



MARTYRS' SUNDAY (ALL SAINTS DAY) (REMEMBERING SLAIN HEROES AND HEROINES)

CULTURAL RESOURCE

***I Remember I Believe**

By Bernice Johnson Reagon

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

I don't know why the rivers over flow their banks
I don't know why the snow falls and covers the ground
I don't know why the hurricane sweeps through the land every now and then
Standing in a rainstorm, I believe

I don't know why the angels woke me up this morning soon
I don't know why the blood still runs through my veins
I don't know how I rate to run another day
I am here still running, I believe

My God calls to me in the morning dew
The power of the universe knows my name
Gave me a song to sing and sent me on my way
I raise my voice for justice I believe...

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Composer, Executive Artistic Director of Rejoicensemble, and author of [Playing Gospel Piano](#)

Scripture: Revelations 7:13-17

(v. 13) Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, "Who are these, robbed in white, and where have they come from?" (v. 14) I said to him, "Sir you are the one that knows." Then he said to me, "These are they who have come out of the great ordeal; and they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. (v. 15) For this reason, they are before the throne of God: and they worship him day and night within his temple, and the one who is seated on the throne will shelter them. (v. 16) They

will hunger no more, and thirst no more; the sun will not strike them, nor any scorching heat; (v. 17) for the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of the water of life; and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”

I. Historical Notes

The Festival of All Saints, as we know it today, evolved from a general commemoration in Antioch of martyrs on the Sunday after Pentecost. In 609 or 610, Boniface IV dedicated the Pantheon to St. Mary and Martyrs (the Blessed Virgin and all martyrs); the Festival became a standing spring celebration in the western Roman Catholic Church, honoring those who had passed on to glory. However, in the third century, in an oratory in St. Peter’s for the relics “of the holy apostles and of all saints, martyrs and confessors, of all the just made perfect who are at rest throughout the world,”¹ Pope Gregory III fixed the anniversary for November 1.

The date of the celebration of All Saints was not randomly selected. It was picked to counter a pagan ancient Roman religious ritual performed to drive out evil spirits. In the British Isles, it manifested itself as Samhain:

Samhain is a pagan Celtic celebration of the beginning of winter and the first day of the New Year. This time of the ingathering of the harvest and the approach of winter apparently provided a reminder of human mortality. It was a time when the souls of the dead were said to return to their homes. Bonfires were set on hilltops to frighten away evil spirits.²

Since Samhain was popular during the period of the conversion of the British Isles to Christianity, All Saints was set the day after Samhain as a reminder to the faithful that one day they would all share in the vision of John as found in Revelations.

With the Reformation, the celebration of All Saints was retained in the Church of England and other Protestant denominations.

II. Celebrating All Saints Day: Remembrances

Because of their Catholic heritage, many African American Louisianans, Christian and non-Christian, have traditions for this festival that date back centuries. When, on November 1, my black Louisiana Catholic-born friend, Kevin Michael Gaudin, called, the first words out of his mouth were “Have you done your duty for today?” Initially puzzled by the question, I ran a quick search of my limited memory database and could not find anything on my physical or mental calendar to which I had committed. Now what ball had I dropped? What task was left undone? Kevin then asked if I had been to the cemetery to put flowers on my mother’s grave. “No,” I replied. I informed him that, earlier in the week, I had been at the Washington Shores Cemetery giving the white caretaker a piece of my mind for the cemetery’s lack of upkeep and utter disrespect for its African American dead buried there. However, to Kevin, that did not count. He informed me that it was a part of his New Orleans Catholic tradition that, on All Saints Day, his mother, Mrs. Gertrude Marguerite Julian Gaudin, would lead their family’s annual pilgrimage to the cemeteries in New Orleans, St. Catherine’s (Donaldsonville, Louisiana) and St. Philip Baptist Cemetery (Modeste, Louisiana), where her father was buried.

Here follows excerpts of a telephone interview I [indicated by “CM”] had with Mrs. Gaudin [indicated by “GG”]:

CM: Mrs. Gaudin, where were you born?

GG: In Modeste, Louisiana.

CM: Mrs. Gaudin, do you mind telling me when you were born.

GG: No, I don't mind. I was born January 20, 1931.

CM: When were you confirmed?

GG: In eighth grade at 12 years old, I was confirmed.

CM: Did you attend Catholic school?

GG: Yes, I walked seven miles to Donaldsonville, Louisiana.

CM: When did you become aware of the significance of All Saints Day?

GG: My dad died when I was young, about twelve. My mother, Maude Julian, wore black to commemorate this.

CM: How do you observe All Saints Day?

GG: We plant flowers on the graves and visit our grandmother and grandfather graves. I always pray for the souls who have gone on before.

CM: What else do you do to mark All Saints Day?

GG: After visiting the gravesite in New Orleans, we go to St. Catherine's Cemetery in Donaldsonville, and St. Philip Baptist Cemetery in Modeste, Ascension Parish. We clean the site, pray, reminisce, and visit my sister.

CM: Are there special foods or recipes you have for All Saints Day?

GG: Chicken, red beans, rice, candied sweet potatoes, cornbread and potatoes.

CM: Growing up, did others in your community do the same thing?

GG: Old people wore black on All Saints Day, as a sign of respect for those gone to glory. Because of Marie LaVeau, some people dressed in colors to form a second line.³ You do know about Marie LaVeau?

I learned that the story of Marie LaVeau is a mixture of lore and history. According to baptismal records at St. Louis Cathedral, New Orleans, Marie LaVeau, the first of two famous voodoo priests so named, was born September 10, 1801. According to author, Ina Fandrich, what made LaVeau so popular was

“she heals the sick, gives money to the poor, asks for justice and prays for people who had wrong done to them.”⁴ LaVeau “mixed Roman Catholic beliefs and saints with African spirits and religion,” to create a ritual and network of informants who fed her data on the rich and powerful of New Orleans.⁵ She used this information to become one of the most influential and feared figures in nineteenth century New Orleans.

When the New Orleans authorities banned drumming, dancing and blacks from public gatherings except on Sundays and at designated spots (the preferred being Congo Square), Marie LaVeau used her mastery of spectacle (*e.g.*, snake charming), combined with the skillful use of data gathered from her network of spies placed throughout the city, to emerge as the queen reigning over these Congo Square displays.⁶ Upon LaVeau’s death in 1891, her daughter, Marie LaVeau Glapion, who bore a striking resemblance to the mother, assumed the mother’s identity and continued the work and reigns of power possessed by the mother.

III. Remembering Our Martyrs

“When the Saints Go Marching In,” the most famous All Saints Day song, is associated with the second line funeral tradition of New Orleans. The observance of All Saints Day is the setting aside of a sacred time and place to give honor to those who gave their lives, so that we could move forward. Remembrances of our ancestors through rituals hallow the ground upon which we stand and prepare paths for the next generation.

In her memoir, *InfiDEL*, Somali author, Ayaan Hirsi Ali, laments her grandmother’s forcing her to say from memory the names of eight hundred ancestors: “Later, as I grow up, my grandmother would coax and even beat me to learn my father’s ancestry eight hundred years back, to the beginning of the great clan of the Darod. I am a Darod, a Harti, a Macherten, an Osman Mahamud. I am the consort called the Higher Shoulder. I am a Magan.”⁷

On this All Saints Day commemoration, let us remember those ancestors, known and unknown, who were martyred that we may even today catch a glimpse of the promise of freedom, so moaned for by the African slaves and their descendants for four hundred years. As a Central Florida resident, I must begin my litany with Harry T. Moore and his wife, Harriett. My fellow church member, Dr. Lorraine Harris, a former school principal, like Mr. Moore, says “I’ll always remember that Christmas back in the 50s over in Mims [the actual date was December 25, 1951], when they bombed Harry T. Moore’s house. He was an NAACP president and was active in voter registration.”

Moore organized the first Brevard County, Florida, Chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). In addition, “as executive secretary of the Progressive Voters League, he helped break down registration barriers, and was responsible for the registration of tens of thousands of black Americans throughout Florida.” This was during a period in U. S. history when the norm was the disenfranchisement of the rights and the lynching or killing of African Americans who resisted Jim Crow laws and segregation.

I remember Mose Norman and Julius “July” Perry, two African American land owners in the town of Ocoee, Orange County, Florida, in the post-World War I period. Following the war, many African American veterans who returned home to the South started to insist upon exercising their constitutional rights to register and vote. Norman and Perry launched a drive to register African Americans in Orange

County and Ocoee, in particular. In 1920, Ocoee's population was around 1,000 of which 495 were African American.

During the election of November 2, 1920, Norman and Perry attempted to vote at the Ocoee polling place. Although they had paid their poll tax, they were turned away and told not to return. The subsequent facts and timeline are forever obscured in Ocoee history. According to some accounts, Mose Norman returned to the polling place with a shotgun. This led to an altercation in which Norman was pistol whipped, sent away and subsequently never heard from again.

A white lynch mob was formed under the leadership of civic leader Colonel Sam Salisbury. Ku Klux Klansmen from all over the state of Florida, and some from as far away as Georgia, descended upon Ocoee, burned the African American section of town, sealed off the town and then auctioned off the land owned by the black inhabitants for \$1.50 an acre. Leaving property behind, the African American inhabitants of Ocoee fled to nearby Orlando, Winter Garden and Apopka. Mrs. Estelle Perry, wife of Julius Perry, and their daughter were "sent to Tampa by the authorities for treatment and to avoid further disturbance."⁸

The New York Times reported:

ORLANDO, Fla., Nov. 4.—Reports tonight from Ocoee, near here, where an Election Day race riot caused the death of two white men and a number of Negroes, indicated that quiet prevailed, that practically all negroes had left the region, nearly all of them afoot, as there was no exodus by rail. The white citizens have begun harvesting the citrus crop owing to the lack of Negro labor.⁹

Dr. Harris recounts that native Orlandoan and school teacher, Pinky Price, told her that, "Mr. July's body was dragged back into town [Orlando] and hung from the big oak tree in front of Stark's Funeral home."¹⁰

My litany continues with the heroines and martyrs of Rosewood, Florida, Ms. Sara Carrier and Lexie Gordon. They are but two of the many who died following a week of rampaging and burning of African American homes, churches and businesses in Rosewood by a white vigilante group stirred up by a Ku Klux Klan rally in nearby Gainesville, Florida, on New Year's Eve, 1922. The entire black town of Rosewood was burned to the ground.¹¹ In 1994, the state of Florida allocated \$2.1 million dollars to the surviving victims of the Rosewood Massacre.

IV. A Poem that Provides a Martyr's Roll Call

The world will never know the names of all those who have died in the cause for freedom and equality in the United States of America. However, in her song poem, "They Keep Coming," from the musical Don't Bother Me, I Can't Cope, composer/lyricist Micki Grant, reminds us of some of the better known names who are on the roll.

They Keep Coming

You can stop a rose from growing
If you nip it in the bud,
You can stop a brook from flowing
But you cannot stop a flood

They Keep coming! They Keep Coming!

From the Mississippi delta
To the Louisiana Bayou
Come the grandsons of the grandsons
of the kings of Timbuktu

They Keep coming! They Keep Coming!

From the Midwestern stockyards
and the arid western plains
Come the freedom seekers
And the breakers of the chains

They Keep coming! They Keep Coming!

From the ivied walls of Harvard
and the dark hallways of Harlem

They Keep coming! They Keep Coming!

Some by Underground Railroad,
Some by SST,
Some by mule-train,
Some by SUV

They Keep coming! They Keep Coming!

Running, Walking, Limping, Crawling,
Never stopping... just a-coming
They Keep coming!

With their humor and their laughter
and their rhythm and their blues,
With their jazz and gospel
and many varied hues
They keep coming!

With their dust mops and their tractors
and their soul food recipes,
With their dish rags and their hammers
and their Ph.D's.

They Keep coming! They Keep Coming!

The Nat Turners, Sojourner TRUTHS,
The Dunbars and the Wheatleys

and the Hansberrys and the Hughes
keep coming!

The Jackie Robinsons, the Medgar Evers,
The Schwerners, the Goodmans, the Chaney's,
The Fannie Lou Hamers
Keep coming!

The Malcolms, the Paul Robesons,
The Thurgood Marshalls,
The Martin Luther Kings
Keep coming!

They keep coming! They keep coming!

You can stop a train from running,
You can turn a stream aside,
You can stop an army coming,
But no man can stop the tide—

They keep coming!¹²

V. Songs for this Moment

When the Saints Go Marching In

O when the saints go marching in,
O when the saints go marching in,
Lord, I want to be in that number
When the saints go marching in.

O when the sun refuse to shine
O when the sun refuse to shine,
Lord, I want to be in that number
When the sun refuse to shine

O when the trumpet sounds the call
O when the trumpet sounds the call,
Lord, I want to be in that number
When the trumpet sounds the call.¹³

O, Look at the People

O, Look at the people.
O, Look at the people.
O, Look at the people (What they doing?)
Standing at the judgement 'bout to be tried.

I believe I see my mother
O, I believe I see my mother.

O, I believe I see my mother (What they doing?)
Standing at the judgement 'bout to be tried.
I believe I see my father
O, I believe I see my father.
O, I believe I see my father (What they doing?)
Standing at the judgement 'bout to be tried.¹⁴

* Bernice Johnson Reagon. "I Remember, I Believe." Special thanks to Dr. Reagon for the use of this song in print and audio.

Notes

1. Livingston, E.A., Ed. "All Saints Day." The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church. 3rd ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997.
2. "My Word: All Hallows' Eve." 30 October 2008. Episcopallife online. Online location: http://www.episcopalchurch.org/81834_102048_ENG_HTML.htm accessed 12 May 2009
3. "Second line" refers to a nineteenth century jazz funeral recessional from a burial site which featured lively, upbeat New Orleans jazz music, accompanied by dancing in a style evolved from an African dance called the "Bambula." The evolved dance itself is also called "second line" or "second lining."
4. Long, Carolyn Morrow. "The Lowdown on LaVeau." Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association 46.3 (Summer, 2005): 262-292. Excerpt's online location: [Frenchcreoles.com. http://www.frenchcreoles.com/LouisianaPeople/lowdownonlaveau/lowdownonlaveau2.htm](http://www.frenchcreoles.com/LouisianaPeople/lowdownonlaveau/lowdownonlaveau2.htm) accessed 12 May 2009
5. Ibid.
6. "Marie Laveau: Voodoo Queen/Faith Healer." The Mystic Voodoo. Online location: http://www.mysticvoodoo.com/marie_laveau.htm accessed 12 May 2009
7. Hirsi Ali, Ayaan. Infidel. New York, NY: Free Press, 2007.
8. "Negroes Flee Riot Region: Ocoee, Fla., Lacks Labor, Following Election Lynchings." The New York Times. 5 Nov. 1920. Online location: <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/abstract.html?res=9C0DEFDA1E30E433A25756C0A9679D946195D6CF> accessed 12 May 2009
9. Ibid.
10. Maxie Starks was one of two African American proprietors of Orlando funeral homes that catered to the African American community. His business was located in the neighborhood near the first African American settlement in Orlando, the county seat of Orange County.
11. "Remembering Rosewood." Displays for School, 1997-2012. Online location: <http://www.displaysforschools.com/history.html> accessed 12 May 2009
12. Grant, Micki. "They Keep Coming!" ©1971. Used by permission of the lyricist.
13. "When the Saints Go Marching In." African American Heritage Hymnal. Chicago, IL: GIA Publication, 2001. #595
14. "O' Look at the People." Negro Spiritual.