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Review: 'If You Don't Go, Don't Hinder Me: The African American Sacred Song Tradition'

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If You Don't Go, Don't Hinder Me: The African American Sacred Song Tradition. By **Bernice Johnson Reagon**. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2001. x + 155 pp. \$30.00 cloth; \$15.00 paper.

In 1996, Bernice Johnson Reagon delivered a series of four lectures on African-American sacred music at the University of Nebraska, Lincoln. This book is the collection of those lectures. Reagon invites readers on a journey into a world of music that has the power to transform people, places, circumstances, and ultimately even a culture. Lyrically, she introduces the men and women, many famous and many known only in their local communities, who crafted, preserved, and taught this music, and used it to bring about social justice and to claim recognition and respect for black contributions to American culture, religious history, and experience. Reagon discusses African-American gospel music, congregational singing in the African-American tradition, the spirituals, and the freedom songs. And, she reflects on each genre as she learned it through her experience growing up in the church, her years as a freedom fighting singer in the struggle for civil rights, and as an historian working for the Smithsonian Institution. Her principal argument is that through their songs African Americans have transcended all manner of physical, psychological, and spiritual boundaries. In these essays, she shows how the sound of their voices lifted in praise for over four hundred years has gained for African Americans ever more territory to understand themselves and God. *If You Don't Go, Don't Hinder Me* is a marvelously engaging study that has a unique perspective on the significance of African American sacred music. Heartily, I recommend it for undergraduate and graduate courses on African-American religious history and experience.

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Western Challenge: The Presbyterian Church in Canada's Mission on the Prairies and North, 1885-1925. By **Peter Bush**. Winnipeg: J. Gordon Shillingford, 2000. 272 pp. 14 b/w photos. \$24.95 paper.

Peter Bush argues that during the first two decades of the twentieth century, the Presbyterian Church in Canada was committed to proselytization and grassroots church building and therefore became the "largest Christian denomination on the prairies" (9).

Presbyterian home missionaries exemplified fervor and zeal, and employed flexible and pragmatic methods in carrying out their work. As a result, they founded congregations within a variety of ethnic, racial, and religious communities; some especially macho and adventuresome missionaries even followed the Klondike Trail. The 1925 formation of the United Church divided Presbyterians (one-third of the congregations voted against joining). Bush suggests that home mission leaders did not support organic union because they did not believe it beneficial to missions and thought that sufficient interdenominational cooperation was already occurring.

Western Challenge uses appropriate archival collections, denominational records, and secondary source materials. Despite the fact that three chapters were previously published as articles, there is little internal repetition. The book and endnotes are generally well edited. Parts of Bush's work, however (especially the afterword), exhibit an unfortunate level of denominational