



THE COMPLEX ANCESTRY  
OF  
*WE SHALL OVERCOME*

VICTOR V. BOBETSKY

## *We Shall Overcome,*

the anthem of America's civil rights movement, is a folk song that has played a significant role in American and world history and continues to inspire people around the world who struggle for peace and justice. At different points in time, *We Shall Overcome* has been used as a labor movement song, a civil rights song, a hymn, and a protest song. This article will summarize current knowledge of the origins and evolution of the song's melody and lyrics by examining seven potential antecedent songs and describing the contributions of key individuals associated with some of these songs. In addition, this article will offer a new perspective on the relationship between two of *We Shall Overcome*'s earliest potential antecedents.

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## Antecedents and Relatives of *We Shall Overcome*

An exploration of the song's ancestry takes us on a journey through two centuries of African American and American music and includes one European hymn. We will focus on seven songs whose melody and/or words are related to and may have influenced *We Shall Overcome*. They are: *O Sanctissima*, *No More Auction Block*, *I'll Overcome Some Day* (Tindley), *I'll Be Like Him Someday*, *I'll Overcome Someday* (Morris/Twig), *I'll Be All Right*, and the labor song *I Will Overcome*. Thinking of these songs as members of a musical family tree—one limb representing the music and another, the words—can help provide an historical perspective and identify significant stages in *We Shall Overcome's* development. However, an examination of the chronological progression of these antecedent songs also reveals a large amount of creative reinvention, borrowing, and cross-fertilization, both in similar time periods and across generations. This is typical of many folk songs in general and of *We Shall Overcome* in particular; we can refer to this as the folk process.

Let's begin our journey by examining *O Sanctissima*, the earliest of the seven antecedent songs.

### *O Sanctissima*

*O Sanctissima*, an Italian hymn tune also known as the *Sicilian Mariners' Hymn*, is most likely *We Shall Overcome's* most distant ancestor. Originally set to a Latin text, it was first printed in the November 1792 edition of the *European Magazine and Review*, a British periodical.<sup>1</sup> The Italian melody was soon set to a preexisting English text, *Lord Dismiss Us with Thy Blessing*, attributed to John Fawcett. This version of the hymn quickly became very popular in England and in America and became part of the Prot-



**Figure 1.** *O Sanctissima*, mm. 1–8.  
Digitized copy of the *European Magazine and Review*, November 1792

estant hymn repertoire by the middle of the nineteenth century.

The original source of *O Sanctissima's* words and music is unknown. James J. Fuld has suggested that the melody of *O Sanctissima* may have originally come from an Italian folk song or from an aria in a Neapolitan opera.<sup>2</sup> Others suggest that it was traditionally sung by Sicilian sailors at the end of every day at sea.<sup>3</sup> (No concrete evidence has been offered to support either of these two theories. An exploration of the origins of *O Sanctissima* would make an intriguing topic for further research.)

There are three important musical ideas in *O Sanctissima* that reappear at different times in *We Shall Overcome's* family tree. The succession of pitches and the melodic rhythm of *O Sanctissima's* opening phrase (measures 1–4) represent the first idea: if you repeat the beginning two pitches (sol-sol-la-la-sol-fa-mi) you get the opening phrase of *We Shall Overcome*.

The second idea can be found in



**Figure 2.** *O Sanctissima*, mm. 13–16.  
Digitized copy of the *European Magazine and Review*, November 1792

measures 5–8, where we notice an arc-shaped melodic contour outlining the interval of a fourth and the underlying harmonic chord progression: I-(vii/V)-V-V7/V-V. This is similar to the arc outlining a fifth and the harmonic progression: I-(VI)-V7/V-V-V7/V-V found in the corresponding phrase of the melody to *We Shall Overcome*.

The descending arc of *O Sanctissima's* final phrase spanning high to low do represents the third idea (measures 13–16). As the phrase spins and descends, it outlines the interval of a fourth from hi do to sol and again at the close of the phrase from fa to low do. *We Shall Overcome's* final phrase outlines three fourths: high do to sol, la to mi, and fa to do.

Consider these three ideas as part of a variety of musical seeds that, through cross-fertilization and oral transmission, could have had some influence on the musical content of *We Shall Overcome* and some of its other antecedent songs.

### *No More Auction Block*

The freedom song *No More Auction Block*, also known as *Many Thousand Gone*, is the next possible antecedent to *We Shall Overcome*. Colonel T.W. Higgin-

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son, commander of an African American regiment in the Union army, noted that this song was sung by his soldiers; he called it a "secular spiritual."<sup>4</sup> The song evolved spontaneously and was transmitted orally; there is no evidence of any specific composer or lyricist. A later version of this song titled *Many Thousand Gone* appears in a collection of songs sung by the Fisk Jubilee Singers published in 1915.<sup>5</sup> (Figure 3)

The song has a sophisticated call-and-response structure. In verse one, for example, the call (No more auction block for me) is followed by a response (No more, no more). The call is then repeated, followed by a variation of the first response (Many thousand gone). Throughout the song, the words to the call change with each verse, but the two

responses remain the same.

## Relationship between *No More Auction Block* and *O Sanctissima*

The melodic and rhythmic ideas in the call of *No More Auction Block* contain some similarities to the melodic and rhythmic motive found in the first phrase of *O Sanctissima* (see mm. 1–4 of Figure 1). For example, the first three pitches in each song (sol-la-sol) are identical, and the overall melodic rhythm of the first five successive notes is similar. These similarities suggest that the opening call of *No More Auction Block* may have been influenced by the first four measures of *O Sanctissima*. In addition,

we are looking at a convergence of time, place, and history that created an atmosphere conducive to cross-fertilization. We know that *O Sanctissima* (Lord Dismiss Us with Thy Blessing) was published in various song collections in the late eighteenth century and had achieved popularity in America.<sup>6</sup> Enslaved Africans may have heard *O Sanctissima* and adapted some of its elements into their singing deliberately or simply as part of the oral process. Lomax's claim that a song titled *No More Auction Block* was sung in Nova Scotia by freed slaves in 1833 lends support to this theory.<sup>7</sup>

During the Civil War, Union and Confederate army bands often played for each other during lulls in the fighting; this custom is poignantly illustrated in Winslow Homer's painting, "Home, Sweet Home."<sup>8</sup> We know that *Sicilian Mariners Hymn* was part of the repertoire of the 26th North Carolina Regimental Band.<sup>9</sup> Since the tune was probably heard by Union soldiers, it seems logical that variants of *O Sanctissima*'s musical ideas could also appear in *No More Auction Block*, a song sung by members of the Union army during the same time period. It is fascinating how *O Sanctissima* and *No More Auction Block* may have provided a soundtrack of sorts to the Civil War and that both of these songs can be considered part of the tree that leads to *We Shall Overcome*.

Plaintively  
Call

Response

1. No more auc-tion block for me, No more, no more,  
No more, no more,

Call

Response

No more auc-tion block for me, Ma-ny thou-sand gone.  
Ma-ny thou-sand gone.

2. No more peck of corn for me, etc.
3. No more driver's lash for me, etc.
4. No more pint of salt for me, etc.
5. No more hundred lash for me, etc.
6. No more mistress' call for me, etc.

**Figure 3.** Anonymous, *Many Thousand Gone*  
Jubilee and Plantation Songs

Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division,  
Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library

## Relationship between *No More Auction Block* and *We Shall Overcome*

There is a significant resemblance between the beginning of *No More Auction Block* and *We Shall Overcome*. The first five pitches and the melodic rhythm of the first seven notes are exactly the same in both songs.

Whether or not the opening call of *No More Auction Block* provided direct

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inspiration for the opening phrase of *We Shall Overcome*, there is no doubt that the former has earned an important place in African American history and in the history of American folk music. It has been recorded by many singers. Paul Robeson's masterful version, originally recorded in 1956 at Carnegie Recital Hall with pianist Alan Booth, has been reproduced by Smithsonian Folkways in the 2007 release, *On My Journey: Paul Robeson's Independent Recordings*.<sup>10</sup> The African American composer Nathaniel Dett, founder of the Musical Arts Society at the Hampton Institute, included *No More Auction Block* in his four-volume collection of spirituals (1936) and created an unpublished orchestral version of the song.<sup>11</sup> Bob Dylan cited *No More Auction Block* as his inspiration for *Blowin' in the Wind*.<sup>12</sup>

*No More Auction Block* was a secular

song sung in the style of a spiritual that conveyed an important cultural message about overcoming the cruelties of slavery and achieving freedom.

Our next antecedent song shows how this message of overcoming, presented in a religious context, offered strength to the next generation, who still struggled against racism and social and economic inequalities.

## *I'll Overcome Some Day* (Tindley)

The lyrics of many African American congregational and gospel hymns express the fervent desire to overcome obstacles, sin, and oppression, sometimes using phrases such as, "I'll overcome" or, "I'll be like Him." The words to the first chorus of Reverend Charles Albert Tindley's hymn *I'll Overcome Some Day* (also known as *This World is One*

*Great Battlefield*) illustrate this trait well.

I'll overcome some day,  
I'll overcome some day;  
If in my heart I do not yield,  
I'll overcome some day.

The words and message are strikingly similar to those of *We Shall Overcome*, but the melodic material has nothing in common. A more recent compilation of Tindley's hymns can be found in *Beams of Heaven*, published by the General Board of Global Ministries of the United Methodist Church in 2006.<sup>13</sup>

Tindley's life story personified and reinforced the message of his own hymn. Descended from slaves, Tindley was hired out by his father to work in other people's homes. Through his willpower and tremendous intelligence, he taught himself to read and write, eventually becoming an ordained minister and pastor of the Bainbridge Street Methodist Episcopal Church in Philadelphia, also known in its time as the "Tindley Temple." Although he never learned to read or notate music, Tindley possessed innate musical talent and composed over fifty hymns. He worked with assistants who notated the music for him.<sup>14</sup> Tindley was well known for singing his own hymns during dramatic moments in his sermons. Many of his hymns are still sung today in Protestant churches, especially those with African American congregations.

Most of the words to the final chorus of *I'll Overcome Some Day* appear prominently in our next antecedent song, *I'll Be Like Him Someday*.

I'll be like Him some day,  
I'll be like Him some day;  
My Jesus says I need not fear,  
I'll be like Him some day.



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## *I'll Be Like Him Someday*

*I'll Be Like Him Someday*, a gospel hymn created for lead voice, vocal ensemble, and piano, was written and published by Roberta Evelyn Martin in 1945 under the pseudonym Faye E. Brown.<sup>15</sup> (Figure 4) Martin, an influential publisher, composer, arranger, and performer, lived and worked in Chicago, a prominent center for gospel music at that time. Trained as a classical pianist, she was known for creating a unique and polished vocal and pianistic style of gospel music. She was also a church organist and founder/director of the Roberta Martin Singers, a gospel performing group. While the author was unable to locate any recordings of this group performing *I'll Be Like Him Someday*, their recording of *What A Friend We Have In Jesus* provides a good example of their sound and style.<sup>16</sup>

between the two songs. For example, the pitch succession and harmonic underpinning of Martin's second phrase (Figure 4, mm. 5–8) resemble those contained in measures 5–8 of *O Sanctissima* (Figure 1). One small difference is that the melodic arc in *O Sanctissima* goes up by a fourth, while the similar phrase in *I'll Be Like Him Someday* goes up by a fifth. The final phrase of *I'll Be Like Him Someday* (Figure 4, mm. 9–16) outlines overlapping fourths within a descending octave passage, much like the final phrase in *O Sanctissima* (Figure 2). Is this relationship a result of deliberate borrowing on Martin's part, or was the connection not apparent to Martin at the time? Deliberate or not, the influence probably stems from her work as a church organist, since *O Sanctissima* (Lord Dismiss Us With Thy Blessing) was part of the Protestant hymn repertory.

*Someday* and *We Shall Overcome* reveals that the melodic and harmonic ideas in measures 5–16 of *I'll Be Like Him Someday* are almost identical to the corresponding measures in *We Shall Overcome*. An examination of the lyrics to Martin's *I'll Be Like Him Someday* demonstrates how strongly Tindley's words and the cultural theme of overcoming in general influenced Martin's writing. For example, the words to verse one of *I'll Be Like Him Someday* are the same as those to Tindley's final chorus with one substitution in the third phrase.

In place of "My Jesus says I need not fear," Martin uses a corresponding phrase from the first chorus of Tindley's hymn: "If in my heart I do not yield." Martin emphasizes this final phrase by ending each of her four verses with it.

In addition, the words to the fourth verse of *I'll Be Like Him Someday* are exactly the same as several versions of the popular gospel hymn *I'll Be All Right*. This is another good example of the cross-fertilization and borrowing of culturally meaningful ideas and expressions that are a part of the ancestry of *We Shall Overcome*.

## Relationship between *I'll Be Like Him Someday* and *O Sanctissima*

There are some distinct similarities

## Relationship between *I'll Be Like Him Someday* and *We Shall Overcome*

A comparison of *I'll Be Like Him*

The image shows a musical score for the hymn "I'll Be Like Him Someday" in 4/4 time, with a key signature of two flats (B-flat and E-flat). The score is divided into two systems. The first system, starting at measure 5, contains measures 5 through 8. The lyrics are "I'll be like Him some day" and "If in my heart". The second system, starting at measure 11, contains measures 11 through 16. The lyrics are "I do not yield" and "I'll be like Him some day". The melody is written in the treble clef, and the piano accompaniment is in the bass clef. There are various musical notations including chords, beams, and slurs.

Figure 4. Roberta Martin (as Faye E. Brown), *I'll Be Like Him Someday*, mm. 5–16.

Copyright © 1945 by Martins Studio of Music, Chicago, Illinois.

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In *I'll Be Like Him Someday*, Roberta Evelyn Martin crafted a text drawing from other gospel hymns (*I'll Overcome Some Day* and *I'll Be All Right*) that emphasized the African American cultural message of overcoming. She set that text to music, some of which may have been influenced by *O Sanctissima*. Martin's *I'll Be Like Him Someday* marks an important step in the genealogy of *We Shall Overcome*.

## *I'll Overcome Someday* (Kenneth Morris/Atron Twig)

The message of overcoming is also clearly expressed in the words to another gospel song also published in Chicago in 1945 by the Martin and Morris Studio of Music (no relation to Roberta Evelyn Martin). *I'll Overcome Someday* was written for lead voice, vocal ensemble, and piano accompaniment with original words by Atron Twig and revised lyrics and music by Kenneth Morris.<sup>17</sup> Morris has been referred to as the "dean of black gospel music publishers." His publishing company, founded in 1940 with gospel singer Sallie Martin, was the

oldest continuously operating African American gospel publishing company in the United States.<sup>18</sup> When the business closed in 1993, Morris's widow donated a copy of everything available in the inventory to the Chicago Public Library, where it is housed in the Martin and Morris Gospel Sheet Music Collection.<sup>19</sup>

*I'll Overcome Someday* is built on a solo melody line supported by an accompanying four-part vocal ensemble. The form of the hymn is AB (verse and chorus). The words sung by the soloist and the vocal ensemble in the B section are very similar to the words in the chorus of Tindley's *I'll Overcome Some Day* and to the *We Shall Overcome* we know today. However, the melodies have nothing in common. The first phrase in the chorus of Morris and Twig's *I'll Overcome Someday* is displayed in Figure 5.

Morris and Twig's *I'll Overcome Someday* is another example of how the words of a gospel song, expressed in a religious context, could convey the desire to overcome secular obstacles such as poverty, racism, and injustice. In fact, many phrases in *We Shall Overcome's* antecedent songs are different versions of this same cultural idea and message.

Such phrases include: "I'll Overcome Someday," "I'll Surely Overcome," "We Shall Overcome Someday," "I'll Be All Right Someday."

## *I'll Be All Right*

The gospel hymn *I'll Be All Right* was essentially an orally transmitted folk song. The noted African American scholar Bernice Johnson Reagon maintains that *I'll Be All Right* is the "root song" or the primary ancestor of *We Shall Overcome*.<sup>20</sup>

However, if we consider earlier songs such as *O Sanctissima* and *No More Auction Block* to be part of *We Shall Overcome's* ancestry, then *I'll Be All Right*, although an important ancestor, cannot be the root song of *We Shall Overcome*. It is a valuable branch of the family tree, one of whose variants was eventually adapted by the labor movement. Let's look at a transcription of the first verse of *I'll Be All Right* recorded in 1961 by the Reverend Gary Davis and then at a reprint of the first eight measures of *I Will Overcome* (Figures 6 and 7).

While they are different from each other, both of these versions of *I'll Be*

The image shows a musical score for the hymn "I'll Overcome Someday" in 4/4 time. It consists of three staves: a solo melody line in the treble clef, a four-part vocal ensemble in the alto and tenor clefs, and a piano accompaniment in the bass clef. The lyrics are: "I'll o - - ver - come some - day, some hap - py day. I'll I'll sure - ly o - ver - come, yes, o - ver - come some - day, I'll sure - ly o - ver - come some hap - py, hap - py day, I'll". The piano accompaniment features a steady bass line and chords in the right hand.

Figure 5. Kenneth Morris and Atron Twig, *I'll Overcome Someday*, mm. 1–4, with anacrusis

Copyright © 1945 by Atron Twig and Kenneth Morris, Martin and Moms Music Studio

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All Right display significant elements in common with *We Shall Overcome* and with some of the other songs we have examined.

Both melodies contain syncopation, a characteristic of African American music that we have not seen much of in the antecedent songs we've examined so far. The lyrics feature the words "someday" and "Deep in my heart, I do believe," which are also prominent in Roberta Martin's *I'll Be Like Him Someday* and in *We Shall Overcome*. Notice how the lyrics in *I Will Overcome* incorporate the statement, "I want to be like Him," which we've previously seen in the lyrics of Tindley's *I'll Overcome Some Day* and Martin's *I'll Be Like Him Someday*. Finally, the architectural structure of the phrases and the harmonic movement in *I'll Be All Right, I Will Overcome, I'll Be Like Him Someday, O Sanctissima*, and *We Shall Overcome* are similar. The songs all begin with two short phrases that mirror each other, followed by a longer phrase that moves the harmony to a dominant chord. They continue with two more short phrases that again mirror each other and conclude with a longer phrase that leads back to the tonic. The mirror design of the shorter phrases supports the repetition of similar text ideas:

O sanctissima, o piissima  
I'll be like him, I'll be like him  
I'll be all right, I'll be all right  
we shall overcome,  
we shall overcome.

When we analyze the architectural structure of these particular antecedent songs, it becomes clear how alike these five songs really are.

## *I Will Overcome:* The Connecting Branch in the Family Tree

Around 1945, the labor movement developed an interest in the message contained in the songs we've examined and adapted some of the words and

music. This process took place at the Highlander Folk School in Monteagle, Tennessee, a center where folk and labor movement songs were taught and learned. In 1945, Zilphia Horton, one of the school's founders, learned about *I Will Overcome*, the variant of *I'll Be All Right*, which had been sung by African American workers in a Congress of Industrial Organizations food and tobacco workers' strike held that year in Charleston, South Carolina. *I Will Overcome* became very popular at the Highlander Folk School.

The words were soon changed from "I will overcome" to "We will overcome," emphasizing the importance of the group and reflecting the song's new secular purpose as a labor song. According to Pete Seeger, Zilphia Horton

**Figure 6.** Traditional, *I'll Be All Right*  
Transcribed from *Have a Little More Faith*, Reverend Gary Davis perf.,  
LP 1032, Prestige/Bluesville, 1961, Fantasy Records, 2006

**Figure 7.** Traditional. *I Will Overcome*. in *Sing for Freedom*. ed. Seeger and Carawan. n. 239.



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taught him the song.<sup>21</sup>

In 1950, *We Will Overcome* was one of the Eight New Songs for Labor recorded by Joe Glazer and the Elm City Four, a project of the Congress of Industrial Organizations' Department of Education and Research<sup>22</sup> and in *Songs of Work and Freedom*, edited by Edith Fowke and Joe Glazer.<sup>23</sup>

## *We Shall Overcome* and the American Civil Rights Movement

Having been adapted by the la-

bor movement in the mid-twentieth century, *We Shall Overcome* was soon refashioned once again, this time for an even larger and more heterogeneous group of people participating in the civil rights movement. Along the way, the song's melody and melodic rhythm became more elementary, the syncopations found in *I'll Be All Right* and *I Will Overcome* disappeared, and "will" was changed to "shall."

Some scholars interpret the first two of these changes as an attempt to downplay the African American origins of the song.<sup>24</sup> Another reason for the changes may have been to make the song easier

for larger numbers of people to learn and sing. Sam Rosenthal, coeditor of *Pete Seeger: In His Own Words*, affirms that "Seeger's writings and musings on music performance are filled with these kinds of micro changes. He has always spent a great deal of time thinking about ways to improve a song's singability."<sup>25</sup>

In 1963, Ludlow Music published the *We Shall Overcome* we are familiar with today, containing the alterations described above. The authors credited with new words and music adaptation—Zilphia Horton, Frank Hamilton, Guy Carawan, and Pete Seeger—stipulated that all royalties were to be given to the

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Freedom Movement.

Martin Luther King Jr. was impressed and moved by the song. According to Seeger, King commented that *We Shall Overcome* "really sticks with you."<sup>26</sup> In August 1963, over two hundred thousand marchers sang *We Shall Overcome* in Washington DC when King gave the "I Have a Dream" speech.<sup>27</sup> The song has since become a universal symbol of the struggle for freedom, civil rights, and human dignity. *We Shall Overcome* appears in numerous song collections such as *Get America Singing Again*, and there are at least ten traditional choral arrangements in print, including one by Robert De Cormier (GIA Publications) and another by Roy Ringwald (Shawnee Press).

## Summary

*We Shall Overcome* owes its existence to many ancestors and to the constant change and adaptation that is typical of the folk music process. This article has examined seven potential antecedent songs, many of which contain similar musical and textual ideas to one another and, most importantly, to *We Shall Overcome*, establishing influence on the *We Shall Overcome* we sing today. We have learned that the melody, rhythm, harmonic progressions, and phrase structure found in *We Shall Overcome* contain elements from these earlier antecedent songs, refashioned and simplified for large group singing.

While the music of Tindley's *I'll Overcome Some Day* and Morris/Twig's *I'll Overcome Someday* have nothing in common with *We Shall Overcome* or its other antecedent songs, their lyrics are of major significance in the song's ancestry. The words expressed an individual and group struggle to overcome sin in the religious sense, and oppression in the secular sense, sometime in the future, which was just beyond reach. This



## ACDA TREASURE CHEST

### Space for That Which Exists in Time

by Scott W. Dorsey

Museums come in all shapes and sizes, from the intimate charm of a single room in the county courthouse highlighting local history to the staggering depth and complexity of the Smithsonian. Despite their diversity, however, museums have one thing in common: they use physical artifacts to tell a particular story.

Unlike many other areas of human endeavor, we in choral music do not have many physical items that are representative of our craft. Given that our art form exists in time rather than in space, the very idea of a "choral museum" is almost oxymoronic (though there are some choral libraries that look as though they could be archeological sites).

The north wing of the American Choral Directors Association national office was designed as just such a space. Dedicated in 2003, the McMahon International Choral Music Museum serves to showcase some of the physical artifacts of the choral art while doubling as a performance space.

As a traditional museum, it naturally includes items specific to the history of ACDA. However, the space also features installations that track such historical developments as riser technology (with items donated by Weber University and the Wenger Corporation) and performance attire (through the courtesy of Southeastern Performance Apparel). Without question, the centerpiece of the museum is Eric Whitacre's piano. That keyboard, generously donated to the American Choral Directors Association by Mr. Whitacre, is the instrument on which he composed such works as "Sleep," "Water Night," "Lux Aurumque," and a host of others. The Whitacre display is enhanced by art donated by DCINY.

The McMahon International Choral Music Museum is also an intimate performance venue, with a set of risers ready at all times for choral performance. Both choirs from the local area and those passing through Oklahoma City on concert tours have performed in the space as a part of the Visiting Choir Series. One recent choral ensemble that sang in the museum was the Concert Choir from William Jewell College (Liberty, Missouri). "Performing at the ACDA headquarters and museum was a wonderful experience for our organization," said the choir's conductor, Anthony J. Maglione. "Not only did we get to sing in a resonant performing space, but we were also able to meet the ACDA staff and view the exhibits. We all left with a better appreciation for what we do and how our art contributes to the world."

The McMahon International Choral Music Museum is located within the ACDA national headquarters in Oklahoma City. It is open 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Monday through Friday.

("ACDA Treasure Chest" provides an encapsulated description of some of the remarkable resources available in the Archives of the American Choral Directors Association. The Archive is open to ACDA members without cost. Contact the ACDA National Office to schedule your research visit.)

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message was reinforced in the texts of *I'll Be All Right, I'll Be Like Him Someday*, and in the labor songs leading to *We Shall Overcome*.

*We Shall Overcome* and many of its antecedent songs nourished the spirit of African Americans in their struggle for equality and civil rights during sit-ins, protests, and, ultimately, the March on Washington. A powerful example of group singing that has had a profound effect on history, *We Shall Overcome* and its antecedent songs are a significant part of our musical and cultural heritage.

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## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Review of *Sicilian Mariners' Hymn to the Virgin*, *The European Magazine* and *London Review* 22 (Great Britain: Philological Society, 1792), 385–386.
- <sup>2</sup> James J. Fuld, *The Book of World-Famous Music*, 3rd ed., (New York: Dover Publications, 1985), 623–624.
- <sup>3</sup> <[http://www.hymnary.org/tune/sicilian\\_mariners](http://www.hymnary.org/tune/sicilian_mariners)>
- <sup>4</sup> Irwin Silber, *Songs of the Civil War*, liner notes, LP 39983519 Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage, 1960.
- <sup>5</sup> Fanny S. Haynes, ed., *Jubilee and Plantation Songs. Characteristic Favorites as sung by the Hampton Students Jubilee Singers, Fisk University Students, and other Concert Companies* (Boston: Oliver Diston and Company, 1915), 35.

- <sup>6</sup> Carlton R. Young, *A Companion to the United Methodist Hymnal* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993), 470.
- <sup>7</sup> John A. and Alan Lomax, *American Ballads and Folk Songs* (New York: Macmillan, 1943), 450.
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