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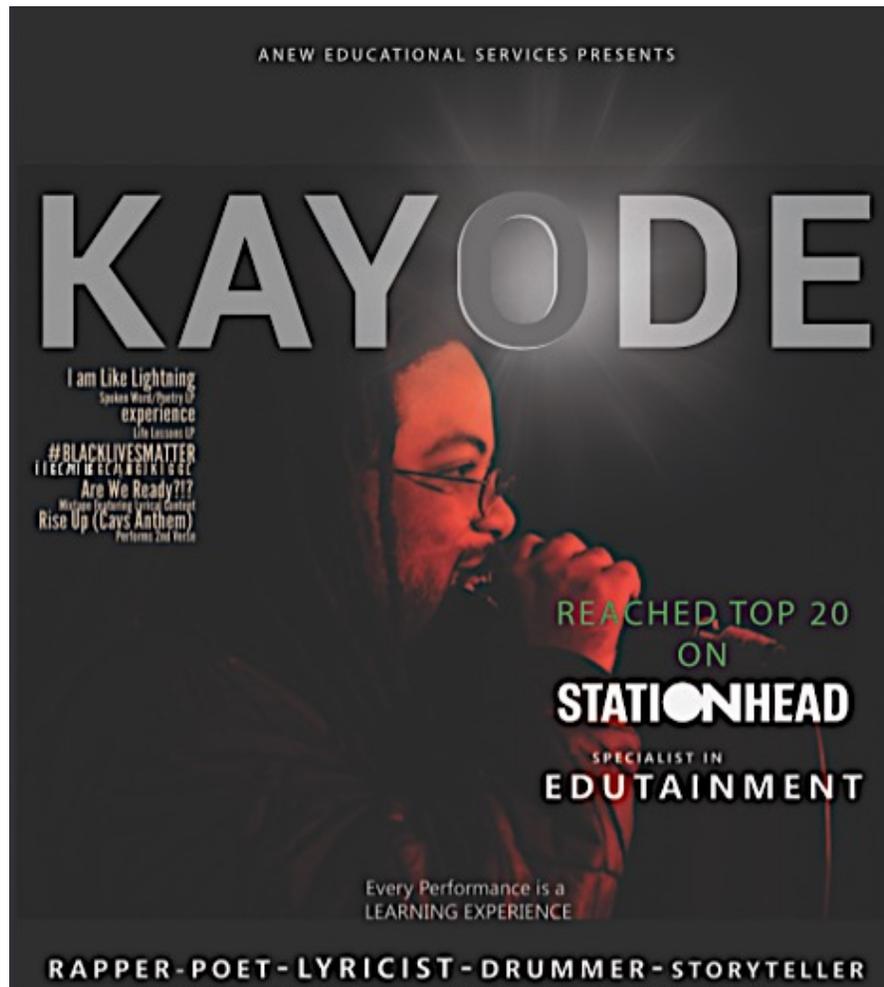
# RASHAD

Center, Inc.  
*Traditions & Beliefs*

June 2019 Newsletter  
Regennia N. Williams, PhD  
Founder, Director, and Editor  
Black Music Month Issue  
*\*On the Cover: Pianist Derrick Spiva*



*Coming Soon . . .*



*. . . The Interview!*

## **Traditions & Beliefs**

The Traditions & Beliefs Newsletter

June 2019—Black Music Month, Volume 13, Issue 3

Published quarterly by the Center for the Study of Religion and Spirituality in the History of Africa and the Diaspora  
The RASHAD Center, Inc.

Regennia N. Williams, PhD, *Founder, Director, and Editor*

**c/o Maryland Resident Agent LLC**

**5000 Thayer Center, Suite C**

**Oakland, MD 21550**

Email: [regennia@gmail.com](mailto:regennia@gmail.com)

Website: <http://www.ClevelandMemory.org/pray/>

Blog: <https://rashadcenter.wordpress.com/>

*\*On the Cover: Pianist Derrick Spiva (Photo by Regennia N. Williams)*

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### FYI:

“**The 400 Years of African-American History Commission Act**, signed into law January 8, 2018, established a 15-member commission to coordinate the 400th anniversary of the arrival of the first enslaved Africans in the English colonies. The Commission’s purpose is to plan, develop, and carry out programs and activities throughout the United States.” To find out more, visit <https://www.nps.gov/orgs/1892/africanamericanhistorycommission.htm>.



# Father's Day 2019: An Ellington Afternoon to Remember!

Regennia N. Williams, PhD

Every day is a good day to celebrate the life and legacy of Duke Ellington, and Sunday, June 16, 2019, was no exception to this general rule. What began as my idea to do something that would honor Ellington in the spring of 2019 became, thanks to the visionary leadership of Dwight Fleming, a Father's Day Tribute to one of America's most prolific composers and an unforgettable Black Music Month event.

Fleming, a tenor who serves as the Artistic Director for the Spiritual Gifts Ensemble and pianist at Cleveland's North Presbyterian Church, invited singers and instrumentalists to share their renditions of compositions that have been performed in jazz clubs, on Broadway, in church sanctuaries, in local theaters, and in other venues. In addition to the songs performed by members of Spiritual Gifts, the program featured selections by a number of guest artists, including jazz pianist Derrick Spiva, the leader of his own instrumental ensemble and an undergraduate music major at Cleveland State University. Spiva is pictured on the cover of this issue and below with Fleming, and the program notes from the Father's Day Tribute appear on subsequent pages.



Dwight Fleming (left) and Derrick Spiva.

Fleming, an alumnus of the original Spiritual Gifts ensemble that had its debut performance at Cleveland State University in 1994, is planning a fall 2019 encore performance (perhaps, in a different venue) of the Ellington program so please watch for detailed rehearsal and performance information on Spiritual Gifts' Facebook page and in upcoming issues of this newsletter.



Gospel legend Mahalia Jackson recorded Ellington's "Come Sunday" on the Columbia label in 1958. (Photo: Carl Van Vechten, Library of Congress)



Regennia N. Williams performs "Come Sunday" at Spiritual Gifts' 2019 Father's Day Tribute to Duke Ellington. (Photo: Still from video recording by Dwight Fleming.)

## The following individuals participated in the June 16th performance:

### The Spiritual Gifts Ensemble

Dwight Fleming, Artistic Director  
Carol Brown, Soprano  
Geraldine Hardin Washington, Alto  
Cheryl Murray, Soprano  
Carlynn Canny, Tenor  
Steve Ritchey, Baritone  
Regennia N. Williams, Alto

### Special Guests

Desmond L. Davis, Choreographer  
L.R. Smith, Pianist  
Jim Cirillo, Saxophonist  
Skip Edwards, Bassist  
Chester Starks, Drummer  
Derrick Spiva, Pianist  
**Thank you and congratulations! --RNW**

## The Composer and “Come Sunday”

Native Washingtonian **Duke Ellington (1899-1974)** left the USA’s capital city as a young adult and, in time, took New York’s jazz scene and then the rest of the world by storm. The music of this legendary pianist-composer-bandleader initially gained popularity during the Jazz Age/Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s. Today, over 45 years after his passing on May 24, 1974, many of his compositions—and works composed by others and performed and recorded by the Duke Ellington Orchestra—have become jazz standards, and Ellington continues to be celebrated as one of the most prolific and most popular composers of all time.

There are many milestones in the Duke’s career that help account for this popularity, not the least of which is his orchestra’s historic residency at Harlem’s Cotton Club (beginning in 1927) and numerous radio broadcasts, international tours, and live and studio recordings. Billy Strayhorn, a Dayton, Ohio native who came of age in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, joined the Ellington team in 1939, and it was Strayhorn who composed the orchestra’s theme song, “Take the A Train.” By the time that the orchestra made its Carnegie Hall debut in 1943, Ellington’s name had become a household word among jazz lovers of various races, colors, creeds, and nationalities.

A pioneer in the creation of larger works, including *Black, Brown, and Beige* (1943) and liturgical jazz/“Sacred Concerts” (beginning in 1965), Ellington blurred the lines between entertainment and art and the sacred and secular in music. The 1981 Broadway musical *Sophisticated Ladies* starring Phyllis Hyman, Gregory Hines, Judith Jamison, and other stellar artists was a fitting tribute to Duke Ellington, who was, to borrow his favorite description for those he admired, “Beyond Category!”

Ellington did not hesitate to experiment with new ideas in entertainment, art, and worship. Many of the songs from his “Sacred Concerts” continue to be popular with singers and listeners alike, but none, it seems, can compete with “Come Sunday.”

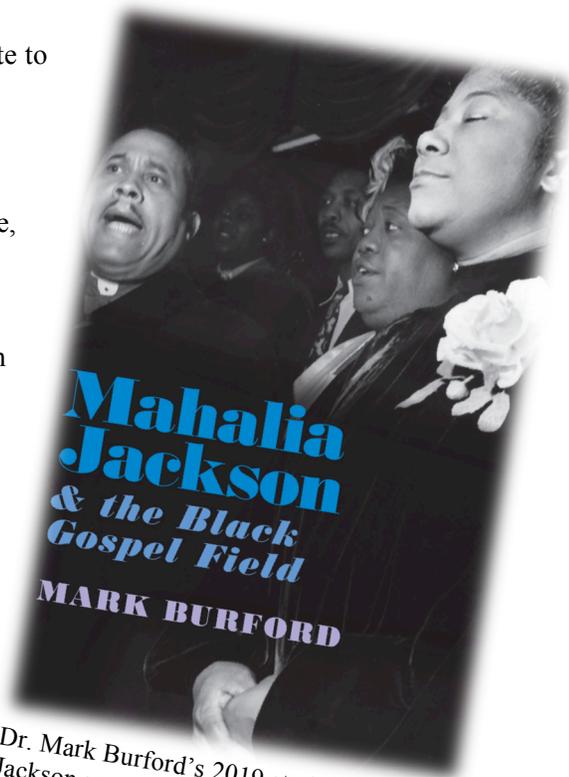
The instrumental version of this song had its world premiere in 1943 during the Duke Ellington Orchestra’s Carnegie Hall debut performance. In 1958, Ellington teamed up to record this work (now with lyrics) with Mahalia Jackson, arguably the greatest gospel vocalist of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and that recording was released on the Columbia label.

In 1965, 24-year-old Queen Esther Marrow provided the solo vocals on this work for both the First Sacred Concert at San Francisco’s Grace Cathedral in September and the album version in New York in December of that same year.

In 1986, Broadway legend Jennifer Holliday earned a Grammy Award (Best Inspirational Performance) for her rendition of “Come Sunday, and, in 1995, opera diva Kathleen Battle and saxophonist Branford Marsalis performed the song for Jazz at Lincoln Center. Today, we celebrate both the composer and these gifted artists for their interpretations of his work, and we invite you to join us in listening to and performing Ellington’s incredible music.



Duke Ellington, William P. Gottlieb Collection, Library of Congress.



Dr. Mark Burford’s 2019 study of Mahalia Jackson provides an excellent overview of both her incredible career through the mid 1950s and her friendship with Duke Ellington.

--Regennia N. Williams, PhD, Author of *Washington, DC, Jazz*

**CSU** Cleveland State University

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**1995-2020**

Name: Regennia Williams

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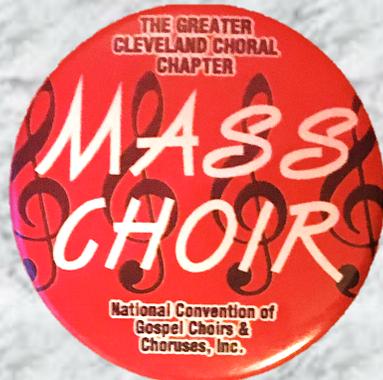
Appointment: Lecturer

Account Number: 02000-00385-12

Address: 1524 East 118th Street, Cleveland, Ohio 44106

Teaching Assignment:

Course Number	Section Number	Credits	Contact Hours	Course Title
HIS 380	101	4	4	Black Sacred Music
HIS 216	350	4	4	Black America from 1877



# Celebrating 25 Years of Teaching History through Black Sacred Music!

*From the Archives:* Regennia N. Williams' Choir ID Button from the Dorsey Convention's 1995 Gathering in Cleveland.

From the summer of 2019 through the summer of 2020, please watch for special announcements about upcoming silver anniversary activities.

## An Oral History of Leadership and Change in South Africa and the United States of America

As someone who participated in Anti-Apartheid protests as a Cleveland State University student leader in 1985--and served as both a CSU faculty host for delegations from the University of the Free State in 2011 and 2013 and a member of the CSU delegation to the 2012 Global Leadership Summit in South Africa, I had firsthand experience working with American and South African students. These young people readily accepted the challenges associated with becoming change agents on campus, in their home communities, and in their countries.

In both the distant past and in more recent years, CSU student leaders were encouraged to read, listen to, reflect upon, discuss, and write about the ideas of such world leaders as Nobel Peace laureates the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., President Nelson Mandela, and Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu—especially as their ideas related to



the history of racism in their countries and the need for transformative leadership, truthfulness, forgiveness, and reconciliation.

During the spring semester of 2019, I gathered and analyzed documentary evidence from 2011-2013 and partnered with Cleveland Public Library to launch a related oral history project, interviewing CSU alumnae about their experiences and the impact of the above ideas on their current work and worldviews. As a result of this research, I hope to produce a publication that will help readers gain a better understanding of the ways in which ideas that are rooted in or related to religious and/or spiritual traditions might enhance or hinder student leadership development and post-secondary learning. --RNW

*Photos: (left) A photo from the CSU Vindicator student newspaper shows Dr. Zelma Watson George (seated) participating in a September 1985 Anti-Apartheid protest. Participants in my 2019 oral history project included (top photo) Rev. Mylion Waite, (center photo, from left) Estefany Rodriguez and videographer Catherine Young, and (bottom photo) Jasmine Elder.*



Meet the Author:  
**Dr. Regennia N. Williams**



**Oxon Hill Branch**  
Saturday, June 08, 1pm - 3pm

Hear the author of *Washington, DC, Jazz*. Dr. Regennia Williams discuss musicians from the Nation's capital influence on Jazz and a performance by professional bassist Mr. Cheyney Thomas and his band.




*We had a wonderful time celebrating **Black Music Month** in Oxon Hill, Maryland on Saturday, June 8, 2019. Bassist Cheyney Thomas and the members of his jazz trio (left) provided the music, and I led the lecture-discussion that focused on the need for more local histories like *Washington, DC, Jazz* (Arcadia Publishing, 2019). I am shown in the top-left photo with Oxon Hill Library patrons and officers for the library's Friends group, the official program sponsor. --RNW*

**The RASHAD Center, Inc.**  
c/o Maryland Resident Agent LLC  
5000 Thayer Center Suite C  
Oakland, MD 21550

**Regennia N. Williams, PhD, Founder and Director**  
Email: [regennia@gmail.com](mailto:regennia@gmail.com)  
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Southeast Branch (Bedford) Cuyahoga County Public Library, Ohio Saturday, Sept 7, 2 p.m.	Maple Heights Branch Cuyahoga County Public Library, Ohio Thursday, October 17, 7 p.m.
Francis Gregory Branch Washington DC Public Library Thursday, September 12, 7:30 p.m.	Warrensville Branch Cuyahoga County Public Library, Ohio Thursday, November 7, 7 p.m.
Smithsonian Institution, Washington DC “Tuesday Talk” Honoring Mahalia Jackson Part of the Smithsonian Year of Music September 17, 2019, *Details TBA	Chagrin Falls Branch Cuyahoga County Public Library, Ohio Tuesday, November 12, 7 p.m.
Garfield Heights Branch Cuyahoga County Public Library, Ohio Monday, September 23, 6:30 p.m.	<i>For more information, write to <a href="mailto:regennia@gmail.com">regennia@gmail.com</a>.</i>