

## PREFACE

I met Joyce Garrett during a Hurlbut-Walker Memorial Research Forum at the Charles Sumner School Museum and Archives on June 19, 2019. One of her former students introduced me to her shortly before the presentation. We exchanged a few pleasantries, then I took my seat and waited for the program to begin.

The topic of the research forum was an Eastern High School Choir documentary produced by Malkia Lydia, a filmmaker, and Joyce Garrett. I was somewhat familiar with the Eastern Choir. I remembered the excitement in Washington, DC, in 1988 when the choir won second place at an elite international music festival in Austria, Vienna. I also attended the choir's reunion concert in July 2018. Those two events were the basis for my limited knowledge of Joyce Garrett and the Eastern High School choir.

Joyce covered a variety of topics during the discussion including the inspiring story of the choir's preparation for the Vienna competition and the numerous prestigious performance opportunities that followed the choir's triumphant return from Europe. She also talked about the Excellence Without Excuses program and how she used the choir as a vehicle to teach the values needed to be successful in life and provide college scholarships.

Between sixty to seventy people filled the room; many were Eastern choir alumni. After the formal presentation, the alumni

stood and shared passionate stories of Joyce Garrett's positive impact on their lives during and after their time at Eastern. She smiled shyly as she listened to all the praise and said, "I am just a music teacher." "Oh no, you are much more!" the audience responded, and then they erupted into applause. I was genuinely impressed by what I learned that evening.

I kept thinking about what I had witnessed as I drove home after the presentation. Like so many educators, Joyce Garrett was more than a music teacher. She was a positive influence who used her love of music combined with high expectations, tough love and determination to embrace the Eastern High School choir students and expose them to options in life many of them may have never considered. "She needs to write a book," I thought while driving home. "I am going to tell her what I did for the Union High History Project so she can do the same for the Eastern High School choir."

In 2010, I initiated the Union High History project to preserve the history of Union High School, Caroline County, Virginia's only high school for blacks during the era of segregation. In addition to archival research, I interviewed ninety-plus people affiliated with the school, documented their memories, and gathered school memorabilia and ephemera. The output from the project was a self-published book titled "Memories of Union High: An Oasis in Caroline County, Virginia, 1903-1969." The book uses remembrances from alumni, faculty, family, and friends, excerpts from school newspapers and yearbooks, and over 100 photographs and other memorabilia to preserve the history of Union High School.

I received recognition and several awards for my efforts to preserve local history. But the most moving responses were the heartfelt thanks I received from the people in Caroline County, Virginia. They were very appreciative that I had preserved the

history of an important institution in their community. After that experience, I was on a mission to encourage ordinary people to take an active role in preserving the history of the communities where they had an affiliation. Joyce Garrett was one such person.

When I got home from the Summer presentation, I began to search the internet to locate Joyce's contact information. I reached

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out to Malkia Lydia, who put me in contact with Joyce. During our conversation, I shared my admiration for her work, summarized my experience with the Union High History project, and offered to share my experience with her and choir alumni to initiate a similar project for the Eastern High School choir. She accepted my offer, and we agreed upon a date and time for the meeting.

A few days later, I met her and her husband at their home to share my thoughts and experience. "This is nice,"

she said as she flipped through the Union High book. "It would be great to do this for the choir." A few days later, I followed up to see if she was interested in moving forward with the discussion. She said she was but couldn't find anyone to help her write the book. "I'll help you," I said. We worked out a collaboration agreement to write her memoir, and the Joyce Garrett Memoir Project was born.

The home office and entertainment room in Garrett's home is an Eastern High School choir archive, filled with memorabilia and ephemera from Joyce Garrett's thirty-plus years of teaching. I accessed her home collection plus archival and online research to develop interview questions to gather the information needed to tell her story.

Joyce Garrett is a mild-mannered, humble woman who doesn't boast about her accomplishments or associations. But she

is a great storyteller and responds well to probing questions. From our conversations, I learned how her experiences growing up in segregated North Carolina and her passion for teaching music led her to become a champion for youth who many would consider having little to no chances of success in life. She taught them to desire more than what they saw in their immediate environment, dream big, work hard and persevere to make those dreams come true. The story of Joyce Garrett and the Eastern High School choir is an inspirational story of a teacher's use of her love for music to help youth reach their fullest potential. I am honored to have been allowed to help her tell her story.

Marion Woodfork Simmons