by default. In other words, the incentives are so great for individual states that they will continue to move their primaries up to the earliest possible date, eventually resulting in a one-day national primary. Before Tuesday, I would have agreed with that analysis. But I think the fact that the nominating process is not yet over may change the structure of incentives such that at least some states will see the potential benefits of having later primaries. This may slow the trend towards an ever increasingly front-loaded process. I would view anything that slows down the process as a positive development as it allows more time for voter education to occur.

How has this current process highlighted the strengths and weaknesses of the current system?

I think the strength of the current system is that it is incredibly democratic. It is an extraordinarily transparent process in which anyone can participate—even, in many states, those not affiliated with either of the parties.

I also think that this feature is the system's chief weakness. There is not enough of a role for peer review—for people "in the know" to use their knowledge to pick the most electable candidate. So to my mind, the chief flaw of the current process is that it does not pay sufficient attention to electability, which is, after all, the *rasion d'etre* of political parties in the first place. And I think that flaw is a direct result of the plebiscitary nature of the process and the absence of a more prominent role for old-style party bosses who were more centrally concerned with winning elections.

You're critical of the "horse race" coverage of the primaries. What sort of reporting would you like to see more of?

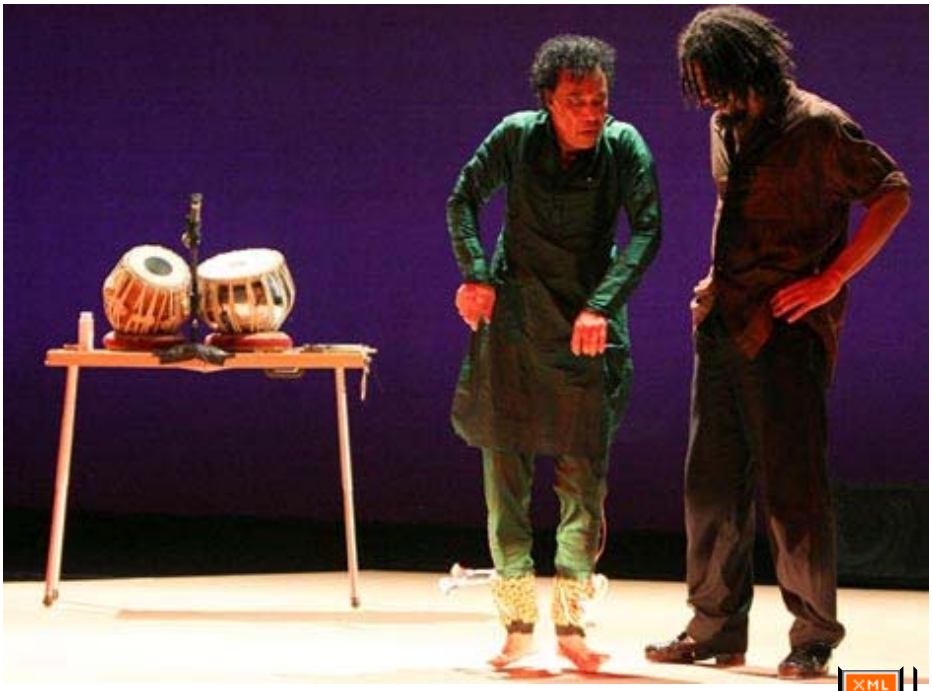
Dan Rather once asked me why Iowa was so important. I looked at him incredulously and said, "because you make it so important." But I've changed my view. I think the problem is with the process, not the media's coverage of it. If you have a plebiscitary and sequential process—instead of one that relies on peer review and coalition building—then the media will inevitably cover it as such. In addition, in a plebiscitary system, the public's only source of information is the media. By contrast, in a system of peer review, the people deciding who their party's nominee will be are peers who have personal knowledge of the candidates, their leadership skills, and their electability. But since I don't see us going back to the smoke-filled rooms of yore, I don't see much likelihood that the media's focus on the horse race will diminish any time soon.

About that horse race ...

Finally, just a few comments about the horse race. First, the results from Super Tuesday highlight what an important role the rules of the nominating process play.

Clinton and McCain won many of the same states, but because the Republicans use a "winner-take-all" system of delegate allocation, McCain emerged as the clear front-runner. But because the Democrats award delegates proportionally, Obama was able to keep the race tight despite the fact that Clinton won a plurality of the vote in most of the "big" states.

Another interesting example of this is that Obama seemed to do much better in states holding caucuses rather than primaries. Ditto for Mike Huckabee. So the method used—primary versus caucus—played a role in who "won" in those states. Because caucuses have lower turnout, they are more susceptible to having a small group of very enthusiastic supporters determine the outcome.



India Jazz Suites Offers Dialogue Between Indian and African-American Traditions

Acclaimed performers Pandit Chitresh Das, a master of the Indian dance form *kathak*, and Jason Samuels Smith, who's been called "one of the brilliant young talents reanimating the art of tap dancing," will present their groundbreaking collaboration, *India Jazz Suites*, in Goodhart Theater next Friday, Feb. 15, at 8 p.m. The program is part of the College's **Performing Arts Series**.

India Jazz Suites presents a conversation between the two dance and musical traditions represented by Das and Smith, with each taking up and transforming rhythms from the other's performance. The performace has been described as a series of "parallel monologues" that explores both forms through a collaboration that never becomes a fusion of the two syles.

Pandit Das, one of the world's best-known performers of Indian classical dance, has performed throughout India and internationally in many of the world's most prestigious festivals and venues. His Chandam School in the San Francisco Bay area is the largest school of classical Indian dance outside India.

Jason Samuels Smith is one of the leading young proponents of tap dance. His choreography has earned both an Emmy and an American Choreography Award, and his performances have been featured in numerous television productions and films. He first rose to national prominence as a member of the Tony-winning Broadway cast of *Bring in Da'Noise, Bring in Da'Funk*.