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Preserving the Negro spiritual: a case study of Wings Over Jordan Celebration Chorus

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PRESERVING THE NEGRO SPIRITUAL:

A CASE STUDY OF WINGS OVER JORDAN CELEBRATION CHORUS

by

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my parents, William Reid, Jr., (1932–2015) and Mattie Belle Williams Reid, who supported me and all their four children in our academic pursuits and sacrificed much so that we could pursue our dreams.

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ABSTRACT

This case study provides a holistic, qualitative, and ethnographic examination of the Wings Over Jordan Celebration Chorus in its dedication and commitment to preserving the Negro spiritual and the history embedded in these songs. The elements of critical race theory provide an interpretative framework to examine the role of race in the identity of the chorus. This dissertation documents the activities and experiences of members of this historical African American chorus, founded by Maestro Glenn A. Brackens in 1988, to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the legacy and history of the original Wings Over Jordan Choir, founded in 1938 by the late Rev. Glenn T. Settle of Gethsemane Baptist Church of Cleveland, Ohio.

The purposes of this study are to: 1) examine the reasons why members of the Wings Over Jordan Celebration Chorus have chosen to preserve the Negro spiritual, 2) to investigate the musical activities and experiences in which members of the Wings Over Jordan Celebration Chorus and Wings Over Jordan Alumni and Friends, Inc. have engaged to preserve the Negro spiritual and 3) to examine the critical role racial identity has played in the motivation and valuation for preservation of Negro spirituals by Wings Over Jordan Celebration Chorus.

Interviews and focus group meetings conducted with members of the Wings Over Jordan Celebration Chorus and its administrative body, Wings Over Jordan Alumni and Friends, Inc., provided evidence that the preservation of Negro spirituals through this organization takes place through performance, education, and documentation. Interviews conducted with Maestro Glenn A. Brackens revealed his philosophy related to performance practices and vision for the future of this chorus. The debate on how to best perform Negro spirituals was also considered.

Findings from the research indicate the critical role racial identity has on the motivation and valuation for preservation of Negro spirituals by members of this chorus. Cultural identity and community identity share both a link and a direct connection to the choir's collective identity as an African American chorus. The identification of the chorus encompasses its mission to celebrate its musical heritage and inspire future generations to do the same. This dissertation shares the steps the chorus has taken to fulfill this mission.

Implications for music education and suggestions for future research include investigation of the activities and experiences of other choral groups that have yet to be documented, to find innovative ways to bridge the gap between generations to preserve the history and meaning of the Negro spirituals and their relevance for today's world, and to collaborate with scholars in various fields to create culturally relevant music curricula inclusive of Negro spirituals.

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The Beginning of Something Great

The purpose of this dissertation is to tell the story of the Wings Over Jordan Celebration Chorus of Cleveland, Ohio, in its efforts to preserve the Negro spiritual. The Wings Over Jordan Celebration Chorus celebrates the legacy of the original, world-renowned Wings Over Jordan Choir of Cleveland, Ohio, its founder, Rev. Glenn T. Settle, and the legacy of the Negro spiritual.

On Saturday, June 11, 1988, at the Cuyahoga Community College Metropolitan Campus near downtown Cleveland, Ohio, the Wings Over Jordan Celebration Chorus held its debut concert entitled "Wings Over Jordan Remembered by Alumni and Friends 50th Year Anniversary Celebration." This concert marked a new beginning in the history of music in the Greater Cleveland Area and in the lives of members of the Wings Over Jordan Celebration Chorus and Wings Over Jordan Alumni and Friends, Inc.

The members of the Wings Over Jordan Celebration Chorus and its conductor and artistic director, Maestro Glenn A. Brackens, actively uphold the motto of the original Wings Over Jordan Choir, *That Which is Worthy Must Be Preserved*. Under the direction of Maestro Brackens, the Wings Over Jordan Celebration Chorus wholeheartedly continues this legacy of preservation with Maestro Brackens' often verbalized mission, understood as, "keep the spiritual alive by any means necessary."

Wings Over Jordan Choir: "That Which Is Worthy Must Be Preserved"

Rev. Glenn T. Settle founded the original Wings Over Jordan Choir from the Senior Choir of Gethsemane Baptist Church in 1937, after becoming the church's pastor in 1935. The Senior Choir, under the direction of James Tate and accompanied by pianist Williette Firmbanks Thompson (the first pianist and assistant director for Wings, and the first American woman to direct a choir nationally and internationally), debuted July 11, 1937, on WGAR Radio Cleveland on *The Negro Hour*. The broadcast was so successful that on Sunday, January 9, 1938, under the choral direction of radio station manager Worth Kramer, the choir debuted nationally on Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS) from WGAR, Cleveland, Ohio, with its new name inspired by Rev. Settle, Wings Over Jordan (Barber, 1979, pp. 39-40).

Wings[1] was most active on CBS' *The National Negro Hour* radio program from 1938 to 1947. They became internationally renowned, performing concerts before kings, queens, Pope Pius XII in Rome, for Eleanor Roosevelt at the White House, and in Chicago with Marian Anderson (Barber, 1979; Barber, 2001, The Wings Over Jordan Foundation, Inc.).

Wings had a unique reputation for promoting unity between Blacks[2] and Whites at the time of Jim Crow laws in the United States. They refused to sing before segregated audiences (Floyd, 1995, p, 171), and they were "goodwill ambassadors" who also sang for American troops overseas. The theme song for Wings, the Negro spiritual "Go Down,

[1] It is customary to refer to Wings Over Jordan simply as Wings. This designation will be used throughout this dissertation. (N.B. Today, 2019, the entire organization is referred to as "Wings," but within this dissertation, the contemporary organization will be referred to as "Celebration Chorus.")
[2] The term Black will be used interchangeably with African American.

Moses," "served as a unifying musical device or as a choral motto" (Barber, 1979, pp. 45-46). As a theme song or choral motto, "Go Down, Moses" was an appropriate choice, for it possesses a spirit of nobility, grandeur, majesty, and exaltation (Johnson & Johnson, 1969, p. 131). The song conveys freedom from one's enemies or captors, and in this specific Biblical case, freedom of the Israelites from the Egyptians (Johnson & Johnson, 1969, p. 20). In addition, Wings used a chordal thematic introit which they "oohed" as a unifying voice. As Turner-Thompson (2014) attested, "Wings Over Jordan had a famous introit [Credo Theme] which they chanted with 'oohs and ahs' to segue to their next song. This introit is familiar today to anyone who remembers the Wings A Cappella Choir" (pp. 25-26). The Wings Over Jordan Celebration Chorus (Celebration Chorus) continues the tradition of singing the theme song and introit.

Origin of the Name *Wings Over Jordan*

In African American Christendom, there is a belief among some that when one dies, there is a metaphorical river—the River Jordan—that one crosses over into heaven. Thus, the name *Wings Over Jordan*, as a designation for the choral group, has significant meaning. Barber (1979) shared that Wings Over Jordan, as envisaged by the Rev. Glenn T. Settle, was "the choir of angels God's children heard as they crossed from earth to heaven" (p. 19). The naming of Wings Over Jordan for this choir is attributed to Rev. Settle, following the Senior Choir's (Gethsemane Baptist Church) promotion from a local WGAR radio station choir to a national CBS radio choir.

Enslaved Africans welcomed death (crossing the River Jordan into heaven) in order to be released from their oppressors. Baraka (2002) made the following point about death as the ultimate freedom for slaves, who identified with Jewish people in song:

> The religious imagery of the Negro's Christianity is full of references to the suffering and hopes of the oppressed Jews of Biblical times. Many of the Negro spirituals reflect this identification: "Go Down, Moses," "I'm Marching to Zion," "Walk into Jerusalem Just Like John," etc. "Crossing the river Jordan" meant not only death but also the entrance into the very real heaven and a release from an earthly bondage; it came to represent all the slave's yearnings to be freed from the inhuman yoke of slavery. (p. 40)

Moreover, in the opening paragraph of a May 18, 1941, *Newsweek* article, "Wings Over Jordan: A Negro with Ideas Builds a Sustainer into an Air Hit," the source for the appellation Wings Over Jordan is crystallized:

> When a Negro dies, it is said that he has crossed the River Jordan. This famed stream is thought of as the dividing line between this earth and the promised eternal reward. In days of slavery, freedom could be obtained only through death, and around the Biblical promises of an eternal reward, songs were sung in plantation cabins, denoting faith in eternity—a place of music, happiness, and enjoyment of the Lord's presence. One passed from this earth into eternity. It was his hope that he would hear the winged chorus of angels, singing the praises of the Most High, calling the earth-worn traveler to his place of rest. Hence, Wings Over Jordan, the choir of angels God's children will hear as they cross from earth to heaven. (Cited in McGee, 2007, p. 50)

For the generation that grew up listening to their music on the radio or seeing them perform, the connotation of the name *Wings Over Jordan* was a source of national pride. The name Wings Over Jordan carried weight and was associated with excellence in sacred choral music for many Americans. Thus, the identity of the Celebration Chorus had already been well established, as this group continues to revitalize the Negro spiritual and to make a name for itself.

Preserving the Legacy: The Founding of Wings Over Jordan Celebration Chorus

The first catalyst to form the Celebration Chorus emerged when Maestro Glenn Brackens, Artistic Director and Conductor of the Celebration Chorus, had a conversation sometime in 1987 with his grandmother, Persie Ford, who was one of the last remaining founding members of Wings. In this conversation, he expressed the need for a celebration of the founding of the original group. The other catalyst for the celebration of Wings was expressed in the letter dated July 5, 1988, to Dr. Samuel Barber, the definitive and authoritative scholar on Wings Over Jordan. This document substantiates the fact that Dr. Barber initiated the idea of a celebration about 1986. The letter was written and sent by Rose Simmons, member of the Program Committee, to Mr. Glenn H. Settle, General Chairman. The letter contained glowing words regarding the success of what would become the inaugural concert of the Wings Over Jordan Celebration Chorus of Cleveland, Ohio, under the direction of Maestro Glenn Brackens.

Maestro Glenn Brackens picked up the gauntlet to continue and expand the main mission of Wings, which was to preserve the legacy of the Negro spiritual through performance and education. Because much research has already been conducted on the original parent group, Wings Over Jordan, an in-depth study of the activities and experiences of the Wings Over Jordan Celebration Chorus was warranted and worthy of merit.

The catalyst for the formation of the Celebration Chorus was prompted by the independent but concurrent actions of both Maestro Glenn Brackens and Dr. Samuel Barber. Each was unaware of the other's vision to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the

debut of Wings Over Jordan across the radio airwaves of the Columbia Broadcasting System (personal communication, Dr. Samuel Barber and Maestro Glenn Brackens, October 9, 2017). Although the idea of forming a chorus to celebrate the 50th anniversary of Wings Over Jordan's national radio debut in 1938 is attributed to Maestro Brackens, the most important thing is that the concert came to fruition on June 11, 1988.

The debut of the Celebration Chorus in June 1988 proved to be "the beginning of something great," as one of the participants in this research study stated. The Wings Over Jordan Alumni and Friends, Inc. (WOJAF), the administration dimension of the organization, became incorporated on September 21, 1988. The organization as a whole comprises the Celebration Chorus and the WOJAF. Both groups are guided by the same constitution and bylaws. The Celebration Chorus consists of singers and musicians from the Greater Cleveland Area who desire to make the purpose of the organization become a reality. All choir members of the Celebration Chorus automatically become members of WOJAF, which is governed by an executive board and a board of trustees.

A Gift to the Nation

Du Bois, Locke, and Washington, three distinguished African American scholars, concur with the elevated position of the Negro spiritual as a great and distinctive gift to the nation (Du Bois, 1903/2007; Locke, 1936/1969; Washington, cited in Coleridge-Taylor, 1905/1980). Collectively, their opinions support the argument that the Negro spiritual is an American cultural heritage worthy of performance, preservation, and restoration. In *The Souls of Black Folk*, Du Bois (1903/2007) eloquently made the following statement about this great gift to the nation:

> And so, by fateful chance the Negro folk-song—the rhythmic cry of the slave—stands to-day not simply as the sole American music, but as the most beautiful expression of human experience born this side of the seas. It has been neglected, it has been, and is, half despised, and above all it has been persistently mistaken and misunderstood, but notwithstanding, it still remains as the singular heritage of the nation and the greatest gift of the Negro people. (p. 322)

Locke (1936/1969) offered similar commentary but noted the universal appeal of the Negro spiritual to the whole world:

> The spirituals are the most characteristic product of Negro genius to date. They are its great folk-gift, and rank among the classic folk expressions in the whole world because of their moving simplicity, their characteristic originality, and their universal appeal. (p. 18)

Locke goes on to explain that this priceless heritage is in need of restoration, dignity, and respect:

> These "sorrow songs" are more than a priceless heritage from the racial past, they are promising material for the Negro music of the future. And they are the common possession of all, part of the cultural currency of the land, as their popularity and universal appeal only too clearly proves. A "Society for the Preservation of Spirituals," organized in Charleston, S.C. by a white singing organization, is a striking symbol of this common duty to restore them to dignity and respect. (p. 25)

Similarly, Coleridge-Taylor (1905/1980) cited Booker T. Washington who stated, "the race as a whole realizes that apart from the music of the Red Man [*sic*], the Negro folk-song is the only distinctively American music and is taking pride in using and preserving it" (p. ix). As these authors have argued, the Negro spiritual represents a tremendous gift to the United States.

Descriptions and Definition of the Negro Spiritual

Negro spirituals have been "called by many names depending largely upon who is the author of the nomenclature . . . and the Spirituals have traditionally been an umbrella for many cries and expressions of the human spirit in bondage. *In Bondage!*" (Walker, 1979, p. 43, emphasis in original). They have been labeled as slave songs, slave hymns, plantation melodies, plantation songs, plantation hymns, cabin songs, Negro folk songs, religious, minstrel, sorrow songs, jubilee songs, African American spirituals, spirituals (lower case), Spirituals (upper case), and even Aframerican religious folksongs, a phrase created by famous tenor Roland Hayes (Caldwell, 2003, p. 1; Walker, 1979; Reagon, 1994, p. 11).

In this dissertation, I have chosen to use the traditional term *Negro spiritual* in addition to the commonly used *Spiritual* and *spiritual* to specify the sacred African American folksongs first conceived during slavery in the United States ca. 1760 (Lovell, 1972; Walker, 1979; Caldwell, 1995). Jones and Jones (2001) shared, "While some later forms of black music have not been as manifestly religious as the spirituals, the unequivocally soulful character of virtually all black American music can reasonably be traced to the template laid down in the slave spirituals" (p. 8). Although the term *Negro spiritual* may raise discomfort for some readers, it is commonly used as a designated music genre within the Black community, including music departments of historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs), the Black church, the National Association of Negro Musicians (NANM), performing artists, and composers.

Negro spirituals may be described as "Negro religious songs, sung by a group,

and a group bent on expression of feelings and not on sound effects" (Hurston, 1981, p. 80). Johnson and Johnson (1925/1926/1969) substantiate the agreement between scholars in their description of the Negro spiritual as "true folksongs and originally intended for group singing" (p. 21).

The Oral Tradition of the Negro Spiritual

In the tradition of folksongs, generations of enslaved Africans preserved Negro spirituals by passing them down from one generation to the next through singing (Reagon, 2001; Southern, 1997). Reed-Walker (2008) defines the oral tradition succinctly as, "the traditional process of preserving, recording, and retaining in memory information of a culture, and the subsequent verbal or oral transference of the information" (p. 10). The oral tradition is a characteristic of all folksongs, the majority of which are composed anonymously. The slaves sang their way through their suffering, and in so doing, passed this legacy down to successive generations. Fisher (1990) asserted, "the chief concern of African music was to recite the history of the people" (p. 1). The oral tradition of enslaved Africans revealed the fertile minds of people who used the songs as a creative form of communication with one another. Whalum (1973) also asserted:

> The music of the oral tradition was a utilitarian music, that is, it aimed at usefulness rather than beauty. It served the needs of the makers. It also reveals, in the peculiar period beginning about 1800, that the minds of the makers were extremely clever and keen in perceiving an increased manner of communication with their fellows. (p. 350)

Graham (2012) explained that the ancestor to the Negro spiritual was the ring shout. She wrote that:

> Over time the ring songs (which became known as ring shouts), wandering refrains, and improvisations coalesced into a body of song that became known as spirituals. By the late 1810s, blacks began holding their own separate camp meetings (which whites sometimes attended), and spirituals were the songs they sang" (part 1, para 5)

According to Walker (1979), the oral tradition of North America was steeped in African customs that encompassed aspects of the whole life as "the transmission by word of mouth through ceremony, song, drum, and folk wisdom of the mores, customs, and religious rites of African peoples that persisted through the Atlantic slave trade and influenced the worship form and patterns of Afro-Americans" (p. 27). Whalum (1973) further asserted, "The oral tradition in the Black community begins to end in 1867 with the presence of schools and the strong institutional churches and their new role of educating Black people" (p. 341). I suggest that Whalum chose the year 1867 for the end of the oral tradition of enslaved Africans, because that was the year when Negro spirituals were first notated in *Slave Songs of the United States*. This compilation of 136 melodies with lyrics was collected and edited by Northern abolitionists William Francis Allen, Charles Pickard Ware, and Lucy McKim Garrison.

The oral tradition, the first line of defense for preserving Negro spirituals, revealed the creative minds of the enslaved African. Negro spirituals proved difficult to notate because the singers hardly sang them the same way twice; thus, different versions of the same song were sometimes preserved. Courlander (1995) made the following statement regarding notation of the spirituals in the preface to *Slave Songs of the United States*:

> The notations in the book, and of course the words, were set down mouth-to-ear by hand, the only way then known. Allen, Ware and Garrison put

> down what they heard or seemed to hear, usually trying to fit the rhythms into our established measures, frequently ignoring those purposive (not accidental) tones that were higher or lower than our usual scales allowed. In their earnest efforts to get everything down "right," they often had a singer repeat a song, only to find that a second singing was a little different. It was the beginning of an understanding that the tradition allowed the singer to perform a piece a little differently if he [*sic*] so wished. The small improvisations here and there might even enhance group singing. Melodies, as well as timing, were not set in stone. (Preface, 3rd para.)

Oral transmission represented a survival tool by which enslaved Africans preserved the singing of Negro spirituals, passing them and the history they represented, down to successive generations. Southern (1997) stated that, "almost every contemporaneous source contains references to slaves born in Africa who helped to keep African traditions alive in their communities during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries" (p. 185).

Finally, Bernim and Maultsby (2006) pointed out that:

> because they were not inducted into the iterate world of their White masters, antebellum slaves, like their African forebears, lived in a world of sound in which the spoken, chanted, sung, or shouted word was the primary form of communication…[B]ecause the slaves' cultural roots were in an African sacred worldview that never drew modernity's clear line between the religious and the secular, music of what was sung in both house and field were spirituals . . . Spirituals also testify to the continuation of a strong sense of community. (pp. 588-589)

In this way, the oral tradition of the Negro spiritual provided a way in which enslaved Africans could effectively communicate their pain in the face of bondage. The oral tradition of the Negro spiritual enabled continual dialogue (Burnim & Maultsby, 2006), which facilitated a sense of community. Moreover, the oral tradition, a carryover tradition brought to the United States by the enslaved Africans (Jones 1993/2005), was carried on through the Negro spirituals.

Origin of the Term *Spiritual*

The term *spiritual* is derived from the King James Bible translation of Ephesians 5:19: "Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord." Similarly, Colossians 3:16 states: "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord." Thus, the Bible serves as the origin for the term *spiritual* based upon those scriptures . . . Nathaniel Dett shared, "no one knows *how* the spirituals came to be known by that name, but it seems impossible to suggest a better one" (Dett cited in Spencer, 1991, p. 100, emphasis added). Similarly, Southern (1997) pointed out that it is not known exactly how these slave songs became known as spirituals, but that the Bible is the source for appellation:

> It is not known precisely when the term *spiritual* was first used in print to apply to the religious folksongs of the black American. Obviously, the term points back to the three species of sacred song early set up in the history of Protestantism——psalms, hymns, and spirituals——which, in turn points to the Scriptures. (pp. 180-181)

Dett also noted that the name *spiritual* comes from the root of the word which signifies the enslaved were "moved by 'the spirit'" (Spencer, 1991, p. 100). Regarding the inspiration for the composing of spirituals by enslaved Africans, Bell (1995a) stated, "the Bible was often their primer as well as the primary access to their adopted religion, Christianity" (p. 909).

The Negro Spiritual and Divergent Perspectives of its Birthplace

The Negro spirituals are generally thought to have been conceived on plantations in the south as enslaved Africans sang to help endure hours of arduous labor. The spirituals were sung in secret arbor bush or brush meetings, where the slaves found opportunity to pull away from the purview of their slave masters to worship in the "invisible church" (Lovell, 1972, p. 189; Walker, 1979, p. 19; Work, 1969); however, the late African American scholar Southern (1972) proposed that the Negro spiritual was originally birthed in Northern independent Black churches, away from the influence of the White church, and thus where slaves were uninhibited and could worship freely:

> One of the established myths about spirituals is that the songs were born on plantations of the South, invented by the slaves as they labored in the cotton fields under the blazing sun. To be sure, southern slaves did sing spirituals. But all evidence suggests that the song type originated in the independent Black churches of the North where Black congregations, freed from the supervision of White clergymen, could conduct their religious services as they wished. (p. 11)

Southern's (1972) opinion, however, is not the prevalent one among scholars, most of whom believe that the Negro spiritual had its origin on southern plantations by enslaved Africans in the throes of hard labor and cruel degradation. This viewpoint is confirmed by Washington, who posited:

> Wherever companies of Negroes were working together, in the cotton fields and tobacco factories, on the levees and steamboats, on sugar plantations, and chiefly in the fervor of religious gatherings, these melodies sprang into life. Oftentimes in slavery, as today in certain parts of the South, some man or woman with an exceptional voice was paid to lead the singing, the idea being to increase the amount of labor by such singing. (cited in Coleridge-Taylor, 1905/1980, p. viii)

Despite divergent views, most scholars readily assert the Negro spiritual was

birthed by enslaved Africans without White collaboration, even though influence from White Protestantism was inevitable (Baraka, 2002, p. 18). African elements were dominant in Negro spirituals, including call and response, rhythmic syncopation, and body movement instead of prohibited drumming (Southern, 1997; Work, 1998) into which enslaved Africans infused their original, emotional, and heartfelt folk songs. As Graham (2012) discussed, the ban on African drums during slavery in the United States resulted in an emphasis on the importance of rhythm: "In their stead slaves substituted handclasp, foot stomps, and beating of sticks, which formed a polyrhythmic accompaniment to the singing and dancing" (part 1, 2nd para).

The Negro Spiritual and its Influence on Other Black Music Genres

The Negro spiritual is considered to be "roots music" for other American music genres. Whalum (1973) offered support for the Negro spiritual as foundational American music. He declared, "The spiritual . . . is the root and trunk of Black music. Its influences are felt today in much that we hear" (p. 353). Though the spiritual is a sacred genre, it has influenced secular genres as well. Some of the characteristics of the Negro spiritual, which include call and response, improvisation, bended notes, wailing, and moaning and groaning, are heard in blues, jazz, gospel, and rock and roll compositions. Walker (1979) offered thoughts regarding the spiritual's significance and influence in American culture:

> The Spiritual is of social significance not only because of the religious message it bears but also because of its widespread musical influence. Despite the fact that the creation of Spirituals ended shortly after the Emancipation Proclamation, their influence in the family of Black music continued. The Afro-American Spiritual has colored all the forms of Black sacred music, and almost every single form of American popular music has felt its influence either directly or indirectly. Among the American

> music art forms that the Spiritual counts as its heirs are minstrel songs, jazz, blues, ragtime, gospel, and "soul" music. (p. 48)

Caldwell (1995) shared, "Africans create music (spirituals) that speaks to various aspects of enslavement, and the music they craft becomes the foundation for all other types created by Blacks in America" (p. 3). Newman (1998), in agreement with this idea, declared, "Spirituals are now well established as the foundation of Black music, the progenitor of gospel, early blues, New Orleans brass bands, and jazz itself" (p. 197).

Trailblazers and Keepers of the Flame

No discussion of the Negro spiritual is complete without including the remarkable contributions of the Fisk Jubilee Singers of Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee. They were trailblazers in that they inaugurated the concert spiritual, which established a longstanding tradition of Historically Black Colleges and Universities undertaking choral tours for the purpose of fundraising and strengthening public relations.

On October 6, 1871, the Fisk Jubilee Singers embarked upon their first tour, inspired by George L. White, choral director, music professor, and college treasurer. Within the ensemble of 11 young Black men and women, all but two were ex-slaves ("Fisk Jubilee Singers, Our History," n.d.). The tour was for the expressed purpose of raising funds for the financially troubled institution. It is important to note the courage of this White visionary's contribution to the development of the concert spiritual, which provided the direct impetus for the Negro spiritual becoming a global phenomenon ("Fisk Jubilee Singers, Our History", n.d.; Lovell, 1972); however, it was on the campus of Oberlin College, on November 15, 1871, where the concert spiritual was truly birthed.

After a lukewarm response from the audience for the concert, the Fisk director made a quick and weighty decision of long-lasting effect to have the singers perform Negro spirituals at the end of the concert.

Surprisingly for the Jubilee Singers, their songs were well received. That day was a turning point in music history, as the Fisk Jubilee Singers blazed a trail for Black choral groups to follow. The year 1873 was also a turning point, for the Jubilee Singers would become internationally known as they performed for American, European, and African audiences ("Fisk Jubilee Singers, Our Music" (n.d.). Interestingly, Oberlin was the first racially integrated college in the United States (Ward, 2000, p. 3). Harris (1972) pointed out, "the authenticity heard in the performance of these songs came about largely as a result of the personal experiences of the singers" (p. 34).

The Fisk Jubilee Singers set in motion the development of college concert choirs on campuses of many Historically Black Colleges and Universities. These keepers of the tradition included Nathaniel Dett at Hampton University, Kemper Harrel and Wendell Whalum at Morehouse College, Willis Laurence James at Spelman College, William Dawson at Tuskegee University, Warner Lawson at Howard University, and John W. Work at Fisk University (Harris, 1972, p. 65). According to Harris (1972), these choirs were trailblazers (p. 9).

I believe they were also keepers of the flame. They endured hardship because of racism in America. Gilroy (1993) explained:

> The choir, sent forth into the world with economic objectives which must have partially eclipsed their pursuit of aesthetic excellence in their musical performances, initially struggled to win an audience for Black music produced by Blacks from a constituency which had been created by fifty

> years of "blackface" entertainment. Needless to say, the aesthetic and political tensions involved in establishing the credibility and appeal of their own novel brand of black cultural expression were not confined to the concert halls. (p. 88)

In spite of the racism they suffered in America, the Fisk Jubilee Singers were able to lay the groundwork for and participated in a transatlantic international cultural exchange between America, other European countries, and African nations. In this way, through the Jubilee Singers, the concert Negro spiritual reached international status. The Fisk Jubilee Singers became the first preservers of the concert spiritual. Interestingly, it is the Wings Over Jordan Choir that set the stage for the development of Historically Black College and University choral programs in the 20th and 21st centuries.

Statement of the Problem

The Wings Over Jordan Celebration Chorus (Celebration Chorus) evolved with a mission: to keep the legacy and the history of the Negro spiritual alive through performance and education. A principal goal of the Celebration Chorus is to reach younger generations, specifically college bound students, by providing financial support through scholarships, educational workshops, and community outreach. In this way, the organization has deliberately sought and continues to make a difference through the fine arts by providing cultural enrichment in the Greater Cleveland Metropolitan Area, the state of Ohio, and beyond.

This study seeks to describe the ongoing efforts of the Celebration Chorus to preserve the history and cultural legacy of the Negro spiritual. The issue I identify as the problem of this study is that there is a lack of knowledge related to preservation of the

Negro spiritual and its history through performance, because interest in the spiritual and in groups such as Wings has waned or is absent due to ignorance of their existence. Unfortunately, education about and fervor for the spirituals has declined for various reasons in the United States, but especially since gospel music has replaced the spiritual in popularity. "Despite the continuation of the spirituals in many church settings, it is also true that gospel songs have in large part supplanted the spirituals as the music of choice in the contemporary African American church" (Jones, 1993, p. 91).

The original choral group, Wings Over Jordan, laid a solid foundation of building race and cultural relations in America and abroad through performance and education. Several African American scholars, including Dr. Samuel Barber, have documented the original group (Barber, 1979; McGee, 2007; Price, 1995; Southern, 1997); however, there exists no study of the Wings Over Jordan Celebration Chorus, Wings' second and third generations. In this way, documentation of the activities of the Celebration Chorus in their education of young people and audiences about the effects of racism and hatred, which caused the enslaved Africans to sing these songs in the first place, has not heretofore been recorded. Jones (1993) expressed this sentiment and its ramifications:

> Some of us, living and traveling in America's twentieth-century African communities, have long seen fully the complete historical record. We have also seen the continuation in our time of the American legacy of oppression, against us and against other sisters and brothers of color. Although some formidable legal barriers to our freedom have been eliminated, the cancer of racism and hatred continues to grow. (p. 35)

Jones (1993) continued his argument regarding enslaved African ancestors:

> For many of our clearest-visioned sisters and brothers, the songs of our ancestors have always lingered in the air, providing a seemingly boundless fountain of transformative spiritual sustenance to combat the persistent

> stubbornness of America's stance toward African peoples. However, the last few decades have witnessed the softening and sometimes silencing of these ancestral songs. In fact, there are children born in our community today who don't hear the songs at all, songs that made up a large part of the foundation of our survival as a people. When these songs are present in the air, a "cloud of witnesses" from the past leaps out at us, reminding us that there are many who have come before us who have suffered even more difficult crises but have nonetheless emerged emotionally and spiritually whole. However, at various times in our history we have internalized the misrepresentation of our songs imposed on us from the outside, and we have somehow concluded that we no longer need those songs. Some of us have complained that the songs embarrass us. We have to learn, again, to recognize the distortions contained in such misrepresentations; we have to reclaim our songs, freeing the air again for their comforting and transformative presence. (p. 35)

The main objectives of the Celebration Chorus are to preserve the Negro spiritual through performance (including narration, dance, and drama); to demonstrate the beauty of the spiritual, and to enlighten and educate diverse audiences about this culturally rich music that emerged from the songs of enslaved Africans who persevered through harsh conditions and suffering. Most young and old people in America and abroad are unaware of the Celebration Chorus, even though it continues "the dream of the late Rev. Glenn T. Settle, to preserve the memory of Wings Over Jordan and the Negro spiritual as a cultural contribution to African American history" (Wings Over Jordan Celebration Chorus and Wings Over Jordan Alumni and Friends, Inc., Bylaws, Preamble).

Preservation of the Negro spiritual through performance is flourishing in Cleveland, Ohio, through several community groups besides the Celebration Chorus who are dedicated and committed. Such African American groups include the Duffy Liturgical Dance Ensemble, the Heritage Chorale, the Cleveland School of the Arts R. Nathaniel Dett Concert Choir, and the Ecumenical Disciples Choir; however, to date, no

comprehensive study of the Celebration Chorus has been conducted. It is important to note here that preservation of the Negro spirituals does not solely mean performance of the concert spirituals, which are "preserved" through notation and publication. The preservation discussed in this dissertation encompasses much more; for the Celebration Chorus, preservation includes the history and cultural legacy represented within the songs. Preservation goes far beyond maintain the spirituals as cultural artifacts.

Background for the Study

Role of the Middle Passage in the Birth of the Negro Spiritual

The first precious cargo of only 20 Africans reached Jamestown, Virginia, in 1619 as indentured servants. Caldwell (1995) offered a description of the beginning of slavery and the subsequent birth of the Negro spiritual:

> The Atlantic Slave Trade portion of the global African Holocaust begins a population flow of Africans into the United States. The first twenty Africans are captured and brought to the English colonies, arriving in Jamestown, Virginia as indentured servants. Through the next century the structure of enslavement emerges and grows. One aspect of the cultural response of blacks to this enslavement is the creation of Spirituals. (p. 9)

The captured Africans were transplanted to a strange land where the Negro spiritual, ironically, would become one of the greatest contributions to indigenous American music. However, according to Darden (2014), "The slaveholders did not destroy the slave's music. It was too firmly entrenched in all of Africa's children, too potent, too much a part of their DNA to ever fully eradicate" (p. 3). The enslaved Africans came to this country with "baggage": the traditions, rituals, and customs of their homeland, as

Southern (1972) explained:

> Our search for the origin of the spiritual necessarily begins with the year 1619, when black men first arrived on the shores of the mainland of the New World. Even though Africans were brought here naked and in chains, they carried with them, nevertheless, an invisible kind of baggage—the rich cultural heritage of their homeland, especially with regard to music and dance. (p. 9)

Newman (1998), in agreement with Southern, suggested that the music of enslaved Africans and the trauma of the Middle Passage eventually became what we now call spirituals:

> It has been suggested that African-American culture began on the upper decks of the slave ships during the painful Middle Passage between Africa and the New World. There the slaves were forced under the whips and lashes of the ship's crews to improvise dances for exercise. Whatever singing took place was in African languages, as were the earliest versions of what we now know as the spirituals. The original texts of the first spirituals were never written down and are lost forever. (p. 141)

Berlin (1998) also gave a vivid description of the horrific conditions and atrocious treatment the enslaved Africans endured crossing The Middle Passage:

> The Creole's transit from the periphery of the Atlantic—whether from Africa, Europe, or the Caribbean—to mainland North America, no matter how frightening and disorienting, had none of the nightmarish qualities of the Middle Passage which the mass of plantation slaves experienced. Slavers bound for the plantations of the New World stuffed their human cargoes tight between the creaking boards of vessels specially designed to maximize the speed of transfer. Slaves were forced to wallow in their own excrement and were placed at the pleasure of the crew. Although conditions improved on slave ships over time, death stalked these vessels, and more than one in the ten Africans who boarded them did not reach the Americas. The survivors arrived in the New World physically depleted and psychologically disoriented. (pp. 103-104)

From its earliest beginnings as indentured servitude, American slavery transformed into an inhumane enterprise with devastating effects. Booker T. Washington (in Coleridge-

Taylor, 1905/1980) concluded that slavery "was established for selfish and financial reasons, and not from a missionary motive" (p. 8). Long (1985) stated, "again the Blacks, unfortunately for themselves, proved adaptable to the plantation work and conditions. By the end of the seventeenth century, the prosperity of the southern British settlements was totally tied to the institution of slavery" (p. 7). Slavery in the United States as a legal institution lasted approximately 244 years, from 1619 to 1865; however, it has continued into the present time in other forms such as mass incarceration (Alexander, 2010).

Negro spirituals emerged from a need for community among enslaved Africans who were from different African regions (mainly from West Africa). According to Southern (1997), the legacy of Africa is based in community and is a custom retained in the United States. The function of music as a communal activity . . . led to the development of slave-song repertories that provided some measure of release from the physical and spiritual brutality of slavery" (p. 21). Levine (1977) similarly posited that, "The spirituals are a testament not only to the perpetuation of significant elements of an older world view among the slaves but also to the continuation of a strong sense of community" (p. 161). The enslaved Africans sang in order to endure the harshness of their environment and to cope with brutality. Frederick Douglass (2007) explained how the songs allowed those enslaved to endure:

> Every tone was a testimony against slavery, and a prayer to God for deliverance from chains. The hearing of those wild notes always depressed my spirit and filled me with ineffable sadness. I have frequently found myself in tears while hearing them. The mere recurrence to those songs, even now, afflicts me; and while I am writing these lines, an expression of feeling has already found its way down my cheek. To those songs I trace my first glimmering conception of the dehumanizing character of slavery . . . I have often sung to drown my sorrow, but seldom to express

> my happiness. Crying for joy, and singing for joy, were alike uncommon to me while in the jaws of slavery. The singing of a man cast away upon a desolate island might be as appropriately considered as evidence of contentment and happiness as the singing of a slave; the songs of the one and of the other are prompted by the same emotion. (pp. 358-359)

Although the exact date and birthplace of the Negro spiritual is shrouded in mystery, it emerged from the trauma of the Middle Passage and the conditions of slavery. Several scholars including Graham (2012) and Southern (1997) agreed that the exact origin of the spiritual is unknown. Work (1998) stated, "it is difficult to determine the period in which Negro song first assumed a definite character in America, because there were no successful attempts to collect any Negro songs before 1840 and because early letters or articles describing Negro singing were not carefully preserved" (p. 1).

Music and Racial Identity

Small (1998) noted, "whoever engages in a musical performance, of whatever kind, is saying to themselves and to anyone who may be taking notice, *This is who we are*, and that is a serious affirmation indeed" (p. 212, italics in original). Small further declared, "how we like to music is who we are" (p. 220). In an educational video series entitled *American Roots Music*, the late Floyd Red Crow Westerman (2012), a Native American actor, singer, and political advocate, spoke of how one's music identifies who he or she is. Robert Two Crow, another Native American in the series shared, "Our songs are resources. They tell who we are and where we came from, what types of accomplishments we have had. They also give you a sense of pride, honor, and empowerment to feel good about yourself" (Powers, 2001, p. 4).

The main thrust and purpose of the Celebration Chorus is to carry on the mission

of the original group by preserving the Negro spiritual, and the history the songs embody, through performance, based upon the motto, "That Which is Worthy Must Be Preserved." The Celebration Chorus intentionally identifies with performance of the Negro spiritual as African Americans. Cone (1972/1991) sheds some light on music and identity in the lives of Black people:

> The spirituals are historical songs which speak about the rupture of black lives; they tell us about a people in the land of bondage, and what they did to hold themselves together and to fight back. We are told that the people of Israel would not sing the Lord's song in a strange land. But, for Blacks, their *being* depended upon a song. The spirituals enabled Blacks to retain a measure of African identity while living in the midst of American slavery, providing both the substance and the rhythm to cope with servitude. (p. 30)

The identity of the Celebration Chorus as an African American sacred choral group is one of the most important characteristics of the organization. The chorus's identity reaches back to roots that began with the enslaved Africans of the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries, as Walker (1979) described:

> Wherever the Africans and their progeny touched New World shores, no matter what the condition of their existence, they maintained their musical identity. Maud Cuney Hare is explicit in identifying the "Rhythmic relationship and melodic similarity" between music indigenous to Africa and the folk song of American Blacks. (p. 48)

Frith (1996) describes the role of music as a process related to experience that serves in identity formation:

> The broad argument that I want to make here, in short, is that in talking about identity we are talking about a particular kind of experience, or a way of dealing with a particular kind of experience. Identity is not a thing but a process—an experiential process which is most vividly grasped as *music*. Music seems to be a key to identity because it offers, so intensely, a sense of both self and others, of the subjective in the collective. (Frith as cited in Hall and Du Gay, p. 110)

As Frith explained, music is key to identity because it offers an intense sense of a collective sense of self and others, and thus may be considered important to the development of racial identity, which Tatum (1997) defined as follows:

> *Racial identity development* usually refers to the process of defining for oneself the personal significance and social meaning of belonging to a particular racial group. The terms *racial identity* and *ethnic identity* are often used synonymously, though a distinction can be made between the two. An *ethnic* group is a socially defined group based on *cultural* criteria, such as language, customs, and shared history. An individual might identify as a member of an ethnic group (Irish or Italian; for example), but might not think of himself in racial terms (as White). On the other hand, one may recognize the personal significance of racial group membership (identifying as Black, for instance) but may not consider ethnic identity (such as West Indian) as particularly meaningful. (p. 16)

The function of the spiritual for African Americans and hence the identity of the Celebration Chorus is an expression of its "cultural and religious identity" (Burnim, 2006, p. 2).

Sociology and the Cultural Milieu

The *cultural milieu* or social environment which many members of the Celebration Chorus experienced was racially charged and sometimes violent, leading to the Civil Rights Movement in the United States. The 1896 Supreme Court decision *Plessy v. Ferguson* resulted in "separate but equal" and ushered in the Jim Crow era. Eventually, dissatisfaction with legalized segregation led to acts of civil disobedience by courageous individuals such as Rosa Parks; on December 1, 1955, she refused to give up her seat in the front of the bus to a White man. This is often considered to be the watershed moment which became the Civil Rights Movement.

For the Celebration Chorus, the historical origin of the intersection of race matters and the Negro spiritual began with the founder of Wings, who placed great importance on race matters. This intersection remains essential for the Celebration Chorus today. Writing about Wings, Barber (1979) pointed out:

> During its peak years, the choir under its founder, the Rev. Glenn T. Settle, was instrumental in influencing policies of national and international scope relating to matters of race. For example, the BBC selected the choir to broadcast world-wide on the "Friendship Bridge" program, and CBS selected the choir (at the time, its most popular radio program) to perform on the "School of the Air" series, which was broadcast between the Northern and Southern Hemispheres for the purpose of fostering better cultural relations. Noteworthy is the fact that the choir was selected by the USO (United Service Organization) and the Department of the Army respectively to entertain servicemen overseas during both World War II and the Korean Conflict. Consequently, the wide range of activities, events, and achievements of the Wings Over Jordan Choir are significant in the historical continuum of the Black man's [*sic*] struggle for dignity for all mankind. (pp. ii-iii)

Several members of the Celebration Chorus experienced the type of cultural degradation which led to the Montgomery Bus Boycotts and locally, the Hough Riots of Cleveland, Ohio, in 1966, as well as other aspects of the Civil Rights Movement, including the passing of *The Civil Rights Act* of 1964 and *The Voting Rights Act* of 1965, preceded by the Supreme Court decision of 1954, *Brown v. Board of Education,* which deemed public school segregation unconstitutional. They also lived during the volatile and racially charged season of the assassinations of Malcolm X in 1965, and Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. in 1968.

The Million Man March in Washington, D.C. on October 16, 1995, represented a turning point in African America's response to social, political, and economic disenfranchisement in the United States against Black men especially. This march

signaled a unity and solidarity between African American men of all creeds and diverse backgrounds that heretofore had not been witnessed on the United States National Mall. Louis Farrakhan, who organized the event, made poignant statements that historic day regarding the issue of racial divide in the United States:

> And so we stand here today at this historic moment, we are standing in the place of those who could not make it here today. We are standing on the bold of our ancestors. We are standing on the blood of those who died in the middle passage, who died in the fields and swamps of America, who died hanging from trees in the South, who died in the cells of their jailers, who died on the highways and who died in the fratricidal conflict that rages within our community. We are standing on the sacrifice of the lives of those heroes, our great men and women, that we today may accept the responsibility that life imposes upon each traveler who comes this way….There is a great divide, but the real evil in America is not white flesh or black flesh. The real evil in America is the idea that undergirds the setup of the Western world, and that idea is called white supremacy… (Louis Farrakhan, cited in Marable & Mullings, 2000, p. 616, as recorded by the Federal Information Systems Corporation).

The negative image of Black men as violent was challenged by this march of such great magnitude. According to Dyson (1996), "the march rebutted persistent stereotypes about black men and resounded as a colossal 'we are' against the sophisticated denigration of black men's lives" (p. CO3).

Currently, members of the Celebration Chorus are living through unprecedented times in American history, including the mass tragedy of the 9/11 Terrorist Attacks on September 11, 2001, the ongoing mass incarceration of Black men, and unique movements such as the Black Lives Matter and #MeToo movements. Members of the Celebration Chorus live during times of mass school shootings and student activism against school gun violence, and two Women's Marches in Washington, D.C. on January 20, 2017, and January 20, 2018, to advocate for the civil rights of all people. Lastly,

members of the Celebration Chorus live amid the crisis of United States Border Control and the debacle of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), which I believe bears a direct connection to the issue of White supremacy and racism in the United States.

The cultural milieu of the Celebration Chorus has not changed for better in comparison to the cultural milieu of Wings: turbulent racial unrest still persists in the United States. There is, therefore, a necessity for the Celebration Chorus to continue to perform the Negro spiritual, because its message is still relevant for African Americans and for people everywhere as the embodiment of both past and present seasons of struggle and racial discrimination. The Celebration Chorus represents celebrating the "good things," the positive things that are happening in our culture, which helps to offset all the negativity associated with race relations in the United States.

Cultural Characteristics of the Negro Spiritual

African elements. The enslaved Africans did not come "empty-handed" but with a rich culture (Du Bois, 1903/2007) that included such African elements as dance movement, rhythmic beat, and syncopation. Jones (1993) pointed out:

> A Negro religious music contingent on Christianity developed later than the secular forms . . . However, Africans were not Christians, so their religious music and the music with which they celebrated the various cultic or ritualistic rites had to undergo a distinct and complete transfer of reference . . . So the music which formed the *link* between pure African music and the music which developed after the African slave in the United States had had a chance to become exposed to some degree of Euro-American culture was that which contained the greatest number of Africanisms and yet was foreign to Africa. And this was the music of the second generation of slaves, their work songs. The African slave had sung

> African chants and litanies in those American fields. His sons and daughters, and their children, began to use America as a reference. (p. 18)

The Negro spiritual is an authentic folk song genre that combines African and African American culture. Jones (1993) maintained, "clearly, music and dance have always been defining elements of African culture, including the time period of the slave trade" (p. 1).

Communication and coded messages. The Negro spiritual provided a form of communication; hence, storytelling was at its center. Fisher (1990) asserted, "the chief concern of African music was to recite the history of the people" (p. 1). Thus, enslaved Africans continued the tradition of storytelling by singing Negro spirituals; at the same time, they communicated with one another while also passing down a musical heritage to subsequent generations.

Call and response represented the typical form of spirituals, providing a practical and necessary means of communication on the plantations. The slave songs—the Negro spirituals—were replete with coded messages: some songs even served as maps, pointing the way to routes leading to freedom and safety. One of the most well-known of these songs is "Follow the Drinking Gourd," which directed runaway slaves to keep traveling in the direction of the Big Dipper. Southern (1997) stated:

> The purpose of some songs was to alert the slaves that a "conductor" was on the way…One of the leading conductors of the organization was the ex-slave Harriet Tubman (1820?–1913), called the "black Moses of her race"…Many of the old songs that the slaves had been singing for years must have been sung with special meaning when an escape plot was in the air. Such songs as *Steal Away to Jesus*; *Swing Low, Sweet Chariot*; *Brother Moses Gone to de Promised Land*; Hear from Heaven To-Day*;* Good News, de Chariot's Coming*; Oh, Sinner, You'd Better Get Ready*; and numbers of others with similar texts undoubtedly served as "alerting" songs. Then there were songs that served as "maps," the best known of

> which was *Follow the Drinkin' Gourd*, which directed fugitives to always travel in the direction of the Big Dipper…Most of the records of the Underground Railroad activities were systematically and carefully destroyed, and understandably so, for the penalties of discovery were too great to risk taking chances. (p. 144)

Jones (1993) declared, "This was a powerful weapon of all oppressed peoples. Often, they communicate with each other in a language that has a double meaning. Sometimes they resort to ciphers or simple codes or symbols" (p. 45). Bell (1995a) conveyed that

> it was a long time before the masters learned, if they ever did, that the slaves used their songs as a means of communication: giving warning, conveying information about escapes planned and carried out, and simply for uplifting the spirit and fortifying the soul (p. 909).

Even though the belief that the Negro spirituals contained coded messages has been widely accepted by several scholars and the African American music community, a counterargument suggests that the notion of coded messages in Negro spirituals can be contested. In reference to "Follow the Drinking Gourd," Kelley (2008) posited:

> While it is possible that "Follow the Drinking Gourd" was employed as a signal song or even as one part of a more complex communication system of the underground Railroad, serving a specific group of escaping slaves in a specific place and at a specific time, there appears to be no real evidence beyond Parks' account, and that account seems . . . to call attention to its own status as a tale that is transformed with every retelling. In any case, the song's meaning cannot be said to be fixed by the possibility of a coded message alone. (p. 270)

Kelley (2008) argued that a certain writing of Frederick Douglass contains evidence that supports his argument that the basis of coded messages is dubious. He shared:

> A subsequent passage of *My Bondage and My Freedom* (1855) does assert that several "pass-words" were used by slaves and abolitionists to communicate certain "things, important to us," but Douglass's account makes no connection between such secret signals and song lyrics. The "O Canaan, Sweet Canaan" passage from Douglass thus appears to be quoted out of context in these more sophisticated online education resources in

> order to validate the otherwise undocumented "coded message" thesis. (pp. 279-280)

Nonetheless, there is a ponderance of scholarship in support of the idea that enslaved Africans communicated with one another in code, constituting a secret society, even though there is not unequivocal evidence that supports singing in coded messages A Library of Congress article on the African American spiritual regarding the Underground Railroad stated, "it is often speculated that songs like 'I got my ticket' may have been a code fore escape. Hard evidence is difficult to come by because assisting slaves to freedom was illegal." Indeed, it is widely accepted that enslaved Africans were not permitted to sing in their native African languages, so at some point any songs sung by them would have to have been sung in English. Pratt (2013), in a discussion of Negro spirituals and the elements of resistance contained therein, stated:

> Music became an expression of hope, a barrier against assimilation and a weapon of resistance–at least in cultural or metaphorical terms–especially considering that slave owners in the United States, the West Indies, and Cuba prohibited the use of African dialects among their slaves, and punished slaves for traditional musical rituals of birth, death, marriage. Such musical modes of resistance whether expressed in spirituals, gospel, call-and-response preaching–eventually shaped the larger culture and became central to the music of North America. (p. 3)

Marable and Mullings (2000), however, in keeping with the widely accepted premise that Negro spirituals were used in the Underground Railroad and during slavery to convey messages wrote, "Many historians have observed that the same spirituals contained hidden meanings for messages that could serve as a coded language, communicating information among slaves without the knowledge of overseers and masters" (p. 114). Marable and Mullings (2000) referenced "Go Down, Moses," and

"Didn't My Lord Deliver Daniel," as examples of spirituals containing coded messages. It is difficult to prove definitively that these songs (such as "Follow the Drinking Gourd") contained coded messages, because the whole point of coded messages is to remain "underground." Burnim and Maultsby (2006), however, minimized the importance of this controversy: "whether they exhibited double entendre or not–that is, whether they conveyed subliminal messages understood only by the initiated, or members of the group–was to wage systematic warfare on the institution that imposed the chains of bondage" (p. 61). The participants in my study, however, strongly believe that the Negro spirituals contained coded messages, and the Celebration Chorus shares this belief with their audiences through narration in performances and workshops.

Christianity and the enslaved African. The Negro spiritual has many distinguishing cultural elements. First and foremost, the slaves used the Bible as their primary source for inspiration. Bell (1995a) summarized the conditioning process of newly arrived slaves:

> As part of the subjugation process, newly arrived Africans were separated from those of the same tribe. They were barred from using their native language or practicing their customs. While required to learn sufficient English to understand the White masters who would rule their lives, penalties for actually learning to read and write were severe. Despite the dangers, we know that many of the enslaved did acquire basic literacy skills. The Bible was often their primer as well as the primary access to their adopted religion, Christianity. (p. 909)

Enslaved Africans identified with Biblical characters such as Moses, Daniel, Joseph, Noah, and Jesus (Lovell, 1972, p. 475). The Bible was taught to enslaved Africans by slaveholders, and some slaves learned how to read the Bible as they and others were

taught about Christianity. As a result, the slaves took those scriptures and applied it to their song making; however, not all Negro spirituals were Biblically based—some were gleaned from the personal experiences of the singers.

Johnson and Johnson (1969) explained why enslaved Africans adopted Christianity and how it influenced the Negro spirituals:

> Far from his [*sic*] native land and customs, despised by those among whom he lived, experiencing the pang of the separation of loved ones on the auction block, knowing the hard task master, feeling the lash, the Negro seized Christianity, the religion of compensations in the life to come for the ills suffered in the present existence, the religion which implied the hope that in the next world there would be a reversal of conditions, of rich man and poor man, of proud and meek, of master and slave. The result was a body of songs voicing all the cardinal virtues of Christianity—patience—forbearance—love—faith—and hope—through a necessarily modified form of primitive African music. The Negro took complete refuge in Christianity, and the Spirituals were literally forged of sorrow in the heat of religion fervor. (p. 20)

The life of enslaved Africans can be compared to the life of the "children of Israel" in the Bible, who were forced to sing in the strange land of Babylon. Lincoln and Mamiya (1990) declared, "a study of black singing, then, is in essence a study of how black people 'Africanized' Christianity in America as they sought to find meaning in the turn of events that made them involuntary residents in a strange and hostile land" (p. 348).

The Negro spiritual as protest music. Understandably, the Negro spiritual as a musical genre represents a form of protest against the state in which enslaved Africans found themselves. This music constituted a multilayered genre, in that it served more than one purpose. In the spiritual, "All God's Children Got Wings," enslaved Africans

sang in code to protest the slave master's audacity in presupposing that he could mistreat a slave and still go to heaven:

> I got wings, you got wings, All God's children got wings
> (Then looking up to the big house where the master lived, he said)
> But everybody talking 'bout Heaven
> Ain't going there.

Thurman (1975), concerning these song lyrics declared:

> This is one of the authentic songs of protest. It was sung in anticipation of a time that even yet has not fully come—a time when there shall be no slave row in the church, no gallery set aside for the slave, no special place, no segregation, no badge of racial and social stigma, but complete freedom of movement. (pp. 43-44)

"All God's Children Got Shoes," represents another of the protest spirituals. Darden (2014) provided insight to the significance of slaves and the wearing of shoes:

> Many slave owners prohibited, upon pain of severe punishment, the owning of shoes in a vain attempt to keep their slaves from running away. How galling the line "*All* God's children got shoes" must have been to them. Likewise, the line "Everybody talkin' about heaven ain't goin' there" has a barbed point aimed directly at the hired white (and sometimes black) preachers who only preached obedience, the pious slave owners who whipped their slaves for attending a brush-arbor church, or even the white religious denominations that refused to condemn slavery. As another equally dangerous, almost subversive spiritual claims, "I'm going to tell God how you treat me." (p. 45)

According to Darden (2014), "the persistent and pervasive nature of the 'protest spirituals' indicates . . . that these songs provided slaves with both comfort and passion, kindling and rekindling hopes of deliverance from bondage" (p. 46). There were several other protest spirituals, such as "Ride On, King Jesus," which Darden (2014) recognized as one of overt protest and rebellion (p. 44). Darden also noted that the following spirituals are songs of protest that have been identified with enslaved Africans' desperate

yearning for freedom:

> "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot," "Oh Freedom," "Most Done Ling'rin' Here," "Wade in the Water," "Good News, de Chariot's Comin'," "Hold the Wind," "Joshua Fit the Battle of Jericho," "Oh, Wasn't That a Wide Riber" (also "One More Riber to Cross"), "Many Thousand Gone," and "Heaven" (alternately, "Heav'n, Heavn'n," "Goin' to Shout All Over God's Heavn," or "All God's Children Got Shoes." (p. 45)

As protest songs, spirituals expressed a story of hope for a bright future in spite of the current circumstances:

> Scholars have always concurred that antislavery hymnody, social gospel hymnody, and civil rights songs were vehicles of protest . . . In telling the exodus story through the spirituals and the story of the spirituals through the exodus, I maintain that the spirituals were unquestionably the archetype of protest seen later in antislavery, social gospel, and civil rights hymnody. (Spencer, 1990, p. vii)

Wings had a reputation for refusing to sing before segregated audiences. Thus, by performing before racially diverse audiences, Wings peacefully protested the days of Jim Crow and refused to acquiesce to that degraded way of living. Floyd (1995) pointed out:

> As natural and as spontaneous as the use of spirituals and hymns in this church-based protest activity may have seemed, the foundation for it had been laid, in one sense, by the Wings Over Jordan Choir . . . Traveling across the nation in buses, the Wings Over Jordan Choir refused to perform before segregated audiences . . . The choir's popularity among both Blacks and Whites, its refusal to accommodate segregation at its concerts, its stature as a radio-network fixture, and its presentation of the spirituals both as culturally viable aesthetic expressions and as songs of freedom, faith, and documentation, set the precedent and the context for southern protest activity among Blacks in the 1950s. (pp. 171-172)

The Celebration Chorus continues that tradition today, singing for all audiences who would like to hear them perform.

The slave masters had no idea enslaved Africans were capable of such creations of depth. The slaves were truly underestimated. Similarly, Black students of the 1950s

and 1960s, for example, protested against oppression by campaigning for their civil rights as American citizens. Levine (1977) shared:

> The eagerness with which Black students during the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s turned to the spirituals as the source of their freedom songs was both an effect and integral part of this many-faceted movement to keep the spirituals alive. And certainly, the spirituals did remain alive, but more as a historical legacy, a proud heritage, than as a living expression of twentieth-century Black consciousness. (p. 169)

In this way, the Negro spirituals served as songs of protest not only during slavery but also during the Civil Rights Movement, and even today as injustices continue against people of color in particular.

The Negro Spiritual and Objections to its Contemporizing

In discussions about preserving the Negro spiritual, controversy has arisen as to how Negro spirituals should be performed. Debates over how choral groups should and should not perform the Negro spiritual include objections to its modernization, or what I call objections to advancing the Negro spiritual. These objections are quite strong among performers and listeners. For some objectors, authenticity is extremely important; for others, creativity and freedom within reason is acceptable. I suggest these debates, however, obscure the more important issue that preservation of the history represented by the Negro spirituals is essentially done *through* performance, whether or not there is agreement on *how* they should be performed:

> Many commentators complain about the adulteration or watering down or desecration of spirituals by singing groups. This kind of complaint flies in the face of what is known about the nature of folk song. Every folk song is created at the behest of a given folk community and is kept alive by the community and by people joining with the community. (Lovell, 1972, p. 422)

While opinions may differ on what is appropriate in the performance of Negro spirituals, there is no debate that they are worthy of preservation. The mission of Wings was to preserve the Negro spiritual, a mission continued today in the Celebration Chorus. Lovell (1972) suggested:

> The preserving of songs by putting words and music into print or by making records of them is also highly desirable. But one should remember that what is preserved is a particular version from a particular place at a particular time in the song's development, not all the versions, not the whole song in its many ramifications. There are no facilities for preserving the whole song. Even if there were, to insist upon these as the final body of the song would be to kill and bury the song. The folk process is just the reverse of this kind of murder. The song is kept alive by having new people it has inspired present it in their own creative ways. (p. 422)

I learned as a member of the Spelman College Glee Club (directed by Dr. Roland L. Allison) and from my experience with the Wiley College A Cappella Choir (directed by Stephen L. Hayes) that Negro spirituals should be sung with solemnity and the utmost respect; however, Lovell (1972) argued that choral groups have the right to interpret the music that has been passed down to them as they see fit; there is no right or wrong way to perform a spiritual, otherwise choirs may not be inclined to perform them:

> Thus, there is no such thing as adulterating a spiritual. There is no superstandard [*sic*] to begin with; there are only people creating and singing what is in their hearts, what is on their minds as they survey the living scenes through the eyes and other senses of their art. This incontrovertible fact takes nothing from individual spirituals. The fact they passed from subgroup to subgroup is a testimony of the unity of slave thinking, feeling, artistic purpose, and method. As new groups interpret them in new ways, they ensure that the spiritual will stay alive. If people were forced to sing the songs the way some arbitrary authority decides or not sing them at all, the spiritual would quickly die. And would be better dead. (p. 422)

Hurston (1981) argued that the concert spiritual is not authentic, and that no one

performing Negro spirituals since the Fisk Jubilee Singers has sung authentic spirituals. They are without duplication. Hurston asserted:

> There never has been a presentation of genuine Negro spirituals to any audience anywhere. What is being sung by the concert artists and glee clubs are the works of Negro composers or adaptors *based* on the spirituals. Under this head come works of Harry T. Burleigh, Rosamond Johnson, and Work. All good work and beautiful, but *not* the spirituals. These neo-spirituals are the outgrowth of the glee clubs. Fisk University boasts perhaps the oldest and certainly the most famous of these. They have spread their interpretation over America and Europe. Hampton and Tuskegee have not been unheard. But with all the glee clubs and soloists, there has not been one genuine spiritual presented. (p. 80)

I agree with Hurston that what one hears on the concert stage is not an authentic rendering of the songs sung by enslaved Africans. Those songs were not recorded and may have undergone many changes as they were passed down orally; what we do have is a stylized estimation of how they may have sounded; however, hopefully what one hears in a performance pays homage to the true originators. Nonetheless, there are many advocates for the Negro spiritual who are offended by contemporized or modernized renditions of Negro spirituals by performance groups. Objections to modernization of Negro spirituals started very early, as early as 1893. The following statement was made by a former slave upon hearing a performance of Negro spirituals on the college campus of Hampton University (an HBCU): “Dose are de same ole tunes, but some way dey do’n sound right,” and many years later another former slave complained: “I do not like the way they have messed up our songs with classical music” (Southern Woman, 22, 1893, cited in Levine, 1977, p. 166; see also Holland, 2019). Reed-Walker (2008) reported the opinion of one of her interviewees about performance practices of Negro spirituals, who distressfully complained, “when performers and performing organizations change the

lyrics, the rhythms, jazzing it up as it is called, and 'gospelizing' [performed with a gospel music like beat] the spirituals, they [Negro spirituals] are presented in a distorted form" (p. 129).

Confusion sometimes exists about the Black musical genres that the Celebration Chorus performs. For example, Price (1995) mistakenly asserted:

> In Cleveland, Ohio, a "Wings Over Jordan Celebration Choir" today sings gospel music as opposed to spirituals, a fact that is unacceptable to some purists. This may have to do with the fact that spirituals are traditionally a cappella or unaccompanied renditions. The four-part harmony, frequent strong lead vocalists, answered by the choir or with what was called a "moving bass," is very unlike contemporary, sacred choral music. Gospel music uses full instrumental accompaniment and the vocal parts are typically muted by comparison. (p. 27)

Although the Celebration Chorus does occasionally perform gospel music, ironically, Wings, the original group, also sprinkled its concerts with gospel music. These protests against modernization of the Negro spiritual, or what I call "advancing the Negro spiritual," are protests against stylization of Negro spirituals. The Fisk Jubilee Singers in 1871 were the first to render re-compositions or stylizations of the folk spiritual, which resulted in the advent of the concert spiritual as an art form. Thus, since 1871, choral groups and soloists have taken license to interpret Negro spirituals creatively arranged but performed with the utmost respect for the past.

Authenticity and the Negro Spiritual

Conflicting attitudes exist regarding preservation of Negro spirituals in performance. Some scholars and musicians are convinced the Negro spirituals should be sung "authentically," that is, singing them a cappella and with conscientious simplicity or

lack of extravagance. Barber (1979) shed some light on what is considered an authentic rendering of a Negro spiritual: “the choir at Gethsemane Baptist Church sang Negro spirituals in the authentic manner as they had been literally transmitted from generation to generation” (p. 32). Barber (1979) shed further light on what he considered an authentic rendering, “The Negro spirituals were undergoing serious mutations. Dance bands and orchestras and even some black male quartets and choral groups were performing Negro spirituals in a burlesque manner” (p. 32). In the same dissertation, Barber shared, “Authentic Negro spirituals may be properly thought of as folk music, since by their very nature, purpose, and function they are devoid of sophisticated musical interest” (p. 40). Thus, Barber advocated the restoration of Negro spirituals to a position of dignity and honor.

Finally, Barber (1979) posited, that an authentic performance of Negro spirituals involved, “the text, delivered in simple, direct, and forceful imagery” (p. 41), with an “atmosphere fraught with emotional fervor” (p. 41). To perform them otherwise is considered sacrilegious and an affront to an authentic performance of the Negro spirituals by some Black scholars, including Johnson and Johnson (1925/1926/1969) and Work (1969). However, others including Maestro Glenn Brackens, director of the Celebration Chorus, feel the spiritual should be kept alive by any means necessary while maintaining its inherent dignity and honor. Within this logic, experimentation and creativity do not lessen the value of the Negro spirituals but make them accessible to a wider audience.

In the Black church, too, there exists disagreement on how to perform Negro spirituals. For example, it is generally felt one should not borrow from secular genres

such as jazz when performing Negro spirituals, as this is considered sacrilegious or displaying irreverence. Barber (1979) attested:

> The Black choral tradition expressed the distilled essence of centuries of suffering at the hands of hard slave masters, and to desecrate the Negro spiritual was sacrilege. Naturally, loud protests were registered by the Black community, especially by Negro ministers. Many ministers objected vehemently to the desecrating practices of jazzed-up arrangements of Negro spirituals. The controversy was no small matter. At stake was the preservation of a noble tradition and a venerable religious institution. (p. 9)

Similarly, Johnson & Johnson (1925/1926/1969) offered another example of an inauthentic performance of Negro spirituals: "Of course, it is not necessary to be an expert in Negro dialect to sing the Spirituals, but most of them lose in charm when they are sung in straight English. For example, it would be next to sacrilege to render: 'What kinda shoes you gwine to weah?' by 'What kind of shoes are you going to wear?'" (p. 28). Johnson & Johnson (1925/1926/1969) shared the remarks of Carl Vechten, who felt Whites cannot perform Negro spirituals, and especially White women, because they would not be able to render them authentically:

> I agree that white singers are, naturally, prone to go to two extremes: to attempt to render a Spiritual as though it were a Brahms song, or to assume a "Negro unctuousness" that is obviously false, and painfully so. I think white singers, concert singers, *can* sing Spirituals—if they *feel* them. But to feel them it is necessary to know the truth about their origin and history, to get in touch with the association of ideas that surround them, and to realize something of what they have meant in the experiences of the people who created them. In a word, the capacity to *feel* these songs while singing them is more important than any amount of mere artistic technique. Singers who take the Spirituals as mere "art" songs and singers who make them an exhibition of what is merely amusing or exotic are equally doomed to failure, so far as true interpretation is concerned. (p. 28).

Schippers (2010) offered an opposing view in respect to authenticity and historical correctness which may be applied to the Negro spiritual:

> In music, "authentic" has been strongly associated with "historically correct." However, it is difficult to maintain that any art form exists merely to be reproduced in a historically correct manner or in original context. Others argue that the key to authenticity lies in creativity, aesthetics, spirituality, or emotional effect. The discussion revolves around whether the essence lies in the notes, the instruments used, the setting, the context, the sound, the attitude or frame of mind of musicians or audience, or other intangible aspects of the total music experience. (p. 47)

In the above statement, Schippers suggested that authenticity may not be the ultimate goal for any musical performance, including Negro spirituals, but that the total music experience should be the measuring stick of an authentic modern-day performance of the same. I propose it is the attitude in which Negro spirituals are performed that determines if the performance can be considered "authentic."

Lovell (1972) argued against authenticity as the "superstandard" by which all performances of Negro spirituals must be measured (p. 422). Many scholars agree that when performing concert spirituals, one cannot sing them truly authentically like the enslaved Africans because we do not know how they actually sounded. James (1995) suggested that even the original Wings Over Jordan Choir presented concerts in an eclectic, unauthentic, style:

> Whereas this choir is generally looked upon as a Negro choir of authentic Negro folk song expression, quite the contrary is true. The fame of this organization rests on a combination of disguised traditional spirituals, "ballads," the use of blues and jazz for motifs, and the personal touch that comes from the urgent desire to please the masses. Their following is large because their singing has some of all the popular types of music rolled into one—blues, boogy woogy, jazz, hymns, spirituals, and jubilees. (p. 224)

By sharing this quote by James, I make the point that authenticity is in the eye of the

beholder. According to Radano (2003), as the Negro spiritual has its identification with Black people and hence may be considered to be "race music" and thus is characterized by natural authenticity.

The Negro Spiritual and The Black Church

The Negro spiritual in the Black church of the 20th and 21st centuries has declined in prominence, in deference to contemporary gospel music. Lovell (1972) posited, "but, except in a few churches, the spiritual has been replaced as a regular diet" (p. 424). There is a palpable concern among music scholars about the neglect of the Negro spiritual. This neglect has negatively impacted music in the Black church. Whalum (1986) asked:

> What would our church music be like today if we had built upon the spiritual, instead of cutting away from it; if we had added to this the lined-out hymns, the anthems, and the gospel of high quality; and if we had made music education an essential part of Christian education? (p. 19)

Many African American music scholars concur that contemporary gospel music has overtaken the Negro spiritual in importance, and that the Black church, in its lack of interest, holds responsibility for its decline and devaluation (Jones, 1993; Reed-Walker, 2008; Walker, 1979).

Purpose of the Study

The historical legacy of the Negro spiritual represents an important piece of American cultural history. The waning of interest in this musical genre, as evidenced in the Black church, suggests a need within the field of music education to preserve the

historical legacy of the Negro spiritual as integral to understanding American history. An indigenous American music genre, the Negro spiritual is revered in the African American music community as a most telling segment of African American and American history. The preservation of the Negro spiritual through musical notation was accomplished in 1867 by three White northern abolitionists: Allen, Ware, and Garrison, who were instrumental in preserving the written historical legacy of the Negro spiritual in the seminal book, *Slave Songs of the United States* (Ramsey, 2012, 3rd para.). The essence of the Negro spiritual, transmission of a message through musical oral communication, continues to be preserved through performance by organizations such as Wings Over Jordan Celebration Chorus of Cleveland, Ohio, the focus of this dissertation.

The purpose of this dissertation, therefore, is to tell the story of the preservation of the Negro spiritual and the history that the genre represents by the Celebration Chorus. This particular story has not been previously told. The story of the original Wings has been well documented by scholars, especially by Dr. Samuel Barber, an authority on the Wings Over Jordan Choir; his 1979 dissertation from the University of Cincinnati was the first to broach this topic. Southern (1972) stated, regarding Wings Over Jordan,

> as the records of the choir testify, no other group in United States history was as versatile or attracted as much attention to its activities as the Wings Over Jordan Choir. Its sphere of influence was far-reaching. Repeated requests for the choir to concertize in various cities throughout the United States and [soon after the world]. (p. 8)

Similarly, Reed-Walker (2008) argued that:

> Literature is replete with the recording of research efforts that describe the derivation and the use of the Negro spiritual during the period of slavery in America and its importance as a religious musical genre . . . But literature does not present an organized recording of individuals and

> organizations engaged in preserving the Negro spiritual. Neither does literature report an organized recording of categorizations of Negro spiritual preservation. (p. 4)

The Celebration Chorus, though prominent in Cleveland, Ohio, has not reached the level of renown of Wings, its parent group; however, gaining fame is not its primary mission. The purpose of this study, utilizing case study methodology, is to tell the story of the Wings Over Jordan Celebration Chorus of Cleveland, Ohio, in its preservation of the Negro spiritual and the history represented in the genre, and thereby to fill a gap in the literature of American and African American music education and music history. This case study documents both the activities and experiences of members and key people pivotal in the preservation of the Negro spiritual through the Celebration Chorus. This study thus seeks to make a unique contribution to the existing scholarly research on the history and preservation of the Negro spiritual.

In addition to building upon existing scholarship related to preservation of the Negro spiritual, the purpose of this study is to help weave, like a quilt, the specific stories of members of the Celebration Chorus in their efforts to preserve the Negro spiritual. "The art of quilting is practiced today in churches and in homes. Many quilts tell a story of family history, slavery, and other gems from collections" (Turner-Thompson, 2014, pp. 18-19). The rich history of the Celebration Chorus and its foundational choir, Wings, is extended through this study, adding to the important legacy related to the preservation of the Negro spiritual. This study tells how the Celebration Chorus has taken up the torch to carry on the mission of the original Wings. What I intend to show in this dissertation is how a dedicated group of African American singers has committed to preserving the

Negro spiritual, as well as the contributions the Celebration Chorus continues to make to the Greater Cleveland Area and beyond, to American music history and education, and African American history.

Need for the Study

Keep the Negro Spiritual Alive

The phrase, "keep the spiritual alive," is commonly found in literature concerning preservation of the Negro spiritual. I originally thought it was a phrase instigated and propagated by Maestro Glenn A. Brackens; however, in my research I came across this phraseology in the work of formidable authors including Lovell (1972):

> The thousands of Black creators and the irrepressible groups who picked up the songs and kept them alive and moving were certainly perpetually busy. They were spread all over the slave land for hundreds of years. The few thousand songs extant are thus hardly more than a tiny fraction of total output. (p. xiii)

The spirituals were first kept alive by the slaves who created them and then passed them down to successive generations; however, according to Lovell (1972), we can only enjoy a few in comparison to the innumerable total output. The spirituals, according to Candelaria and Kingman (2015), have also been preserved and hence kept alive in the United States in "the Sea Islands off the coast of Georgia and South Carolina. There, in relative isolation, numbers of black people . . . retained Africanisms in music, speech, and customs well into the twentieth century. This area has been a rich mine for folklorists and anthropologists" (p. 16).

Many creative musicians, including Maestro Glenn Brackens of the Celebration

Chorus, often have a desire to take a genre in new directions. Jones (1993) suggested fresh ideas are inevitable, and that rap music serves as an avenue by which new sounds may transform the Negro spirituals that older generations are accustomed to hearing. He asserted:

> But just as we might be tempted to believe that the voices of the creators of the spirituals might actually recede from our collective consciousness, sisters and brothers in new generations call to our attention fresh, creative ways to keep those voices alive. So, it is currently, as the distinctively African sounds and rhythms of the rap movement make their way through a maze of racially and sexually exploitive messages to reach new transformative heights, strengthening again our spiritual connection with our ancestral teachers. Refreshingly, new sounds rise up into the air, again providing us music which signals the arrival of new hopes and new visions. (p. 138)

The Celebration Chorus is dedicated to keeping the Negro spiritual alive by any means necessary for the sake of the preservation of the genre and for successive generations to gain knowledge about the Negro spiritual and this chorus.

The Negro Spiritual and Education

Many scholars, both White and Black, hold the Negro spiritual in high regard and consider education about the Negro spiritual of considerable importance. They share an interest in upholding the legacy of the Negro spiritual through education because it is part of the heritage of African Americans and an inheritance of the United States of America. Because it was created by and for African Americans, the Negro spiritual today is held in high regard by most African Americans in music education and performance; however, keeping the Negro spiritual alive, to perpetuate the art form of the Negro spiritual, requires ongoing education about the songs and their history. Jones (1993) declared:

> Those of us who are knowledgeable about the rich legacy of the spirituals must continue to pass the torch to new generations. With the challenges facing us more ambiguous, more disturbing and more complex than ever, we and our children need desperately to hear our music in the air, signaling the presence of an omnipresent spiritual force larger than ourselves, offering support, reassurance and new direction as we step up to the overwhelming challenge of accountability in our ongoing struggle for justice, freedom, and meaningful life. This struggle, begun by our fore-parents, must be continued by us, their twentieth-and twenty-first-century daughters and sons. But not without the transforming power of music. (pp. 137-138)

Perhaps understandably, following the Civil War (1861-1865), ex-slaves desired to forget the degradation of the past represented by the music, thus putting education of the Negro spiritual for successive generations in jeopardy:

> Naturally enough, when the Negro found himself free, he literally put his past behind him. It was his determination that as far as within him lay, not one single reminder of that black past should mar his future. So away went all these reminders in to the "abyss of oblivion" . . . His music was one of these reminders and as sweet as it was to him, as much as it had helped him, it too, must go, for it was a reminder of the awful night of bondage. (Work, 1969, pp. 110-111)

Many African Americans received education related to the Negro spiritual from African American scholars and choral directors of Historically Black Colleges and Universities committed to sharing this great body of music with their music students. Without such nurturing, the Negro spiritual otherwise may have fallen by the wayside. Reagon (2001) substantiated this argument:

> There were others who believed it was our responsibility to continue to transmit to younger generations the treasures of our past. The spirituals were part of that legacy. It was important to struggle against representations of the spirituals that were offensive, to avoid stereotyping any group of Black people with insensitive requests to "sing one of those old spirituals." The way forward was led by African American musicians who, during the opening decades of the twentieth century, took over the music departments on Black college campuses, and the concert spiritual

> tradition continued to blossom. Brilliant musicians—like R. Nathaniel Dett, William Dawson, Hall Johnson, Margaret Bonds, John Work, Eva Jessye, and Willis Laurence James, all trained in the Western classical tradition, emerged, and through their work as composers, arrangers, and choirmasters expanded the audience through the twentieth century. (pp. 87–88)

It is important to educate young and old generations about the past, so as to avoid forfeiting the legacy of the Negro spiritual for the future. The education of knowledge of Negro spirituals can be understood in a myriad of ways, but one way is with the foresight to ensure its preservation. The Celebration Chorus is committed to the education of young people in knowledge of the Negro spiritual, and the choir is devoted to sharing this fertile cultural legacy with successive generations, as discussed in subsequent chapters of this dissertation.

Research Questions

My investigation of the Wings Over Jordan Celebration Chorus centers around the following overarching research questions:

1. Why have members of the Wings Over Jordan Celebration Chorus chosen to participate in this organization to preserve the Negro spiritual?

2. In what activities and experiences do members of the Wings Over Jordan Celebration Chorus engage to preserve the Negro spiritual?

3. What role does race play in the identity of the Wings Over Jordan Celebration Chorus in its preservation of the Negro spiritual?

Interpretive Framework

I utilized the interpretive framework of Critical Race Theory (CRT) to view the racially charged context in which members of the Celebration Chorus have experienced American culture, which has motivated their investment in preserving the legacy and history of the Negro spiritual through performance and education of young and old audiences. According to Delgado and Stefancic (2017):

> The critical race theory (CRT) movement is a collection of activists and scholars engaged in studying and transforming the relationship among race and racism, and power. The movement considers many of the same issues that conventional civil rights and ethnic studies discourses take up but places them in a broader perspective that includes economics, history, setting, group and self-interest, and emotions and the unconscious. Unlike traditional civil rights discourses, which stresses incrementalism and step-by-step progress, critical race theory questions the very foundations of the liberal order, including equality theory, legal reasoning, Enlightenment rationalism, and neutral principles of constitutional law. (p. 3)

Similarly, according to West (1995), "Critical race theory is an intellectual movement that is both particular to postmodern (and conservative) times and part of a long tradition of human resistance and liberation" (p. xi). The writings of several prominent CRT scholars are examined in Chapter 2. The Celebration Chorus is committed to educating, through performance, audiences of all "colors" about the Negro spiritual, a race-based music genre that emerged from the condition of slavery.

Overview of Methodology

The methodological approach of case study was chosen for the data collection of this study.

> In the fields of sociology and anthropology, a "case" is generally regarded as something bound in a unity by time and/or place. A case is a unique phenomenon of interest: a person, situation, community, event, locale, neighborhood, network, organization, culture, and so forth. (Silverman, 2014, p. 2)

This single, bounded case study was by design inherently qualitative, descriptive and holistic, with elements of ethnography and historiography. Ethnographic techniques were employed to understand the activities and experiences of participants situated in the context of race relations, societal issues, and culture in America. Furthermore, elements of historical research were employed in the collection and examination of documents retrieved from the archives of libraries and historical museums. Triangulation of data included interviews, a focus group, observations, and reviews of private and public archived documents.

My Position as Researcher

This research is very important to me because as an African American educator and musician (pianist). I believe it is crucial to know where one came from and where one is going. Education is very important to me, and I believe it is incumbent upon me to share the knowledge I have gained from this study about the Celebration Chorus and its preservation of the Negro spiritual with younger and older generations.

As a student and music major in the Department of Music at Spelman College, a historically Black college for women, I served as student piano accompanist and sang alto in the Spelman College Glee Club for two years. Those were significant years in my life, for that was when my love for the Negro spiritual was sealed and grew by leaps and

bounds. Spelman College's Choral Department, as is the custom at most HBCUs, valued highly and frequently performed Negro spirituals in concerts and weekly chapel services. My cultivation, respect, and reverence for the messages in the Negro spiritual began at Spelman College.

Additionally, I bring a unique position to this study, as I grew up in Cleveland, Ohio, the birthplace of Wings Over Jordan Choir. Additionally, several members of my family, including my maternal grandmother, my mother, and many uncles and cousins were or remain members of the historic Gethsemane Baptist Church of Cleveland, Ohio, where it all began. Thus, I believe this case study of the Celebration Chorus has importance for the Greater Cleveland Area, the United States, and perhaps the world, as it will contribute to furthering understandings of music's role in preserving cultural knowledge and difficult histories of oppression. R. Nathaniel Dett shared, "so the life of the ante-bellum Negro was poured out in song; and the song was poured into the mold of religion was kept at white heat by the passionate desire to be free. Thus, it is that the passion for freedom became the keynote of the Negro spiritual" (Spencer, 1991, p. 106).

The conditions that produced the Negro spiritual are not so far removed from the 21st century of today. My parents, born in 1932 and 1937, lived during the Jim Crow era. For example, my mother shared with me something that happened near Tuskegee, Alabama, when my sister and I became violently ill after drinking contaminated well water.

We went to the Hometown of your father William Reid, Jr. near Tuskegee, Alabama, July 2,1964. The last time we had visited was 1960 and never for the 4th of July. That was a big thing. William had 3 weeks' vacation, and we were going to stay in Alabama for one week and go to Mississippi to visit my family for a week. My father had died March 1963,

and this was our first visit since his death!! We had been in Alabama a few days when you developed a fever. My mother-in-law was holding you while I cooked dinner and after I took you back then I realized how hot you were with the elevated temperature. It was about 7:30pm and I felt you start to shake. We went to the small town and headed for the doctor's office and saw the Sheriff. He told us to go to the doctor's office and he would get the doctor for us. I think his Nurse came, too.

They took us in the back door and worked on baby to get fever down to stop seizures. Once they got the fever down the seizures stopped, and they gave us an appointment. to come back the next day, which was July 3rd. When we were seen the next day, we were in a different side of the office because the "White side" had what they needed to work with. Then I saw the difference in the equipment on the side we were on the next day. The doctor met us at his office alone the morning of July 4,1964. The nearest hospital was 20 miles away and the 2nd choice was 40 miles away!!!

This true story illuminates the context in which many African Americans lived during the Jim Crow era.

Overview of the Dissertation

This section provides an overview of the dissertation. Chapter 1 lays the foundation for the entire dissertation and provides a comprehensive description and definition of the Negro spiritual, statement of the problem, background for the study, purpose and need for the study, the overarching research questions, the interpretive framework, an overview of the methodology, and my position as researcher. Chapter 2 provides a review of the literature related to the interpretive framework of critical race theory, through which an analysis of the data will be examined. Chapter 3 describes the methodology and the steps that were taken to obtain data for analysis. Chapters 4 and 5 provide a narrative analysis of the data collected based upon the research questions. Chapter 6 presents discussion of research findings and conclusions, including implications for music education, and suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER TWO: INTERPRETIVE FRAMEWORK AND REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

There are, it may be, so many kinds of voices in the world, and none of them is without signification. (I Corinthians 14:10, KJV)

In this study of the Celebration Chorus's preservation of the Negro spiritual, the subjects of race, racism, racial identity, and race relations emerged as important subjects, inasmuch as race is one of the central ingredients of the Negro spiritual resulting from the oppressive circumstances under which the enslaved Africans produced this music genre. The legacy embodied in Negro spirituals remains an inheritance of African Americans that has directly impacted the lives of members of the Celebration Chorus and WOJAF, Inc. Because the Celebration Chorus identifies itself as an African American choral group dedicated to singing a genre originally associated with the oppression of African Americans, and because the Celebration Chorus follows in the footsteps of Rev. Glynn T. Settle and Wings by bridging the gap of racial divide between Blacks and Whites, I believe that Critical Race Theory (CRT) represents an appropriate interpretive framework for this study.

CRT is based upon the five basic tenets of CRT, which fit my study of the preservation of the Negro spiritual by the Celebration Chorus directly, because of the songs that they sing and the reason that they sing these songs. Maestro Brackens referred to them as freedom songs. Inasmuch that one of the main tenets of CRT is voice and counternarrative, or telling of the story, perhaps in opposition to a more dominant story, the framework of CRT fits well. I venture to say that every participant in this study has

experienced racism firsthand and is keenly aware of the racist society of the United States both in the past and currently. Several participants in the study offered personal accounts of racism experienced in the south especially. In spite of the unfortunate relevance of Negro spirituals still to this day, according to Gilroy (1993), "Our country, however, is the beneficiary of jewels from bondage found in Negro spirituals" (p. 87). Knowledge of these jewels should be shared; the spirituals and their history deserve to be preserved. This is the mission of the Celebration Chorus.

The issues surrounding race, racism, race relations, and racial identity are often considered sensitive and sometimes tension-filled topics in the United States because of the country's past history of slavery. There is no debate that the United States is a post-slavery country; however, there is still much discussion of whether or not the United States is a post-racial *and* post-civil rights country (Bonilla-Silva, 2014). Even now, in the 21st century, our country has persistent race-based problems that have become most evident during public platforms such as political elections between White and Black candidates. Moreover, the United States is culturally divided along racial lines in matters of musical and cultural identity.

Many of the basic tenets and key elements of CRT resonate and relate to the experiences, activities, mission, and legacy of members of the Celebration Chorus. Wings and Rev. Settle laid a solid foundation and cultivated a rapport of establishing healthy race relations between Black and White music audiences, particularly in the face of Jim Crow. The Celebration Chorus inherited the legacy of Wings' reputation of diplomacy. Inasmuch as the Celebration Chorus has chosen unswervingly to preserve this legacy,

CRT provides an appropriate theoretical lens for this study. This characteristic of concern and sensitivity to camaraderie between races and making a difference in the community and the world continues with the Celebration Chorus, adopted from Wings.

In the first part of this chapter, I define and discuss both critical theory and critical race theory in order to establish a clear understanding of foundational terminology crucial to this dissertation. Secondly, I discuss racism and its effects through presentation of what I call "a case of the tions," a post-slavery and allegedly post-civil rights malady which continues to malign the United States. Next, for the purposes of this study, I discuss racism in terms of specific federal and state laws in the United States that have had direct bearing and/or consequences for people of color, especially African Americans.

In the second part of this chapter, I discuss the five basic tenets and specific key elements of CRT, along with their significance and correlation to the Celebration Chorus and WOJAF. In the third and final part of this chapter, I present the pioneers and proponents of CRT in education who paved the way as forerunners for the intersection of CRT and music education. I conclude the chapter with a discussion about the intersection of CRT, music education, and music performance.

Critical Theory and Critical Race Theory

Critical Theory

Critical theory has roots in the German Frankfurt School, a group of philosophers and social scientists associated with the *Institut für Sozialforschung (*Institute for Social

Research). These scholars include Horkheimer, Adorno, Habermas, and Hegel (Bronner, 2017; Held, 1980). Horkheimer (1972), one of the leading figures of the Frankfurt School, proposed that "critical thought has a concept of man [*sic*] as in conflict with himself [*sic*] until this opposition is removed" (p. 210), and "every part of the theory presupposes the critique of the existing order and the struggle against it along lines determined by the theory itself" (p. 229).

Critical theory as a philosophy holds that the path to freedom of humanity in society is inherently full of opposition and resistance. Thus, critical theory represents an oppositional movement to the existing status quo of contemporary society (Horkheimer, 1972; Tar, 1977, p. ix). The activities of the Celebration Chorus pay homage not only to the activities of Wings, but more importantly to the enslaved Africans who were the first to musically oppose and resist slavery by singing Negro spirituals. In this way, the Celebration Chorus and WOJAF have joined the struggle against racial inequality as music activists participating in an oppositional movement. Tar (1977) shared, "critical theory turns against 'enslaving conditions' . . . The struggle cannot be limited to the 'real sphere' [but] must be extended to the changing of consciousness," (p. ix). He further expressed the idea that "the arch malady (*Urgebrechen)* is not the exploitation and the oppressive domination of man [*sic*]. Rather it is domination itself" (p. xi). Tar implies that the human desire to dominate another human being is the real enemy or malady of society.

The main goal of critical theory then, is the emancipation of human beings from oppression, according to Horkheimer (1972, p. 246). Cavallaro (2001) offered a brief

history of critical theory that explains use of the term in the past and in its more contemporary general usage:

> The activities of the Frankfurt School were carried out between the early 1920s and the late 1950s with the aim of moving beyond purely functional and pragmatic readings of Marx's theories through a self-critical approach that would consistently examine the relationship between those theories and contemporary culture. Today, the phrase "critical theory" is generally used in a far less specialized fashion . . . It describes a cluster of approaches which—especially since the 1970s—have prompted a radical reassessment of notions of meaning, history, identity, power, cultural production, and cultural consumption. Several subject areas and doctrines have participated in this process: philosophy of language, semiotics, aesthetics, theories of representation, political theory, psycho-analysis, feminism, ethics, epistemology, and science. (p. x)

Critical theory, according to this description by Cavallaro, applies to the activities and experiences of the Celebration Chorus, as its members have a clearly racial and musical identification and are culture producers as performers of Negro spirituals. Furthermore, because critical theory is dynamic, its approach has application to various disciplines including music education and performance studies, studies of race, and the law.

Shedding more light on critical theory, Bronner (2017) posited that critical theory is most commonly associated with alienation and reification (p. 3). The participants of this study, members of the Celebration Chorus and WOJAF, have lived during racially turbulent times. Many of these participants have personally experienced the alienation of Blacks and the reification of negative images of Black people. According to music education scholar Regelski (2000), "critical theorists, therefore, engage in ideology critique by which false consciousness can be rationally analyzed and valid knowledge rationally justified and communicated" (p. 4). In this way, critical theorists are dedicated

to and concerned about the struggle for a thought-conscious society devoid of falsehood in every area of society. The terms *conscious* and *consciousness* are intrinsic to the writings of critical theorists and by scholars of color such as Levine (1977), Du Bois (1903/2007), and Bonilla-Silva (2014).

Within the range of theories that are considered critical (anti-racism and feminism, for examples), critical race theory has emerged as a platform for scholars to discuss the significance of race and racism in the United States and how the intersection of race and American law has directly impacted people of color, especially African Americans. The intersection of race, law, and music is applicable to the Celebration Chorus. The following discussion focuses on Critical Race Theory and its origins.

Critical Race Theory

Bell (1995a), known as the "Father of Critical Race Theory" (Ladson-Billings, 2014, p. 38), defined CRT as:

> a body of legal scholarship . . . a majority of whose members are both existentially people of color and ideologically committed to the struggle against racism, particularly as institutionalized in and by law. Those critical race theorists who are White are usually cognizant of and committed to the overthrow of their own racial privilege. (p. 897)

The founders of critical race theory are usually identified as Derrick Bell, Richard Delgado, Charles Lawrence, Mari Matsuda, and Patricia Williams (Bell, 1995a, p. 898). The following provides a detailed account of the social impetus for the movement:

> Kimberlé Crenshaw places the social origins of what was to become critical race theory at a student boycott and alternative course organized in 1981 at the Harvard Law School. The primary objective of the protest was to persuade the administration to increase the number of tenured professors of color on the faculty. The departure of Derrick Bell,

> Harvard's first African-American professor, to assume the deanship of the law school at the University of Oregon had left Harvard Law School with only two professors of color. Students demanded that the law school begin the rectification of this situation by hiring a person of color to teach "Race, Racism, and American Law," a course that had been regularly taught by Bell, who was also the author of a ground-breaking text on the subject. When it became apparent that the administration was not prepared to meet their demand, students organized an alternative course. Leading academics and practitioners of color were invited each week to lecture and lead discussion on a chapter from Bell's book . . . This course served as one of several catalysts for the development of critical race theory as a genre and movement. (Matsuda, Crenshaw, Delgado, & Lawrence, 1993, p. 4)

CRT officially emerged as a scholarly discipline around 1980; however, unofficially CRT began in the 1970s with the birth of Critical Legal Studies (CLS), a "legal movement that challenged liberalism from the Left, denying the neutrality of law, that every case has a single answer, and that rights are of vital importance" (Delgado and Stefancic, 2017, p. 171). One of the main critiques critical race theorists levied against proponents of CLS was the slow-moving progress of an incremental approach to solving problems affecting people of color (Bell, 1995a; Delgado, 2017). In contrast to CLS scholars, critical race theorists have a desire to use their writing scholarship and activism to deal with issues of race more swiftly and directly.

CRT thus began as a reactionary intellectual movement (Bell, 2004, p. 126) by scholars and activists who were committed to confronting legal injustices and racial inequities against people of color in the United States. Tate (1997), in making distinctions between CRT and CLS, shared:

> Scholars using both methods of legal analysis have concurred that the law serves the interest of powerful groups in society; however, scholars in the CRT movement have argued that civil rights discourse in CLS does not adequately address the experience of people of color. Ultimately, this

> argument serves as a point of departure between the two theoretically driven movements. (p. 198)

CRT originated with legal academics and activists on U.S. college and university campuses who felt the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s had stalled in the 1970s (cummings, 2010, p. 500; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017, pp. 3–4). CRT's first definitive workshop was held in 1989 at the St. Benedict Center in Madison, Wisconsin. A scholarly group of lawyers, activists, and intellectuals convened to vigorously confront what they perceived to be insufficient attention paid to racism and the law (Delgado and Stefancic, 2001). Critical race theorists do not represent monolithic voices but collectively unique voices who share a common bond in advocating for racial equity and justice in American law (Dixon and Rousseau, 2005, p. 11; Matsuda et al., 1993, pp. 6-7).

Critical race theorists built heavily upon: (a) the movements of critical legal studies and radical feminism; (b) Western European philosophers of critical theory including Gramsci, Foucault, and Derrida; (c) African American "outside-the-box-thinkers" including Sojourner Truth, W.E.B. Du Bois, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., César Chavez; and (d) the Black Power Movement and Chicano Movement of the sixties and early seventies (Delgado and Stefancic, 2017, p. 5). Bell (1995a) asserted that he was not sure who coined the phrase *critical race theory* to describe the writings by these legal scholars and that he had received too much credit for the movement's origins; however, he concluded that the academic scholarship of critical race theorists met a need that could not be satisfied in existing platforms (p. 902).

Critical race theorists actively confront issues of White social domination and subordination of people of color as upheld by the law (West, 1995, p. xi.) One of the

goals for proponents of CRT then, is to dismantle the status quo of practices which support inequalities between Whites and people of color. According to Taylor (1998):

> CRT is deeply dissatisfied with traditional civil rights and liberal reforms. Having seen many of the gains of the civil rights movement rendered irrelevant by an increasingly conservative judiciary, CRT scholars have lost faith in traditional legal remedies. They have seen restrictive definitions of merit, fault, and causation render much of current antidiscrimination law impotent . . . By relying on merit criteria or standards, the dominant group can justify its exclusion of blacks to positions of power, believing in its own neutrality. CRT asserts that such standards are chosen, they are not inevitable, and they should be openly debated and reformed in ways that no longer benefit privileged whites alone. (pp. 2-3)

Finally, Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, and Thomas (1995) defined and summarized the two common interests shared by CRT scholars. They declared:

> The first is to understand how a regime of White supremacy and its subordination of people of color have been created and maintained in America, and, in particular, to examine the relationship between that social structure and professed ideals such as "the rule of law" and "equal protection." The second is a desire not merely to understand the vexed bond between law and racial power but to *change* it. (p. xiii, emphasis in original)

In the previous discussions, I defined critical theory and critical race theory and gave the origins of both intellectual movements; however, the racial climate and consciousness that produced critical race theory needs discussion. It is important to offer the cultural milieu, social climate, and environment as foundations to describe the conditions which produced the Negro spirituals which are being sung. The performance of these songs continues to be appropriate because the racial climate in the United States has not necessarily improved, and in some aspects may have worsened.

Racial Climate and Race Consciousness in Post-Slavery America

The U.S. is a race-conscious society. The racial climate of the supposed post-civil rights United States is one that, to the chagrin of most U.S. citizens, maintains racial division between people of color and Whites. This racial divide has continued to represent a longstanding issue and societal irritant.

The ramifications of a race-based nation (Calmore, 1995; Webster, 2011) have resulted in deep seated and well-entrenched racial problems that remain pervasive to this day. Many people in the United States, particularly White people, are not aware of the effects of racism, but for people of color, the problem of the color-line has persisted and is still relevant for the United States, as Du Bois (1903/2007) poignantly wrote in *The Souls of Black Folk*:

> The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color-line,—the relation of the darker to lighter races of men in Asia and Africa, in America and the islands of the sea. It was a phase of this problem that caused the Civil War; and however much they who marched South and North in 1861 may have fixed on the technical points of union and local autonomy as a shibboleth, all nevertheless knew, as we know, that the question of Negro slavery was the real cause of the conflict. (p. 175)

Du Bois's comments spoke to the concept of a race consciousness society. At the other end of the color-conscious spectrum is the denial that one even sees or recognizes skin color. Omi and Winant (2015) pointed out that "the most effective anti-racist consciousness, policy, and practice is simply to ignore race. We are urged to see people as individuals only, not as persons or groups whose identities or social positions have been shaped and organized by race" (p. 2). Omi and Winant further argued that the United States is not a colorblind society but one that was actually built upon racism:

> A cursory glance at American history reveals that far from being colorblind, the United States has always been an extremely race-conscious nation. From the very inception of the republic to the present moment, race has been a profound determinant of one's political rights, one's location on the labor market, and indeed one's sense of identity. The hallmark of this history has been racism. (p. 8)

I agree with Omi and Winant that the U.S. is not a colorblind society and that to think that it is represents a form of self-deception. In addition I feel the U.S. will forever be a race conscious society because of her disgraceful start with the institution and exploitation of slavery and the long-term effects of the Civil War—including the Jim Crow era, mass incarceration, and the rise of White supremacy—which have not yet subsided. Barnes (1990) wrote about race consciousness "as a basis of oppression" (p. 1864). In this same work, Barnes noted the common bond people of color have experienced historically by being labeled "other"—relegated to a subordinate, lower class status (pp. 1864–1865). Omi and Winant (2015) addressed a concept they identified as *racial theory*: "race and racism in the United States have been shaped by a centuries-long conflict between White domination and resistance by people of color" (p. 3).

The issues of racial climate, race consciousness, and resistance pertain to the Celebration Chorus; the songs they sing still serve as social commentaries against the backdrop of a race-based North American society. On a positive note, the Celebration Chorus and institutions with a similar mission offer a singing solution to bridging the gap between the races. Their singing solution aligns with West's (1993a/2017) statement: "Without a vibrant tradition of resistance passed on to new generations, there can be no nurturing of a collective and critical consciousness" (p. 37).

Racism Sanctioned by Legislation

Racism sanctioned by law began with the Slave Codes and later the Black Codes. The connection of race, U.S. laws, and U.S. mindsets can certainly be understood through the Slave Codes, which relegated the enslaved as chattel property and stripped them of all rights under the power of the slave master (Vaughn, 1946). The Slave Codes were first enacted in the state of Virginia (which became the model for other states) beginning in the 1660s, then definitively in 1705 (Finkleman, 2010). The Southern Black Codes, enforced from 1865 to 1866 after the Civil War, "were designed to replicate, as closely as possible, the prewar suppression and exploitation of blacks" (Finkleman, 2010, p. 36). The Black Codes were

> attempts to reduce blacks to a status somewhere between that of slaves (which they no longer were) and full free people (which the white South would not allow). The labor contract laws, the vagrancy laws, and the laws limiting the ability of blacks to rent in urban areas were designed to create a kind of serfdom, tying the former slaves to the land, just as they were once tied to their masters. (Finkleman, 2010, pp. 37–38)

These laws spoke volumes to the pervasive attitudes of White southerners, especially, towards Blacks before and after the Civil War. Furthermore, there were post-slavery federal and state laws that had a direct connection to the feelings of superiority that southern Whites expressed towards Black people, exhibited in discrimination laws that stood as tangible evidence of these strained race relationships. Separation laws (Jim Crow laws) were already unofficially in effect following Reconstruction (1865 to 1877). They finally came to an end in 1964 with the signing of *The Civil Rights Act* by President Lyndon Johnson**.**

Since then, mass incarceration of African American men has been identified as a

new form of Jim Crow which marginalizes and segregates large segments of African American communities "in prisons, jails, and ghettos" (Alexander, 2010, p. 17) and can be equated to a modern-day slavery sanctioned by law. A racial caste system of second-class citizenry is then the result which "authorizes discrimination against [mainly Black men] in voting, employment, housing, education, public benefits, and jury service" (Alexander, 2010, p. 17). While Michelle Alexander labeled 21st century mass incarceration as the "new Jim Crow," Bonilla-Silva (2014) labeled 21st century racial discrimination as the "new racism" (p. 25). Anti-discrimination laws are obligatory for a race-conscious U.S. society where moral consciousness has to be legislated.

The Relevance of and Antidote to Race-Related Laws and Amendments

Certain antidiscrimination laws (aforementioned in Chapter 1) including *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896)*, Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), *The Civil Rights Act* (1964), *The Voting Rights Act* (1965) and amendments to the U.S. Constitution hold relevance and serve as an antidote to societal racism. Because these laws have directly or indirectly impacted each member of the Celebration Chorus, awareness of this history indicates that the original Wings were directly affected by the intersection of music and race, as Goodwill Ambassadors for the United States. The inheritance of living in a racially divisive nation has been passed down to the Celebration Chorus.

The Constitution of the United States as a historical document offers context for the treatment of African Americans before and after the abolishment of slavery. According to Article 1, Section 2, Clause 3 of the U.S. Constitution adopted in 1787, enslaved Africans were considered to be only three-fifths of a human. Thus, the

justification for slavery was built into the Constitution. Today, the First Amendment (1791) applies to *every* American citizen and grants freedom of expression and religion. Ratified after the Civil War (1861-1865), the Thirteenth (1865), Fourteenth (1868), and Fifteenth (1870) Amendments to the U.S. Constitution dealt respectively with the abolishment of slavery and involuntary servitude, guaranteed rights including privileges and immunities of citizenship, due process, and equal protection of laws, and the right of men to vote regardless of race, color, or previous condition of servitude **(**The Constitution of the United States, n.d.). My review of antidiscrimination laws and amendments pertaining to race and racial issues points to the climate of the U.S. as largely race-driven. This knowledge serves to remind members of the Celebration Chorus and WOJAF of the importance and uniqueness of their cultural contributions to a society negatively affected by its race consciousness.

Five Basic Tenets of Critical Race Theory

Critical race theorists name five basic tenets that form the foundation of their beliefs and distinguish their scholarship (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017, 2001; Matusda, et al., 1993). According to education scholar Ladson-Billings (2014), the five basic tenets of CRT are: (a) the belief that racism is normal or ordinary, not aberrational, in United States society; (b) interest convergence, material determinism, and racial realism; (c) race as a social construction; (d) intersectionality and anti-essentialism; and (e) voice or counternarrative (p. 36).

The Normalcy of Racism

This tenet is a foundational tenet for CRT theorists who maintain that racism is a norm in American society and thus is "very difficult to address or cure because it is not acknowledged" (Delgado and Stefancic, 2017, p. 8). Lawrence (1987) explained the normalcy of racism as a function of society in the United States, where it is so embedded in the social fabric of our society that citizens categorize each other with the point of view that adopts White supremacy. Similarly, Bonilla-Silva (2014) expressed the idea that even though the United States operates under a new form of racism that is less overt than that of the Jim Crow era in presentation, yet is still just as effective as White supremacy was in that era. In the essay "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack," McIntosh (1989) envisaged her privilege of being White as carrying a passport that people of color were not able to enjoy nor given access to obtain in the first place.

Interest Convergence, Material Determinism, and Racial Realism

This tenet of CRT states that racism or race-based issues experienced by people of color only become a societal issue of concern to Whites when the interests of Whites are at stake. "Because racism advances the interests of both White elites (materially) and working-class Whites (psychically), large segments of society have little incentive to eradicate it" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017, p. 9). According to Delgado and Stefancic (2017), Derrick Bell suggested that the American U.S. government only responded to the NAACP's insistence on passing the *Brown v. Board of Education* legislation when the country needed to "improve its image in the eyes of the Third World," (p. 24). Thus, the

interests of Whites converge with the interests of people of color when such concerns have bearing on their material wealth and welfare.

The tenet of interest convergence or material determinism is closely connected to *racial realism*, the term coined by Derrick Bell. According to Bell (1995), racial racism is a real factor of North American society that will never be remedied and will not change (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017, pp. 20–24). In other words, Bell purports that racism in the United States will never subside; there is no cure for racism. The obliteration of racism is an impossibility in the United States because it is so deeply entrenched. Bell stated:

> The struggle by black people to obtain freedom, justice, and dignity is as old as this nation. At times, great and inspiring leaders rose out of desperate situations to give confidence and feelings of empowerment to the black community. Most of these leaders urged their people to strive for racial equality. …In spite of dramatic civil rights movements and periodic victories in the legislatures, black Americans by no means are equal to whites. Racial equality is, in fact, not a realistic goal. (p. 302)

Race as a Social Construction

One of the five tenets that critical race theorists have identified maintains that race is a social construct (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017, p. 9). Tatum (1997), in discussing race as a social construct, stated that "the original creation of racial categories was in the service of oppression" (p. 10). This statement implies that race was manufactured for the purpose of one group of people having justification to oppress another group whom it perceives as lesser than themselves.

In *Keeping Faith: Philosophy and Race in America*, West (1993b) proffered that the origins of racism predate capitalism; the ideology of White supremacy made its way

from Europe to the Americas during days of colonization. Perhaps as a way to justify colonial conquests, in the 16th through 19th centuries, scientists put forward the concept that race was biologically determined, and that some races were inferior to others as a result of that biology. The work of François Bernier in 1684, a French physician, and that in 1735 of Carolus Linnaeus represent two scientists who promoted theories of racial division and hierarchy.

Smedley (2005) gave a succinct understanding of race as a social construction—a discursive invention—not biological. Smedley asserted that race as a social construction is a way and means for one race to socially and stereotypically identify another race as less than themselves in order to justify its right to an elevated position of privilege and social status. Lopez (1994) defined race as a social construction according to four important facets using the term "racial fabrication":

> First, humans rather than abstract social forces produce races. Second, as human constructs, races constitute an integral part of a whole social fabric that includes gender and class relations. Third, the meaning-systems surrounding race change quickly rather than slowly. Finally, races are constructed relationally, against one another, rather than in isolation. Fabrication implies the workings of human hands, and suggests the possible intention to deceive…referring to the fabrication of races emphasizes the human element and evokes the plastic and inconstant character of race. (p. 28)

Furthermore, Lopez (1994) regarded the social construction of race as a negative result of slavery where Africans brought to the United States were given a new condescending label of "Blacks," where before they were simply Africans.

Morning (2007) offered a definition of the meaning of race as a social construction: "constructionist arguments reject biological definitions of race by pointing

to historical and contemporary social processes that shape the emergence, spread, and evolution of race thinking" (p. 446). Similarly, Du Bois (2011) discussed the position that the idea of races is a manmade invention. He stated, "When we thus come to inquire into the essential difference of races, we find it hard to come at once to any definite conclusion" (p. 111). Du Bois (2011) further stated, "great as is the physical unlikeness of the various races of men their likenesses are greater, and upon this rests the whole scientific doctrine of Human Brotherhood" (p. 112). These statements point out that the idea of different races and their separation into groups is a sociological and historical phenomenon and not scientific. Du Bois (2011) also shared that, "they [subtle forces of separation of people into groups based on the physical] have divided human beings into races, which, while they perhaps transcend scientific definition, nevertheless, are clearly defined to the eye of the Historian and Sociologist" (p. 112).

Intersectionality and Anti-Essentialism

The CRT tenet of intersectionality considers the individuality of each person and how each individual is made up of at least two intersections. Such intersections can include one's gender, race, and language, for example. The intersection of gender and race provide the first two identifiable characteristics for every human being; however, no two people are alike, and each person's life holds varying intersections which contribute to the complexity of the human existence.

According to Carbado, Crenshaw, Mays, and Tomlinson (2013), the term *intersectionality* was first introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989 (p. 303). Carbado divulged that Crenshaw

> exposed and sought to dismantle the instantiations of marginalization that operated within institutionalized discourses that legitimized existing power relations (e.g., law); and at the same time, she placed into sharp relief how discourses of resistance (e.g. feminism and antiracism) could themselves function as sites that produced and legitimized marginalization. (p. 304)

Thus, Crenshaw pointed out how certain intersections, such as gender and race, placed some people in a vulnerable position of marginalization in society.

The concept of anti-essentialism complements intersectionality. Because every person is staunchly unique, it is erroneous to identify any character trait and attribute it to a whole race of people. CRT scholars resist those who would lump everyone together in one heap; anti-essentialism resists the notion that all Blacks are alike, and that all Blacks *essentially* think alike and share the same lifestyles or beliefs. Thus, one Black person cannot speak for the entire race. Essentialism may be described as another form of racism disguised. "No person has a single, easily stated, unitary identity . . . Everyone has potentially conflicting, overlapping identities, loyalties, and allegiances" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017, pp. 10–11).

Unique Voice of Color or Counternarrative

The CRT tenet of counternarrative has also been described as the *voice-of-color thesis*. All people of color do not have the exact same experiences or mindsets, but in the "legal storytelling" movement—another hallmark of CRT—each person of color has a unique voice. Legal storytelling offers a form of communication that deals with real life scenarios. Delgado and Stefancic (2017) asserted:

> Coexisting in somewhat uneasy tension with anti-essentialism, the voice-of-color thesis holds that because of their different histories and

> experiences with oppression, Black, American Indian, Asian, and Latino writers and thinkers may be able to communicate to their white counterparts matters that the Whites are unlikely to know. Minority status, in other words, brings with it a presumed competence to speak about race and racism. The "legal storytelling" movement urges black and brown writers to recount their experiences with racism and the legal system and to apply their own unique perspectives to assess law's master narratives. (p. 11).

Key Elements of Critical Race Theory

Matsuda et al. (1993) identified the following six unifying key elements of CRT, some of which encompass the five tenets above:

1. Critical race theory recognizes that racism is endemic to American life.
2. Critical race theory expresses skepticism toward dominant legal claims of neutrality, objectivity, color blindness, and meritocracy.
3. Critical race theory challenges ahistoricism and insists on a contextual/historical analysis of the law.
4. Critical race theory insists on recognition of the experiential knowledge of people of color and our communities of origin in analyzing law and society.
5. Critical race theory is interdisciplinary and eclectic. It borrows from several traditions including liberalism, law and society, feminism, Marxism, poststructuralism, critical legal theory, pragmatism, and nationalism.
6. Critical race theory works toward the end of eliminating racial oppression as part of the broader goal of ending all forms of oppression (pp. 6–7).

These six unifying elements of CRT reinforce (and coincide with) the basic tenets of CRT. Critical race theorists declare that racism is embedded in American life and that the United States is neither colorblind, neutral, or objective in race matters. In this way, a meritocratic society where everyone is equal and on a neutral and objective playing field is therefore unrealistic. In addition, critical race theorists suggest that analysis of the law must be considered within the context of history. Matsuda et al. (1993) argued:

> Current inequalities and social/institutional practices are linked to earlier periods in which the intent and cultural meaning of such practices were clear. More important, as critical race theorists we adopt a stance that presumes that racism has contributed to all contemporary manifestations of group advantage and disadvantage along racial lines, including differences in income, imprisonment, health, housing, education, political representation, and military service. Our history calls for this presumption. (p. 6).

The two most relevant unifying elements of CRT for this study are linked: the interdisciplinary, eclectic element of CRT (the fifth element) in service of the sixth element, to end oppression in all its forms. Due to its eclecticism, CRT has been adopted not only by scholars in education but, for the purpose of this study, music education as well, as a tool of analysis. "This eclecticism allows critical race theory to examine and incorporate those aspects of a methodology or theory that effectively enable our voice and advance the cause of racial justice even as we maintain a critical posture" (Matsuda et al, 1993, p. 6).

Finally, "CRT works toward the end of eliminating racial oppression as part of the broader goal of ending all forms of oppression" (Matsuda et al., 1993, p. 6). This element of CRT also holds importance for the Celebration Chorus, as it resonates with the desire of Maestro Brackens and the choristers to continue the tradition of Wings by singing for

diverse audiences, to bridge racial divides, and hence join the movement to end racial oppression and division between cultures nationally and internationally.

Critical Race Theory and Education

Several educators aligned themselves with the tenets of critical race theory and in so doing entered new territory. One of the most celebrated educators in academia connected to critical race theory is Gloria Ladson-Billings. In 1995, she and William F. Tate, IV, changed the face of education scholarship with the ground-breaking and seminal article, "Toward a Critical Race Theory of Education" (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Focused on the intersection of race-based issues in education, they introduced academia to critical race theory and its relevance to education. In the article, they guided their discussion around three central propositions pertaining to an understanding of race and property, which they aptly applied to societal inequity in general and to school inequity particularly: (a) Race continues to be a significant factor in determining inequity in the United States, (b) U.S. society is based on property rights, and (c) The intersection of race and property creates an analytical tool through which we can understand social (and, consequently, school) inequity (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995, p. 48).

Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) attributed the work of Du Bois and Woodson as the foundation on which they built their work. They shared that "both Woodson and Du Bois presented cogent arguments for considering race as *the* central construct for understanding inequality" (p. 50). Tatum advised that the "dismantling of racism is in the best interests of everyone" (p. 14).

Dixson and Rousseau (2005) state that CRT offers a qualitative approach through narratives and stories, in contrast to a quantitative perspective. They assert that CRT scholars "believe and utilize personal narratives and stories as valid forms of 'evidence' and thereby challenge a 'numbers only' approach to documenting inequity or discrimination that tends to certify discrimination from a quantitative rather than a qualitative perspective" (pp. 10-11). In this dissertation, the stories from members of the Celebration Chorus provide qualitative data that describe their efforts to preserve the Negro spiritual and to educate the public about the evils of racism.

Critical Race Theory and Music Education

The intersection of critical race theory and music education, including education through music performance, represents newly chartered waters; however, a hand full of scholars in music education including Bradley (2006, 2007, 2012), Hess (2013, 2015), Gurgel (2013), and Gustafason (2005), have drawn upon critical race theory and/or anti-racism to frame their research and philosophical writings. Scholarship in music education that intersects and uses critical race theory and/or anti-racism as a theoretical framework is fairly young. Excluding the work of Du Bois's (1903/2007) *The Souls of Black Folk*, this scholarship in music education began around 2005. Gustafason (2005) confirmed this idea as she described her dissertation:

> Its first contribution is its creation of a new focus for research in music education: an assessment of the child's participation as related to racialized fabrications of the child's biography, comportment, and disposition. The dissertation's second level of significance is in expanding the range of content and applying a new theoretical framework for research in the history of music education. (pp. 13–14)

Certain scholars recognize the need for music educators to not allow their music prejudices to exclude certain musics that otherwise may be neglected. For example, choral directors in public education, when choosing repertoire for their choirs, would serve their students well by including a diverse musical palette. As Bradley (2006) asserted "The choice to include or not particular musical genres in curricular materials makes the question 'what music' always and unavoidably 'whose music'?" (p. 335). Bradley recognized the need to ensure that her approach to including diversity in teaching and directing a community youth choir did not turn a blind eye to the reality of the issues of social justice:

> It would be easy within this setting and with my students to lapse into a liberal ideology of plurality, which like official multiculturalism, sweeps issues of social justice and racism under the discursive diversity carpet. Yet my concept of a multicultural human subject does not turn a blind eye to issues of social justice. Thus, within the space of competing national, multicultural, religious, familial, gender, and ability discourses, an antiracism pedagogy enables MFYC [Mississauga Festival Youth Choir] members to realize the inequities that these discourses obfuscate. Our global song curriculum becomes the vehicle for identifying and interrogating issues of social justice through an anti-racist pedagogy that is itself performative. (pp. 188–189)

In addition to educating her choral students about issues of racism of social justice to produce music performers who are informed about what they are singing, Bradley (2007) also spoke about the need for a diversified music curriculum that de-centers Western music through the inclusion of world music (p. 153). Her ideas bear implications for the Celebration Chorus, who deems it important to educate audiences of all ages, including school audiences, about music such as the Negro spiritual and its related history.

> This means that we must again look seriously at curriculum, rethinking "whose music" our curriculum valorizes and whose music is ignored, or even denigrated, from the viewpoint of the racial identities in question. For music educators, this suggests that we acknowledge and address the ways curricula (at all levels), research practices, audition requirements, and the musical skills that are most valued . . . are also structured by racial relations. We need to talk directly about the raciology at work within music education. (p. 153).

In this same article, Bradley (2007) further discussed the importance of a diverse curriculum at every age. She shared:

> While age-appropriate approaches are important, even young children understand difference . . . This suggests the importance of learning music from diverse cultures, in a range of styles as well as languages, beginning with the youngest learners . . . From middle to late elementary grades right through high school, these experiences may be additionally enriched by talking with students about the social and historical contexts for all the music we teach, including their racial implications. African-American spirituals emerged from the condition of race-based slavery; what is now called the blues began after slavery had officially ended but freedom was legally withheld through Jim Crow laws and social norms that reiterated white supremacy . . . This is a history that our students need to know, and in learning it through and as part of the music, they develop much deeper understandings of music's sociality, as well as its role in our constructions of identity and our relationships with others. (p. 155).

These statements highlight the need for intentionality in educating school agers whose minds are open to thinking about the social implications of the music they hear and perform. One of the main purposes of the Celebration Chorus is to educate audiences in schools and churches about slavery and the Negro spiritual. As Bradley (2007) stated, "Engaging meaningfully with our students about oppressions, racial oppression included, may provide a needed catalyst for transforming a discipline that remains sadly out of sync with the students we currently serve and those whom we desire to serve" (p. 153).

Hess (2015) asserted that "challenging the institutions that perpetuate inequality

and inequity in society, therefore, is an important element of anti-racism" (p. 72). Hess shared that music educators should enrich their classes by offering students a more diverse palette other than the traditional fare of a European music diet. She purported

> This destabilizing of Europe as the center is a significant impediment to white supremacy in music education. Supporting students in recognizing different ways of knowing the world is a powerful move toward dismantling systems of privilege as they currently stand. (p. 75).

Gurgel's (2013) scholarship offered another example of research that addressed critical race theory and the intersection of music performance and race. She examined music education discourses surrounding race and culture and identified themes that run parallel with critical race theory.

Bradley (2012) used critical race theories to "consider how the socio-historical context of certain musics seems dangerous terrain for some teachers" (p. 190). She discussed how some music educators are uncomfortable delving into the socio-historical context because in reality they are not comfortable with the topic of race. Thus, instead of dealing with race, they feign that they are uncomfortable with the "P" word, meaning political issues (p. 190), where the "P" is actually code for race.

Bradley (2012) encouraged music educators not to be afraid to take the time to study the historical context in which racially based music has been birthed, such as that associated with apartheid in South Africa and slavery in the U.S. history (and hence Negro spirituals) (p. 193), providing an example based upon the spiritual, "Swing Low, Swing Chariot":

> On the surface, the song speaks to a promise of life after death. But scholars believe the song conveyed a different meaning for those in slavery: Jordan was code for the Ohio River (which separated slave states

> from free states). The band of angels were those who assisted runaway slaves to freedom via the Underground Railroad (Dixon & Rousseau, 2006). By including this meaning alongside the surface interpretation, student's understanding becomes deeper. (p. 193)

Bell's (1995a) discussion of the relatedness of CRT and the spiritual is most probably the first scholarly work that intentionally approached this unlikely intersection. Scholars of the critical race theory movement and the Celebration Chorus share a common bond that draws upon the community as an agent of social change. Both are involved in telling, narrating and/or singing stories that speak for people who are or were once oppressed.

Critical race theory and the artistic goals of the Celebration Chorus are congruent. The Celebration Chorus along with the WOJAF are dedicated to preserving the legacy of Wings and the Negro spiritual, and by doing so, the choristers remind audiences that the struggle to resist oppression by singing Negro spirituals started a long time ago. The basic tenets and key elements unifying themes of CRT bear a strong connection to the history and legacy of the original Wings and the Celebration Chorus; the singing of Negro spirituals suggests a form of protest music that tells a story against oppression (Jones, 1993, p. 43; Spencer, 1990, vii). According to Jones (1993),

> This subtle underlying meaning in the traditional spirituals (and their gospel song progeny) is highly instructive as a manifesto for social change. Often, significant changes begin with the actions of one individual or with a small community of dedicated workers; this provides the impetus for larger waves of change. And clearly, freedom is not the final object of personal changes . . . but to "serve God." (p. 106)

Reagon (2001) asserted that the singer of spirituals represents a dissenting sound or voice. In keeping with this idea of a unique voice or counternarrative, scholars of CRT

champion the unique sound or voice from a person of color who tells a story of oppression through narration. According to Reagon (2001), Douglass credited the spirituals with helping him come to understand that the idea that the system into which he was born was fundamentally wrong. Under a system such as slavery, open critique was dangerous; thus the spirituals became a dissenting voice through their sound (p. 73).

The significance for the Celebration Chorus is that Wings had a strong racial identity as an African American chorus established during World War II (1939-1945), a time of international turmoil and national racial struggle. The Celebration Chorus currently lives under similar racial conditions (though more subtle and erratic but sometimes hostile). The lyrics and the singing of Negro spirituals were used as resistance against slavery's injustice. Similarly, the Celebration Chorus and proponents of CRT use words to express the anguish of the oppressed today.

Bell (1995a), though not a musician, made noteworthy comparisons between CRT and Spirituals in a section of an article he entitled "Black Art in a White Land." In drawing a parallel between CRT and Negro spirituals, Bell's discussion bears a direct link to the activities and experiences of the Celebration Chorus, as he described the condition of slavery in the United States that produced the spiritual (p. 908). Bell's unique scholarship is the first of its kind to draw direct parallels between the Negro spirituals and CRT. In this way, Bell suggested the songs can be interwoven and are therefore highly relatable. I propose CRT and the preservation and performance of Negro spirituals intersect on another level as well: enslaved Africans sang the songs that eventually became Negro spirituals, which collectively constituted social commentary

painfully birthed under legally-sanctioned oppression. Similarly, scholars of critical race theory produce social commentary in opposition to legally sanctioned oppression, racism, and the slow-moving changes in the law. Frederick (2009) asserted that

> some spirituals were rebellious songs that dealt with the conditions of physical life. These were songs of defiance, revolt, and escape. As such, these messages had to be conveyed in a cryptic manner in order to be acceptable. A number of spirituals had multiple meanings. (p. 43)

Calmore (1995) made comparisons between what he calls the fire music (bebop jazz music) of tenor saxophonist Archie Shepp, and the oppositional stance maintained by critical race theorists. He invited readers to accept his premise that CRT "is based significantly on culture; its adherents not only recognize this but emphasize it" (p. 324). In the conclusion of the article, Calmore shared:

> I have tried to illustrate how critical race scholarship provides an oppositional expression that challenges oppression. In the process, White experience and judgment are rejected as paradigms against which people of color must be measured. As reality itself is contested as a culturally directed and socially constructed reference, critical race theorists are insurgents in the effort to undermine dominant, context-setting assumptions and truths. This oppositional grounding is a distinctive, experiential, and subjective orientation, which directs critical race theorists to connect politics and culture insofar as they offer alternative definitions of reality. (p. 326)

Furthermore, Calmore (1995) pointed out that "the discussion of cultural racism indicates that racial identification is a social construction of self-identification and societal determination. In all regions of the United States, black-white relations are still marked by this 'we-they' character" (p. 325). According to Calmore, cultural racism is an issue against which critical race theorists stand. Similarly, members of the Celebration Chorus stand against cultural racism as well as stand on the shoulders of Wings. To

preserve the spirituals is to oppose assimilation, refuting the myth that the United States is a color-blind society. To see color or race is not always a discriminatory practice or something to be feared or shunned.

Summary

In this chapter, I laid the foundation for critical race theory as the theoretical framework of analysis for this dissertation. Second, I differentiated the terms critical theory from critical race theory, as the former serves as the basis for critical race theory. Third, I discussed the context of the racial climate of a post-slavery America. Fourth, I discussed racism and its effects to paint a picture of the socio-historical context of the Negro spiritual and the activities and experiences of members of the Celebration Chorus. I also examined the concept of racism and legislation by noting Slave Codes, Black Codes, and amendments to the U.S. Constitution. Next, I reviewed the literature concerned with the intersection of critical race theory and education. Finally, I examined the intersection of critical race theory and music education.

Critical Race Theory represents a commitment to change without fear. It confronts the laws of the United States through academic excellence and academic scholarship presented by Black law scholars especially, but people of color in general, and sympathetic White scholars. Critical Race Theorists intellectually confront the disparaging facts of racism as it pertains to law in the United States, with the goal not to eradicate racism because it's so deeply entrenched in U.S. society, but to expose and offer solutions for how the law has to rebuild what has been broken down from the

beginning.

The somewhat marginalized position of the Negro spiritual in American cultural knowledge speaks to the need for critical race analysis. The Wings Over Jordan Celebration Chorus is made up of choir members from various predominantly Black churches in the Greater Cleveland Area, and the chorus identifies racially as an African American sacred music choir. Race is a significant and salient feature of the choir; the choir aligns itself with singing Negro spirituals identified with oppressed and enslaved Africans. Negro spirituals are a form of storytelling, since each song tells a story of trouble, woe, or the hope for future relief in the form of freedom from slavery, the ultimate solution.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this case study of the Wings Over Jordan Celebration Chorus is to tell the story of how the Celebration Chorus continues the mission of its renowned original group, Wings Over Jordan Choir (Wings)—to preserve the Negro spiritual through performance, education, and documentation. This case study relies upon historical documentation and documentation through interviews and focus groups that described the activities and experiences of its members, including Maestro Glenn A. Brackens, its founding director. This chapter provides an overview of the research design and procedures followed to investigate the activities and experiences of the Celebration Chorus.

Case Study

I utilized case study methodology to present my findings of the Wings Over Jordan Celebration Chorus in its preservation of the Negro spiritual. Creswell described as case study in the following statement:

> the study of an issue explored through one or more cases within a bounded system (i.e. a setting, a context) . . . I choose to view it as a methodology, a type of design in qualitative research, or an object of study, as well as product of the inquiry. Case study research is a qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a bounded system (a ***case***) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving ***multiple sources of information*** (e.g. observations, interviews, audiovisual material, and documents and reports), and reports a case ***description*** and case-based themes. (Creswell, 2007, p. 73, emphasis in original).

I drew information from several sources including interviews, newspapers, books,

articles, one-one-one interviews, personal communications, personal libraries of members of the Celebration Chorus, special collections housed in local libraries, and the personal collections of Professor Dr. Regennia Williams, and Wings Over Jordan authoritarian, Dr. Samuel Barber.

This case study has several defining characteristics: it is qualitative, descriptive, intrinsic, holistic, and contains elements of historiography and ethnography. Merriam (1998) defined qualitative research as an "umbrella concept covering several forms of inquiry that help us understand and explain the meaning of social phenomena with as little disruption of the natural setting as possible" (p. 5). She pointed out that, "since qualitative research focuses on process, meaning, and understanding, *the product of a qualitative research is richly descriptive.* Words and pictures rather than numbers are used to convey what the researcher has learned about a phenomenon" (Merriam, 1998, p. 8, emphasis in original). Furthermore, she asserted, "a *descriptive* case study in education is one that presents a detailed account of the phenomenon under study" (p. 38, emphasis in original).

According to Creswell (2007), the term *intrinsic* in case study research implies that, "the focus is on the case itself because the case presents an unusual or unique situation" (p. 74 original). Creswell (2007) also suggested the adjective *holistic* implies focus on "the *entire* case to present a comprehensive and complete picture" (pp. 243–245, emphasis in original). Creswell (2007) pointed out that there are four basic types of information to collect: "interviews, observations, documents, and audiovisual materials" (p. 43). I used all four of these types of information to collect data. I conducted

interviews, observed the choir in rehearsals and performances as a participant-observer, and viewed DVDs of former interviews and concert performances. In this way, my focus and interest centers on the Celebration Chorus in its entirety and its uniqueness as a choir that continues to preserve the legacy of its predecessor, Wings Over Jordan.

Merriam (1998) wrote, "a case study might be selected for its very uniqueness, for what it can reveal about a phenomenon, knowledge we would not otherwise have access to" (p. 33). I chose to study this particular choir not only because of its uniqueness but also because the mission of the Celebration Chorus resonates with my philosophy as a musician and educator. I am a teacher and concert pianist dedicated and committed to preserving Negro spirituals and their history through performance and education. In addition to interviews with choir members and the focus group, Maestro Brackens, and my observations, I collected data about the Celebration Chorus and Wings from a historical viewpoint, through examination of documents that included both digital sources and archival material.

This study may also be considered ethnographic, in that I examined the cultural aspects of the Celebration Chorus, including its racial identity. According to Fetterman (2010), "ethnographers assume a holistic outlook to gain a comprehensive and complete picture of a social group" (p. 18). Similarly, Flinders and Richardson (2002) posited that ethnography "attempts to describe as much as possible about a culture or social group, including its history, religion, politics, and environment" (p. 1163). The research data found in this study is unique to Wings and the Celebration Chorus and cannot be generalized to other such groups (Merriam, 1998, p. 208).

According to Yin (2003), "a case study is favorable when a 'how' or 'why' question is being asked about a contemporary set of events, over which the investigator has little or no control" (p. 9). The contemporary set of events surrounding the Celebration Chorus lent itself nicely to several "how" and "why" questions. The research questions included "how" and "why" questions. Which served as a guide to help keep the overarching purpose of the study in focus. The questions helped to further a rich and detailed discussion for the purpose of a descriptive analysis of the Celebration Chorus in its preservation of the Negro spiritual.

The research setting included the rehearsal space at the home-base church, the neighborhood library, private homes of certain members, and specific concert venues. I conducted face-to-face individual interviews and served as facilitator for the focus group. In addition, I was a participant observer to rehearsals and performances, which provided me with a rich understanding of the organization, its mission, and the people who form the choir today.

My investigation of the Celebration Chorus centers around the following overarching research questions:

1. Why have members of the Wings Over Jordan Celebration Chorus chosen to participate in this organization to preserve the Negro spiritual?
2. In what activities and experiences do members of the Wings Over Jordan Celebration Chorus engage to preserve the Negro spiritual?
3. What role does race play in the identity of the Wings Over Jordan Celebration Chorus in its preservation of the Negro spiritual?

Research Sites

My study of the Celebration Chorus formally began with permission from the Institutional Review Board of Boston University on April 15, 2016; however, my connection to and informal observation of the organization began in 2013 through attendance at rehearsals and concerts. At that time, I spoke to Maestro Brackens to advise that I was a student at Boston University interested in studying the choir.

The research for this study took place at the historic Gethsemane Baptist Church of Cleveland, Ohio, the site for the rehearsals and business meetings of the Celebration Chorus and the WOJAC, the administrative and executive body of the organization. The interviews and focus group meetings took place at the Hough Branch of the Cleveland Public Library; and when necessary, in the private homes of three participants.

Historic Gethsemane Baptist Church

Gethsemane Baptist Church was founded in 1900 as a Baptist mission for African Americans (Van Tassel & Grabowski, 1998). Gethsemane is considered a historic church mainly because of its connection to Wings Over Jordan. It has also had a long line of illustrious pastors, including Rev. Glenn T. Settle (from 1933 to 1947). Under the pastorate of Rev. Settle, around the year 1935, a reputation for excellence began to grow related to Gethsemane's Senior Choir, which would later become the world-renowned Wings Over Jordan Choir. After Rev. Settle's tenure there, the church moved to its current location in the historic Hough neighborhood.

Historic Hough Neighborhood

The majority of the interviews and all the focus group meetings took place in Cleveland's historical Hough neighborhood (named after Oliver and Eliza Hough, who settled there in 1799), the birthplace of Wings and hence the Celebration Chorus. The Hough neighborhood made its mark on Cleveland history when it experienced severe racial tensions that culminated in the infamous Hough Riots of July 1966 (Cleveland Historical Team, 2018). Once a predominantly White and affluent neighborhood, like so many American neighborhoods, Hough experienced integration followed by White flight and loss of revenue (pp. 2–4). Nonetheless, according to The Cleveland Historical Team (2018):

> Since the 1980s, especially under the vigorous leadership of the [late] Councilwoman Fannie Lewis, the area's decline has shown signs of leveling off amid investments such as the Lexington Village and Beacon Place townhouses, Renaissance Village (a group of twenty upmarket homes), and novel land reuse strategies such as Chateau Hough, an urban vineyard. (pp. 5-6).

The significance of this neighborhood cannot be overemphasized; because of Wings and the Celebration Chorus, Gethsemane Baptist Church has enjoyed a longstanding reputation for excellence in music and producing outstanding musicians, and for providing a site for community cultural events, programs, and concerts.

Participant Selection

Description of Participants

The participants of this study of the Celebration Chorus and WOJAF highly value education for themselves and their children and grandchildren. They are were highly

educated African American men and women, representing middle to upper middle-class citizens of the Greater Cleveland Area. Collectively, their educational backgrounds (including their children and grandchildren) ranged from high school diplomas to master's degrees and doctoral degrees. The participants belonged to various churches, and the majority were active or were once active in the music departments of their respective churches. Several participants were members of the founding church, Gethsemane Baptist Church.

The majority of participants were retired or near retirement; only a few participants were employed at the time of the study. The participants represented a diversity of career backgrounds, including teachers, counselors, entrepreneurs, college and hospital business administrators, government employees, and professional musicians. The participants ranged in age from late 40s to late 80s. The common characteristic of all the participants was their dedication and commitment to preserving the Negro spiritual and the legacy of Wings through their participation in the Celebration Chorus.

Recruitment of Participants

All participants were members of the Celebration Chorus and WOJAF. I felt it was important to include members of the entire organization to present a complete picture. Moreover, due to the relatively small combined active membership of both organizations (approximately 20 active members), I needed to ensure I would have enough participants and viewpoints related to all aspects of the organization.

There is no conflict of interest between the Celebration Chorus and WOJAF; both groups work seamlessly and in tandem with one another and share the same Constitution

and Bylaws. Regarding membership, Article IV of the Constitution and Bylaws of Wings Over Jordan Celebration Chorus and Wings Over Jordan Alumni & Friends, Inc., states:

> Members of the Wings Over Jordan Celebration Chorus and Wings Over Jordan Alumni & Friends, Inc. shall consist of singers from the Greater Cleveland Metropolitan area; former members of the Wings Over Jordan Choral Ensemble; and/or persons willing to support, and promote the ideas as stated in Article III. [Purpose] of this Constitution. Active membership will be acknowledged by those individuals who have paid their yearly dues. (p. 3)

Initial Recruitment of Participants

After receiving permission from Boston University's Institutional Review Board (IRB), I contacted the president of the Celebration Chorus for permission to speak to the choir on Saturday, May 14, 2016, the next business meeting of WOJAF. I also gained permission from the president of the Celebration Chorus and the president of the WOJAF to launch my study on Saturday, May 14, 2016, at Gethsemane Baptist Church of Cleveland, Ohio. The president of the WOJAF, who presided over the business meeting, formally introduced me to the body. I hand delivered recruitment letters and consent forms to the members present (See Appendix A for recruitment letters and Appendix C for consent letters). Using the consent form to guide my thoughts, I introduced the study, read the purpose of the research, and encouraged everyone to consider participating in an interview, the focus group, or both. Approximately 20 members were present. I had predetermined to interview 10 choir members including Maestro Brackens. In addition, I wanted to include a focus group of 5 members; thus, the total number of participants needed for the study was 15. I wanted to ensure that the number of participants could yield sufficiently diverse perspectives on the issues related to preserving the Negro

spiritual.

I provided the potential participants with a self-addressed envelope to be returned within one week; however, the president of WOJAF urged everyone to take the time, right then and there, to fill out the forms. The few who needed more time to decide were invited to take the forms home. I thanked the entire membership for their time and informed them that I would follow-up with a call for to all those who turned in forms and expressed interest in participating.

Selection of Participants

Originally, the study was designed to have 15 participants: 10 one-on-one interviews and a focus group of 5 participants. Upon examination of the consent forms collected, I determined that the number of willing participants (18) exceeded the number needed for the study (15). Some recruits consented to participate in the interviews only, and some recruits consented to both an individual interview and to participate in the focus group. In order to determine who would be interviewed and who would participate in the focus group, I conducted a lottery in my home, as determined in the research protocol. First, I wrote the name of each willing interviewee on an individual sheet of paper, folded it up, and placed it in a bowl. I then randomly pulled 10 names for the 10 face-to-face interviews and listed the names on a sheet of paper. I then placed the names of those who consented to the focus group in a bowl and pulled five names. Two (2) out of the five (5) names pulled were the same names pulled for the interviews. I called both members to ask what each wanted to do. One of the two willing participants felt comfortable doing both an interview and the focus group and agreed to do so. The second of the two agreed

to do the interview but thought it best for me to choose another member to participate in the focus group, due to the extra time commitment that participating in both would entail. Upon completion of the lottery, I ended up with 14 fourteen participants in total, because one participant's name was pulled twice, both for the interview and for the focus group.

I then utilized purposeful selection (Creswell, 2007) to ask a consenting member chosen for an interview to be a part of the focus group instead, and she agreed. Another of the consenting members chosen for an interview, upon my call, decided to withdraw from the study. I then made another purposeful selection and asked another member who was indecisive initially, but who had taken her consent form home, if she would participate in the study, and she agreed. I then realized that the majority of my questions were directed toward choir members specifically, and some of the non-singers chosen for an interview would be better suited for the focus group, so, one more member was asked to shift from an interview to the focus group in order to achieve the desired number of interviewees and focus group members.

Participant Observer Researcher Role

Initially, I began this research as an observer only; however, after Maestro Glenn A. Brackens invited me to participate in the Celebration Chorus as a rehearsal and concert piano accompanist and to sing in the alto section, in November 2016, I requested and received permission from the Institutional Review Board of Boston University to become a participant observer. This change in status from observer to participant observer had both disadvantages and benefits. One disadvantage to this status was that in spite of this insider position, I had to remain somewhat "detached to observe and

analyze" (Merriam, 1998, p. 103). In addition, "a participant observer has to rely on memory to recount the session" (p. 104). Moreover, even though I had an insider role, I still needed to analyze the data objectively, without hesitating to discuss both the positive and negative aspects of the organization.

The benefits, however, outweighed the disadvantages as a participant observer. The insider position permitted easy access to participants and allowed me to make connections with everyone present in rehearsals and meetings. As an African American, I identified with the Celebration Chorus by having a common cultural background. Therefore, I was able to establish a rapport with the Celebration Chorus, which helped to build trust and credibility. As Merriam (1998) stated, "in reality, researchers are rarely total participants or total observers" (p. 102). Thus, I do not claim impartiality in this study; rather, my personal experiences frequently resonated with the narratives shared by the participants.

Data Collection Methods

I collected data using multiple methods that included interviews and focus group meetings, as well as other primary and secondary sources including music scores, books, articles, archival materials, audiovisual materials, special collections including private collections, and online resources.

Maxwell (2005), discussing the limits of selected data collection methods, stated:

> By using several methods of gathering data, the results are more reliable, credible, and trustworthy. However, while interviewing is often an efficient and valid way of understanding someone's perspective, observation can enable you to draw inferences about this perspective that

> you couldn't obtain by relying exclusively on interview data. Conversely, although observation often provides a direct and powerful way of learning about people's behavior and the context in which this occurs, interviewing can also be a valuable way of gaining a description of actions and events—often the only way, for events that took place in the past or ones to which you cannot gain observational access. (p. 94)

I served as the research instrument used to collect data in this study. As Merriam (1998) offered, there is an inherent weakness in a qualitative study—the human factor. Merriam (1998) offered this insight:

> In a qualitative study, the investigator is the primary instrument for gathering and analyzing data and, as such, can respond to the situation by maximizing opportunities for collecting and producing meaningful information. Conversely, the investigator as human instrument is limited by being human—that is, mistakes are made, opportunities are missed, personal biases interfere. Human instruments are fallible, as any other research instrument. (p. 20)

Duration of the Study

The duration of the study was originally planned for 16 weeks; however, due to the unforeseen critical illness of the founding Choral and Artistic Director, Maestro Glenn A. Brackens, data collection was extended to over a year. Thus, formally, the interview and focus group data collection period lasted from the introduction of the study on May 14, 2016, to May 3, 2017, the date of the last interview with Maestro Brackens. Data collection continued informally, however, as certain participants who owned pertinent archival material, including the script for one of the Celebration Chorus' dramatic narrations, continued to share invaluable documents after May 3, 2017. Data collection ceased on October 10, 2017, after I had researched the private collection of Dr. Samuel Barber.

Procedures for Interviews

Personal interviews were conducted with 10 members of the Celebration Chorus and WOJAF, including Maestro Glenn A. Brackens. The interviews were semi-structured with scripted questions and lasted about 90 minutes each. Flexibility was included in the interview protocol to generate rich, thick descriptions (Merriam, 1998). In this way, additional questions could be asked if scripted questions were not fully addressed or if questions emerged from a participant's answers. This helped to ensure that questions were answered fully. The interviews were videotaped and/or audiotaped with the consent of the participants. I interviewed everyone, and then went back again for a second round of interviews to obtain further information where necessary.

The interview script consisted of 16 questions covering topics pertaining to the participants' personal backgrounds, reasons, and motivation for valuing the Negro spiritual, activities, and experiences as members of Wings (and WOJAF), racial identity, and the philosophies of Maestro Glenn Brackens and Rev. Glenn T. Settle. The interview participants, all African Americans, comprised seven women and three men, including Maestro Glenn Brackens.

Procedures for Focus Group

The use of a focus group enabled me to collect data from multiple viewpoints at the same time and to gain a deeper understanding of the Celebration Chorus. Kamberelis and Dimitriadis (2005) viewed focus group research as efficient, because focus groups

> generate large quantities of material from relatively large numbers of people in a relatively short time. In addition, because of their synergistic potentials, focus groups often produce data that are seldom produced

> through individual interviewing and observation and that result in especially powerful interpretive insights . . . in addition, focus groups foreground the importance not only of content, but also of expression, because they capitalize on the richness and complexity of group dynamics . . . Focus groups, to a greater extent than observations and individual interviews, afford researchers access to the kinds of social interactional dynamics that produce particular memories, positions, ideologies, practices, and desires among specific groups of people. (pp. 903–904)

The focus group for this study consisted of five participants, one man and four women, all members of the Celebration Chorus or WOJAF. Each member of the focus group chose his or her own pseudonym to be used in the data analysis. The focus group met on June 14, July 5, 19, and 26, 2016, at the Hough Branch of the Cleveland Public Library, in a large, private conference room, for approximately 90 minutes per meeting. The following topics were discussed in the four separate meetings:

> Focus Group Meeting 1: Preserving the Negro Spiritual
>
> Focus Group Meeting 2: Advancing the Negro Spiritual: Keeping the Negro Spiritual Alive by Any Means Necessary
>
> Focus Group Meeting 3: Racial Identity of Wings Over Jordan Celebration Chorus
>
> Focus Group Meeting 4: Mission of the Wings Over Jordan Celebration Chorus and Wings Over Jordan Alumni and Friends, Inc.

I served as the facilitator for all focus group meetings. In preparation for this role, I took a free course at the PNC Fairfax Connection, a free community resource center in Cleveland's historic Fairfax neighborhood. I videotaped and audiotaped the focus group meetings with permission of the participants. Due to unforeseen events, no focus group had perfect attendance. At one focus group, a participant took part by telephone rather than in person.

Confidentiality and Anonymity

In order to protect the anonymity of the participants, pseudonyms were assigned to each participant except Maestro Glenn A. Brackens, whose real name is used with his consent. Although some participants verbally consented to use their real names in the study, I determined it prudent to maintain the established research protocol of using pseudonyms for everyone except Maestro.

Participants who were interviewed were advised not to discuss the research with others, to maintain both their personal anonymity and the confidentiality of the information they shared. Likewise, focus group participants were urged not to discuss this research outside of their focus group meetings. Participation in the study represented minimal risk both for interviewees and focus group members.

Data Analysis

Coding

I personally transcribed each interview and focus group meeting. Once transcriptions had been completed, I read the transcript for each interview and focus group meeting, searching for emerging themes and sub-themes. I conducted the coding manually for the analysis of the ten interviews and four focus group meetings in two focused sessions. In the side margins on the hard copy of each transcript for the interviews and focus group meetings, I wrote down what I considered prominent themes and sub-themes.

Next, I wrote the emergent themes and sub-themes from the ten interviews and four focus group meetings on three log sheets of enumerated lined paper. I then typed up

the list of 212 themes and sub-themes, without delineation or categorization. I did not concern myself with duplication of themes at this point. Next, I took a green marker and a yellow marker and read down the entire list to differentiate what I considered to be themes (green) from the sub-themes (yellow). For this initial analysis, I did not include the themes and sub-themes from the interviews of Maestro Brackens. This was simply because his interviews were very lengthy and conducted over the course of three days, and I needed more time for analysis.

During the second round of data analysis, I combed through the interviews a second time with an eye to more detail; I made additional notes in the margins. In addition, I re-read the three interviews of Maestro Brackens and the four focus group meetings and typed a second list of the emergent themes and sub-themes of Maestro Brackens and the four focus group meetings, taken directly from the transcripts, as opposed to handwriting them on the log sheets. This list comprised 29 themes and sub-themes for the interviews of Maestro Brackens, and 113 themes and sub-themes for the four focus group meetings.

Emergent Themes

I next made an initial outline for the data analysis based upon the emergent themes and sub-themes for organization. Upon closer reexamination of the themes and subthemes and after having a better understanding of the data, I identified five overarching themes. The first overarching theme was the importance of the Celebration Chorus and the WOJAF to preserve the history, legacy, and mission of Wings and the Negro Spiritual**,** with the sub-themes of the mission and history of the Celebration

Chorus. The second overarching theme represented the activities and experiences of members of the Celebration Chorus and WOJAF, and the need for revitalization of the chorus to fulfil its mission and purpose related to preserving the Negro Spiritual, with sub-themes of the story and message of the Negro spiritual, and motivation and value in singing the Negro spirituals.

The third overarching theme was the importance of the Celebration Chorus to educate younger generations and general audiences in preserving Negro spirituals. The fourth overarching theme was the significance of the racial, cultural, and community identity of the Celebration Chorus in its performance of Negro spirituals. Southern family roots, heritage, genealogy, and the role of the Black church were emergent subthemes. The fifth overarching emerging theme represented the convergence and divergence of philosophies of what I have dubbed "The Two Glenns," Rev. Glenn T. Settle and Maestro Glenn A. Brackens. This particular overarching theme had subthemes concerning divergent views held by members of the Celebration Chorus about performance practices of Negro spirituals.

Finally, in coding the themes and subthemes, I placed four poster size post-it sheets on four separate walls in my office. On each sheet, I wrote down the initial four overarching emerging themes of the case study. Under each heading, I wrote down the subthemes to categorize the themes and help to shape the organization of the data. Table 1 illustrates the emergent overarching themes and their related subthemes.

Table 1

Emergent Themes and Subthemes Resulting from Analysis of Interviews and Focus Groups

Themes	Subthemes
The importance of preserving the history, legacy, and mission of Wings Over Jordan by the Wings Over Jordan Celebration Chorus and the Wings Over Jordan Alumni and Friends, Inc.	• Historical archives, collections, and documentation of the organization • Role of Gethsemane Baptist Church and the Black Church • The Spiritual Preservation Fund, Inc. of Wings Over Jordan • Mission Statement of the Organization
The activities and experiences of Wings Over Jordan Celebration Chorus and its need for revitalization to fulfil its mission and purpose	• Purpose of the Wings Over Jordan Celebration Chorus • Mission Statement of the Organization • Motivation for singing Negro spirituals • Outstanding performances and representative repertoire • Role of the Black Church • Recruitment of new members
The importance of educating younger generations and general audiences about preserving the Negro spiritual, Wings Over Jordan, Wings Over Jordan Celebration Chorus, and Wings Over Jordan Alumni and Friends, Inc.	• Neglect and miseducation of Negro spirituals • Need for Negro spiritual presentations in schools • Need for continued community outreach through concerts, workshops, and scholarship programs • Need for strategic use of technology to market the activities of the chorus
The significance of racial, cultural, and community identity of the Wings Over Jordan Celebration Chorus in its preservation and performance of Negro spirituals	• Role of the Black Church, spirituality, and church membership • African American heritage, genealogy, experiences of Jim Crow, racism, and Northern migration • Need for continued community involvement • Special performances in the Greater Cleveland Area • Childhood music formation

Themes	Subthemes
Philosophies of "The Two Glenns": Maestro Glenn A. Brackens and Rev. Glenn T. Settle	• Convergent and Divergent views by participants toward the philosophies of "The Two Glenns" concerning Negro spiritual performance practices • Keep the Negro spiritual alive by any means necessary; preserving the Negro spiritual through advancement or contemporizing • Vision and Revitalization Plans for the Future of Wings Over Jordan Celebration Chorus

Ethical Considerations and Trustworthiness

In order to collect data for this study in a trustworthy manner, I employed data triangulation and member checks (Creswell, 2007; Stake, 1995; Merriam, 1998). I strove to establish validity with the Celebration Chorus and WOJAF throughout the research process, described as follows.

Triangulation

The triangulation of data in a research study involves the use of multiple methods in data collection and analysis in order for the researcher to gain and ensure confidence in what one considers as the emerging themes of a study and in what one reports; it involves examining and re-examining data (Stake, 2010; Merriam, 1998). I used several data collection methods, and my sources were diverse. I utilized data from interviews, focus group meetings, participant-observations of specific choir rehearsals, performances, business meetings, audiovisual materials including DVDs of concerts, YouTube recordings of the 2008 concert and Wings documentary, scholarly journals, choral music

scores of pieces performed by the choir; archived materials from the special collections at Cleveland State University as well as the Praying Grounds African American Faith Communities: A Documentary and Oral History Project of the Initiative for the Study of Religion and Spirituality in the History of Africa and the Diaspora (RASHAD) established by Dr. Regennia Williams. In addition, sources were examined at the Cleveland History Center at the Western Reserve Historical Society, the East Cleveland Public Library Icabod Flewellen Collection, the extensive private collection of Dr. Samuel Barber, several priceless documents donated by Dr. Regennia Williams, as well as documents donated from private collections of several participants and from the collection of Taller Williams, founder of Tallerworks, Inc. I also used newspaper clippings from two local papers, the Cleveland Plain Dealer and the Cleveland Call and Post.

Member Checks

Merriam (1998) defined member checks as "taking data and tentative interpretations back to the people from whom they were derived and asking them if the results are plausible" (p. 204). I gave each participant the transcript of his or her interview or focus group meetings, and I invited all participants to write corrections and comments directly onto their transcripts in order for me to include their input into the final report.

Throughout the study and especially near completion of writing the narrative analysis, I sought input from a feedback group comprised of key people in the Celebration Chorus and WOJAF as a means of establishing credibility. I did this to build

trust with the participants and to allow myself to have an opportunity to hear and incorporate feedback from the participants. In addition, I convened a meeting with participants of the focus group (only two out of five attended) to hear their comments on what they deemed as important, and thereby to have a larger data base from which to draw in writing the final report.

Validity

For my research, I constructed a study with multiple sources of evidence to establish internal validity. Creswell (2007) summarized many perspectives of validity in qualitative research and several validation strategies for the researcher. One of those strategies or approaches is to assess the accuracy of the findings, as best described by the researcher and the participants. To ensure validity and accuracy of the findings, I studied the transcripts of the interviews and focus group meetings in-depth to ensure I presented the data accurately. Secondly, I spent time in the field as a participant-observer in performances and rehearsals and attended selected business meetings to develop a relationship with the participants, to add value and accuracy for thick descriptions.

Creswell (2007) further posited that validation is a process, and that research scholars have historically used terms such as accuracy, credibility, trustworthiness, and staying power to describe this process. I therefore sought to develop a positive rapport with the Celebration Chorus participants in order to write an accurate, credible, and trustworthy report. Lather (1991) defined face validity as "a click of recognition" and a "yes, of course" instead of "yes, but experience" (cited in Creswell, 2007, p. 204). To this end, I made frequent clarification inquiries in the form of subsequent communication

following the interviews. This determined that my analysis met what Lather terms *face validity*.

Protection of Data

I kept data collected in the form of transcripts, audiotapes, and videotapes in a secured file cabinet in my home office. The data I collected on my computer was password-protected and encrypted. Files were backed up to a removal disk and to the Cloud. Data will be retained for a minimum of seven years, after which time it will be destroyed or added, with permission, to the WOJAF archives.

Summary

This chapter focused on the case study methodology employed to conduct the study of how the Wings Over Jordan Celebration Chorus has preserved the Negro spiritual. The key characteristics of a case study approach were defined, and the research design and procedures of this particular study were discussed. Recruitment of participants from the Celebration Chorus and from WOJAF was also discussed. The chapter included a description and brief history of Gethsemane Baptist Church and the Hough Neighborhood of Cleveland, Ohio, the primary research site. This served to help describe the context in which the original Wings Over Jordan Choir and its progeny, the Celebration Chorus, carried on work to preserve and advance the Negro spiritual.

CHAPTER FOUR: PRESERVING A LEGACY LEST WE FORGET

Walk together Children, don't you get weary.
There's a great camp meeting in the promised land.
(Negro spiritual)

The Negro spiritual, "Walk Together Children," holds significance for the Celebration Chorus because they perform this song often in concerts and have been "walking together" ever since 1988. There is also another well-known Negro spiritual, "You Can Tell the World," that speaks to the purpose of this dissertation: to tell the world about the work of the Celebration Chorus. This worthy work endeavors to spread the good news of the Negro spirituals, preserving the history of their emergence.

The history of the Celebration Chorus in its preservation of Negro spirituals is worthwhile and valuable as it contains the story of the oppression of enslaved Africans in the United States. The story of the Celebration Chorus provides an integral part of our American history and African American history. To tell the story of the Celebration Chorus is to tell the story of a dedicated, determined, and tenacious group of African Americans in the Greater Cleveland, Ohio Area who have refused to allow the legacy of Wings die and are poised to add greater contributions to this unique history. In this chapter, I provide an analysis based upon the data collected in this study of the Celebration Chorus and its preservation of the Negro spiritual. To guide my interpretation of the data for this chapter, I have used the research questions and their related themes and subthemes.

Preserving a Legacy "Lest We Forget"

The participants of this study, members of the Celebration Chorus and WOJAF, have made a conscious decision to preserve the legacy inherited from Wings by not forgetting what they received. After having examined the data, it became apparent that the Celebration Chorus and WOJAF are preserving the legacy of the Negro spiritual through a three-pronged approach of performance, education, and documentation. Each of these prongs show up in the discussion of each research question. In the first section of this chapter, I address the first research question: *Why have members of the Wings Over Jordan Celebration Chorus chosen to participate in this organization to preserve the Negro spiritual?*

The Celebration Chorus and WOJAF are governed by a constitution and bylaws which were revised on March 8, 2014 and contain a five-fold purpose. The Celebration Chorus and WOJAF exist because of the great legacy they inherited from Rev. Glenn T. Settle and Wings. It is my belief that it is beneficial for one to know the past of a group like Wings to better perpetuate its memory for future generations. A visionary in his own right, Rev. Settle sought to fulfill his vision for the original Wings around a four-fold mission: (a) "to preserve the Negro spiritual; (b) to foster better race relations; (c) to present to the world outstanding Black leaders; and (d) to share the outstanding accomplishments of the Afro-American slave" (WOJAF, c.1988). This third item, "to present to the world outstanding Black leaders," is not explicitly stated in the five-fold purpose of the Celebration Chorus and WOJAF; however, it is implied in their purpose, because they often use prominent Black leaders in the musical arts from the local

community and around the nation to host, sponsor, and participate in their concerts and special events including educational Negro spiritual seminars or workshops. Critical race theorist Bell (1995b) speaks to the status of a Black community and its leaders:

> The struggle by black people to obtain freedom, justice, and dignity is as old as this nation. At times, great and inspiring leaders rose out of desperate situations to give confidence and feelings of empowerment to the black community. Most of these leaders urged their people to strive for racial equality. (p. 302)

This statement made by Bell can be applied to the Celebration Chorus and WOJAF because by being active musical leaders in the Hough community and beyond, through the vehicle of Negro spirituals, they have peacefully made a stand of solidarity for racial justice and camaraderie.

A Five-Fold Purpose for Preservation

The organization's five-fold purpose is outlined in the third of 11 articles. This document proved to be important to this study, because it lays out the plan for its members "to continue the dream of the late Rev. Glenn T. Settle to preserve the memory of Wings Over Jordan and the Negro Spiritual as a cultural contribution to African American history" (Preamble to Constitution and Bylaws, Wings Over Jordan Celebration Chorus and Wings Over Jordan Alumni and Friends, Inc. 2014). The organization's five-fold purpose is summarized below:

1. To keep the Negro Spiritual alive, and preserve the contributions made by the original Wings Over Jordan Choral Ensemble; and to promote, enhance, revere, and reveal the vital importance of the Negro Spiritual, and those who founded and contributed to it as an important part of our African American culture.

2. To sponsor programs such as concerts and educational seminars.

3. To establish a "Wings Over Jordan Library" in which to exhibit Wings Over Jordan memorabilia, and other memorabilia related to the Negro Spiritual.

4. To seek contributions, pledges, endowments, grants, and other valuable assets that will serve to make possible the furthering of the works of this organization.

5. To assist students through the awarding of full or partial scholarships. (WOJCC/WOJAF, Preamble, pp. 2–3).

The data showed that the activities and experiences of the Celebration Chorus and WOJAF serve its five-fold purpose to preserve the legacy of the original Wings and the Negro spiritual. The objectives of the Celebration Chorus are also stated succinctly in "Wings Over Jordan and The Revitalization of the Negro Spiritual," a one-page document which summarizes the long term and short-term goals of the organization (WOJAF, Inc., ca. 1988). The last paragraph of this one-page document states:

> The Wings Over Jordan Alumni and Friends, Inc.'s objectives are to bring about a cultural awareness of African American history by honoring the memory of the Wings Over Jordan Chorus and establishing a mechanism to preseve and revitalize the Negro Spirituals performed by them. These objectives are being brought about through the following medium [*sic*]: Annual Negro Spiritual Scholarship Awards, Annual Seminar and Workshop, and celebration through commemorative programs and events. Long range goals include establishing a library to house special musical collections and other culturally historical memorabilia.

In the interviews and focus group meetings, the participants shared their reasons for why they were motivated and continue to be motivated to fulfil the purpose of keeping the Negro spiritual alive and continuing the legacy of Wings. They also shared their reasons for valuing Negro spirituals. These descriptions are provided below.

Motivations and Valuations for Preservation of the Negro Spiritual

The motivation for singing the Negro spirituals by the Celebration Chorus is obviously markedly different from that of enslaved Africans, whose primary motivation was an obsession for freedom (Lovell, 1939). Participants gave several reasons for valuing the preservation of Negro spirituals. Reed-Walker (2008) is an African American scholar whose work resonated with my dissertation in her pursuit of examining contemporary preservations practices of Negro spirituals. The results of her study, generated from her interviews with participants, dovetailed my study. She identified eight reasons that the participants in her study valued Negro spirituals. Six of these reasons for valuing the Negro spiritual resonated with participants in my study:

1. The participant was born into the tradition and culture where the Negro spiritual was valued.

2. The participant experienced emotional attachments and feelings evoked by the sounds, qualities, and lyrics of the Negro spiritual.

3. The participant developed a strong desire to perform the Negro spiritual after hearing the Negro spirituals or receiving instructions relative to its history.

4. The participant claimed ownership to the Negro spiritual because of ethnicity or racial influences.

5. The participant desired to present the Negro spiritual as a major contribution to and recorder of African American, American, and world histories, and

6. The participant desired to impede Negro spirituals' decline. (Reed-Walker, 2008, p. 200)

Reed-Walker (2008) pointed out the "experiential introductions to Negro spirituals" (p. 199) that participants in her study shared. The same experiences resonated with participants in my study. These introductions to Negro spirituals discussed by Reed-Walker served the participants as foundational motivators and had much bearing on why they chose to preserve the Negro spirituals. The "Experiential introductions to Negro spirituals" which resonated with those of the Celebration Chorus included: (1) The participant was born into and grew up in the Negro spiritual tradition;" (2) "The participant was introduced to Negro spirituals in a religious setting;" and (3) "The Negro spiritual was introduced in his or her home where the Negro spiritual was valued" (pp. 199-200). In this way, I believe there exists a congruency of values and motivations amongst African Americans in the United States who have chosen to preserve the legacy of Negro spiritual; for the Celebration Chorus, this preservation occurs through performance, especially.

Childhood experiences. The participants in this study shared several common bonds and characteristics that influenced their motivations for valuing preservation of the Negro spirituals. First, all were introduced to the Negro spiritual in their churches and homes. Thus, all the participants grew up in the Black church where Negro spirituals were sung and valued. Also, they experienced the Negro spiritual from childhood. Thus, love for Negro spirituals was cultivated from a young age. Indeed, the majority of the participants grew up at Gethsemane Baptist Church, the founding church of the original Wings where Negro spirituals were cultivated.

The Celebration Chorus is a multigenerational choir in which there are

descendants of families who participated in the original Wings, and/or who had firsthand experiences with the original Wings in person or by radio. Several participants grew up listening to Wings over the air, and some were under the pastorate of Rev. Settle. Some were alive when the original Wings, on tour, performed in Cleveland at the home base of Gethsemane Baptist Church. For one participant, Rachel, these were very exciting times in the history of Wings. Rachel shared:

> I had never had a chance to sing with the Wings Choir, but I listened to them constantly whenever [I could], and we didn't have records at that time. So, I enjoyed that choir in my life and we learned how to act in the choir. And as we got a little bit older, people started getting old and dropping out, so sometimes they would ask us to teach in there and help by singing with the Wings for a minute or two, but we were not members of the Wings Over Jordan. They dressed in robes and I liked that. (Interview, June 14, 2016)

Thus, as a member of Gethsemane Baptist Church, positive memories of Wings served as motivation to value the Negro spiritual and to become a lifelong member of the Celebration Chorus. It is interesting to note that Rachel occasionally served as "a ringer" for the original Wings, in that she was not a member but helped to fill the occasional void. The original Wings had similar problems to the Celebration Chorus concerning retention of singers. In this same interview, Rachel continued her praise of Wings and shared another fond memory which served as an initial attraction and motivation to become a member of the Celebration Chorus:

> So anyway, Wings was not the major concern of Gethsemane because they had beautiful church services every Sunday . . . But when they came to town it was like the president coming to the ghetto . . . Because you know they made us a little parade of cars and they came in and they would sing. (Interview, June 14, 2016)

Thus, Rachel enjoyed being a member of the historic Gethsemane Baptist Church where

she and other members enjoyed the excitement surrounding the notoriety of the original Wings. The choir served as a source of positive racial pride in what she referred to as "the ghetto." Rachel heard the original Wings in her hometown down south and again at Gethsemane Baptist Church as a member. In remembering Wings with fond childhood recollections, Rachel shared some of her motivation and reasons for valuing the Negro spirituals:

> I heard Wings Over Jordan on a Philco battery operated in Anniston, Alabama. And people that didn't have a radio, they would gather at other people's houses and listen to Wings Over Jordan. That had to be '40—1940. And you know, I felt a desire to see this choir and to become a member of this choir. They made a trip to Anniston, Alabama, which I shall never forget because they segregated the church. But Rev. Settle asked them not to do that. And the White [people] they did that. (Interview, June 14, 2016)

Junia expressed similar fond memories of Wings from her childhood, which instilled in her the motivation to value the spirituals:

> When I was a little girl, my father used to turn on the radio and he used to, on Sunday mornings, before we get ready to go to church, and this choir, it was called the Negro Hour and he would turn on this music and while he was in the study and mother would get me ready and I would go in and he would be listening to that song. And then when—I could remember so vividly when it would go off—they would have that prelude of humming, and I started that as my little thing and I would go around the house humming (ooh, ooh, ooh). (Interview, June 6, 2016)

Junia also shared her motivation for singing and valuing Negro spirituals as a member of the Celebration Chorus:

> What motivates me, the songs, the original songs and the story that the songs told. It was something in there that told a story of that Negro spirituals, the struggle and the growth that they went through you know, and how they related to that song in their everyday life. So . . . I find myself with some of those songs just humming them to myself, and it seems to give you that inner strength. You know sometimes you're down

> and you're feeling and you get into one of those old songs you know, "O, I Couldn't Hear Nobody Pray," you know and things like that. And it seems to get a lifting, a lifting of your spirit. And those songs, just, I think they should, you know, keep them alive because they are the backbone of our musical growth and our spiritual gifts. (Interview, June 6, 2016)

Thus, the National Negro Hour of the original Wings Over Jordan with its program of spirituals and gospel music had an appeal and long-lasting effect for some participants in this study. According to Radano (2003):

> The first public displays of black musical displacement in the postbellum era extended from the spirituals, those emblems of descents that had drawn American listeners directly after the war. With the rise of the jubilee movement in the early 1870s, black choruses introduced the first public performances of music by African-Americans, and the wholesale enthusiasm for these concerts set the stage for black music's prominence as a folk vocal practice from there on. (p. 258)

Mary offered her reasons for valuing the Negro spirituals and participating in preserving the Negro spiritual through the Celebration Chorus:

> Well I value them because, I personally . . . but I personally remember times when Negro was not very well thought of. And I know what my parents went through. It's being rebuked and the history that they told us from the beginning of how hard they had to work. And I just could not help but love them and as I said, my history there at the church singing some of those songs—they're so poignant. The words, the music, the beat, the *stories*, I mean it's just wonderful. And I am resolved that, that is, it's American history, those spirituals they are a part of American history and it needs to be known. It needs to be known. That's my goal to get as much out there to these young folk, to be proud of their history. (Interview, June 10, 2016)

The Negro spiritual bears a direct connection to many participants' pasts and the values instilled in them during childhood This is one reason why members of the Celebration Chorus and WOJAF have chosen to preserve the Negro spiritual. For some participants,

their exposure to Wings during their upbringing served as a major source, and hence another explanation, for their motivations and valuations for preserving the Negro spiritual.

Spiritual connections. Many participants expressed a spiritual connection to Negro spirituals, which also served as a powerful motivation to sing and value them. These religious songs resonated with their souls and Christian beliefs. Susan declared, "But see, I sing because I want to, and that's what, no matter what's going on in my personal life, music is what makes me . . . My motivation for singing at all is to reach lost souls and to tell my story" (Interview, June 2, 2016).

Belfield expressed his motivation for preserving the Negro spirituals:

> Number one, I love music, and I love the inspirational music of the spiritual. I was thinking about that coming over here, so many of our young people don't really realize what it's about. They hear it but they don't know . . . and the spirituals are, to me, they were a lot of things that saved us during the slavery times just to get through. (Interview, October 26, 2016)

In this way, one motivation for singing spirituals is the connection of the songs to the soul and the spiritual uplift that they provide.

History has to be considered in terms of what these songs mean to the participants, as Cone (1972/1991) emphasized:

> The spiritual, then, is the spirit of the people struggling to be free; it is their religion, their source of strength in a time of trouble. And if one does not know what trouble is, then the spiritual cannot be understood… The spiritual is the people's response to the yet societal contradictions. It is the people facing trouble and affirming, "I ain't tired yet." But the spiritual is more than dealing with trouble. It is a joyful experience, a vibrant affirmation of life and its possibilities in an appropriate esthetic form. The spiritual is the community in rhythm, swinging to the movement of life.

> The best approach in interpreting the song is to *feel* one's way into the cultural and historical milieu of the people's mind and let the song speak *to* and *for* you. When the song is sung, "Have you got good religion?" and you can respond from the depths of the black soul, "Certainly Lord," then you are moving in the direction of the meaning of the spiritual. The meaning of the song is not contained in the bare words but in the black history that created it. (pp. 30-31, emphasis in original)

The data revealed that the Celebration Chorus was highly compassionate in their endeavors to preserve the Negro spiritual, and they carried out their five-fold purpose of preservation of Negro spirituals through performance, education, and documentation of archival material. The foundation on which to preserve the Negro spiritual through performance, education, and documentation was first established through the philosophy of Rev. Glenn T. Settle, the founder of Wings. Conversely, the foundation for the Celebration Chorus to preserve the Negro spiritual through performance was established through the philosophy of its founder, Maestro Glenn A. Brackens. In the next section of this chapter, I analyze the data pertaining to the Celebration Chorus' preservation of the Negro spiritual through performance by first comparing the philosophies of Rev. Glenn Settle and Maestro Glenn Brackens. This section focuses on the research questions: 1) *Why have members of the Wings Over Jordan Celebration Chorus chosen to participate in this organization to preserve the Negro spiritual?* and 2) *In what activities and experiences do members of the Wings Over Jordan Celebration Chorus engage to preserve the Negro spiritual?*

Philosophies of "The Two Glenns"

In order to reflect upon the presentation of style in performance of Negro spirituals by the Celebration Chorus, in contrast to the original Wings, I asked the participants to reflect on the philosophies of Rev. Glenn T. Settle and Maestro Glenn A. Brackens, whom I have dubbed "The Two Glenns." I found it fascinating that both founders have the same first name, "Glenn." Bobby L. Mitchell, a historian, composer, musician, narrator, and teacher closely associated with the Celebration Chorus, also found this fact interesting because he asked the question, "Should there be any 'magic' in the name 'Glenn'?" (Mitchell, 1990, p. 2).

The motto adopted by the Celebration Chorus from Rev. Settle and the original Wings is, *That Which is Worthy Must Be Preserved*; however, a secondary motto that has been voiced in the philosophy of Maestro Brackens is his belief that he should be granted freedom to interpret Negro spirituals in the way he sees fit. Maestro Brackens felt that his philosophy toward preservation of the Negro spiritual resonates and is in agreement with that of Rev. Settle.

"Push the Envelope"

Maestro Brackens believes in "pushing the envelope"—that is to say, he thrives on the creative license to stretch the Negro spiritual and to consider the endless possibilities for preserving their history and legacy. These performance possibilities include singing the Negro spiritual in what he calls "the raw form." The raw form is the unabashed, unrehearsed, Black congregational church style of singing the Negro spiritual

that is unpolished in its presentation. He also advocates for possessing the freedom to sing Negro spirituals both a cappella and accompanied with piano, drums, organ, or electric piano, and dance (Interview, July 26, 2016).

Maestro Brackens made note on more than one occasion of a particular well-respected African American voice instructor who expressed her disapproval of his philosophy. Maestro in turn told me, "no one complained when Jessye Norman and Kathleen Battle performed the Negro spirituals with orchestra." To him, their renditions are not technically pure or traditional spirituals, either. Perhaps the issue that preservers of the Negro spiritual are debating is really about preference. Maestro Brackens shared his philosophy at some length:

> Now, my philosophy is, keep the Wings Over Jordan. Keep the spiritual in the pure form; but my, what we and some of my colleagues disagree on, and I can say this and very open. My professor [and a couple of them out there] and I, I love her to death, but we go at it sometimes, believe me. . . But my philosophy is this, I say keep the spiritual alive any way, by any means necessary. So, it means if you have a group and they're doing the spiritual in the hip hop, *fine*. If you want to do the spiritual using instrumentation, *fine*. And my challenge is this, they always saying, "but you're not keeping it in the pure form." You know what they are trying to say, I'm not keeping it in the way the western world form as it relates, as we know in how western music should be performed, in the classics, that's a style. That's a style. Because, if we keep it in the pure form, we wouldn't even, it's not even, it wouldn't even be, no person, just start singing it.
>
> Babette: It's an oral communication.
>
> Maestro: Yes, and you go for it. So, that's not, I mean, you know so I think what they are trying to say, let's keep it in, what they call . . . the classical form of the Western world. And that's good, but that's not the pure form of the spiritual. So, if the pure form, if that's not really the true form, how the spiritual as sung by our people who was on the plantation, who used the song. The word I want to use was, was freedom songs.

> Babette: Yes.
>
> Maestro: Then we went to the Western world and we put it into the form, *which is okay*. Nothing wrong by notating things that we do. But don't frown on somebody who don't want to do it in that classical. That's only one style of the spiritual. (Interview, September 30, 2016)

In his interview, Maestro Brackens showed that his concern for "preserving" Negro spirituals involves preserving the history of Black oppression through freedom songs, He continued:

> The spiritual can be done in gospel form. The spiritual can be done in a pop form. So, what they are trying, I think what they are trying to say that, maybe that's a dissertation too, but I guess maybe what they are trying to say I prefer to have the spiritual, I like the spiritual in the classical form. (Interview, September 30, 2016)
>
> Babette: Yes, a cappella.
>
> Maestro: Yes, but the spiritual is bigger than that. That's what I mean by pushing the envelope. You know I add dancers too, I do. And I used dancers and I used instrumentation. Now, people get me all the time about, you used instrumentation in the spiritual, right? But, when Kathleen Battle did the spiritual with the symphony orchestra, didn't nobody say anything.
>
> Babette: That's right, yes, so you feel you should be given creative license.
>
> Maestro: When Quincy Jones did *A Soulful Celebration* [A modernization of Handel's *Messiah*] and added all those other styles to it and didn't nobody say anything to him. So why pick on little ole me. 'Cause I see in the whole, that's what I mean by pushing the envelope. (Interview, September 30, 2016)

Susan spoke about Maestro's need for malleability and adaptability regarding the Negro spiritual in performance and the purpose that it serves:

> You don't want to change, but at the same time, you might have to make adaptations. I say make adaptations without killing the original. So, if you see these people [of the Celebration Chorus] dying out [dropping in numbers]—we have to modernize it somehow. (Interview, June 2, 2016)

Mary offered her comments on the philosophy of "The Two Glenns":

> They're both, I would say, almost equally important. *That Which is Worthy Must Be Preserved* is something we have on almost all of our literature and that is our goal, that's our impetus to keep pushing and keep going; we can't let it go. We've gotta preserve that history and to think that we've been together, this group; the Alumni group started in 1987 or so, but the choir began in 1988; that we have preserved and kept some of the same people. Some have come and gone but whenever we do something large and we call people, they will float back. But yeah, we must preserve this and that's my heart, that's what I've been telling you all day. We must preserve it and that's so very important. And Glenn's, I did mention that before, "To keep the spiritual alive by any means necessary, push the envelope." And by that, I'm sure what he means is we have to do it in different forms that satisfy all people. The words are good, the message is good, the story, the music is good; and Glenn has a wonderful way of choreographing, collaborating, orchestrating, or arranging these spirituals in a way that are just so interesting and accepted by most any kind, type of person and whatever it takes to get that message across to the young, to the old, all ages, let's do it. Let's push the button and get this story told, get his music out there and keep it going; keep it, to preserve it. That's what I think, and I think they're both very important. (Interview, June 10, 2016)

In the philosophy of Maestro Brackens is an understanding that musical artists have a need to adapt and remold a genre, in this case, the Negro spiritual, to fully satisfy an inner drive to create anew. Cook (2017) stated, "It follows that the meaning of Coleridge-Taylor's music, *and of all music*, is not something deposited in the notes and laid down for all time, but rather something that emerges through interpretation and is embodied in the act of listening" (p. 716). The creative license to interpret by Maestro Brackens (and others of his mindset) is sometimes met with opposition. The result is an ensuing debate of whether or not it is proper to "advance" the Negro spiritual. The philosophies of "The Two Glenns" is at the same time directly a part of the great debate of whether or not one should "advance" the Negro spiritual. Participant Belfield had this

to say about the philosophies of "The Two Glenns":

> I think it has to be a combination of both in my opinion. Because if we just say, if you were say, either next month or something, let's say you were gonna have a concert of Negro spirituals from the '20s and '30s and '40s, I don't think a whole lot of people would come. Especially because most of the people in that era have died out. (Interview, June 6, 2016)

Junia remarked how the Celebration Chorus navigates in the successful merger of both philosophies of "The Two Glenns":

> We do traditional Wings and then we do modern. Glenn will rearrange it for today. You know like the Wings did it this way and then we'll do maybe a couple of theirs and then this he'll say these are original and this is rearranged. You know he'll do it with a different, upgraded—incorporate that into theirs. He's very good at doing that. Wings does the old and the new; Maestro is an excellent arranger for the group (Interview, June 6, 2016)

The Great Debate: To Advance or Not to Advance

I use the concept of advancing the Negro spiritual to describe the activity of musicians such as Maestro Brackens and the Celebration Chorus who intentionally expand beyond the traditional performance style of the Negro spiritual, such as that of the Fisk Jubilee Singers. Advancing the Negro spiritual is equivalent to what others describe as contemporizing, modernizing, or gospelizing (Reed-Walker, 2008) Negro spirituals. In my thinking, the phrase *advancing the Negro spiritual,* connotes being on the forefront of a battle. Advancing the Negro spiritual is a very controversial issue among traditionalists and purists in the Black music community, including performers, audiences, and academics. In this discussion, I do not take a pejorative stance. I simply give recognition to this debate, which has a direct connection to Maestro Brackens and his philosophy on performance of Negro spirituals. There are many in the African American sacred music

community who object rather vehemently to the advancing of Negro spirituals. Barber (1979), in speaking about attitudes surrounding this topic in the era of the original Wings Over Jordan, noted that:

> By 1935, musical forces such as sophisticated choral groups, bands, and orchestras detrimental to the survival of the authentic manner of performing Negro spirituals had escalated. Conversely, in the same year, an embryonic movement which later proved to be a most worthy opponent surfaced to provide a counterattack. This movement was spearheaded by Rev. Settle who, in October 1935, became pastor of the Gethsemane Baptist Church of Cleveland, Ohio, where he found a good choir performing Negro spirituals in the authentic manner . . . Above all, he believed that the integrity of the authentic manner of singing Negro spirituals should be preserved. (p. 10)

By citing Barber, I seek to avoid an antagonistic viewpoint between "The Two Glenns." This debate simply shows that one philosophy should not be considered in opposition to the other but simply as two ways of reaching the same end: to preserve the legacy of the Negro spiritual. For me, this discussion is a little uncomfortable because I respect both viewpoints. I empathize with those who feel performers should not tamper with the genre and sing it like the original Wings did or the original Fisk Jubilee Singers––as the stately concert spiritual. Preservation preferences are personal. The viewpoints of Maestro Brackens and the late Rev. Settle are not in opposition to one another. Maestro believes in preserving the Negro spirituals in their authentic manner as well. He highly respects and desires to maintain this style of presentation in performances and agrees with the need to retain the integrity of performing the concert spiritual in a more traditional way. He also wants to ensure that the heritage, the history, is not lost, and approaches preservation with a view to today's audience preferences, who may be moved through contemporary forms of "spiritual entertainment" (a term attributed to Rev.

Wayne Dawson at the 75th Anniversary of Wings in October 2012.)

Frith (1996) touched on a topic that I feel relates to Maestro Brackens' notion of who decides what is the "right way," or what Frith called "musical truth." Though discussing pop music, the principle is the same. Frith expounded:

> Critical judgement means measuring performers' "truth" to the experience or feelings they are describing or expressing. The problem is that it is in practice, very difficult to say who or what it is that pop music expresses or how we recognize, independently of their music, the "authentically" creative performers. Musical "truth" is precisely that which is *created* by "good music"; we hear the music as authentic (or rather, we describe the musical experience we value in terms of authenticity, and such a response is then read back, spuriously on to the musicmaking (or listening) process. An aesthetic judgement of effect is translated into a sociological description of cause: good music must be music made and appreciated by good people. (Frith, 1996, p. 121, emphasis in original).

Junia shared her thoughts about Maestro Brackens and advancing the Negro spiritual: "I don't think it's diminishing but adding, enhancing it to another level. This is the original, this is rearranged to do it this way and I think that enhances it and I don't think, it doesn't take away from, you know, the value of the original" (Interview, June 6, 2016). The majority of participants were above 60 years of age, and though they were open to the creative ideas expounded by Maestro Brackens, preferred the traditional presentation of Negro spirituals. Otis commented:

> My idea is that we sing it in its original form, the original form as sung by the original Wings Over Jordan Choir. Now Wings Over Jordan used to do some gospel also, but it was nice gospel because I think . . . I have a couple of the CDs where you know the choir, they were part of the radio broadcast and they did the spiritual; but they did gospel—it was nice gospel. (Interview, June 1, 2016)

It is apparent that Otis adheres more to the philosophy of Rev. Settle in that he is not an

advocate of "pushing the envelope." He prefers a more simplistic approach to performance of Negro spirituals where less is better. The great debate about the Negro spiritual is about *how* it should be performed.

Maestro Brackens' Philosophy on Desired Choral Sound and Repertoire

Maestro Brackens admires and tries to emulate the sound of *The Sounds of Blackness*, an African American choral ensemble who performs and proclaims the music, culture, and history of African Americans to audiences around the world. They perform music from jazz and blues to rock and roll, rhythm and blues, gospel, spirituals, hip hop, reggae, and soul (soundsofblackness.org). Maestro Brackens stated:

> I have heard some wonderful jazz arrangements of the spiritual. I think *The Sounds of Blackness* does wonders with the spiritual. And, that's what's motivated me; and Wings Over Jordan made [themselves] world renown. Remember that was just a group that sang locally. They became one of our first syndicated groups. Because when they came on the radio, they came on all 50 states, and you could hear them overseas, too, through CBS. So now the Celebration Chorus, we must. What's motivating me is to take it even beyond that. (Interview, July 28, 2016)

Maestro emulated the musicianship of certain artists, including Quincy Jones and Kenneth Morris of the First Church of Deliverance of Chicago. Maestro respected the skill and talent of Quincy Jones, and he borrowed some of the techniques that Morris used to apply to his own arranging techniques, since Morris was the first to use the Hammond organ in the church. Indeed, Morris arranged a few pieces for Wings, including "I'll Be a Servant." In terms of repertoire, Maestro chooses spiritual arrangements and compositions by African American composers. Thus, the Celebration Chorus has sung works by John W. Work, William Dawson, Roland M. Carter, Richard

Smallwood, Lena McLin, Glenn Burleigh, Barbara Gulley Collier (a Clevelander), William Henry Smith, and various traditional Negro spirituals.

Maestro Brackens is a humble man who in rehearsals gladly relinquishes the baton if he feels someone else can better teach or demonstrate a particular vocal sound. Thus, his choral conducting/teaching style shares governance with the choristers. Maestro is one who believes in sharing the stage unselfishly with the assistant director and the more advanced singers in the chorus to reach the objective of a certain sound. One of his skills is his ability to bring various musicians and singers together to collaborate with the Celebration Chorus on certain concerts.

According to Johnson and Johnson (1925/1926/1969), the preservation of Negro spirituals through performance is "due overwhelmingly to the work of Negro composers, musicians, and singers. It was through the work of these Negro artists that the colored people themselves were stirred to a realization of the true value of the Spirituals" (p. 49). Thus, musicians such as Maestro, and the value he places on the Negro spirituals, helps to motivate current members and younger generations to value the Negro spirituals, as well as audiences who become the beneficiaries of this valuation of the songs.

Representative Program Music of the Celebration Chorus

The Celebration Chorus performs certain songs in its repertoire with constancy. The chorus' programming of certain Negro spirituals speaks to research question #2, *In what activities and experiences do members of the Wings Over Jordan Celebration Chorus engage to preserve the Negro spiritual?* The Negro spiritual, "Go Down, Moses,"

is a signature song that was first performed by Wings on their radio broadcasts. The Celebration Chorus continues this tradition. It is important to reiterate that this Negro spiritual is *the* theme song of the Celebration Chorus, inherited from Wings. It is also important to emphasize that this spiritual was one of the theme songs of the Underground Railroad. "Go Down, Moses" was used by Harriet Tubman, whose nickname was "Moses," and this song signalled to enslaved Africans that the attempt to escape to freedom up North was imminent. It was a song not sung openly among Harriet Tubman's people in the south (Reagon, 2001).

The Celebration Chorus includes this spiritual in the majority of its concerts, and audiences expect the song. "Go Down, Moses" is significant for the Celebration Chorus (as it was first for Wings) because it represents release from bondage and freedom from one's oppressor. This song represents a defiance against one's enemy and the audacity of the oppressed to tell the oppressor to "let my people go." Johnson (2008), in speaking to the oppression that created the need to sing such songs, stated:

> Now, imagine several million people, bursting with something to express, finding a way to express it, having plenty of time to study and practice and every external encouragement to do that and nothing else. These ideal conditions lasted for nearly three hundred years under one super-teacher, oppression. (p. 233)

The Celebration Chorus has a varied repertoire list that has been performed and narrated since 1988. Several participants were asked to share their favorite spirituals. Some of their responses included the spirituals "Steal Away" and "Wade in the Water." According to Reagon (2001), "the African American oral tradition is full of stories about the use of spirituals like 'I Couldn't Hear Nobody Pray,' 'Steal Away,' and 'Run

Mourner Run' as signal songs of escape in general or, more specifically, with the efforts of those working the Underground Railroad" (p. 74). Du Bois (1903/2007) highly ranked "Steal Away" in his list of Ten Master Songs (p. 324).

Another Negro spiritual, "Oh, Freedom," has had significance for the Celebration Chorus in performances. The meaning of this piece for the Celebration Chorus was emphasized by Belfield, who shared:

> If I'm not mistaken, we did that quite a bit along that, "Oh, Freedom." We did a lot of the old songs and spirituals into modern songs and we showed the relation between the two. And it just made me feel good to let people know where we came from. It was something Glenn did, he worked with it. He had other people help him. But I was a part of it. We sang, and it basically talked about the past, but it all stemmed or came from a double edge meaning of "Steal Away"—you know, from the plantation owner. And it sounded just like an old gospel, you know with people just moping around. You don't want to be found out by the slave master. (Interview, October 26, 2016)

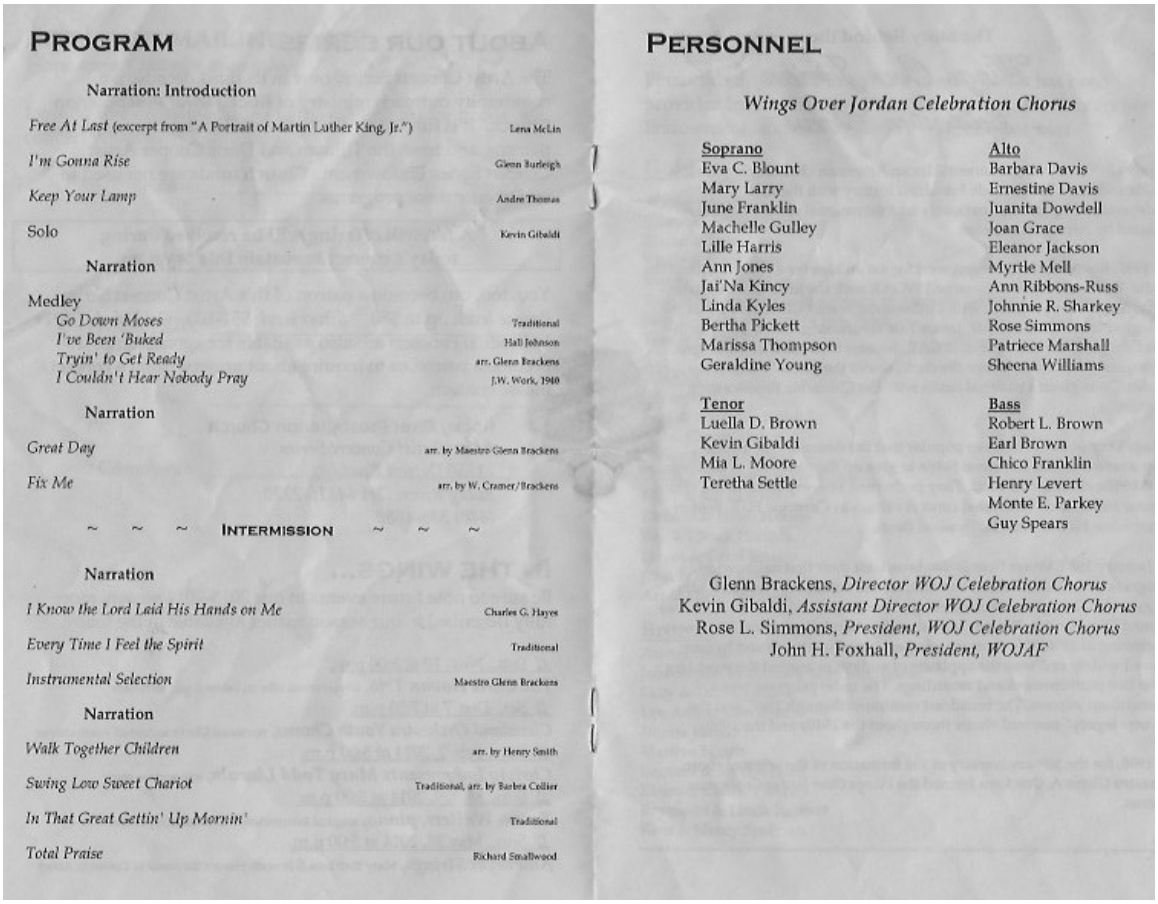
Jones (1993) wrote about the multiple layers of meaning in this spiritual:

> Oh, freedom. Here another layer of meaning was added. The singer would certainly not sit around, passively waiting for death, but would fight for freedom . . . The singers must have been aware of the parallel to Patrick Henry's "Give me liberty or give me death!"—a phrase the majority community experienced as relevant only to white libertarians. The transforming power of "Oh, Freedom," composed around the time of the official announcement of "emancipation," carried it into African American community gatherings in the 1880s, into the collection of Hampton Institute songs in 1909, into the African American freedom movement of the 1960s and into justice and freedom movements around the world, in places the original composer could not have imagined. As was true of many other spirituals, this was an inspired song, with deeply archetypal meanings and applications. (p. 83)

Figure 1 is a representative program from October 2013 of the Wings Over Jordan Celebration Chorus. I attended this concert, at which WOJAF had a display table containing artifacts about the organization— a tradition that the organization customarily

follows as a tool for community outreach before and after the concerts. This particular concert included some of the Celebration Chorus' regularly performed and well-known spirituals: "Go Down Moses, " I've Been 'Buked," "Tryin' to Get Ready," "I Couldn't Hear Nobody Pray," "Great Day," "Fix Me," "I Know the Lord Laid His Hands On Me," "Every Time I Feel the Spirit," "Walk Together Children," and "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot." In addition, the Celebration Chorus' concerts always incorporate educational narrations about the songs to be performed and often a solo or two by a chorister and/or Maestro Brackens.

Figure 1. Celebration Chorus Representative Program.



PROGRAM

Narration: Introduction

Free At Last (excerpt from "A Portrait of Martin Luther King, Jr.") — Lena McLin

I'm Gonna Rise — Glenn Burleigh

Keep Your Lamp — Andre Thomas

Solo — Kevin Gibaldi

Narration

Medley
- *Go Down Moses* — Traditional
- *I've Been 'Buked* — Hall Johnson
- *Tryin' to Get Ready* — arr. Glenn Brackens
- *I Couldn't Hear Nobody Pray* — J.W. Work, 1940

Narration

Great Day — arr. by Maestro Glenn Brackens

Fix Me — arr. by W. Cramer/Brackens

~ ~ ~ INTERMISSION ~ ~ ~

Narration

I Know the Lord Laid His Hands on Me — Charles G. Hayes

Every Time I Feel the Spirit — Traditional

Instrumental Selection — Maestro Glenn Brackens

Narration

Walk Together Children — arr. by Henry Smith

Swing Low Sweet Chariot — Traditional, arr. by Barbra Collier

In That Great Gettin' Up Mornin' — Traditional

Total Praise — Richard Smallwood

PERSONNEL

Wings Over Jordan Celebration Chorus

Soprano	Alto
Eva C. Blount	Barbara Davis
Mary Larry	Ernestine Davis
June Franklin	Juanita Dowdell
Machelle Gulley	Joan Grace
Lille Harris	Eleanor Jackson
Ann Jones	Myrtle Mell
Jai'Na Kincy	Ann Ribbons-Russ
Linda Kyles	Johnnie R. Sharkey
Bertha Pickett	Rose Simmons
Marissa Thompson	Patriece Marshall
Geraldine Young	Sheena Williams

Tenor	Bass
Luella D. Brown	Robert L. Brown
Kevin Gibaldi	Earl Brown
Mia L. Moore	Chico Franklin
Teretha Settle	Henry Levert
	Monte E. Parkey
	Guy Spears

Glenn Brackens, *Director WOJ Celebration Chorus*
Kevin Gibaldi, *Assistant Director WOJ Celebration Chorus*
Rose L. Simmons, *President, WOJ Celebration Chorus*
John H. Foxhall, *President, WOJAF*

Representative Performance Opportunities and Experiences

Maestro Brackens' interviews corroborated the findings of the other participants. In my interviews with the participants, common threads were shared, including two special concerts which they deemed as significant performances: the 70th and 75th Anniversary concerts. The 70th Anniversary, a Cleveland Citywide Celebration in 2008, was organized in collaboration with Dr. Regennia N. Williams of Cleveland State University. Also, in 2008, the Celebration Chorus held a special concert at the Doubletree Hotel, Beachwood, Ohio, in collaboration with Maestro Brackens' Wiley College Middle School Challenge Choir. The 75th Anniversary in 2012 at Holy Trinity Baptist Church, Cleveland, Ohio, marked the July 11, 1937, inaugural date of the founding of the choir on local Cleveland radio station WGAR. Both years, 1937 and 1938, were important in the history of Wings and hence the Celebration Chorus.

Maestro Brackens also shared how the Celebration Chorus performed at several institutions of higher learning, including his undergraduate alma mater of Kent State University. It was there that in February 1989, they performed the unique drama-musical piece composed by the late Bobby L. Mitchell entitled, *Child, Ain't Nothing Like a Song*. They also performed at Wilberforce University on September 21, 1997, at which Mrs. Mildred C. Settle, the widow of Rev. Glenn T. Settle, founder of Wings, was honored. It was she who encouraged and endorsed Maestro Brackens' need to experiment with the performance style of Negro spirituals. Commenting on his need for unconventionality, Mrs. Settle said something to Maestro to this effect, "that's not how I would do it, but if that's what you want to do it, you have my blessing" (Interview with Maestro Brackens,

October 16, 2016).

Maestro Brackens and the Celebration Chorus performed on the campus of John Carroll University of University Heights, Ohio, in the presence of Coretta Scott King on at least three occasions. This connection to John Carroll University was through one of its members, the late Rev. Valentino Lassister, a Pastor in Residency at the university. The Celebration Chorus, in collaboration with Dr. Regennia N. Williams, through the Departments of History and Music, performed on the campus of Cleveland State University on numerous occasions. In addition, they collaborated to conduct several Negro spiritual workshops at which they educated young people. Certain workshops stood out, including that conducted by gospel composer and musician, Margaret Douroux.

It was at their debut concert that the Celebration Chorus and WOJAF began their tradition of incorporating young people into performances with the Tri-C Gospel Choir, conducted and accompanied by Michael Dotson. The Tri-C Gospel Choir performed that day, and the R. Nathaniel Dett Concert Choir of the Cleveland School of the Arts, conducted by Dr. William Woods, performed as well. It is worth noting that Maestro Brackens and the Celebration Chorus have collaborated with several artists to offer a variety of educational backgrounds and expertise, another form of providing education for the choristers.

The Celebration Chorus has performed in churches, on college and university campuses including Cuyahoga County Community College, Cleveland State University, Kent State University, Wilberforce University, and John Carroll University. In addition,

they have performed for numerous civic and community programs. These include performing in Columbus, Ohio, for the inauguration of Mayor and later Governor George V. Voinovich, and the Juneteenth Festival, sponsored in conjunction with Gethsemane Baptist Church. They have often performed at the Cleveland History Center of the Western Reserve Historical Society for Black History Month celebrations. In February 1997, in celebration of Black History Month, the Historical Society celebrated with the Smithsonian traveling exhibit, "Wade in the Water." The Celebration Chorus performed on the closing concert, itself a historical event; nearly 1500 people were in attendance. The same year, 1997, the Chorus performed at Wilberforce University for Rev. Glenn T. Settle's widow, Mrs. Mildred C. Settle. On September 30, 2001, they performed at the Palace Theater in downtown Cleveland for a citywide cultural festival.

After having interviewed participants of the Celebration Chorus, several concerts stood out in the recollections of their most memorable experiences. There was a consensus among the participants of the most special experiences they shared as a chorus. The Celebration Chorus has sung in pivotal concerts which marked special anniversary years of the original choir, including the inaugural concert, which marked the 50th Anniversary of Wings in 1988.

On September 9, 2017, the Celebration Chorus performed selections for a historic street renaming event hosted by WOJAF, Gethsemane Baptist Church, the family of Rev. Glenn T. Settle, and Councilman T.J. Dow. This was a community wide event where Teretha Settle, the granddaughter of Rev. Settle and other family members of Rev. Settle were present. Teretha Settle gave memorable and educative remarks about the story of

the Negro spiritual, explaining their use of double entendre, coded messages embedded in Negro spirituals. She referred to the Negro spirituals as musical maps. Jones (1993) wrote about the encoded messages of the Negro spirituals: "Some songs even served as maps, pointing the way to routes leading to freedom and safety. The most well-known of these songs is 'Follow the Drinking Gourd,' which directed runaway slaves to keep traveling in the direction of the Big Dipper." (p. 45).

The Celebration Chorus has also maintained Wings' tradition of including narrations in its performances. The late native-Clevelander Bobby L. Mitchell, an African American teacher, musician, author, and historian closely associated with the Celebration Chorus, made the following statement regarding their concert presentations:

> The structured concert performance scheme for public presentation consisted of a cappella singing correlated with a divided narration, rich in context, generated by the persuasive speaking authority of Glenn T. Settle, for the Original Wings Over Jordan is also the same format adopted by the present Wings Over Jordan Celebration Chorus for today's concerts. (Mitchell, circa 2000, p. 2)

Difficulties and Challenges

The second research question: *In what activities and experiences do members of the Wings Over Jordan Celebration Chorus engage to preserve the Negro spiritual to fulfill its mission?* resulted in a resounding consensus among participants about what they deemed as difficult and challenging experiences.

Membership Growth

One difficulty expressed by members of the Celebration Chorus and WOJAF was

the great decrease in numbers on the choir roster, due to attrition by death and an aging membership. There was, therefore, an expressed need for revival through recruitment of new members. Although members of the Celebration Chorus and WOJAF voiced these difficulties and concerns, I sensed that there was no attitude of defeat but a strong desire and determination to address the problem and find solutions. Members of both the Celebration Chorus and WOJAF agreed there was a need to recruit younger generations so that the legacy of Wings will not die with them but carry on. Deloris shared:

> We don't have enough members now. All we have is older people in the group and they're dying out or they're sick. You know, they can't stand up or not for too long. So, it's like we're losing members and that's what's disappointing because when we go to sing, we don't have as many members as we should. We can't get any younger ones. We have auditions and hold things. We had a couple, but we can't get them to commit to the organization. I guess they don't want to do those types of songs. (Interview, June 6, 2018)

Part of the decline may also be symptomatic of the Black Church, in which contemporary gospel groups have drastically outgrown groups such as the Celebration Chorus. Jones (1993) expounded upon this decline of interest in Negro spirituals in deference to gospel music: "Despite the continuation of the spirituals in many church settings, it is also true that gospel songs have in large part supplanted the spirituals as the music of choice in the contemporary African American church" (p. 91). Jones (1993) further shared:

> Hopefully, we will again find ourselves open to the possibilities for an infusion of the best features of the spiritual's legacy . . . We are in need more than ever of a renewed vision of ourselves as potent and able agents of social change. Although it is tempting to withdraw into the world of the spirit to the exclusion of social actions, the legacy of the spirituals reminds us that even in the most desperate of times, African Americans have transcended their conditions to serve as leaders in the building of a just

> world. If we can hear and experience the socially empowering messages of the spirituals alongside the potentially nourishing voices of the gospel movement, we will indeed have something to sing about! (p. 94)

Funding

Another challenge for the Celebration Chorus and WOJAF is the raising of funds and procurement of grants to ensure there is scholarship money set aside for prospective high school seniors applying for college. Otis lamented:

> But the matter of raising funds has been a challenge; so that's my problem, it's been the most challenging and difficult part, in raising the funds. Sometimes for the chorus, singing and getting donations from concerts, and checking other foundations, and our own donations, and whatever we can get. That's been the challenge. (Interview, June 1, 2016)

The difficulties in securing funds and the need for funds was first discussed in Chapter 1, starting with the Fisk Jubilee Singers and its first director, George L. White. The need for funding is not unique to the Celebration Chorus and WOJAF; however, difficulties in securing funds may be conversely tied to Black audiences particularly, who may not place high value on the Negro spiritual in comparison to and in competition with popular musics. Gilroy's (1993) statement concerning the Fisk Jubilee Singers and the value of the Negro spiritual to audiences may shed light on the difficulties experienced by the Celebration Chorus:

> The choir's progress was predictably dogged by controversies over the relative value of their work when compared to the output of the white "minstrel" performers. The Fisk troupe also encountered the ambivalence and embarrassment of black audiences unsure or uneasy about serious, sacred music being displayed to audiences conditioned by the hateful antics of Zip Coon, Jim Crow, and their odious supporting cast. Understandably blacks were protective of their unique musical culture and fearful of how it might be changed by being forced to compete on the new terrain of popular culture against the absurd representations of blackness

> offered by minstrelsy's pantomime dramatization of white supremacy. (p. 89)

The organization has used the talent of special members to write and submit grant proposals. They have successfully garnered financial funds through grants, albeit not enough funds to accomplish all of their goals.

Another challenge for the Celebration Chorus and WOJAF organization, also related to funding, is to pull together all of their documents and artifacts to form one central collection. Plans to open a Wings Over Jordan Library at Gethsemane Baptist Church have been discussed since 1988. Lack of funds has seemingly been the main hindrance. Thus, the need for a library to house and document this history still exists.

Mary shared the challenges WOJAF has endured to have the library come to fruition:

> One of our goals… from day one, we talked about having a Wings Over Jordan Library. And that got to be a very difficult task. In fact, at the time, Fannie Mae Jones, councilwoman in that ward, where our church is and there's a big plot of land directly across the street, she was going to *donate* and ask council to give for our library. And at that time we, Glenn met, but the leadership at Gethsemane couldn't see it or for whatever reason it didn't come to fruition and the land is still there available…and so that's a goal that we ought to work toward and as we get older we don't have the energy and the stamina, but the joy and the determination. (Interview, June 10, 2016)

Opportunities for the Future

Regarding future opportunities, the Celebration Chorus and WOJAF were very hopeful that the Wings Over Jordan Library will open in the near future. They have begun working with Gethsemane Baptist Church to make the upper level of the annex to the church a Wings Over Jordan library, to bring this 30-year idea to fruition.

Maestro Brackens envisioned a fruitful future for the Celebration Chorus and WOJAF. His vision is five-fold. At the top of his list is recruitment of young people to the Celebration Chorus. In this, his focus is on rebuilding, revitalizing, and reviving the chorus. Second, he desires to continue promotion of educating young people about the Negro spiritual through the WOJAF's recently established (summer 2017) Summer Performing Arts Camp. Third, he wants to establish a planned concert series and reinstitute choir tours to signal a clear sign of rebirth. Fourth, he desires to use funds raised from the concerts and tours to establish a Wings Over Jordan Library and a Wings Over Jordan Performing Arts Center. Fifth, he desires to compose a musical play, *One More River to Cross* (working title), to bridge the gap from Wings to the Celebration Chorus, from one generation to the next—to tell this one-of-a-kind story of African American and American history. Baraka (2002) encapsulated the plans of a visionary such as Maestro Brackens:

> Independent venues, networks, publications, festivals, orchestras, scholarships, institutions, schools, must be created by diggers (musicians, audiences, scholars, critics, enlightened proprietors) to expand and magnify the total impact of the music; as well as preserve it, with all the sanctity and security and social and economic impact of the Museum of Natural History's ancient artifacts and mission or the Museum of Modern Art's great "woiks." That, and reach the new generations and great sections of the population still unhip. . . . (p. xi)

The statement offers a similar vision to that which Maestro aims to accomplish, but his first step is to rebuild, revamp, and revitalize.

Preservation Through Education

Participants of this study shared the common bond of highly valuing education. They are themselves an educated group of people; many hold college and advanced degrees and encourage their children and grandchildren to pursue a college education and beyond. Because of their respect for education, the participants believe in educating audiences about the Negro spirituals and the legacy of Wings.

Education is an important tool used by members of the Celebration Chorus and WOJAF to help preserve the legacy of the Negro spiritual and Wings. The precedent for investment in the education of young people through the awarding of college scholarships was first established by Rev. Settle and Wings in 1941. The WOJAF and hence the Celebration Chorus have continued this foundational legacy, having awarded their first scholarships in 1989.

The Celebration Chorus and WOJAF educate audiences through planned educational narrations of the spirituals during concert performances and by conducting Negro spiritual workshops in the Greater Cleveland Area. Reagon (2001) shared, "there were others who believed it our responsibility to continue to transmit to younger generations the treasures of our past. The spirituals were part of that legacy" (pp. 87-88).

Education, History, and Culture—The Heritage of a Great Race

Synder (2018) declared, "Combine history with culture and the end product is *heritage*" (p. 76, emphasis in original). I suggest this statement could be revised by adding the word *education*, and thus it would read, "Combine *education,* history with

culture, and the end product is heritage." The participants of this study take education seriously, and they demonstrate this by the great investment they have made in educating audiences through their performances. This emphasis on education as an important component of the Celebration Chorus and WOJAF began when Rev. Glenn T. Settle and Wings established the giving of college scholarships to young people in 1941. The document, *The Committee to Protect the Spirituals, Statement of Purpose*, signed by the late widow of Rev. Settle, Executive Secretary of Wings Over Jordan, Inc., addresses preservation of the Negro spiritual through a three-pronged approach of performance, education, and documentation:

> Rev. Settle sought through music to develop harmonious relationships among the major racial groups of our country. Furthering this noble and far-sighted objective, he organized the Committee to Protect the Spirituals with three broad aims: (1) creation of a national repository, under conditions of maximum security, for manuscripts and recordings of Negro spirituals: (2) encouragement of education regarding the origins and uses of Negro spirituals among children, young people and adults throughout the United States and internationally; (3) encouragement and sponsorship of performance and proper use of Negro spirituals through public presentations and through mass media including radio, television, and the press. (n.d., circa 1970).

The first sentence addresses harmony between different racial groups. Item two above encourages education for children, young people, and adults (everyone). I procured this document from Dr. Samuel Barber, which shows the depth of the organization and demonstrates that the goals of the Celebration Chorus and WOJAF were first an established goal of Wings. Education of the Negro spiritual with the goal to build relationships between races has been a hallmark of this organization from its beginning.

The focus group had a healthy conversation that triggered Hall's memory about a

special workshop the Celebration Chorus had at the Karamu, the oldest Black theatre in the United States. This discussion centered around the Negro spiritual, "Follow the Drinking Gourd."

> Hall: No, [directed to group members] were you there when they were going through the … and the youth had to participate in, in there?
>
> Edward: This was for the Karamu, what, the 100th Celebration?
>
> Hall: Right, I can't remember the song, it was one of the old songs that told how the slaves talked to each other . . . I can't think of the name . . . Something you said, you were able to get in there and participate and how you got from one place to another. The song told the story and you could see.
>
> Babette: "Follow the Gourd"
>
> Hall: [In exhilaration] That's it! Thank you.
>
> Marcata: What's that song called?
>
> Deloris: "Follow the Drinking Gourd."
>
> Hall: So, those kinds of things, when you're teaching the youth about black history . . .
>
> Babette: Get them involved
>
> Hall: It's not only teaching them about the slaves and how you got away, but it's teaching the spiritual, it's teaching the meaning of them, what these words mean that you are listening to and that you're hearing.
>
> Edward: Now, I was doing this before I was a member of Wings. I used to have a school camp and I was a camp director in Cleveland and part of our escaping thing was that we brought two schools from the east side and two schools from the west side. And we took them out in the woods and our theme was the Underground Railroad. And every day we did something working on the Underground Railroad. For our last night, we would have the great escape after dinner. Now, I was in the Civil Rights Movement. And what you did when you marched, you sang.
>
> [group agreement: Right]

> Edward: Because that was the way you entertained yourself.
>
> Babette: And it gives you more determination.
>
> Edward: [begins singing] "Ain't gonna let nobody turn me round, keep on a-walking, keep on a-talking, marching up to freedom land." We would do all of those songs. Then the last night we would have our farewell dinner, and slaves were not allowed to talk, and we would have a silent dinner and we would give all kinds of signals and what have you of what time and what place we were going to escape. And we did our escape no matter if there was snow on the ground or no matter every Thursday night we did our escape, okay? I got invited to Wings by Charles McCoy, which was a member of Gethsemane. (Focus Group, July 5, 2016)

As discussed previously, the reasons for preserving Negro spirituals were also cultivated in the participants as they participated in the choirs at their churches, and many were introduced to and developed a love for music at an early age in their public schools. In this way, the appreciation for education and therefore, the promotion of education of the arts was instilled in the participants at an early age. Belfield declared:

> In elementary school that was the thing that really changed my life, because we had science and all those subjects, but we had *music*. And the music program part of it was every year, we would go up to Severance Hall to hear the Cleveland Orchestra. And one of the first times I went there, maybe some 10 rows back from the stage, they played some of Wagner's music. (Interview, October 26, 2016).

Education through Negro spiritual workshops. Since 1988, the Celebration Chorus and WOJAF have promoted education of the Negro spiritual by hosting Negro spiritual workshops. Workshops are multigenerational with the purpose of targeting young musicians and choristers. The workshops consist of panel discussions on various topics about Negro spirituals, concert performances by the Celebration Chorus, and other special guests including the Cleveland School of the Arts, for example, and lectures given by academics and other invited guests. Indeed, one memorable workshop was held at

Cleveland State University by composer, teacher, and musician, Dr. Margaret Douroux. Deloris commented on how this workshop greatly impressed her, but also disappointed her:

> Yeah, and she [Dr. Margaret Douroux], prepped us for a couple of songs. And, but then, that's another thing, I love singing with the group but when we have the performances, we hardly get any people out in the audience and that's what really makes me [pause] sad and upset, because we do all this practicing; and when we had that one down here and she came all the way from California, and the choir was full of people and you could count, you could count the people that were out there, and this was at Cleveland State. I thought it would be huge like wow, you know. We [the Celebration Chorus] had a lot of people. (Interview, June 6, 2016).

Education through awarding college scholarships. The Celebration Chorus was dedicated to promoting education through awarding scholarships to college bound seniors. Certain requirements must be met to receive the scholarship. The applicant must demonstrate his or her musicianship by performing a solo piece, have a minimum grade point average of 2.5, two letters of recommendation, and submission of an essay which states how the applicant will promote and participate in the preservation of Negro spirituals, with the intent of a lifelong commitment. Belfield spoke about the scholarship process goals for applicants:

> We went from performance [to performance and] a brief essay because the idea behind the brief essay was just to give people whoever wanted to try out for scholarships to know something about Wings . . . instead of just giving some money out, but to know something about it [the history of Wings and the Negro spiritual]. And then with encouragement that hopefully they [young applicants] would make a commitment to either participating in the group at a later time or either spread the word about the spiritual where ever they might go in life. (Interview, October 26, 2016)

Thus, applicants are encouraged to join a group such as the Celebration Chorus

and WOJAF that promotes preservation of Negro spirituals. In addition, applicants who win the scholarships (the number awarded is dependent upon the amount of funds raised that year) are asked to perform a solo piece at a scholarship luncheon. Past recipients have been African American, but all races are welcome to apply.

Education through school outreach. The desire to reach and teach younger generations about the Negro spiritual to keep this rich heritage vibrant is one of the main purposes of the Celebration Chorus and WOJAF. Representatives from the Celebration Chorus and WOJAF have reached out to schools in the Greater Cleveland Area to share the history and legacy of Wings and the Celebration Chorus. They also incorporate a performance element to the presentation of Negro spirituals to these young audiences. This aspect of the organization is vital to keeping its connection to the community and educating school age children of all races and creeds. Mary shared her thoughts on this aspect of the organization:

> And one of the things that I think we can do if we can get into the schools, get this information to the children, the younger people. Input that soul, that history because they don't get much history in high school and nothing much in Black history. And, so that they can be proud of who they are, and they can carry that message on to the next generation. So, I think that's one of our goals. One of our present things that we want to do and also one of our goals, as you can see in some of our materials, is that from day one, we talked about having a Wings Over Jordan Library. (Interview, June 10, 2016)

The following dialogue transpired in one of the Focus Group meetings about the need to reinstitute going into the schools in the Greater Cleveland Area and beyond to teach about the organization and preservation of Negro spirituals:

> Edward: Auditions, what have you because we haven't done that for a couple of years. The other thing that I've asked is only Teretha Settle and I have gone to high schools. And we've done Wings workshops. She is a skilled musician and I am a master historian.
>
> Deloris: Right
>
> Edward: So, she does the music and I tell the story. Okay, so what I'd like to see is more of that being done. (Focus Group, July 5, 2016)

The Focus Group continued the discussion, highlighting an educational workshop the organization conducted for young people at the historic Karamu House Theater in Cleveland. The Underground Railroad Negro spiritual, "Follow the Drinking Gourd," was used in the workshop to teach young audiences. Another participant of the Focus Group stressed the importance of teaching young people the *meaning* of Negro spirituals; otherwise, these songs have no real significance:

> HTT: I think it should be kept in the pure form and I think it should be explained to the youth the meaning of why, (pause) "Steal Away" what did it mean, it wasn't just a song. It's like one time just like what Thomas Dorsey, wrote, "The Lord Will Make a Way Somehow" and he taught us the *meaning*, why that song was. And I think sometimes the young people don't have the understanding of what the meaning of the spirituals were, where they were going and what time of night or day, they were going to take that trip. And just to sing it, I mean just to sing it is nothing; but you got to give the *meaning* to why it is, the word. Oh, I can't, you must have that true religion. [spoken/sung very rhythmically] you must have your soul converted. They have to know there's a meaning to why the old people, the older people sang those spirituals, 'cause that was a way they could get a message across to each other. (Focus Group Meeting, July 5, 2016)

Education through social media and technology. The Celebration Chorus and WOJAF is working on establishing a website; however, the organization makes use of social media through a Facebook page for general contact with the public to advertise concerts and other upcoming events, to recruit new members, and to invite people to open

auditions. Maestro Brackens expressed his desire to have concerts of the organization uploaded on YouTube, as there are none directly accessible. Marcata expressed in one of the focus group meetings the need for the choir to become savvy in making recordings and having a means for the public to purchase past concerts. The lack of marketing is an issue for the group. Marcata stated:

> Wait a minute, we also had Margaret Douroux which is known all across the country, a great songwriter, musician, instructor, educator, all of the above, for the 70th anniversary at Cleveland State, and that was pretty well attended, and we were exposed. My thing is, if I ask my great grandmother and people who lived, who listened not only to the Wings but the Fisk Jubilee Singers, they would know, but the average young person would not know. If you did a percentage based on the Metropolitan area of Greater Cleveland it wouldn't be a big percentage. Now think back about the Workshop and HTT and Maestro and I, we were all a part of the Thurston G. Frazier Chorale, and you sight-read and you do a lot of structured music, and people on that level you get exposure because they try to do all [types of sacred] music and you can present it. (Focus Group, July 5, 2016)

From this dialogue between participants of the study who expressed varying views on the status of the Celebration Chorus and their production of recordings and access to the same, it is apparent that they agree that the Celebration Chorus needs to do a better job of making their recordings available to the public and uploading concerts to YouTube or a future website, for examples.

Education through mentorship. The participants in this study were committed to mentorship by encouraging students to participate in the workshops and seminars the Celebration Chorus and WOJAF sponsors. In addition, Maestro Brackens had served as a mentor to several of his students over the course of his long career teaching in the public-school systems of East Cleveland, Ohio, and Cleveland Heights, Ohio. He continues to

teach (e.g. in Wings Over Jordan Performing Arts Summer Camp) and mentor several students, some of whom are professional musicians and recording artists. He promotes his students and they support him as well. Some of his students served as mentors and teachers in the Summer Performing Fine Arts Camp of 2017, "When Hip Hop Meets the African American Spiritual," for example.

When Hip Hop Meets the African American Spiritual

Education is the key to bridging the gap between generations and for bridging the gap between knowledge and ignorance, Maestro believes. Therefore, in 2017 the WOJAF and Maestro Brackens inaugurated a unique Summer Fine Arts Performing Camp. The two-week long camp was entitled, "When Hip Hop Meets the African American Spiritual." With the support of the home base church of Gethsemane Baptist Church, Cleveland, Ohio, Maestro Brackens considered the camp a total success, because the number of children initially projected to attend was 15-20 African American children, but the camp actually had about 50 children who participated, more than double the projected number. Secondly, the camp culminated with a showcase performance in which the students created their own raps incorporating Negro spirituals, and their creative talents were employed comprehensively. The classes were provided by volunteer teachers who offered a varied curriculum of group piano lab, drama, creative writing, chorus, dance, and performance/production. The parents bought into it. As Susan, one of the participants of the study indicated, "when you have the parent's support, you have the interest of the child" (Interview, June 2, 2016).

Maestro chose the bridge of hip hop or rap music to reach young people, because

in his estimation, both the Negro spiritual and hip-hop deal are genres that represent oppression by the establishment. Both genres have in common a music that signals the need for social change in the world. He then educated the young by making connections between creative writing, music literacy, dance, drama, piano laboratory, and musical performance/production. Students and parents were interviewed together to ensure he would have respectful students who understood the purpose of the camp. The summer camp's intriguing title, "Hip Hop Meets the African American Spiritual," provided an effective marketing strategy that appealed to the parents and students and drew them in.

In the article, "Trying to Make Old Negro Spirituals Resonate with the Hip-Hop Generation," Simon (2008) described an eighth grader who expected not to enjoy a presentation by The Spirituals Project of Denver assembly because he preferred hip-hop to the spirituals. Later in the article, Simon described a concert in which 600 students of Metro Denver heard performances that "spanned centuries, from soulful, age-old spirituals to the rowdy showmanship of a 'hip-hop violinist' who layered a modern urban beat atop traditional songs such as 'The Battle of Jericho'" (p. A17). This article signals a trend that cannot be ignored. To reach a younger generation, sacrifices to original musical forms may have to be made—no compromises, however: Keep the old, but embrace the new for the sake of preservation of the Negro spiritual.

Mis-Education about the Negro Spiritual

Maestro Brackens and members of the Celebration Chorus and WOJAF use education to teach students and audiences of all ages the history and legacy of the Negro spiritual and Wings. Maestro noted how many people do not know the difference

between Negro spirituals and gospel music. The term *gospel* means "glad tidings *from* God, i.e. the good news of the Kingdom" (Burrows, 1925, p. 23); so in that respect, the label for all sacred Black music could be called gospel music; however, talking about gospel music as a genre and then referring to the Negro spiritual as gospel music is problematic and shows a lack of understanding, and may suggest that a tug of war exists between the Negro spiritual and gospel music, or that the Negro spiritual is being neglected in churches and schools in preference for gospel music.

Maestro Brackens stated:

> Well, first of all, they're not even in the same category. Okay, technically, the Negro spiritual and gospel music are two different forms of music. It's like taking classical and putting it into jazz. Now, you can use a jazz piece that uses those forms, but you can do a classical piece in a jazz form; you can the overtones . . . It's not about its being taken over, they do it because they don't have the knowledge. The spiritual is not gospel; gospel is a whole different thing. (Maestro Brackens, Interview, July 28, 2016)

Maestro also stated that the two genres are not at war because they are not the same. He noted that you can gospelize a Negro spiritual, make jazzy arrangements, add dance, sing them a cappella or with accompaniment such as piano, drums, or organ, but the two genres are not the same. I asked Maestro Brackens if the Negro spiritual was being neglected in preference for gospel music, to which he responded:

> I wouldn't say it's being neglected—it's just not being taught. It's not being neglected because people don't teach it to our younger people; our churches don't teach it. So, if anything is not being taught. . . . (Interview, September 30, 2016)

I asked a participant if she felt the Negro spiritual is being taken over by gospel music. Voicing a different perspective, Sophia shared, "I don't think it's being taken over. I think that everyone has their own way of interpreting music. And so, when you do

[interpret the Negro spiritual] it's not been taken over, it's expanding" (Sophia, Interview, October 21, 2016). To further the argument regarding miseducation about the Negro spiritual, Lovell (1972) stated:

> In my opinion the most contribution to poor understanding and knowledge of the spirituals is the "mis-education" that still prevails in much of the educational process to which contemporary African Americans continue to be subjected. In this process not only are the spirituals misunderstood but numerous pieces of our history as a people, both in America and on the African continent, are distorted as well. The mis-education process exerts constant pressure on African Americans to see cultural contributions outside of the African tradition as always more valuable than those from within that tradition. (p. 129)

Lovell's statement emphasized the need for African Americans to be educated about the richness of the Negro spiritual and that this genre should be valued by African Americans in the same way that European music (e.g. Bach, Beethoven, Brahms, Mozart) is valued in the United States. Lovell (1972) further stated:

> As in the 1960s, we have to believe in the potential of the African American community, armed with its songs, to push pass misplaced perceptions of naivete and mis-education to reassert its rightful position in the vanguard of ethical leadership in America. However, that opportunity may be lost if we fail to remind ourselves periodically about the critical role of our music in the ongoing struggle. (p. 131)

In light of Lovell's statement above, to counteract miseducation about the Negro spiritual, African Americans should follow the example established in the 1960s wherein this music played a critical role in pushing the Civil Rights Movement forward.

Preservation Through Documentation

Participants in this study placed a high value on documenting and maintaining records on Wings and the Celebration Chorus. Several participants had private collections

which they were more than willing to share with me. All the participants gave me copies of extra programs and articles and several participants gave me permission to make copies of their precious documents. It was interesting to discover that no one person had it all. Thus, the documentation of the Celebration Chorus and WOJAF is a collection spread out amongst its members; however, one person has an extensive private collection, including documents on the Celebration Chorus: Dr. Samuel Barber, the authoritative voice and researcher of Wings Over Jordan. As mentioned previously, Dr. Barber wrote the first doctoral dissertation about Wings and is the founder of the Wings Over Jordan Foundation, Inc., established in 1992. I had access to the private collection in North Carolina of Dr. Samuel Barber. This extensive, 10,000-piece collection, housed in his home, contains documents focused on Wings, but he also has important artifacts pertaining to the Celebration Chorus, including VHS tapes of the debut concert of 1988.

The Special Collections of the Michael Schwartz Library at Cleveland State University has several artifacts and documents in the Praying Grounds: African American Faith Communities (A Documentary and Oral History), Cleveland Memory Project, which includes concert programs, DVD recordings of the June 11, 1988, debut concert donated by the Sam Barber Collection, and audio recordings of interviews conducted by Dr. Samuel Barber, including participants of this study. In addition, transcripts and DVDs of interviews conducted by Dr. Regennia N. Williams and her student assistants are also in the Praying Grounds collection. Some participants in this case study were interviewed by Dr. Williams.

The participants of this study interviewed by Dr. Williams included Maestro,

Deloris, Edward, Mary, and Rachel. These interviews by Dr. Regennia N. Williams were pertinent to my study and shed light on the experiences of these participants as members of Black churches, the Celebration Chorus, and WOJAF. In addition, Dr. Williams, founder of the Praying Grounds project of the Cleveland [State University] Memory Project, has provided a digitized online resource through Cleveland State University, which includes several documents about the Celebration Chorus and Wings.

The Praying Grounds: African American Faith Communities (A Documentary and Oral History) project is an ongoing documentary and oral history project which offers audio and video recordings of oral histories and musical performances, as well as photographs, newspaper articles, anniversary programs, and other printed materials, along with an extensive bibliography. It is a fascinating collection gathered from African American churches and faith communities throughout greater Cleveland. It is interesting to note that in 2007, Maestro Brackens thoughts resonated with the interview I would subsequently conduct in 2016 and 2017, a decade later. In Williams and Brackens (2007), Maestro Brackens made some of the following statements when interviewed by JTB (whose name was not given in the transcript but can be heard in the DVD recording of his interview), that are pertinent to this study. Regarding fame and notoriety of the Celebration Chorus, Maestro Brackens stated, “More than world-renowned, I want it to become more of a movement” (p. 22). In order to seek higher ground for the Celebration Chorus to keep in step with a standard of excellence established by Wings, Maestro Brackens stated: “The Wings just didn’t sing; they did a lot of social things that took us to the next level” (p. 22).

In Ohio, the East Cleveland Public Library has archived the Icabod Flewellen Collection, which contains only a few concert programs from 1989 pertaining to the Celebration Chorus (there are also several unique items pertaining to Wings.). Similarly, the Cleveland History Center of The Western Reserve Historical Society Research Library only had a few documents on the Celebration Chorus contained in a file donated by the late Dr. Zelma George Watson, a renown Clevelander and former United States delegate to the United Nations. In my opinion, this deficiency of documentation about the Celebration Chorus also needs to be remedied. There is a great need for the Celebration Chorus to submit archival material to The Cleveland History Center Research Library. I was very disappointed that there was no easily accessible information on the Celebration Chorus—only a restricted file through the Gund Foundation, to which I received access with the help of my dissertation supervisor.

Additionally, Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland, Ohio maintains an online encyclopedia in which there is no entry for the Celebration Chorus. This needs to be remedied as well; whereas Wings is properly documented, there is no mention of the Celebration Chorus. I also consulted several books, websites, dissertations, and the private collections owned by participants in this study. The history of Wings is well preserved through documentation, including a video documentary produced by Dr. Barber and copyrighted in 1998. His collection also includes a documentary about Wings, videotaped at a Los Angeles TV station.

In terms of archiving the history and activities of the Celebration Chorus, there is plenty of room for growth; however, there are many articles that document the activities

of the Celebration Chorus in the Cleveland Plain Dealer and the Cleveland Call and Post, two local newspapers. In addition, Cleveland's TV 20 Cable Station had a copy of the Celebration Chorus' 2012 concert "Remembering the 75th Anniversary of Wings." Unfortunately, for certain historic and pivotal concerts, there are no audiovisual recordings available, and for some performances there is no paper trail, including the February 1997 concert at the Western Reserve Historical Society of Cleveland, Ohio, commemorating the Smithsonian "Wade in the Water" traveling exhibit. In addition, I am not aware of any audiovisual recording of the 70th Anniversary Concert of 2008, and there are no audiovisual recordings of certain historical concerts, including the February 1997 concert held at the Western Reserve Historical Society.

Leach and Thomas (2018) stressed the importance of meticulously preserving local music. They advised that in order to preserve the history of popular music [contemporary music], one must be deliberate in documenting that history comprehensively:

> Many of the most valuable resources about popular music history are ephemeral—designed to be discarded after use—and these include posters, flyers, handbills, promotional photos, press kits, local news publications, fanzines, and, of course, recordings on various media and in multiple formats. In many cases, these materials serve as the only extant primary resources about music, the people who created it, and its consumers . . . it is essential that these resources be systematically collected, properly preserved, and made accessible to future generations by the libraries, archives, and historical societies that serve those areas, thereby helping to ensure a more comprehensive historical record. (pp. 3-4)

Leach and Thomas (2018) also used The Rock and Roll Hall of Fame (opened in 1995) and The Rock Hall of Fame's Library and Archives (opened in 2012) in Cleveland, Ohio as exemplary institutions:

> The Library collects, preserves, and provides access to more than 100,000 noncirculating books, periodicals, and commercial recordings as well as more than 450 donated archival collections in which researchers work directly with hundreds of thousands original photographs, posters, promotional materials, rare audio and video recordings, and personal and corporate papers. (p. 5).

The Wings Over Jordan Choir has been documented in this library and archives; however, the Wings Over Jordan Celebration Chorus has yet to be documented in this library.

Besides the work of Dr. Regennia N. Williams in her scholarly online *Journal of Traditions and Beliefs* of Cleveland State University, I have found only one academic work, a dissertation, that referenced the Celebration Chorus, and it contained erroneous information. Price (1995) labeled the Celebration Chorus as a choir that focused on gospel music instead of the Negro spirituals. Secondly, I found only one encyclopedia that referenced the existence of the Celebration Chorus, the *Encyclopedia of American Gospel Music*. In the entry for Wings Over Jordan in this encyclopedia, in the last paragraph, Markovich referenced the Celebration Chorus: "Although the original Wings Over Jordan has long since disbanded, a new iteration, the Wings Over Jordan Celebration Choir, continues to preserve the spirituals by performing in the original style of Reverend Settle's musical ambassadors of African American pride" (p. 430).

Indeed, a friend of Maestro Brackens and the Celebration Chorus, Taller Williams, a Clevelander and the founder of Tallerworks Educational Development, Inc.,

owns a remarkable collection of Wings and the Celebration Chorus and has organized and promoted Black History Month performances for the chorus. As aforementioned, The Gund Foundation of Cleveland, Ohio, has restricted documents pertaining to the Celebration Chorus housed in the Research Library of The Cleveland History Center of the Western Reserve Historical Society of Cleveland, Ohio near Case Western Reserve University. There are also a few artifacts and documents on the Celebration Chorus from 1988 and 1989 (with several documents on the original Wings) also available at the National Afro-American Museum and Cultural Center in Wilberforce, Ohio.

Summary

In this chapter I described how the Celebration Chorus preserves the Negro spiritual by way of a three-pronged approach through performance, education, and documentation. By doing so, I addressed why members of the Wings Over Jordan Celebration Chorus have chosen to participate in the organization to preserve the Negro spiritual and in what activities and experiences they have engaged to preserve the Negro spiritual. The participants have chosen to participate in preservation of the Negro spiritual because they have had a Christian upbringing where their parents and church placed a high value on sacred music, including the Negro spiritual. Some of the participants had childhood remembrances of the original Wings Over Jordan. The most common bond was the fact that all participants had an early start in music performance, and all of them sang in choirs and/or received musical training from a young age. Thus, because their parents valued music and especially the Negro spiritual, they learned to value music from

their childhood school music programs, lessons, and especially the Black church.

The Celebration Chorus and its administrative body, the Wings Over Jordan Alumni and Friends, Inc., are governed by a Constitution and Bylaws in which a Five-Fold Purpose is stated. Collectively, both bodies are dedicated to the education of audiences about the Negro spiritual as an important component of the Celebration Chorus and WOJAF. How the organization accomplishes the goals outlined in the Constitution and ByLaws forms the basis for all three of the research questions addressed in this study, the first two of which comprised the focus of this chapter.

To address the research question of why members of the Celebration Chorus and WOJAF have chosen to participate in these organizations to preserve the Negro spiritual, the participants considered it a joy and a welcomed responsibility to preserve and move forward the well-laid legacy of Wings, its parent organization, and to continue to preserve the history and legacy of the Negro spirituals. In order to fulfil this obligation, its members have participated in workshops on the African American spiritual, concerts, community outreach in events such as Juneteenth and the awarding of monetary scholarships to deserving college bound students. The Celebration Chorus and WOJAF are unabashedly identified as an African American organization dedicated to preservation of Negro spirituals and most of its participants hold memberships in Black churches. Hence, in essence, the organization is unashamedly a religious/Christian /organization. The role of race has played a pivotal role in the identity of the organization since the 1935 birth of its parent group in Gethsemane Baptist Church. This will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 5.

I described the philosophies of "The Two Glenns," contrasting and compared their philosophies in the words of participants and especially Maestro Glenn Brackens. Certain historical documents from Wings were included to show that the original group was the first to articulate this philosophy about preserving the Negro spiritual through documentation.

Preservation through performance is a critical component of the Celebration Chorus. Preservation through education is also a very important component of the Celebration Chorus and WOJAF. I showed that the emphasis placed on education was established by original Wings who established the awarding scholarships in 1941, and that the Celebration Chorus continues this tradition of awarding scholarships to college bound seniors. The Celebration Chorus also conducts Negro spiritual workshops to educate multigenerational audiences.

I also discussed the great debate on how best to perform Negro spirituals and included the topics of choral sound and representative repertoire. Participants shared memories of special performances, difficulties, challenges, and plans for the future as members of the chorus and WOJAF. Thus, participants shared their joyful experiences, disappointments, and optimism for the future of the organization.

The Celebration Chorus and WOJAF still have plans to establish a Wings Over Jordan Library and perhaps a Performing Arts Center. Many participants own their own private collection of documents of Wings, the Celebration Chorus, and WOJAF including programs, recordings, and newspaper clippings. The participants of the Celebration Chorus and WOJAF place high value on documentation.

In summary, to preserve the rich legacy of the Negro spiritual, “lest we forget” (a most significant hallmark theme) of the Celebration Chorus and WOJAF, several avenues have been followed toward this endeavor. These include preservation through performance, education, and documentation. Several streams of preservation include Negro spiritual workshops, the awarding of college scholarships, community schools outreach, and mentorship through a summer performing arts camp such as “When Hip Hop Meets the African American Spiritual.” The participants expressed their difficulties and challenges in the need for membership growth and funding to support their mission. In the words of the “The Two Glenns”: “*That Which is Worthy, Must Be Preserved*” (Rev. Glynn T. Settle) and “*Keep the Negro Spiritual Alive by Any Means Necessary”* (Maestro Glenn A. Brackens).

CHAPTER FIVE: RACIAL, CULTURAL, AND COMMUNITY IDENTITY

Guide my feet while I run this race, (yes, my Lord!)
Guide my feet while I run this race, for I don't want to run this race in vain!
(Negro spiritual)

In this chapter, I provide a descriptive analysis of the data concerning the significance of racial, cultural, and community identity of the Wings Over Jordan Celebration Chorus in preserving the Negro spiritual. Thus, specifically, I focus upon the third research question: *What role does race play in the identity of the Wing Over Jordan Celebration Chorus in its preservation of the Negro spiritual?*

Racial, Cultural, and Community Identity

The racial, cultural, and community impact that the Celebration Chorus and WOJAF has contributed to its audiences in the Greater Cleveland Area is immeasurable but palpable. Cornell West (1993a/2017) pointed out that:

> The genius of our black foremothers and forefathers was to create powerful buffers to ward off the nihilistic threat to equip black folk with cultural armor to beat back the demons of hopelessness, meaningless, and lovelessness . . . These traditions consist primarily of black religious and civic institutions that sustained familial and communal networks of support. (p. 15)

Racial Identity

The participants of this study shared a collective racial identity bound to a common heritage. Helms (1993) clarified the concept of racial identity:

> Many people erroneously use a person's racial categorization (e.g. Black versus White) to mean racial identity. However, the term "racial identity" actually refers to a sense of group or collective identity based on one's

> *perception* that he or she shares a common racial heritage with a particular racial group. Racial designation or category and ethnicity per se are confusing issues in the United States. (p. 3)

The sense of group or collective identity that Helms attributes to racial identity suggests that racial identity may overlap with cultural identity (described in the next section). Information shared through the interviews and focus group meetings strongly indicated that there exists a strong cultural bond based on race between members of the Celebration Chorus as well. Edward, a participant in the focus group, and a retired educator, administrator, and business owner, made the following statement regarding an incident that occurred at a suburban school in the Greater Cleveland Area. Blacks were forced to take responsibility and ownership of their musical cultural heritage and racial identity in the face of seemingly subtle racism:

> Edward: And that's what this was to me. We had to negotiate our culture to say that we would not do just gospel, we would do music across America. Then we had to change the name from the Gospel Choir to the Heights Ensemble, then our children who were in the choir could get class credit. But it was never a problem with the children over here [makes geographical gesture] for getting class credits for being in the choir who were White. So, I'm of the opinion of Black kids getting class credits for being in the choir. I'm of the opinion we don't negotiate, we don't have to sell ourselves short ethnically because this is our music and we're proud of it. Like other cultures have their music, we have our music. (Focus Group, July 12, 2016).

This incident that Edward shared was one of racial discrimination, where Black children were not given the same credit as White children for participating in the same choir in school. Similarly, certain members of the Celebration Chorus shared personal experiences of racial discrimination. Belfield, another participant, reflected on a childhood experience down south during the Jim Crow era:

> You have to get to the back and get up and you move to the back and leave the other seats for the White folks. Then I know one time I was 4 or 5 years old—we were on a train in Atlanta. I was waiting for the train to come and I was thirsty. This always stuck out in my mind. I saw a fountain and I started going to the fountain and everybody was shouting, "No! No! No!" And I remember looking up, but I might have been 3 or 4. I don't know if I could even read the sign, but I knew what it was because it was like a "White Only" thing. And you know they took to me another one, you know, but they were going crazy because I was going to this fountain, and no telling. (Interview, October 26, 2016)

Belfield contrasted the identity of Jews with that of Blacks through his assertion that although Jews are not ashamed to know their history, Blacks tend to distance themselves from their culture inherited from slavery, in this case Negro spirituals. The Celebration Chorus is not ashamed to flaunt this history because the quality of the music of the Negro spiritual for them is unquestionable. Belfield shared about this shamed-based nature:

> But we're the only race of people that do that like the Jewish people, and I have love for everybody, I don't have any hatred. But they celebrate Passover which happened 2000 years ago and stuff. But you talk about a lot of Black people when you put some Negro spirituals on or some other old song, "I don't want to listen to that stuff." It's almost like they don't want to [know their history]. They look at it as a bad period of time. They don't want to talk about it you know. But that's what makes us who we are and strengthens us you know, because they have this saying about history, if you don't know your past, you're doomed to repeat it. (Interview, October 26, 2016)

Belfield referred to the plight of the Jews as depicted in the Bible, which resonated with the plight of African Americans, making the songs relatable to the participants. Johnson and Johnson (1925/1926/1969) similarly stated:

> It is not possible to estimate the sustaining influence that the story of the trials and tribulations of the Jews as related in the Old Testament exerted upon the Negro. This story at once caught and fired the imaginations of the Negro bards, and they sang, sang their hungry listeners into a firm

> faith that as God saved Daniel in the lion's den, so would He save them; as God preserved the Hebrew children in the fiery-furnace, so *would* He preserve them; as God delivered Israel out of bondage in Egypt, so would He deliver them. *How* much this firm faith had to do with the Negro's physical and spiritual survival of two and a half centuries of slavery cannot be known. (pp. 20–21, emphasis in original)

Maestro Brackens shared his personal experience as a music teacher in public schools where other teachers or administrators challenged him on his choice of repertoire, namely Negro spirituals: He said:

> I feel really proud. I say, African American music, it has arrived, you know. It's no more the little bastard child in the back. I remember right before I started teaching school, I hear that teachers used to have, *I know of some them*, they would challenge them [music teachers] if they would do gospel music or the spiritual . . . And I know even I remember myself being challenged a couple of times in my school system. So, you know, and late as in the early 90s, we were still being challenged by teaching African American [sacred] music in the classroom.
>
> Babette: That you were teaching too much of it? Or there wasn't enough diversity?
>
> Maestro: Well no, you know, I mean we were doing like, we couldn't do gospel. And, what I challenged them on, I said "We do the *Messiah*; Unto you a Son is Given," "The Hallelujah Chorus," "And He shall reign forever and ever" you know. So, I mean, those have religious overtones and they do not say anything. So why we gone get upset because we're doing the spiritual? I mean, I mean, it's an art form.

Johnson and Johnson (1925/1926/1969) wrote:

> This reawakening of the Negro to the value and beauty of the Spirituals was the beginning of an entirely new phase of race consciousness. It marked a change in attitude of the Negro himself toward his own art material; the turning of his gaze inward upon his own cultural resources. Neglect and ashamedness gave place to study and pride. All the other artistic activities of the Negro have been influenced. (p. 49)

Belfield also shared that there is ignorance among young people about slavery and

the Negro spirituals, and a lack of knowledge leads to a disinterest in the things of the past. He shared the following:

> And young folks again, they wanna pretend that that didn't happen. We had one teacher, she took some of her students down to Fisk where they have the Fisk Jubilee Singers, and they watched a movie before the choir performed, and one of her students at the end of it they had question and answer. And a girl raised her hand and asked why do the people in the movie, why didn't they have shoes on? The slaves, why didn't the slaves have shoes [in incredulous short laughter at the student's ignorance]? And the teacher said she couldn't believe it. But you know again, we take it for granted that our people, our young folks know but they didn't know, she didn't know. That's a legitimate question on her part. She saw the people walking around and with no shoes on and she didn't know that slaves didn't have shoes, and you know and the beatings and things, and the rapings, and all that other stuff.
>
> Babette: Yes, they were at the mercy of their slave owner.
>
> Belfield: Right, right but and a lot of our young folks don't know that and again some parents don't wanna teach that to the kids because you know it's so degrading and, and, you know and like Martin Luther King said you know judge people by the content of their character

Junia talked about the racial identity of the Celebration Chorus: "the music that the Wings [Celebration Chorus] sings is mostly Black music but we're representing. But the way we represent it, it is received by the White race" (Interview, June 6, 2016).

Deloris also talked about the racial identity of the Celebration Chorus:

> Yeah, and that's another reason that I like singing with the group because of that reason. Um, yeah, music can be colorized; it is race. All the songs, well most of the songs that The Wings [Celebration Chorus] sing about have to deal with slavery, "Go Down Moses," "I've Been Buked and I've Been Born." All those songs like that have to deal with when they're escaping and go through the "Wade in the Water," all these different. And I looked up those songs up, most of them like and it was saying, telling the slaves you know which way to go. They were just singing, and the slave owner didn't know [chuckle sound] what they were singing about, "Oh, look at them they're singing." But he's ignorant and doesn't know that

> they're talking, but they're actually telling each other what *to do*. And so yes, it is race, it does have to do with race, and it is okay to do it because it's telling our people what they, what they *need to know*. That we weren't just, you know, we were just smart beyond everything. (Interview, June 6, 2016)

Mary offered the following regarding racial identity and the Celebration Chorus:

> Well I think, Black music, the spirituals, you can tell when a black person is singing a Negro spiritual song or a song period. There is a certain soul, there is a certain expression depth and understanding, knowledge that brings forth a sound that is difficult for a white person to mimic. So, I do think that Negroes do, we do colorize our music in a way that is different from most people. Now there are some whites who do very well, but we have that embedded in us and maybe in the genes or whatever, but there is a certain colorization that black folk have. (Interview, June 10, 2016)

Rachel discussed the promotion of racial identity and the Celebration Chorus:

> It should promote racial identity because they sing about a race. For an example, why can't we sing about our adventures, our life as slaves if the Mormon Tabernacle Choir can sing their classical music, that's my feeling, it might not be correct but that's the way I feel. It is supposed to be racial; it is the Negro spiritual. (Interview, June 14, 2019)

Cultural Identity and Community Identity

In *Race Matters*, West (1993a/2017) stated, "Culture is as much a structure as the economy or politics; it is rooted in institutions such as families, schools, churches, synagogues, mosques, and communication industries (television, radio, video, music)" (p. 12). The culture of the participants in this study, as members of the Celebration Chorus, is one which highly values preserving the legacy of their predecessors, Wings Over Jordan, and the Negro spiritual as the music of their ancestors. West (1993a/2017) further stated, "people, especially degraded and oppressed people, are also hungry for identity,

meaning and self-worth" (p. 13). Preserving the Negro spirituals provides a means through which the Celebration Chorus can satisfy their hunger for identity, meaning, and self-worth.

Concerning the culture of Black people in the United States, West (1993a/2017) also pointed out, "after centuries of racist degradation, exploitation, and oppression in America, being Black means being minimally subject to White supremacist abuse and being a part of a rich culture and community that has struggled against such abuse" (p. 25). It is my belief that members of the Celebration Chorus, in the spirit of critical race theorists, are committed to making a positive change in the community simply by adding beauty to the communities in which they sing Negro spirituals. In doing so, they fight what West (1993a/2017) identified as political cynicism among Black people which "encourages the idea that we cannot really make a difference in changing our society. This cynicism…dampens the fire of engaged local activists who have made a difference" (p. 45). Members of the Celebration Chorus and WOJAF continue to make a difference as local activists in Cleveland, Ohio, and beyond, to defeat cynicism and/or ambivalence about our past and the Negro spiritual.

Junia shared the following about how the Celebration Chorus is well-received in the community by Black and White audiences:

> My experience has been, the way people and the audience receive the choir and the music that we deliver because it touches so many people, so many different ways, you know. You know we're well received and the mixed audience as well.
>
> Babette: Do you find that people know about the choir when you go around to perform?

> Junia: Some have heard of the choir and they wanna know why the choir was started you know. And the pastor started the choir in the church, Reverend Glenn T. Settle started the choir and he added members not just only from Gethsemane but from any other church, any other members that wanted to be a part of that choir, then it began to grow so much that it began to move around so much and when they began to travel he could not continue the pastoral duties so he chose to continue with the choir. So that was the radio choir and the traveling choir. (Interview June 6, 2016)

Junia's experience had been that the Celebration Chorus was well received by mixed Black and White audiences. Also, she highlighted a fact about the members of the Celebration Chorus in that they placed high value on knowing the history of the chorus's legacy inherited from Wings. In speaking to the cultural identity of the Celebration Chorus, Junia said:

> I think, the songs that we sing carry a message and is able to reach the other cultures or races. It can reach the whole community, the lyrics of the song. That's outreach (laughter: heh, heh, heh). I feel that with this choir with the travel from church to church and using, because we do programs for various churches and mixed audiences and I think that has done a lot and will continue as we go, when we go into the, maybe to the schools to perform. And the youth hear these songs and they have, that's why we give scholarships to for the youth to continue in this language. (Interview, June 6, 2016)

The cultural identity of the Celebration Chorus and WOJAF is integral to their musical identity. Frith (1996), offering insight into the role of music as an identifier, shared: "Music, like identity, is both performance and story, describes the social in the individual and the individual in the social, the mind in the body and the body in the mind; identity, like music, is a matter of both ethics and aesthetics" (p. 109). This statement suggests that the Celebration Chorus shares both a cultural and community identity through the preservation of what they view as worthy and beautiful, the Negro spirituals. It is interesting that Johnson and Johnson (1925/1926/1969) suggested that Negro

spirituals, which are true folk songs, were "originally intended only for group singing" (p. 21). If one agrees with this thought, the voice of the Celebration Chorus is a collective group of social commentators on the cultural and community milieu. That makes the spirituals attractive as well, for the communal voice is fortifying and powerful. Hall Johnson (1983) shared that Negro spirituals were not conceived as solos, but the voice of community identity; Johnson stressed this characteristic of the performance of Negro spirituals:

> It must be kept in mind that the Negro Spiritual is essentially a group or choral form—many people singing together. It reached its highest musical peak in the Negro Church during the early years succeeding the abolition of slavery—where large *crowds* sang *freely*. (p. 277, emphasis in original)

Jones (1993), in speaking about the spirituals and their connection to African American cultural roots, expounded:

> The teachings that emerge as we experience early African American music in the way that Robeson describes are particularly relevant to issues of oppression that have necessarily been of concern to African Americans throughout our history in America. However, the wisdom communicated by the spirituals extends as well to universal matters of human life that transcend their specific cultural context of origin. As such, the spirituals have a great deal to say to all Americans, regardless of ethnic or cultural roots. (p. 16)

Similarly, Jones and Jones (2001) made note that "It is also true that many of the singers of arranged spirituals performed these songs out of a strong emotion identification with black music traditions, including the music of slavery" (p. 24). Speaking to the topic of community, Jones and Jones (2001) related that, "It is impossible to understand the cultural history of the spirituals without recognizing the strong community values of early African Americans. In many ways, this emphasis on family and community relationships

is a direct extension of the strong religious orientation [in the African American community]" (p. 10).

Jones (1993) shared:

> As in the 1960s, we have to believe in the potential of the African American community, armed with its songs to push pass misplaced perceptions of naiveté and miseducation to reassert its rightful position in the vanguard of ethical leadership in America. However, that opportunity may be lost if we fail to remind ourselves periodically about the critical role of our music in the ongoing struggle. (p. 131)

As Jones (1993) asserted, we cannot understate the power of the musicians and singers in our neighborhoods — they can serve as leaders in the community to negotiate change for the better.

Cone (1972/1991) gave insight into Du Bois's interpretation of the significance of the spirituals: Du Bois "was happy to place his weight on the side of the distinctive character of the slave songs, characterizing them as the 'sole American music'" (p. 13), but he went far beyond that to relate the songs to the cultural history of Black people striving for humanity in a society of oppression and racial hatred. Cone's statement is relevant to members of the Celebration Chorus and Maestro: What they are doing is making a cultural impact; they are contributing to preserving the musical cultural history for not only themselves but also the community. Edward, a Focus Group participant, commented on the cultural deficit in the Black community regarding the Negro spirituals and how they were used in the Civil Rights Movement marches:

> Edward: What you did, you would strike up one of the old Negro *spirituals*, and everybody in your group would sing the Negro spiritual and it would go on up the line and they'd pick up the song and they'd add verses, and many of the songs that we sang in the Civil Rights Movement were those Negro spirituals. I can remember one that we would change the

> name, "No more George Wallace Over Me," that kind of thing. "No More Bull Carters" that what have you, those were the kind of songs that sang. So, when I talk about those things that work as Black people, to get us to where we are, we're the only culture that does not teach our culture, does not remember our culture, that's ashamed of our culture. That's what we were as a *people*. So, when you do anything to dilute that, you lose it because now you don't know what part of the coffee is cream and what part of the coffee is sugar, okay? (Focus Group, July 5, 2016)

The Celebration Chorus has stood on the shoulders of Wings and followed in its footsteps by promoting race relations and thereby identifying with the community. The document, "The Second Annual Wings Over Jordan Celebration Program booklet," states, "Rev. Settle's idea of presenting a program of music and inspiring messages grew out of his desire to further the understanding and brotherhood of all people, thereby creating better race relations" (WOJAF, Inc., 1989).

The Celebration Chorus has enjoyed a strong community in the Greater Cleveland Area and in the state of Ohio. Their presence in the community has been felt by performing mostly in Black churches, but others places as well: civic and political venues, schools, colleges, universities, and fine art venues including the Karamu Theater, the first and oldest African American theater in the United States.

The community of the Greater Cleveland Area and beyond has benefitted from the uplifting messages shared by the Celebration Chorus in singing Negro spirituals. Mary shared a story about her neighbor, who remembered hearing Wings overseas, a recollection that reinforces the rationale for both the Celebration Chorus' existence and the need to document the chorus's history:

> Well . . . there have been so many memorable experiences. One of the things that I remember in traveling with the choir and spreading the word and getting to people and actually seeing and hearing from folk who

> remember [Wings]. My next door neighbor when we first got started; he was, I forget which branch of service, but Wings Over Jordan Choir, the chorus visited his headquarters over in Europe somewhere. I don't remember what country it was, but they had come to visit, and he was able to share that with me, and the more you talk, the more you see people remember. (Interview, June 10, 2016)

The Celebration Chorus' cultural identity, community identity, and racial identity thus are all interwoven and intertwined. Deloris, one of the youngest members, born in the 1960s, talked about the community identity of the Celebration Chorus: "It brings us, it brings the community, it brings colored, African American community together" (Interview, June 6, 2016). Regarding community and cultural identity, Deloris further stated:

> It brings us together, especially at a church or at an event; at like Juneteenth festivals and things, you know. Somebody, an older person will say, "oh, Wings Over Jordan is going to be there." Oh, I used to hear them sing, like, "take me to a festival to hear them." So, it brings us [she moves her hand in a motion of gathering/in a circular-like movement] together. So, it does, by the songs we're singing, it brings us together because we can relate. (Interview, June 6, 2016)

Deloris was too young to have heard the original Wings but grew up hearing and experiencing the events conducted by the Celebration Chorus. Mary offered the following regarding community identity:

> Okay, well I think the music gives a great history of *how* the slaves were treated; how this country failed in protecting its, its people . . . liberty and justice for all, we just did not have that protection, and the songs that are sung relay that, relay that terror, that fear, that heartbreak and struggle that so many black folk went through. It's been my generation, I didn't see as much as the generation before, but I knew enough to know, but I remember and saw enough to know that this world, this country was not good to black people. It was not fair to all people . . .

> Babette: In what ways does the Wings Over Jordan Celebration Chorus promote racial identity?

Mary continued:

> And, and for that reason I think that they promote the *songs*, the history of those songs and when you think about them, it, it promotes black identity and our struggle, and I know and remember in the Civil Rights struggle and all those marches and whatever, they leaned on that music . . . as their theme songs and their marching songs. And I, it brings forth a strength and a determination that is identifiable so. (Interview, June 10, 2016)

These words by CeeCee, a participant who has also held a longstanding membership offered a performance philosophy of the Celebration Chorus: "We sing all over, we don't separate Black or White or one church denomination against another one. We just sing; we sing wherever we're wanted or needed" (Interview, June 8, 2016)

Summary

The Celebration Chorus and WOJAF is committed to educating young and old audiences about the legacy of Wings Over Jordan in its preservation of the Negro spiritual to produce a culturally rich community— to impact the world through this beautiful music. They are interested in preservation of a culture, a genre, and in raising the consciousness of the human race. The chorus has a collective identity as African American, and it promotes culturally based events to the community. Advocates of education, the participants possess knowledge about what they sing in terms of cultural background and context.

The effort to educate diverse audiences about the Negro spiritual by the Celebration Chorus reinforces both racial and cultural identity. As critical race theorists

pointed out, Black people are not a monolithic race. Harris (1990) decried ‘“racial essentialism”—the belief that there is a monolithic ‘Black Experience’ or ‘Chicano Experience’”(Harris, 1990, p. 588). As a race, African Americans have often been assigned negative labels, and the destructive behavior of some individuals sometimes overshadows the positive cultural contributions of African Americans. Thus, the positive impact that the contributions of groups such as the Celebration Chorus offer to the culture of all communities often go unnoticed. Nonetheless, the Celebration Chorus is intentional in giving aesthetic beauty back to the community through the arts instead of taking away from it.

CHAPTER SIX: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

Wade in the water, wade in the water children. wade in the water, God's gonna trouble the water.
(Negro Spiritual)

The Negro spiritual, "Wade in the Water," holds special significance for me. I frequently perform this piece, "Troubled Water," by Margaret Bonds (1967), an African American composer (1913–1972). It is one of the ways that I can tell the story of the spiritual through performance. Edward, a member of the focus group declared, "We need to write our own history." That is the goal that I have pursued here. My purpose in this research has been to tell the unique story of the Wings Over Jordan Celebration Chorus, through the voices of its African American participants, to describe how this organization fulfills its mission and its determination to continue to do so. The interviews and focus group meetings of the Celebration Chorus, its Artistic Director, Maestro Glenn A. Brackens, and members of the WOJAF suggest that this organization is wholly committed to keeping the Negro spiritual and its legacy alive. This final chapter of the dissertation discusses important findings with implications for music education and suggestions for future research.

Preservation Through Perseverance

One question that seemed to cry out for an answer and ran as an undercurrent for this study was, why preserve the Negro spiritual in the first place? The answer for the Celebration Chorus and WOJAF is quite simple. Along with many African Americans,

particularly of older generations, they place a high value on Negro spirituals. Although the source of motivation for the slaves to create and sing Negro spirituals differed from the motivation for members of the Celebration Chorus to sing these songs, the Celebration Chorus sings these songs for the deep spiritual connection to their souls, the sheer beauty of these songs, and a drive to carry on their inherited legacy. The songs embody a collective racial and cultural identity that is shared by members of the Celebration Chorus. Therefore, members of the Celebration Chorus and WOJAF have chosen to preserve the rich legacy handed down to them from the Wings Over Jordan Choir. The participants of this study considered it their duty to preserve their heritage.

In an archival document given to me by Dr. Regennia N. Williams of Cleveland State University, the following statement describes a sentiment made about Wings which still holds true for the Celebration Chorus today: "Native American Folk Songs Rendered Treasured Jewels." The document referred to the Negro spirituals sung by Wings in concerts across the nation and the world as a treasure trove of precious jewels and gems. The Negro spirituals represent an inheritance of musical treasures for anyone who deems them valuable to listen to or perform.

Members of the Celebration Chorus continue to persevere to preserve Negro spirituals because the songs reach down to the depths of their souls. Lovell (1939), in speaking about a statement made by Du Bois concerning the singing of Negro spirituals by enslaved Africans, wrote, "He hinted at the African genius for transmuting trouble into song" (p. 635). Participants expressed how the songs relate to everyday life even today and connected to their spirits. For participants of the Celebration Chorus, the

choice to persevere (since 1988) to keep the Negro spiritual alive was mandated, because the songs represent foundational cornerstones of their shared cultural identity and history.

The Celebration Chorus is a choir at a crossroads and in transition. Many members have died since 1988, and the membership has dwindled down to a small group of approximately 15-20 active members, in comparison to the roster of 30-60 active members in the past; however, due to the participants' passionate dedication and Maestro Brackens's vision for the future, they have begun to rebuild, and the future is bright. Even though the group has "slowed down," they have maintained performances at the home church of Gethsemane Baptist Church and in other local Black and White churches. They have also continued to participate in special community events, including a Street Renaming Event of the Glenn T. Settle Way and Gethsemane Baptist Church Way on September 9, 2017. To many of its members, the organization provides a calling and hence a vocation. In this way, the struggles of the Celebration Chorus and WOJAF to keep the organization thriving are tangible, but the good news is that they are in a rebuilding and revitalization mode. They continue to preserve through perseverance.

Preservation Through Documentation

Participants of the Celebration Chorus and WOJAF preserve African Americans' sacred music heritage, the Negro spiritual, by maintaining private collections that include a variety of artifacts. Several participants and Maestro Brackens have artifacts including original copies of concert programs, photos of various events including pictures—on more than one occasion—with Coretta Scott King. One of the goals that is coming to

fruition through tenacity is the establishment of a Wings Over Jordan Library in the Annex building of Gethsemane Baptist Church. The library will hold a variety of artifacts including audiovisual recordings (e.g. DVDs and CDs) of past concerts, music scores of arrangements used by the group, and other memorabilia pertaining to African American history and music history. Indeed, Taller Williams, a friend of Maestro and the Celebration Chorus, is founder of Tallerworks Educational Development, Inc. and owns a remarkable collection of Wings and the Celebration Chorus. The East Cleveland (Ohio) Public Library has a few workshop/concert programs of the Celebration Chorus in its Icabod Flewellen Collection. This same collection also contains several interesting original artifacts on Wings. The lack of information on the Celebration Chorus needs to be remedied. Archival material of the Celebration Chorus is also maintained in the private recording studio of a Cedric Sims a local Clevelander closely associated with the choir; he is in the process of compiling recordings he has made over the years.

Ironically, it was when I travelled to Winterville, North Carolina, to study the private collection of Dr. Samuel Barber that I procured a VHS copy of the inaugural concert of the Wings Over Jordan Celebration Chorus on June 11, 1988. Only afterwards did I discover that the Special Collections at Cleveland State University had DVD copies of this inaugural concert as well.

The Special Collections at Cleveland State University also has DVD video and sound recordings of interviews conducted by Dr. Samuel Barber around 1990 of Wings and Celebration Chorus members including Persie Ford and Gladys Hauser Goodloe (prominent members in Cleveland), for examples. In addition, Dr. Regennia Williams has

conducted several interviews of members of the Celebration Chorus as a part of one of her Praying Grounds Oral History projects of RASHAD.

Preservation Through Performance

The performance of Negro spirituals represents the most direct and powerful vehicle which the Celebration Chorus and WOJAF has utilized for preservation of Negro spirituals. The immediacy of performance and direct emotional connection with their audiences has allowed the Celebration Chorus and WOJAF to effectively preserve a genre that holds significance, not only for many African Americans, but for all races. Since June 11, 1988, they have made remarkable contributions to keep the Negro spiritual alive. Their visibility in the community as performers for the past 30 years has shown their commitment to the Greater Cleveland, Ohio Area, as well as their versatility and humility in serving the community. In contrast to the original Wings Over Jordan Choir, who had many conductors, the Celebration Chorus has enjoyed the continuity of its founding conductor, Maestro Brackens.

The performance venues have been eclectic and have included: (a) local churches (both White and Black); (b) The Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum for Black History Month (at least twice); (c) The Karamu House, the first Black theater in the United States; (d) several civic events in Cleveland and Columbus, Ohio, during the tenure of Mayor and Governor George V. Voinovich; (e) colleges and universities including Kent State University, the alma mater of Maestro Brackens, Wilberforce University, Cuyahoga County Community College (for the first concert), John Carroll

University of University Heights, Ohio (where one of its members, the late Dr. Valentino Lassiter, taught), Cleveland State University (on numerous occasions), often in collaboration with the Music and History Departments; (f) John Patterson Green Day (John P. Green was an African American Ohio Senator and the Father of Labor Day) in Woodland Cemetery of Cleveland, Ohio; and (g) several community ethnic festivals including its own Juneteenth Festival held at Gethsemane Baptist Church.

Preservation Through Education

Without educating our young people, we lose a legacy of how we as African Americans have communicated through the years. Sometimes songs communicate where spoken words cannot. The Celebration Chorus and WOJAF have placed a high premium on the education of younger generations and general audiences. Following in the footsteps of their predecessor, Wings, they began awarding scholarships to college bound students with monies garnered from their debut concert; the first scholarships were awarded in 1989. Since that year, they have strived to award scholarships annually. To receive a scholarship, the applicant must meet certain criteria including a minimum grade point average of 2.5 and a letter of recommendation; however, the most important criterion is that the applicant, by writing an essay, tells how he or she will promote the preservation of Negro spirituals after graduation as a lifetime pursuit, financially or by membership in organizations similar to the Celebration Chorus and WOJAF. Jones (1993), concerning the value and importance of education about Negro spirituals, explained:

> It is often difficult even for African Americans to make the necessary shift in perspective that permits us to understand fully the value of the music of our ancestors, which properly experienced provides an important component of our education as enlightened human beings. As the historian Carter G. Woodson would say, our "mis-education makes it difficult for us to value and understand the notion that a body of folksongs could serve as a source of information concerning informed and productive contemporary living. (p. 13)

The Celebration Chorus has taken the message contained in the Negro spirituals to churches, public, and private schools. In their concerts, they educate through explanations of the songs by using well-prepared narrators. In addition, they have conducted annual Negro spiritual education workshops in local churches, schools, universities, and The Karamu House Theater. They have taken Rev. Settle's dream and expanded it through their workshops and the fine arts camp. In rehearsals, the choir uses music scores as opposed to learning only by rote. Thus, by teaching the next generations how to read music and compose, the choir also increases music literacy.

Perhaps most importantly, however, the participants of this case study shared a wealth of knowledge based upon their experiences as African Americans in the United States. They spoke of the need to teach our young people the struggle and depth of the Negro spirituals–a need that goes beyond just the music and the enjoyment they gain from performing and preserving the songs–but a need that encompasses the history embedded in *the words* of the songs and their meaning for Black people. They shared the depth of their experiences growing up in the United States where Blacks were viewed as second class people. Some marched during the Civil Rights Movement and in so doing, showed their determination to counteract the vestiges of slavery by their protest marches.

Education is a cornerstone of the Celebration Chorus and the Wings Over Jordan

Alumni and Friends, Inc. Its members believe the education of the next generation, and generations to come, is key to the organization's longevity, vitality, and relevance. Within the members exists a wealth of information that they generously choose to share with their audiences.

Maestro Brackens: Through the Eyes of a Visionary

Maestro Glenn Alton Brackens had the vision to initiate the Wings Over Jordan Celebration Chorus to celebrate the 50th anniversary of Wings Over Jordan. He has served as the only artistic director since 1988. Maestro Brackens is a staunch advocate for music education through the Celebration Chorus. He is moving towards developing a choir that reflects the positive side of a changing culture; that is to say, he is progressive in his outlook on how to reach young people.

His music philosophy for the Celebration Chorus and WOJAF aligns with that of the founder of Wings: "That Which is Worthy Must Be Preserved." His philosophy also embraces the theme of the 70th anniversary (2008), "Celebrating Our Musical Heritage and Inspiring Future Generations!" He understands the importance of connecting with young people to enable this heritage to continue beyond the activities and experiences of the current group. Edward, one of the participants, stated, "had there not been a Wings Over Jordan Celebration Chorus, Wings would have died!" (Follow-up Meeting to Focus Group, June 9, 2018).

Maestro Brackens is a creative Artistic Director of the Celebration Chorus, who has the need for malleability and freedom to express his artistry in order to reach the

future generations. Maestro Brackens' approach to education through performance of Negro spirituals may be understood as "education as the practice of freedom" (hooks, 1994). For example, he has chosen to use music education to reach youth strategically by marketing his inaugural summer camp to appeal to a hip-hop generation. He also uses the tool of mentorship to include his former music students who chose music as their career, to help him attract youth to this same summer camp. In addition, Maestro Brackens uses "education as the practice of freedom" by not catering to the pressures of what some view as the degradation of the Negro spiritual in concert presentations. He uses the merger of education of Negro spirituals and rap music to teach the children the common tie between the two genres: expressions of oppression by the establishment. His philosophy of "by any means necessary" and "push the envelope" are put into practice by including dance, various instruments, a cappella and accompanied presentations of Negro spirituals in the jazz, gospel, and traditional modes.

Maestro Brackens has several goals to move the organization forward. He desires to establish a Wings Over Jordan Library and Performing Arts Center, grow the choir exponentially, take tours in the southern states, but also in great venues including Carnegie Hall, the White House, and Boston Symphony Hall, as did the original Wings. He wants to add to the legacy that was given to the Celebration Chorus from his ancestors, including his grandmother Persie Ford. He wants to reach a greater audience and impact the world.

Limitations and Transferability of the Study

The research data found in this study is unique to the Celebration Chorus and cannot be generalized to other such groups; however, emergent themes discussed in this research study may be transferable to the contexts of other choruses (see Merriam, 1998, p. 208). Other choirs can examine the themes discussed in this case study and may find that the themes resonate with their organizations and are thus transferable. To begin, the importance of preserving a choral organization's history, legacy, and mission is vitally important. It is important that a historian and/or archivist constantly maintains records of the choral organization's activities. Similarly, data surrounding membership rosters and minutes of the administrative activities need to be maintained for posterity. A professional photographer may need to be identified for the group to maintain a pictorial history of the choral group as well. I found these aspects of preservation to be weaknesses of the Celebration Chorus.

The importance of a written philosophy to guide the vision of the Celebration Chorus and WOJAF in addition to its constitution and bylaws would serve as an effective tool to help keep the organization focused. Thus, an examination of the weaknesses of a choral organization such as the Celebration Chorus is worthwhile in order to avoid certain pitfalls for any organization. For example, the need for ongoing updates of technology such as maintenance of the organization's website and the positive use of social media in order to stay culturally relevant may be a transferable theme. In addition, a liaison of public relations from one's organization to the community is of vital importance. The Celebration Chorus's impetus to continue community outreach and

continuous education within and beyond the organization may be common to other community organizations.

My study's use of critical race theory as the interpretive framework might also be transferable to other comparable research studies based on the Celebration Chorus' own unique racial and cultural identity, particularly for those choral groups who identify themselves based upon race or ethnicity. The issues surrounding the ramifications of race and racial identity in the United States is one of great concern. Thus, other groups who seek to education younger generations about the importance of preserving Negro spirituals and their historical legacy may find some of the findings of this study useful.

Implications for Music Education

This study offers several implications for music education and for those who are interested in preserving the history told through Negro spirituals. This study of the Wings Over Jordan Celebration Chorus can serve as an educational model for the formation of future African American choral groups dedicated to preserving the Negro spiritual. The structure of the organization from the beginning of its formation in 1988 to the present is worth modeling. The structure of the Celebration Chorus and WOJAF, Inc. is one of shared governance and thus provides a model useful for organizations who desire to operate democratically. Several committees (i.e. membership, program, publicity/public relations, finance, scholarship, library, and benevolence) execute the duties for the benefit of the entire organization.

The Celebration Chorus is not only a Black sacred music performing group, but it

is also an education-promoting sacred music choral group. Members believe it is incumbent upon them to educate audiences about the history and meaning of the Negro spirituals that they perform. The chorus, by example, encourages the imitation of its actions in performing at K-12 schools, colleges, and universities, and it hosts free workshops on the Negro spiritual. In its emphasis and insistence on education, the Celebration Chorus includes narrators in its concerts who explain the meanings of the Negro spirituals they perform, and at the same time the narrators expound upon the legacy of the Celebration Chorus' predecessor, Wings Over Jordan. When the Celebration Chorus performs concerts and conducts educational Negro spiritual workshops, it includes visual displays of artifacts from its Wings Over Jordan collection.

Music and Racial Identity

The Celebration Chorus unabashedly identifies as an African-American chorus. In the history of the chorus and its predecessors, all the choristers have been African American; however, Wings Over Jordan's first conductor, Worth Kramer, was White, and it was he who gave Wings entry into national recognition because of his position with CBS radio. The Celebration Chorus, on the other hand, has had only Black conductors and choristers. In the future, the chorus may expand to include other people of color according to Maestro Brackens who said, "But my journey would be to, as we go forward, to take it to the next level to expand that. I wouldn't mind having some Spanish and some Mexican but keeping the identity of the African American or the African American music experience" (Interview, September 30, 2016). In saying this, Maestro Brackens is not suggesting racism against Whites in any way; he is merely stating that the

identity of the chorus is taken from the perspective or point of view of those who have struggled in the United States because they are people of color. In this way, there is a shared identity to the struggle connected to being of color.

Bradley (2007) shared that some White music educators are uncomfortable discussing race—the "R word." She stated, "Talking about race can be risky business" (p. 140). She also shared, "Attempts to focus deliberately on issues related to race as a named concept go against [W]hites' socialization" (p. 140). It is possible that many Blacks are more comfortable talking about race than Whites because it is so much a part of their daily culture. In her article, "Avoiding the "P" Word: Political Contexts and Multicultural Music Education," Bradley (2012) referred to the adage, "music is a universal language," stating that without cultural context for understanding, this statement cannot hold true:

> A commonly heard sentiment, "Music is a universal language," suggests that musical understanding translates across cultures with no need for contextualization. Belief in this myth leads many music teachers to employ pedagogies focusing strictly on music's common elements (which, at closer look, are not particularly common from culture to culture). The belief that music's sonorous qualities have meaning without reference to the historical and cultural contexts from which the sounds emerge lulls educators into misguided pedagogies focused on performance where attention to notes and rhythms takes priority over important cultural meanings. (p. 193)

In other words, for music educators like Maestro Brackens, and members of the Celebration Chorus and WOJAF, and me, who decide to go out into schools and colleges and to diverse audiences of all ages, it is important to do our research of that community before we go to them and not to assume what they already know or do not know. In this way, we become collaborators with the music educators who are already teaching in these

institutions. It is also important for the Celebration Chorus and WOJAF to continue the long-established tradition of including narrations about the Negro spirituals that the chorus performs, for in doing so they are keeping the Negro spirituals alive through oral tradition.

Curriculum and Racial Identity

Another implication for music education relates to curriculum and the choices made every day by all American teachers, schools, and institutions of higher learning. In the case of music educators, choices are always made on what to include and what to exclude. The Celebration Chorus may serve as a positive model. Curricula can benefit from expansion to include performances and presentations by the Celebration Chorus and similar groups who are intentionally educative about the history of Negro spirituals, as well as school choirs that also engage in knowledgeable performances about the spirituals.

In my interviews and focus groups, I intentionally included questions that dealt with race and racial identity and its connection to the Celebration Chorus in its preservation of Negro spirituals. In order to analyze the activities and experiences of members of the Celebration Chorus, I chose Critical Race Theory (CRT) for the interpretive framework for my dissertation. One of my main goals was to illustrate how the Celebration Chorus models a solution to bridging the gap between the so-called races. Music can have a healing influence and can bring people together who might not otherwise cross paths. One of my goals for this dissertation was to show how the Celebration Chorus has bridged the gap between the need for and the lack of preservation

of Negro spirituals through performance and education.

The intersection of Black sacred music, cultural production, and social protest, during an emerging civil rights awareness from 1945 to 1960, spoke to the issues of a collective identity or collective racial awareness of African Americans and oppression (Frederick, 2009). He shared, "Black American sacred music has historically been a medium that has functioned as an outlet for the frustration against the dominant ideology of racial oppression in the United States" (p. iii). Frederick (2009) further described how music reflects the collective awareness of Black Americans:

> The ability of Black American music to function as an expression of social and political thought is rooted in an oral culture that can be traced back to Western Africa—the native region of most Black American ancestors. In Western African culture, singing was a part of everyday life. Singing preserved a way of life as it reflected the religion, cultural values, and customs of the people. (p. 1)

The United States is an extremely race-conscious society and not colorblind (Omi and Winant, 2017, p. 8). Therefore, as Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. stated in his "I Have a Dream" speech (1963), Americans need to consciously decide to judge each other according to one's character and not by one's skin color. One's perspective about Negro spirituals and education about the same bears heavily on whether one values Negro spirituals or not. For some African American performers, singing Negro spirituals calls up a negative history they may prefer to ignore (Walcott, 2000); however, if performance of spirituals is neglected, we risk forgetting our history.

The preservation practices of the Celebration Chorus in singing Negro spirituals, therefore, represents a type of oppositional movement, in step with critical race theory. As an oppositional movement, the Celebration Chorus resists the trend of 21st-century

audiences, who generally gravitate toward mainstream popular music, neglecting what is considered historical or outdated (such as preferentially singing gospel music to the exclusion of Negro spirituals). However, as CRT proposes, the stories told through singing the spirituals offer important opposition to ongoing issues of racism and oppression in today's world.

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy

As a music professor on the college campus of Holy Cross College, Notre Dame, Indiana, I created an American Music Traditions course in response to student's enthusiasm and interest in the section of the textbook that focused on music of the United States, which came near the end of course which focused on Western art music. In contrast, when teaching public middle and high school students in the East Cleveland City School District, I came to realize that when the students found no connection to the music I presented (such as opera), they became disinterested, expressed their boredom both verbally and tacitly, which led to classroom disruption. In order for today's students to make connections to Negro spirituals, they must engage not only with the context in terms of cultural relevance but also the cultural meaning of the songs. One solution to this problem of disconnect and a lack of cultural relevance was provided by Maestro Brackens of the Celebration Chorus. He saw a direct correlation between hip hop music and Negro spirituals; he stated that both genres expressed anguish about "oppression by the establishment." Thus, when teaching Negro spirituals, a music teacher can show how the music of enslaved Africans was in many ways equivalent to the protest music of the "hip hop" generation of the 20th and 21st centuries. The spirituals thus might represent a

starting point for exploring the feelings expressed in song by enslaved Africans and those of post-emancipation generations that may be found in the genres of blues and jazz as well as in hip hop music of today.

For an educational platform, music educators, including the members of the Celebration Chorus, have a responsibility to teach not only the context in which spirituals were birthed, but also and more importantly, the meaning and the message of the songs that enslaved Africans left behind–for us to study, understand, and empathize with the message contained therein. Everyone can connect to pain, struggle, tension, suppression, and oppression. These stresses and oppositions to the spirit of the human race are universal.

Negro spirituals can be taught and performed confidently in the public school, classroom, performance hall, or auditorium without fear of backlash from administrators, parents and students who might feel it is inappropriate to teach songs that refer to God. Teachers armed with the knowledge that Negro spirituals can be taught from the stance of cultural relevance can stand up to voices of opposition to teaching and learning about this part of United States music history. From this viewpoint, music educators can include Negro spirituals in their curriculum without fear that the songs will be denigrated to cultural, archaic artifacts.

Although Negro spirituals are sung by choruses in the United States, Europe, and Asia because of their universal appeal, the history of the songs is not well-known worldwide. It is important for music educators to teach a culturally relevant curriculum that includes Negro spirituals as part of a diverse musical palette. Ladson-Billings (2014)

posited the need for responsible teachers who are focused on student learning, academic achievement, cultural competence, and sociopolitical consciousness (p. 76). She recognized that responsible teachers place a great price and interest on the education of their students. It is not enough for educators to discuss the context of slavery alone; they must also educate students comprehensively about Negro spirituals, their role in resisting the oppression of slavery, and the meaning of hope conveyed by the songs that remains relevant to the struggles of today. Listen to them, perform them, but discuss the meaning of the songs and what it meant for the enslaved, who endured these horrific hardships and trauma.

In the same article, Ladson-Billings (2014) discussed *culturally sustaining pedagogy*, a phrase coined by Paris (2012). Thus, music educators can sustain the culture of Negro spirituals by teaching this cultural legacy in innovative and creative ways. One example, discussed previously, is that of the Performing Arts Summer Camp, "When Hip Hop Meets the African American Spiritual" given by the WOJAF, Inc. and directed by Maestro Brackens. In the 2019 two-week camp, the students' ages ranged from 4 to 18; they all took classes in piano lab, drama, creative writing, chorus, dance, and a showcase performance. The interesting name of the camp may have helped to draw the students in; however, it was the high quality and dedication of the teachers and their commitment to teaching a topic of relevance that made the camp a success for its second year. Through sung or spoken word, piano pieces, and a percussion polyrhythmic piece, the campers performed the Negro spirituals "Ain't That Good News," "Joshua Fit the Battle of Jericho," "Didn't My Lord Deliver Daniel," "Shall We Gather at the River," "and "Old

Time Religion."

A subtopic of culturally relevant pedagogy is cultural appropriation; White people may fear that singing these songs becomes an appropriation of Black culture (Holland, 2019). Music educators need to know that even though Negro spirituals were "composed" by African Americans under the oppression of slavery, they are appropriate for everyone to sing. Everyone in the world, and especially in the United States, should have the opportunity to learn about and sing these songs. While some may attempt to argue that the mention of slavery is degrading to Black students (Walcott, 2000), the degradation lies in the enterprise of United States slavery that caused the need for such songs in the first place. The degradation is in the attitude of White supremacy in which some citizens deem themselves better than African Americans just because they are White. I suppose some White students and others may not find these songs relatable, and therefore may dismiss themselves from singing Negro spirituals. Both Whites and people of color may be uncomfortable singing these songs because of the association with the degradation of slavery. Some White educators may not feel comfortable acknowledging that it was their descendants who enslaved Africans for approximately 400 years (Bradley, 2012). Nonetheless, every K-12 music class should devote a section of its syllabus to Negro spirituals and their meaning in the context of history and cultural relevance. Everyone can identify with the concept of opposition, oppression, and protest. Negro spirituals were used as freedom songs of protest in the United States, and later in other countries such as South Africa under apartheid, adopted because of the oppositional and counternarrative voice. There is a necessity for music educators to move students of

any color and ethnicity beyond the backgrounds with which they may be most comfortable. When one performs these songs, which have undoubtedly undergone transformations since they were first sung on plantations, homage should be given to the originators, the enslaved Africans, whose songs and musicality forever changed the music of the Americas.

Suggestions for Future Research

Education about Negro spirituals in public music education is in a state of doubtful disputation; however, several organizations are dedicated to the purpose of the Celebration Chorus in its three-pronged strategy to preserve the Negro spiritual through performance, education, and documentation. The following are proposals for future research.

Researchers interested in the preservation of Negro spirituals could investigate the preservation practices of well-established organizations, such as Friends of Negro Spirituals, The Society for the Preservation of Spirituals, the Moses Hogan Vocal Society and Chorale, and the Duffy Liturgical Dance Ensemble and their uses of education to reach young people. This research proposal furthers knowledge of Negro spirituals, as these organizations have demonstrated longevity in their commitments to preserve the Negro spirituals. These organizations are located in different states across the United States, and each emphasizes preservation through performance. The Society for the Preservation of Spirituals is the oldest of these organizations and represents a predominantly White organization that recognizes preservation through performance,

education, and documentation. These organizations share some of the same goals and purposes of the Celebration Chorus to promote, revere, enhance, and reveal the vital importance of the Negro spiritual and those who founded and contributed to it as an important part of African American culture.

Researchers might also investigate preservation practices of Negro spirituals to build upon the work of Reed-Walker (2008) and other African American music education scholars interested in preservation of Negro spirituals. Such research could further knowledge about Negro spirituals by encouraging field research and thus adding to the work in this field. Such research would serve to improve race relations by encouraging researchers of all ethnicities to study a genre to which all people can relate.

Music education research scholars may consider researching the condition of preservation of the Negro spirituals at historically Black colleges and universities besides Fisk University, including institutions and their choral conductors. This research would further knowledge about preservation of Negro spirituals, as the state of choral music programs at these institutions depends upon the choral director, who may or may not have interest in preserving Negro spirituals or the history they represent. Such research might serve to improve race relations, as it would facilitate documentation of the activities and experiences of institutions whose choral programs have been a mainstay of ambassadors of public relations. The Celebration Chorus and WOJAF seek contributions, pledges, endowments, grants, and other valuable assets that serve to make possible the furthering of the work of this organization. Such research could investigate how such organizations operate to raise funds for their perspective institution. I also propose that

researchers could investigate a comparison and contrast of the performance of Negro spirituals to gospel music.

Finally, music education research scholars could investigate how the resultant work of collaborations between African American authors of African American children's books and African American arrangers of Negro spirituals could be incorporated into K-12 music curricula for greater diversity and integration of the arts. This proposal furthers knowledge about Negro spirituals because it contributes to the music education of school aged children. It serves to improve race relations by offering a curriculum that may have not considered including Negro spirituals—this can serve those music educators who adopt the philosophy of comprehensive musicianship. The Celebration Chorus and WOJAF has from its inception continued the legacy of its predecessor, Wings, in making the music education of youth and the furtherance of education through post-secondary work a high priority.

Epilogue

There is, unfortunately, competition for the attention of Black performers between Black gospel music and Negro spirituals in Black churches and college campuses. These genres can co-exist, but sometimes there is an adversarial and antagonistic tension between the two Black sacred music genres. I have personally witnessed power struggles both tacit and aggressive, between proponents of the two genres.

It is my opinion that because of the determination of the Wings Over Jordan Celebration Chorus and the Wings Over Jordan Alumni & Friends, Inc., preservation and

advancement of the Negro spiritual will continue to thrive; however, vigilance is necessary in educating younger generations, because if these songs are not performed by successive generations, they stand in danger of becoming relics and forgotten. This is problematic, because when older generations are not willing to let younger generations creatively experiment with the performance style of the Negro spiritual, they raise the possibility of the spirituals becoming obsolete or neglected. Essentially, older generations tacitly speak to younger generations: "Do not change what I am comfortable with hearing and with what I consider a beautiful and correct interpretation of how these slave songs should be sung."

Perhaps more importantly, however, singing Negro spirituals (in addition to the stories told by critical race theorists) can be equated to the type of storytelling in CRT that serves "the survival of the community. Spirituals were songs created as leverage, as salve, as voice, as a bridge over troubles one could not endure without the flight of song and singing" (Reagon, 2001, pp. 74–75).

Telling the story of the Celebration Chorus and the efforts to preserve the legacy of Wings and the history of the Negro spiritual has been a journey which drew to mind the beautiful poem, "The Road Not Taken" by Robert Frost. The road I chose was inspired by my oldest sister, Wanda Reid Wilson, who verbalized the need for me to begin pursuit of my doctorate. This road was full of twists and turns. It was a road of struggle and trouble, often created by me; however, it was a road that I was determined to travel to the finish. The pursuit of a doctorate is a pursuit in "striving after God," as expressed in a composition by Undine Smith Moore (1958) of the same title, with a text

attributed to Michelangelo. The last three lines of Frost's poem personally express my journey in completing this dissertation: "Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—I took the one less travelled by, and that has made all the difference" (1959/2001, p. 130).

> Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
> And sorry I could not travel both
> And be one traveller, long I stood
> And looked down one as far as I could
> To where it bent in the undergrowth;
>
> Then took the other, as just as fair,
> And having perhaps the better claim,
> Because it was grassy and wanted wear;
> Though as for that the passing there
> Had worn them really about the same,
>
> And both that morning equally lay
> In leaves no step had trodden black.
> Oh, I kept the first for another day!
> Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
> I doubted if I should ever come back.
>
> I shall be telling this with a sigh
> Somewhat ages and ages hence:
> Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
> I took the one less travelled by,
> And that has made all the difference.

The arrangements of slave songs, the Negro spirituals we sing today, belong to the community and therefore should be shared with the community. The Celebration Chorus and the WOJAF use their talents and efforts not only to preserve a legacy but to perpetuate and promote a treasure trove of songs they deem worthy of preservation. Rather than following the easy path that could see the spirituals become relics of the past, they have taken the road less travelled to preserve the songs and their heritage. Maestro Brackens refers to the activities and experiences of the Celebration Chorus as a

movement. It is my hope that the Wings Over Jordan Celebration Chorus and Wings Over Jordan Alumni and Friends, Inc. can experience a huge Alumni reunion of choristers across the nation. Such a movement would signal a bright future for generations to come.

APPENDIX A: RECRUITING LETTER

Dear Wings Over Jordan Celebration Chorus and Wings Over Jordan Alumni and

Friends, Inc.:

My name is Babette Reid Harrell and I am a doctoral student in the College of Fine Arts of the School of Music at Boston University.

I am conducting a study of the Wings Over Jordan Celebration Chorus. The purpose of this research is to tell the story of the preservation of the Negro spiritual through the Wings Over Jordan Celebration Chorus.

If you are interested in participating in this study, please review the enclosed information, complete the enclosed form, and mail it back to me in the enclosed pre-paid envelope within one week. Should you have any questions or concerns, you can reach me at 216-496-5399. My Supervisor, Dr. Deborah Bradley, can be reached at 647-993-5732.

It is important to know that this letter is not to tell you to join this study. It is your decision. Your participation is voluntary. Whether or not you participate in this study will have no effect on your relationship with Wings Over Jordan Celebration Chorus or Boston University.

You do not have to respond if you are not interested in this study. If you do not respond, no one will contact you, but you may receive another letter in the mail to follow up, that you can simply disregard.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Babette Reid Harrell

Attachment:
Abstract
Consent Form

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL AND QUESTIONS

Preserving the Negro spiritual: A Case Study of Wings Over Jordan Celebration Chorus

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview today. The purpose of this interview is to document the activities and experiences of members of the Wings Over Jordan Celebration Chorus, to tell the story of preservation and advancement of the Negro spiritual by the Wings Over Jordan Celebration Chorus. The information gleaned from this interview will be used in my dissertation research at Boston University. Your participation is voluntary, and you may stop participating at any time. You may also choose not to respond to one or more of the questions. The interview will last about 90 minutes. I will be videotaping the interview, but the transcripts and the dissertation will not use your name or any other identifiable information. I will keep your responses confidential. I will not repeat what was said outside this room. If you have any questions you may ask them now or you can contact me later at **babsreid@sbcglobal.net** and/or by telephone, 216-496-5399. You may also contact my Dissertation Supervisor, **Deborah Bradley, Ph.D.**, at debbradley42@gmail.com. You may obtain further information about your rights as a research subject by calling the BU CRC IRB Office at 617-358-6115.

Tell the story of the preservation of the Negro Spiritual through the Wings Over Jordan Celebration Chorus

1. Tell me a little about your personal background.

2. Please tell me your story of being a member of the Wings Over Jordan Celebration Chorus (WOJCC). When did you become a member of Wings Over Jordan Celebration Chorus? What influenced you to become a member of Wings Over Jordan Celebration Chorus?

3. How long do you plan on being a member of this historic chorus?

4. What is your motivation for singing in Wings Over Jordan Celebration Chorus?

5. What are your reasons for valuing the Negro spiritual?

6. What has been your experience as a member of the Wings Over Jordan Celebration Chorus?

7. What is your most memorable experience with the choir?
8. Have there been any difficult times that you are willing to share?

9. Some scholars suggest that there is a decline in prominence and performance of the Negro spiritual, and that the Negro spiritual is in danger of becoming obsolete. Do you agree or disagree with this idea and why?

10. Is the Negro spiritual being taken over by gospel music as a genre in the Black music community? If so, in your opinion, why or why not?

11. If you are a member of, or attend a church, please describe how the Negro spiritual may or may not be a part of your church musical environment.

This next series of questions deal with race.

12. From your point of view, do you think music can represent race and if so, how does that influence the way the WOJCC performs "Black" music?

13. In keeping with the idea of race music, in what ways does the Wings Over Jordan Celebration Chorus promote racial identity? If you feel that it does not, why?

14. In your opinion, how and why does this organization promote community and race relations?

Whereas, the above questions dealt with preserving the Negro spiritual, these next two questions are concerned with advancing the Negro spiritual.

15. Re: **The Philosophies of "The Two Glenns": Then and Now**

The following statements exhibit the philosophies of what I call "**The Two Glenns."** Rev. Glenn T. Settle, founder of Wings Over Jordan Choir is known for saying: "*That which is worthy must be preserved*." Maestro Glenn A. Brackens, founder and director of Wings Over Jordan Celebration Chorus is known for saying: "*Keep the spiritual alive by any means necessary, push the envelope.*"

In your opinion, what are the merits of both of these statements? Which philosophy resonates more with you and your beliefs and why?

16. What is your opinion concerning advancing the Negro spiritual? That it is to say, should the Wings Over Jordan Celebration Chorus engage in advancing the Negro spiritual by adding dance movement, rap, various musical instruments, theater and "gospelizing" the Negro spiritual? Or, should the WOJCC sing the Negro spiritual in its pure form as did the original Wings Over Jordan Choir under Rev. Glenn T. Settle? Why or why not?

APPENDIX C: CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Boston University

Boston, Massachusetts

Consent to Participate in Dissertation Study

"Preserving the Negro Spiritual:

A Case Study of Wings Over Jordan Celebration Chorus"

Dear Wings Over Jordan Celebration Chorus Member or Wings Over Jordan Alumni and Friends, Inc.:

The following information is provided for you to decide whether or not you wish to participate in this study. This dissertation research study is being conducted in partial fulfillment of completion of my doctoral studies at Boston University in Boston, Massachusetts.

I was raised and now reside in East Cleveland, Ohio. I have a Bachelor of Arts in Music from Spelman College (magna cum laude) and a Master of Music degree from the University of Notre Dame in Piano Performance. I have taught music courses including piano, music theory, music history and appreciation, as well as accompanied college choirs on the campuses of the University of Notre Dame, Saint Mary's College, Holy Cross College (all of Notre Dame, Indiana) and Wiley College ("Home of The Great Debaters") of Marshall, Texas. The pursuit of my doctoral degree was inspired and encouraged by Dr. Joyce F. Johnson of Spelman College because of her excellence as a Professor of Music and equally gifted pianist and organist.

The purpose of this study is to document the activities and experiences of this

historic choir to preserve the ongoing history of the Negro spiritual through the Wings Over Jordan Celebration Chorus. Data collection will involve one-on-one interviews of the director, Maestro Glenn Brackens and nine members of the choir. In addition, I would like to conduct a focus group of 5 members which would meet four times, once a month. This invitation to be a participant is also extended to members of the Wings Over Jordan Alumni and Friends, Incorporated. In addition, data will be collected via observations of choir rehearsals and concerts using field notes. All data are confidential and all identifying information will be withheld.

The transcriptions from the interviews, focus group meetings and field notes will become the data for analysis including primary sources including archives of this organization, newspapers, recordings, past concerts, repertoire lists, and concert programs.

No known risks or discomforts are associated with this study. Expected benefit associated with your participation in the study is the information about the preservation of the Negro spiritual by the Wings Over Jordan Celebration Chorus. Feel free to ask questions about the study before giving your consent.

With the exception of Maestro Glenn Brackens, please be assured that your name will not be a part of the study. Your identity will not be known, except by the researcher. As a participant you may withdraw at any time during the study. Questions concerning this study or your rights as a participant may be directed to Babette Reid Harrell, telephone number (216) 496-5399 or Dr. Deborah Bradley, Supervisor, Doctoral Studies, telephone number (647) 993-5732.

Should you consent to participate, you will be interviewed and videotaped at a mutually agreeable time for a maximum of 90 minutes. Each of the four focus group meetings will last for a maximum of 90 minutes to discuss topics pertaining to this chorus. Interviews and focus group meetings will take place at the Hough Branch of the Cleveland Public Library located at 1566 Crawford Road in Cleveland, Ohio 44104.

Check all to which you give consent:

Participate in an Interview _____Yes _____No

Participate in a Focus Group _____Yes _____No

APPENDIX D: Maestro Glenn A. Brackens

Photo by Anton Albert, Cleveland, OH.

APPENDIX E: Wings Over Jordan Celebration Chorus at Holy Trinity Baptist Church, Cleveland, Ohio

Photo by Anton Albert, Cleveland, OH.

APPENDIX F: Wings Over Jordan Alumni and Friends, Inc. at Gethsemane Baptist Church, Cleveland, Ohio

Photo by Anton Albert, Cleveland, OH.

APPENDIX G: Wings Over Jordan and Wings Over Jordan Alumni and Friends, Inc., Archival Photos

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