Camilla Williams
Reflective Quotes from

DMFAH
Camilla Williams Activity Set
Danville Museum of Fine Arts & History
QUOTE OF THE DAY

WHAT DOES THIS QUOTE MEAN TO YOU?

“Someone asked me how I felt about being inducted into the Danville, Virginia Hall of Fame. I thought about it for a minute. When I was growing up, the building that houses the Hall of Fame used to be a library for whites only. It was strictly off-limits to black folks. I could walk by it but could never go into it. Now I was in it permanently as a Hall of Fame inductee. I answered, ‘Well, when I was a little girl, I couldn’t even get through the front door. So this is really something.’"
"...Eugene Conly, who was assigned the role of Pinkerton, dested the idea of working with a black woman... Apparently, Conly did not like the prospect of touching me. It was not because of my size... I strongly suspected that the problem was the color of my skin— even though ironically it was covered by all the light makeup. Simply put, the problem was that I was black and perhaps also the surprising fact that I sang well."
"The management at Columbia Artists discovered they could make a lot of money if I toured the country and did small concerts... I quickly grew accustomed to encountering bigotry and racism. The train would stop and Boris could get off and go and have a meal in the restaurant but I had to stay on the train. Here I was— an American— and he was a foreigner who could speak only a few words of English; but he was free to go anywhere and I was constrained."
"Many nights, we would stop somewhere and I would have to sleep in the train because the hotels would not allow blacks to get a room. I found it ironic that the people who would enjoy listening to my performances were the same ones who would not allow me to sleep in the hotel room next door. Strange world."
“I began singing for the civil rights movement when it was not fashionable to do so. I was never paid for it. I just did it because it was right.”
“...When I was about 12 years old, I started voice lessons. Danville had two colleges that were founded before the Civil War: Averett College in 1859 and Stratford College in 1852. Both were for girls— rich white girls. Black kids couldn’t go to those schools. A Welshman was brought in to teach voice at these two white colleges. His name was Raymond Aubrey. When he came to town, he heard that black folks in Danville had gorgeous voices so he decided he wanted to teach black singers. Of course, we couldn’t go up there to the white school. Such was the nature of our Southern town. So one of the citizens in Danville opened her house to him.”
“I never could be political myself. I say it like I see it. That’s how I was brought up. Mama and Papa both always told me to say what I mean and mean what I say. I have never regretted being like that. Perhaps others have gotten more recognition because they have been political. I intend to always remain true to myself.”
“Now by the time Farrar recommended me, only Todd Duncan had sung with the New York City Opera in 1945 but he had never been given a major contract. The entryway to opera then was still inaccessible to black singers but I was oblivious to all these tensions. I just wanted to sing beautifully and work hard.”
"My work in Africa was intense and at times tedious but it was memorable. Before I left for the African tour, people had jokingly or sarcastically asked me if I was going to sing for cannibals. I’m glad I did not listen to any of these detractors. I found people in Africa to be dignified, welcoming, and highly intellectual. They were extremely appreciative of my singing everywhere I went..."
"It was not easy to be a singer in my time, break down barriers and maintain standards. I came before my time. The world was not ready for me. But I am not bitter, not mad, not mean, not small-minded. I just sit back and embrace my life, and pray..."