

# *No Dreams Deferred*



**Jeanette Temple Dandridge  
1912-2001**

"As a magnet attracts a needle, so can the speaking voice attract the listener," declared Mrs. Dandridge on her radio program *Masterpieces Made to Live* that aired in Topeka (WREN) and Lawrence (KLWN) in 1956. "I am not an actor," she explained, "but as a literary interpreter, I translate into real pulsating life—word symbols on the printed page." Indeed, for nearly forty years, Mrs. Dandridge captivated audiences as a performer of literary interpretation. As a teacher of speech and public speaking, she inspired her students to enjoy the flexibility and power of the human voice.

Born and raised in Topeka, Kansas, Jeanette Temple Dandridge was afforded a wealth of emotional support and security by her family. Her father, John W. Temple, earned a living as a mail carrier for the Topeka Post Office and her mother, Pearl Temple, worked in the home as a seamstress. While her younger sister, Alberta, prepared the daily meals for the family, Jeanette assumed the responsibilities of sewing the family's clothing. Throughout her public school days she took delight in playground games. And, unlike her older brother, James, who obeyed parental instructions, she found ways to avoid rules at home and school by creatively making her own way. Her younger brother, Frederick, however, soon surpassed her reputation for mischievous behavior.

The center of the Temple family's spiritual and community life was the church. Jeanette and her siblings were raised in Lane Chapel CME Church in Topeka. During the late 1920s, she joined St. Simon's Episcopal Church in Topeka. After the St. Simon's parish closed, she, along with her husband and daughter, transferred to St. David's Episcopal Church where she found opportunities to deliver literary interpretations at services and programs, as well as volunteer at the Church book store. She remained a member of St. David's for the rest of her life.

Like most African American families of that era, the Temple family placed a high value on formal education. Jeanette and her siblings were all members of the National Honor Society at Topeka High School. After graduating from high school, she and each of her siblings continued their education by acquiring both undergraduate and graduate degrees. Jeanette earned a Bachelor of Arts degree from Washburn University in 1933 where she focused her studies on English and Art. She also became a member of the Alpha Iota Omega Chapter of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority. In 1942 she was awarded a masters degree from Northwestern University. She conducted additional studies at Emporia State University, the University of Kansas, the University of Minnesota, and Emerson College, Boston, Massachusetts.

She embarked upon her teaching career during the Great Depression. In 1935, she taught English and Art at Kansas Vocational School in Topeka.

By 1938, she was teaching the fourth grade at Monroe Elementary School. After 1942, she served on the faculties of the Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). At Langston University in Langston, Oklahoma, she taught Speech and English. In Concord, North Carolina, she taught Speech, Art, and courses in the department of Education at Barber-Scotia College. She was chair of the English Department at Storer College in Harpers Ferry, West Virginia. And, at Morgan State College in Baltimore, Maryland, she taught English, Literary Interpretation, and Public Speaking courses. In 1959, she joined the adjunct faculty at Washburn University where she taught courses in Public Speaking, Literary Interpretation, and Voice and Diction until her retirement in 1975.

Throughout these years, she performed literary interpretation concerts across the Southeast and Midwest. She also organized and led choral speech choirs on college campuses where she taught. During her years at Washburn University, she participated in theatre performances that included playing the title role in *Medea* and Queen Hecuba in *The Trojan Women*. In the 1970s, she presented her concert *Black Splendor*, which consisted of classic poetry and prose by African American writers. In addition, she produced recordings of the Greek drama *Antigone* and poetry by American, British and South Asian writers.

In 1952, she married P. Milburn Dandridge, who was a long time friend of the Temple family and an active member of St. Simon's Episcopal

Church. She also became the mother of her husband's six-year old daughter, Deborah. As wife and mother, she filled her home with literature, art, music, surprise celebrations, and train trips to visit cultural institutions in cities across the nation.

Her unique legacy was her artistry as a literary interpreter. Wallace A. Bacon, chairman of the Department of Interpretation in the school of speech at Northwestern University, praised Mrs. Dandridge for "her strong and moving embodiment of literary texts. By making words come alive for listeners in audiences and classrooms, she sought to convey the power of the human voice as Walt Whitman described it: "surely, whoever speaks to me in the right voice, I shall follow, as the water follows the moon, silently with fluid steps, anywhere around the globe."

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The archival papers and photographs that document the family and career experiences of Mrs. Dandridge are now a permanent part of the Kansas region's historical record. They are preserved and made available for use in the Kansas Collection, which is dedicated to an ongoing effort to locate, identify, and acquire materials such as letters, diaries, speeches, scrapbooks, and photographs, as well as organizational, business, religious and education records that document the experiences of African Americans in Kansas and the region.

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. An archivist is available to visit, examine the materials, advise as to their historical content, and pack and transfer the materials to the Kansas Collection.

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## The Kansas Collection

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