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The Career Paths of Non-European-American Executive Opera Administrators in the United States

Antonio C. (Antonio Christopher) Cuyler
The members of the committee approve the dissertation of Antonio C. Cuyler

_________________________________________
Pat Villeneuve
Professor Directing Dissertation

_________________________________________
Patrick Mason
Outside Committee Member

_________________________________________
Anne Hodges
Committee Member

_________________________________________
Marcia Rosal
Committee Member

Approved:

_________________________________________
Marcia Rosal, Chair, Art Education Department

_________________________________________
Sally McRorie, Dean, College of Visual Arts, Theatre, and Dance

The Office of Graduate Studies has verified and approved the named committee
members.
“Those who have no record of what their forebears have accomplished lose the inspiration which comes from the teaching of biography and history.”

Carter G. Woodson
For my grandmother Mary Frances Cain Campbell
&
my sister Maikeisha Nikia Cuyler
Whose battles with serious illnesses have taught me the true meaning
of love for my family!
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Life is a journey that leads us places we never expect to go. Along this journey we will have many compasses. But to dream the impossible dream, we must take the road less traveled. This makes all the difference, and we will not defer our dreams. Completing a dissertation is no easy undertaking. It is absolutely necessary that I give thanks to those who helped me carry out this monumental task. First, I want to thank my study participants, Michael Ching, Linda Jackson, and Willie Waters. I could not have conducted this study without your participation, thank you! I would like to acknowledge my supervisory committee led by Dr. Pat Villeneuve. Dr. Marcia Rosal, thank you for your constant support in all of my pursuits. Dr. Patrick Mason, thank you for encouraging me to look at my topic objectively with a quantitative mind. Dr. Anne Hodges, thank you for always helping me feel better.

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ABSTRACT

The individual and organizational practices that advance and impede careers of people of color are well documented in research (Alfred, 2001; Bell, 1990; Clay, 1998; Chee, 2004; Darden, 2003; Dawkins, 2004; Fagneson, 1993; Green-Powell, 1993; Huang, 1995; King-Toler, 2004; Lester, 1996; Livingston, 2000, 2003; Salleh-Barone, 2004; Scott, 2003; Thomas and Gabarro, 2005). In the arts, however, little is known about the career challenges, choices, and patterns of professional growth of non-European-American executive-level managers. DiMaggio (1987) studied the careers of executive managers in the arts, but excluded opera administrators and ignored the scarcity of non-European-Americans in these positions. Yet, affirmative action, the bi-cultural life structure theory, and Alfred’s (2001) internal/external model offer explanations for how non-European-Americans achieved executive careers in major opera companies.

Consequently, this exploratory qualitative research study examined the career trajectories of three non-European-American executive opera administrators to identify career advancers, career barriers, career strategies, and beneficial experiences to their career success. Through in-depth, semi-structured interviews, follow-up interviews, content analysis, and document analysis, this study compiled the most comprehensive primary source material on the career paths of non-European-American executive opera administrators. The findings of this study support the development of a paradigm that will assist future arts administrators in their pursuit of vertical mobility in arts administration.
CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

When a profession lacks a number of diverse individuals, one might assume that discrimination has reared its ugly head without considering the complexities of the situation. I believed this, too, until I had the experience of working in human resources for an arts organization. My current view is that in spite of a society plagued with discrimination, marginalization, and oppression, individuals can obtain professional success regardless of their age, cultural background, ethnicity, gender, mental, or physical disability, political affiliation, race, religion, sexual orientation, or socio-economic status. These characteristics represent a multitude of individual differences and similarities that exist among people of the United States, as well as a variance of perspectives that are valuable and meaningful.

This dissertation is about diversity in the field of performing arts administration. I studied the careers of three non-European-American executive opera administrators to tell the story of how they achieved top-level management positions in major opera companies. Statistically firm conclusions were not drawn from this study. The size of the sample did not necessitate such a study. Nor was it the goal of this study to prove that a glass ceiling, discrimination, racism, and sexism existed in the pursuit of top-level management positions in arts administration. Instead, use of the exploratory qualitative research method allowed in-depth examination of outliers.

Background for Study

In the late 1960s, arts administration emerged as a program of graduate study because arts organizations needed well-trained managers who understood both the artistic and business aspects of managing the arts. Martin and Rich (1998) insisted that successful arts management is critical to the continued vitality of modern cultural institutions and arts organizations. Therefore, arts organizations and cultural institutions need skilled arts managers. As a result of this emerging field of study, arts organizations find significant value in recruiting managers with graduate training in arts administration. Until 1987, however, the only studies conducted on these managers were salary studies
that yielded little information about the demographic backgrounds of these administrators.

DiMaggio (1987) studied the careers and opinions of senior administrators of U.S. art museums, symphony orchestras, resident theatres, and local art agencies. This study initiated scholarly discourse on the careers of arts managers and provided information on the backgrounds of arts managers, the rewards they received from their work, their expectations about future employment, their training and their evaluation of it, and their professional participation and attitudes on a number of management and policy issues. DiMaggio excluded executive opera administrators in his study and disregarded the scarcity of non-European-Americans in executive administrative positions in the arts. Little is known about the careers of executive opera administrators and, more specifically, the careers of non-European-American executive opera administrators.

**Personal Perspective**

As a first-year graduate student in arts administration, I was sure I wanted to pursue a career in opera administration. But as I matriculated through my academic program, I was discouraged by the scarcity of role models and mentors in executive opera administration who were like me, a Black American male. I wondered why this issue was not addressed in my arts administration courses. What hope did I have of obtaining a position of top-level management in opera as a Black American male? How would my cultural background, gender, ethnicity, and race impact my pursuit of top-level management positions in opera? How could I prepare myself to gain a position of top-level management in opera? In essence, I was in search of a role model. Many of these questions were never answered, and currently there is little to no literature addressing this issue in arts administration education and practice.

**Problem Statement**

Pertinent issues relative to the value of arts administration degrees, as well as curricular and pedagogical challenges to the professionalization of arts administration, are documented in research (Bienvenu, 2004; Chandler, 2000; Martin & Rich, 1998; Dorn, 1992; Hutchens & Zöe, 1985). But the topic of multiculturalism is ignored. Bienvenu (2004) found a scarcity in the number of recent non-European-American graduates of arts administration programs. Ninety percent were European-American, and only 10% were
non-European-American. Yet, there is still a small amount of literature actively addressing the scarcity of arts managers representing the multiculturalism of U.S. society.

Indeed, it was not until 1998 that students at Carnegie Mellon University conducted a study investigating the effect of gender on the career advancement of arts managers (NSAM, 1998). This study sampled five types of medium-sized arts organizations: art museums, dance companies, opera companies, symphonies, and theatre companies, collecting and analyzing data on job positions, salary, education, experiences, age, and career goals. The results of the analysis suggested that gender inequalities do exist in arts management and that there is a glass ceiling in executive arts administration for women. Factors such as age, education, and experience helped to explain why men predominate in upper-management positions and have higher salaries. Although this study highlights the inequalities women face as they climb the executive ladder in arts organizations, it is remiss in addressing the effect of culture, ethnicity, and race on the advancement of arts managers.

OPERA America’s (2002) unpublished report on opera’s administrative personnel found that 88% were European-American, 7% African/Black American, 3.2% Chicano/Hispanic/Latino American, 1.8% Asian and Pacific Islanders, .1% American Natives, .1% other. In terms of gender, 33.4% were male, while 66.6% were female. These statistics suggest that the glass ceiling does not exist for European-American women in executive opera administration as it does for non-European-American men and women. This implies that the problem warranting study is under-representation, particularly in terms of the number of non-European-Americans who attend opera, and the national population. According to the U. S. Census report, 69.3% of the population is European-American, 12.32% is African/Black American, 12.55% is Chicano/Hispanic/Latino American, and 6% is other (U. S. Census Bureau, 2000).

OPERA America does not separately collect demographic data on executive opera administrators. Yet, non-European-American conductors are just beginning to appear in opera pits; Black stage directors and general managers are rare, as are more than a token number of Black members on opera boards (Baker, 2002; Cheatham, 1997; Oby, 1998; Smith, 1989). Consequently, this study investigated beyond the under-representation that leads to meaningless and unsubstantiated accusations of discrimination.
The Purpose of the Study

This exploratory qualitative research study discovers, describes, and documents (a) the career trajectories of three non-European-American executive opera administrators, (b) the barriers they faced, (c) the strategies they used to achieve top-level management positions in major opera companies, and (d) the major influences on their career success. Highlighting new career knowledge that may assist future non-European-Americans in their quests for vertical mobility in arts administration is another purpose of this study.

Research Questions

In this study I address the major research question: What are the career paths of non-European-American executive opera administrators? I also answer the following guiding questions: (1) What factors advanced the career paths of non-European-American executive opera administrators? (2) What factors served as barriers to the career paths of non-European-American executive opera administrators? (3) What strategies did non-European-Americans use to overcome barriers to their appointment as executive opera administrator? (4) What experiences benefitted the career paths of non-European-American executive opera administrators?

The qualitative research paradigm is most appropriate for addressing the research questions. Qualitative inquiry is science and art, but more than anything, qualitative inquiry is drama that involves capturing people’s stories and weaving them together to reveal insight into real world dramas (Patton, 2002). In qualitative research, researchers are learners who continually and consciously make decisions that affect the questions pursued and the direction of the study. Research, in this sense, provokes learning about some facet of the social world to improve social circumstances (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). This study did not use one particular method of qualitative research. The methodology for this study was emergent and allowed the use of existing methods, such as biography, historiography, and phenomenology, as they served the purposes and goals of this study.

Significance of the Study

The U.S. 2000 Census reported that the population was much more diverse in 2000 than in 1990 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). I contend that if ethnic and racial
diversity will increasingly characterize the population of the United States, then the significance of diverse participation in the arts is pragmatic. If more non-European-Americans aspire to pursue top-level management positions in the arts, knowledge about the careers of non-European-Americans serving in these positions can empower them. Implications for teachers, students, policy makers, and practitioners of arts administration emerged from this study. This study expands the literature on the careers of executive arts administrators to include strategies pre-professional arts administrators can use in their quests for vertical mobility. This study further develops the literature on career development theories relative to arts administrators and non-European-Americans.

**Delimitations**

As the primary instrument of research for this exploratory qualitative study, I am a Black American male from the Southeastern region of the United States. I have studied arts administration at the master’s and doctoral levels. I have also worked with arts organizations in a variety of capacities. I am sensitive about issues of equality, empowerment, and cross-cultural understanding relevant to the study and practice of arts administration. I bring certain biases to this study because of my previous experiences.

The personal epistemology I hold is that of the critical humanist. My position is that the individual consciousness is the agent to empower, transform, and liberate groups from dominating and imprisoning social processes. The stories of the lived experiences of those who share similar career aspirations and cultural backgrounds can enlighten and inform this consciousness. These experiences can assist in empowering oppressed individuals with the means to triumph in spite of a society plagued with discrimination, marginalization, and oppression.

My position is that discrimination is a mainstay of U.S. society meant to maintain the status quo. To achieve real societal transformation, we must consider and simultaneously dismantle the interconnected nature of discrimination, marginalization, and oppression. My perspective is that discrimination against certain groups of people characterizes the history of the United States. This history has caused a perpetual elitist disenfranchisement within the arts for “the other.” Yet, measures exist to correct this history of social injustice.
Affirmative action redistributes power in the acquisition of job and educational opportunities (Alon & Tienda, 2005; Cole, 2003; Jabbra, 2001; Wilcher, 2003). Even so, non-European-Americans have unique professional challenges because of their endless struggle for cultural plurality in the United States. To achieve success in any career, non-European-Americans must understand how they fit into the dominant culture. The bi-cultural life structure theory supports this assertion through double consciousness. Non-European-Americans physically, psychologically, sociologically, and spiritually negotiate the terrain between two raciocultural worlds, one dominated by European-Americans and the other within their specific ethnic communities (Alfred, 2001; Bell, 1987, 1990; Dubois, 1903). Non-European-Americans must seek role models because these individuals can assist in the facilitation of their careers. Non-European-Americans must also develop strategies and tools that will empower them with the means to attain access to key positions of power to impact change. In this study, I ground my biases in the bi-cultural life structure theory, affirmative action, and Alfred’s internal/external model, which I will discuss further in chapter two.

Definition of Terms

1. **Advancers** - agents that served in helping non-European-Americans achieve top-level management positions in major opera companies. Assistance such as education; mentors; professional colleagues; and friends advance careers.
2. **Arts administration** - refers to the administration and management of all performing and visual arts organizations.
3. **Arts organizations** - non-profit and for-profit organizations specializing in producing the performing and visual arts.
4. **Career development theories** - a body of literature developed to help make sense of how careers are developed and structured.
5. **Career path** - refers to the outcome of the career process, which is defined by one’s life history, career planning, career decisions, and career experiences.
6. **Diversity** - includes the collective mixture of differences and similarities in a society, not just one monolithic piece of it.
7. **Executive opera administrator** - pertains to those who hold positions of artistic director, chief executive officer, executive director, general
director/general manager, or managing director in a non-culturally specific opera company.

8. **External barriers** - issues over which non-European-Americans have no control. These issues or situations include institutional structures and practices that restrict a non-European-American’s access to administrative positions, for example, negative attitudes towards non-European-Americans, inequality that structures the administrative positions, lack of professional recruitment, and preparation for non-European-American administrators. These barriers are often perceived as discrimination on the basis of color, culture, ethnicity, gender, or race. External barriers could also include familial barriers.

9. **Internal barriers** - These refer to perceptions of obstacles resulting from the individual consciousness influencing the beliefs and attitudes, motivation, resilience, self-actualization, self-concept, self-efficacy, socialization process, and value systems. Examples include the fear of not succeeding, low aspirations, or ambivalent demands from home and employment that may relate to culture, ethnicity, gender, and race.


**Summary**

The conceptualization of this dissertation emerged from my personal educational and professional experiences as a Black American male arts administrator. Non-European-Americans have achieved top-level management positions in opera. Although unsubstantiated, it is assumed that the disparity of non-European-Americans in these positions is the result of the glass ceiling and discrimination (Baker, 2002; Cheatham, 1992, 1997; Franklin & Moss, 2000; Hooks, 1994, 2001; Oby, 1998; Smith, 1989; West, 2005). Yet, it is still unclear how non-European-Americans obtained positions of top-level management in opera.
This research study discovers, describes, and documents (a) the career trajectories of three non-European-American executive opera administrators, (b) the barriers they faced, (c) the strategies they used to achieve top-level management positions in major opera companies, and (d) the major influences on their career success. Highlighting new career knowledge that may assist future non-European-Americans in their quests for vertical mobility in arts administration is another purpose of this study.

I used the qualitative research paradigm to address the major research question: which was: What are the career paths of non-European-American executive opera administrators? I also answered the following guiding questions: (1) What factors advanced the career paths of non-European-American executive opera administrators? (2) What factors served as barriers to the career paths of non-European-American executive opera administrators? (3) What strategies did non-European-Americans use to overcome barriers to their appointment of executive opera administrator? and (4) What experiences benefitted the career paths of non-European-American executive opera administrators?
CHAPTER II
LITERATURE REVIEW

As I matriculated through my academic programs in arts administration, I was discouraged by the scarcity of non-European-American executive opera administrators. The under-representation of non-European-Americans is greater at the executive level, (Baker, 2002; Cheatham, 1997; Oby, 1998; Smith, 1989). The glass ceiling and discrimination are possible explanations for this disparity (Baker, 2002; Cheatham, 1992, 1997; Franklin & Moss, 2000; Hooks, 1994, 2001; NSAM, 1998; Oby, 1998; OPERA America, 2002; Smith, 1989; West, 2005). But statistically, there are more European-American women in executive opera administration, than non-European-American women and men. Yet, arts administration educators are preoccupied with professionalization. This conflict in the education and practice of arts administration needs addressing, particularly if more non-European-Americans aspire to pursue executive-level careers in arts administration. Through a discussion of the bi-cultural life structure theory, U. S. operatic history, affirmative action, recruitment theory, career development theory, and professionalization in arts administration, I provide a conceptual framework for this study.

Bi-cultural Life Structure Theory

The bi-cultural life structure theory provides a lens to understand the dynamics of double consciousness and the process by which non-European-Americans internalize their location within and their interactions with majority-dominated institutional cultures. Bi-cultural life structure theory stresses the interrelationships of the individual and the environment as key determinants in the developmental process (Alfred, 2001; Bell, 1987; 1990). Dubois (1903) introduced the notion of double-consciousness in an assessment of the dilemma Black Americans faced in their struggle to survive in two raciocultural worlds. Double-consciousness describes both the external and internal worlds, and particularly, the intrapsychic dynamics that resulted from living in an oppressive U. S. society. This society’s ideological creed boasted equal opportunity for all, yet non-European-Americans were systematically denied full access to equal opportunities (Bell, 1990). In 1925, Hughes further articulated the intensity of double consciousness and the
difficulty of living in a society plagued with a struggle for cultural plurality in his poem *I, Too, Sing America* (Rampersad, 1995):

I, too, sing America.
I am the darker brother. They send me to eat in the kitchen when company comes, but I laugh, and eat well, and grow strong.
Tomorrow, I'll be at the table when company comes.
Nobody'll dare say to me, "Eat in the kitchen," then.
Besides, they'll see how beautiful I am and be ashamed.
I, too, am America.

The life structure is the underlying pattern or design of a person’s life at any given time during the individual’s pattern of involvement in relationships, roles, activities, and physical settings. The life structure provides a bridge between one’s inner workings and the demands of society in which the end result is a product of both sets of forces. The life structure also enables an individual to live out and elaborate basic choices and values, conscious or not, as well as to adapt to one’s surroundings (Alfred, 2001; Wolfe, O’Connor, & Crary, 1990). The bi-cultural perspective allows researchers and scholars to examine issues of bi-culturalism and the power dynamics that emerge from the contested terrain of difference (Alfred, 2001).

One can also study issues of identity and community, inclusion and exclusion, voice and representation, power and subordination in bi-cultural groups. Bi-cultural life structure theory explains how non-European-Americans derive the power to contest their marginal location, while also articulating their worldviews and continuously renegotiating their elusive culture and identity to meet career expectations in a majority-dominated institution (Alfred, 2001). Bi-cultural life structure theory helped me understand the particular challenges non-European-Americans faced in constructing career paths in majority-dominated institutions, such as opera companies.

This theory also allowed me to view the literature and data for cases where culture, ethnicity, and race negatively intercept the career development process of non-European-American executive opera administrators. I also looked for examples where culture, ethnicity, and race did not negatively impact the career paths of non-European-American executive opera administration. However, it appears that bi-cultural life structure theory was developed incognizant of affirmative action (Alfred, 2001; Bell, 1987; 1990; King-
Toler, 2004; Livingston, 2003). Affirmative action equally levels the playing field so that ability, credentials, experience, and talent carry more weight than culture, ethnicity, gender, or race in employment opportunities equally for U. S. citizens in the arts and elsewhere (Alon & Tienda, 2005; Cole, 2003; Froomkin, 1998; Wilcher, 2003).

**U. S. Operatic History**

Opera is an electrifying and unique art form. It is inappropriate to compare it to film, theatre, ballet, or concert music because it has its own life force that makes it one of the most exhilarating and captivating of all the performing arts (Waugh, 1996). Holden, Kenyon, and Walsh (1993) argued that opera’s unique appeal is its difference, its aesthetic remoteness, its wanton splendour and often wanton expensiveness. What solidifies opera’s place as an unrivaled art form is how successfully it combines all of the arts. Only in opera can one experience vocal and symphonic music, literature, drama, theatre, dance, and visual art in the form of costumes, sets, and lighting.

The operatic history of the United States began in February of 1735 in Charleston, South Carolina, with a performance of the ballad opera *The Hob in the Well* (Dizikes, 1993). At that time, few expected opera would become so popular given the major obstacle Puritanism posed to its evolution. Opera’s history in the United States was affected by immigration, politics, war, and events in Europe. Dizikes (1993) argued that another indication of a maturing operatic culture was the first critical notice in 1767 of the opera *Love in a Village* by Thomas Arne. After then, opera played a much larger part in the theatrical repertory offered by touring companies, making it a livelier element of popular culture.

Between the end of the 1760s and 1883, the thriving arts culture of New Orleans influenced the evolution of opera in the United States. In New Orleans, between 1803 and 1815, there were over 700 performances of 150 different operas by 50 composers. New Orleans provided northern cities with almost all of the European opera they heard between 1827 and 1833 (Crawford, 2001; Dizikes, 1993; Donington, 1978; Jacobs & Sadie, 1984; Holden, Kenyon, & Walsh, 1993; Southern, 1982, 1997). In New Orleans, audiences were drawn from all elements of the population, including African/Black American slaves restricted to the gallery. Dizikes (1993) suggested that New Orleans’ early operatic history illustrated the central importance of the audience for opera in the
United States. This brought to light opera’s need to compete within a capitalist entertainment marketplace for its audience because of the lack of state patronage.

Cheatham (1998) argued that the newly rich had a considerable impact on the history of opera in the United States, particularly in the northeastern region. The establishment of the Metropolitan Opera in October of 1883 supports this contention. The Metropolitan Opera was formed for the social benefit and pleasure of a handful of New York’s wealthiest families. Still, as time progressed, the Metropolitan Opera grew beyond the ambitions and vanities of its original benefactors, and now more than 130 million people benefit annually from the creative and artistic genius of the world’s finest opera house (Cheatham, 1998; Dizikes, 1993).

Rudolph Bing’s (1902-97) arrival at the Metropolitan Opera as general manager proved one of the most exciting times in the Met’s history. Bing achieved a substantial amount during his tenure at the Metropolitan. He lengthened the New York season from 18 weeks to 31, and restructured the subscription season by offering shorter series that quadrupled the number of subscribers from 5,000 to 21,000. His most notable achievement as general manager was his stand on civil rights. He broke the Met’s color barrier by engaging the African/Black American ballerina Janet Collins, the first African/Black American artist to appear on the Met’s stage (Bing, 1972; Cheatham, 1997; Dizikes, 1993; Fiedler, 2001). Additionally, under Rudolph Bing’s management an increase of ethnically and racially diverse opera singers appeared at the Metropolitan Opera. This list includes Marian Anderson and Robert McFerrin, the first Black American female and male to sing lead roles with the Metropolitan Opera. Leontyne Price, George Shirley, Martina Arroyo, Grace Bumbry, Shirley Verrett, Seth McCoy, and Simon Estes are other Black American opera singers who made their Metropolitan operatic debuts during Bing’s tenure. After Bing, James Levine continued similar casting policies that also added a number of gifted ethnically and racially diverse opera singers to the roster of the Metropolitan Opera (Cheatham, 1997; Fiedler, 2001; Southern, 1997; Story, 1990).

The U.S. opera audience grew by 35% between 1982 and 1992. This trend also continued through 2002, when the opera audience grew by an additional 8.2% (National Endowment for the Arts, 2002). I contend that the Met’s national tours and Saturday
afternoon broadcasts impacted the number of regional opera companies that emerged between 1883 and 1980. Nevertheless, even if opera is more popular in the United States than it has ever been, as Waugh (1996) suggested, it is still one of the most unattended performing art forms because much of the U.S. populace is unfamiliar with classical music, and, more specifically, the sound of the unamplified trained voice (Malone, 1994). This prejudice against opera presents an obstacle that must change before the audience for opera can expand multiculturally.

The percentage of European-American attendees is decreasing, while percentages of African/Black American and Chicano/Hispanic/Latino American audiences are increasing (OPERA America, 2004). In spite of its growth as a popular art form, opera continues to attract a largely homogenous segment of the multicultural U. S. population. This is the result of the risk-adverse nature of arts organizations and a historic disenfranchisement caused by Jim Crow laws and segregation in the United States (Baker, 2002; Cheatham, 1992; 1997; Franklin & Moss, 2000; Hooks, 1994; 2001; Oby, 1998; Smith, 1989; West, 2005). But, what does diversity have to do with it?

*Labor Market of Opera Administration*

To successfully achieve artistic goals and objectives, arts organizations must make decisions about how they will establish, budget, and manage income, expenses, and investments in a fixed time period. The revenue breakdown for arts organizations include: ticket sales 53%, donations 35%, other income 7%, and grants 5% (Byrnes, 1999). In fiscal year 2001, despite economic recession and the September 11th attacks, the collective budgets of OPERA America and Opera.ca companies equaled $735,174,456 (OPERA America, 2001). OPERA America and Opera.ca companies posted $279,349,405 in box office receipts for the 2003 fiscal year, 39% of the total operating income. Private support for OPERA America professional opera company members in the United States totaled $367,572,690 in fiscal year 2003, 48% of the total income. Support from the National Endowment for the Arts increased from $1,379,880 in fiscal year 2002 to $1,896,035 in fiscal year 2003, 0.26% of reported income in 2002-03. Other income made up almost 13% of the revenue for opera companies (OPERA America, 2005). Based on the economic impact, including related expenditures by audience members and employees, opera is a multi-billion dollar industry in the United States.
OPERA America is the nonprofit service organization for opera in the United States. OPERA America leads and serves the entire U.S. opera community by providing support for the creation, presentation, and enjoyment of opera. OPERA America offers artistic services that help opera companies and creative and performing artists improve the quality of productions while also increasing the creation and presentation of North American works. Informational, technical, and administrative services to opera companies reflect the need for strengthened leadership among staff, trustees, and volunteers. Education, audience development, and community services enhance all forms of operatic enjoyment. OPERA America’s membership includes: 125 professional company members in North America, more than 250 affiliate and business members, many of which produce and present opera, and 1500 individual members from around the world (OPERA America, 2005).

OPERA America categorizes its professional company members by budget size. All professional company members produce and present fully-staged productions of opera annually. There are 15 level-one companies with budgets above $7.5 million. The municipal location of companies at level-one includes cities such as Chicago, Dallas, Miami, New York, Washington, D.C., San Francisco, and Seattle. There are 19 level-two companies with budgets between $3-7.5 million. The locations of companies at level-two include cities such as Atlanta, Austin, Baltimore, Boston, Cincinnati, Denver, and Philadelphia, among others. There are 25 level-three companies with budgets between $1-3 million, and there are 52 level-four companies with budgets below $1 million. Level-three and level-four opera companies are located in cities that include Anchorage, Dayton, Des Moines, El Paso, Hartford, Honolulu, Memphis, Nashville, and Orlando. The 111 OPERA America professional company members cover 45 states (OPERA America, 2006).

On a per-performance basis, opera is by far the most expensive of the live performing arts to produce, involving as it does elements of all the others. It is economically important to play to relatively full houses, so seasons are short. With the exception of the very largest companies, the number of performances opera companies produce per season is usually well below 50 (Heilbrun & Gray, 2001).
In 2002-03 OPERA America’s professional company members presented 1,891 performances of 375 fully-staged productions (See Table on page 30) (OPERA America, 2005). Caves (2000) suggested that opera companies compete mainly on the quality of vocal prowess of their principal singers. The share of opera house budgets devoted to personnel expenses increases accordingly with their size: 53% for the smallest group, 70% for the largest.

Opera programming is more conservative than the programming of symphony concerts because opera involves dramatic and musical elements, and other kinds of innovations that enhance productions (Caves, 2000; Heilbrun & Gray, 2001). In an attempt to expand and diversify audiences, the action of a new production of a standard in the operatic repertoire is typically set in a different period. For example, an opera company might set a production of Verdi’s Macbeth in 1920s Harlem. Recently, Baz Luhrmann presented Puccini’s La Bohème on Broadway using a Broadway model for marketing.

A reported $1,350,000 dollars were spent on a marketing plan that included a television and radio campaign, print campaign, internet campaign, outdoor campaign, group sales, and direct mail. Ticket pricing for La Bohème on Broadway was developed based on the recent rise in standard Broadway musical tickets caused by The Producers. Marketers also took into consideration that an orchestra seat at the Metropolitan Opera costs $150, while the same ticket at the New York City Opera cost $100. To make La Bohème on Broadway more accessible to people of many different economic backgrounds, only three prices were set: $100 for orchestra and mezzanine, $45 for the entire rear mezzanine, and the first two rows of the orchestra sold for $20 on the day of the show, the standard rush policy. The show closed early and ran for 31 weeks instead of the initially planned 52 weeks because tickets did not sell well. Nearly 300,000 tickets instead of the initially planned 500,000 were sold. The operating profit over the 30 weeks was $2.5 million. Nearly, $6.5 million was lost on a $9 million budget (OPERA America, 2003).

Opera companies also present alternate dramatic interpretations of productions. Still, unless new operas develop and attract new audiences, the long-run prospect of opera is not hopeful. The conservatism of an opera company’s repertory increases with the conservatism and income per capita of the city it serves. Repertory choices are also
more conservative when the company has full-year contracts with its artists. This implies heavier fixed costs and reliance on donations (Heilbrun & Gray, 2001). OPERA America professional company members with the largest budgets are beholden to the aesthetic preferences of the cities they serve and must present operas in the traditional standard operatic repertoire annually.

OPERA America (2001) reported that the cumulative top-ten, most-produced operas in North America over the past ten seasons included, in order: Madama Butterfly (Puccini), La Bohème (Puccini), La Traviata (Verdi), Carmen (Bizet), The Barber of Seville (Rossini), The Marriage of Figaro (Mozart), Don Giovanni (Mozart), Tosca (Puccini), Rigoletto (Verdi), and The Magic Flute (Mozart). Since 1990, however, the number of North American operas in the seasons of OPERA America professional company members has significantly increased. The number of productions has risen from 34 in 1990-91 to 75 in 2000-2001. Also since 1990, 133 new works have premiered at OPERA America professional company members in North America. The most frequently produced North American operas in order are Porgy and Bess (Gershwin), Susannah (Floyd), Amahl and the Night Visitors (Menotti), Candide (Bernstein), The Ballad of Baby Doe (Moore), The Rake's Progress (Stravinsky), and Of Mice and Men (Floyd) (OPERA America, 2005). These works collectively received a total of 117 productions over the past decade. European and European-American male composers dominate operatic programming.

OPERA America professional company members at level four have the smallest budgets, but consistently advocate for and commission new works. Opera companies with slender budgets are more venturesome in repertory (Caves, 2000). For example, American Opera Projects, Inc., the Center for Contemporary Opera, and Encompass New Opera Theatre, all level-four companies, create and produce contemporary opera. Of the new works premiered since 1990, 46% were produced by companies with budgets less than $1 million, 18% by companies with budgets $1-3 million, 11% by companies with budgets $3-7.5 million, and 25% by companies with budgets over $7.5 million (OPERA America, 2006).

Of the over 100 new North American operas premiered in the past decade, 33 works received subsequent productions by OPERA America professional company
members. Of those 33, twelve have received more than one subsequent production (OPERA America, 2001). In terms of managers’ and patrons’ preferences, the dominant pattern for a coalition seems to favor maximum quality in conservative repertory, while an alternative coalition structure with parsimonious productions but venturesome programming and casting is viable in some settings (Caves, 2000).

The National Endowment for the Arts (2002) reported that the popularity of opera, ballet, and modern dance are approximately equal in the United States, as measured by the proportion of the population that attends at least one performance a year. Almost 6.6 million adults attended at least one opera performance during fiscal year 2002. The percentage of adults viewing or listening to opera via broadcast and recorded media, however, remains higher than live attendance. In 2003, 37.6 million adults experienced opera on television, video, radio, audio recordings, or the internet.

The ability of opera to withstand the competition of non-live performances falls between theatre and symphonic music. Operatic music is recorded and played back at the listener’s convenience just as successfully as symphonic music. The production value that makes up a significant part of opera’s appeal for many of its devoted is lost on recordings and not very successfully captured on film, television, or tape. The live performance of an opera is a good deal more exciting than the non-live. Moreover, the introduction of super-titles is a technological innovation that further enhances the attraction to live opera performances for many audience members (Heilbrun & Gray, 2001; Jepson, 2001).

During the 2002-2003 season, 1.4 million adults personally participated in performing or creating opera, while the audience for education and community programs served by U. S. and Canadian companies totaled 4,023,863. This is a 14% increase from the previous year. In comparison to other arts-goers, those who attend opera are wealthier, the most highly educated, and tend to reside in the suburbs. In 2002, 25.3% of the U. S. opera audience was under the age of 35. Women made up 58% of those who attended opera, whereas 42% were men. In 2002, 86.5% of the opera audience was European-American, whereas 6.1% of the opera audience was Chicano/Hispanic/Latino American, 3.8% African/Black American, and 3.6% Asian American or American Native (see Figure 2.1). Heilbrun and Gray (2001) suggested that if non-European-Americans make up a substantial proportion of the U. S. population, and sometime in the next
century may well constitute the majority, a problem exists for opera because it developed out of European cultures and traditions. Indeed, prospects for the continued growth of opera in the United States depend in part on how well it adapts to an increasingly multicultural society. In theatre and dance, this is less of a problem. The works of Black playwrights are frequently produced, Black film makers are becoming successful, Black actors and actresses have begun to make their way in theatre and in motion pictures, and African/Black American, Asian American, and Hispanic American dance companies have long been a part of the modern dance tradition.

Historically, opera was not always accessible to non-European-American administrators, artists, and audiences. However, culturally specific arts organizations, such as African-American opera companies, have provided facilitation between opera and the African/Black American community. The history of African-American opera companies began in 1873 with the founding of the Original Colored American Opera Troupe in Washington, D.C. Their first production featured Eichberg’s *The Doctor of Alcantara*. Theodore Drury Colored Opera Company made its debut in Brooklyn, New York, in 1889. Although the company generally employed White orchestra members and soloists, Black artists sang most of the principal roles and in the chorus.

In 1890 Black Americans established The Grand Creole and Colored Opera Company in New York City. Black Americans in New York City created the Aeolian Opera Association in 1934 and produced *Emperor Jones* from Gruenberg and Mascagni’s *Cavalleria Rusticana*. Four years later the Detroit Negro Opera Company opened in Detroit, Michigan. Mary Caldwell Dawson’s National Negro Opera Company debuted in Pittsburgh in 1941 with Verdi’s *Aïda*. In 1945 Raymond Lowden Smith founded the Dra Mu Opera Company in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania with productions of Mascagni’s *Cavalleria Rusticana* and Gounod’s *Faust*. In 1968, Gian-Carlo Menotti created the opera theatre of Harlem, which is the present day Harlem Opera Society (Smith, 1995).

But it was not until 1970 that African-American opera companies began to develop in the Southeastern part of the United States. Sister Mary Elise, a nun and voice teacher at Xavier University joined three historically Black colleges in creating Opera South in Jackson, Mississippi. Much like the Onyx Opera founded in 1988 by voice professors at Spellman and Morehouse Colleges in Atlanta, Georgia, this company did
not survive. But Sister Mary Elise did not give up her dream of an opera company for Black artists. After meeting Benjamin Matthews and Wayne Sanders, Sister Mary Elise joined them and Margaret Harris in creating Opera Ebony in New York City in 1973. African-American opera companies subsequent to the founding of Opera Ebony include Opera North in 1974, the Onyx Opera in 1988, the Municipal Opera Company of Baltimore in 1991, and the Houston Ebony Opera Guild in the mid 1980s, incorporated in 1992 (Smith, 1994; Southern, 1997).

African-American opera companies face the challenge of attracting diverse audiences and of recruiting and retaining managers and administrators formally trained in opera administration. The significance and relevance of African-American opera companies in contemporary U. S. society is great because culturally-specific arts organizations enrich the communities in which they exist, while elevating the national community by presenting repertoire and artists that might not otherwise receive attention. The performances of African-American opera companies bring people together across the color line (Mary Guillory, personal communication, November 2, 2005).

Data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that in 2003 job market conditions weakened for the total civilian work force and for most workers in artist occupations (National Endowment for the Arts, 2004). In 2003, 8 million civilian workers were unemployed, representing 5.6% of the labor force. The 2003 unemployment rate for artists reached 6.1%, which was up from 5.5% in 2002. Unfortunately, these data report information only on artists. Data on arts administrators and managers either do not exist or are not accessible because it is unclear if arts administrators and managers report information to the Bureau of Labor Statistics in the 27-0000 Arts, Design, Entertainment, Sports, and Media category or the 11-0000 management category (J. Jones, personal communication, December 2005). Nevertheless, over 20,000 people were employed in opera on a full-time or part-time basis in 2001 (OPERA America, 2001).

The demographics of opera administrators are similar to the demographics of the opera audience. Nearly 63% of opera administrators are between the ages of 20 and 39, whereas 37.2% of opera administrators are age 40 or above (see Figure 2.2).Ethnically and racially, European-Americans dominate the profession of opera administration as
88% of the population of opera administrators. Only 7.0% are African/Black American, 3.2% Chicano/Hispanic/Latino American, 0.1% American Native, and 0.1% other (see Figure 2.3). Females predominate in opera administration. Only 33.4% of opera administrators are male, while 66.6% of opera administrators are female (see Figure 2.4). Full-time employees made up 75.2% of opera administrators, and only 24.8% were employed part time (see Figure 2.5) (OPERA America, 2002).

Arts administrators and managers are educated at institutions of higher education across the United States and abroad. According to the Association of Arts Administration Educators (2006), there are 30 graduate and 9 undergraduate degree-granting programs in the United States. In terms of education, most opera boards desire candidates with a bachelor’s degree in business or arts administration and management, although they prefer candidates with master’s degrees (OPERA America, 2001; 2002; 2003; 2004; 2005). According to DiMaggio (1987), these requirements have not always existed because arts administration and management is a profession where people come from a variety of backgrounds and disciplines. Several executive opera administrators were previously conductors, stage directors, stage managers, technical directors, or vocalists. Executive opera administrators also come from disciplines such as business, English, psychology, and sociology, among others. Opera boards seek executive opera administrators with two or more years of experience working in opera administration as an executive or in some progressively responsible managerial capacity.

Statistically, arts organization expenses and budget percentages are as follows: staff salaries 58%, marketing 19%, development and special events 11%, miscellaneous expenses 7%, and productions 5% (Byrnes, 1999). Salaries are the highest expense for arts organizations and depend upon the size and location of the organizations for which arts administrators work. Small and new organizations pay little or nothing in the earliest years. Entry-level positions pay between $20-25,000. Senior positions in small organizations pay $35-45,000. Larger and more established arts organizations pay $60-$80,000 and even higher for large organizations in large cities for senior-level management positions (Goucher College, 2005).

Salaries in opera administration also depend on OPERA America’s professional member company categorization. Executive opera administrators at level-one companies
receive the highest salaries in the labor market. For example, the Metropolitan Opera Company is by far the largest performing arts company in the United States. Its budget is more than three times the size of the next largest opera company, which explains why statistical studies of opera companies present their results on a with- and without-the-MET basis to avoid its distorting effect on reported averages (Heilbrun & Gray, 2001). The Metropolitan Opera Company’s expenses exceed $636,737,667 annually. Joseph Volpe, General Manager of the Metropolitan Opera, received a reported salary of $713,000 during fiscal year 2004 (GuideStar, 2005). The three non-European-American executive opera administrators in this study work for opera companies at the level-three category. Their salaries range from $69,000-95,000 annually (GuideStar.org, 2005). The median salary range for non-European-American executive opera administrators is $81,527.

Opera has enjoyed extraordinary growth during the years of cultural boom. This increase has inevitably created a demand for good opera managers and administrators, while creating more administrative career opportunities for non-European-Americans. The future of opera in the United States still depends heavily on the extent to which it appeals to the non-European-American segment of the U.S. population. The managers and board directors of opera companies must build diversity among their audiences. This is particularly important for opera companies based in large multicultural urban cities where non-European-Americans are highly concentrated.

The inclusion of diverse voices from a multicultural society can have a transformative effect and engage audiences from different backgrounds and with different cultural perspectives (OPERA America, 2005). Moreover, from a business and organizational behavior staffing point of view, Kreitner and Kinicki (2003) maintained that diversity is good because it lowers cost; improves employees’ attitudes; improves recruiting efforts; increases sales, market share, and corporate profits; increases creativity and innovation; and increases group problem-solving and productivity. I maintain that non-European-American executive arts administrators in the arts and opera, particularly, are the missing connection between social identification and non-European-American participation in opera and achieving diversity in the arts. Recruiting, retaining, and giving non-European-American executive arts administrators greater visibility and legitimacy
within and outside the community will increase non-European-American arts participation (Gilmore, 1993).

TABLE 1: OPERA COMPANY DEMOGRAPHICS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COMPANIES</th>
<th>NUMBER OF COMPANIES</th>
<th>AVERAGE NO. OF ANNUAL PERFORMANCES</th>
<th>AVERAGE REVENUE</th>
<th>AVERAGE EXPENSES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level I</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>4-29</td>
<td>+ $7.5 million</td>
<td>$7.5 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level II</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>3-5</td>
<td>+ $3-7.5 million</td>
<td>$3-7.5 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level III</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>2-5</td>
<td>+ $1-3 million</td>
<td>$1-3 million</td>
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<tr>
<td>Level IV</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>1-5</td>
<td>- $1 million</td>
<td>- $1 million</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Demographics of Opera Audiences

Figure 2.1. The Demographics of Opera Audiences
Figure 2.2. The Age Demographics of Opera Administrators

Figure 2.3. The Ethnicity/Race Demographics of Opera Administrators
Figure 2.4. The Gender Demographics of Opera Administrators

Figure 2.5. The Employment Status Demographics of Opera Administrators
Affirmative Action

Froomkin (1998) stated that affirmative action is the nation’s most ambitious attempt to redress its long history of racial and gender discrimination. According to Wilcher (2003), affirmative action’s history began in 1961 with President John F. Kennedy’s Executive Order (E.O.) 10925. Moss and Franklin (2000), Dray (2002), and M. Jones (personal communication, November 2004) argued that affirmative action began during World War II when A. Phillip Randolph threatened to arrange a march on Washington. President Roosevelt’s response to Randolph’s protest was Executive Order 8802.

This order started to disband discriminatory practices against African/Black Americans searching for job opportunities. President Truman, however, lacks recognition as an advocate for the early stages of affirmative action. Between 1946 and 1957, Truman appointed committees to investigate civil rights and higher education for African/Black Americans. He also ordered the full integration of the armed services in 1948 (Moss & Franklin, 2000). In 1957, President Eisenhower created the Civil Rights Act. This act gave African/Black Americans the right to vote, created a civil rights section in the Department of Justice, and established the Federal Civil Rights Commission.

President Kennedy’s Executive Order 10925, according to Wilcher (2003), encouraged federal contractors to take affirmative action to ensure that applicants are treated equally without regard to race, color, religion, gender, or national origin. This executive order established the Committee on Equal Employment Opportunity, and the Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibited employment discrimination by large employees. Presidents Lyndon B. Johnson (E. O. 10925, 1965), Robert Nixon (E. O. 11625, 1971), Jimmy Carter (E. O. 12138, 1979), and Ronald Regan (E. O. 12432, 1983) all played a part in affirmative action’s history. Their executive orders required government contractors and subcontractors to expand job opportunities for non-European-Americans, directed federal agencies to develop comprehensive plans and specific program goals for national women and non-European-American business enterprise contracting programs, and commanded grant-making authority to develop a non-European-American Business Enterprise development plan.
Affirmative Action in Court

As a result of legislation in support of affirmative action, several court cases have gone to the Supreme Court, including Sheet Metal Workers’ International Association v. EEOC, 478 U.S. 421 (1986), Johnson v. Transportation Agency, Santa Clara County, California, 480 U.S. 616 (1987), Texas v. Hopwood, 518 U.S. 1033 (1996), and Adarand Constructors, Inc v. Mineta, 534 U.S. 103 (2001) (Alon & Tienda, 2005; Cole, 2003; Creswell, 2003; Jabbra, 2001; Wilcher, 2003). A case involving the admissions practices and policies of the University of Michigan’s Law School, where the Sixth Circuit handed down its decision in Grutter v. Bollinger, 288 F 3d. 732 on May 14, 2002, and upheld the use of race as one of many factors in making admissions decisions at the University of Michigan’s Law School constitutional. Recently, a case involved Abercrombie and Fitch’s violation of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 because the ethnic and racial demographics of their staff did not represent compliance with affirmative action. Full-jacket reviews gained popularity in both academia and corporate America following the Supreme Court’s decision (Cole, 2003). These full-jacket reviews involve reviewing a student’s or recruit’s potential based on academic or work experience, while not ignoring life experiences, or looking at the whole picture of a person. Although affirmative action has equalized opportunities for non-European-Americans in many ways, it has also fallen under heavy criticism from its greatest enemies.

Affirmative Action and Critics

Most critics of affirmative action argue that affirmative action is “reverse racism” or “positive discrimination.” Some critics claim that affirmative action gives jobs and college admissions to undeserving and unqualified non-European-Americans. Bean (2003) stated that affirmative action’s most ardent foes combat affirmative action by receiving funding from conservative foundations that enthusiastically support the dismantling of diversity by funding media, academic research, and litigation. These foundations strategically spend more money at higher levels with a narrow focus. Currently, affirmative action is under attack at Southern Illinois University. The Chicago Sun-Times (2005) obtained a letter from the Justice Department alleging the university has engaged in a pattern or practice of intentional discrimination against Whites, non-preferred minorities, and males. The Justice Department is targeting three graduate
fellowship programs at Southern Illinois University. These programs target underrepresented non-European-Americans with the purpose of increasing ethnic and racial diversity on campus and in specific majors and professions. The Justice Department is ordering Southern Illinois University to cease the fellowship programs or the Civil Rights Division will sue, but what of the Federal Glass Ceiling Commission’s (1995) reporting that non-European-Americans occupy only 5% of senior management positions in the corporate sector? And if not through programs such as those targeted by the Justice Department, how is the United States to correct historic and systemic social injustice?

Affirmative action and the Federal Glass Ceiling Commission identify barriers that have blocked the advancement of non-European-Americans, as well as the successful practices and policies that have led to the advancement of non-European-American men and all women into decision-making positions in the private sector. Affirmative action increasingly falls under harsh criticism because of its misperception of the establishment of a quota system that provides numbers of unqualified non-European-Americans with opportunities they do not deserve. Affirmative action is an intervention with the goal of allowing management to correct an imbalance, injustice, historic disenfranchisement, and outright discrimination. Therefore, affirmative action does not legitimize quotas because quotas are illegal. Nonetheless, judges imposed quotas when finding that a business has engaged in discriminatory practices (EEOC, 2005; Kreitner & Kinicki, 2003). Thus, quotas provide quantifiable data supporting their compliance with affirmative action and the Equal Employment Commission. Although affirmative action has created opportunities for women and non-European-Americans, European-American women have benefitted more, and affirmative action alone is not enough to ensure effective management of diversity (Alon & Tienda, 2005; Cole, 2003; Creswell, 2003; Jabbra, 2001; Kreitner & Kinicki, 2003; Wilcher, 2003).

Recruitment

DiMaggio (1987) stated that arts administration is a career with multiple entry portals and a lack of fixed credentials. This is rapidly changing due to the rise of high-quality arts administration programs in academic institutions. It is still difficult, however, to identify generalizations that suggest how one might construct a career path in arts
administration that leads to top-level management in an arts organization. In fact, there is no one path or way to obtain executive administrative positions in arts organizations (Baskerville, 2001; Byrnes, 1999; DiMaggio, 1987; Federal Glass Ceiling Commission, 1995). Nevertheless, arts organizations hire managers to make fundamental decisions about the kinds of art shown and performed by an institution and where the money will come from to fund it all.

The Virginia Education Foundation (2005) stated that depending on whether the artistic enterprise is a museum, theatre, symphony, dance company, community arts organization, or a rock band, the role of an administrator varies. Some arts administrators get directly involved in the creative process. Artistic directors of a theatre or opera company make final decisions about scripts, set designs, costumes, choreography, and music. Sometimes they also audition the cast, conduct rehearsals, and direct the stage crew. Other administrators, such as museum directors, are more involved with the business side of the arts, deciding on the overall direction of the museum, planning budgets, and raising funds as well as overseeing the establishment and maintenance of collections (Genoways & Ireland, 2003). However, even if these generalizations are made about the arts manager or administrator, how does this differ from executive opera administrators, and how are executive opera administrators recruited?

Opera company boards of directors recruit and hire executive opera administrators. Job postings for executive opera administrative positions typically appeared in OPERA America’s Newsline, on OPERA America’s website, on the employment page of individual opera company’s websites, or at arts job websites such as www.artswire.org or www.artjob.org. I conducted a content analysis of over four years of job postings in Newsline that revealed boards of directors’ expectations of executive opera administrators.

In terms of education, boards desire candidates with a bachelor’s degree in business or arts management, although they prefer candidates that have master’s degrees. The number of years of previous experience ranges from two years on up. However, the most important set of skills for prospective general directors and managers, executive directors, and managing directors included: budget preparation, human resources management, financial management, strategic planning, directing and leadership of the
marketing, education, and fundraising departments, negotiation of contracts, interpersonal relationships, community relations, and board development.

Artistic directors’ most desired set of skills included: direction of all productions, artistic planning and proposing, proposal of production concepts, artistic team selection, overseeing the work of artists, futurist thinking, multi-tasking, strong contact network in the opera industry, and knowledge of opera and music (OPERA America, 2001; 2002; 2003; 2004; 2005). With the work force’s growing need to embrace diversity and multiculturalism, I maintain that opera outreach, internship, and fellowship programs are viable means of recruiting non-European-American arts administrators for opera. Additionally, arts administration programs provide opportunities for the recruitment of non-European-Americans into the field of arts administration.

*Opera Outreach and Non-Caucasian Recruitment*

Most opera outreach programs at the K-12 level focus on performance, whether it is to introduce students to an operatic performance or to integrate students into a performance. As a result, the repertoire of children’s opera has increased and is categorized by the ages and musical proficiency of their intended performers and audiences. If non-European-American students are encouraged to consider and pursue careers in opera administration, I contend that the relationship between their decision and opera outreach programs is only tangentially related because there is little to no research assessing arts education’s impact on the careers of arts administrators.

Opera outreach programs continue to cultivate and develop young audiences, despite the demise of secondary music education programs in the United States. U. S. opera outreach programs educate adults about classical music, primarily to dispel persisting misconceptions about classical music and opera (Figgers, 2003). Pogue and Speck (1997) identified the following misconceptions as threats to developing a committed opera audience: (1) opera is for snobs, (2) opera singers are fat ladies who wear helmets with horns, (3) operas are long, (4) opera characters need at least ten minutes to die, (5) you need to know a foreign language to “get” an opera, (6) opera is boring, (7) you have to dress up to go to the opera, (8) opera plots are far-fetched and creaky, (9) opera isn’t worth the prices they charge nowadays, and, lastly, (10) opera singers have it easy.
It is not the purpose of this aspect of opera outreach to recruit non-European-Americans into opera administration. Several opera companies, however, offer internship programs to prospective opera administration professionals. Internships are valuable tools that bridge the gap between theory and practice. In fields such as arts administration, business, education, and medicine, internships are absolute degree requirements. Opera companies across the United States recruit arts administration and management students into their internship programs. But opera companies have not developed a set of standards for good internships that provide the structure students need to successfully acquire knowledge and build skills.

Structure is difficult to achieve because these internship programs are diverse. Arts administration students can choose to focus on a particular aspect or department of administration. For example, an arts administration student might request to work in the development department. Provided the competition for internships in development is not great, the student will work under the supervision of the development department and spend most of his/her internship assisting the development department with different fundraising functions and special events.

These programs provide an important part of the arts administration student’s education. There are only four programs: the Josie Bass and Los Padres career development programs at the Wolf Trap Foundation for the Performing Arts, the Allen Lee Hughes Fellowship program at the Arena Stage, and the Multicultural Arts Management Internship Program at the Arts and Business Council, designed explicitly to recruit non-European-American students into the profession of arts administration and possibly opera administration (S. Wood, personal communication, June 2005; L. Potter, personal communication July 2005).

In 1999, the Wolf Trap Foundation for the Performing Arts designed the Josie A. Bass career development program to provide internship experiences in arts administration for qualified African/Black American students. This program facilitates entry into the profession of arts administration with funding for the program coming from the Anthony and Beatrice Welters family. The program fosters mentor relationships between interns and the Josie A. Bass Advisory Committee, which consists of Wolf Trap's diverse board of directors, experienced administrators, and other outstanding local and national
representatives within the business and arts communities. By the program’s sixth year of existence, it had placed students from 30 schools, including six historically black colleges and universities, in various departments of the Wolf Trap Foundation. Past participants have continued their careers at Wolf Trap and in other non-profit arts organizations across the country; at the same time, others have attended graduate school in arts administration or related fields, and have joined the Josie A. Bass Advisory Committee (S. Wood, personal communication, June 2005).

The Wolf Trap Foundation for the Performing Arts created the Los Padres internship program for Chicano/Hispanic/Latino American students in the summer of 2004. Edgar and Lillian Rios support this program with its mission being to encourage Chicano/Hispanic/Latino American students to consider careers in arts administration. Edgar and Lillian Rios established the Los Padres Foundation as a result of their commitment to contribute to the development of others. Students selected to participate in the Josie A. Bass and Los Padres programs receive internships at the Wolf Trap Foundation for the Performing Arts (S. Wood, personal communication, June 2005).

The Wolf Trap Foundation’s internship program provides meaningful, hands-on training and experience in the areas of arts administration, education, and technical theater. Internships offer the practical opportunity to become an integral member of the staff and to work side by side with professionals producing, promoting, and administering the full spectrum of the performing arts. Both undergraduate and graduate students may participate in these internship programs. Students can choose to work in a list of areas that include the Wolf Trap opera company, education, development, communications and marketing, program and production, human resources, accounting, ticketing services, information systems, internet programs, planning initiatives, special events, and the arts education partnership. Students earn college credit while also receiving a stipend to offset the cost of their housing while at the Wolf Trap Foundation.

Additionally, African/Black American and Chicano/Hispanic/Latino American students who participate in these programs receive housing and travel to and from work. (S. Wood, personal communication, June 2005). Although these programs do not include all non-European-Americans, the Josie A. Bass and the Los Padres programs are valuable because they recruit not only non-European-American students into arts administration
and possibly opera administration on some small level, but they recruit non-European-American students into studies in arts administration.

At the undergraduate level, the Multicultural Arts Management Internship Program introduces students from culturally diverse backgrounds to career and volunteer leadership opportunities with New York City nonprofit arts organizations. Participants are granted a full-time, ten-week internship and awarded a stipend. Interns in the Multicultural Arts Management Internship Program gain insight into the field by assuming responsibility for a project under the guidance of experienced arts managers and by involvement in a wide range of other activities. Arts organizations gain valuable assistance from skilled and capable students. This program is for undergraduate students who demonstrate a strong interest in arts management as a career option and particularly those underrepresented in the field of arts administration, such as individuals of African/Black American, Chicano/Hispanic/Latino, Asian, or American Native descent. Applicants must have completed their sophomore or junior year of undergraduate study as of June of the placement year.

The program has also established a mentoring component. Selected employees from the Con Edison management departments volunteer their time and experience to an intern throughout the duration of the program. The coordinators of the program hope to connect, professionally as well as personally, the student intern with the mentor and the host organization. The interns participate in weekly site visits to each of the host organizations. This allows the interns to learn how other non-profit arts organizations function as well as to showcase their summer talents in the work environment. Interns also participate in professional development opportunities arranged by the Arts Business Council and cultural excursions throughout the five boroughs (L. Potter, personal communication, July 2005).

Higher Education. At the higher education level, arts administration programs have become another means of recruiting non-European-American students into opera administration. According to the National Association of Arts Administration Educators, there are 30 graduate-level programs and 9 undergraduate-level programs across the United States (Association of Arts Administration Educators, 2005). These programs have diverse curricula based on standards prescribed by the association. But what is
unclear is how successful these programs are at recruiting non-European-American students.

The list of programs is not comprehensive in that schools such as George Mason, Howard University, the Savannah College of Art and Design, Wagner College, and Western Michigan are not members of the organization. If Stein (2000) is correct in stating that one of the greatest barriers for people of color in selecting the non-profit sector as a possible career is that the non-profit sector does not do a good job of marketing itself as a career choice, then I suspect that most of these programs are small; and because of limited space in terms of full-time enrollments (FTE’s), most arts administration and arts management program directors base who gets into their programs on who applies. Thus, if non-European-Americans are not aware of arts administration programs, then the probability of their applying for admissions to these programs is low, unless, on some rare occasion, those prospective non-European-American students come across someone who introduces them to the notion of studying arts administration (T. Stein, personal communication, July 2005).

I contend that there is much to learn and gain by exploring the possible ways non-European-Americans are recruited and retained in the field of opera administration. It would appear that the most feasible methods of recruiting and retaining non-European-Americans are through arts administration programs and the internship programs at the Wolf Trap Foundation and the Arts and Business Council of Americans for the Arts. These programs could benefit from evaluation to determine their effectiveness at recruiting non-European-Americans into opera administration and arts administration. Opera outreach programs could serve as another way to introduce non-European-Americans to opera administration, but these programs need to include some discussion with K-12 students about what goes on in opera from the front door to behind the stage. I maintain that these programs implemented with the tenets of recruitment theory and informed by literature on career development theory will yield the best results for the successful recruitment in the twentieth-first century of non-European-Americans into at all levels arts administration.

**Recruitment Theory.** Recruitment theory encourages the identification of individuals who are potentially successful leaders in organizations such as corporations
and opera companies. This framework can assist in viewing the process of recruitment from the proposition that everyone is a potential recruit for an organization (Darden, 2004). The most important stage of recruitment is attracting the best potential employees, including non-European-Americans. Although there are only a few organizations that engage in formal recruitment evaluative efforts to attain a diverse workforce, successful personnel management connects recruitment theory with selection strategies theory while emphasizing the organization’s bottom line of profit making (Darden, 2004; Davidson, 1998; Russo, Pietveld, & Nijkamp, 1995). Recruitment theory incorporates multiple recruitment phases that include performance predictions and methods to analyze new and different approaches to recruitment, thereby proposing a model that researchers and practitioners can use to understand the factors that influence the usefulness of recruitment theory to predict success (Darden, 2004). Most importantly, recruitment theory suggests that job seekers not only make career decisions based upon their own personal values, but also on the organization’s reputation for employee treatment. A thorough review of the literature related to career development theories fills the gap between recruitment theory and the career development process.

**Career Development Theory**

Dorn (1994) argued that much of Nietzsche’s (1844-1900) philosophy focuses on the individual through the development of a doctrine that allowed the individual to overcome human instincts in order to achieve mastery over, rather than slavery to, experience. Therefore, Nietzsche’s most maligned contribution to philosophy was his goal of self-mastery through the development of courage, pride, and firmness. This aspect of Nietzschian thought is characterized through references to his concept of the individual as a “super person,” capable of pride and self-confidence, rejecting the trivial and ineffectual, learning to control others. For Dorn, then, five variables Nietzsche did not take into consideration are career, culture, ethnicity, gender, and race.

Tolbert (1980) identified work as purposeful, mental, physical, or combined mental-physical activity that produces something of economic value. The career is a valued and significant aspect of the cultural context of U. S. society (King-Toler, 2004). Work provides a framework in which individuals create an identity, establish values, and support behaviors related to the investigation and exploration of different types of work.
according to one’s skills, abilities, and interests. So important is the career that many scholars and researchers have developed theories about the career development process. These theories consider the interaction of psychological, sociological, economical, physical, and chance factors that shape the sequence of jobs, occupations, or careers that a person may engage in throughout a lifetime, as well as how the career involves a person's past, present, and future work roles (Career Net, 2001). The term career development process suggests that a single formulaic approach may exist as a determinant for making a choice about what type of career to pursue, but this is not the case (King-Toler, 2004). Career development theorists do not agree that a single approach to career choice exists. Two divisions that exist in the career development theory literature are: structural theories, which focus on individual characteristics and individual tasks, and development theories, which focus more on human development across the life span.

**Traditional Career Development Theories**

Peter and Gonzalez (2000) argued that Parson’s theory created the first tangible means for assisting people with choosing a career path. Parsons (1909) suggested that in the wise choice of a vocation there are three broad factors: (1) a clear understanding of yourself, your aptitudes, abilities, interests, ambitions, resources, limitations; (2) a thorough knowledge of the requirements and conditions of success, advantages and disadvantages, compensation, opportunities, and prospects in different lines of work; and (3) true reasoning on the relations of these two groups of acts. Thus, two major assumptions of trait and factor theory are: (1) that individuals and job traits are matched, and (2) that close matches are positively correlated with job success and satisfaction. Trait and factor theory, however, is too rigid in its underlying assumption that everyone has the option of making a career choice (Chartrand, 1991; King-Toler, 2004). Brown (1995) argued that Parson’s theory of career development was ill-suited for responding to the career experiences of non-European-Americans, given the limited understanding career development theorists have about their career patterns and behaviors.

Focusing more on the role of personality as a means to helping individuals make career choices, Holland’s (1959) person environment theory offers a variation in the conceptualization of the career development process (King-Toler, 2004). This theory
organized voluminous data about people in different jobs and data about different work environments to suggest how people make career choice, and to explain how job satisfaction and vocational achievement occur. Holland suggested that people work best and achieve job satisfaction in careers that fit their personalities (Ettinger, 1996). Holland based his theory of personality types on several assumptions. People tend to choose a career that reflects their personalities because people are attracted to certain jobs. The environment then reflects this personality. He classified these personality types and work environments into six types that he labeled realistic, investigative, artistic, social, enterprising, and conventional (often referred to by the acronym RIASEC). He suggested that the closer the match of personality to job, the greater the satisfaction. One type is usually evidenced more strongly, although a person may resemble up to three of the types.

Holland’s model illustrates these key concepts: consistency, differentiation, identity, and congruence. Holland's theory emphasized accuracy of self-knowledge and career information necessary for career decision making (Zunker, 1994). Although the theory is applicable to both male and female workers, there is some question of gender bias in that most females frequently tend to score predominately in three personality types: artistic, social, and conventional. Holland (1994) suggested that in our gendered society, females will display a greater interest in female-dominated occupations. Holland’s theory has been used extensively and continuously revised since its inception because of difficulties with its cross-cultural applicability. Holland’s theory, however, did not take into consideration hostile environments often experienced by those who do not belong to the dominant culture or have limited access to the U. S. opportunity structure on the psychological functioning of non-European-Americans (King-Toler, 2004; Brown, 1995).

The socioeconomic theory used by sociologist and economists provided detailed explanations and descriptions of how one's culture, family background, social and economic conditions, and other factors outside an individual's control strongly influence one's identity, values, and overall human and career development. Socioeconomic theory is also known as the chance or accident theory. This approach to understanding career development suggests that many people follow the path of least resistance in their career development.
development by simply falling into whatever work opportunities happen to come their way (Ettinger, 1996).

Developmental Theories

Super’s (1957) life-span, life-approach theory offered further insight into understanding the career development process based on the changes people go through as they mature. Socioeconomic factors, mental and physical abilities, personal characteristics, and opportunities affect career patterns. People seek career satisfaction through work roles in which they can express themselves and implement and develop their self-concepts. Career maturity, a main concept in Super's theory, is manifested in the successful accomplishment of age and stage developmental tasks across the life span (Ettinger, 1996). Nevertheless, self-concept is an underlying factor in Super's model. Vocational self-concept develops through physical and mental growth, observations of work, identification with working adults, general environment, and general experiences. As experiences become broader in relation to awareness of the world of work, the more sophisticated a vocational self-concept is formed (Zunker, 1994; Super, 1957). Super's contribution formalized stages and developmental tasks over the life span. The six stages identified were: (1) crystallization stage, ages 14-18; (2) specification stage, ages 18-21; (3) implementation stage, ages 21-24; (4) the stabilization stage, ages 24-35; (5) consolidation, age 35; and (6) readiness for retirement, age 55. Super’s contribution to the career development theory literature is the role of the self-concept. People will refine their self-concept over time, which will cause adaptations in their career choices. Super’s theory provides a foundation for understanding the professional work force, but it has not taken into consideration the career experiences of women, people of color, and those of lower socio-economic backgrounds (Evans & Herr, 1994; Farmer, 1997; King-Toler, 2004; Savickas & Lent, 1994; Stitt-Ghodes, 1997).

Krumboltz’s (1991) social learning theory considered career decision-making and development with our social learning, environmental conditions and events, genetic influences, and learning experiences. People choose their careers based on what they have learned. Thus, certain behaviors are modeled, rewarded, and reinforced (Ettinger, 1996). Decision-making theories hypothesize that there are critical points in our lives when choices are made that greatly influence our career development. These decision-
making points are such events as educational choices, entry-level job positions, changing jobs, etc. Other decision-making theories address choices across the life span. Our awareness of career choices available to us influences the decisions that we make and how we evaluate them (Ettinger, 1996).

Cognitive theories of career development developed on the basis of how individuals process, integrate, and react to information. The ways in which individuals process information determine their cognitive structures. These structures influence how individuals see themselves, others, and their environment. Cognitive theories suggest ways to help clients build or refine a hierarchy of thinking skills and decision-making skills that influence career development (Ettinger, 1996). Bandura (1977, 1986) theorized that one’s perception of self-efficacy and expectation connects to one’s ability to successfully complete a task, which is coupled with the likelihood of persistence in accomplishing other tasks (King-Toler, 2004). In terms of gender, self-efficacy’s applicability relates to the ways in which women’s confidence levels, self-esteem, and overall lack of persistence to complete difficult tasks are perceived. What implications then, are there for this theory in terms of ethnicity and race? Brown (1995) maintained that this area for non-European-Americans remains unexplored.

The social cognition career theory (SCCT) grew out of Bandura’s (1986) social cognitive theory and attempts to address issues of culture, gender, genetic endowment, social context, and unexpected life events that may interact with and supersede the effects of career-related choices. This theory focuses on the connection of self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and personal goals that influence an individual’s career choice. The following four major sources influence career choices based on individual beliefs: a) personal performance accomplishments, b) vicarious learning, c) social persuasion, and d) physiological states and reactions. This process reinforces one’s self-efficacy or belief in future continued success in the use of her or his ability and expertise. SCCT differs from existing career development theories in that it focuses on the role of the self-system and the individual’s beliefs. This theory addresses the inherent influence of social and economic contexts, but what about cultural, ethnicity, and racial identity?

Baker (2002) suggested that people of the United States are seeing the lines between ethnicities blurred, yet they seem to think of non-European-Americans as
existing among the outer fringes of society. This struggle for cultural plurality has not changed over the past few generations. So, how do non-European-Americans continue to integrate into mass culture and majority-dominated institutions without relinquishing their ethnic identities? Since the implementation of affirmative action, are non-European-Americans accomplishing this with greater ease today than 50 years ago? How do culture, ethnicity, and race affect how individuals construct careers in majority-dominated institutions?

Career Development Theories and Non-European-Americans. Career development theories help us understand the career process (Alfred, 2001; Holland, 1959; King-Toler, 2004; Livingston, 2003; Savickas & Lent, 1994; Super, 1953, 1957). Initially, these theories took into account the career experiences of European-American men only. As societal pressure, social justice, and social change pushed expansion, these theories included the career experiences of European-American women (Betz, 1993; Betz & Fitzgerald, 1987; Zinn, Cannon, Higginbotham, & Dill, 1986). Nevertheless, these theories developed incognizant of culture, ethnicity, race, and gender in terms of people of color. If these theories remain unchallenged, under-researched, theorized, and do not expand to include the experiences of non-European-Americans, these theories will persist to foster images that fit the experiences of a monolithic ethnic and racial group of people (Alfred, 2001; King-Toler, 2004; Livingston, 2003).

Hence, Alfred (2001) developed the internal/external model to study the careers of non-European-Americans. The initial study that formed the basis for the internal/external model examined the professional developmental history of five tenured African/Black American women at predominantly White universities. The findings of the study indicated that race, culture, and identity played a vital role in the career development of non-European-American professionals in majority-dominated organizations. The internal and external career framework is driven by the bi-cultural life structure of non-European-Americans. People of color use the bi-cultural life structure to evoke the power to contest the terrain of differences that contribute to their marginal positions in majority-dominated organizations, such as opera companies. The internal career represents the psychological or personal contexts of the developing career. The internal career supports the notion of personal agency originating from the life structure.
Individuals have the power to choose the strategies, behaviors, and interactions they will use to meet the expectations of the external career. The external career represents the structural contexts of the development experience, which includes the institutional cultures, structures, and role expectations (See Figure 2.6).

Alfred’s (2001) model of career development explains the bi-cultural life structure of non-European-American executive opera administrators and their success in major opera companies. The internal career for non-European-American executive opera administrators relates to their career strategies, behaviors, and interactions within the majority-dominated institution. The organizational environment represents the external career of non-European-American executive opera administrators. The bi-cultural life structure of non-European-American executive opera administrators and their internal careers allowed them to successfully navigate careers into top-level positions in the external career. It is still unclear how non-European-American executive opera administrators constructed careers to top-level management in opera in relation to the psychological dimensions of Alfred’s (2001) model. Further research is necessary to ascertain the psychological dimensions non-European-American executive opera administrators used in accessing top-level management positions in major opera companies.

**Professionalization in Arts Administration**

DiMaggio (1987) defined professions as occupations with a monopoly of esoteric knowledge, a body of professional ethics and standards, professional associations that enforce these standards, accredited training institutions, licensed practitioners, extensive collegial interaction among practitioners employed in different organizations, a commitment to professional standards even when they conflict with organizational goals, and a claim to altruism in professional practice. A managerial and aesthetic orientation causes a paradox that challenges the professionalization of arts administration. Executive arts administrators must master budgeting, marketing, fundraising, and public relations to effectively do their work. This makes it difficult to reach a consensus about what the expert manager is expert at doing. Consequently, it is difficult to design a formal curriculum of arts administration. Nevertheless, researchers have studied the value of arts administration degrees, arts administration curricula, and pedagogy.
Figure 2.6. Alfred’s Internal/External Model of Career Development
Arts Administration Curricula Issues

Arts administration and arts management programs across the United States provide much of the management pool for today’s arts organizations (Bienvenu, 2004). Graduates of these programs were surveyed to ascertain their perceptions of their training and the value arts administration degrees hold. A web-based survey administered to 322 Master’s degree program graduates found 202 employed in the arts, 10 employed outside the arts, and 20 unemployed. Respondents answered a combination of forced-choice and open-ended questions. This study used basic and advanced statistical procedures to analyze collected quantitative data.

In general, respondents reported that the degree helped them in their job searches and prepared them to work in the arts. They also discussed their misgivings with the degree and problems they found in their job searches. Respondents expressed a lack of mid-level or higher-paying jobs and a need for more training in fundraising, accounting, and other areas of business management. Respondents highly regarded their courses in marketing, fundraising, business applications specific to the arts and non-profits. Respondents also valued the practical experiences and networking opportunities their formal training in arts administration provided. This study builds support for the value of Master’s degrees in arts administration, but does not take into consideration ethnicity or gender relative to the respondents’ education and pursuit of careers in arts administration after degree completion, particularly at the executive level.

Martin and Rich (1998) conducted a similar study assessing the role of formal education in arts administration training. Their research study used a stratified sample of 641 organizations by arts type and budget size with a 48.4% return rate. The top-rated skill was leadership for all organizational types, except presenting organizations. Presenting organizations, such as ballet, opera, and theatre companies, rated marketing as the highest skill. The survey results strongly suggest that formal training is serving the field reasonably well, so much so that arts managers have made a strong call for training programs to move beyond the traditional degree and create new packages of executive education programs for those who cannot afford to enroll in a full- or part-time program.
Hutchens and Zöe (1985) considered curricular issues in arts administration out of a need to correlate degree-granting graduate-level programs in arts administration with the practical needs of arts organizations, as perceived by their professional leaders. The study produced a guide for individuals committed to professional arts management, primarily program directors of arts administration, professional arts administrators, and boards of trustees. A random sampling of representative arts organizations in the United States, arts administrators, and corresponding board officers identified participants for this study. The results of the study revealed that accounting, fundraising, marketing, organizational behavior, and arts and law are the most valued aspects of the arts administration curriculum to program directors, board members, and professional arts administrators. The results also revealed that professional administrators and board officers place great value upon experience and apparently underrate formal education. Issues of cultural pluralism, diversity, and multiculturalism, however, were not considered with these curricular concerns.

*Arts Administration Pedagogy*

Chandler (2000) proposed that teachers of arts administration rethink their use of the case study in the arts management classroom. The case-study design inherently embodies the convergence of theoretical and practical thought and the simultaneous exploration of the work (process) of people involved in change. When case design is selectively and simultaneously employed over time, it affords the student and arts professional an opportunity to understand an issue deeply and from a variety of perspectives. The traditional case method is a valuable teaching tool to familiarize students with management issues and tools to make informed decisions. Although the case study approach may not fit all arts management classrooms or courses, it offers possibilities for how we might extend our discussions of curricular content in arts management education to include a focus on pedagogy.

Dorn (1992) also addressed professionalization in arts administration and its pedagogical issues. He recommended an examination and evaluation of the curricula goals of arts administration programs with regard to their content validity, philosophical validity, political feasibility, and technical adequacy. This will move the field from one that is not highly regarded to one that is respected by both the academic and artistic
communities, at the same time providing students a more reflexive and synergistic approach to resolving means and ends of arts organizations through a stronger linkage to their aesthetic goals. Bienvenu (2004), Chandler (2000), Martin and Rich (1998), Dorn (1992), and Hutchens and Zöe (1985) dealt with pertinent issues relative to curriculum and pedagogy in arts administration and their relationship to the professionalization of the field. But only Stein (2000) began to address the issue of professionalization with a more inclusive perspective of diverse representation in the arts administration classroom and the field of arts administration.

According to Stein (2000), the legal classification of any non-profit arts or cultural organization is grounded in the inclusive public and cultural roles required of those who work for it. At the same time, non-profits participate in the open market and make significant economic contributions to urban and rural communities across the United States. Still, arts organizations have a moral purpose in our society. If non-profit organizations and the artists they represent are legally, socially, and morally bound to serve the public as a whole, what implications should such service have for recruiting and staffing managerial personnel multiculturally? Furthermore, to what extent are the recruiting strategies of nonprofit performing arts organizations centered on their public missions of openness to all?

The large proportion of arts organizations have historically recruited European-American managers and serve European-American audiences. Since its founding in 1883, the Metropolitan Opera has employed European-American general directors and predominantly served European-American audiences. Relying on qualitative indicators such as observations of an arts conference and interviews with applicants to Masters programs in performing arts management, Stein (2000) demonstrated that the majority of people entering the field are European-American, just as those who are already occupying managerial positions in arts organizations are European-American. She also used data collected from four managers of non-European-American ethnic origin. These managers participated in a panel discussion on career opportunities for multicultural managers in the performing arts.

Multiracial undergraduates attended the session that focused on racial and cultural barriers to entry into arts management. Although Stein (2000) identified graduate
education as a possible means for non-European-American managers to combat these barriers, the greatest barriers for people of color in selecting the non-profit sector as a possible career is that the non-profit sector does not do a good job of marketing itself as a career choice. Graduate programs in arts management may offer non-European-Americans both the opportunities for gaining experience and the academic credentials to gain entry into the profession, but there is a lack of interest in participation on the part of non-European-Americans. This is compounded by the fact that many graduate and undergraduate programs in arts administration do not actively recruit because of lack of funding. Performing arts management and administration remains a hidden career option for non-European-Americans who may not know of this career possibility.

Instead, the pursuit of business, education, and law degrees continue to attract non-European-American students. My belief is that the internal support provided by non-European-American students’ families plays an important part in this career phenomenon. This is not the case in opera administration. Not many non-European-American parents seem to encourage their college-age children to pursue careers in opera administration or arts administration. As Brandi (2004) suggested, non-European-American participation in business, especially leadership roles, is important to substantiating non-European-American communities. If non-European-Americans continue to increase at greater rates of change than the majority population, then business leaders will take a greater interest in improving the ratio of non-European-American to European-Americans in business careers. What Stein (2000) does not consider is the lack of readiness on the part of arts administration professors and practitioners to fully embrace the idea of multiculturalism. If the managers in a nonprofit organization are to preserve the status quo, they are likely to make little room for multiracial diversity. Even still, we must continue to seek ways to create a discourse that engages larger questions of inequality in the arts, education, and society (Lynn, Yosso, Solórzano, & Parker, 2002). If we do not, particularly at the higher education level, it is my position that the arts community will lose an important segment of the American multicultural population, while perpetuating the perception of elitism that ultimately results in disenfranchisement in the arts of non-European-Americans.
Summary

Given my biases about the career paths of non-European-American executive opera administrators, the bi-cultural life structure theory is the most appropriate lens to use in viewing the literature and data. The bi-cultural life structure theory, however, does not take into consideration affirmative action’s equalizing of job opportunities so that talent weighs more heavily in the recruitment process than culture, ethnicity, gender, or race. Yet, when affirmative action is not actively implemented into the recruitment process, recruitment theory offers strategies for arts organizations to consider, particularly when the longevity of the arts is continuously threatened by attracting a monolithic segment of our multicultural world.

A review of literature on U.S. operatic history revealed a popularity growth in opera (National Endowment for the Arts, 2002). Opera companies and administrative career opportunities for non-European-Americans increased. But in terms of staffing and audience members, opera continues to attract a largely homogenous segment of the U. S. multicultural population. This is the result of the risk-adverse nature of arts organizations and a historic disenfranchisement caused by segregation (West, 1994; 2005). A discussion of the bi-cultural life structure theory, affirmative action, recruitment, and U. S. operatic history seems meaningless without serious consideration of how individuals construct their careers. Career development theory literature provides insights into how the interaction of psychological, sociological, economical, physical, and chance factors shape the sequence of jobs, occupations, or careers that a person engages in throughout a lifetime. But, many of these theories developed without full consideration of the cultural, economical, historical, political, psychological, and sociological implications of a history of discrimination, disenfranchisement, and oppression against certain groups of people, in particular, non-European-Americans.

Alfred’s (2001) internal/external model of career development helps to explain the bi-cultural life structure of non-European-American executive opera administrators and how they constructed career paths to top-level management in major opera companies. The internal career for non-European-American executive opera administrators relates to each administrator’s individual consciousness, career strategies, behaviors, and interactions. The organizational environment in which they work affects the external careers of non-
European-American executive opera administrators. The bi-cultural life structure of non-
European-American executive opera administrators and their internal careers have allowed
them to access the power to successfully navigate into top-level positions in the external
career or opera companies, which in this study are majority-dominant institutions.

In relation to the psychological dimensions of Alfred’s model, however, it is still
unclear how non-European-American executive opera administrators constructed careers
to top-level management in opera. This is where further research is necessary to ascertain
an understanding of the psychological dimensions of non-European-American executive
opera administrators used in accessing top-level management positions in majority-
dominated opera companies. This study discovers, describes, and documents the career
paths of non-European-American executive opera administrators. It reveals critical
influences and career strategies that can assist future non-European-Americans in their
quests for vertical mobility in arts administration. Lastly, this study initiates further
scholarly discourse on the careers of executive arts administrators, providing an answer
to my initial inquiry on the career paths of executive opera administrators.

Culturally relevant programming, non-European-American staff and artist
representation, and culturally specific arts organizations will increase non-European-
American participation and support for the arts (Gilmore, 1993). Vincent (1988) asserted
through social identification theory that the more strategic and concerted efforts there are
to recruit non-European-Americans as board members, staff, artists, and audience, the
more non-European-American populations will respond. It is then that the typically
homogenous arts audience we are so used to will no longer exist. Opera administrators
representing the non-European-American population will help to deconstruct the concept
of cultural elitism and breathe new life into the standard operatic repertoire, thereby
achieving heterogeneity and reaping all of the rewards of truly engaging the full public
human capital of the United States in opera and the arts.
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The disparity of non-European-Americans holding positions in executive arts administration is possibly caused by a glass ceiling (Baker, 2002; Cheatham, 1997; Oby, 1998; OPERA America, 2002; Smith, 1989). Yet, a review of the literature revealed: 1) affirmative action, the bi-cultural life structure theory, and Alfred’s (2001) internal/external model as explanations for non-European-Americans attainment of top-level management positions in major opera companies; 2) arts administration educators’ preoccupation with professionalization caused discussions about diversity to seem nonexistent; 3) DiMaggio (1987) studied the careers of top-level management in the arts, but excluded executive opera administrators and disregarded the scarcity of non-European-Americans in executive administrative positions in the arts; and 4) the career trajectories of non-European-Americans led to top-level management positions in the arts, but there was a paucity of literature on their career experiences in their quests for executive positions in the arts.

This study discovers, describes, and documents (a) the career trajectories of three non-European-American executive opera administrators, (b) the barriers they faced, (c) strategies they used to achieve top-level management positions in major opera companies, and (d) major influences on their career success. Highlighting new career knowledge that may assist future non-European-Americans in their quests for vertical mobility in arts administration is another purpose of this study.

Research Questions

I addressed the major research question: What are the career paths of non-European-American executive opera administrators? I also answered the following guiding questions in this study: (1) What factors advanced the career paths of non-European-Americans executive opera administrators? (2) What factors served as barriers to the career paths of non-European-American executive opera administrators? (3) What strategies did non-European-Americans use to overcome barriers to their appointment as executive opera administrators? (4) What experiences benefitted the career paths of non-European-Americans executive opera administrators? These research questions and
Alfred’s (2001) internal/external conceptual model of career development determined use of the qualitative research method to collect and analyze data. A discussion of the research theoretical foundation, design, participant selection, instruments of data collection, data analysis, and the procedures associated with each follows.

**Methodological Theoretical Foundation**

Glesne and Peshkin (1999) defined research as a careful and diligent search. And although there are two primary modes of inquiry for research, both quantitative and qualitative studies use similar elements in their work, such as problem and purpose statements, development of a research population, time frame, collection and analysis of data, and the presentation of outcomes. Research studies that investigate the quality of relationships, activities, situations, or materials are frequently referred to as qualitative research (Creswell, 2003; Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003; Glesne & Peshkin, 1999; Merriam, 1998; Rossman & Rallis, 2003; Stake, 1995; Wolcott, 2001; Yin, 1998).

Qualitative researchers hold different views than quantitative researchers. Qualitative research methods support the interpretivist and constructivist paradigms that portray a world in which reality is socially constructed, complex, and ever changing (Glesne & Peshkin, 1999). This allows the key players in a qualitative research study to construct social realities in social settings. To understand the nature of these constructed realities, qualitative researchers interact and talk directly with participants about their perceptions, while seeking a variety of perspectives that are not reduced to a norm (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Creswell, 2002, 2003; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Eisner, 1991; Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995; Merriam, 1998; Patton, 2002; Stake, 1995; Yin, 1989). The issue of sensitivity regarding issues of power and authority in research relative to the relationship between the researcher and the researched has emerged (Glesne & Peshkin, 1999). Qualitative researchers incessantly rethink research design and implementation (Creswell, 2002, 2003; Creswell & Miller, 2000; Fraenkel & Wallen, 2000).

Denzin and Lincoln (1998) suggested that to learn about people we must remember to treat them as people; then they will uncover their lives for us. Bogdan and Biklen (1998) contended that when the intent is to capture one person’s interpretation of his or her life, the study is called a life history. Life histories focus on the experiences of an individual and what s/he felt while passing through the stages of life. Armstrong
(1987) insisted that the life history method assigns significance to the person’s own story and interpretations people place on their experiences as an explanation for their behavior. Alfred’s (2001) internal/external model was developed based on the life history approach. Therefore, I used the life history method to ascertain the greatest understanding of the career paths of non-European-American executive opera administrators from their perspectives.

**Research Design**

In a qualitative research study, inquirers state research questions that evolve and change during the study in a manner consistent with the assumptions of the emerging design. These questions allow participants to explain their ideas, while also focusing on one central phenomenon (Creswell, 2003). Qualitative research is an effort to understand situations in their uniqueness as part of a particular context and the interactions therein. Major characteristics of qualitative research include: (1) the researcher understands the phenomenon of interest from the participant’s perspective not the researcher’s, (2) the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis; (3) the research usually involves fieldwork; (4) the researcher employs an inductive research strategy which builds abstractions, concepts, hypotheses, or theories rather than tests existing theories; and, finally, (5) the product of a qualitative study is richly descriptive; words and pictures, rather than numbers, convey what the researcher has learned about a phenomenon (Merriam, 1998).

Much like Alfred’s (2001) original study, this dissertation is a basic exploratory qualitative study. I collected data through interviews and document analysis. The findings in my study mixed description and analysis, resulting in the identification of patterns in the form of categories, factors, and themes from the data. In basic exploratory qualitative studies the analysis does not extend to building a substantive theory as it does in grounded theory. This was not a case study; there is no bounded system or functioning unit that circumscribes the investigation. The value of the basic exploratory qualitative study is that it allowed me the flexibility to discover and understand the process by which non-European-Americans became executive opera administrators.
Sample and Participation Selection

In qualitative research, random sampling is ordinarily not feasible, since the researcher wants to obtain a sample that is uniquely suited to the intent of the study (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003). I used a purposive snowball sample to determine and identify the best participants. Purposive sampling allowed me to proactively select individuals, based upon particular attributes, while also considering the recommendations of OPERA America (Merriam, 1998; Rossman & Rallis, 2003). I chose participants as their positions in opera administration, ethnicity, gender, and race served the goals and purposes of this study. Using the above-mentioned criterion, OPERA America identified four possible participants (D. Hossack, personal communication, July 2005). Although I contacted each possible participant, only three chose to participate in this study. All of the participants waived their right to anonymity and gave me permission to use their real names.

Rossman and Rallis (2003) and Merriam (1998) maintained that the snowball, chain, or network sampling method is the most common form of purposive sampling. In this sampling strategy, each participant or group of participants is asked to refer the researcher to other possible participants (Patton, 1990, 2002). This aspect of the study is directed toward ensuring that every possible non-European-American executive opera administrator in the United States had the opportunity to participate in this study. Nevertheless, Glesne and Peshkin (1999) argued that the snowball sample is not always in itself a sufficient strategy for participant selection.

Indeed, Seidman (1998) warned that easy access is not the best solution to finding participants. The snowball sample served as a way of confirming the recommendations of OPERA America to make available to every non-European-American executive opera administrator the opportunity to participate in this study. Two participants’ recommendations exactly matched those of OPERA America. One of the two participants also recommended I contact with Wayne Brown, Director of Music and Opera at the National Endowment for the Arts and the Washington National Opera, where it was believed an African/Black American woman had served as managing director.

I followed these leads, but I found no new participants for this study. The willingness of the prospective participants to participate also served as a means for choosing the most appropriate subjects. Given the phenomenological nature of this study,
I followed Rossman and Rallis’ suggestion (2003) about not extending the sample beyond five participants, because I extensively interviewed each participant about her or his career. Given that OPERA America only identified and recommended four participants, this was not a problem.

Data Collection

To develop the internal/external model of career development, Alfred (2001) collected data through in-depth-semi-structured interviews. I used in-depth-semi-structured interviews, follow-up interviews, and document analysis as the primary instruments of data collection in this study to address the research questions (See Table 2). In qualitative research when a conclusion is supported by data collected from a number of different instruments, its trustworthiness is enhanced (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003). Interviews allow researchers to put into a larger context that which they have seen, heard, and experienced (Hermanowicz, 2002; Seidman, 1998; Silverman, 2001; Rubin & Rubin, 1995). I designed an interview guide using Seidman’s (1998) model incorporating questions about the participants’ background and personal life, the details of what the participants are currently doing, and the meaning of the participants’ experiences. I also adopted the interview protocol from Alfred’s (2001) study on Black American women in the White academy (See page 166). For example, Alfred asked participants, “How did you get your first job in the academy?” I adjusted this question in my protocol to read, “How did you get your first job in opera administration?”

The interview protocol gave a sense of structure that kept me grounded. Although the participants determined the length of their interviews as I anticipated, they willingly answered questions about their careers. To ensure the key players of this study shared information about their careers in naturally unfolding, familiar, and meaningful ways, I traveled to each participants’ place of employment to interview them in a space that was convenient, comfortable, and familiar to them (Hermanowicz, 2002). Follow-up questions helped solidify clarity, meaning, and understanding. Once all interviews were conducted, they were transcribed as the first stage of analysis. I wrote up transcribed interviews as narratives for analysis. The process of interviewing participants in a familiar space and transcribing interviews was also based on Alfred’s (2001) previous study.
Fraenkel and Wallen (2003) defined documents as written or printed materials produced in some form or another. These can include annual reports, books, circulars, diaries, diplomas, newspapers, magazines, memos, and resumes. In short, documents refer to information that exists in written or printed form. Using documentary material as data is not much different from using interviews and observations. In document analysis, the data collection is guided by questions, educated hunches, and emerging findings. This systemic search allows for the accidental uncovering of valuable data. Research-generated documents are documents prepared by the researcher, or for the researcher, by participants after the study has begun (Merriam, 1998).

Although Alfred (2001) did not use document analysis, I used resumes, bios, reviews of productions, articles from publications such as Ebony and Opera News, marketing material, annual field reports, unpublished reports, and Newsline journals prepared by OPERA America as data. In addition, audience development reports and websites provided rich data for this study. I also used websites to review job postings for executive opera administrative positions that led to conclusions about what executive opera administrators do. These documents provided rich data that were written up with the interviews for the narratives in chapter 4.

Table 2

Research Question/Data Collection Method

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Questions</th>
<th>Interview</th>
<th>Document Analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. What are the career paths of non-European-American executive opera administrators?</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. What factors advanced the career paths of non-European-American executive opera administrators?</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. What factors served as barriers to the career paths of non-European-American executive opera administrators?</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. What strategies did non-European-Americans use to overcome barriers to their appointment of executive opera administrator?</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. What experiences benefitted the career paths of non-European-American executive opera administrators?</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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</table>
Data Analysis

Miles and Huberman (1994) asserted that analyzing the data in a qualitative study essentially involves analyzing and synthesizing the information the researcher obtains from various sources into a coherent description of what she or he has observed or otherwise discovered. I wrote transcribed interviews as narratives and analyzed the narratives using Riessman’s (1993) strategy of analysis that includes: transcription of data, organization of data, familiarization of data, coding, and identification of themes. Alfred (2001) also used case analysis and narratives to develop the internal/external model. I used cross-case analysis to compare frequent emergent themes across narrative cases. One aim of studying multiple narrative cases is to increase the generalizability of findings, particularly for replication and transferability of the study.

On a deeper level, seeing and uncovering processes and outcomes across many cases helps qualitative researchers develop more sophisticated descriptions and more powerful explanations (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Although each narrative case is understood on its own terms, qualitative researchers hunger for the understanding that comparative analysis yields (Coffey, 1996; Denzin & Lincoln, 1998; Riessman, 1993; Silverman, 2001; Wolcott, 1994, 2001). Because the primary analytic strategy in this qualitative study is thematic, I used content analysis for coding that gave a synthesis of the information collected from the data. This type of analysis enabled me to study human behavior through an analysis of their communications. In using content analysis, a researcher codes either the manifest or the latent content of a communication and sometimes both simultaneously (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003). Coding in this context is essentially a process of indexing the data texts, whether they are fieldnotes, interview transcripts, or other documents, into equivalence classes and categories (Coffey, 1996).

For example, a few codes I looked for across cases are education, individual, mentors, and family. The qualitative analyst can retrieve chunks or segments of textual data that share a common code. The major disadvantages of content analyses are that it is limited to the analysis of communications, and it is difficult to establish validity (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003). Therefore, member checks were vital to the reliability of this study. Member checks helped to maintain the power structure between researchers and
the researched. The participants checked the presentation of their perspective by reviewing what I wrote as a check for accuracy and completeness in the narrative. Member checking increases the level of validity in qualitative research studies and helps to establish the truth of the participants’ stories.

**Data Presentation Strategy**

Qualitative researchers are criticized for the lack of openness in their analyses (Anafara, Brown, & Mangione, 2002; Chenail, 1995; Constas, 1992; Krathwohl, 2004). Constas (1992) argued that qualitative researchers are especially vulnerable in a method-reporting deficit when sharing the decisions and rationales for choices related to the creation of qualitative research studies and methods. This is because qualitative researchers create new methods for their particular studies or improve or modify current and extant approaches. Given this idiosyncratic tendency with methods, qualitative researchers leave the reader in the dark (Chenail, 1995). To address these shortcomings, openness in the presentation of qualitative methods and data analysis is advocated (Anafara, Brown, & Mangione; 2002, Chenail, 1995; Constas, 1992; Krathwohl, 2004).

Chenail (1995) maintained that the data is the “star.” As data analysis turns into data presentation, it is easy to lose a sense of place for the data in qualitative studies. Nevertheless, data collected in all its richness, breadth, and depth is the center of the research study, so that as much data as is possible is presented. Juxtaposition is a data presentation strategy that Chenail (1995) advocated. I present data in a variety of ways, including juxtaposing data excerpts with talk about the data, annotating the data by citing relevant previous studies and theoretical pieces, contrasting the data with what the previous literature has stated about similar data, using the data to guide me into literature that I had not previously considered, and most importantly, using the data with previous literature to validate my observations and findings. I used these strategies in the analysis and organized the findings by research question.

Chenail (1995) suggested the following data presentation strategies for qualitative researchers to consider: natural, most simple to most complex, first discovered/constructed to last discovered/constructed, quantitative informed, theory guided, narrative logic, most important to least important or from major to minor, dramatic presentation, and no particular order. In this study, I used narrative logic
because data are arranged with an eye for storytelling. I plotted the data in a way that allowed me to transition from one exemplar to another, just as narrators arrange details in order to best relate the particulars of the story. I first presented the data in narrative form; subsequently, I displayed data in tables organized by themes and supporting evidence (Anafara, Brown, & Mangione, 2002; Chenail, 1995; Constas, 1992; Glesne & Peshkin, 1999; Krathwohl, 2004; Rossman & Rallis, 2003).

Discussion of Credibility

Researcher bias is something that needs addressing when it comes to the interpreting of qualitative data. The issue of researcher bias is considered with a discussion of credibility. Credibility addresses the questions of how the findings of the study match the participants’ reality. One assumption in a qualitative study is that humans make multiple realities (Green-Powell, 1993). My role in this study is ensuring credibility by matching the reality of the participants with the findings. Using triangulation, reviewing the data with participants, and the researcher’s interpretations of the data, increased the credibility of this study. An important check on the validity and reliability of the researcher’s interpretations is to compare one participant’s description of something with another participant’s description of the same topic with different information (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003).

Discussion of Transferability

External validity is a problem in qualitative research because of the lack of generalizable results in terms of transferability. Although generalizing is possible in qualitative research, it is different than that found in quantitative studies. In this sense, what is learned about a particular situation extends beyond the situation itself (Eisner, 1998). That theme is applied to other situations through naturalistic generalization. The study’s level of transferability supports the notion of naturalistic generalization (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Fraenkel & Wallen, 2000; Glesne & Peshkin, 1998; Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995; Yin, 1989). If generalizations are made, interested practitioners of arts administration will make them (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003).

Arts administration educators can make generalizations that will assist students in their career development processes, as well as arts administration policy makers regarding the work of arts administrators. When dealing with issues of credibility and
transferability in a qualitative study, Creswell and Miller (2000) recommended use of at least two of the eight verification procedures: (a) prolonged engagement and persistent observation, (b) triangulation, (c) peer review or debriefing, (d) negative case analysis, (e) clarifying researcher bias, (f) member checks, (g) thick description, and (h) external audits. Creswell (1998) recommended that qualitative researchers engage in at least two of the eight verification procedures. I used triangulation in terms of sample, data collection, and data and literature; clarification of researcher bias, which I have chosen to demonstrate by grounding my biases in the bi-cultural life structure theory; member checks of all participants to ensure their story is being told and not my own; and finally, thick description in the write-up of the narratives.

**Limitations of the study.** The primary limitation in this exploratory qualitative study is my role as the researcher. In this study, the findings are subject to other interpretations by researchers with dissimilar biases and theoretical frameworks. As I stated earlier, I am a Black American male from the southeastern region of the United States. I have studied arts administration at the Master’s and Doctoral levels. I have also worked with arts organizations in varying capacities. I acknowledged my biases relative to issues of cultural democracy, equality, empowerment, and cross-cultural understanding in the study and practice of arts administration. I also clearly stated my personal epistemology.

As a critical humanist, I believe individual consciousness is the agent to empower, transform, and liberate groups from dominating and imprisoning social processes. Nevertheless, I chose to ground my biases in the bi-cultural life structure theory, affirmative action, and Alfred’s (2001) internal/external model. It is critically important that the stories of the participants are told and not my own. I used the above-listed verification procedures throughout this study to confirm what I saw, heard, felt, sensed, and understood to further establish the credibility and transferability of this study. Another limitation of this study is the sample. Although I am not sure of the exact number of non-European-American executive opera administrators in the United States, I have tried to give every non-European-American executive opera administrator the opportunity to participate in this study by seeking recommendations from OPERA America and the participants. These recommendations did not yield more participants.
CHAPTER IV
CAREER NARRATIVES

This chapter consists of narratives originating from the interview transcriptions and documents analysis. The narratives were also modeled after Alfred’s (2001) original study for analysis purposes. The narratives embody the findings of this study. Each narrative includes the same basic components relative to the research questions: (1) What are the career paths of non-European-American executive opera administrators? (2) What factors advanced the career paths of non-European-Americans executive opera administrators? (3) What factors served as barriers to the career paths of non-European-American executive opera administrators? (4) What strategies did non-European-Americans use to overcome barriers to their appointment of executive opera administrator? What experiences benefitted the career paths of non-European-American executive opera administrators?

This exploratory qualitative research study discovers, describes, and documents (a) the career trajectories of three non-European-American executive opera administrators, (b) the barriers they faced, (c) the strategies they used to achieve top-level management positions in major opera companies, and (d) the major influences on their career success. Highlighting new career knowledge that may assist future non-European-Americans in their quests for vertical mobility in arts administration is another purpose of this study.
Michael Ching

Michael Ching was born September 29, 1958 in Honolulu, Hawaii. Before he was one year old, his family left Honolulu, affording him the opportunity to grow up in New Orleans, Louisiana, and St. Paul, Minnesota. Because his grandparents were born here in the United States, he describes himself as a third-generation Asian American, one quarter Chinese and one quarter Japanese. He describes his family as fitting the traditional cultural stereotypes about Asians being hardworking, wanting to become doctors, lawyers, or professionals of some sort.

Mr. Ching’s father was no exception. He wanted to become a musician, but was not allowed to in the cultural milieu of his day. Mr. Ching’s father never discouraged him from becoming a musician. Because of this, he thinks his father was the family member who most influenced his career path. Mr. Ching’s father earned Master’s and Doctoral degrees and became a professor. His mother did not complete her college education. Mr. Ching completed a B.A. in Music at Duke University, but regards himself as rather academic compared to other opera administrators. After his father passed, his mother was not negative about his career pursuits. But, he and his mother had several conversations about his career decisions.

The schools Mr. Ching attended throughout his life were not diverse, but he does not think his ethnicity and race impacted his experiences. His college aspirations and career plans in high school and college were all related to music. At age six, he began studying piano and was always a good pianist. At one point, he even thought he was going to become a concert pianist. It was only later that he realized that the piano would serve him as a composer. He was reintroduced to composition in the tenth grade while attending summer camp at Interlochen in Michigan. That summer, he discovered he had a facility for composing. He wrote a huge amount of music. In high school, Mr. Ching’s extracurricular activities were entirely related to music. These activities plausibly impacted his career. It was in high school that he saw his first full-length opera by composer Giuseppe Verdi. Although he does not remember which opera it was, he does remember that it was poorly performed by a touring company in North Carolina.

Mr. Ching’s childhood was moderately disciplined, and although his family supported his interest in music, they wanted him to attend Duke as opposed to Eastman
School of Music at the University of Rochester or the University of Michigan. He said “They thought if I went to Duke, I would become a doctor.” He credits the Asian cultural values of hard work, discipline, and study as important to his development. He said, “I think it made me a little bit obsessed with having a regular paycheck, and so except for maybe two or three months of an essentially 25 year career, I have never not had a regular paycheck.”

Mr. Ching assumes most Asians succeed in the United States through assimilation. Because of this he knows very little Chinese and no Japanese. He shared this story:

They just couldn’t understand why I wasn’t interested in it. I am more interested in it now than I used to be, but the truth is that, you know, in our household, you’d have to look hard to figure out an Asian lives there; there are a few things, even here in my office. Feng shui, I’m usually facing the door. There is a kind of Asian-looking teapot over there. I do drink tea. There is green tea in there. See, it is just one of those things that for me it actually hasn’t been an issue.

He thinks the attitude towards assimilation has changed to one where Asians assimilate to a certain extent, but Asians also embrace certain cultural values and traits from their ethnic culture. He believes when and where you are raised plays a part in how you develop ethnically and racially.

No one was surprised Mr. Ching pursued a career in music. Immediately after graduating from Duke University, he went into composing. As a composer, he found great compositional models in opera. Composition served as a useful route into the field of opera for him. In fact, the relationship that most influenced his career progression after college was with his composition teacher Robert Ward. Ward arranged his first job with Carlisle Floyd at the Houston Opera Studio and the National Opera Association. He thinks that currently there is a lack of mentorship in the field because no one wants to put her or his stamp of approval on the line. He said, “We tend to view helping someone else as not being in your best interest, but once you are in this field helping people is in your best interest.”

At age 21, Mr. Ching entered the field of opera, but every year until he was 30 or so he stated, “I would say, if I don’t think this field is any good, I’ll just get out of it and do something other than music.” Mr. Ching ended up falling in love with it by doing it,
but, he has a more ambivalent attitude towards opera than people who come into the field from different routes. Nevertheless, he is in opera for life. He feels it is important for arts administrators to figure out how they fit in. He said “Most of us go into the field of classical music to escape from the rest of the world, to narrow our focus. It is healthy because it makes you feel successful. It makes you feel like you have mastery of the world. But, it’s not the world; we have to figure out how to relate to the world successfully so they won’t ignore us.”

His early exposure to opera reinforced his ambivalence because he was not sure that he was going to stay in the field as a composer or administrator. Nevertheless, his previous positions in opera include pianist and composer for the Houston Opera Studio, music administrator for the Florida Grand Opera, music director for the Triangle Opera Theatre, assistant to the general director and associate artistic director at Virginia Opera, and currently general/artistic director of Opera Memphis. When I asked him about how he feels about diversity in executive opera administration, he responded, “There is no diversity.” But he does not regret his career choice. His experiences as a composer and administrator allowed him to take advantage of career opportunities he did not actively seek. These experiences came about because of the excellent career history he established in the field, first as a composer, then as an administrator.

Mr. Ching does not believe his career was negatively affected by ethnicity, gender, or race. Nevertheless, he has experienced racism. He thinks being an Asian can limit a person. But he thinks incidents of racism should not be taken too seriously. He said, “To me those kinds of things are more or less comical. It sort of depends on how you take those kinds of things. It might have been a little hurtful when you were eight, but it’s something that you just can’t take seriously.” He told this story:

All three of the finalists/candidates for this job had wives. Statistically, this field is not run by heterosexuals, so something tells me that there was something going on that maybe was never written down on a piece of paper. So some things work for you and some things work against you. Statistically, if there are three finalists for a job as an artistic director you would think you would have at least one Gay person.

Some opera companies in the United States have a bias for hiring certain types of opera administrators. Mr. Ching said this: “Some companies only hire administrators
from Europe. I can understand that in a limited dumb ass sort of way… but that’s the attitude. It may be very subconscious.”

Even though he has a mixed group of friends, he does not think his group of friends is mixed enough. But Mr. Ching believes living diversity is very important. When he first arrived in Memphis, he opened an account at the Black American-owned bank to establish a relationship. He said, “It was a way for me to make some kind of statement about diversity.” He thinks the Asian population is large in classical music, so it is unremarkable that he is an executive-level opera manager. The color line he wants to break is the color line of being the first Asian to have a hit on country radio. That to him would be a cultural accomplishment because it would say something about the position of people of color in the United States. He shared this:

Everyone assumes if you are Black, you are from here, unless you speak like you’re from Jamaica, or the Caribbean, or some African country. They assume your family has roots here, but I can go somewhere and someone will think I just got off some boat. It annoys me because my family has been here for a long time.

He acknowledges that he is motivated by his own cultural baggage. Yet, he does not feel his appointment as general/artistic director of Opera Memphis is entirely significant. He believes that holding the general/artistic director position as an Asian American is important in a global sense, but he does not consider it a cultural accomplishment.

Mr. Ching feels it is difficult to attract Asians to opera. Yet, he knows that in Memphis, he is one of the role models of the Asian community. He is comfortable in this a role as a model for the community, but because of the large number of African Americans in Memphis, he has something of a mission to reach the African American community. He does not think opera as a field has solved the problem regarding attracting African Americans. He shared this:

It’s so bloody obvious. The casting at Opera Memphis is very diverse and has been diverse, that has some positive impacts. That’ll help get you to two or three percent. The answer is programming, but the problem is programming what? Why should that audience come, unless they get a piece every year? Then maybe they’ll come to it and by the time you get them there for two or three years they’ve embraced the whole art form. The answer is programming, and it is so obvious.
He does not recall any opera company that has strategically programmed annually to target African Americans. He said, “No opera company has solved that problem. Basically, they all do *Porgy* or *Margaret Garner*. Well, and that’s good. The Opera Company of Philadelphia seems to be sincere about it. They did *Margaret Garner* last year and they’re doing *Porgy* this year, that’s logical.”

Regarding his career, he does not think he faced any barriers. He said, “My barriers are self-imposed. I admit that I would be farther along, if I wanted to.” He also does not feel that his career path is any different from European-American executive opera administrators. When comparing the career paths of European-American executive opera administrators at level III companies across the country, there are several similarities across career paths. The most significant difference is the entry into the field. Some executive opera administrators enter administration from singing, conducting, or stage directing. Few enter the field from composition. Mr. Ching does not think affirmative action benefitted his career. He feels affirmative action is mostly important in the early stages, such as access to higher education, so that all people of color are prepared to effectively compete with their European-American colleagues. Ten years from now, he wants to have had a number one hit on country radio. He also wants to contribute to solving the audience development problem relative to African Americans and opera. Mr. Ching is happy and satisfied with his career path. He does not aspire to work for an opera company higher than level III. He shared this insight: “My balance has more to do with the fact I work somewhere it’s a perfect balance for me because there’s enough, we look at the stuff we do and it can always be better. We have enough resources to do respectable work that the job is not so taxing that I can’t go to Honolulu every summer.”

The one expectation he did not have accepting his current position was dealing with full-time employees. He discussed the difficulties in working with people who do not appreciate opera. He said, “You know the full-time employees that are the easiest to deal with are the ones who love opera.”

To a non-European-American aspiring to pursue a career in opera administration or even arts administration he said, “It’s a great opportunity. This field is wide open, whatever color you are, but especially for minorities. If you know what you are doing,
you will be very welcomed. It’s hard to express: as a career option arts administration is just not up there. It’s a hidden field, but you won’t have any problems; it will provide you with certain kinds of opportunities.” Although Michael Ching does not consider himself a trail-blazer, he feels that he is perceived as one because of his work in opera as a non-European-American.
Linda Jackson was born July 17, 1953 in New York and grew up in the New York City metropolitan area. She was fortunate to grow up in a supportive and upwardly mobile family. Both Ms. Jackson’s father and brother earned degrees in Law. Her father had a career in law and was involved in New York City politics. Her brother works as an attorney in the entertainment industry. Her mother taught in the New York City public school system and was very much into the arts. As a result, Ms. Jackson and her brother attended all kinds of shows growing up. She shared this story:

When I got into high school, I am not even sure why, but I ended up with a group of friends who put the shows on in high school. I think that contributed a lot to sort of how I got involved in this. Both my parents were very much into my brother and I pursuing professional careers and going to college and those kinds of things. It was up to us to decide where we wanted to go and what we wanted to do. In that sense it was a really supportive household and just not feeling like there was anything that we couldn’t do.

When I asked her which family member most influenced her career path she responded, “Probably my mother in the sense that we went to the arts, but my father also because he taught me to be fearless.” Neither of her parents were involved in the arts. While Ms. Jackson was in college, her mother repeatedly told her she needed to get an education degree to have something to fall back on. Although her father always believed she should have gone to law school, he encouraged her to do whatever she wanted as long as she was happy and successful. She also credits her father for helping her develop a strong business sense.

Although not a big opera supporter, Ms. Jackson’s mother attends opera. She is an avid theater and dance attendee. Even now, she and her mother still attend the theater together. Ms. Jackson stated, “She goes to opera because I work in it.” Her brother attends performances of opera. She said, “I made him be in an opera once down in Florida. He was obsessed with being on stage with Domingo. He enjoys it, but again, he is not a regular opera goer.” Her father has also attended some of the shows she has produced. Her parents most influenced her career path by saying it was okay to do it. She said, “No one ever said, ‘You shouldn’t be doing that. Well, you know. There is no money in opera. Why don’t you be a doctor?’” At times she thinks that her parents
wonder how she got into opera because it is atypical. She said, “More than anything, they worry. We have a lot of conversations about fundraising and audiences and things like that, but I think they see I am happy, and that is what is most important.”

Ms. Jackson’s earliest memory of opera occurred in sixth grade. She thinks she saw a production of Giuseppe Verdi’s *La Traviata*. But she does not think this early exposure to opera had an influence on her career. Only after years of remembering spotty parts of the production, deducing that her teacher would not have taken her class to see something unpopular, and recalling that in the last act someone died in a bed, does she believe it may have been *La Traviata* that she was first exposed to. Most of her peers work in opera or the performing arts, so they understand her interest in opera.

Ms. Jackson believes ethnicity and race were important to her family because of her father’s involvement in New York City politics. She shared this story:

I did not consciously understand this until I was old enough. My father used to go down South and do a lot of voter registration. I never quite realized until I was an adult that on all those trips he was making he might not come home. That was really sort of eye-opening. It is interesting because this past Thanksgiving he was telling a story about being down in the South and being careful about how they went out and having police escorts. It was sort of scary. It was fascinating to hear but very scary.

Ms. Jackson defines herself first as a woman, second as a Christian, and third an African American. She shared this thought:

I will say this, I am honestly glad I did not grow up White. It is not because I was necessarily a big, out-there, Black pro-whatever. It is just that I don’t think I would have the opportunities or the sensitivity that I have if I had been raised as something comfortable. I mean I think the challenges that have been presented to me because I am a woman and because I am Black have made me a better person. I am not sure I would have had those same challenges if I had just been raised a White male upper middle class or something else. I am not sure I would have the same humility.

Yet she does not feel she is on a mission. She stated, “I feel very strongly, and I feel it is very important for me to be successful at what I do because I have to continue to be in a position where I can be a role model.” She also shared this story:

When I was at Chautauqua I was very conscious about how we handled color-blind casting and all of those issues. It is not as though I have gone out and done anything major or important in terms of wanting to change the nature of how the
field works. For a short time actually, I worked at 651 at BAM (Brooklyn Academy of Music). When I was hired there it was because Mickey Shepherd was running the organization and wanted to bring Opera Ebony in. Wayne and Ben just weren’t interested. Part of me always wanted to work with a company that was African American, but part of it is having the resources to do it, and part of it is just trying to figure out where to do it. You know if I had been wealthy, I might have been able to start a company on my own, but barring that it has been important to me to work in companies and organizations where I can make sure I can influence casting.

Implementing color-blind casting ethnically is not always easy in opera because of personal aesthetic preferences. But Ms. Jackson shared this:

It’s like if you watched television and you were an alien and you landed here and you turned on the television, you would believe that from watching commercials there was a comfortable ethnic mix in this country and that everybody is accepting of everybody else. You see a Black man and an Asian woman in their home doing the laundry. Part of the reason that I chose to stay in opera as a field originally was that the first time I did a production of Butterfly the soprano singing Butterfly was an African American. That was in a summer festival season, but then when HGO (Houston Grand Opera) did it on the main stage; we also had an African American in both casts. The first time I did Butterfly I thought there is something wonderful about this field where it does not matter as long as vocally the person is able to portray the role. The fact that was accepted made it much more interesting to me as a profession. It was also that I could get work in it. Now, that is not to say that there aren’t all kinds of racial problems and inequities in the field, but it certainly is much more open and inviting.

Ethnically, Ms. Jackson defined herself as African American. I asked her why. She responded, “Oh, I was saying that to be politically correct. I rarely use that term. I usually say Black because to me it is all words. It just makes me really crazy that in 2006 we are having this conversation anymore.” When I asked her if there were times in her, life being non-European-American was more or less important to her she stated, “It becomes more important because society makes it more important. Therefore becoming the first Black woman to run an opera company is important for that reason, which is stupid, as opposed to it just being important because I’m capable of running an opera company. That, of course, is important for that very reason, but that’s a stupid reason. It is less important to me most of the time. Most of the time I just don’t understand why it should be more important.” Yet, Ms. Jackson does believe she has experienced racism:
I grew up in the 60s and 70s, and so it was more an issue because people were still very defined by their races. Being a Black woman you become very conscious of the fact that because you satisfy two stereotypical quotas when somebody is looking for you. I am sure I’ve had advantages I would not have had if I had been a Black man or a White woman.

She shared this when speaking about the complexity of ethnicity and race in terms of work related social activities:

It is more about, you know, going to a cast party with a group of people who may or may not be prejudiced. It is not about, “Oh she’s Black; she should not be stage-managing.” It is “Oh is it going to be okay to be at this person’s home or something like that.” You know, at first when I started in Houston, which was for better or worse, the South, and the same thing is true of Florida. You are a little bit conscious of that, but as time goes on and people get to know you and accept you, it goes away.

Ms. Jackson finds the sexist factor more prominent in the field. She said, “I very consciously feel, ‘Oh, she could not possibly know what she is talking about. She is a girl.’” She has found this particularly in business communities involving Boards of Directors. She said, “There are times when I feel like, I bring it on myself. I know my voice pitches up when I am angry or excited or trying to make a point, and I wish it didn’t. I would probably be better at that if I was a male, but I do think that there are times when I realize it would have been a lot easier to make the case if I was a guy in a business suit in a room with a bunch of business men.” For Ms. Jackson, it appears that her gender is more problematic than her status as a non-European-American in U.S. society. When I asked her about this, she expounded on the ethnicity, gender, and race mix and its impact:

I think it is different more than anything else. If I had been born ten years earlier and raised in Georgia, I am sure it would be very different than being born and raised in New York City and being part of a very prominent culture in Manhattan of upwardly mobile African Americans, Black Americans who were involved in politics. There were things that my father and mother were able to do that I know their parents weren’t able to do. But I also know that because they were able to do it, they were not even issues for my brother and I. When I first went to Chautauqua as the production stage manager with Cynthia Auerbach, I remember when we first got there in the summer of 81, neither one of us would have been able to buy property at Chautauqua. No one would have sold to a Jew or a Black person; it would not have happened. I think the first Black family to buy a house there would have been maybe late 90s and Jewish property owners were probably
a little bit earlier than that. I can remember laughing about the fact that the ladies running the opera company can’t buy property. So again, a lot of things just naturally changed over the course of time. When you are in situations where you are surrounded by people who are more tolerant it’s very different. The female thing I don’t think has kept me from participating in things. I think that we are in a time where that would be politically incorrect. It is just a question of how much harder you have to work to make an impact.

Ms. Jackson has a mixed group of friends and associates; although, she acknowledges that she has more White friends because of the field she works in. Yet, Ms. Jackson has always had a comfort level relating with people of diverse ethnic backgrounds and heritages. This is something she believes was developed early on. For example, because her mother was a teacher, she attended high-achieving elementary, middle, and high schools:

There was a book written in the 60s called *Triumph in a White Suburb*, and it was about the movement of Blacks into a White community that was successful because the Whites technically didn’t run. It was written about Teaneck, and that is where we moved. So from the time I was in the fourth grade until the time that I was a senior in high school in Teaneck, we were a very well integrated community, very professional. I went to Bar Mitzvahs as well as Sweet 16s. All through high school kids were interracially dating. So we are talking in the 60s. My brother who is two years behind me, actually started to experience the decay of that. So it was always very integrated, very mixed, we were all very college-bound, high achieving. You know, all my friends went to college, and we all sort of had aspirations toward professional careers.

When discussing the bi-cultural competence and challenges negotiating ethnic and racial identities in a majority-dominated world, Ms. Jackson stated, “I’m not any different. I feel like a few people can’t figure out why I work in opera. It’s not because it is White; it is because it’s opera. I get that more than I get working in a European environment. But I never felt like I had to change to adapt to either of those situations in any way.” I asked Ms. Jackson if she thought it was easy or more difficult to attract African/Black Americans to opera, she responded:

I am assuming we are hearing from more singers of color than a lot of other places are in terms of wanting to audition for us and everything, which is sort of a blessing and a curse, because I think there is also some expectation that we are going to be more accepting. A bad singer is a bad singer no matter what color they are. You know, it is sort of an awkward kind of position to be in. We certainly both get asked for advice from singers about career and what they
want to do and what our experiences have been. This does not happen as much here because Willie is such a prominent figure here. Certainly more people who don’t know anything about the field know about Willie as being out there, then necessarily know about me. It was a bit different when I was at Chautauqua, but when I was general director, I used to get that a lot. Unfortunately, it does get taken a step further, which is to say that I think there are singers who think, “I have a better shot at getting hired because both Willie and Linda are Black.” And that is an unfortunate belief, because like I said, if you can’t sing, you can’t sing.

She also spoke about a discussion she had with a colleague about why African/Black Americans support African-American opera companies:

Opera Ebony used to have a relationship with a company in Philadelphia called Opera North. I remember having a conversation with her once and she said, “What is frustrating to me about Opera North is that the productions are really bad, and as a result it is influencing the decision of Blacks to go to the opera.” I said, “What are you saying?” She said, “Opera North will do a production of Marriage of Figaro, and they will sell lots of tickets, and they will have all these Black audience members there, but they don’t go see productions at the Opera Company of Philadelphia or Pennsylvania Opera Theatre.” I told her that they go because they see themselves reflected on the stage. It has nothing to do with the quality of the opera. They are not coming to see your shows because if there are all White singers up there, no one will be interested, and they won’t care.

At one point in her career, Ms. Jackson desired to work for an African-American opera company. African-American opera companies developed based on a similar philosophy as culturally-specific arts organizations such as Dance Theater of Harlem and Alvin Ailey. These companies have staffing, board members, and contributors who are people of color because they create a situation where those people are interested in those art forms. Ms. Jackson expounded on this:

My parents knew one couple who are actually very big opera supporters. But they also go to see dance and financially support dance. I don’t know if they would have supported dance had there not been places like Dance Theatre of Harlem and Alvin Ailey. Does that necessarily mean they have a different opinion of those art forms? No, there is still the fact that they are European classically based art forms that still sort of have no direct relationship to whatever the African American experience is. It is just that the nature of those companies has created a situation where people feel that there is an obligation to support them. Having a company like Opera Ebony would get support for the same reason. But just because say Willie and I are here, we are not necessarily going to generate a larger response from the African American community unless we were going to be do a whole
season of productions of operas geared towards African Americans. Even then I am not sure we would generate huge support because most people are just not into opera.

The extracurricular activity Ms. Jackson mostly participated in was church. But she also participated in a lot of after-school programs at the theater. I recognized a connection between her extracurricular activities and her career, she responded:

It wasn’t planned though. I went to high school like the usual. I went to college, and I was like, “Oh, I am not going to do shows for a while, I need to focus on my career.” I mean I had planned to be a doctor at one point, and then I got over that, and then I was going to be a lawyer. Then I planned to go to seminary. Then I got to college, and literally my freshman year dorm was across from the theater. I went over to volunteer and then just sort of after four years ended up being a theater major. It had not been my intent.

She double majored in English and Theater at Douglass College at Rutgers, but she is not sure when she consciously decided to pursue a career in theater. She said, “Probably not until I was like into my Junior or Senior year. I knew that I wanted to go into theater, but I really wanted to go into straight theater. I thought it would be the coolest thing to be a Broadway stage manager. I wanted to produce at the Beaumont Theater.” After earning her B.A., she considered earning a Master’s in English, but eventually applied to NYU and went to graduate school for a year.

The person who most influenced her career decisions after graduation from high school and college was her undergraduate department chairman. He taught her about production managing. After college, she immediately stage managed for one of her professors who had written a play. She and the professor became good friends, and for the next two years she worked on all of his productions. She said, “It sort of got me through my early stage in New York.” She does not believe that her ethnicity, gender, and race impacted her college experiences. She stated, “It was a very mixed program.”

The mentor relationships that most benefitted her career progression were with her department chair at Rutgers and David Gockley at Houston Grand Opera. She said, “I always had a really great relationship with David and still a lot of what I know about producing opera and running a company, I learned working with him. I still sometimes call him and ask him what he thinks.” She also acknowledges the impact of working with
Bob Herman in Miami. She said, “Bob ran a company in a very different way than David and with a very different artistic sense.” Also working for Cynthia Auerbach at Chautauqua and Jane Weaver at the Texas Opera Theater program. Between these four mentors, Ms. Jackson learned the different ways she could manage an opera company:

David is very much devoted to the art form and to exploring it and pushing its boundaries and not understanding boundaries. Bob was much more regimented and taught me a lot about discipline. From Cynthia I learned the undaunting belief that you cannot have an opera unless you have competent people who get along and function as a group of people together. Interpersonal relationships within the staff are tantamount to having a successful company. Jane was also just very daring in terms of the way she just sort of put Texas Opera Theater together. We used to argue a lot, and that taught me a lot, too, because it helped me identify the things that I knew I did not want to do.

When I asked Ms. Jackson about her feelings regarding diversity in opera administration at the executive-level, she responded, “It doesn’t exist.” She explained:

Well, but there is a reason it doesn’t exist. Why would you choose to go into opera? First of all, let’s say you are White. Why would you choose to go work for an opera company? Unless you were predisposed for some reason, it has such a minority support anyway. It’s such a small niche of people that are responding to opera versus the whole rest of the entertainment field to begin with. So next, well, suppose you are a non-White person, whether you are Black or Latino or Asian or anything like that. I mean, you know if you take a look, and I don’t know if anyone has done this, I always thought we should. If we look at the percentage of non-European-American people that are involved in opera as an art form on a percentage basis and apply that to whatever is the percentage base of the population that you are talking to. It’s probably the same percentage, it just looks different because you don’t see so many minorities. But the reality is that there are not a lot of people there to begin with.

Ms. Jackson further expressed her frustration at the field’s response to diversity employment recruitment and retention:

During my years on the board of OPERA America, we would have a lot of discussions about diversity at opera companies. It would come up. Well, we have a hard time finding good singers of color who have been trained, particularly Blacks. I think that is true. I think that the ability to be able to financially afford what you need to do is very difficult on young African Americans. It’s hard on White singers too. They would say, “What are we going to do? I would say things like, “You know, you don’t have to just hire Black singers. You can hire a Black receptionist. You don’t have to like opera to be a receptionist. You don’t have to like opera to be a finance director. It’s a job.
In terms of looking at how balancing diversity issues are viewed when dealing with grant funding agencies, she does not think it really matters if a person is into opera or not. She said, “We are talking about basic office jobs that have to be filled. Now this gets back to, it still has to be a choice. I am not sure that if someone of color were to look through the want ads, because I had advertised for a receptionist they might necessarily say, ‘Well, I am going to go there because it’s an opera company.’ ‘You know, that’s different.’”

Ms. Jackson also spoke about working with the Brooklyn Academy of Music (BAM). Because there is an emphasis on hiring from the Brooklyn community, the staff is naturally much more diverse. She said, “Working at BAM is like being at the UN. You know, the first time I went to the Christmas party, I mean everybody was there. The head of the finance program at BAM when I was there was Black. Her assistant was Asian. The rest of the staff was like Black or Latino. It was like Rainbow Coalition working at BAM because they hired out of the community.”

She thinks most performing art forms are bad about hiring people who are not passionate and interested in the art form. She said, “It never occurs to anybody that the receptionist does not have to love opera to answer the phone. I think that tends to be what happens a lot. Part of that comes because we don’t pay as well as a lot of other people. The assumption is that you are going to look for somebody who wants to work there.” She does not believe that active discrimination is the cause for the lack of diversity in executive opera administration. She said, “Opera is a conscious choice. It is not like when you are growing up Black, somebody says, ‘Don’t forget to think about working for an opera company.’”

Ms. Jackson had very little administration preparation, but she shared this: I started as a stage manager and had a full theater training background and pretty much stage managed. I guess it was in Houston when I realized that stage managers sort of have to know everything. A stage manager is in on pretty much every decision that has to be made. You know, I am a natural organizer, and all of that, so it was an easy enough transition into being a production manager because when you are a production manager you are managing budgets, and it was easy enough to develop an understanding of the budget and budgeting and all of that. There wasn’t any formal training. I didn’t do a degree in arts management or that type of thing.
Yet, stage managing serendipitously assisted her in becoming a leader. She had always been a production manager. She never intended to become the head of an opera company, but she shared this thought about how it happened for her, “Literally, I was number two, my boss died, and they promoted me. You know, Chautauqua is a unique experience because you are not directly responsible for your fundraising, so it was easy enough to run a company without having to have that part. I don’t know, it just happened.”

None of her training directly dealt with diversity; she said, “I assume that when you are working you hire people that you have some personal evaluation skills to be able to tell if somebody is a good person or not. I believe that people are basically honest and hardworking, and if you tell me that you can do something, we will hire you to do it. If you can’t then we fire you.” When I asked her how her knowledge of management principles assisted her in gaining her current position, she responded, “I don’t think it is knowledge. To me it’s logic.” She explained the difference between knowledge and logic:

I mean there is nothing formal about it for me. The nature of Chautauqua every summer and the staffing there. It can’t apply here because I have the same staff here, but the staffing at Chautauqua changed every summer. The composition of the staff, it was like if I hired a stage manager who had these types of skills, then I knew when I was hiring the other stage manager that I had to look for someone who had a different type of skill. Depending on the stage managers, how that was going to affect the company. I always hired personalities. I have always hired people that I knew were going to get along with each other. I would rather hire a person who has really good ethics and morals, but perhaps not the best skill set because I believe skills can be taught if someone is intelligent. I would rather know that people are going to get along. It is just sort of instinctual because that is the way I want to work. I want to work with people who laugh a lot, who have a good time, who have a great sense of humor, but who also are going to get the work done. But I mean I don’t think that happened as a result of any type of formal training. It was a result of working with all of these different people. I mean for as serious as David Gockley is, I have seen a side of him and a sense of humor that I absolutely adore. Bob Herman was a very, very stern person and was sort of formidable in some ways, but still was accessible. Cynthia was really into having a big family, and Jane was really into having a big family. But it wasn’t any sort of formal training.
Ms. Jackson received her first job in opera as a stage manager. Her first job in opera administration came because Chautauqua needed a production manager. She spoke about the occurrence of career opportunities not sought:

I was in the assistant managing director position, which put me in charge of everything when she (Cynthia Auerbach) found out she had lung cancer. She died two months before the season started. At that point, everything was in play, so they just decided not to bring anybody in at that point. We just let the season run, and at the end of the season they said, “Well, you know what you are doing, so…” I didn’t have any choice. I mean I was production manager in Houston, and I was sort of managing director at Chautauqua, and Cynthia died. Then they asked me to be general director. Then suddenly I was a general director.

Chronologically, Ms. Jackson’s career has included positions as stage manager, production manager, managing director, and general director. She stage managed in Houston and Miami, stage managed and production managed at Chautauqua, then became managing director and general director at Chautauqua, also general director for the Berkshires Opera Company. She held positions with the Byrd Hoffman Foundation/Watermill Center, Opera Pacific, New York City National Opera Company, and the Brooklyn Academy of Music. I asked Ms. Jackson, knowing what she knows now, what changes would she have made in the course of her career path. She shared this insight about how important it is to recognize career opportunities not sought for:

None of it was choice. I am in New York; my friend calls me and says I need an assistant for three months. What are you doing? I told him I didn’t know anything about opera. He says you know how to stage manage, come to Houston. I went to Houston for three months. It was supposed to be three months. Got to Houston and stayed through Spring Opera Festival, and they asked me to come back the next year. I ended up staying there for three years. I only got to the point where at the end of that time I was ready to go back to New York and do theater again. So I moved back to Boston with my boyfriend and thought I would go back and pursue my career there. Got another phone call from another friend of mine, the same person, who was now in Washington. He needed an assistant. So I went there. Another friend called and said, “I am going to be in Miami in the spring. Can you come down and help me?” I told him sure, no problem. We were in the house one day, and the phone rings. Cynthia called my friend and said, “I am going to Chautauqua Opera. Will you come stage manage for me?” My friend said, “No, I am going to Santa Fe. But wait a minute let me give the phone to Linda.” Cynthia was looking for a stage manager. I did not know her, and I went to Chautauqua. I mean that is what happened.
Ms. Jackson’s career also advanced because of a formal and informal network that worked for her serendipitously. She further explained:

Yes, but no choices, and even going from Chautauqua to BAM even that, Mickey wanted to bring Opera Ebony to Brooklyn. She asked if there were any Black/African American opera administrators out there, she did not know anything about opera. She called me and said she needed an opera administrator there. You know there was no point where I consciously said I wanted to do this. It has sort of been a natural progression of things. And a couple of times I have actually thought about pursuing other companies or interviewing, but I wasn’t hired.

Ms. Jackson and I discussed that in U.S. society the people who succeed are the ones who go after success. The idea of letting it happen and preparing to respond to unsought career opportunities caused me to reconsider my own career strategies. She said, “It is a little scarier that way. Ninety percent of my jobs started with me. Like the position in Houston, I was the first person to hold that. I mean, you know the stage managing thing pretty much, but when I went to BAM that position started with me. I can think of some other things that started with me.”

I asked Ms. Jackson about the personal and professional qualities that caused Connecticut Opera to select her for her current position, She stated, “Well, I think part of coming here is the fact that I knew Willie, so that had a big influence on it. Then well, you know, the rest of it just spoke for itself.” She did not experience any major challenges in the application and interview process. But the realities of serving in an executive opera administrator’s position are more difficult than she anticipated. She stated, “I just thought it wouldn’t be quite so hard. It is harder than I thought. It is hard to bring a company together. It is hard managing.” When I asked her about barriers to her career success, she shared this insight:

I don’t know that I had any barriers. I know that there are continuing barriers, like you are always dealing with a board of directors that is not always what you want them to be. You are always dealing with not having enough money to do the things that you want to do. I don’t know that there has ever been anything that I felt kept me from getting what I wanted to do. I just think I am one of those people who just aren’t receptive. I definitely don’t think the barriers are necessarily about the color issue. Because of the places I have worked. Even
being a woman, that is really anecdotal in having to deal with specific people just not paying attention to you.

The career strategy Ms. Jackson used to work through feeling like certain colleagues were not listening to her defined perseverance, she said:

You just keep doing it. I figure sooner or later they are going to get it or not. You know, you can spend a lot more time trying to explain things and justify things, although I am not sure that is really bad because it does really force me to rethink things. It really does just sort of force you to look at things differently, but when you are dealing with people who aren’t listening the first time, you find different ways to look at everything, and in the process you refine and make the arguments better for yourself.

Ms. Jackson thinks the most difficult issue she has faced in her career as a non-European-American or woman is getting people to understand what she is talking about:

I am never sure if I am not explaining it well or if it is because people don’t hear what I am saying. It becomes so very clear for me, that and I can be so focused on what I am talking about that I just lose sight of whether I am being clear. It is not until I am running up against people who just don’t completely understand what I am trying to say. I don’t know that it is emotional or psychological. I mean, to me the most difficult thing is trying to create art in a society where it’s not a priority, and it has nothing to do with race or sex or anything. We are dealing with the United States where these are not priorities, and it is very difficult to continue functioning when you are struggling and are constantly at the mercy of everybody else in order to survive.

Despite the difficulty of creating a safe space for an unpopular art form to thrive, Ms. Jackson is still committed to opera and her work as an executive opera administrator. When I asked her if she would choose opera administration if she had to make her initial career decision again, she stated,” It really was not an initial career decision. I like it a lot, and I don’t regret it. Would I have initially made that choice? I don’t know. Probably not. I don’t know what I would have done differently because it just sort of happened. I was happy with that. It was not like this was the area I want to go in.” The most significant incident that impacted Ms. Jackson’s professional development was the death of her superior manager at Chautauqua Opera. She said, “Even at the point when I was her managing director it did not occur to me that I would run the company. I just assumed that I would be in the number two position, so probably that is the most significant thing
that happened and made a difference for me.” This incident taught her that she knew a lot more about opera than she thought she did. She stated:

I figured out that I knew more about producing opera. I didn’t study opera, and so when I started working at HGO as a stage manager it was sort of learning on my feet. In terms of the ability to learn and manage an organization, I mean, I guess I sort of realized I did know how to do it. I still feel like I am learning a lot about it all the time, but I guess certainly I realized that it was a skill set and an ability that I had all the time and it seemed to suit me okay.

Ms. Jackson feels that her career path is similar to European-American executive opera administrators. She thinks that most of the executive opera administrators of her generation were singers, directors, or conductors:

There were no arts administration programs like there are now. You know, people were singers, or they were directors, or they were conductors, and they were not necessarily successful in those areas, but they had a good business background, and they became the general director. Now it is very different. They go to school, and they think, “Oh gee, I might want to run an opera company,” and they take the courses, and they go do it. But in our time, it just was not the way it happened.

When I asked Ms. Jackson if she thought she would have studied arts administration were there programs during her collegiate years, she responded:

Probably not, because I really loved the process of being on stage and in production so at that point in my career when I was in college I would have probably been leaning towards wanting to be a stage manager or something like that. It would’ve never occurred to me then to work in opera. I really think too, because when I started working in opera as a stage manager, companies weren’t hiring stage managers for opera. You would see if there was somebody local, and there were a few of us out there who really were stage managers who were doing it. That is very different now too. Across the board there is more professional training in terms of all the positions in opera than there were when I started which was thirty years ago. When I was in college it never would have occurred to me to actually think that long term I would be doing administrative work.

Although Ms. Jackson is not currently mentoring anyone, she maintains that stage managing is the best way to learn opera administration. She provides this advice for an executive opera administrator aspirant, “If you can be at a company where it is really hands-on, you can really understand how the shows go together, and it will also help you figure out whether or not you can deal with people. If you can deal with artists and
artists’ egos and all of that, then you have a better shot at being a good administrator long
term, whether it is opera or any place for that matter. The rest of it just sort of depends on
your intuition and your instincts. Part of it overall is just dealing with people.” Ten years
from now, Ms. Jackson still wants to produce operas. But she thinks the bigger problem
is if she can continue her work because of U. S. attitudes about opera and the arts:

I saw a production of *Atys*. It was the closest thing to perfect that I have ever
seen, and I have yet to produce mine. I have done some productions that I am
really happy with. I can look at about five different things that I have been
associated with in my career, and every time I do a new one it bumps something
off the list, but I still don’t feel that I have done one where I can definitively say
like, “that’s the best work I have ever done.” I know I will strive for that for the
rest of my life because that is what I want to be able to do.

The five productions Ms. Jackson is most proud of throughout her career are *Turn of the
Screw* at the Berkshires, *Giovanni, Trilogy, Don Pasquale*, and *Cosí*.

Ms. Jackson thinks affirmative action is important because the problem that the
intervention was purposed at solving has not been solved:

Part of where affirmative action has failed is less on the part of people who are
the decision makers as much as it is on the people who need to go forward. I
think we have done enough education with minorities to be able to say you need
to be pushing yourself more. That is, where the shortfall has come is that the
affirmative action program has spent a lot of time rewarding people for doing
stuff that they really should have pushed themselves a little bit more to do on
their own. And I am not a person who believes we should get rid of affirmative
action. I just think that it is important to make sure people understand what the
goals are and in all that.

Still, Ms. Jackson does not think affirmative action benefitted her career progression in
arts administration. She said, “You know, I don’t believe it has. I mean affirmative action
did not benefit my career. It affected my start. Like I said before, because my father and
his generation had positions and created experiences, it made it that much easier for my
generation to be successful. Hopefully, my generation has made it that much easier to be
successful for someone else.” Although she does not think ethnicity and race factor into
succeeding as an opera administrator, she wonders if opera as a field by virtue of what it
is has the potential to attract different races. Ms. Jackson spoke about this more:
More than just opera being a European art form is working against it. There is no money. It is expensive. It is not for profit. It is hard to make a living. It’s not the same kind of money. Given the kind of work I do here, if I was working for a corporation I would be making three times as much money, but I don’t think there are barriers necessarily in terms of administration. I just think it is not a choice that people are going to make, and I am not sure… There are not White people making the choice at this point, either. There is going to be a void soon if we don’t address how to deal with it. It is about compensation packages, and some of it is about just the work load and support systems that there are for nonprofit.

Ms. Jackson and I discussed non-profits further. We both agreed that non-profits do not do a good job marketing themselves as career options. Yet, my position is if non-profits expect to recruit and retain good managers, it will become increasingly important for them to package the idea of “making a contribution to society” so that it is more appealing to work in non-profits, given the low salaries. Ms. Jackson shared more:

There are realities about it. You know, you go from college where you are thrown in with a group of people who are doing all different things from all walks of life. So there you are ten years from now, and you are working for American Red Cross and you are making $35,000 a year, but ten years from now your roommate who decided to be a lawyer is making $400,000 a year. I mean there is a certain amount of that. I think we are better at it and I think that people want to do it, but then there are also the realities of whether or not you can survive or not.

Ms. Jackson does, however think gender comes in to play to some extent. She also talked more about the issue of her ethnicity and race:

I can’t say definitively that it does not. I interviewed for Orlando once upon time. There were many factors that I think contributed to me not being considered seriously. I think my race was part of it because it was Florida, but I also know it was because I was a woman. I also know it was because I was single and didn’t have a family. I think I was just the wrong fit. You know it is interesting. When you go through an interview process, you are interviewing companies as well as they are interviewing you. You are more successful if it is as attractive to you. You present yourself better. In all the instances where there were places where I did that. Like do I wish I had gone to Orlando Opera? I’m glad I didn’t go to Orlando Opera. So as a result I think you sort of influence the decision that people are making as well. But I don’t know that those factors necessarily. . . I also think it has something to do with how you present yourself and whether or not it is the right mix or not. I’d like to believe at this point in time, particularly in a nonprofit, that the right mix won’t be trumped by somebody’s race or sex. I have to believe that at this point in time, because I think that bears out more often than it doesn’t.
When I asked Ms. Jackson why she thought non-European-Americans should pursue careers in executive opera administration, she responded:

Why not? Why would anybody not pursue a career in opera if they are interested? From an administrative point of view, I don’t see that there are barriers. Now maybe I am being naïve, and Willie may have a different opinion about that, but I don’t think so. I think it is more likely that there are… you know, finding African Americans that want to do it.

She advises non-European-Americans who want to become executive opera administrators to question their desire. She feels that her work is so difficult that she is wondering if it can be fun any more. Dealing with a non-sympathetic public is difficult because it relates to the funding climate in the country. There are many more venues to compete with in terms of entertainment. She said, “I would say that if it is about wanting to be an executive director in an arts organization that is one thing. If it is about wanting to be an executive director of an opera company, then I would say that you have got to be sure that is really what you want to do because it is not going to be easy for you to be successful because the job is not going to be easy.” Over her 30-year career in the field, the trends Ms. Jackson most frequently mentioned were funding, the cost to produce opera, arts education, popular cultural trends, programming repertoire that can compete or complement current movie trends, and limited repertoire.

In terms of academic training or leadership development relative to encouraging non-European-Americans to pursue a career path in opera administration, Ms. Jackson said this:

A lot of it has to do with the field being successful and people deciding to choose it as an option. The problem, in terms of education, I think there needs to be better education about arts in general, and not just about creating executive directors for a business. It is about creating corporate executives who understand that they need to be philanthropic at the same time. I think it is about general arts awareness education across the board for everybody whether they end up pursuing a career in the arts or not.

Ms. Jackson thinks she was better at taking risks when she was younger. When it comes to management, however, she thinks people become more conservative and cautious. She spoke about how her responsibilities at Chautauqua allowed her to take a
lot of risks because she was not responsible for fundraising. She said, “They just gave me my budget, and I could go with it. So it is a lot easier to be a lot bolder than when you are sort of having to raise money or anything. In other situations, you start to second guess yourself.” She does not consider herself a trail blazer, but she does consider herself a student of everything:

I’m really good at looking at something and saying that I want to try it and perhaps figuring out a way to do it better and continue it, as opposed to somebody coming up with a brand new idea and taking it forward. If I see somebody do something at another company, I might try it here, but I might try this variation, and it might move it that much further along.

I explained to Ms. Jackson that the question came from looking at her career and bio and thinking that her career has gone in a different direction than what is generally expected from a Black woman. She said, “Probably from 100 feet out there, yeah. But from way up here it is kind of like, you know, it just kind of happened.” Ms. Jackson shared this last insight about her career:

It wasn’t choice. It happened. It worked out. I really love it. Would I have done it again? I don’t know. I might have made different choices. I look at things. Should I have done film training; maybe. I look at the field and I think I don’t know how they survive in the movie business. It is all cut throat. I used to work part-time for my brother. The recording industry makes me sick. It is very cut throat. So you know, I mean, not-for-profit was where I was probably supposed to end up. I like producing. I like making shows. I like creating entertainment for people, but you know. I don’t want to say I’ve been lazy, but it all sort of happened and as a result of things happening it has allowed me to be a little bit bolder about making some choices. Ultimately, it wasn’t my choice. It wasn’t like I said this is where I want to go. I think that has made it more interesting because it wasn’t on a path. My ideal cross-country trip would be able to drive cross country and to stop and read markers and then say, “Oh, gosh, look there is something down here,” and be able to go off and know that I had the year to do it.
Willie A. Waters

Willie Anthony Waters was born October 11, 1951, and grew up in a little town South of Miami, Florida. Everybody in his family sang. Once he was old enough, he accompanied a family singing group on the piano that toured various churches and other organizations in Florida. Both of his parents completed high school, and his father completed two years at Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University (FAMU). His father was a shipping and receiving clerk for Harrell & Kendall Company, which was the largest producer of fresh fruit in South Florida. His mother was a housewife, but she also owned a beauty parlor she ran on their back porch. Mr. Waters’ oldest brother and sister studied operatic singing, which is where he was first exposed to the art form. Another one of Mr. Waters’ brothers played trumpet and was a trumpet minor in college. His grandmother taught him how to read music and play piano when he was four years old. Mr. Waters was immersed in music from a very early age.

Various family members influenced Mr. Waters’ career, including two three siblings, two of whom attended FAMU, and another brother was influential while serving in the Vietnam War. This brother joined a record club, and sent Mr. Waters operatic recordings regularly. His grandmother was very important because she pushed him to read and play music, and to learn repertoire. Although his family does not understand how he chose a career path that led him into opera, Mr. Waters’ family supports his career in opera, particularly when he became artistic director of the Greater Miami Opera. He said:

They all came in mass for the first couple of years. My oldest sister, of course, was very interested. My mother would always go and drag a couple of my aunts along with her. My two younger sisters, initially, would go, because it was an exciting thing for them to see their brother up there conducting an opera. So they all appreciated it. My oldest sister and brother knew more about it than the others did, so they would go even when some of the others wouldn’t. Initially, they all went and dragged my little nieces and nephews along. One of my nieces went to a couple of opera performances last year. She said, “It was because of the experience I had when you were there conducting, so I really got to like it.

When I asked Mr. Waters about his earliest memory of opera, he responded:

My earliest memory of opera is when my sister sang the “Inflammatius” from Rossini’s *Stabat Mater*. Our high school chorus presented it, and she was the
soprano soloist. I was sort of knocked away because of the high C’s at the end. I thought, Whoa! Then her last year at FAMU in 1962 we all drove up for her graduation. The chorus—Rebecca Steel was the choir director then—did the “Halleluiah” from *King of Kings* with band. Even though it’s not opera, it was very operatic, and that sort of knocked me away.

These early exposures to operatic music were powerful for Mr. Waters. But, he also shared more about other early exposures to opera he received: “The Ed Sullivan show was on television and entertainment, and there were always opera singers on Ed Sullivan. The first one I remember hearing was Roberta Peters, and then the next was Richard Tucker, and then there was Leontyne Price. That started around ninth grade.”

In tenth grade, Mr. Waters played trumpet in his high school marching band. The band director introduced his students to opera through recordings and performance by programming the “Triumphant scene” from Verdi’s *Aïda*. Mr. Waters spoke about this more:

He said, “Now, I want you to hear it the way it really should be with all the voices and orchestral instruments.” Again, I was sort of knocked out. There is just something that just spoke to me in a way that nothing had up to that point. That was in the early spring of that year. I ended up having a free period later towards the end of the school year. I asked him if I could come into the band room and learn some of this music and listen to some of this music. He said sure, and he bought a couple of more recordings. I would sit with the libretto, and I had no idea of Italian or any of that kind of stuff, but I was particularly interested in the *Aïda*.

The operatic recording of *Aïda* starring Leontyne Price made a lasting impression on Mr. Waters. His band director encouraged him to listen to the entire recordings:

I got so hooked. I was doing it day in and day out. The other two recordings were *Lucia di Lammermoor* with Roberta Peters and *Don Giovanni* with Sutherland. I wasn’t nearly as interested in those because they did not have Leontyne. The fact that she was a Black singer doing this, I would go to the library and read up on everything that I could about her, and it just made such an impression. I guess that sort of planted the seed deep down inside.

The following year, Mr. Waters became involved in the Upward Bound Program at the University of Miami (UM). Through this program, he had access to the libraries at UM. His band teacher once again encouraged him to take advantage of all the music at his disposal:
My teacher was the same person who introduced me to those recordings and said, ‘You have the musical library there. Why don’t you start listening to various operas?’ He gave me a list of the most popular operas, which were those three and *Don Giovanni*, *La Bohème*, and said in your spare time just go and start listening. I had afternoons off during the summer, so I would go, and I would sit for hours and just start listening to these recordings.

By the time Mr. Waters graduated from high school, he was totally immersed in opera. Throughout the tenure of his education, Mr. Waters primarily attended predominantly Black schools. It was not until his eleventh grade year that he had his first White teacher. She taught biology and loved opera. She took five honors students, including Mr. Waters, to live performances of ballet, symphonies, and opera. Mr. Waters shared this story:

She bought the tickets and everything, that was around 1967, and that was when I saw my first live opera performance, which was *Madame Butterfly*. The role of *Butterfly* was sung by a lady named Irene Patti Schwartz. She was a principal singer of the Miami Opera, the Florida Grand Opera now, and she is also a distant relative of Adelina Patti. Later we talked more about all of that, and I said to her that she was very much responsible for me being in opera because of that first experience. Seeing *Butterfly* on stage was just amazing.

This early exposure to opera was crucial to Mr. Waters’ career path and career success.

Mr. Waters’ career aspirations, plans, and goals before college were to become a concert pianist, but he tired of practicing and grew more interested in opera. He gave up studying applied piano and decided to major in music education. He said, “That seemed to be the safest thing. There are loads of teachers in my family, and my mother said that you need something that you can fall back on and that typical kind of thing, so I went with education.” After changing his major in his second year, he concentrated on accompanying and opera. He also became involved with UM’s opera workshop. The opera coach saw his interest in opera and asked him if he wanted to help with the program. Although he did not seek this opportunity out, it proved very beneficial for Mr. Waters:

She asked if I would like to be involved as a go-for. She let me assist her, and I played some rehearsals, not very many because my chops were not so great at that time. Just being in the environment, that was really exciting and really interesting. When I entered the University of Miami in September, she was saying you ought
to stay involved in the Opera Workshop. Then she died that year, and the whole situation with the Opera Workshop was in flux.

Music education majors study all musical instruments. As a result, Mr. Waters studied voice as a part of his degree plan. Ironically, Mr. Waters’ voice teacher, Mary Henderson Buckley, was the wife of Emerson Buckley, who was the artistic director of Greater Miami Opera. Mrs. Buckley encouraged Mr. Waters to work with the opera workshop and to conduct opera scenes. Mrs. Buckley also introduced Mr. Waters to her husband, who then invited him to audition for the Greater Miami Opera chorus. He said:

I was not a singer, but I could sing, and I was studying with her, and I was a good enough musician, so they took me into the chorus. That next summer, the Opera Company got a grant to do opera excerpts in parks. The county had a show mobile, and they would do performances on this portable stage. They decided five of those performances they wanted to do as opera. It just so happens that two of the places they wanted to perform were Liberty City, and the other was Richmond Heights, where I grew up. They did some PR and everything on the fact that I was from that area. We had huge crowds, and that was my first experience doing something like that. I even narrated. A lot of my friends came from high school. That was my first exposure to that kind of live performance. We did cut-down versions of *Bohème* and *Butterfly*. I would prepare and play the piano for the performances.

After graduating from UM, Mr. Waters decided to attend graduate school to study conducting. He auditioned for three schools, Manhattan School of Music, the Conservatory of Music at the University of Cincinnati, and one other school he could not remember. Manhattan School of Music rejected him because he had little to no conducting experience. Both Cincinnati and the other school accepted him. Cincinnati offered him half of an assistantship and other assistance. He was excited about this opportunity because he would study with Thomas Schippers, one of Leontyne Price’s principal conductors. He was later told that Mr. Schippers was almost never there, but he shared this:

Out of the clear blue sky I walk into the University of Miami School of Music and looked on the bulletin board, and there is an announcement from Memphis State University for a new program in operatic coaching and conducting, which would be run by George Osborne. The person in charge of the actual participants would be Kip Cutchstedder, Mignon Dunn’s husband. I applied, the next week George called and asked if I would come to Memphis for an interview and audition. They flew me to Memphis, and I went, auditioned, and he offered me the job on the
spot. It was a new program, half sponsored by the state, half sponsored by the University. I didn’t have to put any money into it. It was a complete free ride. I said, “Why not?”

Mr. Waters planned to start his graduate studies in September, but his plans changed quickly:

In the latter part of June, George called and said I just fired my pianist. We are doing two shows this summer, *Purlie* and *South Pacific*, and I just want to know if you would be available and interested in coming. I said, “Okay, when?” He said next week. I said, “Okay.” I quit the job that I was going to have for the summer, and I moved to Memphis towards the end of June and stayed there. I went there, I arrived about 4:00 in the afternoon, and there was a chorus rehearsal of *Purlie*, a piece I had never heard, and I had never seen a piece of the music or anything, and I had to do the rehearsal. I said, “You know this is putting me in a very precarious position.” He said, ‘Well, from what I understand, you are a very good musician.’

This experience demonstrated Mr. Waters’ ability to courageously respond to serendipity. He also showed an amazing will to succeed artistically under pressure:

George decided he was only going to conduct the opening night. Then he was going to turn it over to me, but he never told me that. I had only conducted a string quartet at that point. Even though *Purlie* is not a huge orchestra, there were about 15 people in the band. I went through the last couple of rehearsals and the opening night, and then he said, “Okay, it’s yours.” It was a musical so it was not so bad, but I was frightened. But it worked. My two years at Memphis State gave me the opportunity to work with the student orchestra. I was in front of the orchestra practically at least once or twice a week for the whole two years I was there. That’s the way it is. That is the way you learn. You can’t sit in the practice room. You get some of the basics there, but you have to do it. You just have to get in front of the band and do it.

Mr. Waters, however, had big problems about Memphis because of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s assassination there. Nonetheless, Mr. Waters’ decision to attend Memphis State turned out to be one of the best things he ever did. Yet, there were challenges. The first year of the program, he was the only Black graduate student in the School of Music. He said, “Being a Black graduate student in a program like that involving opera is very unusual. There were just all kinds of crazy thoughts that were going through my mind.” The program was relatively unstructured because an accompanist was needed to help out with the Memphis Opera Theater at Memphis State.
University. This joint community effort with the opera company and the University provided students several performance and administration opportunities.

I asked Mr. Waters how ethnicity and race were important to his family. He answered, “I don’t know that it was. I don’t remember there being a conversation, ‘You must do this because you’re Black, or you must do this because there are no African Americans.’ It was only you must go where your goals and talents takes you.” Mr. Waters also spoke about his mentors, Mrs. and Dr. Buckley at UM, never discouraging his interest in a career in opera because of his ethnicity and race. When he went to Memphis, it was slightly different:

That was my initial exposure in that way to prejudice or to people shunning me because I was Black or whatever. But, I was lucky because the protection that I had in Memphis, because the program I was involved in was a University-sanctioned program that was supported by the state, so there had to be a certain amount of protection and a certain amount of support that they gave me whether I was Black or not. When George hired me, I played an audition for five different people on the staff. I found out later that the vote was unanimous that I should get that position. The whole question of race didn’t come up then. As I got older though, it started dawning on me that I’m the only one.

In our interview Mr. Waters defined himself as an African American. I asked him why. He responded, “I use them interchangeably.” He went on to say, “There have been various movements even in my lifetime. People need that for identity. I don’t need it in that way for identity.” Ethnicity, gender, and race impacted Mr. Waters’ college experiences, but mostly in terms of causing him to question his chosen profession:

I don’t know. Maybe deep down inside at some point I found myself asking, ‘Here I am a Black person. Is there any chance for me to be a concert pianist?’ My teachers were very supportive. My piano teacher, Ivan Davis, accepted me as a piano student. I was the only undergraduate piano student he had ever had at the University of Miami. All the others were grad students, and he was still concretizing at that point, he wasn’t around a lot, but he thought I was very talented so he decided to take me on. He had had other Black students, so it was not a question of him needing to have a Black student.

Mr. Waters does not feel he needs to claim an ethnic identity in the way that some people do. When I asked him what influenced him to think this way, he shared this insight:

Other people initially brought it up to me to say, you realize you are the only African American or the only Black-because at that time it was Black-person
I am not saying that I was totally oblivious, but by the time I came back to the Greater Miami Opera and the plan was for me to become artistic director, there was no question about—myself and the plan. This is not an equal opportunity. This is not an Affirmative Action type of thing. There are many, many other people out there who could have been chosen, who could have been hired for that position, but they chose me, and it wasn’t because I was Black. It had to be because I had the chops to do the job. There would have been everything against them for them to hire me, but instead they took a chance, and it worked out very well.

I asked Mr. Waters if he had experienced what he believes to be racism, sexism, or discrimination. He said, “Yes and no.” He believes his achievements are well deserved because he worked hard. He attributed this philosophy of hard work to his ethnic and racial background:

I always felt, as most African Americans do, that you have to work harder. That is something that was ingrained in me not only from my parents and my family, but from other Black teachers who influenced me as I was getting towards the end of high school and college. Like at the University of Miami, one of the reasons I decided not to be a concert pianist is because I saw all those Cuban kids who were coming into the United States, and they had no problems staying in the practice room eight to ten hours a day and practicing. I just wasn’t going to do that. I just did not feel excited about it enough, although when I was in high school I loved practicing piano, and I loved playing piano, and I still do love playing piano. But my focus just became different.

To a certain extent Mr. Waters felt being non-European-American has hindered his participation in aspects of U.S. society. He shared this story:

I’ve rarely directly encountered racism. There have been a couple of instances that I could specifically point to, one of which was with an orchestra in the Midwest in which I was conducting a Carmen there. It was very obvious that this orchestra wasn’t having it. I was walking down the hall, and there were about six members of the orchestra coming towards me. All six of them turned their heads and ignored me as I walked past them. I felt in rehearsal that there was a certain tension. I asked the string players to do a certain thing… Part of this could be because I was a young conductor, and this was a big symphony orchestra. They just don’t care about young conductors. It was hard for me to figure out at that moment. Of course, I wasn’t thinking about it, I was just trying to get the job done, whether it was because I was Black or whether or not it was because I was a young conductor.
Mr. Waters also spoke about this incident in a 1999 issue of Opera News. In our interview he stated, “Working with the Memphis Symphony, in Jackson, Mississippi, Miami, and Arkansas, I never had any problems with the people. There might have been resistance, there might have been resentment, but they did what I asked them to do.” Mr. Waters believes what he experienced in the Midwest was blatant and obvious resistance to what he was trying to do as a conductor:

It wasn’t because I didn’t know what I was doing. It was Carmen, which is the opera I have conducted more than any other. I know I knew it very well. One never knows because in this day and time people are just not going to say right out to you. But I have always been protected. When I went back to Miami, because I was being groomed to be artistic director, I got to know all the board members because they wanted me to attend all the meetings even before I became artistic director. Because of the position, people were obligated to invite me to private functions and country clubs. I mean I don’t want to necessarily make it look as if they had to do it, but to a certain extent they did because there are certain social things that people have to do. If you’re President or Chairman of the Board, and you have someone who is going to become artistic director, of course, you have to invite them to a party, and, of course, you have to invite them to private meetings and all those things. There are things that are inherent in the position. As general director of this company, there are things that I am sure I get invited to, but people just feel it is something you have to do. Whether they like me or not, they have to do it.

Mr. Waters seemed very comfortable in a mixed environment. Yet he attended primarily African/Black American elementary, middle, and high schools. I was puzzled as to how he developed the comfortability to relate to people of all walks of life ethnically and racially. He credits his parents for bringing him up deeply religious. Two of his aunts worked for wealthy White people in Miami Beach. He visited and played with their kids often. These visits helped him to relate to others despite their ethnic and racial origins. One visit benefitted Mr. Waters in a very special way:

There was a wealthy judge visiting from St. Louis. This lady, Mrs. . . I will never forget her because we had sung at her house before. She asked if we would come over and entertain. My middle name is Anthony, and they used to call me Tony. Then she said, “Tony, why don’t you go ahead and play a couple of solo pieces?” I was studying piano at that time, so I did a couple of things. This judge was really quite taken by it. He pulled my mother aside and said you know I think he is very talented. He paid for all my piano lessons until my freshman year in college. But that was one of the exposures that I had to White people. Going to the University of Miami, there were over 260 or so music majors, and there were
eight Black music majors, and we obviously stuck together. That was my first exposure to the social part of dealing with that and just in dealing in general with people outside of my comfort zone.

He believes a person has to prepare for these kinds of situations. He said, “It became very obvious very quickly that we were looked at in a different way. We were also looked at in a positive way:

Any time anybody needed an accompanist, they came to me. We were also in the Chamber Singers. It was funny because of the sixteen people in Chamber Singers, five of them were Black. Three of them were tenors, and I was one of them. We were all excellent musicians, we were all hard workers, and everybody knew it. Also we were aggressive, and we were ambitious. Anytime anybody wanted anything done, they would call on us to do it. To this day my professors—I’m still in touch with a lot of them—they relate back to those days when we were always the soloists, and we were always the number one, you know… We just realized because of our background and because of the teachers that we had in high school that you got to do not only well, you got to do better. That was a hell of a lot of pressure, especially back then because we are talking about the late 60s and early 70s. It was a constant thing where you had to watch your Ps and Qs all the time. We memorized all the music that we had to sing in university chorale. We became section leaders and all of that kind of stuff. We were not overly aggressive because you know you don’t want to get to that point where people begin to dislike you, but it was very clear that we knew what we were doing and that we were accepted as such.

Mr. Waters maintains he was on a mission. He was determined to make it in the operatic world. He surrounded himself with the right people and placed himself in the right situations, but he said:

I don’t know that a lot of it was really conscious. When the opera coach said, ‘You should come and work with me summer on Il Tabarro’, I didn’t think twice about it. I am saying to myself, “This would give me a chance to work with this professional woman and to learn this piece, and I love opera.” So why not? And when Mary Buckley said why not work with the opera workshop, when all these things, opportunities started presenting themselves, I am saying I have got to do it.

The transition from Memphis to San Francisco Opera was also challenging for Mr. Waters. At that time he was 21 and had no idea about what to expect. He said, “All I knew was that I was going to work for the second largest opera company in America in an administrative position.” In Memphis the administration experience Mr. Waters had
Mr. Adler wanted a conductor who was young enough and not itching to conduct, but would be his personal musical assistant to help with casting, stage directors, and singers. I actually started looking at the San Francisco Opera because Leontyne sang there a lot. Everything revolved around Leontyne. There was a magazine, and I forget the name of the magazine, but Francis Ford Coppola, I think he owned the magazine. It just so happened in 1974, Leontyne opened the San Francisco Opera season in *Manon Lescaut*. Once I found out about this, I subscribed to the magazine because I figured there might be other things about Leontyne. I began, for some crazy reason, absorption of the whole San Francisco culture having no idea that within the next two years I was going to be living and working there. Just like a lot of the other things that happened in my life, it was sort of happenstance. Going to San Francisco and immediately realizing what this city was about, that this is a city that is about culture. It is a city that is about art. It is a city that is about fairness and openness and the San Francisco Opera. You know, my God, here I am in my first season, and it is going to be Sutherland, Pavarotti, Price, Söderström, Domingo; you know, all of these people and in a city that is so cultured.

Mr. Waters had to make a lot of adjustments because he was not entirely ready for all he would experience. He had never experienced an environment of that nature. He had some exposure to social behaviors in Miami working with the opera company, but because his position changed from rehearsal pianist and chorister to administrator, he realized he was perceived in a whole different way. He said, “It was a very, very shocking thing. I had to do a lot of learning very quickly.” Social graces and etiquette regarding how to deal with people, responding to calls, and writing notes became more important. He said, “My parents did teach me, but you know when you are young like that you don’t necessarily have to do it, and you are excused because of it, but now I am in a professional world. You have to carry yourself in a certain way.”

Mr. Waters believes that being African American played a part because all of a sudden the position has changed to one of authority. He said:

I am in a position in which I have to tell people, “Yes, you can do this. No, you can’t do that.” I am a nice person and I hate to say, “No.” But I have to understand that I got to say, “No.” I have to keep relationships even though I do say, “No.” Some people are not going to necessarily accept what I have to say, and some of that probably does come down to the racial thing, but again, there is enough respect for me, partially because I am the kind of person that I am, which
is nice, but also because of my position. That is probably more than anything else, the position. It took a lot of adjusting very, very quickly.

The job required Mr. Waters to work 12 to 14 hours a day, six days a week, often on Sundays. Mr. Water held this position for four-and-a-half years. He said, “I was Mr. Adler’s main assistant for artistic matters and later took on the responsibilities of artistic administrator, which meant negotiating contracts and all that. It was tough.”

In terms of attracting African/Black Americans to opera, Mr. Water does not think it is a correct assessment that people go to the theater to see someone like themselves on stage. He shared this story:

On the other hand, last year, for example, when Angela Brown and Mark Rucker made their Met debuts, there was a noticeable bump in African Americans attending the Met. Now Black people go to the Met all the time because it is New York, but this was very different. Part of it was an orchestrated thing, because Angela was the first Black singer in a long time to make her debut there and doing Aïda, and she had developed herself to a point where people were really watching her and watching her development and all. I mean, there were rows and rows and rows of Black people in the orchestra section. Now the Met ain’t giving out no tickets. These people bought expensive tickets to see this sister sing Aïda. And the same thing with Mark Rucker.

In his work as an executive administrator, Mr. Waters feels that he needs to establish a presence in the community. He has done a lot of work in the schools with students. He thinks it is particularly important for students of color to see a new potential role model:

White kids get that, and they get those kinds of role models. Whether I like the term role model or the responsibility is a whole different thing. I think it is really important, and when I see kids when they come up to me and they see who I am and what I do, they ask questions, and they want to know what it is like. I think it is very important, and I have got to serve that purpose. In Miami, the big question came up when I became artistic director, how much of that should we use? Do we not say that you are the first and only African American who is the artistic director of a major opera company? We wrestled with that for quite a while, and I decided that we should. They agreed because this is something that is news that is important for people to know. I like to think that eventually that’s not necessary, but in this society and in this culture it’s probably always necessary.

When I asked Mr. Waters about how he felt about diversity in executive opera administration, he responded, “There is no diversity. Now there are some in theater. There might be a couple in ballet, especially with Black dance companies, but those are
Mr. Waters was one of four people identified by OPERA America as non-European-American and an executive administrator of a major opera company. He was not surprised by the small number:

It is the same thing about being an opera singer as opposed to being a rap star. You look at the money. You look at the fame and all of that, and you figure I could make more money and do much more and have a better life with this kind of stuff than going into opera. It is not something in the main-stream still. I have to say that we in this business haven’t made it necessarily any more inviting for ethnic types to go into administration. You know, they look at it and see that there are so few people out there and think, “Why should I bother?” I certainly did not look at it as a trailblazing thing when Mr. Adler offered me the job in San Francisco. The reason I took it was because it was the San Francisco Opera, and Dr. Buckley had always said to me that I should learn what is happening backstage to become an all-around person in the opera world. It was about the production aspect of opera and working with one of the leading opera impresario’s and to find out how he casts and how an opera is put together at that level.

Mr. Waters’ preparation helped him become the leader he is through trial and error. These opportunities served him well. Mr. Waters learned management principles on the job because there were few, if any, arts administration programs:

Mr. Adler liked things a certain way. This sort of goes back to something we talked about earlier in having to deal with the other aspects of the opera company, which was very interesting for me, looking at all the backstage stuff and working with the technical director and figuring out which productions can go together and can be in the house at the same time. If it’s a new production with this director, how is that going to work versus a new production with another director? Who is going to direct this? What are the staffing requirements? I was responsible for all the assistant directors, the production assistants, the musical staff, everything. You have three or four operas either rehearsing or performing at the same time. We did not have computers in those days, so this was all done by hand.

Several Black opera singers were influential in Mr. Waters’ career development: Leontyne Price, but also Simon Estes and Martina Arroyo. He said, “Martina and Simon have probably been the biggest influences on my career in terms of helping me get to the next step.” It occurred to me that his primary motivation for pursuing a position at the executive-level in opera administration was guided by a force outside of himself:
I thought I would do this for two years, and I will learn what happens backstage at the opera, especially at the San Francisco Opera, and I might meet Leontyne. Then I’ll go back into conducting, which was what I wanted to do. I ended up staying there for four and a half years. Then Martina called and said, “I am doing Trovatore in Detroit next fall.” She wanted me to conduct it. She came to Memphis to do Forza. She had done Aïda in Miami in 1972, and I was in the chorus. I got to know her, and we kept in touch. So in Memphis two years later, there was this Forza, and I conducted the rehearsal without a score, and she was very impressed with that as were other people. She remembered that. When it came time for the Trovatore, she said, “I am doing a production, and I’d like you to conduct it.” I said I didn’t know if I was going to leave the San Francisco Opera yet. She said, “Well, you have to decide at some point if you are going to remain an administrator or if you are going to be a conductor again.” That was the catalyst that convinced me that now is the time.

In the spring of 1979, Mr. Waters resigned from his position at the San Francisco Opera and immediately received an invitation in Salt Lake City to conduct Carmen. That fall he received three more engagements. But an old mentor from UM wanted him to return to Miami. Dr. Buckley wanted to groom Mr. Waters to become artistic director of the Greater Miami Opera. He served there for 14 years. At the end of his tenure in Miami, Mr. Waters hoped to some day become a general director. The story of how he received his current position at the Connecticut Opera is similar. He became music director and after three years the company decided to make a change:

They asked me if I would be general director. That was a good possibility for me, but I said to them “I will not be the typical general director. I don’t deal with finances. I know how to read a balance sheet, but that is not my expertise. We will have to have someone else.” They planned to hire a managing director to deal with the finances, the board, and all of that. I would deal with the board specifically, but the managing director would have that chief responsibility. I can deal with future planning, I can deal with community. I can deal with rebuilding the image of the company in the community and all of that. I will be the spokesperson for the company because I would be general director. That is how this job happened.

When I asked Mr. Waters what changes he would make in the course of his career path, he said that it would probably not be the same:

I probably would have taken some business courses because it would have put me in a slightly different situation. Everything I know I learned from having been there. I got to know a lot of general directors of opera companies, not only Mr.
Adler, but Carol Fox at the Lyric Opera of Chicago and Mark Feinstein of Washington.

We discussed the personal and professional qualities the board of directors used to select Mr. Waters as general/artistic director of Connecticut Opera:

I’m a nice person. I’m a fair person. I’m a passionate person. I passionately believe in what an opera company and what arts organizations in general have to do with the community, how they interact in the community. I’m a fair player. I’m a collaborator. Somebody on the board said, “When you speak, there is not only a clarity, but there is a passion that we get from you that brings us in, that you are a real spokesperson for the opera.” That is because I love it. I mean there are people who say… this gets back to sort of a racial thing, but they say, “Well, you are so articulate, and you speak so well.” Aren’t I supposed to? I’m not the kind of person who is very confrontational about such things. Leontyne always says, “My protest is on the stage. Every time I go on the stage and do a good performance, that’s breaking down another door.” I really think that is where it is. I never got out and marched, I came up during the Civil Rights era. I figured the more I do well, the better it is for not only me but for everybody else in the community.

In the application and interview process for his current position, Mr. Waters did not experience any challenges; he said, “I tell you, I have been lucky. The only one was from the University of Miami to Memphis State, and that was the audition I had” It appears that a formal and informal network helped to advance his career. He told this story about his interview and audition for San Francisco:

We would always list the roles that singers sang. At the time, Mr. Adler was casting *Flying Dutchman*, and it didn’t have a Senta. We are sitting there; Richard Rezinski was my predecessor, they would go over the names and everything. He gave me two sets of cards. One was the artist and the other was the role, so Senta and all the people who sung the role. He told me to look at the card, and he said, “Who are some of the people who are not listed on that card?” I came up with two names, one of which was Gwyneth Jones. He called Richard and said that Gwyneth was not on this card. They both looked at each other, and they were really shocked. That was one of the things that clinched it because he said later, “You have the most encyclopedic knowledge of opera and opera singers of any young person that I have ever met.” I lived, ate, slept, drank opera and still do.

When I asked Mr. Waters about the realities of being an executive opera administrator, he spoke about the difficulties caused by the arts landscape changing. At the Greater Miami Opera there was an abundance of funding and high quality
performances. But a transition in finances and artistic standards caused opera companies to stop engaging famous opera stars. Mr. Water thinks people attending opera to have an operatic experience also caused a problem. Not to mention the competitive, for-profit entertainment sector. The nature of the job functions of an executive opera administrator could detour people’s interest in the career path. Mr. Waters added:

> It does not seem to be a worthy investment until the economy changes around or people’s ideas and practices in terms of supporting arts organizations gets better. On the other hand, young singers are flocking to opera more than they ever have. Our opera guild does a competition in April, and we had one hundred and seventy applicants, and it was a very small competition. When we go to the New York for auditions, we have sometimes 600 to 700 hundred people request auditions. That is typical, not only for the opera companies, but for the competitions and the young artist programs. They are out there, and they want to do this. I think that is very encouraging. But you just have to say, how many jobs are there?

Because of my background, I wondered how many of these singers could become opera administrators. This, however, is difficult to access, as Mr. Water pointed out:

> Well, who knows? It is hard to say because we are not often that visible unless you are the general or artistic director. I thought at one point—actually, more then one point—that it was important for me to continue doing this for exactly that reason, because we want to get more African Americans and more Hispanics in the top-level of opera management. I say to as many people that gave any indication they were interested that they should go and do something about it. Again, it is a question of whether or not you think it is an investment.

Mr. Waters feels he might have chosen a slightly different career path with more conducting, as opposed to administration and conducting:

> I applied and was accepted and got to the finals of the Exxon conducting program. The finals were with the Indianapolis Symphony on the morning I would have a dress rehearsal of *Macbeth* here. That would have been a career choice and investment, but I had no idea of the results, so I stayed here instead. You can’t make it as a conductor just doing opera in this country. In Europe you can, but in this country you can’t. In terms of a career trajectory, I probably would have gone the route of symphonic to get that experience. I had an operatic background I could have transferred. I think that has hampered me in terms of my career because I don’t get the engagements. I did quite a bit of orchestral conducting in Europe. I have done some of it here, but my focus here was opera. I think my career path would have gotten bigger and better had I chosen that other route. I don’t regret what I have done, but in retrospect I think things would have gone quite differently had I done that.
Yet, Mr. Waters does not think his career path is different from European-American executive opera administrators. He is not currently mentoring anyone, but he shared this advice for executive opera administration aspirants:

You need to be involved with an opera company backstage where you can see the workings of the opera company backstage. One needs to have access to the administrator to be able to see daily what goes on in terms of running the company and how the various components work together, how it works with not just the artistic administration, but production staff, development, marketing/PR. You have to be able to immerse yourself in the inner workings of the opera company. An effective general director needs to also know what the chorus is doing, what the costume situation is like, how long it takes to load in a set. Is the set going to be too big or too small and all those things. It is not a part of coursework. It is a part of being there and being around. That is the only way to do it. You have just got to be there and really see and really talk to people and to see it in action. As much as I love and appreciate classrooms, they take you only so far. Then you just have to be out there in the fields doing it.

Mr. Waters is not sure that ten years from now he still wants to be a general or artistic director of a major opera company. Conducting is his passion. He said, “It is what I think I do better than anything else.” He likes his work enough that he would ideally like to become the general director of an opera company at a higher level:

I don’t know that it is in the cards that I would run a company at level one because it is just too complicated, but the next level of companies, Seattle and San Diego, and places we in the business agree are generally well run. Those are places that one could use as a model. I would like to become general director of a company like Atlanta, or I have in the back of my mind Detroit and Michigan Opera Theatre. I have this idea in my mind that I want to be the general director of a company in an area that has a lot of Black people because I want to get more Black people involved in opera, not just Black people but more ethnic people. That is one of the reasons I stick with Houston Ebony Opera.

In addition to his position as the general/artistic director of Connecticut Opera, Mr. Waters serves as the artistic director for the Houston Ebony Opera Guild. This African American opera company hosts summer residencies for young artists and presents a summer opera. Looking at the dichotomy that exists between culturally-specific and non-culturally specific opera companies can become problematic career-wise for students of color. Administrators are needed at both organizations; however, African American opera
companies lack the stability and infrastructure that supports a career. Mr. Waters added this insight:

I think it is a false hope for any of us to think that we are going to develop an African American opera company in this day and age in a way that we would be proud of it, in a way that it would really make an impact, a difference. It’s unfortunate, because opera is still isolated to a certain extent and is not in the mainstream as much as we would like it to be. Although opera is popular enough, but it is not popular in the Black community. You know, it is not a community in which it has been important enough.

Mr. Waters’ position on affirmative action is that it is necessary today because people of color have been shut out for so long in many different ways. He said, “The doors were closed for so long, and some of the doors are still closed. There needs to be a boost. There needs to be someone who says, “Okay, we are going to take a chance on this person and give them the opportunity.” Yet, he does not think someone should be elevated to a position because of his or her ethnicity and race, but that a level of accomplishment and achievement should exist. He also does not feel affirmative action has been as successful as people think. He said, “One could even argue that affirmative action has not been successful in many ways. Other than the entertainment and the athletic industry (maybe in some jobs like hospitals and such things) but where do you have an abundance of African Americans or Hispanics or Asians in top positions? You don’t. It doesn’t exist.”

Mr. Waters and I discussed the belief that White women, more than any other minority, have benefitted from affirmative action. Statistically, there are more White women in opera administration. Mr. Waters stated, “They have really gotten more and have been raised higher than any other group.” His belief is that his achievements and set of skills benefitted him more than affirmative action:

I don’t think I was hired for any of these jobs because of affirmative action. I don’t think I was hired for any of these jobs because I was Black. I think that the stakes were too high. You can’t put somebody in a responsible position like at the San Francisco Opera or in Miami, being responsible for casting, being responsible for choosing repertoire and all that kind of stuff, just because they are Black or Asian or whatever. You have to have somebody who knows what he is doing, who knows what the audience wants. I personally don’t think that affirmative action had anything to do with that.
He thinks ethnicity, gender, and race should not factor into succeeding as an executive opera administrator, saying, “But, that’s ideal. I don’t know; I don’t know that it has been tested enough because there just have not been enough of us. There has been Linda, there has been me and just a couple of other people. You don’t have enough people there to even say.” Yet, the barriers he thinks people face are individual because it is a question of whether someone wants to create a career in opera administration realizing U. S. society’s perceptions of the arts in communities and the lack of financial support for the arts. Mr. Waters stated, “Somebody said to me once, “Why would anybody want to jump on a sinking ship?” He does not think opera, and the arts in general, are a sinking ship:

You look at the big corporations laying off 10, 15, 30,000 people. The people that have these million-dollar corporations. It just does not look good anywhere, so why would anybody want to go into the not-for-profit arts, which by its nature is going to be less financially rewarding because in this day and time the finances make a huge difference. We went into it because we loved opera. You know we could sustain ourselves, but now because things are so expensive and because people want so much and there is so much out there, you have to make a certain living. It is hard to do.

Still Mr. Waters is adamant that non-European-Americans should pursue careers in opera administration only if they love it. He said:

You have got to love it, and that is the way it is with any art form. In the 1970s, like in 1970-71 there were about 30 professional opera companies in America. Now there are about 125 to 130 something. In reading Joe Volpe’s book, it reminded me what he says is absolutely true. The Met stopped touring because regional opera companies began to spring up all over the place. In the cities where the Met used to tour, there were now local companies. So the reason for the Met to tour was no longer because also the big artists used to tour with the Met. Then they started backing away and would not tour as much.

It occurred to me that the Metropolitan Opera’s discontinuation of regional tours caused an uprising of home-grown companies that challenged communities to support them and to make investments in the cultural life of their communities. In Hartford, Mr. Waters experienced an interesting phenomenon, where natives would not attend Connecticut Opera performances because of their support for the Metropolitan Opera. In his current position, he worked to change this by raising the standard of the artistic
product. He said, “The only way to solidify your face and to get people to come and keep
them coming is to have a good artistic product. Everything else is ancillary.”

I consider Mr. Waters a risk-taker because of his career path. As stated earlier, he
is one of two African/Black Americans executive-level administrators in opera at major
opera companies. He is also the only African/Black American male. But he does not
consider himself a risk taker when it comes to his work in opera administration:

I really am basically traditional and conservative. That is the way I was raised. All
the artistic environments that I have been in have been that way, and that is how I
am. My charge here was to turn the company around in terms of improving the
artistic product and improving the relations with the city and with the artistic
community so that we were looked at as a serious organization. We successfully
did that. In the meantime, you can’t take risks. Then the economy collapses, and
people stop going to the opera for whatever reason. You take surveys and realize
people are saying, ‘We love Bohème. We love Aïda. We love Carmen. That is
what we are going to support.’ I argue with Linda and others about this all the
time. I mean, somebody who has never been to an opera as far as I can see is not
going to necessarily be enticed to go and see Nixon in China more than they
would be enticed to go and see La Bohème, Madame Butterfly, or Aïda. That is
one of our big problems, of course, even with people who are regular opera
lovers. Getting them to the opera house to see something unusual is the hard part.”

I consider Mr. Waters a trailblazer in his career. He did not agree entirely. He
believes the trailblazing he has done is because he stayed the course:

There was a conscious effort to stick with this administrative thing once I started
doing it, but to be able to conduct along the way. Yes, I think that if there is any
trailblazing it is because I am still one of two African Americans. I am the only at
this point African American that is a general director of an opera company. I
guess just by the nature of that situation, you could say that I am a trailblazer. I’ve
been so concerned with keeping my reputation so that people trust and believe me
and take me seriously not only as an arts administrator, but there is just a certain
level of accomplishment of achievement that you have to have, and it has to be
consistent. You know that statement, “It is less important to get a job than to get
the second job.” You know, it is more difficult to remain a success than to be a
success. If they realize that the work I am doing is good, then that makes it easier
and better for the next person.

Although he does not consider himself a risk-taker or trailblazer, he is cognizant of the
fact that he is doing something that nobody else of his ethnicity or race is doing. He said,
“A lot of the Black singers in New York look at me as a hope for them. A few of them
have said this, “You should bring all these Black singers to Connecticut, and you could
cast an all Black *Don Giovanni*. I could cast an all-Black anything, but I am not going to do it because that to me is not what I am here for.”

I find it fascinating that Mr. Waters considered the impact his career would have on non-European-American opera administrators of the future. Ensuring a career legacy creates opportunities for others is not always easy. When I considered Mr. Waters’ interview in the sum of the two other non-European-American participants of this study, all of them are cognizant of keeping the career path open for non-European-American executive opera administrators of the future.
CHAPTER V
FINDINGS

This chapter presents the research findings and analysis organized by each of the five research questions. Patterns and themes supporting each research question are represented in textual and tabular form. The findings are then summarized in a table marked with an (X) indicating the source of the finding. This exploratory qualitative research study discovers, describes, and documents (a) the career trajectories of three non-European-American executive opera administrators, (b) the barriers they faced, (c) the strategies they used to achieve top-level management positions in major opera companies, (d) and the major influences on their career success. Highlighting new career knowledge that may assist future non-European-Americans in their quests for vertical mobility in arts administration is another purpose of this study.

RQ1. What are the career paths of non-European-American executive opera administrators?

According to the Glass Ceiling Commission in the corporate sector, there is no omnipresent path to top-level management (1994). This study supports that assertion. The non-European-American executive opera administrators’ career paths in this study are diverse, yet similar. Michael Ching entered the field of opera at age 24 and became an executive opera administrator at age 28. His career in opera administration spans 24 years. Linda Jackson entered opera administration at age 30 and became an executive opera administrator at age 34. Her career in opera administration spans 23 years. Willie Waters was age 22 when he entered opera and 32 when he became an executive opera administrator. His career in opera administration spans 33 years.

In terms of demographics, Linda Jackson and Willie Waters are African/Black American. Michael Ching is Asian American. Linda Jackson is the only non-European-American female executive opera administrator. Michael Ching is the only married participant. Although none of the participants earned degrees in arts administration, all of the participants earned college degrees in an arts discipline. Michael Ching earned a Bachelor of Arts in Music from Duke University. Linda Jackson received a Bachelor of Arts in Theatre and English from Rutgers University. Willie Waters completed a
Bachelor of Music Education from the University of Miami. Additionally, Mr. Waters earned a Master of Music degree from Memphis State University. He is the only participant in this study who completed a graduate degree.

Michael Ching began his career as a composer and is now general/artistic director of Opera Memphis. Linda Jackson was a stage manager and is now managing director of Connecticut Opera. Willie Waters started his career conducting opera and is now general/artistic director of Connecticut Opera. As stated earlier in the literature review, OPERA America categorizes opera companies into four categories based on budgetary sizes. There are 15 level-one companies with budgets above $7.5 million; 19 level-two companies with budgets between $3-7.5 million; 25 level-three companies with budgets between $1-3 million; and there are 52 level-four companies with budgets below $1 million. These 110 OPERA America professional company members cover 45 of the United States (OPERA America, 2006).

Michael Ching and Linda Jackson started their careers at Houston Grand Opera, a level I OPERA America company. Willie Waters began his career at Memphis Opera, now Opera Memphis, a level III OPERA America company. All of the participants are currently employed at level III OPERA America companies. There are currently no non-European-American executive opera administrators employed at level I or level II opera companies. Previous literature suggested discrimination as the cause for all currently employed non-European-American executive opera administrators holding top-level management positions only at level III companies (Baker, 2002; Cheatham, 1997; Oby, 1998; Smith, 1989). Further inquiry into this issue, however, revealed insight into why those with the potential to progress to executive-level positions in opera with levels I and II companies chose not to. When I asked the participants about their career plans ten years from now, they shared these insights:

MC: Hopefully, ten years from now I will have had a number one song on country radio that to me will change the landscape. Also I would like to do something for the African-American community regarding audience development and opera.

LJ: I don’t know. Still probably making shows. The bigger problem is whether or not I will still be able to do it. I saw a production of Atys, it was the closest thing to perfect that I have ever seen, and I have yet to produce mine. I have done some productions that I am really happy with. I can
look at about five different things that I have been associated with in my career, and every time I do a new one it bumps something off the list, but I still don’t feel that I have done one where I can definitively say like, “that’s the best work I have ever done.” I know I will strive for that for the rest of my life because that is what I want to be able to do.

WW: I’m still not sure whether or not I really want to continue doing this as general director or as artistic director or just conducting. Conducting is my passion. It is what I still think I do better than anything else, so that will always be a part of it. I like this well enough that I think I would like to go to… ideally I would like to be the general director of a company that has money and an endowment, that has security, you know? I would like to be in a company, and I think I could do this obviously at a higher level. I mean we are at level three. I don’t know that it is in the cards that I would run a company at level one because it is just too complicated. Looking at the Metropolitan… that is a whole different world. One should never compare themselves to the Met, or San Francisco, or Chicago. Those are different, but the next level of companies, Seattle and San Diego, and places like that where we in the business agree are generally well run. Those are places that one could use as a model. I would like to become general director of a company like Atlanta, or I have in the back of my mind Detroit and Michigan Opera Theatre, for example, because I have a long relationship with them. I have this idea in my mind that I want to be the general director of a company in an area that has a lot of Black people because I want to get more Black people involved in opera, not just Black people but more ethnic people. That is one of the reasons I stick with Houston Ebony Opera.

Willie Waters is the only participant who aspires to work at a company higher than level III. Michael Ching and Linda Jackson are content with their positions at Level III companies, despite having held previous positions at level I and II companies.

The salary range for the participants is $60,000-$95,000 annually. The number of hours worked per week by the participants range from 40 hours upwards. None of the participants proactively sought careers in executive opera administration, nor was opera administration their initial career choice. Their excellent artistic career histories in composition, stage management, and conducting allowed them to successfully navigate career paths into top-level management positions in opera. Although the participants strongly support affirmative action, they did not feel affirmative action benefitted their career progression. The participants shared these comments when I asked them why affirmative action is important today and how affirmative action benefitted their careers:
MC: Mostly in the earliest stages. That’s why affirmative action is important so that the people who hopefully identify themselves that want to go into the arts… affirmative action is important at the earlier stages.

LJ: You know I don’t believe it has. I mean affirmative action did not benefit my career. It affected my start. Like I said before, because my father and his generation had positions and created experiences, it made it that much easier for my generation to be successful. Hopefully, my generation has made it that much easier to be successful for someone else.

WW: I don’t think I was hired for any of these jobs because of affirmative action. I don’t think I was hired for any of these jobs because I was Black. I think that the stakes were too high. You can’t put somebody in a responsible position like at the San Francisco Opera or in Miami, being responsible for casting, being responsible for choosing repertoire, and all that kind of stuff, just because they are Black or Asian or whatever. You have to have somebody who knows what he is doing, who knows what the audience wants.

They all agreed that affirmative action has still not solved the problem of access to educational and employment opportunities. None of the participants considered themselves a risk-taker or a trail blazer in that they belong to a unique cohort of executive opera administrators as non-European-Americans. Neither did they feel their career paths were different from their European-American counterparts.

The participants enjoy their work in executive opera administration but have very different perspectives when reflecting on their career choices. In response to the question if you had to make your initial career path again, would you choose the same or would you choose differently, the participants shared:

MC: I wouldn’t trade the experience. It is so very flexible, but I used to have to deal with a lot more than I do now that at the same time it’s all been good.

LJ: It really was not an initial career decision. I like it a lot, and I don’t regret it. Would I have initially made that choice? I don’t know. Probably not. I don’t know what I would have done differently because it just sort of happened.

WW: In a lot of ways I am thinking that I would have done a slightly different route, and I would have gone just the conducting route. When I first conducted here, Exxon had a conductor’s program. The purpose was to put young conductors with major orchestras for a year or two. I applied
and was accepted and got to the finals. It just so happened that the final was with the Indianapolis Symphony on the morning that I would have a dress rehearsal of *Macbeth* here. That would have been a career choice and investment, but I had no idea of the results, so I stayed here instead of doing that. You can’t make it as a conductor just doing opera in this country. In Europe you can, but in this country you can’t. So in terms of a career trajectory, I probably would have gone the route of symphonic to get that experience. I think that has hampered me in terms of my career because I don’t get the engagements. I did quite a bit of orchestral conducting in Europe. I have done some of it here, but my focus here was opera. I think my career path would have gotten bigger and better had I chosen that other route. I don’t regret what I have done, but in retrospect I think things would have gone quite differently had I done that.

**RQ2. What factors advanced the career paths of non-European-American executive opera administrators?** Summary in Table 4

Previous career path studies revealed the following as career advancers for non-European-Americans: age, age-assuming administrator position, early awareness of the profession, education, faculty rank, familiarity with institutions, family, friends, gender, hours worked per week, hourly work week, job benefits, leadership styles, mentors, networking (formal and informal), political connections, risk-taking, role models, role preparation, serendipity, supervisory support, supportive colleagues, typical promotions, years in progression, years in administration, years in the system, and perhaps most important, the individual (Alfred, 2001; Campbell, 2006; Chapman, 2006; Chee, 2004; Darden, 2003; Farmer, 2005; Gaskins, 2005; Groch, 2005; Salleh-Barone, 2004; Scott, 2003).

The internal and external career advancers perceived important to non-European-American executive opera administrators include the individual, mentors, network (informal and formal), serendipity; and supportive colleagues, family, and friends. The individual is the greatest internal career advancer. The participants shared these insights about how they advanced their careers.

MC: I got into this at 21. I kept saying to myself every year until I was thirty or so if I don’t think this field is any good, I’ll just get out of it and do something other than music. I ended up falling in love with it by doing it, which is a dangerous thing because you know doing it is, it is always easy to love doing something.
LJ: I started as a stage manager and had a full theater training background and pretty much stage-managed. I guess it was in Houston when I realized that stage managers sort of have to know everything. A stage manager is in on pretty much every decision that has to be made. I am a natural organizer, and all of that, so it was an easy enough transition into being a production manager because when you are a production manager you are managing budgets, and it was easy enough to develop an understanding of budget and budgeting and all of that. There wasn’t any formal training. I didn’t do a degree in arts management or that type of thing.

WW: I don’t know that a lot of it was really conscious. When the opera coach said, “You should come and work with me summer on Il Tabarro,” I didn’t think twice about it. I am saying to myself, “This would give me a chance to work with this professional woman and to learn this piece, and I love opera.” So why not? And when Mary Buckley said why not work with the opera workshop, when all these things, opportunities started presenting themselves, I am saying I have got to do it.

Mentors were key external career advancers of non-European-American executive opera administrators. Each participant shared this about their mentor relationships.

MC: My most important mentor relationship was with Robert Ward. Back in the good old days, he called up Carlisle Floyd and said that this guy needs to be at the Houston Opera and the National Opera Association, and boom, it was done. That’s clearly the most significant relationship.

LJ: David is very much devoted to the art form and to exploring it and pushing its boundaries and not understanding boundaries. Bob was much more regimented and taught me a lot about discipline. From Cynthia I learned the undaunting belief that you cannot have an opera company unless you have competent people who get along and function as a group of people together. Interpersonal relationships within the staff are tantamount to having a successful company and a lot of that from Jane, too. Jane was also just very daring in terms of the way she just sort of put Texas Opera Theater together. We used to argue a lot, and that taught me a lot, too, because it helped me identify the things that I knew I did not want to do.

WW: My teacher was the same person who introduced me to those recordings said, “You have the musical library there. Why don’t you start listening to various operas?” He gave me a list of the most popular operas, which were those three and Don Giovanni, La Bohème, and said in your spare time just go and start listening. I had afternoons off during the summer, so I would go, and I would sit for hours and just start listening to these recordings.
Informal and formal networks were evident in the career advancement of the participants. In fact, the three participants worked together in their career histories at the Greater Miami Opera. The participants shared this about the informal and formal network of people that advanced their careers.

MC: A lot of people tend to view life as helping someone else is not in your best interest, but once you are in this field, helping people is in your best interest.

LJ: None of it was choice. I am in New York; my friend calls me and says I need an assistant for three months. What are you doing? I told him I didn’t know anything about opera. He says you know how to stage manage; come to Houston I went to Houston for three months. Got to Houston and stayed through Spring Opera Festival, and they asked me to come back the next year. I ended up staying there for three years. Got another phone call from another friend of mine, the same person who was now in Washington. He needed an assistant. So I went there. Another friend called and said, “I am going to be in Miami in the spring. Can you come down and help me?” I told him sure, no problem. We were in the house one day, and the phone rings. Cynthia called my friend and said, ‘I am going to Chautauqua Opera. Will you come and stage manage for me?’ My friend said, ‘No, I am going to Santa Fe. But wait a minute let me give the phone to Linda.’ Cynthia was looking for a stage manager. I did not know her, and I went to Chautauqua. I mean that is what happened.

WW: I tell you, I have been lucky. The only one (interview) was from the University of Miami to Memphis State, and that was the audition I had.

Serendipity emerged as an external career advancer in this study. The participants were often challenged to respond to career opportunities not sought for.

MC: My balance has more to do with the fact I work somewhere it’s a perfect balance for me. We have enough resources to do respectable work that the job is not so taxing that I can’t go to Honolulu every summer.

LJ: I was in the assistant managing director position which put me in charge of everything when she (Cynthia Auerbach) found out she had lung cancer. She died two months before the season started. At that point everything was in play, so they just decided not to bring anybody in at that point. We just let the season run and at the end of the season they said, “Well, you know what you are doing, so…” I didn’t have any choice. I mean I was production manager in Houston and I was sort of Managing
Director at Chautauqua, and Cynthia died. Then they asked me to be General Director.

WW: Out of the clear blue sky I walk into the University of Miami School of Music and looked on the bulletin board, and there is an announcement from Memphis State University for a new program in operatic coaching and conducting, which would be run by George Osborne. I applied, the next week George called and asked if I would come to Memphis for an interview and audition. They flew me to Memphis and I went, auditioned, and he offered me the job on the spot. It was a complete free ride. I said, “Why not?”

The last career advancer revealed in this study is supportive colleagues, friends, and family. Each of the participants spoke about times their parents expressed concern about their career path. This concern was not perceived as discouraging but affirming.

MC: My father was an amateur musician and clearly wanted to become a musician, but was not allowed to in the cultural milieu of his day, so he was never discouraging of me becoming a musician, and some of my early childhood influences are of him. He was a strong, although not direct, musical influence on me.

LJ: Both my parents were very much into my brother and I pursuing professional careers and going to college and those kinds of things. It was up to us to decide where we wanted to go and what we wanted to do. In that sense it was a really supportive household and just not feeling like there was anything that we couldn’t do.

WW: My mother would always go and drag a couple of my aunts along with her. My two younger sisters would go, because it was exciting for them to see their brother up there conducting an opera. My oldest sister and brother knew more about it than the others did, so they would go even when some of the others wouldn’t. Initially, they all went and dragged my little nieces and nephews along. One of my nieces went to a couple of opera performances last year. She said, “It was because of the experience I had when you were there conducting, so I really got to like it.”
Table 4
RQ2 Career Advancers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Individual (Self)</th>
<th>Mentors</th>
<th>Network (Formal &amp; Informal)</th>
<th>Serendipity</th>
<th>Supportive colleagues, family, and friends</th>
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</thead>
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RQ3. What factors served as barriers to the career paths of non-European-American executive opera administrators? Summary in Table 5.

The Glass Ceiling Commission (1994) highlighted societal, internal structural, and governmental barriers to the career mobility of non-European-Americans. Collins (1997) ascertained that the mobility trap of racialized jobs and the “golden handcuffs” served as a career barrier to non-European-Americans. Major career barriers identified through Alfred’s (2001) research emphasized discriminatory issues regarding ethnicity, gender, and race. Affirmative action, institutional racism, a lack of role models, a lack of networking, unfair recruitment practices, and similarly ethnicity, gender, and race were career barriers identified in a career path study of African American female librarians’ career paths (Darden, 2003).

Scott’s research (2003) highlighted the “isms” (color, race, sex, ect.), a lack of significant mentoring relationships, balancing completing obligations as career barriers for African American female senior student affairs officers. In a study on the career paths and strategies of Chinese American superintendents in California, a shortage of administrative skills and non-European-American role models were identified. The least commonly mentioned external barriers included domestic responsibilities and gender discrimination (Chee, 2004). Salleh-Barone (2004) discovered that a lack of mentoring relationships, guidance, inadequate leadership preparation or administrative programs, not being taken seriously, asserting self to be heard or communicating effectively, being silenced, lack of opportunities for minorities because of negative stereotypes, ethnicity,
gender, and race were barriers for Asian American women educators pursuing leadership positions.

In this study, participants spoke about career barriers from internal and external perspectives. Although the participants agreed they had no barriers to achieving an executive-level position in opera, they identified barriers that might keep non-European-Americans from pursuing careers in opera administration. The individual is the most important internal barrier in the pursuit of executive-level careers in opera administration. Ethnicity, gender, and race were the least commonly mentioned barriers for the executive opera administrators in this study. Linda Jackson, however, anecdotally felt that her gender sometimes caused her to not receive serious consideration in board meetings:

LJ: I definitely don’t think the barriers are necessarily about the color issue. Because of the places I have worked. I don’t think it has been an issue at all. Even being a woman, that is really just sort of anecdotal in having to deal with specific people just sort of not paying attention to you.

Collectively, the participants see themselves as the major barrier to their career success.

MC: My barriers are self-imposed. I admit that I would be farther along.

LJ: Why not? Why would anybody not pursue a career in opera if they are interested? From an administrative point of view, I don’t see that there are barriers. The problem, in terms of education, I think there needs to be better education about arts in general, and not just about creating executive directors for a business. It is about creating corporate executives who understand that they need to be philanthropic at the same time.

WW: I think many of the barriers are individual. It does not seem to be a worthy investment until the economy changes around or people’s ideas and practices in terms of supporting arts organizations gets better. On the other hand, young singers are flocking to operas more than they ever have.

In our interview, Linda Jackson raised the question does opera, by virtue of what it is, have the potential to attract people of color. Each participant spoke about the external barriers that might keep an individual from pursuing a career in opera administration. This also brings to light the difficulty of job duties. The selected passages
above demonstrate the complexity of the landscape in which opera administrators must work. Michael Ching affirmed this thought by speaking about the difficulty of working with employees who are dispassionate about opera. All of the participants agreed that there is a lack of diversity and interest in opera and therefore opera administration, but Linda Jackson provided this insight.

LJ: Why would you choose to go into opera? First of all, let’s say you are White. Why would you choose to go work for an opera company? Unless you were predisposed for some reason. It’s such a small niche of people that are responding to opera vs. the whole rest of the entertainment field to begin with. So next, well, suppose you are a Black or Latino or Asian or anything like that. I mean, you know if you take a look, and I don’t know if anyone has done this, I always thought we should. If we look at the percentage of non-White people that are involved in opera as an art form on a percentage basis, and apply that to whatever is the percentage base of the population that you are talking to it’s probably the same percentage, it just looks different because you don’t see so many minorities. But the reality is that it is just there are not a lot of people there to begin with.

Linda Jackson and Willie Waters also spoke about the lack of competitive compensation in opera administration because it is non-profit management.

LJ: More than just opera being a European art form is working against it. There is no money. It is expensive. It is not for profit. It is hard to make a living. Given the kind of work I do here, if I was working for a corporation I would be making three times as much money, but I don’t think there are barriers necessarily in terms of administration. It is about compensation packages and some of it is about just the work load and support systems that there are for nonprofit.

WW: It just does not look good anywhere, so why would anybody want to go into the not-for-profit arts, which by its nature is going to be less financially rewarding because in this day and time the finances make a huge difference.

Finally, all of the participants agreed that opera administration, like many other non-profit management entities remains a hidden career option. Indeed, the Bureau of Labor Statistics does not currently recognize arts administration as a profession (John Jones, personal communication, July 2005) (See appendix B).
MC: It’s hard to express as a career option arts administration is just not up there. It is a hidden field, but you won’t have any problems it will provide you with certain kinds of opportunities.

LJ: A lot of it has to do with the field being successful, and people deciding to choose it as an option. I just think it is not a choice that people are going to make. There are not White people making the choice at this point either.

WW: I don’t have a grasp of how many people like yourself want to come into this business because they see opera companies, symphony orchestras, and ballet companies going under. But, you know it does not seem to be a worthy investment at this point until the economy changes around or people’s ideas and practices in terms of supporting arts organizations gets better.

Table 5
RQ3 Career Barriers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Ethnicity / Race</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Hidden Career Option</th>
<th>Individual (Self-Imposed)</th>
<th>Job Duties</th>
<th>Lack of Competitive Wages</th>
<th>Lack of Diversity</th>
<th>Lack of Interest In Opera Admin.</th>
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RQ4. What strategies did non-European-Americans use to overcome barriers to their appointment of executive opera administrator?

Summary in Table 6.

Since the mid 1990s career path studies in corporate and non-profit sectors have discovered several beneficial career strategies used by non-European-Americans. Between 1994 and 1999 research documents that non-European-Americans used the following career strategies, consisted of CEO support, becoming part of the strategic business plan, becoming specific to the organization, working with organizations that are inclusive and do not exclude non-European-Americans, addressing preconceptions and
stereotypes, emphasize and require accountability up and down the line, track progress, and are comprehensive (Glass Ceiling Commission, 1994).

Collins (1997) suggested that non-European-Americans must decipher the rules of the game by seeking mentors and other sources of information about meaningful career routes. This research also suggests using racialized jobs as a springboard toward solid mainstream ground. Other strategies listed include individual activism, group commitment, and mentorships and role models. A similar study in the corporate sector established the following as career-enhancing strategies for non-European-Americans, the organization matters, take charge, understand race matters, commit and recommit to excellent performance, and make sure it is worth the price (Thomas & Gabarro, 1999).

Recent career path studies discovered more career-enhancing strategies. Non-European-Americans must learn to handle difficult situations, work hard, acquire knowledge, acquire people skills, and be at the right place at the right time. The role of family was also important to research participants (Chee, 2004). Salleh-Barone’s (2004) research suggested mapping the career, establishing credentials and experience, starting young and finding a niche, knowing yourself and having your own identity, prioritizing and performing the balancing act, becoming involved and seeking support, seeking mentors and building alliances, supporting your staff, and giving your best.

Other career strategies found in research included managing demons, fitting in, and “reading” unwritten rules, making your mark, managing relationships, understanding power, acquiring power, using power for leadership, acquiring more educational credentials, speaking up at staff meetings, participating on task forces, attending more trainings, working longer hours, engaging in business socializing after hours, understanding the culture of the organization, developing a career plan to create excellent career constellations, building collegiality, mentors, finding institutional fit and comfort, nurturing familial relationships, spirituality, sense of purpose, and a strong racial identity development (Campbell, 2006; Chapman, 2006; Cobbs & Turbock, 2003; Farmer, 2005; Gaskins, 2005; Groch, 2005; Livingston, 2003; Scott, 2003).

This study adds to and supports previous findings. The major career-advancing strategies used by participants of this study include experience, knowledge, passion,
perseverance, and work ethic. The two passages below demonstrate how the individual, in terms of self-development, is a career strategy.

LJ: Part of the reason I chose to stay in opera as a field originally was that the first time I did a production of Butterfly the soprano singing Butterfly was an African American. The first time I did Butterfly I thought there is something wonderful about this field where it does not matter as long as vocally the person is able to portray the role. The fact that was accepted made it much more interesting to me as a profession.

WW: She asked if I would like to be involved as a go for or whatever. She let me assist her and I played some rehearsals, not very many because my chops were not so great at that time. Just being in the environment, that was really exciting and really interesting.

The individual is also important when it comes to perceptions of discrimination. Cobbs and Turbuck (2003) suggested managing demons as a career strategy for people of color. The expectation of discrimination based on ethnicity, gender, or race is historically not unjustified, but it can also hinder a career. Willie Waters’ philosophy expresses the sentiment of the participants when it comes to issues regarding ethnicity and race.

WW: Leontyne (Price) always says, “My protest is on the stage. Every time I go on the stage and do a good performance, that’s breaking down another door.” I really think that is where it is. I never got out and marched, I came up during the Civil Rights Era. I figured the more I do well, the better it is for not only me but for everybody else in the community.

The participants responded to serendipitous opportunities by seeking to develop their careers beyond composition, conducting, and stage managing. Through this they developed an incredible knowledge of the culture of opera and arts organizations. The participants are also passionate about what they do as executive opera administrators, given the challenges they face and their dedication to the field. Willie Waters made this comment, which summarizes the basic justification for the participants’ continued work in the field of opera administration.

WW: I passionately believe in what an opera company and what arts organizations in general have to do with the community, how they interact in the community.
These administrators continue to persevere in spite of the nature of their job functions and the difficulties associated with each. Linda Jackson stated an idea that represents this sentiment well.

LJ: You just keep doing it. I figure sooner or later they are going to get it or not. You know, you can spend a lot more time trying to explain things and justify things, although I am not sure that is really bad because it does really force me to rethink things.

The last finding relates to work ethic. Previous studies have concluded that no one becomes a success without demanding practice and hard work (Ericsson, 2003; 2004). Michael Ching and Willie Waters attribute their work ethics to their cultural backgrounds and believe that their career mobility was absolute because of hard work.

MC: Asian cultural values of hard work and discipline and study.

WW: I always felt, as most African Americans do, that you have to work harder. That is something that was ingrained in me not only from my parents and my family, but from other Black teachers who influenced me as I was getting towards the end of high school and college.

Linda Jackson spoke about work ethic from the perspective of career choices and the difficulty of working hard with low compensation.

LJ: There are realities about it. You know, you go from college where you are thrown in with a group of people who are doing all different things. So ten years from now you are working for American Red Cross making $35,000 a year, but your roommate who decided to be a lawyer is making $400,000. I think that people want to do it, but then there are also the realities of whether or not you can survive or not.
Table 6
RQ4 Career Strategies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Experience</th>
<th>Individual (Self-Development)</th>
<th>Knowledge</th>
<th>Passion</th>
<th>Perseverance</th>
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The last research question focused on experiences that benefitted the career mobility of the three participants. The narratives revealed how the initial artistic careers of the participants aided their career mobility into administration at the executive level in opera. Additionally, early exposure to the arts and pre-collegiate extracurricular activities were found to have an impact on the career paths of non-European-American executive opera administrators. When asked about early exposure to the arts, the participants made these comments.

MC: I was always a good pianist. I studied piano from about the age of six. I knew wanted to go into music. For a while I thought I was going to be a performer and it just didn’t pan out. I play well, but I just didn’t want to do that. So I ended up in the opera field.

LJ: I took ballet and always….It is interesting, when I got into high school, I am not even sure why, but I ended up sort of with a group of friends who put the shows on in high school. I think that contributed a lot to sort of how I got involved in this.

WW: My grandmother is the one who taught me how to read music and taught me piano. I was about four year’s old when she first started teaching me piano. There was always music in the family and in the house and everything. I was immersed from a very early age.

When I asked the participants about the earliest memories of opera they stated.

MC: I didn’t see an opera until I was in high school. The first full length opera I think I saw was actually rather poorly performed
opera by a touring company in North Carolina. *Un Giorno di regno* or *La Traviata*, one of the Verdi operas.

LJ: My earliest memory of opera was that in the sixth grade we went to see… I think it must have been a production of *Traviata*. I finally figured out from like sort of memories of it that it had to have been a production of *Traviata* that my 6th grade music teacher took us to see in New York.

WW: My earliest memory of opera is hearing operatic singing, which is when my sister sang the “Inflammatus” from Rossini’s *Stabat Mater*. Our high school chorus presented it, and she was the soprano soloist. Her last year at FAMU in 1962, the chorus did the “Halleluiah” from *King of Kings* with band. Even though it’s not opera it was very operatic, and that sort of knocked me away. Then of course, there were always opera singers on Ed Sullivan. The first one I remember hearing was Roberta Peters and then the next was Richard Tucker and then there was Leontyne Price.

The participants also had several exposures to the arts through their pre-collegiate extracurricular activities. These activities represent the diversity of interests among the participants, but also indicate how their interests led to the same career outcome. When I asked about extracurricular activities the participants responded with the following.

MC: Other than musical activities, no. I was involved in music activities, piano lessons.

LJ: I was really, really very involved in my church at that point. I was doing a lot of after school programs at my church and lot of after school programs at the theater.

WW: This lady, Mrs.…, I will never forget her because we had sung at her house before. She asked if we would come over and entertain. I was studying piano at that time, so I did a couple of things. This judge was really quite taken by it. So he pulled my mother aside and offered to pay for my piano lessons until my freshman year in college.

In retrospect, these experiences logically seem crucial to the career success of the participants. Michael Ching and Willie Waters agreed. Linda Jackson, however, did not. This dialogue between the two of us represents her position.

AC: How crucial to your current success was your early exposure to opera?
LJ: Absolutely had no influence whatsoever.

AC: No influence at all.

LJ: No, in fact that is why I don’t really remember what it is. It is only after years of remembering sort of spotty things about the production and sort of deducing that she would not have taken us to see something that wasn’t popular and that in the last act somebody died in a bed. That leads me to believe that it may have been *Traviata*.

Pre-collegiate extracurricular activities also impacted the career paths of the participants; opera administration was not their initial career choice. Performing was the primary career aspiration for Michael Ching and Willie Waters. As demonstrated in her career narrative, Linda Jackson wanted to become a professional of some sort. We had this dialogue about the relationship between her extracurricular activities and her career path.

AC: There must be some logical relationship between your extracurricular activities and your career.

LJ: Yes, I mean, it wasn’t planned though. I went to high school like the usual. I went to college and I was like, “Oh, I am not going to do shows for a while, I need to focus on my career.” I mean I had planned to be a doctor at one point and then I got over that, and then I was going to be a lawyer. Then I planned to go to seminary. Then I got to college and literally my freshman year dorm was across from the theater. I went over to volunteer and then just sort of after four years ended up being a theater major. It had not been my intent.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Previous Artistic Careers</th>
<th>Early Arts Exposure</th>
<th>Pre-Collegiate Extracurricular Activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>M. Ching</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<tr>
<td>L. Jackson</td>
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<td>W. Waters</td>
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<td>Researcher</td>
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<td>Literature</td>
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Table 7
RQ5 Beneficial Experiences
Summary

In summary, the career paths of non-European-American executive opera administrators are diverse and similar. There is no “one” way to become an executive opera administrator. The careers of the participants were advanced internally by each individual. Externally, mentors, network (formal and informal), serendipity, and supportive colleagues, family and friends advanced the careers of non-European-Americans. Career barriers identified in this study internally include the individual. Externally opera administration is a hidden career option; the job duties of executive opera administrators, the lack of competitive compensation, the lack of diversity, and the lack of interest in opera and opera administration all served as barriers. Ethnicity, gender, and race were not supported as findings by the participants nor the researcher.

Career strategies used to advance the careers of the participants include the individual. Experience, knowledge, passion, perseverance, and work ethic were also found as strategies that advanced the careers of executive opera administrators. Lastly, the previous artistic careers, early arts exposure, and pre-collegiate extracurricular activities were found as beneficial experiences to the career paths of non-European-American executive opera administrators.

Alfred’s (2001) internal/external model provided an excellent framework for ascertaining an understanding of the psychological dimensions of how non-European-Americans achieved top-level management positions in opera. The structural/external dimensions of Alfred’s model regarding institutional cultures, structures, and role expectations were similar to findings on career advancers, career barriers, and career strategies. Even so, the psychological/internal dimensions of Alfred’s model and my findings conflict on the issue of ethnicity, gender, and race.

The internal career represents the psychological and personal contexts of the developing career. Because the internal career is the notion of personal agency originating from the life structure, it is the personal application and construction of strategies, tools, and resources for managing the majority culture (Alfred, 2001). Therefore, the individual is empowered to choose the strategies, behaviors, and interactions to meet the expectations of the external career. But, how is this accomplished in a bi-cultural society? The bi-cultural life structure theory allowed me to consider cases
of discrimination in the acquisition of career mobility. I was also able to consider other possibilities. Cultural background, ethnicity, gender, and race were not as impeding to the career paths of non-European-American executive opera administrators as anticipated.

The participants in this study did not feel they were mistreated by the industry because of their visual cultural, ethnic, gender, and racial differences. In spite of a historic societal norm of discrimination, marginalization, and oppression, success in opera administration at the executive-level is attainable. None of the participants believed that active discrimination was responsible for the disparity of non-European-American executive opera administrators. The participants shared these final thoughts.

MC: This field is wide open whatever color you are, but especially for minorities.

LJ: We are talking about basic office jobs that have to be filled. Now this gets back to, it still has to be a choice. I am not sure that if someone of color were to look through the want ads, because I had advertised for a receptionist they might necessarily say, “Well, I am going to go there because it’s an opera company.” You know, that’s different. It is not like when you are growing up Black, somebody says, “Don’t forget to think about working for an opera company.”

WW: I thought at one point, actually more then one point that it was important for me to continue doing this for exactly that reason, because we want to get more African Americans and more Hispanics in the top-level of opera management. I say to as many people that gave any indication they were interested that they should go and do something about it. Again, it is a question of whether or not you think it is an investment.
CHAPTER VI
CONCLUSIONS

Summary of Findings

This exploratory qualitative research study discovers, describes, and documents (a) the career trajectories of three non-European-American executive opera administrators, (b) the barriers they faced, (c) the strategies they used to achieve top-level management positions in major opera companies, (d) and the major influences on their career success. Highlighting new career knowledge that may assist future non-European-Americans in their quests for vertical mobility in arts administration is another purpose of this study. The following major and guiding research questions were addressed:

1. What are the career paths of non-European-American executive opera administrators?
2. What factors advanced the career paths of non-European-Americans executive opera administrators?
3. What factors served as barriers to the career paths of non-European-American executive opera administrators?
4. What strategies did non-European-Americans use to overcome barriers to their appointment of executive opera administrator?
5. What experiences benefitted the career paths of non-European-American executive opera administrators?

Alfred’s (2001) internal/external model determined use of the exploratory qualitative research method to determine the major findings of this study through in-depth semi-structured interviews, follow-up interviews, content analysis, and document analysis. This study found that the careers of non-European-American executive opera administrators were diverse and similar. Although the participants had very different beginnings in opera, their career histories eventually led them into executive-level management in opera. They also considered their career paths similar to their European-American counter parts. This suggests that there is a variance of ways to map a career plan into executive opera administration. Internal and external career advancers were
identified. They include, respectively, the individual, mentors, network (formal and informal), serendipity, and supportive colleagues, family, and friends.

Internal and external barriers to career advancement in executive opera administration were also identified. They include the individual, opera administration as a hidden career option, job functions, lack of competitive wages, lack of diversity, and a lack of interest in opera administration. This study unearthed six career strategies relative to the attainment of success achieved by executive opera administrators. They include experience, the individual, knowledge, passion, perseverance, and work ethic. Findings relative to research question five highlight the importance of the participants’ previous artistic careers, early arts exposure, and pre-collegiate extracurricular activities.

The most frequently emergent theme across the five research questions is the individual. The individual’s ability to create a positive self-definition and self-system rejecting of stereotypical images and affirming of a self-space ensured career mobility. Additionally, the individual’s knowledge of the profession’s culture and role expectations, becoming visible within the profession and its professional organizations, and maintaining a fluid life structure allowed considerable career success. This finding speaks to Nietzschian philosophy regarding the “super human” and theories of career development relative to self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977; 1986; Dorn, 1994). What if it is truly within our power to develop a self-concept inclusive of a self-efficacy that would garner us achieving the highest level of self-actualization possible regardless of cultural background, ethnicity, gender, and race?

**Implications**

The findings of this study have implications relative to individual consciousness, affirmative action, arts education, cultural background, careers, career development theory, and mentoring. There are also arts administration specific implications. This study found that the individual is his or her best career advancer and career strategy, but also worst career barrier, in pursuit of a career at the executive-level in opera. This suggests that our success and failure in executive opera administration, and perhaps all professions, is entirely up to us. Although none of the participants felt they benefited from affirmative action, they agreed affirmative action was important in leveling the playing field in the early stages.
Early exposure to the arts benefited the career progression of executive opera administrators of color. The participants also participated in arts specific pre-collegiate extracurricular activities. This finding supports the importance of arts education and its potential impact in recruiting executive-level arts administrators of color for the future. The participants came from cultural backgrounds dissimilar to the one in which they work. Yet, this was not a barrier. Careers are not always hindered by ethnicity, gender, and race. My belief, then, is that cultural background only becomes a barrier in executive opera administration and other professions when we allow it to become a barrier. Individuals must find ways to break psychological chains relative to their history even if it involves discrimination, marginalization, and oppression. As Cobbs and Turbock (2003) suggested, reconciling demons regarding social divisions is a strategy for people of color to achieve career success. One way to do this is by committing and recommitting to excellence.

Careers are a phenomena unto themselves. As found in this study we cannot always control the opportunities that serendipity brings our way. If, however, we are prepared to respond to those opportunities with hard work, I believe our career success in any field is inevitable. Therefore, I support a non-culturally specific theory of career development that tenaciously considers the individual consciousness and serendipity. The findings of this study also highlight the potential of a theory of career development for executive opera and arts administrators of color that may extend to all executive arts administrators.

In the initial phases of this study, I considered using critical race theory as my theoretical framework. Critical race theorists believe that counter spaces for the telling of counter stories can only happen with mentors and mentees of similar ethnicities, gender, and race (Broido & Manning, 2002). Yet, the participants in this study received mentoring from people of similar and dissimilar ethnicities, genders, and races. Therefore, use of Alfred’s (2001) model and bi-cultural life structure theory proved beneficial. I advocate for cross-cultural and cross-gender mentoring because the careers of non-European-American executive opera administrators were advanced by meaningful cross-cultural and cross-gender mentor relationships. Additionally, the following arts administration implications are highlighted.
1. The quality of graduate degree programs in arts administrations is continuously debated. Some programs stress the acquisition of business knowledge, while others focus on learning arts administration in the context of the art form. There is little to no research addressing the question of which students have the most successful careers. None of the executive opera administrators in this study earned degrees in arts administration, yet they all had degrees in an arts discipline and exposure to an art form. Given this finding, my position is that both art form specific and administration specific course work is needed in arts administration curricula. Professors and students can work to balance management and art form specific coursework to help students maximize their potential.

2. Arts administration students, regardless of cultural background, ethnicity, gender, and race, can use the participants in this study as role models. These individuals were not discouraged by what could have served as impediments to their career success. Instead, they allowed themselves to become their greatest career advancer and career strategy. They focused on creating outstanding work histories, hard work, and a commitment to excellence to achieve executive-level administrative positions in opera.

3. Arts administration professors can better facilitate career plans for arts administration students regardless of cultural background, ethnicity, gender, and race. It is important that students are encouraged to create high quality and competitive work histories. This is essential for advancement in arts administration.

4. Arts administration professors, professionals, and policy makers can work together to develop quality experiential educational opportunities for pre-professional arts administrators through service-learning projects, internships, fellowships, and residencies.
These opportunities will help students develop competitive career histories for future employment.

5. OPERA America, service arts organizations, and non-profit organizations in general may benefit from maintaining more rigorous accountability regarding diversity recruitment and demographic information about who is working and applying for employment in the field, especially given the policies established by Sarbanes-Oxley (2004). From a human resources perspective, if a claim of discrimination was made, how would arts organizations and non-profit organizations in general protect themselves?

**Recommendations for Further Research**

Based on the research findings discussed in chapter five, the broad and specific implications of arts administration, I recommend the following for further and future research.

1. The replication of this study in other arts disciplines and non-profit management in general, to foster awareness about the careers of non-European-Americans in the non-profit sector for recruitment and evaluative purposes.

2. A grounded theory study to develop a theory of career development relative to arts administrators at the executive-level.

3. A study to assess the decision-making process of boards of directors regarding what qualities they seek in executive managers of the arts and non-profit organizations in general.

4. Annual descriptive research studies of executive opera, arts, and non-profit administrators to assess the amount of diversity in these professions and measure the success of recruitment efforts at increasing the level of diversity among executive administrators.

5. A descriptive research study to examine the correlation between the findings of this study and the general population of executive opera administrators in the United States.
6. Studies to assess the impact early arts exposure and pre-collegiate arts-related extracurricular activities have on career development relative to the arts.

7. Cross-case analysis studies that examine the similarities and differences between how top-level management positions are achieved in the non-profit management sector and private corporations.

8. Experimental studies that evaluate and test the recruitment and retention process in all types of non-profit organizations.

9. Ethnographic case studies of opera companies managed by non-European-American executive opera administrators to assess their strategies for increasing diversity on all levels with implications for opera and the arts.

10. In our interview Michael Ching stated the following: “All three of the finalists/candidates for this job had wives. Statistically, this field is not run by heterosexuals, so something tells me that there was something going on that maybe was never written down on a piece of paper. Statistically, if there are three finalists for a job as an artistic director you would think you would have at least one Gay person.” Given this insight, I suggest a qualitative study that investigates the career experiences of non-heterosexual executive opera administrators.

**Reflections**

Qualitative researchers have different axiological, epistemological, and ontological views than quantitative researchers. Qualitative researchers do not make hypotheses about what they expect to find in their research. If I were a quantitative researcher, I would have hypothesized that ethnicity, gender, and race were barriers to the career mobility of non-European-American executive opera administration. Race relations in the United States have made us overly conscious of visual social divisions as a society. Nevertheless, I am glad that what I found is totally different than I expected.
This study found that the individual is his or her best career advancer and career strategy in pursuit of careers in executive opera administration. These findings direct the focus towards the individual and self-awareness. My belief is that misdirected focus can lead to the expectation of discrimination where it may not exist. By focusing on the individual’s self-concept and self-efficacy, any individual can achieve self-actualization and obtain career success.

In conclusion, at the end of a recent meal at my favorite Chinese restaurant, I excitedly opened my fortune cookie. It read, “You will make a name for yourself in the field of entertainment.” I reflected on my fortune in the context of my research findings. What I have learned by studying the career paths of non-European-American executive opera administrators solidifies my belief that career success is within all of our power despite our cultural differences. I am not sure if I will make a name for myself in the field of entertainment as an arts administrator of color. But, I am certainly more empowered to believe that if I want career success it is mine!
APPENDIX A

Human Subjects Approved University Forms
OFFICE OF THE VICE PRESIDENT FOR RESEARCH
HUMAN SUBJECTS COMMITTEE
TALLAHASSEE, FLORIDA 32306-2742
(850) 644-6873 • FAX (850) 644-4392

APPROVAL MEMORANDUM

Date: 4/12/2006

To:
ANTONIO CUYLER
P.O. Box 66494
TALLAHASSEE, FL 32313

From: THOMAS L. JACOBSON, CHAIR

Re: USE OF HUMAN SUBJECTS IN RESEARCH
THE CAREER PATHS OF NON-EUROPEAN AMERICAN EXECUTIVE OPERA ADMINISTRATORS

The forms that you submitted to this office in regard to the use of human subjects in the proposal referenced above have been reviewed by the Secretary, the Chair, and two members of the Human Subjects Committee. Your project is determined to be Exempt per 45 CFR § 46.101(b) 2 and has been approved by an accelerated review process.

The Human Subjects Committee has not evaluated your proposal for scientific merit, except to weigh the risk to the human participants and the aspects of the proposal related to potential risk and benefit. This approval does not replace any departmental or other approvals, which may be required.

If the project has not been completed by 4/15/2007 you must request renewed approval for continuation of the project.

You are advised that any change in protocol in this project must be approved by resubmission of the project to the Committee for approval. Also, the principal investigator must promptly report, in writing, any unexpected problems causing risks to research subjects or others.

By copy of this memorandum, the chairman of your department and/or your major professor is reminded that he/she is responsible for being informed concerning research projects involving human subjects in the department, and should review protocols of such investigations as often as needed to insure that the project is being conducted in compliance with our institution and with DHHS regulations.

This institution has an Assurance on file with the Office for Protection from Research Risks. The Assurance Number is IRB00000448.

CC: PAT VILLENEUVE
HSC NO. 2006.0311
Informed Consent Form for Interview

I freely and voluntarily and without element of force or coercion consent to participate in the research project entitled, “The Career Paths of Non-European American Executive Opera Administrators”.

Antonio Cuyler, a doctoral student at Florida State University, is conducting this research project. I understand the purpose of his research is to better understand how non-European American executive opera administrators constructed career paths to top-level management positions in opera. I understand that if I participate in this study, he will ask me questions about my career, experiences, and feelings toward non-European Americans in executive positions in opera administration.

I understand if I agree to an interview with Antonio Cuyler it will take about sixty minutes or more. I also understand that, if interviewed he will digitally or audio record the interview. Only, Antonio Cuyler will use these audio or digital recordings. He will store them in his possession in a secure and fire proof safe. He will destroy the recordings upon completion of this dissertation research project.

I understand that my participation is totally voluntary and I may stop participating at any time. Antonio Cuyler will keep my responses to all interview questions confidential to the extent allowed by law. Although, he may use quotes from my interview in the final report of the research. My name, nor any other identifying characteristics, will appear on any of the results, unless I give my permission.

I understand that I may contact Antonio at (850) 853-3379, or his directing professor, Pat Villeneuve at (850) 644-1915 for answers to questions about this research or my rights. I may also address questions and concerns to the Florida State University, Human Subjects Committee, Tallahassee, FL 32306-2742.

I have read and understand this consent form.

Participant

Date
APPENDIX B

Dear Bureau of Labor Statistics:

My name is Antonio Cuyler. I am a doctoral candidate conducting research on the careers of non-European-American executive administrators of opera. I recently tried to use the Bureau of Labor Statistics data, but found it quite difficult to ascertain the information I needed. As a result, I spoke with Mr. John Jones about my issues using the current system and he suggested that I submit a request of change to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. The current system for categorizing employees of the arts makes it difficult to decipher if arts administrators and managers are categorized in the 27-0000 Arts, Design, Entertainment, Sports, and Media category or the 11-0000 management category. To make the collection, management, analysis, and reporting of data easier and useful for the Bureau of Labor Statistics, Researchers, and Arts administrators I would like to request an additional category for arts administrators and managers.

Goucher College (2005) defined arts administration and management as the management of arts organizations of all kinds. Arts administrators and managers work in the non-profit sector, for arts councils, professional choruses, dance companies, opera companies, symphony orchestras, theatre companies, and museums. They are also found in for-profit organizations, for example working in artist management, in the music industry, and running art galleries. Salaries for arts administrators and managers are highly dependent upon both the size and geographic location of the organizations for which they work. An entry-level position might pay about $20-25,000; a senior position in a small organization might pay $35-45,000; a senior position in a larger, more established organization pay in the $60-$80,000 range, and even higher for very large organizations in very large cities. Very small and very new organizations often pay little or nothing, at least in the earliest years (Goucher College, 2005). For more about salaries please visit guidestar.org. Arts administrators and managers are educated at institutions of higher education across the United States and abroad. According to the National Association of Arts Administration Educators (2005) there are 40 graduate and 13 undergraduate programs students can receive Bachelor’s, Master’s, and Doctoral degrees.

A new category for Arts administrators and managers will ensure easy and efficient collection, management, analysis, and reporting of data on the profession of arts administration and management. This is beneficial not only to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, but also to researchers, scholars, and service arts organizations such as Americans for the Arts, Chamber Music America, Chorus America, Dance America, OEPRA America, the National Endowment for the Arts, and the American Symphony Orchestra League. Adding the new category of arts administration and management will allow reporting on upper-level, mid-level, and entry-level arts administration and management positions. At the same time, this category will allow further reporting and classifying of the variety of career opportunities that exist in arts administration and management. Please seriously consider this proposal and request for a new occupational category at the Bureau of Labor Statistics for arts administrators and managers.

Thank you,
Antonio C. Cuyler
Dear____________________________:

I am a doctoral candidate in the College of Visual Arts, Theatre, and Dance at Florida State University in Tallahassee, Florida. Dr. Pat Villeneuve is the major advisor for my dissertation study. I am conducting a study on “The Career Paths of Non-European-American Executive Opera Administrators.” Currently, there is very little literature on the careers of executive arts administrators. These studies have typically excluded executive opera administrators and overlooked the impact that culture, ethnicity, gender, and race have on the career paths of executive arts administrators. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to discover, describe, and document the career paths of non-European-American executive opera administrators and to reveal some of the critical influences that led to vertical mobility in executive arts administration. Another purpose of this study is producing knowledge and new understandings about career strategies that may assist future Non-European Americans in their quests for vertical mobility in arts administration. This study also seeks to initiate further intellectual and scholarly discourse on the careers of executive arts administrators.

You represent one of the selected non-European-American executive opera administrators whose achievements in the field of opera administration fall within the parameters of this study. I would be most appreciative if you would agree to participate in my study by way of a taped personal interview which will take about 60 minutes or more. The interview can be scheduled at your convenience, flexibly between May 23, 2006 and June 23, 2006. Florida State University will publish the results of my study in dissertation format by the. If you prefer, I will consider your participation entirely anonymous.

Please acknowledge receipt of this e-mail by sending a telephone number where I may contact you at to further discuss the logistics of your participation in this study. If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, feel free to contact my major advisor Dr. Pat Villeneuve at (850) 644-1915 or the Human Subjects Committee at Florida State University. This committee may be contacted at: (850) 644-7900, 2035 E. Paul Dirac Drive, Box 15, 100 Sliger Building, Innovation Park, Tallahassee, FL 323ten.

Thank you in advance for your cooperation,

Antonio C. Cuyler
Ph.D. candidate in Art Education/Arts Administration
College of Visual Arts, Theatre, and Dance
Florida State University
Dear ________________,

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my dissertation study on the career paths of non-European-American executive opera administrators. The purpose of the study is to discover and describe their career paths, career choices, patterns of professional growth, and barriers encountered pursuing executive positions in opera. The interview will take sixty minutes or more. Below is the mutually agreed upon date, time, and place for our interview:

**Day:**

**Date:**

**Time:**

**Place:**

To ensure accurate input of information, I would like to audio and digitally record the interview for transcribing purposes. Thank you for submitting your resume. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me via e-mail at antoniocuyler@hotmail.com or on my cell phone (386) 916-1852. I look forward to meeting with you. Thank you!

Sincerely,

Antonio C. Cuyler
Antonio C. Cuyler
Ph.D. candidate in Art Education/Arts Administration
College of Visual Arts, Theatre, and Dance
Florida State University
APPENDIX E

Interview Protocol

Thank you for agreeing to interview with me. As a part of my dissertation research, I am interviewing non-European-American executive opera administrators to identify career paths, barriers, and strategies for success leading to top-level management positions in opera administration. I will report data without reference to an individual, unless you give me verbal and written permission to do so. You are free to choose a pseudonym or I will assign one to you before we start the interview.

Key
Bi-cultural Life Structure Theory = (BLST)
Psychological Dimension = (PD)
Structural Dimension = (SD)

1. Interview (Questions about background & Personal)
   Family/Personal
   a. Where were you born? (PD & BLST)
   b. Where did you grow up? (PD & BLST)
   c. Please tell me about your family and childhood as they relate to your career success. (PD & BLST)
   d. What family member most influenced your career path? (PD & BLST)
   e. How did this person impact your career? (PD & BLST)
   f. What is your earliest memory of opera? (PD, BLST, and SD)
   g. How crucial to your current success was your early exposure to opera? (PD & BLST)
   h. What are your family’s views on opera? (PD, BLST, and SD)
   i. Does your family attend opera performances? (PD, BLST, and SD)
   j. How did your family members and peers respond to your interest in opera? (PD, BLST, and SD)
   k. Please tell me about your family’s views on your career success. (PD & BLST)
   l. What are the levels of education of your immediate family members? (PD & BLST)
   m. What are the occupations of your immediate family members? (PD & BLST)

   Ethnicity/Race
   a. How was ethnicity and race important to your family? (PD & BLST)
   b. How do you define yourself ethnically and racially? (PD & BLST)
   c. What are the major influences in your choice of ethnic and racial identity? (PD & BLST)
   d. Were there any times in your life that being non-European-American has been more or less important to you? If so, please describe these times. (PD & BLST)
   e. As an adult, have you experienced what you believe to be racism, sexism, or discrimination? If so, please describe these experiences. (PD & BLST)
f. How has being a non-European-American hindered your full participation in U.S. society? (PD & BLST)
g. Please tell me about the ethnicity and race of your friends and associates. (PD & BLST)

**Education**
a. What were the characteristics of your elementary, middle, and high schools? (PD, SD, and BLST)
b. Did you participate in extracurricular activities? If so, what kind? (PD, SD, and BLST)
c. How did your extracurricular activities impact your present career? (PD, SD, and BLST)
d. What was the ethnicity and race of your friends in elementary, middle, and high schools? (PD, BLST, SD)
e. What were your college aspirations, career plans, and future goals before college? (PD, BLST, and SD)
f. Who influenced your decisions after graduation in high school and college? (PD & BLST)
g. Where did you attend college? What degrees do you hold? (PD, BLST, and SD)
h. What was your major? (PD, BLST, and SD)
i. What were the characteristics of your undergraduate and graduate schools? (PD, BLST, and SD)
j. How did your ethnicity, gender, and/or race impact your college experience? (PD, BLST, and SD)
k. How did you cope? (PD, BLST, and SD)
l. What was the ethnicity and race of your friends in college? (PD, BLST, and SD)
m. What mentor relationships benefitted your career progression after college? (PD, BLST, and SD)

**Bi-cultural Competence**
a. What were your early feelings about being non-European-American? (PD & BLST)
b. What are your current feelings about being non-European-American? (PD & BLST)
c. What does it mean to be a non-European-American in the United States? (PD & BLST)
d. How have you negotiated the line between a European-American world and one of your own ethnic community? (PD & BLST)
e. How has this effected your interactions with European-Americans and those of other races? (PD, BLST, and SD)
f. How is it easier or more difficult for you to attract people of your ethnic heritage to opera? (PD, BLST, and SD)
g. How do you feel about diversity in opera administration at the executive level? (PD, SD, & BLST)

**Professional Preparation**
a. What kind of administration preparation did you receive? (SD)
b. In what ways did the preparation assist you in becoming a leader? (SD)
c. What part of your administrative training dealt with ethnicity, gender, or race? (SD, PD, & BLST)
d. How did your knowledge of management and administration principles assist in your attainment of your current position? (SD)

2. Interview (Details of Current Experiences)

Career Path

a. How did you get your first job in opera administration? (PD, BLST, and SD)
b. What motivated you to pursue a career in opera administration at the executive level? (PD, BLST, and SD)
c. Please tell me about your positions prior to accepting your current position. (PD, BLST, and SD)
d. Knowing what you know now, what changes would you have made in the course of your career path? Would it be the same or would you have chosen differently? Why or why not? (SD, BLST, and PD)
e. What are some of the qualities, both personal and professional, that caused your employer to select you for your current position? (SD, BLST, and PD)
f. What were your major challenges in the application and interview process for your executive opera administrative position? (PD, BLST, and SD)
g. What were your expectations as you accepted your position? (PD, BLST, and SD)
h. How are the realities of being an executive opera administrator different than your expectations? (SD, PD, and BLST)
i. Reconsidering each career step, can you share examples of barriers you encountered along each step? (SD, BLST, and PD)
j. Which barriers do you feel are related to being a non-European-American? (SD, PD, & BLST)
k. What strategies did you use to work through barriers you encountered in your career progression? (SD, PD, and BLST)
l. What is the most difficult issue you have faced in your career as a non-European-American executive opera administrator? (SD, PD, BLST)
m. If you had to make your initial career decision again, would you choose opera administration? Why or why not? (SD, PD, & BLST)
n. Thinking over your career, can you identify any incidents you have had that made a significant difference in your professional development? (SD, PD, & BLST)
o. What did you learn from these incidents? (SD, PD, & BLST)
p. How is your career path similar to European-American executive opera administrators? (SD, PD, & BLST)
q. How is your career path different than European-American executive opera administrator? (SD, PD, & BLST)
r. What formal or informal networks were influential to your career advancement? (SD, PD, and BLST)
s. Who are your mentors? (SD, PD, and BLST)
t. How did their mentoring assist you in your career? (SD, PD, and BLST)
u. Are you currently mentoring anyone? (PD, SD, & BLST)
v. What tools are you using to assist your mentees? (PD, SD, & BLST)
w. What other factors do you think supported your achievement of your current position? (SD, PD, & BLST)
x. What are your plans ten years from now? (SD, PD, & BLST)

3. Interview (Meaning of Experiences)
a. Why is affirmative action necessary today? (BLST, PD, & SD)
b. How has affirmative action benefitted your career progression into executive arts administration? (BLST, PD, & SD)
c. How is ethnicity and race a factor in succeeding as an opera administrator? (PD, SD, & BLST)
d. How is gender a factor in succeeding as an opera administrator? (PD, SD, & BLST)
e. What barriers do non-European-Americans face in climbing the executive ladder in opera and arts organizations? (PD, SD, & BLST)
f. Why should non-European-Americans pursue careers in opera administration? (BLST, PD, & SD)
g. What is the role of non-European-Americans in opera administration? (SD, PD, & BLST)
h. What advice would you offer to a non-European-American aspiring to become an executive opera administrator? (BLST, PD, & SD)
i. What could be done in academic training and leadership development to assist non-European-Americans in their careers? (SD, PD, & BLST)
j. How are you a risk taker? (PD, BLST, and SD)
k. How are you a trail blazer given that you are one of few non-European-Americans holding an executive position in opera? (BLST, PD, & SD)
l. Which publications are you aware of have featured stories about you and your career? (BLST, PD, & SD)
APPENDIX F

Transcriptions of Interviews

Linda Jackson

Date: Wednesday, May 24, 2006
Time: 3:00 p.m.
Place: Connecticut Opera Administrative Offices, Hartford, Connecticut

Antonio: I would like to start by getting a general picture of what it was like for you growing up. Where were you born and where did you grow up?

Linda: I was born in New York and I grew up in New York City and then New Jersey just outside of New York City, so pretty much the New York metropolitan area.

Antonio: Okay, tell me about your family and your childhood as they relate to your career success.

Linda: Well, my father is an attorney who was a professional and he’s a lawyer, and was a policeman, and has an amazing career and was a judge involved in New York City politics, not really an arts person. My mother is a school teacher who always was very much into the arts. So she raised my brother and I, we would go to shows and things like that. I took ballet and always….It is interesting, when I got into high school, I am not even sure why, but I ended up sort of with a group of friends who put the shows on in high school. I think that contributed a lot to sort of how I got involved in this. Both my parents were very much into my brother and I pursuing professional careers and going to college and those kinds of things and supportive and never really gave us direction about… it was sort of up to us to decide where we wanted to go and what we wanted to do. In that sense it was a really supportive household and just not feeling like there was anything that we couldn’t do.

Antonio: Which family member would you say most influenced your career?

Linda: Probably neither. Probably my mother in the sense that we went to the arts, but my father also because he sort of taught me to be more fearless. It’s not like either one of my parents were involved in the arts and encouraged us to pursue that. In fact, when I was in college my mother kept saying you need to get an education degree so you have a teaching certificate to fall back on. I never did, and I can’t say it was one or the other. I think it was because they were just so supportive of us doing whatever we felt really strongly we should be doing.
Antonio: So how did this person impact your career? You spoke of your father encouraging you to be fearless and your mother giving you that arts foundation. What specific things would you say they did to impact your career as you see it?

Linda: Well, it’s interesting. My father just always wanted me to be happy. He always believed I should have gone to law school, but he certainly has encouraged me to do whatever as long as I am happy and as long as I am being successful. Nothing more than the fact that as I started to do it and told them what I was involved in, they supported me. It is not like somebody who was the child of a singer or performer who decides to follow in their parent’s footsteps. Because my father is an attorney and has been involved in business, I mean that sort of impacted my sort of strong ability to have a business background in terms of the arts and all of that. My mother is really into the arts. My mother is great; I mean she comes to see the shows and all of that and has always enjoyed going to the theater. She and I still go to the theater together and things like that so I mean, she has never been a big opera supporter at all. She is very big into theater and dance. She goes to opera because I work in it, but I am not sure that she is necessarily… she did go to the opera when she was younger. I think the only way really that they influenced me was that they said it was okay to do it. No one ever said, “You shouldn’t be doing that.” I think that is probably the best of anything they gave me. They didn’t say, “Well, you know. There is no money in opera. Why don’t you be a doctor?” That never happened. It was really being supportive more than anything.

Antonio: What was your earliest memory of opera?

Linda: My earliest memory of opera was that in the 6th grade we went to see… I can only now… I don’t even know if I have anything to go back and look at, I might have a souvenir but I think it must have been a production of *Traviata*. I finally figured out from like sort of memories of it that it had to have been a production of *Traviata* that my 6th grade music teacher took us to see in New York.

Antonio: How crucial to your current success was your early exposure to opera?

Linda: Absolutely had no influence whatsoever.

Antonio: No influence at all.

Linda: No, in fact that is why I don’t really remember what it is. It is only after years of remembering sort of spotty things about the production and sort of deducing that she would not have taken us to see something that wasn’t popular and that in the last act somebody died in a bed. That leads me to believe that it may have been *Traviata*. 

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Antonio: I had a similar experience when I was in kindergarten. There was a... I think it was a young artist program that came to my elementary school and I don’t remember what they were doing. I think it was some kind of put together maybe opera scenes. It looked like it was Little Red Riding Hood. I can’t remember exactly what it was, but I thought it was kind of unique the way that they sang and how it was very different from the gospel music that I grew up listening to. So what are your family’s views on opera?

Linda: Well, my mom likes it. Like I said, she comes to see my shows, but she does not go to the opera on a regular basis on her own. My brother works as an attorney in the recording industry; so he is involved in music. He will come up and see shows. I made him be in an opera once down in Florida. He was obsessed with being on stage with Domingo. So he enjoys it, but again, he is not a regular opera goer. My father has come up to see some stuff that I have done, but my family is not a family that was really into opera or isn’t consciously aware of what is going on in the field or anything like that.

Antonio: How did you family members and peers respond to your interest in opera?

Linda: You know there were people that... It is interesting because most of my friends now are people who are in the field, so that is kind of a hard question to answer. I mean the people who are not people in the performing arts field in some other area, so they sort of get it. I think my father and my mother... I think my parents both probably at times wonder how I got here because it wasn’t typical. More than anything they worry. We have a lot of conversations about fundraising and audiences and things like that, but I think they see I am happy and that is what most important.

Antonio: Okay, you spoke a little bit about your mother being a teacher and your father being an attorney and also your brother. Can you tell me about their levels of education?

Linda: Well, my dad went to law school. Both my father and my brother went to law school. My mother went to college, and she just told me this weekend that she was a few credits shy of her Master’s, but I said to her why you don’t go get it. But one of the things about being a school teacher in New York, I don’t know it if is true in every place, but there are a lot of continuing education courses that you can take over the years, so she has been to college and everything.

Antonio: Okay, we are going to move into a different area. We are going to talk about ethnicity and race. How is ethnicity and race important to your family?
Linda: Pretty much. Because of the nature of my father and what he did and how he was involved in city politics. My father... and I did not consciously understand this until I was old enough to understand it after the fact. He used to go down south and do a lot of voter registration. I never quite realized until I was an adult that on all those trips he was making he might not come home. That was really sort of eye-opening. It is interesting because this past Thanksgiving he was telling a story about being down in the South and being careful about how they went out and having police escorts. It was sort of scary. It was fascinating to hear but very scary. My father has always been sort of a semi-prominent member of the Black Democratic Party in New York City. He sort of knows lots of people. He was liaison for the Black Players Association. That has been kind of important. With my mom, my mom taught in the south Bronx, so she was where it was predominately Blacks and Hispanics all of her career. My brother by sheer virtue of being now in the entertainment and music field. The field is dominated by minority artists. He does a lot of work with hip-hoppers. They are all sort of involved.

Antonio: So speaking of that tradition, how do you define yourself ethnically and racially?

Linda: Well, you know, I define myself as... and I always have... I always define myself first as a woman and probably second as a Christian and third as probably an African American. I will say this, I am honestly glad I did not grow up White. It is not because I was particularly or necessarily a big, out-there, Black pro-whatever. It is just that I don’t think I would have the opportunities or the sensitivity that I have if I had been raised as something comfortable. I mean I think the challenges that have been presented to me because I am a woman and because I am Black have made me a better person. I am not sure I would have had those same challenges if I had just been... particularly if I had been raised a White male upper middle class or something else. I am not sure I would have the same humility. I don’t know if I would be the same person that I am. For all of my craziness, I kind of like the person that I am, and I also know that it has forced me to think things through a certain way. I look at things differently and experience them differently. What I don’t do... I’m not a person who is... I don’t feel like I am necessarily on a mission. I feel very strongly and I feel it is very important for me to be successful at what I do because I have to continue to be in a position where I can be a role model. What I can say is that I have not been very good about maybe helping someone else after the fact. I have not consciously gone out and done that. When I was in Chautauqua I was very careful and conscious about how we handled color blind casting and all of those issues. It is not as though I have gone out and done anything major or important in terms of wanting to change the nature of how the field works. For a short time actually, I
worked at 651 at BAM (Brooklyn Academy of Music). When I was hired there it was because Mickey Shepherd was running that organization and wanted to bring Opera Ebony in. Wayne and Ben just weren’t interested. Part of me always wanted to work with a company that was African American, but part of it is having the resources to do it, and part of it is just trying to figure out where to do it. You know if I had been wealthy, I might have been able to start a company on my own, but barring that it has been important to me to work in companies and organizations where I can make sure I can influence casting.

Antonio: Now you spoke about color blind casting. How did you implement that? When you were going through that process was there some kind of ethical imprint on your mind as a woman, Christian, African American that was saying, “We have to balance this visually so that it represents all of the population of U.S. society?”

Linda: Yes, but I can’t honestly say it is that conscious. I’ve never understood how we can’t do that. It’s like if you watched television and you were an alien and you landed here and you turned on the television, you would believe that from watching commercials that there was a comfortable ethnic mix in this country and that everybody is accepting of everybody else; I mean, it gets better every day. I mean you see a Black man and an Asian woman couple in their home doing the laundry. You know those things always stun me because… it is fascinating… I know that they exist in our real world, but the fact they were are actually starting to represent the majority. Unfortunately it is not supported 100% how we behave in our real lives. Part of the reason that I chose to stay in opera as a field originally was that the first time I did a production of Butterfly the soprano that was singing Butterfly was an African American. That was in a summer festival season, but then when HGO (Houston Grand Opera) did it on the main stage; we also had an African American in both casts in Butterfly. So it was and the first time I did the Butterfly with that there was something wonderful about this field where it does not matter as long as vocally the person is able to portray the role. The fact that was accepted made it much more interesting to me as a profession to be in. It was also that I could get work in it, but it was fearing that, you know, that wasn’t an issue. And I was raised at HGO. It was Treemonisha and Porgy. It was kind of like, oh well. That said casting in general there, but I did think it was much more forgiving of that because it was about the ability to do vocal. Now that is not to say that there aren’t all kinds of racial problems and inequities in the field, but it certainly is much more open and inviting.

Antonio: Okay, I would like to talk about that more, but just kind of getting back to that ethnicity and race thing, what are the major influences and which was the ethnic and racial identity. You said African American, but you said Woman, Christian, and African American. Why African American and
what influences you to kind of embrace that ethnic identity vs. Black American or something else?

**Linda:** Oh, I was saying that to be politically correct. I rarely use that term. I usually say Black because to me it is all words. You know, I’m sort of idealist, but I don’t want to even have to go through the thought. It just makes me really crazy that it in 2006 and we are having this conversation anymore. You know the reality is for as much as things have gotten better, they are just the same. It identifies me in the sense that there is no… I don’t think it is possible to be Black in this country and not on some level understand that pretty much all the time. I just don’t think it is possible.

**Antonio:** With that said, were there any time in your life being Non European American has been more or less important to you? If so, please explain.

**Linda:** More or less important to me. It becomes more important because society makes it more important; so therefore, you have becoming like the first Black woman to run an opera company. That, of course, is important for that very reason, but that’s a stupid reason. It is less important to me most of the time. Most of the time I just don’t understand why it should be more important.

**Antonio:** Right. As an adult have you experienced what you believe to be racism, sexism, or discrimination? If so, please describe these experiences.

**Linda:** Oh yeah, oh yeah. I think growing up probably I was much more conscious of the race thing because of when I grew up. I grew up in the 60’s and 70’s, and so it was much more an issue because people were sort of still being very defined by their races and, you know, being a Black woman you become very conscious of the fact that because you satisfy two stereotypical quotas when somebody is looking for you. I am sure I’ve had advantages I would not have had if I had been a Black man or a White woman as a result of it. So there are… when I look back on it, I mean there were times when I have been in situations where I felt that I was not being listened to is probably the best way to put it. Like, “Why is this person here? Why do they have to be here?” Interestingly enough, because of the situations I have been in where on the one hand I have been conscious of this race issue in terms of… it is not about work; it is more about social things. It is more about, you know, going to a cast party with a group of people who may or may not be prejudiced. It is not about, “Oh she’s Black; she should not be stage-managing.” It is “Oh is it going to be okay to be at this person’s home or something like that.” You know, at first when I started, particularly when I started in Houston which was for better or worse, it is still in the South and the same thing is true of Florida. You know, you are a little bit conscious of that, but as time goes on and people get to know you and accept you and it goes away. The thing that is
more prominent that I find or that I have experienced, maybe it is because over the years having gotten used to the race issue. Is the sexist factor. I still find many more situations where I very consciously feel, “Oh, she could not possibly know what she is talking about. She is a girl.” I mean I find particularly in business communities where you get on a Board of Directors and things like that. It is an interesting phenomenon. There are times when I feel like, I bring it on myself. I know my voice pitches up when I am angry or excited or trying to make a point and I wish it didn’t. I would probably be better at that if I was a male, but I do think that there are times when I realize it would have been a lot easier to make the case if I was a guy in a business suit in a room with a bunch of business men.

Antonio: Well, the next question that I have is about being a non-European and how you feel that has hindered your full participation in U.S. society, but it seems for you like your gender is more of a problem than being Non-European American in terms of participating in everything that being a U.S. citizen offers. Would you say that is the case or would you say that it is different?

Linda: I think it is different more than anything else. I mean, I don’t feel like I haven’t been able to do anything because of my life. That is also surely by virtue of when I was born, where I lived, and the situations I have been in. If I had been born ten years earlier and been raised in Georgia, I am sure it would be very different than being born when I was and being raised in New York City and being part of a very prominent culture in Manhattan of upwardly mobile African Americans, Black Americans who were involved in politics in government and city. There were things that my father and mother were able to do that I know their parents weren’t able to do. But I also know that because they were able to do it, they were not even issues for my brother and I. They were not even obstacles that we had to consider that might be out there. When I first went to Chautauqua as the production stage manager with Cynthia Auerbach when she was still alive and she was Jewish. I always remember when we first got there in the summer of 81, at that point in time neither one of us would have been able to buy property at Chautauqua. No one would have sold to a Jew or a Black person; it would not have happened. I think the first Black family to buy a house there would have been maybe late 90s and Jewish property owners were probably a little bit earlier than that. I can remember her sharing at a table at a diner and laughing about the fact that the ladies running the opera company can’t buy property. So again, a lot of things just naturally changed over the course of time. When you are in situations where you are surrounded by people who are more tolerant its very different. The female thing I don’t think has kept me from participating in things. I think that we are in a time where that would be politically incorrect. It is just a question of how much harder you have to work to make an impact.
Antonio: Wow. Please tell me about the ethnicity and race of your friends and associates you spoke about, the Jewish female who was the general director at that time. Would you say you have a mixed group of friends and associates?

Linda: Yes, I really do. I mean I probably have more White friends just by sheer virtue of the fact that I am in a field where... I mean you socialize with the people you work with.

Antonio: So let’s talk more about your education. This is kind of going back and talking about elementary school and your early educational experiences. What were the characteristics of your elementary, middle, and high schools in terms of race, in terms of level of achievement? Was it a performing arts school?

Linda: Elementary school was, remember my mother is a school teacher. So they were always going to be good schools. Elementary school started in the Bronx, a very high achieving school. I would say that the mix was probably whatever the mix was at that time. I know there were probably Black kids in the school and we lived in the area where a lot of Jewish kids went to school. When we moved to New Jersey in Teaneck. You are way too young to remember this, but there was a book print written in the 60s called Triumph in a White Suburb, and it was about the movement of Blacks into a White community that was successful because the Whites technically didn’t run. It was written about Teaneck, and that is where we moved. So from the time I was in the 4th grade until the time that I was a senior in high school in Teaneck, we were a very well integrated community, very professional. I went to Bar mitzvahs as well as Sweet 16s. All through high school kids were interracially dating. So we are talking in the 60s. My brother who is two years behind me, actually started to experience the decay of that. Then we started to move out of Teaneck. Teaneck is still very much African American, Black, and very much Jewish with some other things. There were a lot of different groups there now. So it was always very integrated, very mixed, very... we were all very college-bound, high achieving. You know, all my friends went to college and we all sort of had aspirations toward, you know, professional careers.

Antonio: Did you participate in extracurricular activities?

Linda: I did church.

Antonio: Was there anything else?
Linda: I was really, really very involved in my church at that point. I was doing a lot of after school programs at my church and lot of after school programs at the theater.

Antonio: So there must be then some logical relationship between your extracurricular activities and your career.

Linda: Yes, I mean, it wasn’t planned though. I went to high school like the usual. I went to college and I was like, “Oh, I am not going to do shows for a while, I need to focus on my career.” I mean I had planned to be a doctor at one point and then I got over that, and then I was going to be a lawyer. Then I planned to go to seminary. Then I got to college and literally my freshman year dorm was across from the theater. I went over to volunteer and then just sort of after four years ended up being a theater major. It had not been my intent.

Antonio: So what were your college aspirations, career plans, and future goals before college?

Linda: Well, I did. When I was growing up I wanted to be a doctor, and then I don’t remember quite when. There was a while when I thought I wanted to be an attorney, and then there was this period when I decided that I was going to go to seminary, which was when I was a freshman. I had a double major in English and Theater. Actually when I graduated I was thinking about going to college and doing my masters in English. But I spent so much time working in the theater that I also… I mean I was going to apply to … and then I eventually just applied NYU and went to graduate school for a year at NYU. There was a point my freshman year when I thought about dropping out of school to go work for John Lindsey and run for president. I am not even sure I know when I consciously decided I was going to pursue theater, probably not until I was like into my Junior or Senior year. I am not sure that I… you know I knew that I wanted to go into theater, but I really wanted to go into straight theater. I thought it would be like the coolest thing to be a Broadway stage manager. Eventually, someday I wanted to produce at Beaumont Theater. Now the thought of stage managing Broadway shows makes me just want to through up.

Antonio: Who influenced your decisions after graduation from high school and college?

Linda: Well, at school my theatre department chairman, he was a very big influence on me. He was a great guy. He taught me a lot about production managing. My senior year in college I produced cabaret theatre. He was good at helping me figure out how to do that. Then out of school, actually what happened when I left college, I went to work for one of my
professors who had written a play, and he asked me if I would stage manage it. The man who directed that show I got to be good friends with. For the next two years I sort of worked on all of his productions. It sort of got me through my early stage in New York.

Antonio: Where did you attend college, and what degrees do you have?

Linda: I went to Douglass College at Rutgers, and I got a B.A. in English and theater.

Antonio: Your major was in theater and English?

Linda: Yes, it was a double major.

Antonio: Now it all makes sense.

Linda: It was exhausting. English classes only at 8:00 in the morning. So I be getting home after rehearsals and writing papers until 3:00 in the morning and had to get up for class the next day.

Antonio: Interestingly enough, I don’t think much of that has changed.

Linda: I am sure it hasn’t, but being an English major it was just so much writing and so much reading and that is just really hard to do when you are trying to like be in rehearsals and be in production work.

Antonio: That’s true, especially with no laptops too; where you know, you can sit there and write your papers while you are rehearsing or whatever. What were the characteristics of your undergraduate school?

Linda: Well, I was in the first class of the separated theater department at Rutgers. The department chairman started with me my freshman year. It was his first year too. At the time Rutgers was going through a major debate about whether they were going to put the theatre graduate program on the Newark campus or the New Brunswick campus. I was on the New Brunswick campus. My department chairman really wanted the graduate program at New Brunswick. So, from the day I started working in the theatre program it was very professional. I remember going from college into professional work and never feeling like I had to go through any sort of transition period because we had like a professional theater as an undergraduate, so that was really nice. So you know, I mean Douglass, it was nice. Douglass is a woman’s college, but the theater program for the university is on the Douglass campus, so though my personal living experiences at school were all female, which I think was really important, all of my classes were co-ed.
Antonio: So how did your ethnicity, gender, and race impact your college experience if at all?

Linda: I don’t know that it did. I mean it was a very mixed program and actually when about half way through as Jack was putting together a graduate program, he brought a lot of his graduated students he had been at Oberlin before, came in as teachers as he was doing that. The person who eventually… I ended up going to HGO to work for came in that way, and I worked with him as an undergraduate, but another person that was very important was Avery Brooks who sort of pulled together the whole Black theater program at Rutgers. It’s really interesting; I think Avery is probably the best actor I have ever seen on stage. He is also an incredible musician and everybody thinks of him as being so very intense because it’s like he was Hawk. But he is really an accomplished musician. He is sort of amazing and a jazz person. It was always has an exquisite very advanced program, a very nice program.

Antonio: It seems to me like you have always been comfortable having like a mixed group of friends, associates from elementary school, middle school, high school. Would you say that was the case for college as well?

Linda: Yes, absolutely.

Antonio: What mentor relationships benefitted your career progression after college? You spoke about the Department chair and a professor at NYU. Would you say they were mentors?

Linda: Well, Jack certainly was, from Rutgers. Actually, I did not really have a mentor at NYU. Albert was a mentor, but he was not even actually affiliated with the school. He just happened to be the director or the show that I worked on. I was at NYU for a year. After that, I would be lying to say that I didn’t… I mean I think of David Gockley as a mentor just because I started my career at HGO and always had a really great relationship with David and still a lot of what I know about producing opera and running a company, I learned working for him, and he is still a very great person. I still sometimes call him and ask him what he thinks. Mentor is probably the wrong word, it is just I learned so much from him that I guess I could call him that. It is not like, you know, we had regular sessions or sat down or anything. It is just I watched how he ran the company and a lot from him. In terms of how my career is shaped from working with David in Houston and then Bob Herman in Miami. Bob ran a company in a very different way than David did and with a very different artistic sense. Working for Cynthia Auerbach when she was alive at Chautauqua. And also Jane Lever who ran the Texas Opera Theater program. Between the four of them and working for them and the different ways that they worked and how I sort of how I developed from that. David
is very, very much devoted to the art form and to exploring it and pushing its boundaries and not understanding boundaries. Bob was much more regimented and taught me a lot about discipline. From Cynthia I learned that the undaunting belief that you cannot have an opera unless you have competent people who get along and function as a group of people together. Interpersonal relationships within the staff are tantamount to having a successful company and a lot of that from Jane too. Jane was also just very daring in terms of the way she just sort of put Texas Opera Theater together. We used to argue a lot and that taught me a lot too because it helped me identify the things that I knew I did not want to do.

Antonio: Okay, well we are going to move back into talking about what we call the bi-cultural competence where you understand that as a Black American you kind of have to work in this majority dominated society. We already talked about your early feelings about being a Non European American and you current feelings about that as well. How did you negotiate the line between the European-American World and one of your ethnic background?

Linda: Would you define that question a little bit more?

Antonio: Absolutely, okay, so going in between, looking at opera, you have to deal with primarily European-Americans and so when you go to work, you go to work with European-Americans. When you go home you deal with your family, which is primarily Black American. How did you negotiate going between those two worlds? Would you say that you stayed the same or did you accommodate going into a European-American world? How was that for you?

Linda: I am not sure it was any different. You know, I don’t know how it is so different. I mean I’m not any different. I feel like a few people can’t figure out why I work in opera. You know it’s not because it is White; it is because it’s opera. I get that more than I get working in a European environment. But I mean in terms of my family and how I deal with them, I mean I am not a different person. I mean I may feel a little out of place only because I am not up on a lot of things. I stay in touch with my brother more than I stay in touch with my culture or anything like that. But I never felt… I never felt like I had to change to adapt to either of those situations in any way.

Antonio: With you not changing, how has it been attracting Black people to come to opera for you? Do you think it is easy or more difficult?

Linda: Well, I think that… I guess I don’t really think… and I have had this experience pretty much across the board. I definitely think that there are singers of color who will come sing for me or want to sing for me both at
Chautauqua and the Berkshires when I was there and particularly now with Willie, where I think we get a lot... I am assuming we are hearing from more singers of color than a lot of other places are in terms of wanting to audition for us and everything, which is sort of a blessing and a curse, because I think there is also some expectation that we are going to be more accepting. And a bad singer is a bad singer no matter what color they are. You know, it is sort of an awkward kind of position to be in. You know, we certainly both get asked for advice from singers about career and what they want to do and what our experiences have been. This does not happen as much here because Willie is such a prominent figure here. Certainly more people who don’t know anything about the field know about Willie as being out there, then necessarily know about me. It was a bit different when I was at Chautauqua, but when I was general director I use to get that a lot.

Antonio:  It is interesting. I never really thought about it that way with the singers having kind of this realization of, “Oh, wow! There are these two executive-level managers at this one opera company who look like me. I want to work with them.”

Linda:  Well, yeah, but unfortunately, it does get taken a step further, which is that, “I have a better shot at getting hired because of that.” And that is an unfortunate belief, because like I said, if you can’t sing, you can’t sing. It is interesting. The woman who used to run the 2nd company in Philadelphia. I can’t remember what the name of it was. But anyway, a really crazy woman, she was a conductor, White, and Jewish. At the time, Opera Ebony used to have a relationship with a company in Philadelphia called, Opera North. I remember having a conversation with her once and she said, “What is frustrating to me about Opera North is that the productions are really bad, and as a result it is influencing the decision of Blacks to go to the opera.” I said, “What are you saying?” She said, “They will do a production of Marriage of Figaro, and they will sell lots of tickets and they will have all these Black singers there, but they don’t go see my operas and they see productions at the Opera Company of Philadelphia. I told her that they go because when they go see it in the theater they see themselves reflected on the stage. It has nothing to do with the quality of the opera. They are not coming to see your shows because if there are all White singers up there, no one will be interested and they won’t care. I thought that was an interesting observation from a woman who otherwise I thought was pretty intelligent to sort of not get that part.

Antonio:  I think that actually pervades the whole, from my understanding, I think that this diversity thing, which we will talk about later, there has to be like, there needs to be people on the staff and people on the board, but artistic programming also has to speak to diversity. You can’t just expect for people to want to come especially when the repertoire is dominated by
composers who are European or European-American males and when the cast is dominated by European or European-Americans.

**Linda:** My desire is to have wanted to work with an African American opera company, it is sort of the same as Dance Theater Harlem and Alvin Ailey’s philosophy which is that, those companies have staffing and board members and contributors who are people of color because they have gone out of their way to create a situation where those people would be interested in those art forms. Now my parents had friends who…actually my parents knew one couple who are actually are very big opera supporters. They go to opera a lot, but who are also very much into dance. I don’t know if that would have happened had there not been places like Dance Theatre of Harlem and Alvin Ailey. Does that necessarily mean they have a different opinion of those art forms? No, there is still the fact that they are European classically based art forms that still sort of have no direct relationship to whatever the African American experience is. It is just that the nature of those companies has created a situation where people at least feel that there is an obligation to support so that having a company like Opera Ebony wanting to do the same thing. But just because say Willie and I are here, we are not necessarily going to generate a larger response from the African American community up here unless we were literally going to be doing a whole season of productions of operas geared towards African Americans but even then I am not sure because people are just not into opera.

**Antonio:** Well, how do feel about diversity in opera administration and particularly at the executive-level?

**Linda:** It doesn’t exist.

**Antonio:** It doesn’t exist?

**Linda:** Well, I mean, but there is a reason it doesn’t exist. Why would you chose to go into opera? First of all, let’s start with your White. Why would you choose to go work for an opera company? Unless you were predisposed for some reason, your parents taught you, whatever, but it has such a minority support anyway. It’s such a small niche of people that are responding to opera vs. the whole rest of the entertainment field to begin with. So next, well, suppose you are a non-White person, whether you are Black or Latino or Asian or anything like that. I mean, you know if you take a look, and I don’t know if anyone has done this, I always thought we should. If we look at the percentage of non-White people that are involved in opera as an art form on a percentage basis, and apply that to whatever is the percentage base of the population that you are talking to, It just looks different because you don’t see so many, but the reality is that it is just there are not a lot of people there to begin with. That said, what is
frustrating to me is that during my years on the board of OPERA America, we would have a lot of discussions about diversity at opera companies, and I used to say, “Well, you know…” And it would come up; well we have a hard time finding good singers of color who have been trained, particularly Blacks. I think that is true. I think that the ability to be able to financially afford what you need to do is very difficult on young African Americans. It’s hard on White singers too. They would say, “What are we going to do? There are not a lot of good singers out there.” I would say things like, “You know, you can hire a Black receptionist. You don’t have to like opera to be a receptionist. You don’t have to like opera to be a finance director. It’s a job.” You know, in terms of looking at how you are going to balance your diversity issues when you are dealing, particularly granting when people are looking at what your staff composition is. It really does not matter if you are into opera or not. We are talking about basic office jobs that have to be filled. Now this gets back to, it still has to be a choice. I am not sure that if you were to look through the want ads, because I had advertised for a receptionist. People might necessarily say, “Well, I am going to go there because it’s an opera company.” You know, that’s different. What is interesting is one of the things about BAM because there is an incredible emphasis on hiring from the Brooklyn community. The staff is like the UN, working at BAM is like being at the UN. You know, the first time I went to the Christmas party, I mean everybody was there. The head of the finance program at BAM when I was there was Black. Her assistant was Asian. The rest of the staff was like Black or Latino. It was like Rainbow Coalition working at BAM because they hired out of the community. The person who came for the job was Black. I mean one of the things we do badly in opera more so than I think a lot the other performing arts, although symphony may be as bad is that we tend to look for people to work for us who also like opera. It never occurs to anybody that the receptionist does not have to love opera to answer the phone. I think that tends to be what happens a lot. Part of that comes because we don’t pay as well as a lot of other people. The assumption is that you are going to look for somebody who wants to work there. You know, I have a hard time saying that there is necessarily active discrimination opposed to people who are actually seeking it out. Like opera is a conscious choice. It is not like when you are growing up Black, somebody says, “Don’t forget to think about working for an opera company.” I just don’t think that is happening.

Antonio: I want to talk about your professional preparation now. What kind of administration preparation did you receive?

Linda: None, I mean nothing formal. I started as a stage manager and had a full theater training background and pretty much stage-managed. I guess it was in Houston when I realized that stage managers sort of have to know everything. You have to know everything. I was also nosy. I used to read
things on peoples’ desks when I was in the office. A stage manager is in on pretty much every decision that has to be made. You know, I am a natural organizer, and all of that, so it was an easy enough transition into being a production manager because when you are a production manager you are managing budgets and it was easy enough to develop an understanding of budget and budgeting and all of that. There wasn’t any formal training. I didn’t do a degree in arts management or that type of thing.

Antonio: So in what ways did you preparation assist you in becoming a leader?

Linda: You know I have always been sort of a production manager type. I never intended to be the head of the company. Literally, I was the number two, and my boss died and they promoted me. You know, Chautauqua is a unique experience because you are not directly responsible for your fundraising, so it was easy enough to run a company without having to have that part. I can’t, I don’t know, it just happened.

Antonio: Was there any part of your training that dealt with ethnicity, gender, diversity or any of that stuff? So like you just, I guess, when I think about these human resource manuals that talk about things like sexual harassment and cultural sensitivity and that kind of thing, I am just always interested that arts organizations tend to not have any discussion about that, at least at some of the smaller ones. Some of the bigger ones do, like at Wolf Trap there was a manual and I was actually helping them with that. That’s just really interesting.

Linda: You know I would be really bad in an arts management program at this point. No really, you know first of all, I am really lazy, but I assume that when you are working you hire people that you have some personal evaluation skills to be able to tell if somebody is a good person or not. I believe that people are basically honest and basically are hard-working, and if you tell me that you can do something we will hire you to do it. If you can’t then we fire you.

Antonio: Well, that is a basic philosophy to work with.

Linda: I would be a really bad model for human resources, I just don’t believe in doing all that stuff. I don’t want to keep track of peoples’ vacation times. I don’t care. I want you to do your job. If you can do it in two days, do it in two days. If it’s going to take you six days do it in six. At the end of week I want the job done. If you need to take a day off, take a day off. To me, it sort of defies the logic of the company. You should be able to hire people that get along and who will do the work. I could never run an HR department.
Antonio: Well, how did your knowledge of management and administration principles assist you in gaining your current position?

Linda: I don’t think it is knowledge. To me it’s logic. You know what I mean?

Antonio: What is the difference do you think between knowledge and logic?

Linda: I mean there is nothing formal about it for me. I mean there really isn’t. You know the nature of Chautauqua every summer and the staffing there. I mean it can’t apply to here because I have the same staff here, but the staffing at Chautauqua changed every summer. The composition of the staff, it was like… I tell you this… If I hired a stage manager who had these types of skills, then I knew I had to look for a different stage manager who had a different type of skill. Depending on the stage managers, how that was going to affect the company. It all sort of… I always hired personalities. I have always hired people that I knew were going to get along with each other. I would rather hire a person who has really good ethics and morals, but perhaps not the best skill set because I believe skills can be taught if someone is intelligent. I would rather know that people are going to get along. Now, I don’t know if there is anything formal about that training. It is just sort of instinctual because that is the way I want to work. I want to work with people who laugh a lot, who have a good time, who have a great sense of humor, but who also are going to get the work done. But I mean I don’t think that happened as a result of any type of formal training. It was a result of working with all of these different people. I mean for as serious as David Gockley is, I have seen a side of him and a sense of humor that I absolutely adore. Bob Herman is a very, very stern person and is sort of formidable in some ways, but still was accessible. Cynthia was really into having a big family and Jane was really into having a big family. But it wasn’t any sort of formal training.

Antonio: So for your position here you were kind of the missing piece that they needed with your skill set?

Linda: A little bit, but my staff is very different than it was when I started working here. Everybody that is here now and particularly in the positions that they are in now, I hired them into those positions and moved them into those positions.

Antonio: So, how did you get your first job in opera administration?

Linda: Well, I got my first job in opera as a stage manager, which really isn’t administration. And my first job in opera administration… the reason it came about was I was stage managing at Chautauqua and eventually we decided we needed a production manager position, so they pulled me out. Cynthia, bless her heart, was just a very bad business person. We were just
spending way too much money. And they said Linda is going to be in charge of the money.

**Antonio:** So that was good experience for you and you got some good budgeting experience. You spoke about the opportunity kind of came about because the general director passed?

**Linda:** I was in the assistant managing director position which put me in charge of everything when she found out she had lung cancer. She died two months before the season started. At that point everything was in play, so they just decided not to bring anybody in at that point. We just let the season run and at the end of the season they said, “Well, you know what you are doing, so…”

**Antonio:** Would you say that sort of motivated you to kind of pursue a career in opera administration at the executive level?

**Linda:** I didn’t have any choice. I mean I was production manager in Houston and I was sort of managing director at Chautauqua, and Cynthia died. Then they asked me to be general director. Then suddenly I was a general director. Then you know, at that point you sort of don’t really go back to stage managing. Although I did. I did go back to stage manage when the stage manager quit, but you know, I mean, I would not go back to stage managing now.

**Antonio:** In a chronological way, your first position was in production management?

**Linda:** Yes, stage manager, production manager, managing director, general director.

**Antonio:** What companies were those positions with?

**Linda:** Stage manager in Houston and Miami, then stage manager and production manager at Chautauqua, then managing director at Chautauqua, then general director at Chautauqua.

**Antonio:** Knowing what you know now, what changes would you have made in the course of your career path? Would it be the same, or would you have chosen differently, why or why not?

**Linda:** That is an interesting question to ask. I don’t… none of it was choice. It was not like, literally… I am in New York; my friend calls me and says I need an assistant for three months. What are you doing? I told him I was thinking about opera. He says you know how to stage manage come to Houston I went to Houston for three months. It was supposed to be three
months. Got to Houston and stayed through Spring Opera Festival and they asked me to come back the next year. I ended up staying there for three years. I only got to the point where at the end of that time I was ready to go back to New York and do theater again. So I moved back to Boston with my boyfriend and thought I would go back and pursue my career there. Got a phone call from another friend of mine the same person who was now in Washington. He needed an assistant. So I went there. Another friend called and said, “I am going to be in Miami in the spring; can you come down and help me?” I told her sure, no problem. We were in the house one day and the phone rings. Cynthia called my friend and said, “I am going to Chautauqua opera; will you come and stage manage for me.” My friend said, “No, I am going to Santa Fe. But wait a minute let me give the phone to Linda.” Cynthia was looking for a stage manager. I did not know her and I went to Chautauqua. I mean that is what happened.

Antonio: So it looks like this informal network, then, kind of worked for you.

Linda: Yes, but I mean no choices, and even going from Chautauqua to BAM, even that, Mickey wanted to bring Opera Ebony to Brooklyn. She asked if there were any Black or African American opera administrators out there, that she did not know anything about opera. Someone put her in touch with me. She called me and said she needed an opera administrator there. You know there was no point where I consciously said I wanted to do this. It has sort of been a natural progression of things. A couple of times I have actually have thought about pursuing other companies or interviewing I’ve never been hired.

Antonio: So you just kind of… you could either go after it or let it happen, and so letting it happen seems to work for you better?

Linda: It is a little scarier that way.

Antonio: It really is. It is kind of uncomfortable because I think we are taught that if you want something you got to go get it, you have to persevere or just keep knocking on that door. If it unfolds beautifully like it has for you, I mean that is great.

Linda: Also I would say 90% of my jobs started with me. Like the position in Houston I was the first person to hold that. I mean, you know the stage managing thing pretty much, but when I went to BAM that position started with me. I think of some other things that started with me. So you know it is …

Antonio: What are some of the qualities both personal and professional that caused your current employer to select you for the position that you have now?
Linda: Well, I think part of coming here is the fact that I knew Willie so that had a big influence on it. Then well, you know, the rest of it just spoke for itself. I had just decided to leave the Berkshires.

Antonio: What were some of your challenges in the application and interview process?

Linda: There weren’t really any. It was not like when I came over… I mean I made the decision to just hang out and do nothing. I mean literally I quit the job and I was just going to hang out in the grocery store or something.

Antonio: What were your expectations as you accepted your position that you have now?

Linda: That it was going to be a lot easier.

Antonio: So the realities of being an executive opera administrator is different than what you expected?

Linda: I just thought it wouldn’t be quite so hard. It is harder than I thought. It is hard to bring a company together. It is hard managing.

Antonio: With each career step can you share examples of barriers that you encountered along step?

Linda: You know I don’t know that I had any barriers on each step. I know that there are continuing barriers, like you are always dealing with a board of directors that is not always what you want them to be. You are always dealing with not having enough money to do the things that you want to do. I don’t know that there has ever been anything that I felt kept me from getting what I wanted to do.

Antonio: Okay, so you wouldn’t say that there were barriers that kind of… you spoke about earlier that you felt like you weren’t being heard in certain situations and you attributed that to being a woman. Would you say that there were barriers that you encountered in being a Non European American with the board or raising money?

Linda: No, I think that those are natural barriers. I just think I am one of those people who just aren’t receptive. You know, I definitely don’t think the response is necessarily about the color issue because of the places I have worked. I don’t think it has been an issue at all. Even being a woman, that is really just sort of anecdotal in having to deal with specific people just sort of not paying attention to you.
Antonio: So what strategies have you used to kind of like say, “I am here, and I know what I am doing?”

Linda: You just keep doing it. I figure sooner or later they are going to get it of not. You know, you can spend a lot more time trying to explain things and justify things, although I am not sure that is really bad because it does really force me to rethink things. It forces me to… You know when I first started working in Houston every summer, I used to work girl scouts camps. When you are dealing with kids consistently, particularly because it is a sleep-away camp and you really are playing Mom or Grandmom or something. When you are thrown into a role of being parent or guardian or whatever, you are forced into situations of having to be able to explain yourself or justify yourself or try to…and what I always loved about being away in the summer was that once you are forced to break everything down to its basic components so that you can explain it to somebody, you realize how simple things are. I used to always be revitalized at the end of the summer because I had left very complicated adult situations and then spent a couple of months with kids. Then I felt like, “Well, of course you can do this; it’s very simple.” I also regret not having that time. It really did just sort of force you to look at things differently, but when you are dealing with people who aren’t listening the first time, you find different ways to look at it, and in the process you refine and make it better for yourself.

Antonio: I have learned that a lot dealing with my nephews too. It is so weird coming from this very theoretical, you know, “Oh, we’re doctoral students, we speak this way,” and then having my nephew ask me a very simple question. I am like, “Well, it is because of bla, bla, bla.” Then they were like, “Well, what does that word mean?” And you are kind of forced, like you said, to break it down and it could have been so much easier if I had kind of used a more direct way of getting at it. So I definitely understand that. What was the most difficult issue you faced in your career as a Non European American or as a woman?

Linda: Most difficult? To me it is getting them to understand what I am talking about, and I don’t know if it is because… I am never sure if I am not explaining it well or if it is because people don’t hear what I am saying. I mean I just… You know it becomes so very clear for me that and I can be so focused on it that I just lose sight of whether I am being clear. It is not until I am running up against people who just don’t completely understand what I am trying to say. I don’t know that it is emotional or psychological. I mean, to me the most difficult thing is trying to create art in a society where it’s not a priority, and it has nothing to do with race or sex or anything. We are dealing with the United States where these are not priorities, and it is very difficult to continue functioning you are struggling and are constantly at the mercy of everybody else in order to survive.
Antonio: Okay, so now if you had to make your initial career decision again, would you choose opera administration? Why or why not?

Linda: It really was not an initial career decision. I like it a lot and I don’t regret it. Would I have initially made that choice? I don’t know. Probably not. I don’t know what I would have done differently because it just sort of happened.

Antonio: And you were happy with that?

Linda: I was happy with that. It was not like this was the area I want to go in. You know, it I had been working for a ballet company, it might have been that, so I mean…

Antonio: Speaking of your career, can you identify any incidents that you have had that made a significant difference in your professional development?

Linda: Well, probably Cynthia dying, because it was really never in my… it was not… even at the point when I was her managing director did it ever occur to me that I would run the company. I just assumed that I would be in the number two position, so probably that is the most significant thing that happened and made a difference for me.

Antonio: What did you learn from that incident?

Linda: Well, I learned that I knew a lot more about this than I thought I did. That is probably the biggest, and also that I had the ability to do it. I am not sure that it was conscious; I sort of knew that… I guess I figured out that I did know more about producing opera and I knew more about opera. I didn’t study opera, and so when I started working at HGO as a stage manager it was sort of learning on my feet. In terms of the ability to learn and manage an organization, I mean, I guess I sort of realized I did know how to do it. I still feel like I am learning a lot about it all the time, but I guess certainly I realized that it was a skill set and an ability that I had all the time and it seemed to suit me okay.

Antonio: How does your career path similar to European-American executive opera administrators?

Linda: Oh, I don’t know. It is probably pretty similar. You know, of my generation, it is not like we started out the big heads of opera companies or people that are my age and older they were singers or… There were no arts administration programs like there are now. You know people were singers or they were directors or they were conductors, and they were not necessarily successful in those areas, but they had a good business
background and they became the general director. Now it is very different. They go to school and they think, “Oh gee, I might want to run an opera company,” and they take the courses and they go do it. But in our time it just was not the way it happened.

Antonio: Yes, there is a big shift in that paradigm of thought about how it happens. Do you think you would have studied arts management or administration had you had that opportunity back then?

Linda: I have no idea. I mean, I don’t know. Probably not, because I really loved the process of being on stage and in production so at that point in my career when I was in college I would have probably been leaning towards wanting to be a stage manager or something like that. It would’ve never occurred to me then to work in opera. I really think too, because when I started working in opera as a stage manager, companies weren’t hiring stage managers for opera. You would see if there was somebody local, and there were a few of us out there who really were stage managers who were doing it. That is very different now too. Across the board there is more professional training in terms of all the positions in opera than there were when I started which was 30 years ago. I mean it has changed. When I was in college it never would have occurred to me to actually think that in long term I would be doing administrative work.

Antonio: Wow. How is your career path different from European-American executive opera administrators?

Linda: I don’t know that it is. Much that happened to me has not been the result of being a woman or anything like that. It happened as it happened.

Antonio: Are you currently mentoring any one?

Linda: Not really.

Antonio: If you were... like if I came to you and you were mentoring me, what tools and strategies would you use to facilitate that process?

Linda: I probably would tell you that if you were just starting out I would tell you to go stage manage for a couple of years. It is the best way to learn this business. If you can be at a company where it is really hands-on you can really understand how the shows go together and it will also help you figure out whether or not you can deal with people. If you can deal with artists and artists’ egos and all of that then you have a better shot at being a good administrator long term where it is opera or any place for that matter. The rest of it just sort of depends on your intuition and your instincts. Part of it overall is just dealing with people.
Antonio: I have been learning that recently, just going through this whole doctoral process has taught me that it is not about intellect. It is not about research ability or inability. It is about dealing with people and motivating them around your goals and your dreams and getting them to buy into your vision of where you want to be in a timely manner. When you are in a frame of time it is like… It is kind of like… I have friends who have this kind of lofty idea of getting a Ph.D. you know, it is the highest level of educational attainment. I said, “It is not about how educated you are.” My friend goes, “What?” I am like, “The people who finish are the people who persevered and learned how to deal with people.” He was like blown away. I said, “I am sorry to pull the cover off your lofty idea there, but that’s just how…”

Linda: If you can get a Ph.D. in that structure, but the bottom line is you still have to react and deal with people. The thing is you will, I think, intuit whether or not you will be able to be successful at something like that, so the more exposure you have to be in situations where you are going to deal with people and learn how to interact with them. The bottom line is you can take a course and pick up a book and find out how to make a budget. The difference is… I also when I was at NYU I studied design. We should keep abreast of how much things are costing. By sheer virtue of having stage managed and dealing with sets then as you learn to production manage you learn the cost of this or the cost of that or whatever. All of those are things you can learn, and your ability to maintain or keep information is really going to give you an advantage. If you are going to be successful as a producer you need to be able to keep a lot of that information in your head, which is why I think stage managing is a good proving ground because you are on stage there are limits to how much you can…You can’t carry a laptop around back stage when you are trying to cue entrances and things like that. You know that will hone your ability to be able to think on your feet as well as dealing with people. The bottom line those are the two things. The bottom line is also how you can react because somebody throws you a curve ball and at the same time everybody sees you being calm when you are managing stuff. Here like how to build a budget. Those are things that are easy enough to learn.

Antonio: What are your plans ten years from now?

Linda: You know. I don’t know. Still probably making shows.

Antonio: It is exciting and inspiring to see your commitment, and your love for it. It is not just… You know I think that is kind of how careers are made. You find what you love to do. You are not worrying about money or all the things you could be doing to make more money or the disadvantages of choosing what you have chosen, but committing yourself to a career path and enjoying it. That’s just awesome!
Linda: You know, it is more… the bigger problem is whether or not I will still be able to do it. More because we have figured out how to keep the companies open until there are a few opera companies, and there are more of us than there are opera companies at this point. You know, I saw a production of *Atys*, I don’t remember who the composer is, but it was the closest thing to perfect that I have ever seen, and I have yet to produce mine. I have done some productions that I am really happy with. I can look at about five different things that I have been associated with in my career and every time I do a new one it bumps something off the list, but I still don’t feel that I have done one where I can definitively say like, “that’s the best work I have ever done.” I know I will strive for that for the rest of my life because that is what I want to be able to do.

Antonio: What are those five things?

Linda: Production of *Turn of the Screw* at the Berkshires, *Giovanni, Trilogy*, *Don Pasquale*, and *Così*. I was probably the most happy with.

Antonio: Now we are moving into the last phase of questions. Why do you think Affirmative Action is necessary today?

Linda: Well, I think because we have not solved it yet. It is unfortunate, but I don’t think we have solved it. Part of where Affirmative Action has failed is less on the part of people who are the decision makers as much as it is on the people who need to go forward. I think we have done enough education with minorities to be able to say you need to be pushing yourself more. That is where the shortfall has come is that the Affirmative Action program has spent a lot of time rewarding people for doing stuff that they really should have pushed themselves a little bit more. And I am not a person who believes we should get rid of Affirmative Action. I just think that is to make sure people understand what the goals are and in all that.

Antonio: Absolutely. How has Affirmative Action benefitted your career progression in arts administration if any?

Linda: You know I don’t believe it has. I mean Affirmative Action did not benefit my career. It affected my start. Like I said before, because my father and his generation had positions and created experiences, it made it that much easier for my generation to be successful. Hopefully, my generation has made it that much easier to be successful for someone else.

Antonio: How does ethnicity and race factor in succeeding as an opera administrator, or does it?
Linda: I don’t think it does. The bigger question is opera a field that by virtue of what it is has the potential to attract different races to it? Then that being said, whether or not it is of interest enough for somebody to choose to pursue a career in it. You know, more than just opera being a European art form is working against it. There is no money. It is expensive. It is not for profit. It is hard to make a living. Its not the same kind of money. Given the kind of work I do here, if I was working for a corporation I would be making three times as much money, but I don’t think there are barriers necessarily in terms of administration. I just think it is not a choice that people are going to make, and I am not sure… There are not White people making the choice at this point either. I’m reading a lot lately about the fact that non-for-profit executives… There is going to be a void soon if we don’t address how to deal with it. It is about compensation packages and some of it is about just the work load and support systems that there are for nonprofit.

Antonio: You know talking about that is funny because I don’t really think nonprofits do a good job marketing itself as a career path and career option. I mean I think that my generation (now I am speaking for my generation.) I think that we look for jobs in places where we can feel like we are making a difference. I think we are more socially conscious than is perceived. So working for the Boys and Girls Clubs or working for an arts organization for me or even American Red Cross. Working for those kinds of nonprofit organizations, we kind of have the benefit of making some money. It is not a lot, but I think more importantly it feels like we are making a contribution to society.

Linda: Well, it is. There are realities about it. You know, you go from college where you are thrown in with a group of people who are doing all different things from all walks of life. So there you are ten years from now, and you are working for American Red Cross and you are making $35,000 a year, but ten years from now your roommate decided to be a lawyer is making $400,000 a year. I mean there is a certain amount of that. I think we are better at it and I think that people want to do it, but then there is also the realities of whether or not you can survive or not.

Antonio: Absolutely, especially given our economy.

Linda: Exactly, at this point working for a nonprofit and just being able to afford gas to get to work can become an issue.

Antonio: And so ethnicity or race did not factor in succeeding. Do you think gender comes in to play?

Linda: Well, a little bit, not really as much in nonprofit as it is for-profit. And do I think that ethnicity plays a part? I can’t say definitively that it does not.
Do I think… I interviewed for Orlando once upon time. Do I think… there were many factors that I think contributed to me not being considered seriously? I think my race was part of it because it was Florida, but I also know it was because I was a woman; I also know it was because I was single and didn’t have a family.

Antonio: Wow. There are a lot of factors right there.

Linda: Exactly, so I am not sure that it is necessarily one or the other.

Antonio: Would you say that is the case for… we spoke earlier about… you said there were positions that you pursued and most of the time those positions did not come through, and the ones where you were called. Those were kind of like serendipity.

Linda: It wasn’t that they didn’t come through. I think they were just the wrong fit. You know it is interesting. When you go through an interview process, you are interviewing companies as well as they are interviewing you. You are more successful if it is as attractive to you. You present yourself better. In all the instances where there were places where I did that. Like do I wish I had gone to Orlando Opera? I’m glad I didn’t go to Orlando Opera. So as a result I think you sort of influence the decision that people are making as well. But I don’t know that those factors necessarily… I want to just list them, I don’t want to say that they did not affect something, but I also think it has something to with how your present yourself and whether or not it is the right mix or not. I’d like to believe at this point in time, particularly in a nonprofit that the right mix won’t be trumped by somebody’s race or sex. I have to believe that at this point in time because I think that bears out more often than it doesn’t.

Antonio: What barriers do you think I will face pursuing a career in opera administration at the executive level as a Non European American, if any?

Linda: It depends on what you’re interested in.

Antonio: I think artistic administration would be perfect.

Linda: I think that if you’ve got the skill set. I don’t know your background, but if you have a comfort level and there are positions open. I don’t think you will have a problem getting a job for something like that because you are African American as opposed to because you are White. People are just weird.

Antonio: This series of questions is just kind of, I guess, is going to assess what would it be like… often times peoples say, “I can’t succeed in that career because I’m Black or because I’m female. You know, but when I see
people like you and Maestro Waters, I say, that we still should pursue these jobs even if there might be some kind of barrier that we are not even aware of, I think that Non European Americans and women and anybody can pursue whatever job they want. Why do you think Non European Americans should pursue careers in executive opera administration if their interest is in it?

**Linda:** Why not? Why would anybody not pursue a career in opera if they are interested? From an administrative point of view, I don’t see that there are barriers. Now maybe I am being naïve and Willie may have a different opinion about that, but I don’t think so. I don’t think that factors into it. I think it is more likely that there are… you know, finding African Americans that want to do it. A bigger part of that… Weren’t you at Virginia last summer?

**Antonio:** Last summer I was at Wolf Trap.

**Linda:** You are sort of getting good pedigree on your resume. You got a lot going for you. You speak well, you dress nicely, you have the earrings thing going on but you know I don’t see that... I would never tell you not to pursue a career. You will probably be very successful at it. The bigger thing is once you get into it and if you want to pursue it or not.

**Antonio:** What advice would you offer a Non European American as far as to become an executive opera administrator?

**Linda:** To really question if that is what they want to do. It’s just so hard now. It is so hard I am bordering on wondering if it can still be fun. I like to believe it can still be fun, but there are so many obstacles. It is so expensive. It is really harder dealing with the public that is not sympathetic in any way, so you are dealing with that, and you are dealing with a ridiculous funding climate in a country that is run by an idiot that does not understand and of these funding issues at a time where economics really sucks. You know, you are also competing with three million more gazumptions than there were when I started 30 years ago when I started. I would say that if it is about wanting to be an executive director in an arts organization that is one thing. If it is about wanting to be an executive director of an opera company, then I would say that you have got to be sure that is really what you want to do because it is not going to be easy for you to be successful because the job is not going to be easy.

**Antonio:** Okay, so you have had a career for 30 years in this field. What trends have you seen? What things are different? You talked about the funding climate being very different than what it was 30 years ago. What things have you seen change over those 30 years?
Linda: Well, funding is different. It has just gotten ridiculously more expensive. You know, we are expected to be arts educators in addition to just being arts presenters. You know opera follows regular popular American trends, and we are not as successful at recognizing them as other people are, and so we tend to be behind the curve. For example right now, if you look at movies and the kinds of movies that are out there, then you can’t help but start to say that this is what they are dealing with at the box office. What does that mean in terms of the rep I’m going to present? So the trend is more keeping up with the trends that are out there, but I think opera tends to react slowly to it. It has gotten a little bit better about it, but we tend to react slowly. But it is predictable, not just like anything. One year the lines are long and one year they are short. But the fundraising has become a lot more difficult. I think we are slowly starting to suffer from the limited repertoire because we have not done better about that. Like I said, we are now expected to be arts educators along with everything else.

Antonio: Do you think there is anything you think can be done in our academic training or leadership development to encourage Non European Americans to kind of like take this path?

Linda: I don’t know what unless you have a bunch of interested students in Black colleges, but I am not even sure of that. A lot of it has to do with the field being successful and people deciding to choose it as an option. The problem, in terms of education, I think there needs to be better education about arts in general, and not just about creating executive directors for a business. It is about creating corporate executives who understand that they need to be philanthropic at the same time. I think it is about general arts awareness education across the board for everybody whether they end up pursuing a career in the arts or not.

Antonio: Absolutely, there is a music appreciation course that is taught at Florida State, and that course seems to be mixed with people who plan to go to law school, medical school, and I always wonder what is in the curriculum, because I have seen that syllabus, to imprint upon the students’ hearts, minds, and spirits that this will not survive if they don’t do something about it. I have always wondered what that would be like to kind of sit in that class or teach that class from that perspective. Okay, I have three last questions. How are you a risk taker?

Linda: How am I a risk taker? I am okay. I used to be a lot better when I was younger when it comes to management you get a little bit more conservative, a little more cautious.

Antonio: Do you think that is because of what your experiences have taught you?
**Linda:** I think that as you get older you are a little bit more subtle and you are not willing to put yourself out as much. I used to go out to, but I wouldn’t think about doing that now. I used to eat dinner out by myself all the time. You know, I don’t do that any more because I am just too lazy to stay up to dinner. A lot of it is just being tired. I’m so married to my work that I tend to really not do much else. In terms of entertaining myself other than being at work I’m real bad at that. It is more… a lot of it is just out of exhaustion and just then you get older. It is also… Chautauqua allowed me to have a lot of risks because I wasn’t responsible for my fundraising. They just gave me my budget and I could go with it. So it is a lot easier to be a lot more bold then when you are sort of having to raise money or anything. In other situations you start to second guess yourself.

**Antonio:** How are you a trailblazer given that you are one of three Non European American executive opera administrators?

**Linda:** Am I a trailblazer? I don’t know. I don’t think so. I mean I like to try new things. I don’t know if that makes me a trailblazer or not. Part of me is more of a risk taker, it is not like. I don’t know. I don’t think I necessarily start something new, but because I’m a real student of everything and look at a lot of different things. I’m really good at looking at something and saying that I want to try it, and perhaps figuring out a way to do it better and continue it or something like that, as opposed to somebody coming up with a brand new idea and taking it forward. If I see somebody do something at another company I might try it here, but I might try this variation and it might move it that much further along, but in that sense, but not…

**Antonio:** Well, the reason that I thought of this question is because looking at your career and looking at your bio, I was thinking to myself that just because of the sheer fact that you have taken this whole creativity and taken the responsibility of your career, you have just gone in a different direction than what I think most Black Americans would expect from a Black woman. So in the future when other Black females read about you, it will be an inspiration. That is what I was thinking in terms of being a trailblazer, because before you who else was there?

**Linda:** Probably from 100 feet out there, yeah. But from way up here it is kind of like, you know, it just kind of happened and I did that. It wasn’t…

**Antonio:** I think it is so interesting. You know in trying to find this population of people. I went to OPERA America last summer and talked to them and they gave me suggestions of four people. These are the four people. Essentially, these are the only four people on the face of this planet that can be in my study given the parameters that I have set forth. It is about publications. I came across an article. I think it was written in 1989 Opera
News about you at Chautauqua. Are you aware of other publications that have published information about your career or about who you are? No spread in Ebony or Jet?

Linda: No, probably because I’m not very self-promoting.

Antonio: It would be so fascinating to read about that in one of those magazines, at least for me because I am an opera nerd, a neo-opera nerd.

Linda: Well, maybe. It would have to be after I lost 40 lbs though.

Antonio: Well, thank you so much. Is there anything else that you would like to share? Anything at all?

Linda: No, you know, it happened. It wasn’t choice. It happened. It worked out. I really love it. Would I have done it again? I don’t know. I might have made different choices. I look at things. Should I have done film training, maybe. I don’t know. I look at the field and I think I don’t know how they survive in the movie business. It is all cut throat. I used to work part-time for my brother. The recording industry makes me sick. It is very cut throat. So you know, I mean, non-for-profit was where I was probably supposed to end up. I like producing. I like making shows. I like creating entertainment for people, but you know. I don’t won’t to say I’ve been lazy, but it all sort of happened and as a result of things happening it has allowed me to be a little bit bolder about making some choices. Ultimately, it wasn’t my choice. It wasn’t like I said this is where I want to go. I think that was has made it more interesting because it wasn’t on a path. My ideal cross country trip would be to able to drive cross country and to stop and read markers and then say, “Oh, gosh, look there is something down here,” and be able to go off and know that I had the year to do it.

Antonio: The last thing I wanted to do was ask you if you would like to maintain your anonymity or would you like for me to... Okay, so we will do that. That is it.

Linda: There is a certain reality about that. I mean there is only four of us. Somebody is going to figure out who it was.
Willie A. Waters

Date: Thursday, May 25, 2006
Time: 10:00 a.m.
Place: Connecticut Opera Administrative Offices, Hartford, Connecticut

Antonio: What I would like to start with is get a general idea of your background. Where were you born and where did you grow up?

Willie: Miami, Florida. I lived in a little town south of Miami, but all my education and everything was there. The University of Miami was where I got my bachelors degree in Music Education. I started out to be a concert pianist, and then I tired of practicing so much. In the mean time I got interested in opera actually in the tenth grade, so once I was in my second year at the University I decided to concentrate on accompanying and opera. So I gave up the applied piano and went to education because that seemed to be the safest thing. There are loads and loads of teachers in my family and my mother said that you need something that you can fall back on and that typical kind of thing, so I went with education.

Antonio: Wow. So you spoke about your mom a little bit. Tell me about your family and childhood as they relate to your career success.

Willie: Well, everybody in the family sang. We had sort of a family group that went to various churches, and we even toured around Florida singing in churches and other organizations and stuff like that. Once I got old enough I would accompany on the piano, but everybody has some musical background. My oldest brother and oldest sister both studied operatic singing, which is sort of where I started getting my first exposure. My second brother played trumpet and was a trumpet minor in college. He decided to go into math because he thought that would be more practical. So there was always music. My grandmother is the one who taught me how to read music and taught me piano. She was sort of the community piano teacher, and so it started actually when I was about 4 year’s old when she first started teaching me piano. So there was always music around. There was always music in the family and in the house and everything. I was immersed from a very early age.

Antonio: What family member would you say most influenced your career?

Willie: Well, that’s hard to say. Various, because here is my sister, my oldest brother because there is a wide stretch of us because my parents got married when they were very young. So my oldest brother, who graduated from Florida A & M, was out of school and away from home by the time I was old enough to do anything. My sister, who also graduated from
FAMU was around, and I was able to hear her sing solos in chorus and all that kind of stuff. She actually more than he at that time introduced me to opera and all of that. My next brother was in the army in Vietnam, and he had joined a Record Club, and he knew of my growing interest in opera, so he started sending me operatic recordings. So that was a big influence too because now I was being exposed to these things. Of course, I was in junior high school at the time and would not have been able to afford them, but he had this idea that it would be the thing to do. So all three of them in a sense had that influence. I guess if I had to answer the question, it might have been my grandmother since that’s where I started, and she is the one who pushed me and started teaching me piano, to read music, to play in public, to learn repertoire and all of that stuff. So yeah, various.

Antonio: What is your earliest memory of opera?

Willie: My earliest memory of opera is hearing operatic singing, which is when my sister sang the *Inflammatus* from Rossini’s *Stabat Mater*. Our high school chorus presented it, and she was the soprano soloist. I was sort of knocked away because of the high C’s at the end. I thought whoa! Then there was her last year at FAMU in 1962, we went to, we all drove up for her graduation. The chorus, Rebecca Steel was the choir director then, did the *Halleluiah* from *King of Kings* with band. Even though it’s not opera it was very operatic, and that sort of knocked me away. Until this day I remember that performance. Then they recorded, in which they recorded that. So she bought me a recording and gave it to me. I listened to it day in and day out. Then of course when she came back to Miami to start teaching, the Ed Sullivan show was on television and entertainment, and there were always opera singers on Ed Sullivan. The first one I remember hearing was Roberta Peters and then the next was Richard Tucker and then there was Leontyne Price. That sort of started when I guess around ninth grade. In tenth grade I was in marching band at my high school, I was a trumpet player. My band director, who also graduated from A & M and also knew my sister, decided we should be exposed to opera. So he brought in three recordings, one of which was Leontyne singing *Aïda*. So, we played the Triumphant March in concert band. Then he said, “Now, I want you to hear it the way it really should be with all the voices and orchestral instruments.” Again, I was sort of knocked out. There is just something that just spoke to me in a way that nothing had up to that point. That was in the early spring of that year, I ended up having a free period later towards the end of the school year. I asked him if I could come into the band room and learn some of this music and listen to some of this music. So he said sure and he bought a couple of more recordings. So I would sit with the libretto and I had no idea of Italian or any of that kind of stuff, but I was particularly interested in the *Aïda*. You’re too young to have seen the original pressing of that *Aïda* recording, but on the front was a beautiful, beautiful photograph of Leontyne’s face with an Egyptian sort
of head piece with this brown skin and everything. You know when you saw it, you immediately were taken aback. It was just so stunning. So I started listening to it. My band director said, “Listen, don’t just listen to the Triumphal Scene. Listen to everything. Start from the very beginning and listen to it.” So I started doing that, and I got so hooked. I was doing it day in and day out. The other two recordings were Lucia di Lammermoor with Roberta Peters and Don Giovanni with Sutherland. I wasn’t nearly as interested in those because they did not have Leontyne. So really, the fact that she was a Black singer, the fact that she was doing this, and I would read up. I would go to the library and read up on everything that I could about her, and it just made such an impression. So I guess that sort of planted the seed deep down inside, I wanted to do something. The next year I got involved in the Upward Bound Program at the University of Miami. It was at that time just a summer program, but we had access to the libraries at UM, so my teacher was the same person who introduced me to those recordings said, “You have the musical library there. Why don’t you start listening to various operas?” He gave me a list of the most popular operas, which were those three and Don Giovanni, La Bohème, and said in your spare time just go and start listening. So I had afternoons off during the summer, so I would go and I would sit for hours and just start listening to these recordings. By the time I graduated from high school, I was totally immersed in opera. Also by that time, my parents, well my father was still alive at that time, and they allowed me to start driving. They knew of my interest in opera, and I wanted to attend a live opera. Now, in eleventh grade or was it the twelfth grade? It was eleventh grade we had the first White teacher at my high school. It was all Black school with all black teachers. She loved the opera and all the classical things, she was a biology teacher. There were about five of us whom she took, we were all honor students and such, she decided she wanted us to be exposed to live performances. She took us to everything, she took us to ballet, symphonies, and opera. She bought the tickets and everything, so that was around 1967, and that was when I saw my first live opera performance, which was Madame Butterfly. It was a family performance of the Greater Miami Opera, which I later became involved with. So that, of course, was an extraordinary thing. The role of Butterfly was sung by a lady named, Irene Patti, I think her name is Irene Patti Schwartz now. She was a principal singer of the Miami Opera, the Florida Grand Opera now and she is also a distant relative of Adelina Patti. So later we talked more about all of that, and I said to her that she was very much responsible for me being in opera because of that first experience. Seeing Butterfly on stage was just amazing. There were a whole bunch of other things that took place in the mean time. My senior year when I was in Upward Bound, I decided to check out the University of Miami opera workshop, which began to do things during the summer. Eugene Holmes, I don’t know if you know that name, but he was a Black baritone, he’d gotten his Master’s from Indiana University, and he had taken this faculty position at the University of
Miami. His coach, who was the head of the opera workshop, and somehow, and I forget how I was introduced to her. She saw my interest in opera, and they were doing a production of Tosca because he was learning Scarpia, whatever he was learning because he was beginning a relationship with Düsseldorf. She would do the performances in the summer with local singers so he could learn his roles. So I guess it was the summer after I graduated from high school. She asked if I would like to be involved as a go for or whatever. I said I would. At that point they did Tosca and then later they did Tabarro. So she let me sort of assist her and I played some rehearsals, not very many because my chops were not so great at that time. Just being in the environment, that was really exciting and really interesting. So when I entered the University of Miami in September, she was saying you ought to stay involved in the Opera Workshop. Then she died that year and the whole situation with the Opera Workshop was in flux. Finally two years later, my voice teacher, because as a part of my degree plan I had to either study voice or an instrument other than piano. So I decided to take voice lessons. It just so happened that my voice teacher, Mary Henderson Buckley, was the wife of Emerson Buckley, who was the artistic director of Greater Miami Opera. She said, “Why don’t you come and work with me with the Opera Workshop and play rehearsals and all of that?” So I started doing that, and then later she said, “Because your interest and your knowledge of opera is so great, and you are taking choral conducting, why don’t you conduct some of the scenes?” So that is when I started doing that. Then she introduced me to her husband, and he said, “Why don’t you come and audition for the chorus?” So, I was not a singer, but I could sing, and I was studying with her, and I was a good enough musician, so they took me into the chorus. Then that next summer the Opera Company got a grant to do opera excepts in parks. So there are ten parks around Dade County. The county had a thing they called the show mobile and they would do performances on this portable stage. So they decided five of those performances they wanted to do as opera. So it just so happens that two of the places they wanted to perform was Liberty City and the other one was Richmond Heights, which is where I grew up. So they actually did some PR and everything on the fact that I was from that area. We had huge crowds to some grade, and that was my first experience doing something like that. I even narrated. A lot of my friends came from high school. So that was my first exposure to that kind of live performance. We did lots of things like that. We even did cut-down versions of Bohème, of Butterfly. I would prepare and play the piano for the performances. This was once I was in college during the summers. So that is sort of where all of that was.

Antonio: You know that early exposure to opera was very crucial to where you are now.
Willie: Well, yes, but at that time, it was strictly performing. It was not administrating at all, and the idea of administration never came up, not like you going to get a degree in this. It was never that. So when I went to grad school, I was going to study conducting. I auditioned for three schools, Manhattan, Cincinnati, and one other. Manhattan rejected me because I had no conducting experience. Cincinnati accepted me and the other school accepted me. Of course, I needed financial assistance, and Cincinnati finally came through with half of an assistantship and some other stuff. Thomas Schippers was the conducting teacher there, so I thought that would be very good. Then I was told later that he was almost never there, so it wouldn’t be a good situation necessarily for somebody. So then out of the clear blue sky I walk into the University of Miami School of Music and look on the bulletin board, and there is an announcement from Memphis State University for a new program in operatic coaching and conducting, which would be run by George Osborne and the person in charge of the actual participants would be Kip Cutchstedder, who was Mignon Dunn’s husband. So I applied, next thing I knew the next week George called and asked if I would come to Memphis for an interview and audition. So they flew me to Memphis and I went, auditioned, and he offered me the job on the spot. It was a new program, half sponsored by the state, half sponsored by the University. I didn’t have to put any money into it. It was a complete free ride. So I said, “Why not?” I had big problems about Memphis because that was where Dr. King had been assassinated. Even though this was a few years later, I just didn’t know about going to Memphis. As it turns out it was one of the best things that I ever did, but it was very daunting at first because this was a new program, I was the only person in the program. The first year I went I was the only Black graduate student there. Being a Black graduate student, first of all, and in a program like that involving opera, which of course, is very unusual. There were just all kinds of crazy thoughts that were going through my mind as to what this was going to be. It was a relatively unstructured program because George had just put it together because he needed a coach and accompanist to help out with not only opera because it was Memphis Opera Theater at Memphis State University, so it was a joint thing with a community opera company and the University. They had choruses there was opera chorus. So all the students who were studying voice had to sing in opera chorus. All the graduate students were a part of the touring program, and the graduate students did small roles and worked in the office and all that kind of stuff. It actually was a pretty good deal. My situation there, I graduated from the University of Miami in 1973 and I was going to work during the summer and then start there in September. Well, in the latter part of June, he called and said I just fired my pianist. We are doing two shows this summer, *Purlie* and *South Pacific*, and I just want to know if you would be available and interested in coming. I said, “Okay, when?” He said the next week. So I said, “Okay.” So I quit the job that I was going to have for the summer and I moved to Memphis towards
the end of June and stayed there. So I went there, I arrived about 4:00 in
the afternoon, and there was a chorus rehearsal of *Purlie*, a piece I had
never heard and I never seen a piece of the music or anything, and I had to
do the rehearsal. I said, “You know this is putting me in a very precarious
position.” He said, “Well, from what I understand you are a very good
musician.” So actually I was able to get the guy who was playing the
piano at the time to sort of start the rehearsal so I could really see where
they were. Then I sort of took it over from there. Well, as it turns out,
George decided he was only going to conduct the opening night. Then he
was going to turn it over to me, but he never told me that. So I had only
conducted at that point a string quartet. Even though *Purlie* is not a huge
orchestra, there were about fifteen people in the band. I went through the
last couple of rehearsals and the opening night, and then he said, “Okay,
it’s yours.” It was a musical so it was not so bad, but I was frightened. I
was, O my God, what is that all about? But it worked. So my two years at
Memphis State, Kip was almost never there except for concerts, and so it
gave me the opportunity to work with the student orchestra to prepare
them for his concerts. So I was in front of the orchestra practically at least
once or twice a week for the whole two years I was there. That’s the way
it is. That is the way you learn. You can’t sit in the practice room. You get
some of the basics there, but you have to do it. You just have to get in
front of the band and do it. So that’s how that worked out.

**Antonio:** Okay, so I would like to move into a different area of questioning. You
talked about your parents or your mother being a teacher. Could you tell
me just a little bit more about the educational level of your mom and your
dad?

**Willie:** She wasn’t a teacher. She was basically a housewife, but she had her own
beauty parlor, which she ran on our back porch. She was a cosmetologist.
My father was a shipping and receiving clerk for Harrell & Kendall
Company, which was at that time the largest producer of fresh fruit in
South Florida, mangoes, limes, and oranges. I missed your question, I’m
sorry.

**Antonio:** You answered it. I am just asking about levels of education the
occupations of your parents.

**Willie:** My mother graduated from high school, but did not go to college. My
father did two years at FAMU and then dropped out and went to work.
Then they got married shortly after that.

**Antonio:** What are your family’s views on opera? You talked about your sister and
brother having studied opera. What does your family think about opera?
Willie: Well, now I guess you could say they love it. When I first started and went back to the Miami opera, and I would conduct the second cast. So they all came in mass for the first couple of years. It varies. My oldest sister, of course, was very interested. She is older now and has had a stroke, so she doesn’t go to the opera and doesn’t do much of anything any more, but at that time she would go when nobody else would. My mother would always go, and she would drag a couple of my aunts along with her. My two younger sisters, who are older than I am, initially would go, because it was an exciting thing for them to see their brother up there conducting an opera. So they all appreciated it. My oldest sister and brother knew more about it than the others did, so they would go even when some of the others wouldn’t. Initially, they all went and dragged my little nieces and nephews along. They actually even to this day they remember. One of my nieces. She’s like the fifth or sixth niece down the line went to a couple of opera performances last year. She said, “It was because of the experience I had when you were there conducting, so I really got to like it.”

Antonio: How does your family members view your career success?

Willie: Well, they are very supportive. They think it was fabulous. To a certain extent they still don’t quite understand how I chose to do what I did and the career path that I took, but as long as I was successful it was fine.

Antonio: Okay, now I would like to talk about ethnicity and race. How is ethnicity and race important to your family?

Willie: How is it important to my family? That is a hard question. I don’t know that it was. I don’t remember there ever being a conversation, “you must do this because you’re Black, or you must do this because there are no African Americans.” It was never that. It was only you must go where your goal and talent takes you. Maybe I was too young at that point to think. I remember Mrs. Buckley and Dr. Buckley never ever said to me anything around the nature of, “These are positions that African Americans don’t have, or you should be careful because you are an African American, or maybe you should go and do something else.” I never remember hearing anything like that at least not from them. Then when I went to Memphis, it was a slightly different thing. That’s where my initial exposure in that way to prejudice or to people shunning me because I was Black or whatever. But, I was lucky because the protection that I had in Memphis because the program I was involved in was a University sanctioned program which was supported by the state, so there had to be a certain amount of protection and a certain amount of support that they gave me rather I was Black or not. When George hired me, I played an audition for five different people on the staff. I found out later that the vote was unanimous that I should get that position. I went to Memphis State, and I am not saying I was a great pianist, but I was a very
good pianist. As a part of my degree plan they said you don’t need to take piano because you already play better than everybody else here. So I didn’t. The whole question of race didn’t come up then. As I got older though, it started dawning on me that I’m the only one. Then of course, my career going on the San Francisco Opera, and then that is when the administrative part of it started to kick in. I am sure we will talk about that in a bit. But it never really dawned on me, and it never really manifested itself until much later.

Antonio: So, do you define yourself as an African American. I know some people choose Black American, and they are essentially the same thing.

Willie: I don’t care. I use them interchangeably. There have been various movements even in my lifetime. People need that for identity. I don’t need it in that way for identity.

Antonio: I wanted to ask what you consider your major influences of ethnic and racial identity. You just said that you don’t need that as much as some other people do, so what influences you be like that? You seem to say, “I am okay with who I am, so I don’t really need to get into this being called African American or Black American.”

Willie: Well, I don’t know. You go through this life and careers and meeting people in doing things. Other people initially brought it up to me to say, you realize you are the only African American or the only Black, because at that time it was Black, person doing what you are doing. Then I said, “Oh you know you are right. That is the case.” I am not saying that I was totally oblivious, but by the time I came back to the Greater Miami Opera and the plan was for me to become artistic director, there was no question about…I mean this is not an equal opportunity. This is not an Affirmative Action type of thing. There are many, many other people out there who could have been chosen, who could have been hired for that position, but they chose me, and it wasn’t because I was Black. It had to be because I had the chops to do the job. There would been everything against them in a way for them to hire me, but instead they took a chance and it worked out very well. So I don’t know if I answered your question.

Antonio: It does. As an adult have you experienced what you believe to be racism, sexism, or discrimination, if so please describe these experiences?

Willie: Yes and no. Again, I like to think that the things I’ve achieved that I’ve achieved because I deserved them, because I worked really hard. I always felt, as most African Americans do, that you have to work harder. That is something that was ingrained in me not only from my parents and my family, but from other Black teachers who influenced me as I was getting towards the end of high school and in college. Like at the University of
Miami you could see how those kids work. One of the reasons I decided not to be a concert pianist is because I saw all those Cuban kids who were coming into the United States and they had no problems staying in the practice room eight to ten hours a day and practicing, and I just wasn’t going to do that. I just did not feel excited about it enough, although when I was in high school I loved practicing piano and I loved playing piano, and I still do love playing piano. But my focus just became different. So it just became a whole different thing.

Antonio: Have you felt as a Non European American that your ethnicity had hindered you from participating in aspects of U.S. society?

Willie: Yeah, to a certain extent. See the thing is I’ve rarely directly encountered racism. There have been a couple of instances that I could specifically point to, one of which was with an orchestra in the mid-West in which I was conducting a *Carmen* there. I won’t use the specifics, but it was very obvious that this orchestra wasn’t having it. I walked down the hall when everyone was having a break from rehearsal. I was walking down the hall and there were about six members of the orchestra coming towards me. All six of them turned their heads and ignored me as I walked past them. I felt in rehearsal that there was a certain tension, and it was interesting because I asked the string players to do a certain thing. Part of this could be because I was a young conductor and this was a big symphony orchestra. They just don’t care about young conductors. So it was hard for me to figure out at that moment, of course I wasn’t thinking about it, I was just trying to get the job done, whether it was because I was Black or whether or not it was because I was a young conductor.

Antonio: This is so interesting because I think I remember reading about that in *Opera News* in 1999. There was a blurb and you were quoted as saying that actually the racism that you experienced wasn’t in the South as most people would expect.

Willie: Working with the Memphis symphony and in Jackson, Mississippi, and Miami, and Arkansas, I never had any problems with the people. There might have been resistance, there might have been resentment, or whatever, but they did what I asked them to do. What I was confronted with here (mid-West) was what I considered blatant and obvious resistance to what I was trying to do as a conductor, and it wasn’t because I didn’t know what I was doing because I did. And it was *Carmen*, which is the opera I have conducted more than any other, so I know I knew it very well. But, for some reason…Well, that was one instance. One never knows because in this day and time people are just not going to say right out to you. But also, I have always been protected, as I said, like in Memphis because of the way that program was organized. There had to be a certain level of protection, a certain level of support. When I went back
to Miami, because of the fact that I was being groomed to be artistic director, so I got to know all the board members because they wanted me to attend all the meetings even before I became artistic director. There was that whole sort of culture of developing me in that realm. So because of the title/position, people were obligated to a certain extent to invite me to private functions and to invite me to clubs, country clubs. I mean I don’t want to necessarily make it look as if they had to do it, but to a certain extent they did because there are certain social things that people have to do. If you’re President or Chairman of the Board and you have someone who is going to become Artistic Director, of course, you have to invite them to a party and of course, you have to invite them to private meetings and all those things. There are things that are inherent in the position. As General Director of this company, there are things that I am sure I get invited to, but people just feel it is something you have to do. You can’t “not invite” the General Director of the Connecticut Opera. So whether they like me or not they have to do it. Fortunately, most people like me. That is sort of the way it is. I didn’t necessarily choose that course, but as it started unfolding from my time in Memphis then going to the San Francisco Opera, that is sort of the way it worked out.

Antonio: Before we talk about your career specifically, I wanted to ask you because you seem very comfortable in a mixed environment. You said you went to a Black high school, was your middle school and elementary school experience the same? How did you develop the comfortability to relate to people of all walks of life?

Willie: That is an interesting question. A lot of people ask me that. I don’t know. My parents brought us up deeply religious. To like everybody, treat everybody fairly. I did not really get into, come into situations with White people until basically this teacher that I told you about in eleventh grade. Until that time it was all Black. Two of my aunts worked for wealthy White people or Jewish people actually on Miami Beach. We would go over and visit once in a while. They would always bring their kids and we would always play together and such things. Actually, one of the things that happened, there was a wealthy judge visiting from St. Louis. This lady, Mrs. Beckencourt, I will never forget her because we had sung at her house before. So she asked if we would all come over and entertain. So we did. My middle name is Anthony, sort of like you, and they used to call me Tony. Everybody who knew me before college called me Tony. Then she said, “Tony, why don’t you go ahead and play a couple of solo pieces?” So I did. I was studying piano at that time, so I did a couple of things. This judge was really quite taken by it. So he pulled my mother aside and said, you know I think he is very talented. I would offer to pay for all of his piano lessons until the time that he goes to college. So that was like for four years, and he did. He paid for all my piano lessons until my freshman year in college. But that was one of the exposures that I had
to White people. Going to the University of Miami, there were over two hundred and sixty or so music majors and there were eight Black music majors and we obviously we stuck together. That was my first exposure to the social part of dealing with that and just in dealing in general with people outside of my comfort zone.

Antonio: How did you cope with that? What kind of mechanisms did you put in place personally to make that transition?

Willie: I felt that first of all, again, you have to be prepared. You always have to be prepared. It became very obvious very quickly that we were looked at in a different way. We were also looked at in a positive way. Any time anybody needed an accompanist they came to me. All the opera singers and all, they came to me. We were also in the Chamber Singers. It was funny because of the sixteen people in Chamber Singers, five of them were Black. Three of them were tenors, and I was one of them. We had four tenors, and I was one of those. We were all excellent musicians, and everybody knew it. We were all hard workers and everybody knew it. Also we were aggressive and we were ambitious. Anytime anybody wanted anything done they would call on us to do it. So again there is a sort of built in thing… we just went automatically to the top of the list. To this day my professors, I’m still in touch with a lot of them. They relate back to those days when we were always the soloists and we were always the number one, you know… We just realized because of our background and because of the teachers that we had in high school that you got to do not only well, you got to do better. That was a hell of a lot of pressure, especially back then because we are talking about the late 60s and early 70s. So it was a constant thing where you had to watch your P’s and Q’s all the time. We memorized basically all the music that we had to sing in University Chorale. We became section leaders and all of that kind of stuff. We were not overly aggressive because you know you don’t want to get to that point where people begin to dislike you, but it was very clear that we knew what we were doing and that we were accepted as such.

Antonio: What were your college aspirations, career plans, and goals before you actually went to college?

Willie: To be a concert pianist.

Antonio: And so you just knew that going right in. How did your ethnicity, gender, or race impact your college experience?

Willie: Again, I guess as a part of this whole conversation that I’ve just been having, it was… I don’t know maybe deep down inside at some point we found ourselves saying, “Here I am a Black person. Is there any chance for me to be a concert pianist?” My teachers were very supportive. My piano
teacher, Ivan Davis, accepted me as a piano student. I was the only undergraduate piano student he had ever had at the University of Miami. All the others were grad students, and he was still concretizing at that point, he wasn’t around a lot, but he thought I was very talented so he decided to take me on. He had had other Black students so it was not a question of him needing to have a Black student.

Antonio: I am kind of taking this conversation into what we call bi-cultural competence, where you have to deal with the majority dominated world and you have your own ethnic identity and ethnic community. What your early feelings about being Non European American? Were they always this positive as they are now?

Willie: I don’t know that I thought about it a lot. I might have been too young or maybe too naïve at the time, but I guess I can say now in retrospect that I was on a mission. I wanted to make it in that operatic world. So I surrounded myself with the right people and I put myself in the right situations so that I could… I don’t know that a lot of it was really conscious. For example if somebody suggested to me like when the opera coach said, “You should come and work with me summer on Il Tabarro” I didn’t think twice about it. I am saying to myself, “This would give me a chance to work with this professional woman and to learn this piece, and I love opera.” So why not? And when Mary Buckley said why not work with the opera workshop, when all these things, opportunities started presenting themselves, I am saying I have got to do it.

Antonio: This goes back to the coping mechanism. How have you negotiated the line between the European-American world, as some people would say, and one of the African American world because sometimes those two worlds conflict. How have you negotiated that?

Willie: Well, we haven’t talked about this yet, but when I left Memphis and went to the San Francisco Opera… now talk about worlds apart. I mean I was twenty-one at the time, so that was a real eye-opener. I had no idea what I was getting myself into. All I knew was that I was going to work for what at that time was the second largest opera company in America in an administrative position, because I was always a musician. The administration that I had to do was dealing with the young singers in Memphis and booking shows and that kind of thing, but nothing at this level. The deal was Mr. Adler wanted a conductor who was young enough and was not itching to conduct, but would be his personal musical assistant to help him in terms of casting and working with stage directors, and to liaison with singers, etc. When the possibility came up for me to do that, I actually started looking at the San Francisco Opera because Leontyne sang there a lot. Everything sort of revolved around Leontyne. There was a magazine, and I forget the name of the magazine, but Francis
Ford Coppola was the not producer, and not editor I forget, but I think he owned the magazine. It just so happened in 1974, Leontyne opened the San Francisco Opera season in Manon Lescaut. So once I found out about this I subscribed to the magazine because I figured there might be other things about Leontyne. So I began, for some crazy reason, I began an absorption of the whole San Francisco culture, the way of life there, having no idea that within the next two years I was going to be living and working there. So it is just like a lot of the other things that happened in my life, it was sort of happenstance. So going to San Francisco and immediately realizing what this city was about, that this is a city that is about culture. It is a city that is about art. It is a city that is about fairness and openness and the San Francisco Opera. You know, my God, here I am in my first season, and it is going to be Sutherland, Pavarotti, Price, Söderström, Domingo, you know all of these people and in a city that is so cultured. I had to make a lot of adjustments because I wasn’t ready for all that. I had never been in an environment that was like that. Now granted I had been exposed to some social things like that and even some career things in Miami when I was with the opera company, but I was just a rehearsal pianist and I was just a chorister. So it wasn’t at the point like now where I am now administrator and in a whole different and being perceived in a whole different way. So you talk about this transition and all of this kind of stuff. It was a very, very shocking thing. I had to do a lot of learning very quickly. I mean things social graces, etiquette, how to deal with people, responding, somebody calls you up, you have to call them back, writing notes, which of course, my parents did teach me, but you know when you are young like that you don’t necessarily have to do it, and you are excused because of it, but now I am in a professional world, and I have to wear a suit or a jacket and tie. You know you have to carry yourself in a certain way and all of that. Of course, by that time the whole thing of being African American does, of course, play a part because I am in a position of authority now. I am in a position in which I have to tell people, “yes, you can do this. No, you can’t do that.” I am a nice person and I hate to say, “No.” But I have to understand that I got to say, “No.” And I have to keep relationships even though I do say, “no,”. Some people are not going to necessarily accept what I have to say, and some of that probably does come down to the racial thing, but again, there is enough respect for me, partially because I am the kind of person that I am which is nice and all that kind of stuff, but also because of my position. That is probably more than anything else, the position. It took a lot of adjusting very, very quickly. Boy, I am telling you. The job itself was twelve to fourteen hours a day, six days a week. I mean even often times on Sundays I would go, and I didn’t have a free day because we had rehearsals on Sundays. That was for four and a half years, so it was very intense, but I was right up there. I was Mr. Adler’s main assistant for artistic matters and later took on the responsibilities of artistic administrator, which meant negotiating contracts and all that. So, it was tough. It was tough.
Antonio: How do you think your ethnicity makes it easier or more difficult to attract African Americans to opera?

Willie: Well, the people often say when they go into a theater if they see somebody like themselves on stage it makes it easier. I am not so sure that is always correct. Actually, I am not so sure it is correct at all. On the other hand, I must say that, you know, the few times... last year, for example, when Angela Brown made her Met debut and Mark Rucker made his Met debut, there was a noticeable bump in African Americans attending the Met. Now Black people go to the Met all the time because it is New York, and anytime you go there you see Black people, but this was very different. Part of it was an orchestrated thing, because Angela was the first black singer in a long time to make her debut there and doing *Aïda*, and she had developed herself to a point where people were really watching her and watching her development and all. So I mean, there were rows and rows and rows of Black people in the orchestra section. Now the Met ain’t giving out no tickets, you know? So these people bought tickets, and they bought expensive tickets to see this sister sing *Aïda*. And the same thing with Mark Rucker. It was pretty amazing. There again, I have gone off and I have forgotten the crux of the question.

Antonio: It's good, it's good. We were talking about difficulty in attracting African Americans to opera.

Willie: So, one of the things that I have done here, for example, is that I have always felt that I needed to be a presence in the community and not just in the White community or the artistic community, but in the non-operatic, meaning schools and such things. So I have done a lot of work in the schools with students. We bring kids into the theater, and I think it is very important for them to see and for me to go to schools and for them to be able to talk to me, to have a dialogue about such things. Some people say, “Oh, well, is that self serving.” No, I think it is necessary because the White kids get that, and they get those kinds of role models. Whether I like the term role model or like the responsibility is a whole different thing, but the fact is it’s there. I just think it is really important, and when I see kids when they come up to me and they see who I am and what I do, they ask questions and they want to know what it is like. I think it is very important and I have got to serve that purpose. One thing I did not mention earlier, in Miami the big question came up when I became artistic director, how much of that should we use? Do we not say that you are the first and only African American who is the Artistic Director of a major opera company? We wrestled with that for quite a while, and I decided that we should. They agreed because this is something that is news that is important for people to know, so we did. I think it worked out very well there, and we have done that here too to a certain extent. I like to think that
eventually that’s not necessary, but in this society and in this culture it’s probably always necessary.

Antonio: My next question is how do you feel about diversity in executive opera administration?

Willie: Well, there is no diversity. Linda and I are it. There was a guy, John… I forgot his last name. He was an associate director of development for the San Francisco Opera, but he left and is now working for some university, I think, in southern California. I mentioned to you the lady in Washington D.C. Other than that, I don’t know of any other African Americans who are in top administrator positions with opera companies. Now there are some in theater. There might be a couple in ballet, especially with Black dance companies, but those are not big companies. Symphony orchestras, I’m not in that world, so I don’t really know.

Antonio: And that is the thing that will become a spin off of what I am doing because even though these people are in these positions, it is kind of like you have to really search and dig through files and files of research to find them and to find their careers and try to follow them. I don’t know. When I went to OPERA America and asked you know, you and Linda were two people. Then they said Michael Ching and Henry Akina.

Willie: Only four?

Antonio: I was like okay, well, so there were only four people who could be in this study in this country based on the parameters that I have defined. That is how it is. That’s it.

Willie: Well, it does not surprise me because these are jobs that, first of all, a lot of people don’t know about. A lot of people don’t necessarily want to go into that. It is the same thing about being an opera singer as opposed to being a rap star, or whatever. You look at the money. You look at the fame and all of that, and you figure I could make more money and do much more and have a better life with this kind of stuff than going into opera. Also it is not something that is in the mainstream still. You know we have a pretty big operatic audience around the country, but still theaters here, a twenty-eight hundred-seat theater. You set out to get twenty-eight hundred people, but you know, you do a rock concert and you get seventy-five thousand. I have to say that we in this business haven’t made it necessarily any more inviting for ethnic types, or for non-White people to go into administration. You know, they look at it and see that there are so few people out there and think, “why should I bother?” I certainly did not look at it as a trailblazing thing when Mr. Adler offered me the job in San Francisco. The reason I took it was because it was the San Francisco Opera, and Dr. Buckley had always said to me that I should learn what is
happening backstage in order to become an all-around person in the opera world. He knew as an older impresario, not only as a conductor and all of that, but he knew about costumes. He knew about sets and all of that kind of stuff. That always fascinated me. He said you should get yourself into a position where you can learn all of that kind of stuff. That was one of the reasons even when I found out the job was not about making music, but it was about producing music and about the production aspect of opera and working with one of the leading opera impresario’s and to find out how he casts and how an opera is put together at that level and all of that. So that is how it turned out.

**Antonio:** You know, John Moriarty suggested I do the same thing when I was at Central City Opera. I thought that was really good advice because throughout my educational process and internships I have kind of tried to learn as much at different places by painting sets and dealing with costumes, and make-up, and what make-up works best for Black people, and the lighting and all that kind of stuff. I think that advice he gave me was very beneficial. How did that preparation prepare you to become the leader that you are today?

**Willie:** I don’t know. I guess through trial and error, through all the experience, exposure, being in situations like San Francisco and Miami where you have really top professionals doing it and seeing how it is done. Of course, you draw various conclusions and such. The whole thing with African Americans was very interesting, the performers that is because while I was in San Francisco and getting to know Shirley and getting to know Leontyne, and getting to know Grace Bumbry and not Jessye Norman so much, Kathleen Battle. We were very good friends at one point before she became so crazy. You know it Simon Estes but just being able to talk to them and to see… Shirley for example, you know we were talking about lighting, and I just asked her do you have a specific thing that you take around with you. She said, “Well, no, but I do know exactly what I want. I know what makes me look better.” I will say to them, for example, she prefers a pink gel. You know, if there is a spot light, she wants a pink gel because it softens everything, and she lightens up just a little bit for certain roles, but she does not want to look pasty. At first there was resistance because the lighting designer did not think it was good. She just said, “This is what I know works for me, and this is what it shall be.” Very simple, and that is what it was. Leontyne never made any demands like that. Leontyne was the most incredible, I mean she’s a crazy woman. She was difficult beforehand, and I should not say difficult, but it was hard for her to make decisions. It was very difficult for her to make decisions. She had to think a lot about things. You know before deciding on a new role or deciding whether or not she was going to come back to San Francisco that season or whether she was overexposed in New York and all this kind of stuff. Once she made a decision then she was all fine. She was the
consummate professional, and there were never any discussions or never any arguments. There was just so much respect and people were in awe of her that there were never any questions about anything with Leontyne. Then there were people like Grace Bumbry, who... I mean Grace was just difficult. But you know Martina, also Martina was very nice and cool and calm, but with Grace there was always this idea that “I have to fight for what I want.” A part of that, I think, was ridiculous. From her point of view she didn’t really have to. There was that whole group of singers who were all sort of prominent at that time, and so they had to sort of make way for themselves. You know, Shirley and Grace and Martina and Leontyne and Franki Whethers and all of them. See Leontyne was always here and everybody else was here. Okay, I have gotten completely away from...

Antonio: No, no. I like this because I remember there was a story about Martina was going in to do something at the Met and the doorman addressed her as Leontyne Price and she said, “No, sweetie, I am the other one.”

Willie: Yeah, she tells that story a lot. You know, I know Martina very well. Actually you are talking about influences and stuff. Martina and Simon have probably been the biggest of influences on my career in terms of helping me get to the next step, getting jobs, working with me, advice, all that kind of stuff. They both have been extraordinary in that way. I know Martina very, very well and very personally. We have talked about that a lot. You know she... Martina realized what. I mean hate to put it like this, but she realized where her place was and what her place was, in that she was not Leontyne Price and that she was “the other one,” the second one. Martina had an incredible career, and she has nothing to apologize for, but she wasn’t Leontyne Price. It just worked out that way.

Antonio: This is so great. So okay, we talked a little bit about your knowledge of management and administration principles. How did they assist you in getting your current position?

Willie: Well, I learned all this on the job. There were no arts administration courses, no there might have been one or two. No degree plans at that time, you just went and did it. Working at the San Francisco Opera, I was just thrown into all of this. You have to be organized, which I am not necessarily by nature the most organized person; but you have to do that because there are systems, there are things Mr. Adler liked in certain ways and certain procedures and all of that kind of stuff. You know, I just sort of forced myself into doing them. It was a completely different world than just being a pianist and preparing operas and all of that. This sort of goes back to something we talked about earlier in having to deal with the other aspects of the opera company, which was very interesting for me, looking at all the backstage stuff and working with the technical director and
figuring out which productions can go together and can be in the house at the same time. If it’s a new production with this director how is that going to work vs. a new production with another director. Who is going to direct this? What is the staff? What are the staffing requirements? I was responsible for all the assistant directors, the production assistants, the musical staff, everything, you know how all that works out. The other thing is that San Francisco is a repertory house. So you have three or four operas either rehearsing or performing at the same time. We did not have computers in those days, so this was all done by hand.

**Antonio:** You know I was talking to Linda about that yesterday. I was like, “How did you do that?”

**Willie:** You do it by hand. You do it with intuition. You do it by sitting and thinking.

**Antonio:** You know, my generation is very spoiled because we can pick up our laptop, emails. We have the cell phone.

**Willie:** The level of communication that we have today is unprecedented. I think back on those days, and I am thinking we did nine operas a season, and I can see the chart now, the distribution chart. It was the opera, then I would have assistant conductor I, II, III, assistant director I, II, III. All of it was done like this, and I am sitting there, and I have to juggle looking at the calendar and think... When does this rehearsal start? When is this in performance? The juggling act was just incredible. Eventually you learn by instinct what you can do and how you can do it. Actually, sometimes it was better to just use the alphabet. Then I have A, B, C and you can see A is here so A can’t be here. That type of thing. It was a way of working it out, and there were few mistakes; believe it or not.

**Antonio:** So what motivated you to pursue a position at the executive-level in opera administration?

**Willie:** Well again, it was just because that job was offered to me, and I thought I would do this for two years and I will learn what happens backstage at the opera, especially at the San Francisco Opera, and I might meet Leontyne. That was really a part of it. I might meet Leontyne. Then I’ll go back into conducting, which was what I wanted to do. Well, I ended up staying there for four and a half years, I guess it was. Then it was Martina who called and said, “I am doing *Trovatore* in Detroit next fall.” This would have been the fall of 1979, and she wanted me to conduct it. Now I had not worked with Martina much. She came to Memphis to do *Forza,* and that is when I got to know her. Now she had done *Aïda* in Miami in 1972, and I was in the chorus. She had been so nice to us, dinner and all that kind of stuff. So I got to know her, and we kept in touch after that. So in
Memphis two years later, there was this “Forza,” and there was one rehearsal where he could not make it or something, so I conducted the rehearsal. Martina tells people it was an orchestra rehearsal. It was not. It was a piano rehearsal, but I knew “Forza” very well, again because of Leontyne. I conducted the rehearsal without a score, and she was very impressed with that as were other people. So she remembered that. So when it came time for the Trovatore I mean I had seen her in San Francisco, and I had become friends with her. She said, “I am doing a production, and I’d like you to conduct it.” I said I didn’t know if I was going to leave the San Francisco Opera yet. She said, “Well, you have to decide at some point if you are going to remain an administrator or if you are going to be a conductor again.” That was the catalyst that convinced me that now is the time. So I did resign in the spring of ’79 and immediately got an invitation to go to Salt Lake City to conduct Carmen that very next month. Then the summer was open because you can’t fill things up that quickly, but then the fall ended up being… because now I was not going to be tied down to San Francisco Opera so I could pursue other opportunities. I had three engagements in the fall and then things sort of continued from there. That is sort of how that happened, and then in Miami…Dr. Buckley had been trying to get me back to Miami for a long time. So once I left San Francisco Opera, he said, “Well, I am going to be retiring soon because I have been here almost thirty years. I would like to groom you to become Artistic Director. Of course being artistic director means more than just conducting. There are certain administrative things that I have, so I went to Miami and did that. I was with the company a total of fourteen years. Looking at all that and realizing that administration in and of itself was not something at the top of my list, but I have to say I liked being in the top position. I liked the accolades. I liked the attention. I liked all of that, and maybe that is where my ego comes in or whatever. I’ve rarely been, what I call, a secondary person. I have always had the personality and been on top of things and at the forefront. So toward the end of my time in Miami I’m saying to myself I really would like to perhaps, be a General Director someday. And at the time in Miami dealing with the board and dealing with the various committees and dealing with the guild and all of those kinds of things, even though I was not directly involved in it, I saw how it went. I was in meetings and that kind of stuff, but it was not my responsibility. What happened here was George asked me to be Music Director here, so I did that for three years. Then at the end of that time, they decided to make a change from him and asked me if I would be General Director. So that was a good possibility for me, but I said to them that I will not be the typical kind of General Director. First of all, I don’t deal with finances. I know how to read a balance sheet, but that is not my expertise. We will have to have someone else. They had already planned to hire a Managing Director when George was still here, someone to deal with the finances, the board and all of that. That sort of fit into what I am thinking in my mind that I
would have to deal with the board specifically, but the other person, the Managing Director would have that chief responsibility. I can deal with future planning, I can deal with community. I can deal with... because the company at that point was like way down and in terms of rebuilding the image of the company in the community and all of that. I can deal with all of that. I will be the spokesperson for the company because I would be General Director. So that is how this job happened.

Antonio: So we talked about you going from Memphis to San Francisco, then Miami, and then here. So that is how that goes. Knowing what you know now, what changes would you have made in the course of your career path? Would it be the same?

Willie: Well, no. I probably would have taken a couple of business courses. If I had felt that arts administration as opposed to being a musician who became an administrator, I probably would have taken some business courses and those kinds of things because it would have put me, I think, in a slightly different situation. This particular situation... actually it is working out this way with Lay Arts Organizations now, in which it is two-tiered, even though there is just one person ultimately responsible, but it is sort of a two-tiered management model. I don’t think that is so bad, but with most arts organizations, especially opera companies there needs to be one person, a General Director who is where the buck stops. That is the way it should be, and I firmly believe that. So I think that would probably a good thing. I never did any administrative internships or anything like that, so everything I know I learned from having been there. I got to know a lot of General Directors of opera companies, the older, not only Mr. Adler, but Carol Fox at the Lyric Opera of Chicago and the Mark Feinstein of Washington. Because of my position in San Francisco and in Miami I was with those people a lot on a name basis, so I could talk to them and see how they ran their companies. So a lot of that was very good for me.

Antonio: What qualities, both personal and professional, do you think caused your employer to select you as the current General and Artistic director?

Willie: Well, I think first of all, I’m a nice person. I’m a fair person. I’m a passionate person. I passionately believe in opera. I passionately believe in what an opera company and what arts organizations in general have to do with the community, how they interact in the community. I’m a fair player. I’m a collaborator, and I think, that there is something, somebody on the board said, “When you speak, there is not only a clarity, but there is a passion that we get from you that brings us in, that you are a real spokesperson for the opera.” And I am. That is because I love it. That is what I do. I mean there are people who say... this gets back to sort of a racial thing, but they say, “Well, you are so articulate, and you speak so
well.” Aren’t I supposed to? See I’m not the kind of person who is very confrontational about such things. Leontyne always says, “My protest is on the stage. Every time I go on the stage and do a good performance that’s breaking down another door.” I really think that is where it is. I never got out and marched, I came up during the Civil Rights Era. I figured the more I do well, the better it is for not only me but for everybody else in the community.

**Antonio:** Kind of subversively and covertly shifting and changing presumptions and perceptions in a way. I get that statement all the time. “You’re so articulate,” “You are so well-mannered.” It is like I want to say, “Well, I’m from the south, my dad’s a preacher, my mom’s an evangelist.” But what major challenges did you have in the application and interview process for your positions?

**Willie:** There was no interview process, ever. I tell you, I have been lucky. The only one was from the University of Miami to Memphis State, and that was the audition I had. Them just talking to me about doing various things, just explaining what would be involved in this position.

**Antonio:** So there is kind of this informal network that basically worked for you in terms of getting these positions.

**Willie:** What am I saying? I had a three-day interview in San Francisco, but it was not as much an interview as it was just sitting around in Mr. Adler’s office and seeing people come back and forth. Then he would ask me questions about what I had seen or what I had heard. He did ask me to play. He brought in a singer and she did the *Rake’s Progress*. So I did that, but for the most part there wasn’t a formal interview process. It was meeting all the department heads and sitting in his office basically two days and just observing. He told me later that one of the things that clinched it for him. They used to have, no computers at this time, but they used to have a system of cards which listed all singers, and they had volunteers come in and they had twenty to thirty magazines. We would always list the roles that these singers sang, so that if you had Price it would list every role that she has ever sung in her career. At the time, he was casting, “Flying Dutchman.” It was going to be new production with Jean Pierre Bernaue directing, and it didn’t have a Senta. We are sitting there, Richard Rezinski was my predecessor, they would go over the names and everything. So he gave me two sets of cards. One was the artist and the other was the role, so Senta and all the people who have sung the role. So he told me to look at the card and he said, “Who are some of the people who are not listed on that card?” I came up with two names, one of which was Gwyneth Jones. So he called Richard and said that Gwyneth was not this card. They both looked at each other and they were really shocked. He looked at me and said, “And you figured that out from just this?” I said,
“Well, you know, yeah.” So anyway, that was one of the things that just sort of clinched it because he said later, “You know, you have one of the most encyclopedic knowledge of opera and opera singers of any young person that I had ever met.” I lived, ate, slept, drank opera, and still do. For some reason, again that was just happenstance, but I was so interested in that and that now has worked very well for me in terms of my career track.

Antonio: Are the realities of being an executive opera administrator what you anticipated, or is it different?

Willie: Well, it is different only because or maybe because the whole landscape has changed now. When I was in Miami we were flushed. We had so much money, and we did such incredible things, but I saw the transition not only in the financial world but in the artistic world the last few years that I was there to the point where many opera companies stopped engaging big name singers. The big name singers started taking themselves out of the regional market. When you had Martina, you had Beverly Sills and people like that going to regional companies, then you paid them quite a bit of money. That started dwindling because those singers only started singing at the Met, San Francisco, Chicago, they only wanted to sing where the big fees were. Then most companies started going towards more ensemble and younger singers because is cost less money. Realizing that the audience for those superstars was dwindling also. People began to go to the opera to have an operatic experience as opposed to hearing them. I am still on the fence about that because I still think that if there were superstars, people would still pay a lot of money to go and see them. So I think one of the big changes was seeing that artistic thing go from those types of performers to younger singers and seeing budgets being slashed left and right. The more we do in this world, the more there is to do. You know, the whole home entertainment thing is really putting the screws to us in terms of live theater. We are trying to come up with all kinds of ways and ideas just to keep people coming to live theater.

Antonio: That was one thing I came upon. I went through the fellowship program for the American Symphony and Orchestra League in the interview process. There was something that came up in a discussion about live performances and why are they important. We had to write this essay and part of the application/interview process was to go to a concert at Carnegie Hall. It was the Atlanta Symphony doing Verdi Requiem. I wrote an essay about it that Sunday morning after the performance. Even if there are mistakes, I think people go listen to recordings at home because they don’t want to hear any mistakes, but at live performances I’ve kind of notice myself is the excitement of seeing these people meet this artistic goal of keeping everything perfect. In any case, that a person sings out of tune or
the conductor has the tempo too fast, or whatever it is, you just walk away from those live performances just stunned by what you have experienced. I have never been able to recreate that kind of atmosphere based on a recording.

Willie: Well yeah, there are just as many people who do. I think that is unfortunate. I had this argument with one of my best friends in Miami now. He used to work for the opera company. Now he works for the University of Miami School of Medicine. He almost prefers DVDs and videos and CDs and everything instead of going to live performances exactly for that reason. I say to him that first of all, not only what you just mentioned, which is a very important part of it, but there is a certain communion, a certain ‘being there’ with other people and sharing the situation, sharing that artistic experience with other people that feeds into either your enjoyment of your lack of enjoyment of what is going on. It’s not supposed to be perfect, as far as I am concerned. Even the CDs and DVDs are not perfect either, but the important thing is that it is live, and that is what is unique about it. It only happens that one time. With a CD you can repeat it. It is going to be the same every time. That one time, and it hits you, depending on where you are. If you had a bad day, it might make your day better. If you had a good day, it might depress you. The thing is it makes a statement that affects you as a human being. I think that is very important.

Antonio: You’ve talked about the trends you’ve seen during your career, the funds being slashed, and the artistic trends that have changed. Do you consider those barriers to people coming into the field? If so, what other barriers that you have encountered personally in getting where you are?

Willie: Well, that is hard to say because from an administrative point of view, I don’t have a grasp of how many people like yourself want to come into this business because they see opera companies, symphony orchestras, and ballet companies going under, more symphony orchestras, not too many opera companies yet. But you know, it does not seem to be a worthy investment at this point until the economy changes around or people’s ideas and practices in terms of supporting arts organizations gets better. It is not the best investment in the world. On the other hand, young singers are flocking to operas more than they ever had. I mean, my God, I can’t tell you the number of applications and submissions of résumés as far as auditions. Our opera guild does a competition in April and we had one hundred and seventy applicants, and it was a very small competition. The top prize was five thousand, so that’s not bad. One hundred and seventy applicants that is a lot of singers. When we go to the New York for auditions we have sometimes upwards of six to seven hundred people who request auditions. That is typical, not only for the opera companies, but for the competitions and the young artist programs. So they are out there, and
they are wanting to do this. I think that is very encouraging. But you just have to say, how many jobs are there?

Antonio: Then from an administrative standpoint, for me, I started out as a singer, but I knew that I did not have the chops, particularly as some of my other Black male colleagues. I did not have the chops they had. So I thought to myself, it was kind of selfish and kind of stupid of me to try and go down this path when really I could go into administration and open more doors for people who do have the talent who look like me and other people as well. I wonder how that trend will change in the future where people will study voice and then maybe realize that maybe they need to go into administration. That might kind of open a pool of people to come and administrate too.

Willie: Well, who knows? It is hard to say because, we are not often that visible unless you are the General Director or Artistic Director. So people on the outside don’t really see it. So I thought at one point, actually more then one point that it was important for me to continue doing this for exactly that reason, because we want to get more African Americans and more Hispanics in the top-level of opera management. I wasn’t so concerned about symphony or ballet. You know, anytime I would see somebody like Debbie Evans, she’s the head of the Met guild program. I had an opportunity in Miami because my assistant was leaving to go Lyric Opera Chicago, and so Debbie had sent a résumé. As I called her up and we chatted. She came down for an interview. I wanted to hire her as my administrative assistant. She did decide to get married and to stay in Washington, so she turned the job down. She was one example of a very, very smart, and personable person who would go somewhere, and she did. She was in Washington for a lot time, and now she is with the Met Guild, and she is doing very well there. I try to say to as many people as I saw that they gave any indication that they were interested that they should go and do something about it. Again, it is a question of whether or not you think it is an investment.

Antonio: If you had to make your initial career path again, would you choose the same thing or would you choose differently?

Willie: That’s a hard question to answer. In a lot of ways I am thinking that I would have done a slightly different route, and I would have gone just the conducting route. When I first conducted here, Exxon had a conductor’s program. The purpose was to put young conductors with major orchestras for a year or two. I applied and was accepted and got to the finals. It just so happened that the final thing was with the Indianapolis Symphony on the morning that I would have a dress rehearsal of Macbeth here. I had to decide very quickly. Obviously, I would have to give up this engagement to do that. This was a job, and this was something that was in the hole, in
the bag because I was doing it, as opposed to that. That would have been a career choice and investment, but I had no idea of the results, so I stayed here instead of doing that. As a conductor, one needs to do other things. You can’t make it as a conductor just doing opera in this country. In Europe you can, but in this country you can’t. So in terms of a career trajectory, I probably would have gone the route of symphonic to get that experience. Because I had an operatic background I could have transferred, but I didn’t. I think that has hampered me in terms of my career because I don’t get the engagements. I did quite a bit of orchestral conducting with, at least some of the Orchestral Repertoire in Europe. I have done some of it here, but my focus here was opera. I think my career path would have gotten bigger and better had I chosen that other route. I don’t regret what I have done, but in retrospect I think things would have gone quite differently had I done that.

**Antonio:** How is your career path different from European-American executive opera administrators?

**Willie:** I don’t know. I have never even thought about it. I really don’t know. I told you how I have gotten to where I have gotten. Now granted, I don’t know that many people who had both the... I was going to say that have had both the performing side of it and the administrative side of it, but that is not necessarily true.

**Antonio:** I think that I will find that with everyone that I interview because it just seems that the informal network of where your mentors were and who they were and how they influenced shaping you just allows you to have these opportunities that are rewarding. I think that is kind of cool actually. It is funny, when I was introducing this study to my committee of professors, they actually said you should choose five Non European Americans and five European-Americans so you can compare them. I didn’t really think I needed to do that because I can read about other people’s careers and kind of go hmmm...this is the same thing, or it is different in terms of the person’s interest or the particular interest that the person had. I think that is what I have found. Are you currently mentoring anyone?

**Willie:** No.

**Antonio:** If you were mentoring someone, what tools and strategies would you use to kind of assist and facilitate them in their career path?

**Willie:** I think, first of all, you need to be involved with an opera company backstage, i.e., the production assistant, or the assistant director or something where you can see the workings of the opera company backstage. Obviously, one needs to have access to the administrator to be
able to see daily what goes on in terms of running the company and how the various components work together, how it works with not just the artistic administration, but production staff, development, marketing/PR. Even though I don’t have as much experience in those areas as many people, but I do have a lot. I mean because I was there in San Francisco and in Miami in dealing with a lot of those initiatives and involved in those meetings when those decisions were made as to what you do, how you do it, which whom, and all that kind of stuff. That is what you have to do. You have to be able to immerse yourself in the inner workings of the opera company. People do compartmentalize, but I do happen to think that an effective General Director needs to also know what the chorus is doing, what the costume situation is like, how long it takes to load in a set. Is the set going to be too big or too small and all those things. All those things fit in together. It is not a part of coursework. It is a part of being there and being around. So, no, I have not mentored anyone. I have not had anybody around here who wants to do that, but we have had on a couple of occasions people who come in during productions to observe what happens. That is the only way to do it. You have just go to be there and really see and really talk to people and to see it in action. As much as I love and appreciate classrooms, they take you only so far. Then you just have to be out there in the fields doing it.

**Antonio:** What are your plans ten years from now?

**Willie:** Well, I am not sure that... I have to say honestly, I’m still not sure whether or not I really want to continue doing this as General Director or as Artistic Director or just conducting. Conducting is my passion. It is what I still think I do better than anything else, so that will always be a part of it. I like this well enough that I think I would like to go to... ideally I would like to be the General Director of a company that has money and an endowment, that has security, you know? That rarely exists now. I would like to be in a company, and I think I could do this obviously at a higher level. I mean we are level three, level two. I don’t know that it is in the cards that I would run a company at level one because it is just too complicated. I just finished reading Joe Volpe’s book. I mean it is a quick read. You should probably read it because it... I did it like in two days, but it is an easy read. Looking at the Metropolitan... that is a whole different world. One should never compare, or San Francisco, or Chicago. Those are different, but the next level of companies, Seattle and San Diego, and places like that where we in the business agree are generally well run. Those are places that one could use as a model. I would like to become General Director of a company like Atlanta or I have in the back of my mind Detroit and Michigan Opera Theatre, for example because I have a long relationship with them. I am going back there next year for a *Turandot*. I have this idea in my mind that I want to be the general director of a company in an area that has a lot of Black people because I want to
get more Black people involved in opera, not just Black people but more ethnic people. That is one of the reasons I stick with Houston Ebony Opera.

Antonio: You know we did not talk about that organization that much. It actually came up in Linda’s interview. I always wondered what it would be like to work for an organization like an African American Opera Company. I did some research on those organizations. I was very much so interested.

Willie: You have been in touch with Mary.

Antonio: Yeah, and I was saying as an arts administration student who has this passion for opera. Looking at the dichotomy that exists between the two organizations, I have this passion for African American opera companies, but at the same time it is kind of like you said, the endowment funds, the stability, where is that going to come from? Will I have to go there and kind of create that, or try to create an infrastructure that supports that? Should I go to an organization and get those skills and then go help the African American opera companies?

Willie: That’s always going to work. I think it is a false hope for any of us to think that we are going to develop an African American opera company in this day and age in a way that we would be proud of it, in a way that it would really make an impact, a difference. No, it is not going to work that way, and it’s unfortunate, because opera is still so isolated to a certain extent and is not in the mainstream as much as we would like it to be. Although opera is popular enough, but it is not popular in the Black community. You know, it is not a community in which it has been important enough unlike most of the Hispanic community, at least… Well, in Miami for example, and this does exist similarly across the country. Miami, for example has a huge Cuban population. They had opera in Cuba. They had symphony. They had ballet, so you know. A lot of the South Americans who migrate to Miami, they had government supported arts, so it is a part of their culture, a part of their lives. Here in Hartford, for example, the Hispanic community is Puerto Rican, which is basically American. That means they do the same things because suffered the same things or they had advantages of the same things that we as Americans do. They are not an affluent group of people. The things the Mexicans in Houston and in Dallas and Southern California…they are not of the same ilk. I hate to say it; I would not say it too much publicly, but it is very true. They don’t have the same exposures. They don’t have the same background as people from South America or from Cuba do; therefore, those people (the Cubans and everything) support the opera in Miami in a way that other Hispanics across the country don’t because it is a part of their blood. It is what they expect. It is what they are used to doing.
Antonio: That is interesting. I see that in Orlando too, actually.

Willie: You see in Orlando you are talking about migrant workers. You are not talking about people who have disposable income. You are not talking about people who are well educated. I mean, this is not against anything else, but that is where the statistics are.

Antonio: I think you are right. The people I knew who went to Orlando opera tended to be Cuban. At least from Stetson, in terms of people who worked at Stetson in the past had disposable income to go see a production and they tended to be Cuban. It was like, “how could you not go see it?” Especially if it was “Carmen.” They wanted to go see “Carmen.” With Denyce Graves that makes it even better. Well, we are in our last series of questions. Why do you think Affirmative Action is necessary today?

Willie: I figure it is necessary because minorities have been shut out for so long in so many different ways. I am not the kind of person that thinks that somebody should just be elevated to some position or whatever just because he is Black or Hispanic or Asian or whatever, but there has to be a certain level of accomplishment and achievement. The doors were closed for so long and some of the doors are still closed. There needs to be a boost. There needs to be a help. There needs to be someone who says, “Okay, we are going to take a chance on this person and give them the opportunity.” You know, there are varying levels as to how one does that, but if you look at it, Affirmative Action has not been as successful as people think it has. The situation has been there, at least certainly in writing, but in terms of the actual way of doing it, I mean, the actual results; one could even argue that Affirmative Action has not been successful in many ways. Other than the entertainment and the athletic industry where (maybe in some jobs like hospitals and such things) but where do you have an abundance of African Americans or Hispanics or Asians in top positions. You don’t. It doesn’t exist.

Antonio: Well, some people actually argue that its benefitted White women more than any other minority. Statistically, when I look at the statistics on opera administrators, predominantly it was White women at any level.

Willie: They have really gotten more and have been raised higher than any other group.

Antonio: That is interesting. We talked about this a little bit earlier. Do you feel that your career progression was affected any by Affirmative Action, or do you feel that your achievement and your set of skills was more beneficial in pushing you along vs. this Affirmative Action thing?
Willie: I would say the latter. Again, I don’t think I was hired for any of these jobs because of Affirmative Action. I don’t think I was hired for any of these jobs because I was Black. I think that the stakes were too high. You can’t put somebody in a responsible position like at the San Francisco Opera or in Miami, being responsible for casting, being responsible for choosing repertoire and all that kind of stuff, just because they are Black or Asian or whatever. You have to have somebody who knows what he is doing, who knows what the audience wants, etc. I personally don’t think that Affirmative Action had anything to do with that.

Antonio: So how does ethnicity or gender or race factor into the succeeding as an executive opera administrator?

Willie: Well, it shouldn’t. But, that’s ideal. I don’t know; I don’t know that it has been tested enough because there just have not been enough of us. There has been Linda, there has been me and just a couple of other people. You don’t have enough people there to even say. It is not there.

Antonio: So what barriers do you feel that Non European Americans face in climbing the executive ladder in opera or arts organizations? What barriers do you feel we face in climbing the ladder?

Willie: Well, I think many of the barriers are individual. As I said earlier, it is just a question of whether or not somebody wants to go into this business realizing where we are now in terms of the perception of the arts in communities, the financial support of arts, which is dwindling from all counts. So it is a question of whether or not… somebody said to me once, “Why would anybody want to jump on a sinking ship?” Well, I tend to want to believe that it is not a sinking ship, but is certainly it is not the most encouraging, but that is the case everywhere. You look at the big corporations laying off ten, fifteen, thirty thousand people. The people that have these million dollar corporations. It just does not look good anywhere, so why would anybody want to go into the not-for-profit arts, which by its nature is going to be less financially rewarding because in this day and time the finances make a huge difference. When I was doing it we went into it because we loved opera. You know we could sustain ourselves, but now because things are so expensive and because people want so much and there is so much out there, you have to make a certain living. It is hard to do.

Antonio: Why do you think Non European Americans should pursue careers in opera administration?

Willie: Well, I think you should only do it, first of all, if you love it. I mean you have got to love it, and that is the way it is with any art form. I think it is still important for us to be there. We cannot let it die. I don’t think it will,
but what will happen… you know in the 1970s, like in 1970-71 there were about thirty professional opera companies in America. Now there are about one hundred twenty-five to one hundred and thirty something. In reading Joe Volpe’s book it reminded me what he says is absolutely true. The Met stopped touring because regional opera companies began to spring up all over the place. In the cities where the Met used to tour there were now local companies. So the reason for the Met to tour was no longer because also the big artists used to tour with the Met. Then they started backing away and would not tour as much.

Antonio: I argued that point with one of my best friends. I think that the Met’s touring caused this uprising of regional opera companies like Atlanta or Orlando. It was kind of a double-edged sword in that it stopped the Met from touring, but these communities had home grown companies and it kind of challenged the communities to start supporting these companies and to make an investment in the cultural life of the community as well.

Willie: But it was a very difficult and a long road. In practically every one of those cities, Boston, Memphis, Cleveland, Dallas, Minneapolis, because there were people who would go to the Met, and people who would pay to see the Met even though the tickets were very expensive and would not support the local organization. So when the Met stopped touring, it took a long time for most of those cities, Boston and Memphis specifically, it took a long time for those cities to get the people who support the Met to support the local opera company. Sarah Caldwell struggled in Boston for so many years because there were the Met people and there was the opera company in Boston. In Atlanta there is a huge, huge network of people who supported the Met. The Atlanta Opera struggled for years, and now they are just beginning, same thing in Memphis, same thing in Cleveland. It was hard to get those local people to say, “Okay, we are going to support the local opera company,” because it was not the Met. We have that problem here to a certain extent because being so close to New York. We’ve changed the attitude of a lot of people here who used to go to the Met and would not go to the Connecticut Opera. Now they accept the fact that they can get a very good operatic experience right here in Hartford, less expensive. A lot of people don’t like what they are seeing at the Met, so they don’t go to the Met. But there are still a few people, and I would only say maybe, and I am sure there are more, but as far I know there are five to six people in this community, major people in the arts community who support what we do, not financially, but will go to the Met and not come to a performance at the Connecticut Opera. It is just their mindset. It has nothing to do with anything else. It is just the mindset. It is interesting. To this day I don’t understand why, but that is the way it is. I will say that we have successfully changed the attitudes of a lot of people, and they do come to the Connecticut Opera now.
Antonio: How did you go about doing that?

Willie: By the artistic product. You know the only way, the only way to solidify your face and to get people to come and keep them coming is to have a good artistic product. Everything else is ancillary. The artistic product is… you can have the best staff, you can have the best development, you can have the best PR and marketing, if you don’t have a good artistic product… everything else has to feed into the artistic product. If you don’t have that, you’re lost. It is as simple as that. It is the opera, stupid, it’s the opera.

Antonio: Okay, our last four questions. How are you a risk taker?

Willie: I’m not so much. I really am basically traditional. I am basically conservative. That is the way I was raised. All the artistic environments that I have been in have been that way, and that is how I am. It is hard. I have not been presented with a situation in which I could. Even when I came here… my charge here was to turn the company around in terms of improving the artistic product and improving the relations with the city and with the artistic community so that we were looked at as a serious organization. That took a lot of time. I told them. We are talking about three years to be able to turn that around. Well, we successfully did that. In the meantime, you can’t take risks. So you’ve got Carmen. You’ve got Aïda. You’ve got Bohème. You’ve got all those things. As soon as you get to the point where you think, “This is going well. Now I can begin to…” Then the economy collapses and people stop going to the opera for whatever reason. So there is nothing you can do. You take surveys and you realize what people are saying, is that, “We love Bohème, We love Aïda. We love Carmen. That is what we are going to support. We don’t want to hear, Of Mice and Men. We don’t want to hear, Nixon in China. You know, and so there is this gulf between the tried and true, which of course, practically every opera company, even though some companies specialize in other things. But you know the idea of keeping that audience but introducing new pieces to that audience and also try to introduce new people to come into the opera house. Now I argue with Linda and others about this all the time. I mean, somebody who has never been to an opera as far as I can see is not going to necessarily be enticed to go and see Nixon in China more than they would be enticed to go and see La Bohème, or Madame Butterfly or Aïda. Nixon in China does not mean a damn thing to most people. They won’t know, but somebody out there who is educated, who gets around and reads the newspaper and all of that would certainly, hopefully, have heard of La Bohème, or Madame Butterfly or whatever, but Nixon in China or Of Mice and Men or Miss Julie or whatever, no, no. See that is one of our big problems, of course, even with people who are regular opera lovers. Getting them to the opera house to see something unusual like that is the hard part. A lot of those pieces once
you get them there, then they will enjoy it. But they won’t even buy the
tickets.

**Antonio:** You know it is funny because *Porgy and Bess*, that’s an American opera
that most people love and want to go see, but it is interesting because
*Susanna* I think is a great American opera, you know, *Vanessa*. There is a
repertoire that has come about. I mean *Malcolm X*, I think that is a great
opera.

**Willie:** Maybe, I don’t know if it’s great, but it is effective. That is just a
difference of opinion. See *Porgy and Bess* is unique. *Porgy* is unique. See
people know *Porgy*. It was written back in 1935, so it has already had
almost twenty years *Susannah* so because of its musical language and
because it has been exposed internationally. *Porgy and Bess* is in a place
that no other American opera is. There is no other piece except maybe
*West Side Story*, which I think is dumb, that has the popularity that has the
accessibility. *Porgy* is unique also because not only does it have great
music but it has great characters and it has great dramatic situations. It hits
you here. It hits you here. There is just so much about that piece, I mean it
is a masterpiece as far as I am concerned. The good thing about it, and I
was thinking about this with *Carmen*, and *Aïda* and *Bohème*, not only it is
composed well, but it is so acceptable to the public without denigrating
any of the musical ideas that Gershwin had or whatever; so it sort of
encompasses everything, and it puts it all out there right in front of you.
Despite the fact that it is a masterpiece and that even composers like the
piece because it is composed well. Most of the audience does not know
that. They know that it is a piece of theater that they love and that it is
music that they love. That, I think, is what makes a masterpiece a
masterpiece.

**Antonio:** So how are you a trailblazer? You mentioned that term earlier.

**Willie:** I did? I don’t know that I am.

**Antonio:** You said that you did not think that you were a trailblazer, but I think that
you are a trailblazer because I’ve kind of followed what you have done, at
least from a paper standpoint and reading about you in *Opera News*, about
the *Black Conductor* book that Antoinette Handy, I think it was. I think that
you are, but…

**Willie:** Again, I think that whatever trailblazing has been done is because I just
stayed the course, you know, and there was a conscious effort to stick with
this administrative thing once I started doing it, but to be able to conduct
along the way. Yes, I think that if there is any trailblazing it is because I
am still one of two African Americans. I am the only at this point African
American that is a General Director of an opera company. So I guess just
by the nature of that situation, you could say that I am a trailblazer. You asked earlier about risk taking and all that. I don’t know. I’ve been so concerned with keeping my reputation so that people trust and believe me, and take me seriously as not only an arts administrator, but there is just a certain level of accomplishment of achievement that you have to have and it has to be consistent. You know that statement, “It is less important to get a job than to get the second job.” You know, it is more difficult to remain a success than to be a success. So there are all those little adages that you are confronted with. I have been very busy just keeping my reputation positive, sterling, fair, and all of that, because I think that is very important so that people will take me seriously. If they realize that the work I am doing is good, then that makes it easier and better for the next person. That’s my biggest concern. The side of me that might want to be a trailblazer, for example, I have lots of plans for this company that I will probably never be able to realize. That has to do with money and that also has to do with the community and how the community perceives opera. This is a traditional and conservative community and you can’t just come bursting in here and say, “Okay, we are going to do it completely contemporary opera.” It would never work. I would be right out of town. So that is a part of knowing your audience and if I were not that kind of person, then I would go to St. Louis or I would go work in Santa Fe, Glimmergass or some place like that where they do that kind of thing, but see those are Festivals. Festivals always work differently than regular companies. So yes, I don’t necessarily consider myself a trailblazer, but I am very cognizant of the fact that I am doing something that nobody else of my race right now is doing. A lot of the young singers, not just young singers, but Black singers in New York look at me as a hope for them. Sometimes a little bit too much because sometimes what they are thinking is that... A few of them have said this, “You should bring all these Black singers to Connecticut and you could cast an all Black Don Giovanni I could cast an all Black anything, but I am not going to do it because that to me is not what I am here for. I worry more about other people than I do myself, so I have worried a lot about what my audience will think, what my board will think. There is... I mean we have been thinking a lot about doing an all Black Bohème, which I did in Houston a few years ago and it was tremendously successful. Great, great, great concept in all of that. That is different, slightly different. You know, that type of thing could be a part of the whole trailblazing thing, but otherwise I just have to stick with it as it is now until we get to a point where one can do some different things.

**Antonio:** It kind of speaks to what you said about making sure that the legacy that you leave behind in terms of your career keeps that door open for other people because if you did something like that and it wasn’t a success, then it is kind of like you have that stamp on your career and associated with it. I certainly understand that. It is actually something I anticipated hearing
come up in this discussion. The last question of the day. I read about you because obviously I am kind of an investigator of such, and so I know that publications that you have had printed in Opera News. There was a thing, I think, in Ebony or Jet and then Black Conductors. Are there any other publications that you know of that you have appeared in.

**Willie:** Not that I know of… you mean in terms of for example, reviews? I’ve had reviews in both Opera, the British magazine and Opera Now. I have had reviews there, but no articles or anything like that. I can’t think of anything else aside from newspapers and things like that. The Ebony thing, I was in Ebony twice. The first time was several years ago when they had the Black conductors. I think… I was in Opera News twice, one time when I came here. Yes, I was in Opera News twice, but I cannot think of any others.

**Antonio:** Okay. Wow. Well, is there anything else you would like to share?

**Willie:** Man, you have been very comprehensive here. My goodness, my goodness.

**Antonio:** I love these kinds of discussions. I think this is a great way, at least for me, to bring my educational process to an end because I am very much looking forward to doing something and getting kind of like expanding my education to go do exactly what you said and actually go out there and put it to practice. It has kind of been this thing where I feel like a marathon racer, and I’m ready to go, but waiting for the gun shot, and I’m not hearing it yet. So I’m looking forward to hearing the shot so I can just start running.

**Willie:** When will you finish?

**Antonio:** I’m planning to be finished by August.
Michael Ching

Date: Wednesday, May 31, 2006
Time: 10:00 a.m.
Place: Opera Memphis Administrative Offices, Memphis, Tennessee

Antonio: Okay so the first thing I’d like to do is get a general picture of what it was like for you growing up. Where were you born and where did you grow up?

Michael: I was born in Honolulu and left Honolulu before I was one year old. After that the principle places I grew up were New Orleans and St. Paul, Minnesota. I am one quarter Chinese and one quarter Japanese. St Paul was a very metropolitan, musical city. I went to school at Duke in North Carolina, that’s it. I immediately went into composing. I found the opera field to be a great way to use their compositional models as a composer. I was always a good pianist. I studied piano from about the age of six. It was sort of a useful route into the field. I started in Houston for a year, did four years in Miami, which is where I met Willie.

Antonio: Okay, tell me about your career success as it relates to your family and your childhood.

Michael: Career success as it relates to my family? I don’t totally understand your question?

Antonio: Okay, so what is the impact of your family on your success?

Michael: I am a third generation Asian American. My grand parents were mostly born here. A lot of Asian Americans in my family fit the traditional cultural stereotypes about Asians being hardworking all wanting to become doctors or lawyers or professionals of some sort. I had a moderately disciplined childhood, and my family was glad I got into music, but they wanted me to go to Duke as opposed to like Eastman or the University of Michigan. They thought if I went to Duke I would become a doctor. That didn’t happen of course. There are certain Asian cultural values of hard work and discipline and study. My father was an amateur musician and clearly wanted to become a musician, but was not allowed to in the cultural milieu of his day, so he was never discouraging of me becoming a musician, and some of my early childhood influences are of him. He was a strong, although not direct musical influence on me. As far as the music itself goes, I did a little composing at about six or seven and then was reintroduced to composing in about tenth grade. I think it was at Interlochen. It turned out I had a real facility for it and wrote a huge amount of music in this time. I got back to composition. At
the same time, I have always… I’m definitely unlike Willie, for example. I’m not so sure. I have a much more ambivalent attitude towards opera. So I think that started fairly early on and I think I actually ended up steering back to classical music and I’m certainly in it for life. But, I have a. Maybe ambivalence is too negative a word, but I am trying to figure out. Maybe this is that whole sort of Asian thing about… of being a minority. Is that you’re just trying to figure out how you fit in. The how you fit in is really a key question for the arts because at this point you are competing with tractor pulls and going bicycling in the park. We’re competing against, we’re in that kind of thing. It’s important for an arts administrator to recognize this. Most of us go into the field of classical music to escape from the world, to narrow our focus. It is healthy because it makes you feel successful. It makes you feel like you have mastery of the world. It is not the world, but we have to figure out how to relate to the world successfully so they won’t ignore us. We’re on a downward sort of spiral and we’re in trouble. So for me, you got to figure out how you fit in. You have to be comfortable fitting in, and I’m not saying that I go to basketball games or anything like that. I’m just saying that I have to at least have some kind of basic understanding about what is going on. It is more important. It is more important for me.

Antonio: I just learned that actually kind of studying arts administration. Would you say then that your father is the family member that most influenced your career path?

Michael: Oh yes.

Antonio: And you spoke about how he influenced your career path. What was your earliest memory of opera?

Michael: Well, I didn’t see an opera until I was in high school. The first full length opera I think I saw was actually rather poorly performed opera by a touring company in North Carolina. Un Giorno di regno or La Traviata, one of the Verdi operas. It was not particularly well done. But when you go into composition, you study Wozzeck and... I had heard of a lot of operas, but really attending an opera was something I had done fairly late.

Antonio: How crucial to your career success was that exposure to opera?

Michael: Well, I don’t know. I guess I have really never thought about that. I guess in a way it is just reinforced my ambivalence because I wasn’t too sure that… I kept thinking, I said to myself, I got into this at twenty-one. I kept saying to myself every year until I was thirty or so if I don’t think this field is any good, I’ll just get out of it and do something other than music. You know, and so, I ended up falling in love with it by doing it which is a dangerous thing because you know doing it is, it is always easy to love
doing something. Doing something is very different from being an audience member. You can’t take that for granted. You might be putting on things that are boring.

**Antonio:** You spoke a little bit about your family’s views on classical music. What are your family’s views on opera?

**Michael:** I don’t think my family had any views on opera. My father died when I was twenty-two or twenty-three, and my mother is fine about it now. She wasn’t negative about it, but after a few conversations she was very particular.

**Antonio:** Does she attend opera?

**Michael:** Yes, she comes. She comes. She actually lives here now.

**Antonio:** How did your family members and peers then respond to your interest in a career in opera?

**Michael:** Well, to most outsiders a career in opera is just some career in music, so they still were not surprised that I was in music and no one was surprised at that. I was a good musician. I was in high school youth orchestra programs and all of that. People assumed I would go into music.

**Antonio:** You spoke about cultural expectations. What are your family’s views on your career success and you being an arts administrator?

**Michael:** I think they are fine with it. I think the main thing is that I, I think it made me little bit obsessed with having a regular paycheck, and so except for maybe two or three months of an essentially twenty-five year career, I have never not had a regular paycheck. I think that my upbringing has somehow made me do that. I never felt like desperate about it, but it has always been and even if it was a small regular paycheck… it was a regular paycheck.

**Antonio:** Absolutely.

**Michael:** So I think that sort of sense of background is slightly bourgeois is what it is.

**Antonio:** You spoke about your father being a professor. What are the levels of education of your immediate family?

**Michael:** My father had his Ph.D. and a Master’s. My mother had some college and my wife is a college professor. I only have a BA. It’s funny. I am actually
rather academic compared to like Willie and Linda. I don’t ever miss having not done what you are doing.

**Antonio:** Sometimes I ask myself why? I like the research. I love the research and the writing, actually. I think this process has taught me more about human relations, because you have a committee of people that you deal with they approve your stuff, and then you send it on to this agency that I was telling you about earlier. That is the most difficult thing. The research and the writing isn’t as bad as people make it out to be. I actually enjoy that part. I do have a good advisor. Maintaining motivation, and kind of like, when that advisor has ten other doctoral students working on dissertations and also trying to keep tenure and that sort of thing is kind of like…

**Michael:** They never get properly compensated for their graduate advice. You know it’s… having something of a research and intellectual mentality is good. Don’t just run along.

**Antonio:** I sent Mark Scorca my resume. The other day he emailed me back and the opera management and administration is like a passion of mine, my dream job would actually be to work with OPERA America somehow in research and assist the field, the broad field of opera managers and administrators with that change through research and analysis. I haven’t heard a response from him yet. I said if I couldn’t do that I would not mind doing artistic administration. That would be fun too. I love working with artists. I think having had that background as a singer I kind of can understand some of the psychological implications of being a singer and singing a role for the first time, and them wondering if they can sing the top and accommodate the bottom and all that sort of thing. I mean I really like that. I enjoy working with them so…

**Michael:** Those are two very different fields.

**Antonio:** I know. Hey diversity, it’s the spice of life. But I would like to talk a little bit more about ethnicity. How was race and ethnicity important to your family?

**Michael:** Well, first of all, the main…I don’t know if you know this or much about it, the way that most Asians succeed is through assimilation, so you speak English and you don’t know any Chinese or Japanese. I don’t speak Chinese.

**Antonio:** My Korean American friend just told me the same exact thing. I was like are you serious? I mean I think it is interesting. I had no idea.

**Michael:** It is one of those things, and so in a sense we are idealistic successes in terms of perception in terms of this American thing of us all being race
less. Since that time the attitude towards... to assimilate has changed to one where yes, you assimilate to a certain extent, but you also embrace certain cultural values and heritage traits from your ethnic culture. The truth is that it is too late for me. I remember. I don’t know any Japanese. They just couldn’t understand and they actually couldn’t understand why I wasn’t interested in it. I am more interested in it now than I used to be, but the truth is that, you know, in our household, if you... you’d have to look fairly hard to figure out that there was an Asian living there, there are a few things, even here in my office. Feng shui, I’m usually facing the door. There is a kind of Asian-looking teapot over there. I do drink tea. I mean there is green tea in there. See, it is just one of those things that for me it does not... it actually hasn’t been an issue. Some of that also is that when you're raised in places like New Orleans and Minneapolis in the 60’s and 70’s, Japanese, Koreans, Vietnamese, maybe thirty thousand, I don’t know Thai, Filipinos. There is just not that many.

Antonio: I think ethnically and racially, you know how we get into labels, like I was talking to you earlier about preferring Black American vs. African American. Do you prefer to refer to yourself as Asian American or Chinese American?

Michael: I usually just say Asian American sometimes.

Antonio: What are your major influences of choices of ethnic and or racial identity like are your parents an influence on that choice of ethnic identity that you use?

Michael: Well, sure.

Antonio: You spoke about the times in your life that you feel is more important to you now to be identified as Asian American vs. in the past.

Michael: Well, it is slightly more important because we sort of have at least a little bit of movement. I’m beginning to read a few Chinese characters and so I’m succeeding at it although pretty marginally.

Antonio: As an adult have you experienced what we consider discrimination, or racism, or sexism?

Michael: Well, they’re grateful to me for not making a fuss about it. To me those kinds of things are more or less comical. It sort of depends on how you take those kinds of things. That you don’t... that you shouldn’t take them too seriously. It might have been a little hurtful when you were eight, but it is something that you just can’t take seriously. I may be jumping the gun on this, but I don’t feel that being Asian is handy for, and particular here or having an Asian accent, it’ sort of limiting, but you know, I just think
it.. All three of the finalists/candidates who showed up for this job had wives. Statistically, this field is not run by heterosexuals, so something tells me that there was something going on that maybe was never written down on a piece of paper. So some things work for you and some things work against you. Statistically, there are three finalist for a job as an Artistic Director you would think you would have at least one Gay person. Some companies only hire administrators from Europe. The Dallas Opera, it’s ok, now, I don’t know rather that’s a…. the Palm Beach opera is an example. I can understand that in a limited dumb ass sort of way… but that’s the attitude. It may be very subconscious. But the truth is I can’t think of.. those are two I don’t feel that… I feel secure for example. But in the American south you’re either Black or White. More than anything, it’s sort of a distorted factor. It’s a complete non-issue. In the African American community that’s because of the historical fact that a lot of tone death Asian business people have opened grocery stores. And really here I don’t.. I haven’t been offered a country club membership, but I think that is really more because it’s a thousand dollars a year, and I couldn’t afford one. But it sort of allows you to float. One of the first things I did here was open an account at this bank. It’s not in the part of town where I live. But, it was at least away for me to make some kind of statement about diversity. They used to have these giveaways. One year I actually won. They gave me a video camera. They were a little stunned because I wasn’t the customer they were looking for to give the camera away to. It’s been somewhat useful for a relationship. We actually have some receptions there. I feel like our Board wants us to do that kind of work. The Board loves it. Most of them don’t do it themselves and its ok. You know, we take their money and we keep it in the community. It’s a fair exchange. I don’t regard it for the educational programs.

Antonio: You spoke about living diversity vs. speaking diversity, are your friends and associates a mixed group of people?

Michael: Not nearly mixed enough and it is my job. I work for them. My job is to.. I haven’t voted Republican in twenty years, but there is a picture of me with Dick Cheney. It is just one the things that you deal with. On the board, it’s social issues. I had to really think like that. I asked the Board president, who I knew was clearly on the other side. Through the day to day stuff at work, yes. It is a fairly racially divided city.

Antonio: What about the diversity of say your elementary school, middle school, high school? Were those pretty diverse places?

Michael: No.

Antonio: What about Duke? Was that a pretty diverse place?
Michael: Are you kidding? No.

Antonio: I’ve never been there.

Michael: I mean it is not. I mean it tries to be. You try to fitting in and it is hard to fit in.

Antonio: Did you participate in extra-curricular activities in high school or in middle school?

Michael: Other than musical activities, no. I was involved in music activities, piano lessons.

Antonio: I think that is a pretty obvious impact on your career where you are now in terms of your career.

Michael: I mean did I do sports? No. I think I am in better shape now. I practice yoga. I have great knees. All these big guys come in and they can’t do the leg lifts. I didn’t hurt my knees.

Antonio: I practice Amrit Yoga. I don’t run. I do a lot of power walking. It’s so funny because I think people have a more Western understanding of fitness and wellness. They tend to be very physically driven, but …

Michael: They tend to be hurting themselves. Your body is... Yoga is a non-impact activity. When you need the impact I feel like if I needed to run a mile or so I could do it quite easily.

Antonio: My yoga teachers are trying to get me certified to teach, and so I keep resisting.

Michael: You know, Bob Swedberg in Orlando is certified in Ashtanga yoga.

Antonio: Yeah, he sent out an email with a website and I kind of explored that.

Michael: You should go and just have coffee with him sometime. You should do that. He is a very interesting man.

Antonio: When I first went to the opera at eighteen, I went to see a production of Don Giovanni and Willie was the conductor. Curtis Rayam sang Don Ottavio. Mr. Swedberg made that happen, and so I’ve kind of facilitated him coming back and doing some things with FSU and in fact they just co-produced Susannah. That was pretty cool. I haven’t spoken to him in a while. I think we have kind of talked about this education and ethnicity thing. Do you think ethnicity impacted your college experiences in any way?
Michael: No, I don’t have much to say about that.

Antonio: And what were your college aspirations and career plans in college and high school?

Michael: Well, I knew I wanted to go into music. For a while I thought I was going to be a performer and it just didn’t pan out. I play well, but I just didn’t want to do that. So I ended up in the opera field. For me, the Asian population is large in classical music. It has bunches of Asians something like that. It may not be a majority of them. So to me, it’s actually rather unremarkable. I don’t mean that in a negative way. It’s certainly for me a been there done that. Actually what I’m trying to do… the color line that I am trying to break right now is the color line of being the first Asian to have a hit on country radio. That to me is a cultural accomplishment. Being the Artistic Director, I do not regard as a cultural accomplishment. Having a hit on country radio, that would say something about the position of minorities in the United States. To me as far as investing myself in something in part because of a certain…is where it’s happening for me. I am not quitting my day job, I don’t intend to quit my day job. Broadway… opera… Broadway musical songs have become popular

Antonio: The closest that I’ve heard was the song from Rent Five hundred twenty-five thousand. I’m not sure really how long ago that was. I’m not really up on musical theater.

Michael: Wouldn’t it be nice for the top hit to be more closely associated. To me that would be good for opera. I am bringing a certain kind of cultural baggage to that particular issue. Everyone assumes if you are Black, you are from here.

Antonio: Unless you speak with a certain accent.

Michael: Yes, unless you speak like you’re from Jamaica, or the Caribbean, or some African country. They assume your family has roots here but I can go some where and someone will think I just got off some boat. It annoys me because my family has been here for a long time. To me the idea of having eventually some success… As far as any kind of.. and I know this may be a digression from but that to me is one of those things that I have some cultural baggage about. The opera thing is a been there done that. It’s far less remarkable to me.

Antonio: I can understand that, but I mean in terms of diversity it’s significant to me. That is kind of why…

Michael: It is significant in a global sense, but it is not a cultural accomplishment.
Antonio: What relationships do you think influenced your career progression after college?

Michael: My most important relationship was with Robert Ward. Back in the good old days, I mean that and it matters now too. He called up Carlisle Floyd and said that this guy needs to be at the Houston Opera and the National Opera Association, and you know boom it was done. These were three of.. not consistently, but somewhat consistently good and very proud of the fact that most of the companies… I’ve had some of the best advice given to me by.. that’s clearly the most significant relationship.

Antonio: Why do you think that there is a lack of mentorship?

Michael: Well, part of that industry.. I’m not going to say this about you or the arts administration program because that’s actually serving a need. There are probably there are sufficiently few what ever field they go into. Your school produces and every school produces too many singers. It is an ethical dilemma. I think that creates mentorship problems. It may be the case with your advisor. I don’t know, hopefully not. But in a situation where you are the voice teacher at FSU who has twenty students and in their hearts of hearts, someday over three drinks at the bar you know fourteen of them should really be doing something else, and they are probably going to be teachers and six are going to be singers. The only way that really works is for them to actively ignore those fourteen. They don’t really have the guts, and the university would probably fire them for saying go do something else. It’s not in the teacher’s best interest because the students will go away, the teachers won’t have jobs all that thing. So it creates a real problem and students a lot of the people in the field are careful about who they mentor because if you put your stamp of approval on the line with them. That is what happens there. We tend to.. a lot of people tend to view life as helping someone else is not in your best interest, but once you are in this field helping people is in your best interest. Some of the agents will treat you like shit. Saying who is this twenty-three year old kid, they would give you some attitude. Some of those other people were actually nice. Professional, they would say ok this is what has been delegated, I better just… I never forgot the people who were nice and to this day some of those people are still in it for having been civil to me twenty-five years ago. In rehearsal, the positive way of looking at it is if they are good colleagues to each other. I always jokingly refer to my tenure as make no enemies and the temptation is to make enemies because there are people that you just want to strangle. You want to strangle these people. But you want to take their money, and the truth is if you take their money and you smile or other times. That’s an extreme situation, but you know, I actually dream of the day when I can fire people who are expensive. It is a great gesture; it’s expensive. Even firing singers can be very expensive.
Antonio: It is interesting because I have found from internships to entering the field that it is receptive to people with arts administration degrees because there is a need for it like you said. But there are some individuals who will say, you can’t learn arts administration in the classroom. I say, it is not really about learning arts administration in the classroom; it is about learning a theory that you can apply to a situation to make it better. I found in the first internship I did there was an individual who had it “in for me.” I was the only person getting an arts administration degree. She felt insecure… She felt that… she actually said to me, “I don’t want you to be like my boss at this particular opera company, in that he just got an arts administration degree and came in and he was the general director. I’m helping you not be like him.” She would give me poor evaluations on purpose even though she never really acknowledged that they led me to the opera company under false pretenses and once I got there my whole job description changed. So it was like I can either cry about these lemons or make lemonade with the lemons. And it was so interesting to me at the end of my tenure there the president of the board, the general director, the music director, and the artistic director, all of those people came to me and said if you need a recommendation at any point they would give me one. Well, she was like… I wondered if it was a Male/Female thing and at one point I wondered if it was a Black/White thing or a Northeastern/Southeastern thing.

Michael: I can tell you off the record, but you know, you probably, if you know what you are doing you will be very welcomed. It’s hard to express as a career option arts administration is just not up there…Arts administrator, well no. It is a hidden field, but you won’t have any problems it will provide you with certain kinds of opportunities.

Antonio: It was like, whoa! It was kind of cool to see that there’s this dichotomy and there are people who could do without and people who were very welcoming. All of my experiences after that one experience… and I thought to myself if I had the good experiences up front I would think that is how it’s supposed to go, but having had a negative experience to compare with the positive experiences I think gave me a more holistic view of what goes on in the industry. I did want to ask you about… how do you feel you negotiate the line between the dominant culture and then your Asian ethnic culture?

Michael: The truth is that I don’t read Chinese. Hopefully, if the Chinese menu has enough English translation on it I can pick… any person can, but that turns out to be a useful toy, but it is sort of a toy. Like if I was a good golfer I would have that skill to go out on the golf course with board members. Beyond that it doesn’t…
Antonio: How is it difficult or easier to attract people to opera of your ethnic heritage?

Michael: It is very difficult. I know that I am one of the role models in the Asian community. I’m moderately close knit, my mother is much more closely. I know that the community, actually one of the things that annoy me with the family is that they don’t ever get out. I am comfortable being a bit of a role model for the community and I have something of a mission but it’s more important to give the African Americans a shot.

Antonio: Because of statistics?

Michael: Yes, statistically, but the truth of the matter is.. I don’t know how Willie and Linda do.

Antonio: It is funny because they were saying the same thing about African/Black Americans with the opera. They were saying invite them so they know they are welcomed to the opera.

Michael: They haven’t solved the problem. My answer is yes. I am going to solve the problem. The reason I think that that issue can be resolved. It’s so bloody obvious. Why should an African American..There is some, but there is only so far you can go with that. We probably have twenty-five to thirty percent diversity in the cast. Don Giovanni and Leporello were both African American. We were supposed to have originally an African American doing Delilah and the high priest. The casting is very diverse and has been diverse at any rate, that has some positive impacts, but there is only so far that’s going to go because it is just the art form. That’ll help get you to two to three percent. We did this, the main focus of the company for me. We had shitty facilities. We didn’t break the back of the company doing this and we don’t have to raise any more money. We can’t go back to somebody who still has three more years on a one hundred thousand dollar pledge and say by the way could you give us ten thousand dollars for something else. The answer is programming, but the problem is programming what? Casting and programming becomes a problem because we have to decide what the hell we are going to do? Actually, I have got a lot of people in the field interested in this. The greatest tragedy is had Scott Joplin had the chance to write the opera after Treemonisha maybe he would have done it. Treemonisha shows potential, but because he didn’t get a chance to write a couple more operas… Puccini even. It’s an interesting story, which is a sad one, is the fact that he didn’t get to revise the parts of Treemonisha that are dull or at least explain those parts. It’s not right for a reason and….

Antonio: It is interesting that you brought that point up because in part of my dissertation… I’m thinking about a spin-off article about artistic
programming and how over the past couple of years you see that these composers, these European-American male composers have been programmed over and over again. But, there is this body of repertoire that has been written by Black American composers, but you know, like Treemonisha, or Porgy and Bess. The only opera in the standard repertoire about Black people wasn’t written by a Black person, but it is a good work.

**Michael:** I may have to start stringing together some things, I’d like to at some point and time here… some where down the road all of the African American, and it might even be Linda, set it in Mississippi, something like that sort of fill in the blanks so that we can kind of get to the point. Why should that audience come, unless they get a piece every year? Then maybe it’ll work, cause then maybe they’ll come to it and say, “Oh yeah I like that” and by the time you get them there for two or three years they’ve embraced the whole art from. Unless you have, the answer is programming, and it is so obvious.

**Antonio:** I think you are right. I think also there has to be an alignment in programming, staffing, casting, and then the fundraising and marketing. The festival I worked for, they were premiering an opera by a White composer about a Black slave for the next season after I was there. So the fundraiser… not Margaret Garner, it was called Gabriel’s Daughter. So they asked me to come up with some audience development initiatives to get the Black population in Denver to come to Central City. Well, there is a huge population there, actually. Statistically, it was more than I would have expected. So I came up with these strategies, and it was so funny because I had a colleague that came after me, and he went to Central City the next season and he saw how they implemented a lot of the things that I suggested. He said that seventy-five of the audiences for those operas were Black. There were ten productions. But we did a case study on Central City and that experience. The next year all of the marketing, all of the funding that they had directed towards that production they took away, and I told them don’t to do anything during Black History Month unless it is a part of your strategic plan because you are setting the community up to expect something, and if they don’t get it they will think they would only come for this one opera. That is not what you are going for. You are not going for a one-shot deal. You want them to consistently come. I helped them come up with radio ads. I suggested they put ads in Jet and Ebony magazine. You know, finding relationships with the Black church because statistically Black people go to church more than some other ethnicities. They implemented the strategies that I suggested very well, and it benefitted them, but I guess it didn’t benefit them enough for them to continue to do that kind of thing.
Michael: The problem is nobody has done that. It’s a one of. They’re well intentioned. I do think that they are well intentioned the problem is… to me they are a little ambivalent about it. You have this well intentioned field that thinks that everybody should love opera as much as they do, so they don’t get it. They don’t understand why the rest of the world doesn’t love opera as much as they do.

Antonio: It is so funny because I have developed this ambivalence over time because when I first got introduced to it by attending a performing arts high school, I was like those people. “How could you not get it? Opera is great. You have Tosca, Aida, and all of these great masterpieces that are just so wonderful, and it combines all of the art forms in one big art form. It is this grand spectacle of events. As I started studying it more and studying voice, singing in operas, and singing roles, and looking at my parents who had never even considered going to an opera before me. My entire family would’ve never even talked about opera and never thought twice about it were it not for me. Kind of like putting myself back into that position of what would have happened if I had never discovered it. I probably would have become a gospel singer.

Michael: No opera company has solved that problem. Basically, they all do Porgy or Margaret Garner. Well, and that’s good. The Opera Company of Philadelphia seems to be sincere about that. They did Margaret Garner last year and they’re doing Porgy this year, that’s logical. I am hoping to do Margaret Garner. I thought Margaret Garner was its okay.

Antonio: What else is interesting is that Anthony Davis had premiers at two major opera companies almost ten years apart and neither one of those operas took off.

Michael: I feel like Anthony is trying to write Art music. That’s the problem with that. Margaret Garner is tuneful enough, he’s writing music for just the new music public. There is no audience. So for us, we want things that… we don’t want to… we want to combine our constituency.

Antonio: What part of your preparation dealt with ethnicity and gender differences and those kinds of things?

Michael: I think that has been very much a part of the process. I guess in retrospect I turned out to be more attuned to it.

Antonio: Your positions prior to accepting your current position? We spoke about that a little bit.

Michael: Well, I was the music administrator at the Miami Opera that really helped me land this job.
Antonio: Knowing what you know now what changes would you have made in your career path, if any?

Michael: Well, how did Willie and Linda answer that question?... I am happy. I am happy with my career,

Antonio: They answered it the same way. They said that they didn’t seek the positions. It was kind of very serendipitous, I would say, how they got into the positions. It was an informal network of people that worked for them in terms of saying, you know… “We have an opening up here. Are you interested?”

Michael: Sounds good to me. I’m fine with that. Pavarotti was in the opera I did, some people have these stories and then they have that experience not like people in the eighties. I wouldn’t trade that experience. It is so very flexible, but I used to have deal with a lot more than I do now that at the same time it’s all been good

Antonio: What are some of the qualities both personal and professional that you think made you a viable candidate for this position?

Michael: Well, they wanted someone who would live here. I lived in Miami, North Carolina, and in Virginia. I’m still that way. I think they saw me as someone who was genuinely interested, not simply the credentials. I think boards like people who are clearly sensible. It’s all very well to be idealistic, but financially successful and clearly conservative and…

Antonio: What were your major challenges in the application and interview process?

Michael: Particularly the application process here was not well handled. I don’t think they had a search firm or anything like that. They weren’t it… that was not very well done. They all showed up with their wives. There was this one . . . a museum director . . . My wife is not sociable. My wife doesn’t suffer fools lightly. She showed up, but she was clearly not going to become a part of the dance. I don’t think there were any other issues beyond the application issue.

Antonio: What are your expectations about your job and how are they different than what you expected?

Michael: The long term perspective, I think I went into this field thinking take that one to heart I was thinking there was a full-time staff. If there’s a singer you bloody hate you just don’t hire them again. They are gone. They have no legal rights because they are 1099 contract employees. They have no
legal rights, whereas a full-time employee has a lot of legal rights. And the knowledge of a full-time employee who is not afraid to exercise those rights. So you know, the hardest thing is that they are a royal pain in the butt. Just trying to fire them and then the legal recourses go after you. It’s the hardest thing. That’s not something I expected. You know the full-time employees that are the easiest to deal with are the ones who love opera they don’t care how you treat them. They are in it for the art form. The marketing director is entirely different, the development director is different. They’re whores, they’re sluts they can work with for the library, they can work for a museum. They’re investment, it’s so much shallower. Ideally, you get somebody like you who loves opera and wants to be managerial.

**Antonio:** In your career path do you think you have experienced any kind of barriers, and if you did what strategies did you use to…

**Michael:** My barriers are self imposed. I admit that I would be farther along. I think there is some truth to that. My balance has more to do with the fact I work some where it’s a perfect balance for me because there’s enough we look at the stuff we do and it can always be better, but we don’t want to. We have enough resources to do respectable work that the job is not so taxing that I can’t go to Honolulu every summer. Take a break.. I don’t know what its like for you, but going back to a place where people think you are attractive. Does that make sense its just because you are Asian. In the normal milieu for an Asian in the American south the women don’t think you are attractive. They don’t think you are unattractive; they just don’t think about you. Where if you go to Hawaii all of a sudden you get this vibe from people that is so different. It becomes almost like a drug. It’s like wow people look at me differently. It is kind of like this weird exotic vacation. So can you relate to that? It is like being back home.

**Antonio:** Going back home for me now is different because I am so different. I left a certain way and I acted a certain way. I have an aunt who said to me the last time I was home, “Every time you come home you change your hair. You change something about yourself.” I am like, “I don’t think it is purposeful. It’s just…”

**Michael:** You’re probably the only one doing Yoga in your family.

**Antonio:** Absolutely. Talking to them about Yoga. They are like, “what? And so do you chant?” I am like, “Yeah, in a couple of classes” I explained the process to them and it is really interesting. How do you feel your career path is different or similar to European-American executive opera administrators?

**Michael:** I think I have already expressed that.
Antonio: What are your plans ten years from now?

Michael: Hopefully, in ten years from now I will have had a number one song on country radio that to me will change the landscape. Also I would like to do something for the African American community.

Antonio: I did a paper on African American opera companies, and W. B. Dubois said that true Black entertainment is about, for, by, and near us, speaking of African/Black Americans. Really, the only thing I can see in contemporary U.S. society that relates to that is the gospel musical the gospel play I always kind of thought about what is the connection between those gospel plays and opera? Is there some kind of collaborative effort that could happen between those gospel plays and opera?

Michael: Could you send me the paper? I’d like to read it.

Antonio: Sure I will send it to you when I get back. My last three questions. Why is Affirmative Action necessary today?

Michael: This is an interesting question. Mostly in the earliest stages. That’s why affirmative action is important so that the people who hopefully identify themselves that want to go into the arts. Affirmative actions is important at the earlier stages.

Antonio: What advice would you give a Non European American who wanted to pursue a career in opera administration or even arts administration?

Michael: There’s way too many singers. It is a great opportunity. There are way too many.

Antonio: I think that the over-abundance of singers is a good way to get people into careers in arts administration.

Michael: What needs to happen is someone needs to say you need to be doing something else.

Antonio: My voice professor, she did that my Senior year. By that time I had finished my recital and had gotten accepted into a graduate voice program. But for me, I said, “You know, there are too many Black male singers trying to be opera singers. Why not try to go into the opera administration field. Even if you have the vocal potential and the credentials to have a career, who is going to open the doors for you to get in.

Michael: This field is wide open whatever color you are, but especially for minorities.
Antonio: Do you consider yourself a risk taker or trailblazer in that you are… We kind of talked about that earlier because you said it is not remarkable that an Asian American …

Michael: Yeah, but I consider myself to be perceived that way. and this is what you have to deal with in this field. Opera is high culture.

Antonio: That is the only thing it can be and that’s the only thing it should be. I plan to write an article entitled, “Is American opera the answer to diversity?”

Michael: American opera could be the answer to diversity, but not if we’re just letting people like Anthony Davis write operas. Anthony is a talented man. Somebody needs to bop him over the head and tell him, “Write something your mother would love and you will be okay.” But no one’s told him that. That is really the secret. His mother, his cousin, his aunt, his extended African American family, those folks and get them to love it. He’d be laughing all the way to the bank. But he wants to write art music.

Antonio: My voice teacher told me once that too much training can be a bad thing. Thank you for agreeing to interview with me.
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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

b. November 29, 1978, ANTONIO C.CUYLER, was recently selected as a 2006-2007 finalist for the American Symphony Orchestra League Fellowship. Subsequent to graduating with honors from the Lois Cowles Harrison Visual and Performing Arts Center in Lakeland, Florida, Cuyler earned degrees from Stetson University (B.M./E.S. Voice and Foreign Languages) and Florida State University (M.A. & Ph.D. Art Education/Arts Administration). He also studied abroad at Die Technische Universität an Dresden in Germany, and in Austria & the Czech. Republic.

An active researcher, Dr. Cuyler has presented research at international and national conferences. Most recently, he presented papers at the Hawaii International Conference on the Arts and Humanities, and the Association of African American Research and Historical Preservation. Dr. Cuyler’s research interests includes Arts Administration Education, Arts Policy & Cultural Pluralism, Culturally-specific Performing Arts Presentations, Hiphop Studies, Music Business & Entertainment Industry Education, Non-profit Management, and Qualitative Research. Cuyler’s scholarly activities also include teaching. He is currently the teaching assistant for Orchestra Management at FSU. Additionally, Dr. Cuyler has presented invited talks and lectures to undergraduate and graduate seminars at Florida State University and Stetson University.

While completing his graduate education, Dr. Cuyler interned with the Central City Opera, Seven Days Arts Festival, Spoleto Festival U.S.A., and Wolf Trap Foundation for the Performing Arts. He also held positions in Development & Alumni Affairs; the International Center; The College of Music’s Fiscal and Opera Departments; and as a classical music and opera host on WFSQ 91.5, all at Florida State University.

Dr. Cuyler has received numerous honors including the Finger Lakes Environmental Film Festival Fellowship, the National Endowment for the Arts 40th Anniversary Symposium Fellowship, Public Active Graduate Education Fellowship (P.A.G.E.), and a three time recipient of the Delores Auzenne Fellowship. He received Presentation, Academic, and Summer Grants at FSU. He was also a two-time recipient of the Alpha Kappa Alpha Educational Foundation Scholarship, and received the Harshaw
and Rosa Music Scholarships at Stetson University, the Tuesday Music Club, Jewett Alumni, and Lee Ross Memorial scholarships.

Cuyler is professionally affiliated with Pi Kappa Lambda the National Honor Music Fraternity, Omicron Delta Kappa the National Leadership Honor Society, American Society of Composers and Publishers, American Symphony Orchestra League, Association of African American Museums, Association of Arts Administration Educators, Center for Black Music Research, Music Entertainment & Industry Educators Association, and OPERA America.

Cuyler continues to perform a wide variety of music including gospel, musical theatre, Negro spirituals, and opera. Most recently, he performed as a guest at the Art & Design for Social Justice Symposium at FSU in *Katrina Jones*, which combined dance, music, and visual technology to honor the memory of victims of hurricane Katrina. When he is not administrating; performing; or tending to scholarly pursuits, Dr. Cuyler enjoys practicing and teaching Hatha Yoga.