

Odetta (b.12/31/1930, d.12/2/2008) Odetta Holmes, simply known as Odetta, was born on December 31, 1930 in Birmingham Alabama. After the death of her father while still a child, Odetta and her mother moved to Los Angeles in 1937. After hearing her sing, one of Odetta's grammar school teachers insisted that Odetta's mother sign her up for classical training. After finishing high school she continued to Los Angeles City College to study music. After graduating from college, Odetta landed a role in the chorus of a traveling production of *Finian's Rainbow*. She fell in love with folk music when, after a show in San Francisco, she experienced a late-night folk music session. After being touched by those songs she said, "I borrowed a guitar and learned three chords, and started to sing at parties." In 1953, she moved to New York City and soon became a fixture at Manhattan's famed Blue Angel nightclub. "As I did those songs, I could work on my hate and fury without being antisocial," she said. "Through those songs, I learned things about the history of black people in this country that the historians in school had not been willing to tell us about or had lied about."

She recorded her first solo album, *Odetta Sings Ballads and Blues*, in 1956, and it became an instant classic in American folk music. Bob Dylan later cited that album as the record that first turned him on to folk music. In 1960, Odetta delivered a famed concert at Carnegie Hall and released a live recording of the performance. These were her most prolific years, as she would record more than a dozen albums during that time. During that decade, she lent her powerful voice to the cause of black equality—so often so that her music came to be called the "soundtrack of the Civil Rights Movement." In 1963, during the March on Washington, Odetta gave the most iconic performance of her life: Singing from the steps of the Lincoln Memorial after an introduction by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Although her popularity would wane after the 1960's, she would record several more albums over the remaining four decades of her life. Her highly acclaimed final album, a live recording performed when she was 74 years old, was entitled *Gonna Let It Shine* (2005). Odetta continued performing right up until almost the day of her death on December 2, 2008, at the age of 77. She had dreamed of performing at the inauguration of President Barack Obama, but tragically passed away just weeks before he took office.