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**AFRICAN
AMERICAN
EXPERIENCE
COLLECTIONS**
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KU LIBRARIES
The University of Kansas

Featured Jayhawks

The following African American Jayhawks are graduates of the university who have donated a collection of personal papers to the Kansas Collection for use by researchers. Their pursuit of excellence created a record of achievement that is unique among graduates of state universities in this region.

I.F. Bradley, Sr.



1862-1938

One of the first African Americans to practice law in the Kansas region, Bradley grew up in Cambridge, MO. After he earned a bachelor of law degree from KU in 1887, Bradley established a successful private law practice in Kansas City, KS, while also serving as city justice of the peace from 1889-91 and the first assistant county attorney from 1894-98. In 1930, he became owner and editor of the "Wyandotte Echo." His publications include "The Reign of Reason: A Treatise on Political Economy."

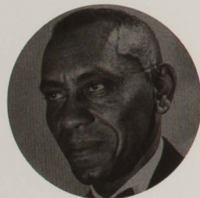
John Andrew Gregg



1877-1953

A native of Eureka, KS, Gregg was a 1902 graduate of KU. He became a national leader in the African Methodist Episcopal Church and served as president of Edward Waters College, in Jacksonville, FL, from 1913-20 and of Wilberforce University from 1920-24. During his service as the 49th Bishop of the AME Church, he established a permanent AME mission in Cape Town, South Africa. Over the next several decades, he served the fifth and fourth episcopal districts. During WWII, President Franklin D. Roosevelt invited him to visit war fronts as a representative of Fraternal Council of Negro Churches. In 1945, Gregg published a record of these travels in his publication "Of Men and Of Arms."

Daniel W. Lewis



1897-1989

Lewis was born in Oklahoma and moved to Kansas for his college education. Having received a teacher's certificate from Kansas Normal School and a bachelor's degree in education from Kansas State Normal School, Lewis earned a master's degree in education from KU in 1938. After serving as principal of various Kansas City, KS, grade schools, he became supervisor of the area's elementary school system in 1951 and remained in that capacity until his retirement in 1964.

Zatella R. Turner



1904-96

Nationally recognized as a model of excellence, Turner was the third woman inducted into Phi Beta Kappa at KU. She earned a bachelor's degree in 1929 and a master of arts in English in 1932. She was a member of the Delta chapter of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc., and later became one of the editors of the "Ivy Leaf," the AKA journal. After serving on the faculty at Texas Southern University from 1933-40, Turner joined the English department faculty at Virginia State College from 1940-73. The "Shakespearean Hour" she established there in 1944 is now an annual tradition at the university.

C. Kermit Phelps



1908-2002

In 1952, Phelps became the first African American to earn a doctorate in clinical psychology at KU. A native of Newton, KS, he received his bachelor's degree in 1934 and his master's degree in 1949 from KU. He served as chief of psychology at the Veterans Administration Hospital, Kansas City, MO, and as associate professor of psychology at KU. During the 1980s he was chair of the Board of Directors of the American Association of Retired Persons.

Lillian Taylor Orme



1911-93

Orme, native of Kansas City, KS, devoted her career and volunteer services to improving social and cultural opportunities for youth. After attending the Kansas City, KS, Teachers College, she earned a bachelor's degree in education from KU in 1941 and pursued her career as a classroom teacher. After receiving a master's degree in education from KU in 1952, she was promoted to principal and became one of the area's leading school administrators.

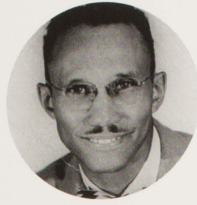
Nicolas L. Gerren



1912-2002

A talented violinist, Gerren broke the color line to become the first African American student to play in the Orchestra and Little Symphony at KU. He earned bachelor's degrees in music (1934) and in music education (1935), a master's degree in music (1948), and a doctorate in music (1953) from KU. In 1935, Gerren earned a post-baccalaureate scholarship to study violin in the Soviet Union. After returning to the U.S. in 1937, he taught music in the Kansas City, KS, school district, and later at Prairie View State College in Texas. After he returned from serving in the United States Army, he launched a distinguished career in music education, teaching, and conducting. He retired from Central State University in Ohio where he also served as the University's dean of the School of Music for five years.

Elmer C. Jackson



1912-99

Jackson was the first African American to serve as a member of the Kansas Board of Regents (1970-78) and as board chair (1976-78). He earned a bachelor's degree from KU in 1933 and graduated from the KU Law School in 1935. A past president of the National Bar Association, Jackson established the National Bar Foundation in 1968. He was also an active member of the University of Kansas Alumni and Endowment Associations boards, created a scholarship at the KU Law School, and donated the founding collection to KU Libraries' African American Experience Collections.

Barbara Knapper Mason



1912-99

A native of Kansas City, KS, Mason earned her bachelor's degree in education from KU in 1942 and later received a master's degree in education from Columbia Teachers College in New York. After teaching kindergarten classes at various schools in Kansas City, MO, for 22 years, she became director of the U.S. Department of Education Kindergarten Program for Kansas City, MO, and implemented innovative programs in early childhood development.

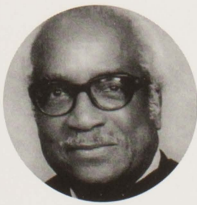
Dowdal H. Davis



1913-57

An influential midwest civic leader of the 1940s-50s, Davis was the son of the first African American physician to practice in Independence, KS. While attending KU, he spearheaded a variety of student efforts to abolish practices of racial segregation and exclusion on campus. After earning a bachelor's degree in fine arts from KU in 1936, Davis joined the staff of the "Kansas City Call" newspaper where he became general manager and editor by 1947. Other positions held by Davis include serving on the board of directors for the National Urban League, and as president of the Negro Newspaper Publishers Association. He was also the first African American member of the Police Board of Commissioners for Kansas City, MO, in 1957.

Cordell D. Meeks, Sr.



1914-87

Born in Little Rock, AR, Meeks moved with his family to Kansas City, KS, in 1923. During his freshman year at KU, he sought abolition of the university's color line by presenting a list of grievances to the dean of men and became active in campus politics. He graduated from KU in 1937 and from the Kansas University Law School in 1940. In 1972, he became the first African American elected to serve as a district court judge of Kansas.

John B. McLendon, Jr.



1915-99

A pioneer of African American leadership in national amateur and professional basketball, McLendon graduated in physical education at KU in 1936. As an advisee of James Naismith, he acquired knowledge and skills in basketball coaching, although KU's color line prevented him from playing on university teams. He earned a master's degree in physical education from the University of Iowa in 1937. He served as head coach in the first integrated National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics Basketball Tournament in 1954, and later coached Tennessee A&I State University and the Denver Rockets. McLendon was the first African American head coach of a professional team, the Cleveland Pipers. Hired in 1969 by the Denver Rockets, McLendon became the first African American head coach for the American Basketball Association.

Dorothy Hodge Johnson



1916-2004

A Phi Beta Kappa graduate from KU, Johnson earned a bachelor's degree in journalism in 1937. After serving as a reporter for the "Kansas City Call," Johnson took on roles as the community liaison for the National Urban League and director of the Florence Crittenton Home for Negro Girls in Kansas City, KS. Upon earning her master's degree in social work from KU in 1960, she was a case worker for family and children services in Kansas City, KS, and became director of the Department of Health and Welfare for Jackson County, MO, in 1973. Later she served as research associate for the Greater Kansas City Mental Health Foundation. KU awarded her the Distinguished Service Citation in 1974. She was also awarded Social Welfare Worker of the Year in 1977 by the Kansas City chapter of the National Association of Social Workers, and received the Woman of the Year award from the Central Exchange of Kansas City.

Lloyd Kerford, Jr.



1918-2000

A veteran of WWII, Kerford earned a bachelor's degree from KU in 1948. He began a career in business by serving as a manager and auditor for George W. Kerford Quarry Company, which was established by his grandfather in 1886 in Atchison, KS. Kerford later served as auditor for Kansas and for the federal government.

Josephine (Campbell) Vandiver-Boone



1918-2010

The 1982 recipient of the Counselor of the Year award sponsored by the Kansas Personnel and Guidance Association, Boone earned a bachelor's degree in liberal arts from KU in 1941. She later received a master's degree from the Hampton Institute and completed graduate studies at Atlanta University School of Social Work and the University of Chicago. As counselor of Schlagle High School, she initiated and administered guidance facilities.

William P. Foster



1919-2010

Regarded as the nation's dean of college marching band conductors, Foster earned a bachelor's degree in music education from KU in 1941, a master's degree from Wayne State University in 1950, and a doctorate in education from Columbia University in 1955. After serving as director of music for several colleges, he became director of bands and professor at Florida A&M University in 1946. Under his leadership, the FAMU "Marching 100" earned international fame for its innovative performance techniques and sound.

Chester I. Lewis



1928-1990

A native of Hutchinson, KS, Lewis became a state and national leader of the modern civil rights movement after earning his bachelor's degree from KU in 1951 and his law degree from KU in 1953. In 1955, he served as a lawyer for Sedgwick County and in 1956 as president of the Wichita NAACP — volunteering his legal expertise to foster racial integration of the city's police and fire departments, as well as its public schools. During his presidency of the Wichita NAACP, he mentored one of the nation's first student sit-ins, which took place in 1958 at the Dockum Drugstore in Wichita, KS. In 1969, he was a leader of the national NAACP's "Young Turks," who sought to include non-violent direct action to challenge the continued practices of racial segregation. In 1983, he was one of four lawyers who successfully led a class action lawsuit on behalf of African American train porters who experienced racial discrimination.

Jesse Milan



1928

A longtime resident of northeast Kansas, Milan was the first African American teacher to serve in the integrated Lawrence Unified School District #497, teaching physical education. Milan earned a bachelor's degree in education at KU, and graduate degrees at both KU and the Kansas State Teachers College (now Emporia State University) in 1954 and 1969, respectively. He later became an assistant professor of education at Baker University in Baldwin City, KS. For his work in education and ending discrimination, Baker University awarded Milan an honorary doctorate in 2001.

Delano E. Lewis



1938

In 1960, Lewis graduated from the University of Kansas with a bachelor of arts in political science and history, and in 1963, he received his J.D. from the Washburn University School of Law. Lewis had a 21-year career with Chesapeake & Potomac Telephone Company in Washington, D.C., serving as its president and CEO from 1988–93. In 1994, Lewis became the first African American president and CEO for National Public Radio and after four years decided to retire in order to finish writing his autobiography; however, he postponed his retirement to serve as the U.S. ambassador to South Africa.

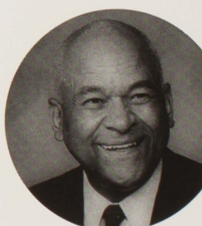
Cordell D. Meeks, Jr.



1943-2006

With hopes to follow in his father's footsteps in the legal profession, Meeks entered the University of Kansas as a political science major. While at KU, he was the first African American elected to KU's all-student council, was president of his law school senior class, and was a member of the senior men's honor society, Omicron Delta Kappa. Meeks began practicing law in Kansas City, KS, in 1970, and in 1976, became a municipal judge. By 1981 Meeks, Jr. became a district court judge for the 29th Judicial District of Kansas.

Michael Shinn



1943-2015

A distinguished former executive of General Electric and Ford, Shinn is a 1966 graduate of KU. During his time as a student, he was a well-awarded football player, served on the Civil Rights Council, and was the vice-polemarch of Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Inc. Shinn served on the national Board of Directors and the Board of Trustees of KU Endowment Association, as well as the Board Governance Committee. Shinn co-founded the KU Black Alumni Association to increase black alumni participation in university life.

Sharon Woodson Bryant



1947-2019

A native of Topeka, KS, Bryant was a reporter and communications specialist in several capacities across the nation — for newspapers in Grand Rapids and Ann Arbor, MI; in marketing for Disney in Florida; as the Kellogg Foundation visiting professor at Florida A&M University; and co-owner and publisher of Tallahassee's African American newspaper, "Capital Outlook." At the University of Kansas, Bryant became a member of the Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc., and earned a bachelor's degree (1969) and a master's degree (1975) from the School of Journalism.



Collecting for future Jayhawks

The University of Kansas Libraries are home to outstanding collections of materials — ranging from the documents of ordinary life in Kansas, to stunning illuminated manuscripts, to exciting images of our university. Kenneth Spencer Research Library is the rare books, manuscripts, and archives library of the KU campus.

The Kansas Collection at Spencer Research Library is the regional history division of KU Libraries. In 1985, the Kansas Collection embarked on an augmented collecting program to document the African American experience in Kansas.

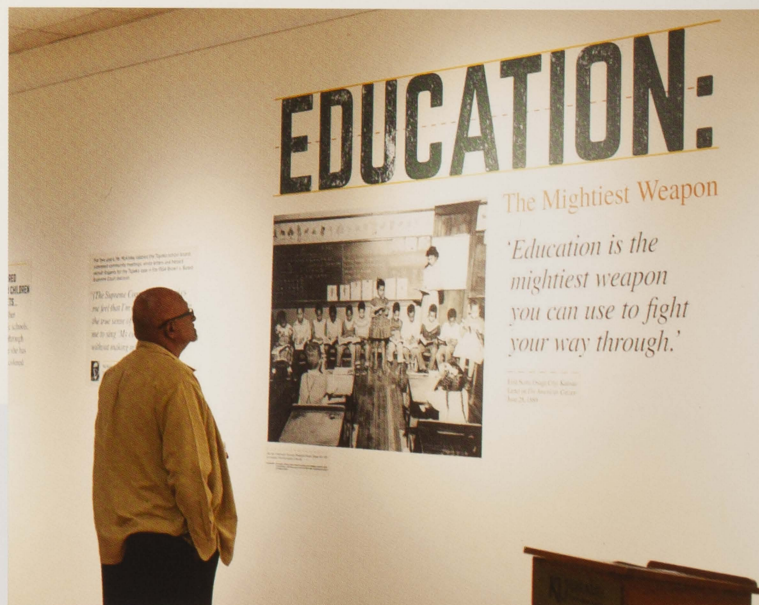
Throughout the past several decades, significant collections of personal and family papers, as well as records of organizations, churches, and businesses — attesting to this rich heritage — were collected and made available for researchers across the state of Kansas and the globe.

The Kansas Collection is involved in an ongoing effort to locate, identify, and acquire materials that document the experiences of African Americans in Kansas and the region. These efforts will help to ensure that the contributions of the African American community will be preserved for future research.

We need your help in further documenting the contributions of African Americans to the social, economic, and political life of the state and the region before the records are lost. If you have materials that you would like to have preserved in the Kansas Collection, or know of the location of papers or photographs that you think would be of interest, please let us know.

***For further information or to set up
an appointment please contact:***

Deborah Dandridge, field archivist and curator,
African American Experience Collections at
ddandrid@ku.edu or 785-864-2028.



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