The Life of Camilla Williams, African American Classical Singer and Opera Diva. Camilla Williams and Stephanie Shonekan. Lewiston, NY and Lampeter, UK: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2011. p/bk 252 pp. ISBN 978-0-7734-1483-9. Price £104.95.

The Life of Camilla Williams, African American Classical Singer and Opera Diva, by Camilla Williams and Stephanie Shonekan is not your typical study of a black singer in pre-civil rights America. Instead of being a critical analysis of the movement, and the singer's place within these larger political arenas, the tome seeks to tell Williams's story. Shonekan wrote the work as her doctoral dissertation, and somewhat aggressively sought the reclusive Williams out. Williams agreed to tell her story on the condition that it was *her* story. Of course, the driving question — for an academic reading this work — rests on the extent to which the story of Williams is significant in terms of contemporary American history. Does it add to the Civil Rights discourse? These issues are not really addressed: the work has little of a larger context as moments of Williams' life are not critically analyzed, or even considered in relation to the discriminatory actions of the era.

The book begins with promise, as the first chapter starts with a note about Williams learning of a hate letter in 2000 ... fifty years after the incident, with her debut in Puccini's *Madame Butterfly*. The letter, from Eugene Conly to Mayor LaGuardia of NYC, protested a black playing the lead (21-23). Of course, this letter is a common example of injustices during the period: Williams was shocked to learn of the protest, since her memories of the production are warm. Yet in the context of the era it was a commonplace occurrence. A comparison, of note, is easily made with Billie Holiday. Of course, Holiday had less than an eighth grade education, was known to read comic books backstage, and grew up poor. Yet, Holiday often portrayed the same glassy view of her success; these people helped her along so she could not complain. There is an advantage to this rose-colored view, as it provides the reader with an avenue to ponder a more philosophical point of being grateful for successes and of playing the game — so to speak — for the larger obtainment of self-gain.

Williams went to Virginia State University, on scholarship, where she sang in the choir. While there she encountered conflicts with her director of music, which she interpreted as jealousy of her talent. After graduating, and

briefly returning home to Danville (Virginia), she moved to Philadelphia and earnestly pursued her singing career. As a young woman, on her own for the first time, she lived with a family who were friends of friends. This family — the Joneses — used her to maintain the house, and take care of their children. As the reader also learns, they insisted she put her earnings into bonds (which Williams later suspected they used to pay for a vacation home in Vermont). While there is some anger under the surface, Williams never really discusses this home life. Instead, she admits to staying with them for eight years and attempting to prevent Mr. Jones from managing her career. She does disclose, here, that she feared he would mismanage her and that he saw her talent and career as his meal ticket. Williams finally left the Joneses when she married her husband Charlie. They eloped, and upon returning and telling her Philadelphia family the news they became irate, demanding she leave immediately.

Throughout her story — as she is being evicted from the Jones' house, when she alludes to the fact that Columbia Management was paying her $250 for a concert while charging a $1000 or more, while her husband Charlie took ill and died — she used her faith as a map, a provider of strength, and a blanket of comfort:

There are two things I do not pretend to know about — politics and intrigue — and they are all over the place. Everywhere you turn, people are being political, lobbying for position and favor. As a result, there are always mini mysteries and intrigues surrounding certain situations. I never could be political myself. I just prefer to be straightforward [...] Perhaps others have gotten more recognition because they have been political. I intend to always remain true to myself (158).

Oddly, Williams says that while her lawyer husband worked on the Malcom X assignation case she never made civil rights a part of her cause. However she does remark that: "I began signing for the civil rights movement when it was not fashionable" (151-152). She notes that she was not paid for these performances. So, the reader must conclude that she performed when asked and not as a political platform. This assertion fits in with the image Williams portrays of herself, but readers might have benefited from a more critical exploration of how this rendered her different from her peers. Williams also notes that it was unusual for her to have a black husband, as she was an opera singer, and most of the other black performers had white husbands or boyfriends (174). A side

note, perhaps, but an interesting one to the story. One might ask how Williams — believed to be the first African-American in a major US opera production — did not get "swept away" by a white man, or even how she did not fall prey to a white man managing her career and masquerading as her husband?

Overall, this book provides a glimpse into the life of an opera singer, but as for being a critical study of an individuals life in relation to the civil rights era it falls short. Williams never discusses differences in treatment, locale, or even pay in Europe, Africa, or the United States, and as was promised in the opening pages the work is Williams telling her story. The book is an autobiography. To Shonekan's credit, she seamlessly writes the narrative so that the reader feels that Williams is talking throughout the text.

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The Coppolas: A Family Business. Vincent LoBrutto and Harriet R. Morrison. Santa Barbara, California: Praeger, 2012. H/bk 183 pp. ISBN 978-0-313-39161-3. Price $48.00.

The legacy of Francis Coppola, the father of the New American Cinema, is beyond dispute, although rather too many books have been written to prove that point. This book has a different agenda: it is a family portrait that takes on the whole creative clan, from Carmine, the father who composed the music for over a half-dozen of Francis's films, to Francis's highly respected academic brother August (father of Nicolas Cage), his actress sister Talia, his Note-taking wife Eleanor, daughter Sofia and son Roman—both now experienced filmmakers—and all the Coppola progeny, covered here in fewer than 200 pages. This is a convenient, sensible, and even original approach, since, as Francis's career seems to be ebbing, so the careers of his children seem to be thriving. Of course, Francis himself is still making pictures, but smaller, more personal ones, like the haunting, reflective and magical *Youth Without Youth* (2007), and *Tetro* (2009), in which a Active family seems partially to resemble Coppola's own, films that, unlike *Apocalypse Now* and the extended *Godfather* trilogy, have not