



ASSOCIATION FOR THE STUDY OF AFRICAN AMERICAN LIFE AND HISTORY

301 RHODE ISLAND AVENUE, NW | SUITE 2204 | WASHINGTON, DC 20001
202.238.5910 | ASALH.ORG

ASALH Remembers John Henry Bracey Jr.

In the month that holds special space for the history and heritage of people of African descent in the United States, one of the greatest teachers, builders, and advocates for the study of African American life and history has begun his journey into history as an ancestor. John Henry Bracey Jr. was a lifetime member of the Association for the Study of African American Life and History (ASALH), but his path to becoming a historian was not a straight line.

At fifteen, Bracey discovered *The Souls of Black Folk* flipping through the stacks in the Moorland-Spangarn Research Center. His mother, Helen, a member of the faculty of the College of Liberal Arts at Howard University and on the editorial staff of *The Journal of Negro Education*, was thrilled to find him taking an interest in history and the work of the great writer and activist. He grew up knowing and talking with scholars like Sterling Brown, E. Franklin Frazier, Chancellor Williams, Frank M. Snowden, Rayford Logan, and many others. In March of 1958, the young Bracey came from high school to go with his mother to Rankin Chapel to hear Dr. W.E.B. DuBois give the speech, "A history of the last forty years," interpreting the years from 1917 to 1957. Bracey recalls wanting to be out having fun, but ultimately being grateful to his mother for insisting that he attend the address. The next year he attended Howard but did not find it possible to come into his own on the campus where his mother worked. Instead, he returned to Chicago where he was born and attended Roosevelt University. It is there he studied with St. Clair Drake, Lorenzo Turner and August Meier, and with his fellow students organized a grassroots community of practice focused on Negro History. Doing this work he met Malcolm X and from their shared interest in Black history led him to deepened his involvement in the insurgent movement surging across the country.

It was in the 1960s that John became an active member of ASALH, attending local and annual national meetings and presenting papers. Together with Darlene Clark Hine and others he headlined a brown-bag lunch session on "maneuvering through graduate school and jumping the hurdles of junior-facultyhood." It became such a staple of the ASALH conference that in more recent years the session was named the Dr. Felix Armfield Series for Emerging Scholars and Leaders. He was very generous of his time with people and such a raconteur that when you sat down with him hours could go by before you realized it. He taught through his stories by making historical facts and analyses come to life.

In scholarship, Bracey's emerged with the African American freedom struggle of the 1960s to challenge the dominance of white supremacist historical narratives. He emphasized the need to locate, preserve, and disseminate primary source materials that were being trashed and lost. His co-edited volumes, such as *Black Nationalism in America* (1970) made available to researchers the words and ideas that today are being studied and written about. His award-winning "African American Women and the Vote: 1837-1965" (1997), an essay on seeing John Coltrane live, introductions to books by C.L.R. James and Muhammad Ahmad, and his *SOS/Calling All Black People: A Black Arts Movement Reader* attest to his wide-ranging expertise and interests. The National Council for Black Studies bestowed on him the Paul Robeson-Zora Neal Hurston Celebrated Elder Award for Outstanding

ASALH MISSION

To promote, research, preserve, interpret and disseminate information about Black life, history and culture to the global community.



ASSOCIATION FOR THE STUDY OF AFRICAN AMERICAN LIFE AND HISTORY

301 RHODE ISLAND AVENUE, NW | SUITE 2204 | WASHINGTON, DC 20001
202.238.5910 | ASALH.ORG

Leadership and Service in the Promotion of Black Studies (2016), The College of Wooster conferred on him the Doctor of Humane Letters degree (2013) and ASALH gave him an Executive Council Award of Special Recognition (2008).

John Bracey's presence will be missed at future ASALH events as well as on his home campus, the University of Massachusetts, where he taught for half a century and helped to create the second PhD-degree granting Department of Afro-American studies. His legacy, however, endures in the many thousands of students he taught and mentored, as well as his editorial work on the Black Studies Research Sources (LexisNexis), which includes the Papers of the NAACP, Amiri Baraka, the Revolutionary Action Movement, A. Phillip Randolph, Mary McLeod Bethune, the National Association of Colored Women's Clubs, and the Papers of Horace Mann Bond. As DuBois imagined Alexander Crummell being greeted in a celestial scene, so may we write of Bracey and say, "Well done!"

ASALH MISSION

To promote, research, preserve, interpret and disseminate information about Black life, history and culture to the global community.