



DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

December 15, 2016

Dear Gerry:

I am very pleased to hear about your documentary film project on Dr. Reginald Scott. Over the past four years, Reggie has become a friend and mentor. I have been enthralled by his captivating life and his determined efforts to document and preserve the history of his family and community.

Reggie is a person who defies expectations and categories. Born into a prominent family in the Arsenal Hill neighborhood of Columbia South Carolina, Scott decided early on to escape the rarefied confines of the African American bourgeoisie. On the contrary, he became a man of the people, a cool renegade, an educated renaissance man—who was at ease hobnobbing with the intelligentsia and hustling in the streets.

Trained as a dentist, Reggie never lost his passion for jazz. To see him now, we catch a glimpse of what life must have been like during the bopping age of Parker, Coltrane, and Miles Davis. Although skilled in medicine, Reggie also perfected exceptional writing skills and penned a series of short stories, magazine articles, and academic publications focused on jazz music and African American life during the Jim Crow Era. As a college professor, he also helped develop the field of African American Studies in the 1960s.

Now in his late 80s, Reggie's mind and gait are sharp and precise. He has a story to tell. He is the last of a long line of people who called Arsenal Hill (a proud African American enclave) home. Reggie has a story to tell about the countless guests and tourists who resided in the house built by his grandparents, Mr. and Mrs. John Cornwell. His grandfather was a prominent barber on Main Street, and his mother and aunt worked in the public school system. Reggie has stories to tell about the legendary Booker T. Washington High School. He has a story to tell about businesses, clubs, dives, churches, and community institutions. He has stories to tell about the dark shadow of segregation and the bold efforts of his neighbors to uproot the tangled vestiges of white supremacy. And he has a story to tell about his own life---an accomplished career cut short by terrible tragedy.

Reggie's remarkable journey should be chronicled. As a historian and a witness and agent of change, he has a way of bringing the past to life, a way of giving voice, context, and texture to places, events, and personalities. He has been an incredible resource for journalists, scholars, and most recently for a group of students enrolled in one of my civil rights courses at USC.

I have thoroughly enjoyed working with Reggie over the past four years, and I look forward to seeing your documentary project.

All the best,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Bobby J. Donaldson'.

Bobby J. Donaldson
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