

A close-up portrait of a Black woman with her hair styled in intricate braids. The focus is on her eyes and the top of her head, with a soft, neutral background.

The Musical Activism of Sweet Honey in the Rock

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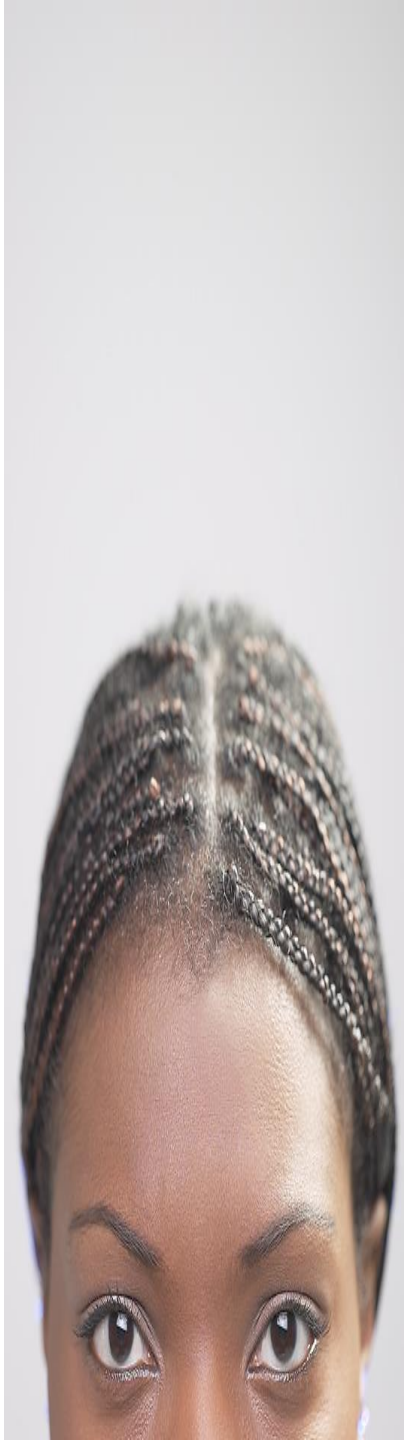
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In the beginning...

Sweet Honey in the Rock

7th Anniversary Concert November 7, 1988 Recorded Live All Souls Church Unitarian, Washington DC

GOOD NEWS

Andrew Carter, the late leader of the national liberation movement in music, "National Liberation And Culture" asserted that maintaining culture in the face of colonial/imperialist oppression is a revolutionary act; that "national liberation is essentially an act of culture." It is culture, finally, that holds the key of a people's history and determines their people's future.

How does this relate to five Black women who come together to sing under the name SWEET HONEY IN THE ROCK?

Taken individually, each of these women is a dynamic cultural warrior, relating histories of southern childhood, where life is black, civil rights (and civil, even darker), and being female: unworked, unbridled... loved... unloved... un-fulfilled.

Collectively, SWEET HONEY is a community-based political force.

Like bottom land, like the rich, fertile soil thrown upon the banks by the flooding of the Mississippi or the Nile, Sweet Honey in the Rock is the earth holding our roots, while nourishing the seeds of our future.

...vision which recognizes its responsibility to preserve and perpetuate cultural struggles, and serves as a voice for the resistance in this society.



Life has taught me never to hunger, for food, money and love. Mother preached, "Never Be Wantful." Through longevity, through fierce music, Sweet Honey in the Rock teach us well.

These women, sharing divergent vocal textures and life experiences, sing struggle and celebration, instruct in the fine art of survival and the daring to love.

The spectrum of Sweet Honey in the Rock's sound blends the traditional with the contemporary, the original with the familiar. It is music that speaks of warriors and victims, music speaking to all whose politics are life.

In these dangerous times, Sweet Honey in the Rock's gift is dangerous music. Are you prepared?

—Michelle Proctor

It was when that white man of the white house, and he chose rather abruptly, to live.

—Rajet Wilson

Witness this miracle. Stay for yourself! For your family especially.

The music of SWEET HONEY will pull you forward. There is a group which gives everyone a purpose for living.

—J. Elizabeth Miller

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—For Tony

SWEET HONEY speaks of the traveled paths and articulates the new needs of people, who by means of color, national origin, age, sex and economic status, are denied a hearing in the courts of the powerful. Whether it is the children of Alabama or the children of Senegal, political prisoners in Chile or political prisoners in North Carolina, whether it is the history of nuclear proliferation or the mistreatment that inflicts on refugee sexual preference, SWEET HONEY has more than a song to sing. SWEET HONEY delivers a message of elemental truths that connects the mind to faith and art.

It is our fortune that we now

SWEET HONEY IN THE ROCK—In Concert—Evelyn Marie Harris, Thane Marie Russell, Eunice Kiani Williams, Bernice Johnson Ringo

have the first recording of SWEET HONEY IN THE ROCK, for a collection, as best an impressive recording can, the organic and ever-evolving relationship SWEET HONEY has with the community out of which it continues to develop. As you will hear in this album, a SWEET HONEY concert is not merely a concert. There is no artificial separation between audience and performers. SWEET HONEY is the very thing the space, and singing listeners to send off the raptures that feed on its immediacy and become part of the whole.



Musicology

- <https://www.npr.org/2018/01/16/577690049/we-who-believe-in-freedom-shall-not-rest>



African Roots

- Denko:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7faPGXyp0u4>
- Fulani Chant
- Breaths:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2oE4Qatypjs>



African Retentions

Elements similar in African and African-American music

- call and response

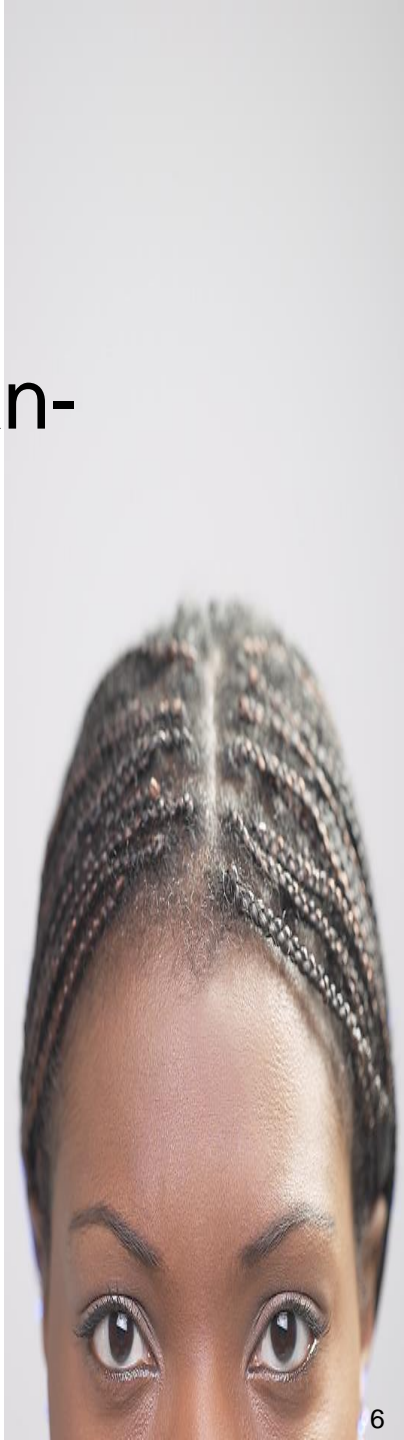
- heterophony, together but varied

- exaggerated tone

Added?

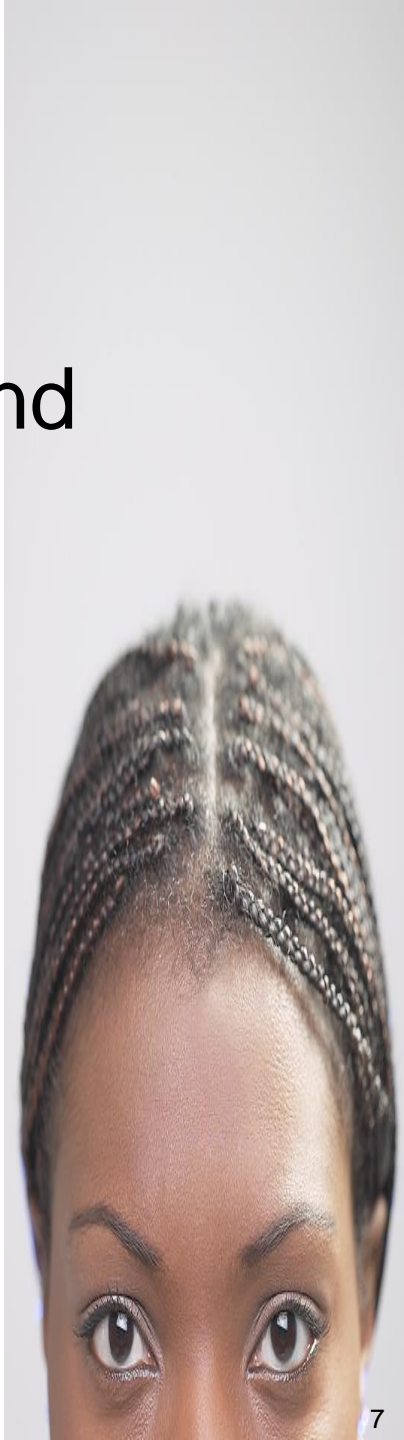
- harmony part above melody

- instrumentalized voice



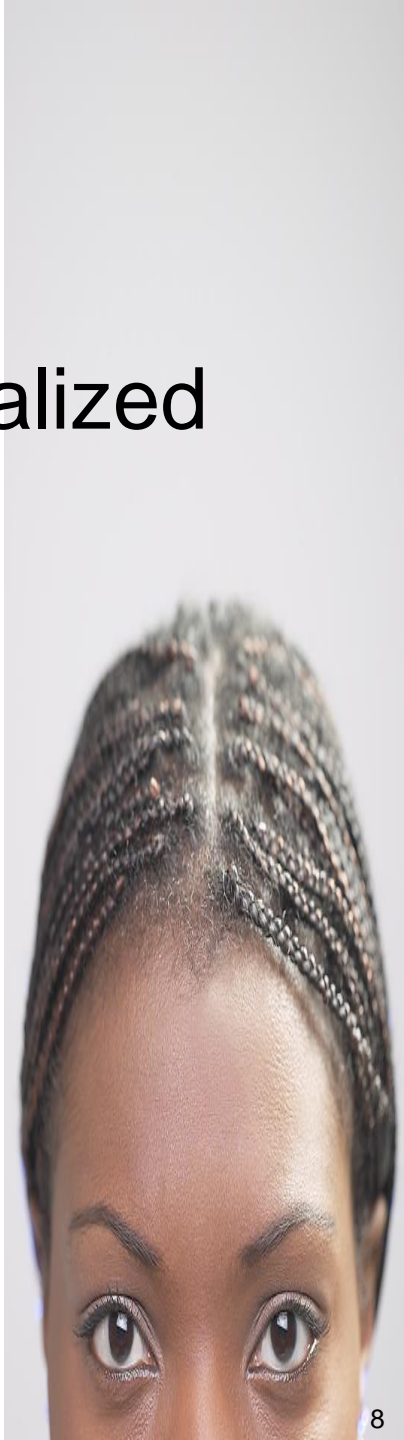
African Retentions

Dance of the Hunter-high flute, call and response, repeated harp (cora) bass
African field recording

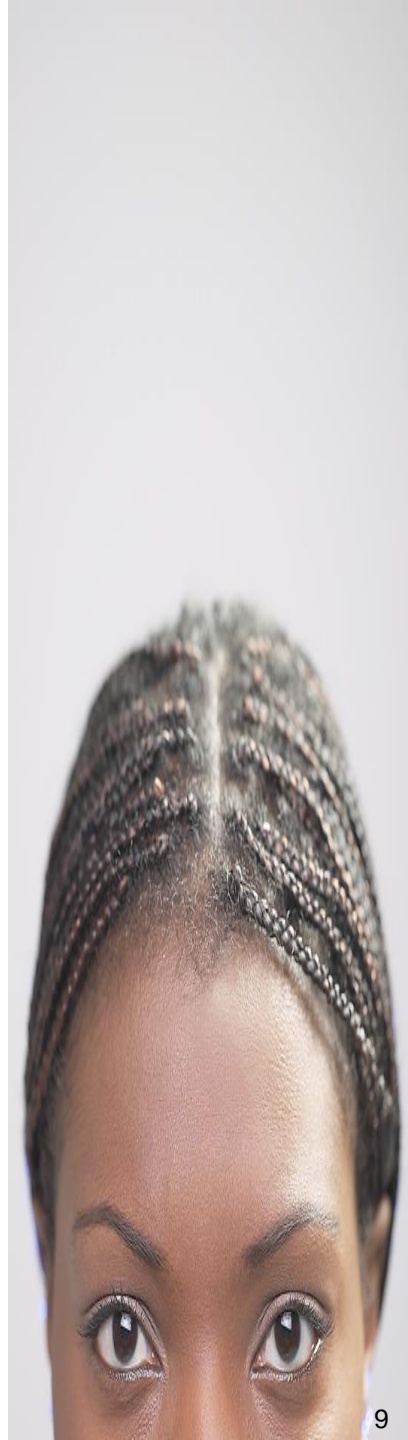


African Retentions

The Angels Bowed Down-Instrumentalized
voice, heterophony, 'chiming voices'
Fisk Jubilee Singers



Evolving



Social Justice

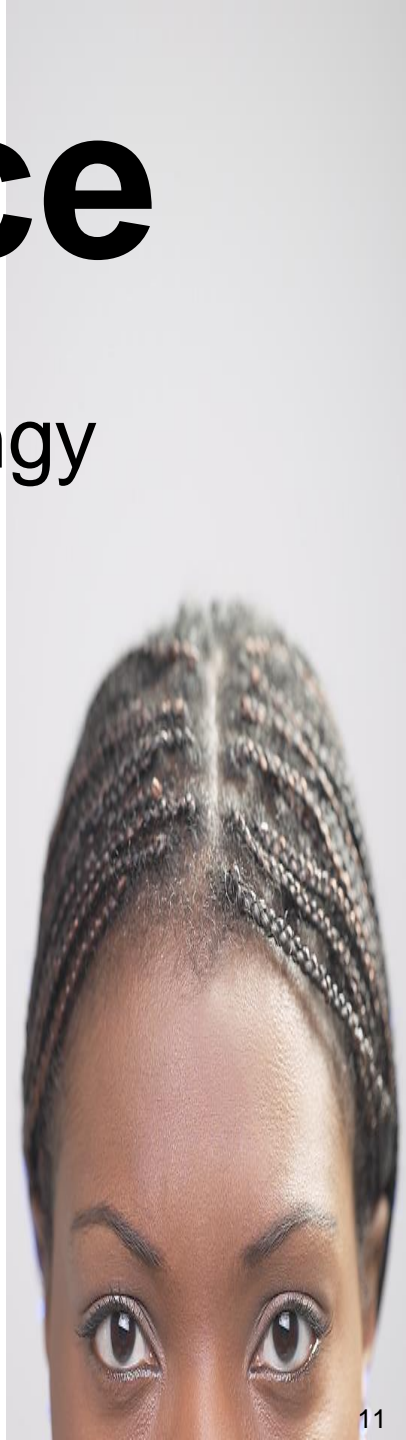
Moses-probably refers to Harriet Tubman, and a stop on the Underground Railroad “in some lonesome graveyard.”
Georgia Sea Island Singers



Social Justice

Ain't I Right-a commentary on a stingy master. Exaggerated tone, growls, exclamations.

Georgia Sea Island Singers



Gospel: Climate Change/Natural disasters?

- ❖ Beatitudes
- ❖ Run, Run, Mourner, Run:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UeBE2lh3xR8>
- ❖ Wade in the Water
- ❖ “Tis the Old Ship of Zion:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8t8JhGWMGw>
- ❖ In the Morning When I Rise:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZAJBZXIzKcY>



Women's Issues and Oppression: Bullying, Rape, and Murder

❖ Oughta Be a Woman:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OvG-GaE_MH0

❖ The Women Gather:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4iKNep3zURQ>

❖ No Mirrors in My Nana's House:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GD57KULelgg>



Social Justice

No More Auction Block-1st verse
heterophony, 2nd chiming in, 3rd call and
response, 4th exaggerated tone, growls.
Sweet Honey in the Rock
(Fisk Jubilee Singers tour of 1873)



Evolving

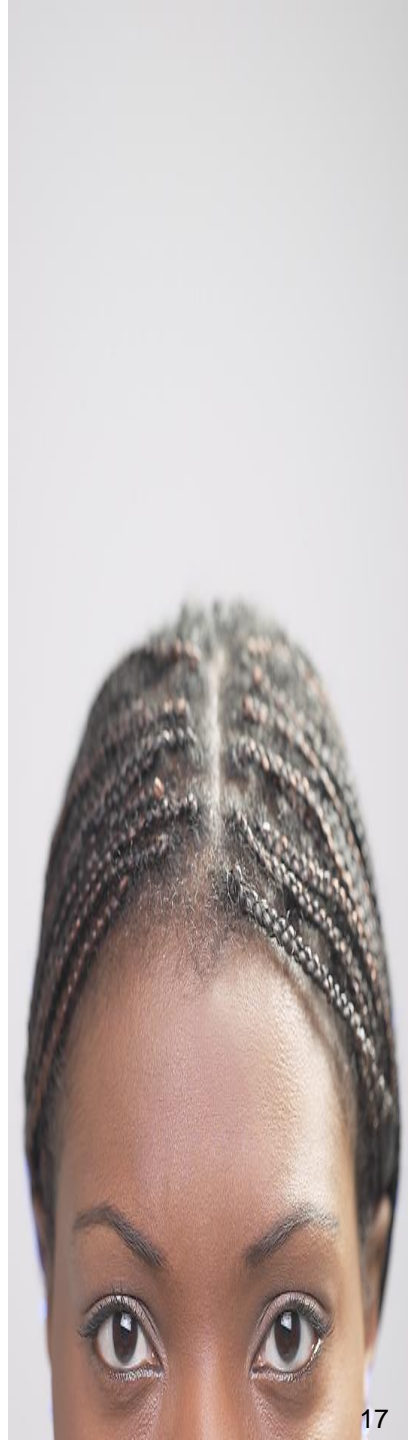
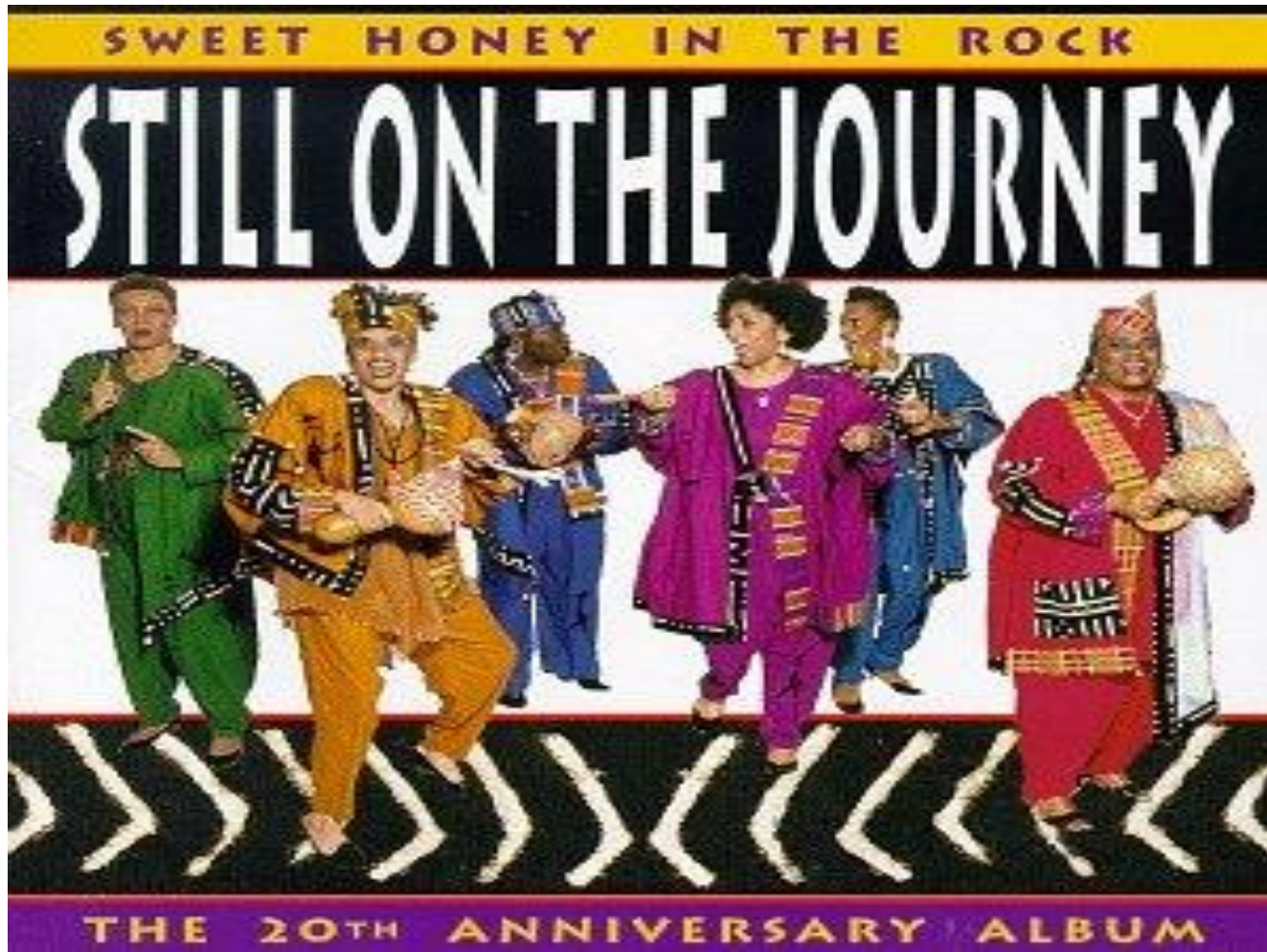


Working People and Environmental Justice: GenX, Flint, hog farms

- ❖ I Remember, I Believe:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sUAbHhIOYhE>
- ❖ Are There Any Rights I'm Entitled To?
- ❖ Poverty Train
- ❖ More Than a Paycheck:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A0tXz6p4xeA>



Evolving



International Social Justice

❖ Are My Hands Clean?

❖ Peace:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n0HWwOUIzKk>

❖ Chile Your Waters Run Red Through Soweto

❖ Biko



Evolving



American Social Justice: Whose Lives Matter?

I Remember, I Believe-instrumentalized
voice, high harmony, heterophony, and more
Sweet Honey in the Rock
(Bernice Johnson-Reagon)



American Social Justice: Whose Lives Matter?

- ❖ Letter to Dr. Martin Luther King
- ❖ Echo: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IGCYcl_Om1I
- ❖ Our Side Won
- ❖ We Shall Not Be Moved
- ❖ Fannie Lou Hamer
- ❖ Ella's Song: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U6Uus--gFrc>
- ❖ Give Your Hand to Struggle:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LV9Vf0a7YtM>



Evolution



“Let there be Peace”

- ❖ <https://www.bernicejohnsonreagon.com/>
- ❖ <http://www.openskyjazz.com/2013/04/ysaye-maria-barnwell-on-the-rich-sweet-honey-in-the-rock-legacy/>
- ❖ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FzICwz28qVw>

