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## The contributions of Floyd Leslie Sandle to black educational theatre in Louisiana

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THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF  
FLOYD LESLIE SANDLE TO  
BLACK EDUCATIONAL THEATRE IN LOUISIANA

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Louisiana State University and  
Agricultural and Mechanical College  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of Theatre

by  
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## **ABSTRACT**

Floyd Leslie Sandle appeared on the theatrical scene in 1938 on the campus of Grambling State University. From his humble beginnings in the segregated town of Magnolia, Mississippi, to Dillard University where his passion for theatre was nurtured by Dr. Sheppard Randolph Edmonds, Sandle made significant strides in the development of Black Educational Theatre in Louisiana. Through his unique approach of presenting plays to the residents of the rural community of Grambling, Louisiana, Sandle was able to establish a state certified Speech and Drama Department at Grambling State University. He trained students in educational theatre through his lectures, laboratory experiences, and his leadership roles in the Louisiana Interscholastic Athletic and Literary Organization (LALIO) and the National Association of Dramatic and Speech Arts (NADSA).

As beneficiaries of Sandle's pioneering work in educational theatre, his students have excelled as teachers, directors, actors, writers, and administrators. Sandle became the first Black student to receive a Ph.D. from Louisiana State University in 1959. This study examines the life and career of Floyd Leslie Sandle as a pioneer of Black Educational Theatre in Louisiana. It has three major objectives: 1) to document Sandle's contributions to the development of a state certified collegiate theatre program by recognizing his diligence in using theatre to promote social change; 2) to retrieve yet another chapter of lost theatre history that is needed for an accurate record of the development of Black collegiate theatre and its organizations and 3) to explore Sandle's influence on Black theatre artists working today. This study will provide a broader perspective of Black Educational Theatre programs, affiliate organizations and Floyd Sandle's direct contributions to their historical development.

## INTRODUCTION

Having been invited to teach General Science at Louisiana Negro Normal and Industrial Institute (Grambling State University) for the summer session, Floyd Leslie Sandle arrived in the rural town of Grambling, Louisiana in June of 1938. Those six weeks of summer school eventually expanded to forty years of exemplary service at the small north Louisiana school; a school which has since become nationally and internationally known. As educator, director, administrator, and author, Sandle's pioneering leadership role in Black Educational Theatre helped build a strong coalition between collegiate theatre programs and professional organizations. Sandle fostered the careers of students whose lives were impacted by his enduring dedication to theatre. This study is a historical/critical examination of Sandle's professional career, forty years (1938-1978) at Grambling State University, and as Chairman of the Division of Humanities at Dillard University (1978-1986).

As the architect of a state certified Speech and Drama Department at Grambling College (1951), Dr. Sandle assisted in enhancing the conference structure of NADSA founded in 1936 by Dr. Sheppard Randolph Edmonds. NADSA is now recognized as the oldest surviving theatre organization in the country. Traveling the path paved by Edmonds, Sandle was elected as NADSA's fifth president, and Drama Director of the Interscholastic Athletic and Literary Organization (LIALO).

Prior to 1935 Louisiana did not have a state program of interscholastic activities for Black high school students (Young 4). It was the vision of Dr. William H. Gray, a professor at Southern University to implement a statewide program of interscholastic and athletic activities culminating in a state rally similar to the one held annually for White students at Louisiana State University (Young 6). Upon assuming the position of state drama director of the LIALO, one of

Sandle's first objectives was to encourage high school drama groups to participate in NADSA. When Grambling hosted the thirteenth annual NADSA conference, Ross High School (Minden) and Washington High School (Shreveport) were invited to present their play since they were the state division drama winners. In his memoir, Dr. Sandle recalls that the LIALO was a high point at Grambling from 1951 until the organization's demise in 1968 brought about by the implementation of integration.

He states:

There was something fallible in that decision. Grambling and Louisiana's Black high schools lost one strong asset for educating ...for academic achievements and upward mobility ...Louisiana's Black schools lost more than they gained from integration. Without the LIALO, Louisiana's Black high schools were like fallow land. (14)

Louisiana like other states, established separate educational facilities for Blacks to meet the educational and emotional needs of their students. The mission of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), unlike other colleges is united in that mission. White colleges offer White ambiance and White values without the opportunity to achieve White identity (Robebuck & Murty, 10). However, HBCUs offer students the chance to develop a healthy Black identity with the following attributes:

1. A firm and strong sense of tradition and heritage which these institutions gained through their struggle;
  2. A special mission and social obligation, which are hallmarks of the Black College;
  3. The experience of being in majority status which aids the comprehension of majority/minority status in the larger world;
  4. The provision of leadership experience; and
  5. Academic support programs which are not offered at other institutions.
- (Sutton 13)

Public Black colleges were created by the southern state government for 3 reasons: 1) to get millions of dollars in federal funds for the development of White land-grant universities, 2) to

limit Black education to vocational training, and 3) to prevent Blacks from attending land-grant colleges (Browning & William, 1978; Baker 1989). When the federal government enacted the Morrill Act in 1862, all southern and border-states opted to establish “separate but equal” agricultural and industrial schools for Blacks. Therefore, facilities for Blacks were never equal, and consequently public Black colleges and universities have never come close to their White counterparts financially or academically.

Theatre at Black universities originated at Howard University, which was established in 1837. English professor Ernest E. Just is credited with organizing the first dramatics club in 1911 (Sandle *The Negro in American Educational Theatre* 1). In 1921, Montgomery T. Gregory brought national attention to Howard University when he organized the Department of Dramatic Arts for the purpose of establishing the first National Black Theatre in the United States. The department offered three areas of professional training: acting, playwriting, and play production. Prior to this period, there was no institution that offered theatre training for Blacks in this country.

Black Educational Theatre was developed by Dr. Sheppard Randolph Edmonds in 1930. Black Educational Theatre offers its students both academic classroom and production experiences. Through this work, on and off stage, students could receive a well-rounded experience in Black life, culture, and art in a nurturing environment. However, training without a commercial venue to express, present, or act upon, must have been quite discouraging to Dr. Edmonds.

Blacks had not achieved the economic, social, nor logistic criteria needed to enhance theatrical productions. Therefore, Dr. Edmonds developed an educational theatre program



because it was the only venue available to reach out to the community, develop teachers, and replace stereotypes with more realistic Black voices.

However, after World War I, theatre groups in Black Colleges and Universities grew rapidly, due in part to a movement known as the Little Theatre Movement and the interjection of plays on Black life by prominent dramatists in the 1920s and 1930s (Wallace 123). The Little Theatre Movement in America began in the first decade of the twentieth century, and it was a revolt against the domination of commercial theatre (Simmons 28). According to theatre historian Oscar Brockett, not until around 1915 did the United States begin to be aware of artistic innovations that had long been underway in the European theatre. This awareness came about in large part through non-professional groups. Around 1912 several ‘little theatres’ were established in emulation of the independent theatres in Europe (Wallace 626).

According to Sheppard Randolph Edmonds, the Negro Little Theatre Movement originated in minstrel shows, dramatic readings, plays for entertainment and other forms of recreational dramatics. With the increasingly large numbers of Black professional actors, and other theatrical artists, the Negro Little Theatre Movement provided these artists with an opportunity to produce plays and other forms of theatrical entertainment by, for and about themselves. (Simmons 29)

In his book, *The Negro in the American Educational Theatre*, Sandle recounts:

The Negro college was probably not so poorly directed from its beginning as the Negro drama. But one finds in almost all of the recorded literature that the Negro college like the Negro drama was born of a desperate need. (1)

## **Significance**

This dissertation cites a number of significant factors concerning the importance of this study. Some are juxtaposed to its particular times, yet some endures today. The exclusion of the contributions of Black in theatre and the unsung heroes who made it possible for Blacks to shine

on stage- the Black Theatre teacher. In a 2004 interview with Dr. H.D. Flowers, he recalled a question he directed to theatre historian Dr. Oscar Brockett regarding the omission of Black Theatre History in his texts. Dr. Brockett's reply was that that was not his job, not rather Flowers job to do.

It is shameful that we live in a dual society where the history of Black theatre artists and teachers are virtually invisible in standard theatre history texts. Black Theatre history is lost because of societal biases. I believe that this negative impact helped motivate that long list of theatre educators to mold stars that will forever shine.

This dissertation is a personal testament to Dr. Sandle, a true theatre pioneer. From our initial meeting in 1974, until our last visit in 2002, he was a source of inspiration and encouragement to me to "stay focused." As a 1976 Speech and Drama graduate of Grambling, I am indebted to him for structuring a foundation in theatre, one that was completed by his student, Dr. Allen Williams. That structure however, was not without Dr. Sandle's blessings, for he remained an invaluable resource. I was trained in all aspects of Speech and Drama as an undergraduate at Grambling including: phonetics, voice and diction, public speaking, radio announcing, theatre history, play directing, stage craft, play production, play writing, acting, lighting, make-up, and costuming. Both Dr. Sandle and Dr. Williams wanted us to be knowledgeable and marketable and to excel in our fields. Because I have traveled paths paved by Dr. Sandle, this study is significant for me, and out of respect for his work, it is within these pages that I salute him.

## **Methodology**

From 1938 until his death on August 22, 2002, Sandle was a resident of Grambling, a small rural community nestled in the piney hills of Lincoln Parish in north Louisiana. This study relies on video and audio taped personal interviews with Dr. Sandle that last from forty-five minutes to

an hour each visit. Dr. Sandle's memoir, *Grambling: My Years in Drama and Speech Revisited, 1938-1978* traces his path from his childhood in Magnolia, Mississippi and examines the forces that helped shape him into a theatre legend who single handedly established a state certified drama department, and became the first Black to receive a doctorate from Louisiana State University. Dr. Sandle's modesty in his memoir prevents the historian from getting a full picture of his contributions and the obstacles he faced such as lack of funding, racism, and gaining respect for theatre as a legitimate area of study. In order to get a fuller picture, I had to conduct personal interviews with his children, Wanda and Floyd, Jr., former students, colleagues and Grambling residents. The duration of these interviews were thirty minutes to an half hour each session.

### **Review of the Literature**

Sandle's book, *The Negro in The American Educational Theatre- An Organizational Development 1911-1964* addresses the development of theatre as a discipline at Historical Black Colleges and Universities. Also helpful was his dissertation, *A History Of the Development of Educational Theatre in Negro Colleges from 1911 to 1959*. This is the only text that specifically attempts to treat the history of the discipline in HBCUs. Sandle approaches the history in three ways: 1) by analyzing influential pioneering playwrights and performers in African-American theatre and drama; 2) tracing the development of NADSA; and 3) describing the development of speech and theatre curricula.

Secondary sources consulted in the preparation of this study including academic theses such as: 1) *The History of the Development and Growth of the Speech and Drama Department at Grambling College, 1938-1968* by Louise Hall Wade, a historical analysis of the growth and development of Grambling's Speech and Drama Department during a thirty-year period, 2) *The*

*Development Of Grambling College* by Earl Maxie, which provides a vivid account of the development of Grambling College with the inception of the internationally recognized teacher education program, and 3) *The Study of the Speech Program at Grambling College with Recommendations for Its Improvement* by Henry Leroy Essex, which examines the Speech program at Grambling College and the course requirements for prospective teachers with recommendations for the program's improvement. I have also utilized several dissertations including: 1) *A History of the Higher Education of Negroes in the State of Louisiana*, by David Coughlin Marshall (1956) which traces the history of Black higher education in Louisiana by delineating the pattern of development manifested in those institutions; 2) *Sheppard Randolph Edmonds: His Contributions to Black Educational Theatre*, by Allen Williams is dealing with Edmond's influence in developing educational theatre in Black institutions in the South, (for example, the USO tours that Edmonds initiated with his college drama group influenced touring practices in other HBCUs); and 3) *The Story of NADSA* by A. Clifton Myles, which traces the development of the National Association of Dramatic and Speech Arts.

Other important sources include: 1) *The History of Grambling State University* by Mildred Gallot, a concise history of the development of the town of Grambling and the impact of the university. 2) *Historically Black Colleges and Universities* by Julian B. Roebuck and Komanduri S. Murty which address the issue of HBCUs from a broad analytical perspective including their history, development, structure, and function in Historically Black Colleges and Universities; 3) *African American Theatre* by Samuel A. Hay charts the history of African American Theatre and examines its origin and impact in his 1994 book; 4) *The Segregation Struggle in Louisiana* by Roger Fischer; and 5) *The Black Teacher and the Dramatic Arts* by

William Reardon and Thomas Pawley. Numerous newspaper articles, photographs, play programs, and catalogues were invaluable aids to my research.

My research investigation to date reveals no single comprehensive study of Sandle's life and career. Some facets of his varied career have been noted in a few works on more general topics. This dissertation is written to unveil the important contributions of Floyd Leslie Sandle to the development of Black Educational Theatre in Louisiana.

Chapter One provides an overview of the educational renaissance of Blacks during the aftermath of the Civil War and the dramatic changes it brought about in their lives, especially in the state of Louisiana. This chapter also examines the significant role that the Baptist, Methodist, Presbyterian and Episcopalian congregations played in establishing colleges and universities that provided educational opportunities for Blacks during this period. It will also examine the history and development of Grambling State University.

Chapter Two provides a biographical sketch of the educational and professional career of Floyd Leslie Sandle's mentor Dr. Sheppard Randolph Edmonds. The roots of drama at Historically Black Colleges and Universities are developed through the initiatives of Dr. Edmonds, Sandle's professor at Dillard.

Chapter Three explores how Sandle introduced theatre to the rural community of Grambling in 1938 by presenting his first play, *Old Man Pete* with the summer school faculty as cast. Through his tactic of "bootlegging plays," during his early years as a Science teacher, he gained the support of the administration, made a cultural impact on the community, and established a Speech and Drama department which was ultimately certified as a degree granting department in 1951. The evolution of the Southern Association of Dramatic and Speech Arts (SADSA) is discussed as well as its impact on Black College theatre programs. Chapter Three also focuses

on the constant challenges of racism Sandle endured while serving in the United States Navy as well as in his pursuit of the doctorate degree at Louisiana State University.

Chapter Four highlights Sandle's early theatrical accomplishments, most notably the 1963 thirty-day USO Tour of *Blithe Spirit* to the Northeast Command. Significant attention is given to his tenure as Grambling's Dean of the Division of General Studies (1963-1978), during which time he authored a book for the freshman seminar course, participated with other colleges and universities in the Institute for Services to Education (ISE), a thirteen college consortium that dealt primarily with General Education courses using to reduce the mass attrition rate among college freshmen. Also important to this chapter is Sandle's participation in numerous local, state and national professional organizations until his retirement from Grambling State University in 1978.

Chapter Five focuses on Sandle's time as Chair of the Division of Humanities at Dillard University beginning the fall of 1978 until his second retirement in 1986. The indelible impact of his work, coupled with his motto, "stay focused," served as a guide for many of his students who embraced his vision, and chose careers in professional and educational theatre, film and television.

The Conclusion help establish and support the significance and impact of Sandle's life and professional career in educational theatre, selected illustrations are included in this study. Appendix A provides a listing of Sandle's honors, awards, and the professional organizations to which he belonged. Appendix B is a listing of the plays he wrote and directed, and the books and articles he authored. Appendix C includes photographs, newspaper articles, and correspondence relating to Sandle's work and personal life.

Dr. Sandle's contributions to the development of the Speech and Theatre Department, educational theatre and The National Association of Dramatic and Speech Arts, influenced each theatre history lecture at Grambling State University. Dr. Allen Williams, department head for thirty-four years, and a former student of Dr. Sandle's passionately taught theatre majors the three W's of Dr. Floyd Leslie Sandle: who he was, what he accomplished, when he accomplished it, and how he accomplished it. This dissertation aims to do the same.

I first met Dr. Sandle the spring of 1974, as a second semester freshman at Grambling. Freshmen were assigned academic counselors in the Division of General Studies to assist with registration, housing, and course scheduling. My academic advisor was Mrs. Marie Sandle, Dr. Sandle's wife. During one of my visits to Mrs. Sandle's office, I observed Dr. Sandle assisting students in the reception area of his division. Although the lines were long, the students frustrated and the secretary agitated, Dr. Sandle weaved in and out of the line mingling with students and assuring everyone they would be taken care of. His personality exemplified that of a concerned parent, rather than that of a dean and I admired him for that. After our initial conversation, Dr. Sandle learned that my major was Speech and Drama, and my name was Ava Marie; we immediately bonded. He joked that we had so much in common: theatre, the names Ava, (mine and his daughter's) and Marie (his wife's). Our brief greetings usually developed into lengthy, inspiring conversations, filled with antidotes for success.

As a visionary, Dr. Sandle continued to build on the work of his former professor and mentor, Dr. Sheppard Randolph Edmonds. Dr. Sandle's tenacity in maintaining Edmond's legacy was evidenced by the numerous students he taught who chose to follow his career path as teacher, director, playwright, and administrator.

I have marveled at Dr. Sandle's perseverance and finesse in overcoming obstacles, such as becoming a part of history when he became the first Black to receive a doctorate from Louisiana State University in 1959. In 1990 he was honored as "A Living Treasure" when the Louisiana State Board of Trustees approved the renaming of Grambling's Little Theatre to The Floyd L. Sandle Theatre; and during the 65<sup>th</sup> annual conference of the National Association of Dramatic and Speech Arts (hereafter referred to as NADSA) in 2001, the Executive Board named him a NADSA Pioneer.

In an interview with his former student Dr. Allen Williams, Dr. Sandle reminded him that, "Art fixes its gaze upon eternity...it's time to pass on to you and your faculty as vines to bear Speech and Drama fruit in your seasons." (Sandle *A Memoir* 258). That is a powerful statement. As I reflect, the analogy is clear. I am a fruit from the vine of Dr. Allen Williams, and he is the blossom from the vine of Dr. Sandle, one of the seeds planted by Sheppard Randolph Edmonds, who gave rise to an interest in the study of the aesthetics and practices of Black Theatre at Dillard University in the early 1930s. Therefore, it is important for me to share the story of this extraordinary educator and his significant contributions to educational theatre. Without a doubt, Dr. Floyd Leslie Sandle has earned a chapter in theatre history.



## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **SETTING THE STAGE: THE DEVELOPMENT OF GRAMBLING STATE UNIVERSITY**

The aftermath of the Civil War brought about dramatic changes in the lives of Blacks in the South. Among these, few were more important to Blacks than the opportunities for education. During slavery, every southern state except Tennessee had prohibited teaching slaves to read and write. Although some slaves had learned to read and write, well over 90 percent of Blacks emerged from slavery illiterate (Nieman viii).

The Civil War was the socio-military event that transformed uneducated slaves into literate human beings (Neufeldt and McGee 29). It is interesting to note that the first two Black colleges were established on the eve of the Civil War, both were funded by religious denominations and both are still in existence today. They are Lincoln University in Pennsylvania, a Presbyterian College incorporated in 1854, and Wilberforce University, in Ohio funded by the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1856 (Williams 17).

The Roman Catholic Churches established education for both Black and White people in Louisiana. In 1727 the Ursuline Nuns arrived in New Orleans from France to establish a school for all races. Blacks and Indians were taught reading, writing, and fabric making in evening classes. Nearly a hundred years after the Ursuline Nuns, the Sisters of the Order of the Sacred Heart established schools for Blacks in Louisiana (Porter 81).

The fall of the Confederacy meant a new chapter in the education of Blacks in Louisiana. General Nathaniel P. Banks, commander of the Department of the Gulf, initiated the first legislation regarding public schools. During the Constitutional Convention in 1864 called by Banks, there was a bitter debate regarding education for Blacks. Banks' Order No. 38 mandated the establishment of one or more elementary schools in each district in the state (Smith 3).

General Banks proposed a new Louisiana constitution regarding education as stated in Article 141:

The Legislature shall provide for the education of all children of the state between the ages of six and eighteen by maintenance of free public schools by taxation or otherwise.

Conservative delegate Edmund Abell responded to Banks' order with the following:

The question is upon the education of the Black children and sir, here is one who will never vote for it. Never will I vote for a measure that will imbrue the hands of the people in blood. To those who have acquired a little property and have invested it in Negroes ...it is a shame that your property shall be taxed to educate Negro children. I say that the levying of taxes upon us to pay for the education of a race that we expect to be torn from us in indignity. Why are we called upon to educate these Negroes? (Marshall 15)

Abell's sentiments were echoed by his colleagues, and they were not content with reforming the old order. Despite strong opposition like that of Abell, a compromise was reached in the debate whereby taxation was left to the legislature with a guarantee of free public education for all children. This guarantee ushered in the beginning of the education of Blacks (Gallot xi). However, it seems more likely that state sanctioned education for Blacks began with the establishment of schools by General Banks and the Freedman's Bureau.

The Freedman's Bureau, a War Department agency established in 1865 to supervise the transition of Blacks from slavery, did not establish schools but provided financial assistance to schools established by the northern societies and by southern Blacks. For Louisiana, the Bureau's policy was to assume and build upon the school system inaugurated by General Banks' legislation of 1864.

After a public elementary education system was established in Louisiana, attention was then focused on providing institutions of higher learning for Blacks. This new focus was not born from sympathies for the plight of Black people, but rather from old Civil War resentment between Yankees and Confederates. Superintendent of Education, T. H. Harris, voiced the greatest opposition to education for Blacks in Louisiana. He was vehemently against the arrangement of northern White teachers coming south to Black school settings when he expressed:

The White population was not enthusiastic about the education of Negro children in the first place, but if Negro schools must be provided, public sentiment demanded that instruction should be offered by Negroes and not by Yankee school teachers. (Gallot xii)

The Louisiana State Legislature according to the stipulations of Act Number 87 on April 10, 1880 established Southern University:

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of the state of Louisiana that there shall be established in the city of New Orleans a university for the education of persons of color, to be named and entitled Southern University. (Porter 1938)

The primary purpose of this institution was to produce and train teachers although industrial education was emphasized as well. Southern University was chosen as a land-grant college in accordance with 1890 legislation, which required that Negro populations receive an equitable share of the land grant in each state (Smith 6). The university remained in New Orleans until 1914 when the property was sold and the institution moved to Scotlandville on the outskirts of Baton Rouge (Marshall 153).

Four institutions were established in the southern part of the state. Three of the four schools were located in New Orleans and established as private schools by White denominational boards. They were: Leland College (1870) established by the American Baptist Home Society, Straight University (1870) established by the Congregationalists, and New Orleans University (1873) established by the Methodist Episcopal Church.

The northern and western parts of the state were practically without advanced educational facilities for Blacks until 1890. Black minister O.L. Coleman founded Coleman College, a small private college on ninety acres of land in Gibsland. This was the only secondary school for Blacks within a 50-mile radius in North Central Louisiana and was operated under the auspices of the American Baptist Home Mission Society (Gallot xiii).

The details of how Black public colleges evolved in Louisiana are unusual. A law that was passed to aid White farmers and to accelerate industrial production actually led to the creation of Black Land Grant Colleges (Roebuck & Murty 201). In 1862 during the midst of the Civil War, Congress passed the first Land Grant Act that made it possible for each state to receive federal funds to establish a state college or university. The bill was first introduced in 1857 by Vermont senator Justin Smith Morrill (1810-1898), only to have it vetoed by President James Buchanan in 1859.

In 1861 Morrill introduced another land grant bill that would grant 30,000 acres to each senator and representative, but added that military tactics be taught in order to enhance the armed forces in lieu of the Civil War (Roebuck & Murty 212). President Abraham Lincoln signed the bill into law on July 2, 1862, which made it possible for each state to receive federal funds to establish a state college. Institutions that received the funds would teach agriculture, military tactics, mechanical arts, and home economics.

Due to the social and political climate during the 1860s, the federal government was unable to secure cooperation from southern states, and therefore sought to pass the Morrill Act of 1890 to support Black institutions. In order for states to receive funding, either race could not be a factor in regard to admission or the state had to designate a separate land grant college for Blacks. Alcorn State University in Lorman, Mississippi founded in 1871, has the distinction of being the first Black land-grant college in the country (Williams 25).

### **The History of Grambling State University**

Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) were established following the Civil War to provide elementary, secondary, and post-secondary education for freedmen and to prepare them to teach other Blacks. Rev. Jesse Jackson echoes this sentiment when he says,

The Black College has a special calling...to reach the unreachable, embrace the rejected and be patient with the late bloomers. (Speech given at Grambling 1975)

The initial impetus giving birth to these schools was ignited and implemented during Reconstruction (1863-1877) by northern missionary groups, the Freedman's Bureau, Black churches and social associations.

Since their inception, HBCUs have stood poised as a catalyst for educational opportunities for generations of Blacks. These institutions were founded for the intellectual leadership and knowledge necessary to strengthen the Black community as it adjusted to new levels of competition and equality (Frierson 1). Their role, as defined by The Carnegie Commission of Higher Education (1971) was:

- To assume leadership in outreach programs of consultation and service to the Black community;
- To develop and expand programs of education and occupational retraining for Black adults;

- To continue developing alternate programs to provide improved postsecondary education for students whose preparation for college falls short of requirements of conventional institutions of higher learning;
- To assume leadership in the development of techniques of overcoming handicaps in the educationally disadvantaged;
- To stimulate the interest of Black youth in higher education; and
- To serve as custodians for the archives of Black Americans, and as centers for both the systematic study of the Black man's problems and achievements, and the interpretation of his aspirations and responses to life as represented in his literature and art. (Frierson19)

Although Grambling State University was not established as a land grant college, its history is only a small portion of the intriguing chapter of education for Blacks in higher education in the state of Louisiana. This rural school had an unusual beginning and development. Established as a private industrial school by the Farmer's Association, on the elementary and secondary levels, it eventually developed into a public four-year university (Marshall 165).

Under the leadership of Lafayette Richmond, the North Louisiana Colored Agricultural Relief Association was organized in Lincoln Parish in 1896. The organization's major objective was to establish an industrial school in the northern part of the state. The original philosophy of the school was to teach students how to farm, improve health and sanitary conditions, purchase land, build houses, and preserve food.

The organization purchased twenty-three acres of land at five dollars per acre in 1888, and constructed a two-story building for the school, which also functioned as a meeting place. For two, three-month terms in 1900 and 1901, the school operated with only two teachers, Henry Wynder and Alice Wilson. The members of the association realized that they did not have the expertise to operate a full-time school, therefore, the association authorized three of its members Lafayette Richmond, Reverend Dennis Hollis, and Rueben Daniels to write a letter to Dr. Booker

T. Washington at Tuskegee Institute for assistance in establishing the school. Charles Phillip Adams arrived on August 4, 1901, in answer to the association's request (Gallot x).

Adams was born July 21, 1873, the oldest of four children to Edward and Mary Adams of Brusly. Due to a house fire that killed his mother and younger brother Baptiste, Adams and his brothers went to live with their maternal grandmother, Mariah Woods. Edward Adams remarried, and four children were born to this union. In his autobiography, Adams writes that his grandmother "was highly respected in the community by people of both races. She believed in hard work and set a good example by her own standards. When she died at the age of ninety-five, all of the stores in Brusly closed during the passing of the funeral procession" (Adams 1).

Adams learned about farm work and the economy at an early age. He worked on his grandmother's farm raising corn and sugar with two of his uncles, John Adams and William Woods. Adams was just turning 19 years old when he entered into a contract with his Uncle William to purchase one hundred acres of land on the Mississippi River for four hundred dollars. He paid the debt off in four years. Adams was pleased with the financial return of the crops, ownership of 30 acres of land and two mules (4). However, he desired more, he had an everlasting thirst for education.

With the intentions of becoming a lawyer, Adams arrived on the campus of Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institution in November 1896 and joined the debate team before he completed the registration process. It was Adams' belief that in order to be a good lawyer, you must be a good speaker, and it was his goal to be the very best lawyer. In his autobiography, *My Life and Work* Adams relates that Tuskegee was a place he admired, and he kept the idea of becoming a lawyer constantly on his mind (8).

Standing 6'10" and 300 pounds, Adams excelled in his studies during his five years at Tuskegee, and became a distinguished speaker. Booker T. Washington had observed Adams' leadership qualities, and the power of persuasion he commanded in his articulate delivery, which prompted him to meet with Adams regarding the request from the Farmer's Association in Grambling.

Washington shared the communication that he had received from the farmers' association in Grambling with Adams. He told Adams that the association wanted him to send a qualified man to come to north Louisiana and build an industrial school, and Adams was his choice since he was a graduating senior (Lockhart 2001). Initially Adams refused, explaining to Washington that he had already made plans to study law at Howard University. Washington's reply was quick; he stated emphatically, "Tuskegee is educating men and women to stay in the South and do their work here. If you study law you will have to leave the South...the race needs your service right here" (Gallot 7). With much respect and admiration for Washington, Adams knew he had nothing else to say but accept his proposition.

Charles P. Adams' arrival in north Louisiana was a momentous occasion for the delegation of men that met him at the train stop. Adams was twenty-eight years old when he stepped off the train to what was then known as the Allen Green Stop on the former Vicksburg, Shreveport, and Pacific Railroad (Gallot 2). He was immediately given a tour of the school site a dense forest of sweet gum and pine trees, and a two-story building that was about fifty percent complete located about two miles west of the present site of Grambling State University (Gallot 7).

From August 4 to November 1, 1901 Adams worked diligently to get the building completed to open for classes. He traveled across north Louisiana visiting different communities and churches seeking financial and moral support for the school. However, in order to finish the



construction on time, he needed additional funds. He wrote his uncle Edward Adams, and he asked him to sell his interest in the Brusly farm. He contributed seven hundred dollars of that money toward the school. When construction of the school was almost completed, Adams wrote to Booker T. Washington requesting two additional teachers for the school: a male teacher for industrial training and a female, trained in home economics (8). Washington selected A.C. Wilcher and Martha Adams, the daughter of Lewis Adams who had assisted Washington in the founding of Tuskegee Institute, and whom Charles P. Adams later married in May of 1904.

On November 1, 1901, The Colored Industrial and Agricultural School opened its doors with three teachers and one hundred and five students, ninety of whom were from the immediate community, and fifteen from other parishes in the state. The students' attitudes varied from complete fear of a cultural change to an excitement about the effects an education would have on their ability to earn a living (Maxie 44).

After 1905, a large number of students opted to become boarding students. The tuition was five dollars per month, however not all students could afford to pay. The majority of the students paid with commodities such as flour, peas, potatoes or other edible products. There were however, some philanthropic donations received as a result of Adams' lectures in neighboring communities, as well as financial aid from the North and Canada through the assistance of Booker T. Washington.

In his thesis *The Development of Grambling College*, Earl Maxie writes the following about Adams' original philosophy of the school:

Adams envisioned the educational needs of Negroes living in the Grambling Community, and set out to satisfy those needs. Activities were to be undertaken in the classroom, on the campus, and in the community. Farmers would be shown how to produce better crops, buy property, prepare meals, and provide for health and

home improvement. Young people on the other hand, would be taught the three R's and given instruction in the care of the body and effective citizenship. This program was inaugurated because Adams realized the immediate needs of the people. (41)



Charles P. Adams  
First President of Grambling State University

After Adams had established the school, solicited financial support, recruited teachers and students, a group of Baptist ministers intervened wanting control of the school. The farm organization became heavily inundated with Baptist ministers, some of whom became trustees and members of the board of directors sought to change the industrial school into a religious institution. Adams rejected this concept since it was his goal to develop the school into a state supported institution. Adams told his supporters the preachers were determined to take his place at the head of a promising institution, and he was just as determined to prohibit them from doing so (Gallot 12).

Conflict escalated between Adams and the farm organization when Adams organized a new, predominantly White, board of directors to oversee the operations of the school. As a result of Adam's action, the farm organization filed a suit against him in Ruston on November 2, 1903 (Lockhart 3). The suit, *Allen Green Normal and Industrial Institute vs. Charles P. Adams, et. al.*, stated that Adams had refused to forfeit his position as principal of the school, even though a new principal, J.D. Stewart, had been appointed (13). The suit caused the White board members to sever ties with Adams and after two years of judicial wrangling, the court ruled in favor of the farm organization.

Adams appealed the ruling to the Circuit Court of Appeals, and the decision was reversed. The ruling precipitated a split in the community between the ministers who opposed Adams, and the supporters who believed in the industrial school concept. According to Grambling resident J. Andrew Galuden, "Adams saw industrial education as being steadfastly engaged in anything useful and honest, ...whether it be a farm, a teaching job, constructing a building, or operating a blacksmith shop" (Gallot 15).

Adams organized a new board and appointed several White members. The board members were: Colonel L.F. Marbury, O.B. Staples, Parish Superintendent; O.M. Wright, President of the Ruston State Bank; E.R. Braswell, and California philanthropist, Miss Fidelia Jewett. Impressed with Adams' work and the promising future of the school, Miss Jewett deposited \$2,000 in a Ruston bank upon her initial visit to the school in 1905, and continued to make substantial contributions to the school until she died (Maxie 48).

Adams worked tirelessly to build a relationship with the White residents of Lincoln Parish, seeking advice and financial support from them. The North Louisiana Agricultural and Industrial Institute operated on private donations from 1905 until 1912. However, contributions began to decline drastically after 1912. Agencies such as the Jeans and Rosenwald Funds contributed small sums of money, and some federal aid was received for agriculture and home economics classes, which aided in the school's continued growth.

Adams was advised by many of his White supporters to reorganize the school on another site. Lafayette Richmond directed Adams to the school's present site, a two hundred acre plot of land. Adams received pledges of twenty-five dollars each as down payment on the land for the construction of a new school from Dave Street, George Williams, Willis Holland, Dick Nelson, Andrew Nuby, and Lafayette Richmond. The land was purchased from M.S. Standifer for eight hundred dollars without interest (Maxie 43).

In May 1905, the school was moved to its present location and renamed North Louisiana Agricultural and Industrial Institute using the Tuskegee Institute program as a model. The school consisted of two frame buildings, which had to accommodate all instructional and housing needs of the faculty and students as well (Gallot 17).

Five students enrolled in the ninth grade when the school opened in 1905, and they graduated in 1907. The graduates were: S. L. Holland, Alfred Moore, Bolton Moore, Dan Moore and Annie Lee Nicholson. The commencement was held outside under a makeshift tent in order to shield the guests from the sun. Adams invited E. Byrd of the Louisiana Industrial Institute of Ruston to deliver the commencement address.

The highlight of the school year was the commencement service. Each spring people came from all over the parish to witness this Sunday service. Adams skillfully coordinated a ceremony that included speeches by honor students, which increased attendance significantly. He knew how proud parents would be of their children's participation on the program. Adams invited Black ministers to deliver the commencement sermon, and White educators and businessmen from Ruston to be the commencement day speaker. The culminating commencement activity was a fried chicken dinner complete with potatoes, hot rolls, cakes and pies, prepared by Adam's wife, Martha. The format of the commencement activities satisfied the Black residents and maintained good will with the White community (Gallot 18).

The Lincoln Parish School Board soon realized that North Louisiana Industrial and Agricultural School was an asset to the educational development of Blacks in that area. It was not until 1912 that the Lincoln Parish School Board actually began to fund various phases of the school, consequently, when the school board paid the salary of one teacher in 1913, the school became semi-public. This move required Adams to report directly to the school board outlining his plans for operation. The School Board passed the following resolution:

Whereas the need of an effective colored school for the parish is very great, and whereas Grambling is the center of a large colored population, where the Negroes largely own their own homes and cultivate their own land, and whereas by centralizing the efforts of the board and the Negroes, money from other sources might be available to erect and equip an adequate schoolhouse and help maintain an efficient school, and whereas,

nearly one-third of the population and land owners are within reach of the Grambling school.

Therefore, be it resolved that, if adequate buildings can be provided and equipment installed, that this board will support the school with a maintenance fund to one-third the amount now appropriated to the parish colored schools; said appropriations to come from the colored children pro rata of the school fund. (Gallot 21)

The purpose of the training school was to provide a superior type of school that provided training for boys and girls in citizenship, education in physical and mental health, and a sense of reliability and responsibility. Additionally, the school would offer teacher training, and provide opportunities for students to study community problems.

Early in 1928, the Lincoln Parish School Board notified Adams that it could no longer provide salaries for the teachers at his school. The growth of secondary education in the state, and the need for better trained elementary teachers, had put a tremendous strain on the school's operating budget. Adams, along with Senator R.P. Knott met with Governor-elect Huey P. Long, seeking state support for the school. Adams wrote in his memoirs, "I told him that if he didn't do something for the colored people in North Louisiana while he was governor, there would be nothing done" (Gallot 37). On July 16, 1928, Governor Huey P. Long signed Act Number 160, Senate Bill Number 227, making Lincoln Parish Training School a state school. The school was renamed Louisiana Negro Normal and Industrial Institute. Finally, the small rural school in North Louisiana that had opened twenty-seven years earlier took its place among the five existing state institutions of higher education (Gallot 40).

Charles P. Adams' tenure as President of Louisiana Negro Normal and Industrial Institute culminated at the end of the school term in 1936. Adams' belief in God's guidance through those thirty-five turbulent, but progressive years is evidenced in his autobiography. He states, "the Black race should not worry about adverse conditions, or become discouraged in our

endeavors, because if it is in God's plan, it will be successful" (51). When Ralph Waldo Emerson Jones was hired as the second president of Grambling the summer of 1936, Adams confirmed that it was in God's plan, and that he would succeed.

Ralph Waldo Emerson Jones was born August 6, 1905 in Lake Charles, Louisiana to John Sebastian and Maria Morrison Jones, both college graduates and educators. Jones completed his high school and college education at Southern University where his father served as the school's first Dean. His first, but short teaching position originated at Lampton College, a small private school in Alexandria, Louisiana. Jones left before the end of the school year because he did not receive the salary that was promised to him (Gallot 60). When Adams learned of Jones' short tenure at the school, he immediately contacted his father to offer him a job. Adams hired Jones without any recommendations, because "he was in the creative plan of the Almighty God with this school in mind" (Adams 51).

Adams assigned Jones to teach biology, chemistry, physics, and math. Additionally, he was to coach football, baseball, and form a band. While Jones performed his varied assignments, his tenure was interrupted when he was awarded a scholarship from the General Education Board to attend Columbia University in New York. He completed his studies and graduated with the Master of Arts in Mathematics Education.

When Jones assumed the presidency of Grambling in 1936, he inherited an institution composed of three wooden buildings, a student enrollment of one hundred and twenty, and seventeen faculty members. The legislative budget was twenty-four thousand and forty dollars, of which twenty thousand dollars came from state funds and four thousand and forty dollars from the federal government (Gallot 61). The school was struggling to survive, and it was in Jones' plan that it would survive.



Jones soon became a well-known college administrator throughout the state, and everyone began to call him “Prez.” He established amiable relationships with the White community and businessmen of nearby Ruston. Jones was a pioneer who led a crusade for racial tolerance even before it became federal law (Graham 2002). In 1936 when Jones assumed the presidency, he knew he had three choices: become just another Black college offering only industrial education, come up with a unique program, or just simply die out. Dying out was not on Jones’ agenda; his vision for the school was teacher education, and he was determined to fulfill that vision.

Jones and his dedicated faculty of seventeen, A. C. Lewis, State Agent for Negro Education, and his assistant, C. L. Barrow devised a plan for the school’s survival. The plan was a program for training rural Black teachers. The program, which was partially funded by the Jeanes Fund, became known as the “Louisiana Plan” or “A Venture in Rural-Teacher Education” which continued from 1936 to 1942. The program was designed to upgrade the education of Black children and offer teachers assistance, as well as improve the living standards of thousands throughout the state (Grambling Catalog 2000).

A wealthy Philadelphia Quaker philanthropist, Miss Anna T. Jeanes, established the Jeanes Fund, through which the program was partially funded, in 1907. The fund was solely for the purpose of the maintenance and assistance of rural communities or county schools under the direction of county supervisors. The Jeanes Teachers’ purpose was to promote education among Black parents, improve relationships between schools and other social institutions in the community, especially the churches, raise money for acquiring sites and constructing schools and provide instruction in sanitation, gardening, canning, sewing and good housekeeping (Interview Audry Harrington August 2001). Jeanes teachers served as liaisons between Black schoolteachers, community supporters, and school officials. Whatever skills were taught, these

teachers found valuable information and creative methods to assist in the development of the teacher education curriculum (Grambling Chamber of Commerce Bulletin 1997).

The main features of Grambling's program, "A Venture in Rural Teacher Education were: (1) the close coordination of teacher education with the state, parish and federal agencies of health, agriculture, and home economics; (2) apprentice teaching; (3) field service; (4) curriculum laboratory; (5) coordination of the Jeanes teachers with college program; (6) the summer school; (7) the instructional part of the program; and (8) follow-up of the graduates. In order to implement the plan, six field centers were organized at Black high schools in the state to offer one year of post high school graduate teacher training (Gallot 60-61). In a 2002 interview, Dr. Sandle confirmed that all students pursuing a degree in education were required to take a speech course.

The school did not publish a catalog until 1946, and there is no mention of a Speech and Drama curriculum. The only curriculum listed was General Elementary Teacher Education. However, the Dramatics Club was listed as serving a dual role; first it afforded wholesome recreation for the community, and secondly, the community theatre project provided opportunities for students, school personnel, and residents of the community to participate in play production and performance (Wade 20).

President Jones described the school's widely recognized project that made headlines in numerous newspapers in these words:

With a crop of incomparably dedicated teachers and others who became imbued with what is now known everywhere as the 'Grambling Spirit,' we set upon a course of establishing a unique program. We embarked upon a special program of rural teacher education. (Gallot 62)

That unique program blossomed, and the school began to flourish academically. Jones' philosophy of "Knowledge for use and knowledge in use" (Lockhart 2000) certainly sustained the schools' spirit. Beginning with the fall semester of 1939, the institution added a third year of college work to the existing two years, which allowed it to award teaching certificates. A four-year program was inaugurated in 1940, and the first Bachelor of Science degree in Elementary Education was awarded to sixty-three graduates in 1944.

As the enrollment grew, the school was constantly being referred to as "Grambling." The legal name however, was still Louisiana Negro Normal and Industrial Institute. In 1946, Jones decided to request a name change for the school and appeared before the Louisiana Legislature during its regular session. Standing before the all-White legislature, "Prez" demonstrated his oratorical skill explaining how the school's program and curriculum had changed in the last ten years. When it appeared no one was listening to his appeal, he then changed to a more jovial manner when he explained:

...the name is too long, when we are playing football and the other team has the ball on our five yard line, the other team has already scored by the time our cheerleaders can say, "hold that line, Louisiana Negro Normal and Industrial Institute." (Gallot 83)

Everyone in attendance enjoyed a long, hardy laugh and the bill passed. The official name of the institution became Grambling College of Louisiana. The Governor signed the bill, Act Number 33 on July 4, 1946 (Wade 16).

The Louisiana State Board of Education granted the college permission to implement high school teachers' training in 1948, and the first secondary teachers graduated in 1953. Also, on August 7, 1953, the State Board of Education authorized the institution to provide preliminary training for the study of medicine, law and dentistry (Andrews 10). During the 1958-1959

school year, the Liberal Arts program was established and the school was reorganized into three divisions: Applied Sciences and Technology, Education and Liberal Arts.

The reorganizations enabled the college to move from a single purpose institution of teacher education, to a multipurpose college with university status. In 1963, the Division of General Arts and Education was changed to Colleges of Business and Applied Programs, Education and Arts and Sciences, respectively. In 1965, Grambling College was granted full accreditation by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, and the Louisiana State Department of Education.

On May 16, 1974 the Louisiana State Board approved the school's name change to Grambling State University during the legislative session as House Bill Number 35 (Gallot 117). The academic programs continued to grow with the approval of the Graduate School program in Early Childhood and Elementary Education in February 1973, and the first graduate courses were offered during the summer session of that year.

When Prez Jones retired in 1977 after fifty-one years of outstanding service at Grambling, forty-one years as president, the school's visible improvements showcased forty-four brick buildings on a three hundred and eighty-two acre campus with a net worth of over forty million dollars. Student enrollment had grown to four thousand-two hundred, with a faculty of four hundred well-qualified instructors. From its humble and unique beginnings in 1901, through the celebration of the centennial in 2001, Grambling State University continues to expand its academic and residential facilities. The university is the most geographically diverse institution in the state of Louisiana with students enrolled from all sixty-four parishes, forty-one states and seventy-four foreign countries (Andrews 16). The campus has over fifty-seven permanent

buildings, a five-mile nature trail, outdoor study pavilion, and a number of ponds for fisheries study research.

Grambling State University takes pride in the strength of its varied degree programs. The school addresses the basic skills needed by their students, and now offers the following degrees: Associate in Arts and Science, Bachelor in Arts, Science, Nursing, and Public Administration, Master of Arts and Science, Master of Arts in Teaching, Master of Public Administration, Master of Science in Nursing, and Master of Social Work, and the Doctor of Education (Grambling Catalogue 2000).

Prez's philosophy, "Take what you have and make what you want," was the driving force behind many success stories at Grambling. In the next chapter, Floyd Leslie Sandle begins his educational journey in the public schools of Magnolia, Mississippi, a trek that ultimately leads him to Grambling, Louisiana. It is here that I will attempt to show Dr. Sandles' contribution to the development of Black Educational Theatre, which is the topic of this dissertation.



Ralph Waldo Emerson Jones  
Second President of Grambling State University

## CHAPTER TWO

### RANDOLPH EDMONDS AND THE TRAINING OF FLOYD LESLIE SANDLE

“There is no state in the union, hardly any spot of like size on the globe, where the man of color has lived so intensely, made so much progress, been of such historical importance and yet about whom so comparatively little is known.”

Alice Dunbar-Nelson  
*People of Color in Louisiana*

His forty years as teacher, administrator, playwright, and director, have made Floyd Leslie Sandle a Living Treasure in the eyes of those who knew him. With his intellectual tone and teary eyes, he shared the following with a Freshman Class at Grambling State University in 1990:

A whole lot of Black people are just plain tired of feeling down and depressed about matters of race, and are ready to try to reverse that self-defeating attitude. But if we keep telling ourselves that things are rotten and we are not going to get any better, then our expectations will not be met. Should we finally get bored with knocking ourselves down and letting others succeed at knocking us down; should we pick up the tools available to us and go to work, there's a chance, a good one, that things will change and for the better. (Sandle *A Memoir* xxvii)

Sandle's untiring efforts to build a state certified theatre department at Grambling State University, certainly mirror those words. Despite difficulties, obstacles, and limitations during his quest, he succeeded and changed things for the better.

Born on July 4, 1913 in Magnolia, Mississippi, Floyd Leslie Sandle was the second child and son of Leslie and Essie Samantha (Hampton). Sandle's parents were aware of the economic and educational disparities for Blacks in Magnolia, therefore they worked diligently in order to

provide for their sons. The Sandles owned their white framed three-bedroom house and land, and Leslie established and operated a small pressing shop.

According to Vernon Lane Wharton's *The Negro in Mississippi 1865-1890*, during the Reconstruction Era a number of the more ambitious Blacks managed to avoid being drawn into the wage system or the poverty of the unpredictable agricultural life. Like Sandle's parents, many established themselves as independent entrepreneurs in various mechanical and commercial businesses (128). Sandle's maternal grandparents Reverend Jeff and Maggie Hampton were well respected in the Magnolia Black community. They had nine children and owned land and a large farm five miles south of Magnolia. After Sandle's mother died when he was about four years old, he moved in with his grandparents and they raised him along with their youngest son Henry (Sandle interview 2000).

Sandle learned valuable life lessons from his father and grandparents regarding perseverance, work ethics and most importantly the value of an education. It was those lessons that charted his course to "stay focused" which became his philosophy in life. When Reverend Hampton died, he left eighty acres of land to be divided equally among his children, and the house and farm in Magnolia was left to his wife.

Magnolia, Mississippi is located in Pike County, in the southwest section of the state. Nicknamed the "Magnolia State," Mississippi is bordered on the north by Tennessee, on the east by Alabama, on the south by the Gulf of Mexico, and on the west by Arkansas and Louisiana. The schools in Magnolia were segregated; education was separate but never equal. The school system in Mississippi was established by the state constitution in 1869. The state set up a board of education and provided that every child would receive free education for four months each year. The state however, supported education for its White children but did not feel required to



support the Black student population. In 1900, Blacks comprised 60 percent of the state's school age children, but received only nineteen percent of the state's school funds (McMillen 73).

James K. Vardman, governor of Mississippi from 1904-1908, echoed the state's position on educating Blacks:

In educating the Negro we implant in him all manner of aspirations and ambitions which we then refuse to allow him to gratify. It would be impossible for a Negro in Mississippi to be elected as much as a justice of the peace... Yet people talk about elevating the race by education! It is not only folly, but also it comes pretty nearly being criminal folly. The Negro isn't permitted to advance and their education only spoils a good field hand and make a shyster lawyer or a fourth-rate teacher. It is money thrown away. (72)

In February 1918, Black educators in Mississippi issued the following appeal to the state legislature:

We cannot understand by what process of reasoning that you can conclude that [it] is humane, just or reasonable to take the common funds of all and use it to the glory of your children and leave ours in ignorance, squalor and shame. The Negro has been silent, gentlemen but not asleep to these gross neglects, for these facts are too patent, even to the most obtuse. (74)

Despite little funding and the state's gloomy outlook on providing educational facilities for Blacks, the Magnolia Colored School opened in 1910. It was a two-story building located on the east side of Highway 51 in Magnolia. The building had previously been used as a boys' dormitory, formerly a part of the Mississippi-Louisiana Normal and Industrial Institute, which was a private school. In an effort to maximize the space to accommodate the grade levels and students, the inside walls of the building were removed and converted into two classrooms downstairs, and a classroom-combination auditorium on the second floor. "The entire building

was a wind and fire hazard, but it was the only means of educating Blacks during that time” (Interview Audry Harrington, August 2001).

The Black parents were pleased that they now had an educational facility for their children; nevertheless, they still wanted better facilities and equipment. The parents organized a community action group, and with the diligent work of the newly appointed principal, Mrs. Eva Gordon, the group organized a fundraising campaign in order to build a modern school for the children of Magnolia. Mrs. Gordon knew it would be impossible to build a school on fundraisers alone, so she sought help from the Julius Rosenwald Fund.

The Rosenwald Fund was named for millionaire Julius Rosenwald, CEO of Sears, Roebuck and Company. In 1912, he teamed with Booker T. Washington, the country’s preeminent Black educator, on an innovative program to improve education for Blacks in the rural south. Over the next twenty years, the Rosenwald Fund used a pioneering system of matching grants to help construct more than five thousand three hundred school buildings in fifteen Southern and Southwestern states (National Trust for Historic Preservation 2003). Traditionally, the buildings held a special place in the community because schools and churches were the only public places where Blacks could meet in the rural South before desegregation.

Through correspondence, Mrs. Gordon learned that owning land was the main stipulation in securing a grant from the Rosenwald Fund. With the assistance of Sandle’s grandparents, Rev. and Mrs. Hampton, and other residents of the community, Mrs. Gordon negotiated the purchase of a tract of land for one thousand dollars from E.W. Reid, and within two months, construction began on the school. On January 1, 1921, Pike County Training School officially opened for the first day of school (Interview Audry Harrington August 2001). The residents of this small

community united in an effort to provide their children with a modern, secure educational facility conducive to learning.

The African proverb, “It takes a village to raise a child” was evidenced by the united efforts of the parents, school board, local churches and residents of Magnolia’s Black community. One resident who exemplified this proverb was Mr. Magee, owner of the local meat market. Sandle remembered him as “a powerful three hundred pound man; brown skinned, and looked every bit the butcher he was” (Sandle *A Memoir* 260).

Audry Harrington long time Magnolia resident, remembers Mr. Magee as an after school teacher, challenging any child who passed his store with a math question, encouraging them to be analytical. Sandle recalls that Mr. Magee was the man who filled a tremendous gap in his comprehension of math. The “gap,” as Sandle explained was caused by the inconsiderable amount of class time allotted to math by his overextended teacher (Sandle interview 2002). Sandle was referencing Mr. L.S. Alexander, his math teacher, who also taught science, coached football and was the schools’ principal. Multi-task responsibilities were not uncommon in Black schools during that time. When Sandle graduated from Pike County Training School in 1933, Mississippi’s school expenditures per Black student was \$ 5.94, compared to \$ 31.33 per White student. The average comparable figures for thirteen southern and border-states were \$12.57 to \$44.32 (McMillen 73). Sandle understood that math.

Sandle developed an interest in drama during his junior year at Pike County High School when he was given the lead roles in several school plays. Impressed with Sandle’s oral and literary skills, his English teachers Mrs. Watkins and Mrs. Evans often selected him to represent the school at local literary rallies and also on the weekly assembly programs. With encouragement from his grandmother, his teachers and his personal interest in drama, Sandle

selected Dillard University in New Orleans to pursue a degree in Drama and English after graduation.

Dillard University was established in 1930 with its first unit, the Flint-Goodridge Hospital. The hospital had opened February 1, 1932 on Louisiana Avenue. The other college units were completed during the summer of 1935 on Gentilly Road, the original site selected by the American Missionary Association. During this historical time, its parent institutions, New Orleans University (founded by the Freedman's Aid Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church) and Straight College (founded by the American Missionary Society of the Congregationalist Church) consolidated to create Dillard. As such, the founding of Dillard University symbolized the fruition of a long tradition of interracial coalition built on the generous philanthropy of White Americans and the extraordinary determination of Black Americans to realize the promises of Reconstruction and the hopes and dreams of a people.

Dillard University's charter, like those of Straight College and New Orleans University, called for the implementation of a coeducational, interracial school, serving a predominately Black student body and adhering to Christian principles and values. As Louisiana's public school facilities for Blacks gradually improved, Dillard University concentrated exclusively on higher education. Dillard offered a traditional liberal arts curriculum rather than nonprofessional, vocational training in order to compete with famous historically Black institutions such as Fisk, Howard, and Atlanta University (Bernard 10).

Sandle studied drama under the tutelage of Dr. Sheppard Randolph Edmonds (1900-83) who was director of theatre at Dillard. Recognized as the Dean of Black Educational Theatre, Edmonds became a practitioner in the theatre as a result of his research and interest in teaching. His teaching career spanned forty years at three institutions: Morgan College, 1929-34; Dillard

University, 1935-47; and Florida A&M University, 1947-69, where he established a little theatre movement at Black colleges and universities.

### **Edmonds and the Black Little Theatre**

The Little Theatre Movement in America began the first decade of the twentieth century and was a reaction to increasing commercialism in the theatre. It was a revolt against the commercial domination of theatre (Simmons 30). Theatre historian Oscar Brockett notes, “Not until around 1915 did the United States become aware of artistic innovations that had long been underway in the European theatre. This awareness came about through non-professional groups. Around 1912 several “little theatres” were established in emulation of the independent theatres in Europe (626).

The Negro Little Theatre Movement, according to Edmonds, had its beginning in minstrel shows, dramatic readings, plays for entertainment and other forms of recreational dramatics (Simmons 31). With the increasingly large number of Black professional actors, the Negro Little Theatre Movement provided these artists with an opportunity to produce plays and other theatrical forms of entertainment by, for and about themselves. According to Randolph Edmonds:

Professional theatre began to decline and theatre began to evolve in smaller communities and educational institutions. It is recorded that in these colleges, theatre began slowly. But after World War I, two developments outside the educational picture furnished impetus to the school theatre: 1) Negro Little Theatre groups in larger cities gained recognition; and 2) prominent dramatists turned out widely acclaimed and commercially successful plays which presented Negro life and problems sympathetically. (18)

W.E.B. DuBois founding editor of the NAACP *Crisis* Magazine surmised that a Black drama must be built from scratch, by Blacks for a Black theatre. DuBois conceived a pageant that

presented the history of the Black race in dramatic form. His pageant, *The Star of Ethiopia* premiered October 22, 1913 at Twelfth Regiment Armory in New York City. Through the *Crisis* he founded Krigwa (Crisis Guild of Writers and Artists), and fostered a Little Theatre company, the Krigwa Players. In a 1926 *Crisis* article, DuBois included a now frequently quoted manifesto:

The plays of a Negro theatre must be: 1. *About us*. That is, they must have plots which reveal Negro life as it is. 2. *By us*. That is, they must be written by Negro authors who understand from birth and continual association just what it means to be a Negro today. 3. *For us*. That is, the theatre must cater primarily to Negro audiences and be supported and sustained by their entertainment and approval. 4. *Near us*. The theatre must be in a Negro neighborhood near the mass of ordinary Negro people. (Hatch 14)

Many Black colleges followed DuBois' lead and throughout the 1920s presented dozens of pageants such as: *The Masque of Colored America*, *Pageant of Progress in Chicago*, *Culture of Color*, and *The Milestone of the Malice* and numerous others. By 1925, it was estimated that over 3,000 amateur groups had built raised platforms for stages and presented one-act plays that seldom required more than a single set (Bean 154).

With few Blacks in educational theatre during this movement, Randolph Edmonds was awarded a Rockefeller Grant in 1933 to study at Yale Drama School, and in 1935 he received The Julius Rosenwald Foundation Fellowship to make an observational study of amateur drama organizations in England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales. Additionally, he studied the production methods of The Abbey Theatre in Dublin (NADSA Program).

Edmonds' vision for a collegiate drama association originated in 1930 with the establishment of the Negro Intercollegiate Dramatic Association (NIDA). The aims of NIDA were to increase interest in intercollegiate dramatics, develop aesthetic and arts appreciation for the dramatic arts,

use dramatic clubs as laboratories for teaching and studying drama to develop Black Folk material, and establish friendship between colleges (Myles 8).

Since NIDA's inception, numerous playwrights, actors, and educators have emerged from its ranks under great teachers like Edmonds. His impact on dramatic associations and educational theatre is evidenced by the now sixty-eight year old National Association of Dramatic and Speech Arts (NADSA), recognized as the oldest surviving theatre organization in the country. The efforts of one man, Sheppard Randolph Edmonds provided the stimulus for the organization of Black Dramatic Associations in America (Williams 2).

Meanwhile, American society was about to experience the greatest decline in economic history when the stock market crashed in 1929 and plunged this country into a deep depression. Black people were the hardest hit, and the theatre was the cultural field that had the greatest trouble surviving. In his book, *Black Drama*, Loften Mitchell vividly describes the early depression:

Joblessness reigned in the nineteen thirties. Once proud men stood on 125<sup>th</sup> Street with signs on their coat lapels, reading: Unemployed. Please buy apples." But few people had money to buy even an apple. Families who could not pay their rent saw their furnishings put out on sidewalks. Poverty forced many families to move eighteen times within nine years. (93)

The Great Depression caused the federal government to initiate programs of economic relief. The trends that had guided the causes of development for the advancement of Blacks in the theatre continued under financial stresses. As the Depression wore on, it was estimated that more theatres closed around the country between 1935 and 1940 than ever before. Of course, the Black artist was even harder hit. Finally, the picture changed when President Franklin Delano Roosevelt and his wife Eleanor became concerned about the massive number of unemployed and the plight of the theatre. To combat this, they developed the Work Projects Administration

(WPA), a program that would put people back to work. The WPA programs ranged from ditch digging to the cultural fields (Smith 53). Hallie Flanagan, a former professor of drama from Vassar was appointed director of the program.

The WPA theatrical program was called the Federal Theatre Project. The aim of the Federal Theatre Project was to employ theatre workers who were on public relief in theatre-related jobs at salaries averaging twenty-four dollars per week. Many Black artists were assigned to the Federal Negro Theatre, The Negro Youth Unit, The African Dance Unit, and the Lafayette Theatre. These special units gave Black actors an opportunity to express and interpret their own culture (Haskins 53). The Federal Theatre Project proved to be one of the most important developments in the history of Black American theatre.

Members from the Federal Theatre Project worked with NADSA and provided the membership with trained theatre personnel. NADSA then turned their attention to placing theatre in the college curricula by removing it from departments of English where untrained faculty were often designated to direct plays. The membership recommended that drama be integrated with other speech art courses such as debate, public speaking, verse reading, and oratorical contest (Sandle interview 2001). It was their hope to have separate departments of Speech and Theatre with their own budget and faculty.

### **Black Educational Theatre**

During the 1930s, Black theatres established by and for the Black community continued to thrive in the Little Theatre Movement. As the Little Theatre Movement spread across America, amateur drama groups formed, met, produced, and disbanded. Schools, lodges, churches, and “Y’s” provided platforms for stages and “put on” plays (Hatch 15). When Floyd Sandle matriculated to Dillard University in 1934, Edmond’s Inter-Collegiate Drama Association (IDA)



was in its fourth year of promoting dramatic arts at southern Black colleges. According to the 1935 Dillard Catalogue, the theatre program is described as a program in theory and in practice; an art form through which the soul of a national and international culture is revealed. Edmonds meticulously designed the curriculum at Dillard to highlight the mission of the school. He believed that the greatest educational problem of the Black race could be solved by training the imagination, tastes, emotions and the whole cultural side of man apace with his scientific and intellectual growth (Williams 125). He organized the Drama Department in such a manner that it became a service to the community and the state. Course offerings included Community and Religious Drama, Playwriting, Lighting and Costuming, Play Production, Play Directing, Public Speaking, Argumentation and Debate, and the Negro in the Western World Theatre. The number of Speech and Drama majors began at six and had increased to twenty-five by the time Edmonds left Dillard in 1949.

During his second semester as a student at Dillard University, Sandle joined the Dillard Players Guild, one of the most recognized organizations on campus. In the first issue of the Dillard Players Guild Magazine, James Brown, the Guild's president wrote,

Dillard University gives all indications of becoming one of the cultural centers of Negro Education in the South...It is not difficult to believe that in every student here there is an abundance of potential appreciation for the intrinsic value represented in the university's cultural activities.  
(Williams 138)

It would appear that Sandle embraced this vision and began a passionate pursuit of this cultural phenomenon. The Guild traveled extensively, participating in local and out of state festivals. He also joined the choir, in an effort to learn to read music. He had acquired a taste for music at an early age and remembered his grandmother's collection of stringed instruments. Although she had no musical training, "she would hum sounds of the various instruments and

explain the differences in their sound due to their structure” (Sandle interview July 2002).

Wanda, Sandle’s daughter, confirms her father’s love for music, “he would hum and whistle songs throughout the house every morning” (Interview July 2002).

After graduating from Dillard University in May of 1937, Sandle’s professional career began at Tangipahoa Parish Training School, (now Dillon High School) in Kentwood, Louisiana. During his one year tenure as a Science teacher, he presented three one-act plays and one three-act play. Sandle’s artistic venture was a refreshing change for the school, and received positive feedback from the administration, faculty and the Kentwood community. The principal told Sandle that his plays made the audience realize theatre was more than entertainment, that it was a lesson, a message for everyone (Sandle interview May 2000). The Roman writer Horace defined the function of theatre as to teach and to please. At times, the educational potential of theatre has been considered its most important asset, particularly as a way of passing on a society’s rules of behavior (Wainscott 8).

A message of hope was revealed to the residents of this small town through the productions. Sandle wanted the community to know that if they were poor in some ways, they were rich in stories. He selected plays with messages that instilled a sense of pride, and that brought old and young, educated and uneducated residents together in a way that had not been seen before. Sandle’s directorial debut gave the Kentwood community a taste of live theatre. The presentation of that satisfying morsel revealed to Sandle that theatre was a powerful tool, an instrument that could be used to promote social change.

Through the years, theatre has been used as a vehicle to highlight the need for social change. It is maybe the most useful and powerful medium for building awareness. Increasingly since the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century, theatre has been availed of by advocates of progressive reform and revolution

according to H.D. Flowers (Interview 2003). Reform of perception is what Sandle worked tirelessly to achieve. He wanted to use theatre as a tool to dispel the public's stereotyped image of Blacks by eliminating the comic buffoon and the happy-go-lucky carefree slave type characters. It was Sandle's desire to create the kind of theatre that would address the needs and hopes of Blacks; he wanted audiences to see a realistic portrayal of Blacks. (Sandle *A Memoir* 247)

Theatre can help us rediscover ourselves through the eyes of others, and to examine the political, cultural and economic issues that we confront in our communities. Thus, we can confirm that theatre becomes a mirror, one that reflects us. Sandle's vision mirrored that of his mentor, Dr. Sheppard Randolph Edmonds. He taught his students, as Edmonds had taught him that theatre is more than entertainment, it is a form of knowledge, and it was his belief that theatre could be used to transform society. But first the artist needed to be trained. It was Edmonds' contention that "the hope of the genuine Negro theatre is to be found in the organizational approach of Negro Colleges." This was the mission of the National Association of Dramatic and Speech Arts, (NADSA) the organization Edmonds founded in 1936 (Interview Allen Williams 2003). That it survives today is a testament to Edmond's vision.

### **The Evolution of NADSA**

During the twenties and thirties, dramatic organizations mushroomed in colleges for Negroes. These dramatic clubs prepared the way for the gradual inclusion of theatre courses in the curriculum.

Floyd L. Sandle

*The Negro in The American Educational Theatre*

In 1930, while on the faculty at Morgan College, Edmonds contacted representatives from Howard University, Hampton Institute, Virginia Union, and Virginia State to establish The

Negro Intercollegiate Dramatic Association (NIDA). Initially, the NIDA was faculty inspired, but as it developed, students became an integral part of the association (Myles 11). Edmonds felt there was a need for dramatic directors to meet periodically to discuss the recognition of dramatics in the curricula, and the need to raise the standard of theatre in schools and colleges

Edmonds knew that athletics were the beneficiaries of their supporters, and of the conferences that provided recognition to the ranks of the sport. Therefore, he reasoned that if theatre was to be part of the curricula, it too must gain respect for its members; and this respect could likewise be engendered and fostered through conferences that would attract attention to the importance of dramatic activities (Flowers 97).

The NIDA elected Edmonds president, an office he retained for five years. It was under his leadership that the organization established six purposes in their charter:

1. To increase the interest in intercollegiate dramatics.
2. To use dramatic clubs as laboratories for teaching and studying drama.
3. To develop Negro folk materials.
4. To develop aesthetic and artistic appreciation for the dramatic art.
5. To train persons for cultural service in the community.
6. To establish a bond of good will and friendship between the colleges.

The first task of the association was to increase faculty and student interest in Drama by holding an annual tournament of one-act plays at a different campus each year. However, many of the directors felt that the competition for prizes did not promote “good will and friendship between the colleges” and eventually the tournament was changed to a festival.

The creation of NIDA enhanced communication among schools, and gained recognition for the schools’ dramatic programs. As the association thrived with new recognition, drama on college campuses flourished. Morgan College for example, offered various drama courses, beginning with Greek drama and moving through the stages of modern drama. Also a dramatic

laboratory, the first of its kind, provided students a practicum course where all phases of the theatre could be pursued. Atlanta University's theatre department prospered under the direction of Ann Cook, who later headed the theatre program at Hampton Institute (Williams 238). Three Yale graduates accepted positions to enhance or develop theatre programs at major Black universities: John McInn Ross at Fisk University, Fannin Belcher, at Virginia State College, and Owen Dodson, at Howard University (Myles 15).

When Edmonds accepted a position at Dillard University to develop a theatre program in 1935, the program was established as the first Speech and Drama Department at a Black University (Williams 1). Additionally, Edmonds organized the Dillard University Players Guild, where Floyd Sandle made his stage debut as Ulf in the one-act play, *The God's of the Mountains* (Dillard's Arts Festival Program 1937). Drawing upon his experiences with NIDA, Edmonds assembled another cadre of Black colleges to form the Southern Association of Dramatics and Speech Arts (SADSA). He wrote letters to directors of drama at all eighty-five predominantly Black institutions, inviting them to an organizational meeting, which was held at Dillard University on February 26 and 27, 1936 (Bean 154).

Sixteen colleges responded to Edmond's request, and it was at that meeting that SADSA was born. The charter member schools were Wiley College (Texas), Fisk University (Tennessee), Alcorn College (Mississippi), Alabama State College (Montgomery), LeMoyne College (Tennessee), Tuskegee Institute (Alabama), Winston-Salem (North Carolina), Southern University (Louisiana), Talladega College (Alabama) and Dillard University. Edmonds was elected president, a position he held until 1942 (Sandle *The Negro in The American Educational Theatre* 35).

Edmonds presented the organization's purposes in his opening speech to the directors, "What Can We Expect of the Conference."

1. To get to know each other better.
2. To create favorable public opinion toward our work.
3. To furnish material for scholars to think and write about.
4. To set up educational objectives in the Speech Arts.
5. To attack the solution of speech problems:
  - a. At least one hour per week in most colleges.
  - b. Find the answer to why debating has fallen so low.
  - c. Determine what to do about oratorical contest.
  - d. Determine how to organize verse-speaking choirs and handle dramatic club meetings.
  - e. Determine how we must emphasize the collective effort.
  - f. Work through the organization for contacts.

During that meeting, there was much discussion regarding the need for plays written by Blacks, and directors voiced frustration about the scarcity of scripts. Edmonds pointed out that the association would inspire playwrights to write, "twenty to forty minute plays which should have a strong moral or religious point or deal with a social problem" (Bean 155). It was Edmonds' contention that if plays are really worthwhile, they ought to contain some universal elements. The membership then agreed to promote plays appropriate for presentation during the annual conference.

SADSA's 1936 objectives were different from those of the 1930 NIDA charter. The new goals addressed playwriting:

1. Negro playwrights could write about middle-class life, not always Negro folk drama;
2. Negroes might write about White life as they see it;
3. More experimentation was needed;
4. More plays needed to be written and more needed to go into the wastebasket; and
5. A desirable attitude should be created among Negroes toward Negro life.

SADSA was an extension of the NIDA, and Edmonds wanted to maintain the play exchange concept he originated in 1930, as a means of artistic training. Impatient with what he viewed as the lack of originality and insight in the sparse play offerings, Edmonds produced his own original scripts. He noted, “most of the great playwrights have been closely connected with the stage, and if Black playwrights were to have stages on which to develop their art, they would have to provide their own” (Bean 154). Edmonds’ plays are published in three volumes: *Six Plays for a Negro Theatre*, *Shades and Shadows*, and *The Land of Cotton and Other Plays*.

*The Land of Cotton* is based on Edmonds’ father’s experiences as a sharecropper. Its central theme, the battle against economic and racial oppression, waged with courage and interracial cooperation is certainly worthwhile (Flowers interview 2003). Three of his plays became standards at SADSA and Black college drama festivals: *The Yellow Death*, *Gangsters Over Harlem* and *Nat Turner*. *The Yellow Death* written in 1935 promotes the teaching of Black history. This play illuminates Edmond’s developing concept of the hero. When two privates who are no longer able to stand the agony of nursing dying victims, plan to desert, Tom the hero, persuades them to remain explaining that what they do, will influence how the Black race is regarded. He tells them also, that they must provide models for Black children (Sanders 43). *Gangsters Over Harlem* brings the gangster to Harlem. Popular among little theatre groups, the play is somewhat of a parody. The White gangster stereotypes add an exhilarating element of impersonation. Edmonds’ play *Nat Turner* departs somewhat from the conventional treatment of Black religion in the folk play (Flowers interview 2003).

Edmonds expected to meet the usual objections to the use of dialect in his plays, because he thought the Black audience would be offended by the crude language of the peasant characters. Nonetheless, he included four elements in his plays: worthwhile themes, sharply drawn conflict,

positive characters, and a melodramatic plot. These elements, according to Edmonds, prevent tragedies from being “too revolting in theme, and too subtle in their action and exposition” (Sanders 18). The characters in Edmond’s plays are positive because they have courage and conviction and fight heroically in their losing struggle.

Edmonds, like the early prolific playwright Willis Richardson pleaded for Black plays written by Black authors. In his manifesto, *The Hope of the Negro Drama*, Richardson points out that Black plays should show the soul of its people because they are truly worth showing. Edmonds introduced to the stage a variety of Black characters from all walks of life: educated members of the Black middle class, hard-working and respectable poor Black families, Black soldiers, rebellious slaves, and various historical figures, none of whom had ever been depicted before (Sanders 61). Edmond’s plays demonstrated that Black life could be the subject of serious drama and that not only the pitfalls of stereotype, but also those of race literature could be avoided. Floyd Sandle embraced Edmonds’ concept, and initiated a one-man campaign to develop a separate department of theatre at Grambling, and through theatre, to inaugurate a cultural change in the community. His journey towards that end is the subject of the chapters that follow.





Dr. Sheppard Randolph Edmonds  
Founder of the National Association of Dramatic and Speech Arts

### CHAPTER THREE THE DUSTY ROAD TO CULTURE

When a man starts out to build a world,  
he starts with himself,  
and the faith that is in his heart-the strength there,  
the will to build. First in his heart is the dream,  
then the mind starts seeking a way.  
The eyes see there materials for building;  
see the difficulties too, and the obstacles.  
The hand seeks tools to cut the wood, to till the soil,  
and harness the powers of the waters.  
Then the hand seeks other hands to help,  
a community of hands to help.  
Thus the dream becomes not one man's dream alone,  
but a community dream, belonging to all hands that build.

Langston Hughes  
*Freedom's Plow*

Floyd Sandle vividly remembers the hot dusty ride to the rural community of Grambling in the summer of 1938, and he remembers his initial reaction to the scarce buildings and gloomy atmosphere of the campus. Equipped with a degree in English and Drama from Dillard University, a job for that summer session and a passionate fervor for drama, Sandle settled into his new teaching position and soon gained acceptance on campus and in the community.

Sandle saw things in Grambling as they were, then he envisioned how things could be. In his heart he knew he could bring an artistic, cultural awakening to the residents of this unincorporated town where the only social activities were a few scheduled basketball and football games with high school opponents. It was more than luck when he accepted an invitation to teach for the summer session, a position that became a permanent one the fall semester. Sandle, a religious man, like Charles P. Adams, knew that it was in God's plan for him to make an impact on the lives of the students and residents of the community through

theatre. He wanted to make an impact that would expand their intelligence and open their eyes to the world of poetry, drama and myths.

As a student at Dillard University, Sandle had learned that theatre in theory and in practice is an art form through which the soul of a national and international culture is revealed. He also remembered his initial theatrical experiences at Kentwood High and the principal's powerful statement that theatre was more than entertainment, it was a lesson. Sandle envisioned a cultural change in the Grambling community. He was aware that the residents were not exposed to various levels of culture, and he recognized the opportunity to create a positive change. He knew that theatre could change the way the residents of Grambling viewed themselves, as well as others. It was his vision that through drama he could help uplift and motivate Blacks to develop their minds culturally. Sandle felt certain that this would in fact, enrich relationships as well as educate and stimulate the residents intellectually.

Theatre is a vital aspect of society, a social phenomenon. A play by Randolph Edmonds or August Wilson is an attempt at communication within a society. Sandle believed that we discover ourselves through the eyes of artists and playwrights who help us explore the political, cultural and economic issues that we confront in our communities today. For him theatre was a mirror, one that reflects us as we are and as we could be. The history of drama is the history of the human race; it is the story of man's developing mind (Courtney 133).

Sandle wanted the residents of the community to experience live theatre, so he devised a plan to do just that. The plan was a simple one, stage a play with the summer school faculty as cast, present it to the residents of the community, and solicit support for future productions. At the same time he would push for the addition of drama courses in the curriculum. Sandle observed that there was very little activity on the campus after 2:00 P.M. each day, which made it

convenient for the faculty to rehearse (Sandle *A Memoir* 4). For his first stage endeavor, he selected Randolph Edmonds' one-act play, *Old Man Pete*.

*Old Man Pete* is the story of an old couple from Virginia who moves to Harlem to be with their sophisticated children. Once there, their parent's plantation dialect, uncouth manners, ragged clothing and their commitment to the Sanctified Church service embarrass the children. The couple is crushed by their children's harsh words and impatience with them. Heartbroken, the couple decides to leave. Having sold their farm in Virginia, they are homeless and depart for the south on a cold winter night. The couple finds a park to camp out for the night, falls asleep on a bench, and the next morning a policeman finds them frozen.

This play examines generational conflict, a result of migration. Sandle wanted the audience to see the attempt of the playwright to present an even-handed story. Pete, the central character is a proud old man who feels he can "tongue-whip" his daughter-in-law. The contrast between the generations is balanced, the marital relationship of their son and his wife, differs from the loving, harmonious bond between Pete and Mandy. Dramatically, the play belongs to Pete and Mandy. In the final scene, Harlem is fading in the background as Pete's closing speech paints a vivid picture of death, as "goin' home":

De sky is dark, Mandy; but down in Fuginia de sun is shining.  
Le's git I de sun. (*A brief silence, then he feebly continues.*)  
Wake up, Mandy! Ah heahs de horses neighing and de pigs  
is squeeling. De is hungry, Mandy, Le's go feed de pigs. (60)

Mutual intolerance causes Pete and Mandy's dispossession and death. Their transplanting may have been an error, but human weakness and not historical inevitability made it fatal (Flowers interview 2003). The audience may have been offended by the dialect, as in many of Edmonds' plays nonetheless, in a sense it was therapeutic. Therapeutic because many members of the audience no doubt had been confronted with similar issues that they had not articulated

openly. The stage then, became an outlet for them, one that provided the relief of dealing with personal problems in a community.

The play was presented the last week of summer school and labeled a success by all in attendance. Sandle asked English teachers Bessie Dickerson and Andrew Gaulden to critique the play, which he had directed and in which he had played the title role of Pete. Their consensus was, “It was thought provoking, refreshing, something entertaining at Grambling” (Sandle *A Memoir* 4). Bootlegging plays’ as Sandle referred to his ploy was a way of sneaking in a play each semester until he ultimately convinced the President to add drama courses to the curriculum (Sandle interview May 2001).

Grambling’s faculty and staff advocated good communication skills and viewed theatre as a vehicle to enhance those skills. Sandle theorized that theatre accentuated the biblical proverb, “iron sharpens iron and one man’s conscience sharpens another man’s conscience.” By presenting plays to a community that had not been exposed to various cultural expressions like theatre and art, he forced the residents to take a look at themselves and initiate change in their lives. Theatre allowed a rural farming community to peep over into other cultures and become transformed by that experience.

Theatre did in fact impact the cultural lives of the Grambling residents and those in surrounding communities as well. Historian Mildred Gallot points out in her book, *The History of Grambling State University* that during the infancy of the school’s Speech and Drama curriculum, the two components of theatre performance were 1) emphasis on community drama and 2) the introduction of the Children’s Little Theatre Movement (128). Like Howard University, Sandle wanted his program to receive the kind of recognition that would afford it an

opportunity to flow into the educational theatre mainstream. He knew of the recognition that other schools were receiving regionally and nationally, and he wanted to be a part of it.

The evolution of educational theatre actually began around 1871 at the all-White St. James School of Theatre in New York. During the same time that theatre began to flourish in the dominant culture, similar headway was being made at Black universities (Myles 3). The St. James School of Theatre was founded to train students to be competent in a professional theatre environment. The curriculum offered courses in body movement, voice and diction, dance, make-up and fencing. “As theatre activity began to make a significant headway, people in America became dissatisfied with professional theatre, which opened the door for educational theatre to present itself” (Langely 164).

As a result, a movement to establish an educational theatre for Blacks evolved. Sandle was cognizant that Black audiences wanted to see theatre that projected positive images of life and he was determined to rid the public of the minstrel show concept of the Black actor. Some of the early plays that he staged were: *A Message From Khufu*, *Craig's Wife*, *Out of This World*, and *On Vengeance Height*. These plays provided students with roles other than those of maids and butlers (Sandle interview May 2001). He taught his students that whatever was believable in society was also believable on stage. Stage dramatization of Black life in America continued to focus on a stereotypical view of race, a view both Edmonds and Sandle fought diligently to dispel. They wanted their audiences to see the tragic element of Black life, the struggle and frustration resulting from the conditions of color and race, and the problems between racial groups resulting from social, political, and economic pressures (Myles 4). It was Sandle's hope to have a separate department of Speech and Drama with its own budget and faculty to address these problems on stage.

A Speech and Drama department had long been Floyd Sandle's dream, and he maintained his focus on fulfilling that dream. What kept him focused was the foundation paved by Edmonds, and his grandmother's words of wisdom, "Do what you love to do" (Sandle interview May 2001). Following those memorable words, Sandle labored tirelessly to develop a theatre program following the success of his initial stage production, *Old Man Pete*. When he shared his desire to teach drama courses with his supervisor, E. L. Cole, he received little feedback. "He was all about Science, the school's focus was on training elementary education teachers, and Speech was secondary education, which didn't fit well at all" (Sandle *A Memoir* 6).

During the last week of the summer session, Sandle accepted a permanent teaching position for the fall semester. Sandle admitted that he often pondered which had actually landed him the job, his work as an outstanding science teacher, or the presentation of his play. The duties for his teaching position as assigned by President Jones were to teach General Science and American History, but no Speech or Drama courses were ever mentioned (Sandle interview May 2001).

The fall semester brought new faces and energy to the campus, which lifted the gloomy veil from the rural campus. Sandle taught his courses with vigor each day, all the while he surveyed his classes for potential actors. In the meantime, he organized a high school dramatics club and several college drama organizations in order to maintain student's and community interest in the theatre. The high school dramatics club members consisted of students enrolled at the Laboratory School. The club also served as a laboratory for students interested in learning the craft of directing.

According to Sandle's former student Henry Essex, The Dramatic Workshop Program was interrelated to all divisions of the school. The nucleus of the program was the Workshop Players Guild in which the elementary and high schools served as laboratories (Interview June 2002).

The Guild established a connection among the various groups on campus and served as a type of varsity team for the area of dramatics. The Forensic Club, an intercollegiate debating society, evolved through the Social Science discipline, (Wade 25) and The Children's Little Theatre was organized in 1943 before Sandle's departure for the United States Navy. This was a collaborative venture with the elementary laboratory school. A faculty member who had some theatre training was allowed to direct a performance and assist in the theatre program.

During scheduled rehearsals, Sandle taught the students voice and diction, acting, and play production. All classes, rehearsals and productions were held on the second floor of the auditorium-gymnasium. Sandle described the facility as busy, "The choir was on the east end, drama was on stage behind white sheets that were used for curtains, and basketball practice was held on the main floor" (Sandle interview 2002). This building was used for theatrical productions and classes from 1949 until 1956.

Later a white-framed building was constructed to accommodate theatre productions. The building consisted of four large classrooms, two of which were converted to an auditorium that seated about 100 people. There were two dressing rooms, office space for Sandle and two instructors. There was little financial support for a theatre program, during the 1940s and 1950s, Sandle recalled:

During the early days, some of the proceeds from the door receipts were used to buy make-up kits; some costumes and for building materials for sets. Mostly, the fabrication of these sets grew out of the unique abilities of many of the students to "find" materials about the campus. (Wade 28)

The first play presented by the High School Dramatics Club was *Submerged*, a one-act play about a ship's captain and his crew. This competitive venture was entered in the district festival at Webster High School in Minden, Louisiana in 1938 (Sandle *A Memoir* 9). The district winner



would then compete at the state festival held at Dillard University in New Orleans. This competition marked a milestone for Sandle; it was his first production away from Grambling's campus, and it garnered statewide publicity for his grass roots Speech and Drama program. It was at this competition that the Dramatics Club experienced its first competitive disappointment by losing to Ruston High School. However, Sandle promised his students, faculty and administration that he could, and would, win the next year.

The Laboratory School hosted the 1939 district festival, and entered Edmond's one-act play *Nat Turner*, which placed first in the festival. It was this play that had won Edmonds a fellowship to Yale. The story of the play draws on the best known of the American slave revolts, a portrait of Black heroism, a topic never treated by White writers of Black folk plays (Flowers interview 2003). Nat Turner is guided by vision and voices, obsessed with the desire to free his people. The self-educated Turner planned and organized an armed revolt that resulted in the death of about sixty Whites before his army of slaves was captured. Turner eluded capture for about eight weeks (Sanders 50). The final speech in the play is from Edmond's creation:

Look at the moon comin' back tuh light up de wrol'.  
Hit is big and round and yellow. Hit done dripped out all  
hits blood. Ma hands is full o' blood, too. Will dey ever  
be clean? Was ah wrong, Lawd, tuh fight dat Black man  
mout be free?...Wut is ah gwin tuh do now?...(Shouting  
wildly as he goes out) Sperit ob Gowd! Show me de way!  
Guide me! Lead me! (Edmonds 63)

It was important for Sandle that each of the cast members understood their roles and the lesson of the play. Sandle was a teacher, and through this play he wanted audiences to understand that the purpose of the revolt was to attract the world's attention to slavery and to strengthen the determination of Black people to be free. The all-male cast consisted of Science students, one a 250-pound center on the football team who played the lead role, with the other

cast members from the Grambling community (Sandle *A Memoir* 11). Casting local residents proved to be a good business practice because the community supported the productions financially.

Maintaining the enthusiasm of his students, and the support of the administration, Sandle entered *Nat Turner* in the state competition at Dillard the spring of 1939. The play placed second to Gilbert Academy directed by James Brown, a former Dillard classmate of Sandle's. Sandle was pleased with the recognition his drama group received and with the great strides the school had taken. Beginning with the fall semester of 1939, a third year of college had been added to the existing two years, and progress at the school brought growth to the village of Grambling. An article appeared in the July 30, 1939 *Monroe News Star* highlighting the progress of Grambling:

Located about six miles west of Ruston, Grambling is the seat of the state Normal School for Negroes. Since last December, the State Board of Education and the Public Works Administration practically have rebuilt the Grambling School to the tune of \$400,000. They have built a large classroom building at a cost of \$129,000; a girl's dormitory, \$64,000; gymnasium-auditorium, \$40,000; library building, \$34,000; dining hall, \$36,000; and a new home for the president, the latter being erected with an allotment of \$6,000 which included funds for some additional landscape on the campus. An additional water and sewage-disposal system and \$23,000 for furnishings to equip the new buildings. (Gallot 69)

Sandle continued holding rehearsals with his group night after night, developing their speaking and acting skills, and teaching them the various phases of play production. The first production presented with a mixed cast of high school and college students was Willis Richardson's one-act drama, *The House of Sham*. The play featured two local residents, M. B. Turner and Thelma Williams. Sandle was proud of this production; he said it was "a gem of a

play.” He admired Richardson’s work and the accomplishments he had made in theatre.

Richardson was the first Black playwright to have had a serious (non-musical) drama, *The Chip Woman’s Fortune* produced on Broadway in 1923 (Sanders 23).

*The House of Sham* written in 1929, centers around the Coopers, a middle class Black family who strives to be socially acceptable, by living an extravagant lifestyle on fraudulent business practices and borrowed money. When the truth of their financial situation is revealed, the daughter’s boyfriend breaks off the relationship, however, her cousin remains close to the family despite the unmasking of their pretensions. “A small community with friendly, caring, people,” is how Sandle described the town of Grambling. His goal was to share with this friendly, caring audience that through theatre, every phase of life may be depicted on stage. The play gave the audience a glimpse of a different setting, a Black bourgeoisie family caught in a catastrophe brought on by their own dishonest dealings.

The community anxiously awaited Sandle’s presentation of Randolph Edmond’s *Breeders* in 1940. They packed the auditorium to see this one-act play that they heard contained murder, and demeaning and embarrassing language. They wondered why Sandle would select such a play. In the production the audience witnessed the murder of David, a plantation worker in love with Ruth, a beautiful young girl who has been given to Salem, another worker, to breed for the master’s plantation. Rather than accept the man that had been chosen for her, Ruth poisons herself. When John the Over-Seer takes Salem to Mammy’s house for her daughter Ruth, Salem is boastful of the arrangement, and Ruth is angry.

Salem: ‘Taint’s so bad being married tuh me, Ruth. Marse George done give me ten wives now, an’ Ah ‘se been able to make dem all satisfied. An’ dey growed tuh lak me, too.

Ruth: (*With fire*) Listen, Salem, yuh knows Ah love David. Go home, an’ tell Marse George in de mawing dat Ah’s too little tuh to be yo’ wife.

Salem: Ah'se gwine tuh make yuh love me. Ah ain't gwine give up nothing dat's mine tuh no David.

Ruth: But Ah done tole yuh, Ah kain't belong tuh yuh!

Salem: Ah ain't nevah 'lowed none de wimmens Marse George give tuh me, tuh talk back tuh me. Ah don't want tuh git rough, so yuh'd better watch out how yuh talk tuh me. (61)

David enters the house and confronts Salem with a razor, they struggle, and Salem takes the razor from David and cuts his throat. Ruth and Mammy frantically attempt to stop the bleeding by applying grease to the cut. Salem demands Ruth stop crying over the dead man, because she belongs to him now. As Salem leaves the house to get a shovel to bury David, he stares at mother and daughter embracing David's limp, bloodied body.

Ruth: Ah ain't gwine tuh live wid him. Ah'd die first.

Mammy: Hisch, gal. Dere ain't nothing else yuh can do. In dis world Black women ain't nothing but breeders, tuh have chilluns fuh de white folks tuh sell down de river lak dey do horses and cows.

Ruth: *(Taking bag from her breast)* Ah ain't gwine tuh live wid him. Ah don't care whut happen, Ah ain't gwine tuh be no breeder.

Mammy: Heah dey come tuh git David, I kin hur tuh dogs. 'Taint no way tuh git outen her, dey gone git yuh to.

Ruth: Yes, dere is a way out to, Dey can take me wid David!  
*(She swallows the poison in the bag, looks about wildly, coughs, and shudders in agonizing pain. She calls out in agony.)* Mammy! Mammy! Ah'se burning up on de insides. Pray fuh me. Tell Gawd take kere of me 'til Ah gits whar David's at.

Mammy: *(Rubbing her face)* He'll always look artery uh, Ruth. Yuh's always been a good gal. (64)

Sandle expected some negative feedback from the community about this production. The audience was uncomfortable with the dialect because traditionally it provided humor in minstrel

shows and marked the Black stage comic. However, in his own ingenious way, Sandle selected the play to teach the audience a lesson about choices. Throughout the play, Edmonds describes Mammy as grieving deeply, inwardly. Sometimes this inward grief flares out with more force than at other times, but it is always there, eating at her like cancer. That image is made vivid through Ruth's dying agony, her insides literally consumed with the poison she has taken.

It is revealed to the audience that the younger generation rejects the passive suffering accepted by the older generation, although the price of choosing is equally high (Flowers interview 2003).

Sandle was proud of the strides he had made in developing a Speech and Drama program and equally as proud of Miss Marie Johnson, the Home Economics instructor who had assisted him since 1938. Miss Johnson designed and tailored costumes, served refreshments during rehearsal, and taught the ladies how to usher during productions. "She was my friend, my biggest fan, through the good and the bad, she was there for me" (Sandle interview 2002). On July 11, 1941 in Baton Rouge, Sandle married his best friend and colleague, Marie Synetta Johnson. Two weeks after his marriage, he enrolled at the University of Chicago for six weeks to begin work on the Master of Arts Degree. He attended the summer sessions of 1942 and 1943.

In an effort to build and recruit students for his drama program, Sandle toured his plays to high schools in Monroe, Winnfield, Minden, Jonesboro, Bernice, Arcadia, Shreveport and Natchitoches. By the end of 1941, the school's enrollment had increased to a record 888 students (Sandle *A Memoir* 18). President Jones acknowledged Sandle as playing a major role in recruiting students with his touring productions.

As audiences throughout the North Louisiana hillsides marveled at the level of professional performances presented by the Grambling Workshopers, Sandle continued his relentless drive in building his program. *Death Takes A Holiday* by Albeto Casella was the first three-act play he

directed in the school's auditorium-gymnasium during the fall semester of 1941. This intriguing play follows the path of Death when he decides to take a holiday from his usual business to see what it is like to be a mortal. He enjoys life for three days and then falls in love (Flowers interview 2003). Prior to this production, only one-act plays had been presented due in part to the inferior facilities. Nonetheless, Sandle used those facilities to train students, teach classes, present one-act productions, while building his theatre program.

The school was flourishing, growing academically, financially and visibly under Prez Jones' leadership. Minutes from the January 3, 1941 Louisiana Qualifications Committee meeting regarding Jones' leadership ability, stated:

...The president's cooperation with the state department has been excellent. The institution has won prominence for the system of teacher training which places prospective teachers in rural schools. (Gallot 77)

Envisioning the future growth of his small school, Jones knew that other southern colleges had become successful due in part to their athletic program, specifically football. Jones had been the lone coach and athletic director since Charles P. Adams hired him in 1926. In order for the football program to become competitive, Jones needed to hire a qualified football coach, and eliminate the high school teams on the schedule. When Prez Jones advertised for a football coach, twenty-two year old Eddie Gay Robinson interviewed for the job and was hired. Robinson was a recent graduate of Leland College in Baker, and a Little- All-American quarterback who was at the time employed at the Kamback-Burkett Feed Mill in Baton Rouge (Lockhart 3).

As Coach Robinson began to build a reputable football program, gloom surfaced; Pearl Harbor was attacked on December 7, 1941. The football team finished their first season under Robinson with a disappointing 3-5 record. However, with Robinson's determination, energy,

and knowledge of the game, his second season was outstanding. Robinson's Tigers won every game, and finished the season un-scored on as well. This was a remarkable season due to the fact that there were only sixty-seven men enrolled during that year, and thirty of them played football (Gallot).

The war basically halted all activities on campus in 1942, and now both Sandle and Robinson were facing the same problem, losing male students from their programs. Sandle described this time as doomsday on the campus; it was a mean, dreary day when the choir's bass and tenor sections, male actors, football, basketball and baseball players all boarded a bus to Camp Beauregard, because they had been mass enlisted by the Army. Enrollment for the 1943-44 school term included only nine male students, prompting the Louisiana State Board of Education to cancel athletic events for the duration of the war (Sandle interview 2002).

World War II resulted in the same negative effects on American theatres had been felt by the country's involvement with World War I (Haskins 124). Opportunities for Blacks in commercial theatre were scarce, and little theatres became more creative during the 1940s. In order to combat the loss of his male actors, Sandle presented plays with all female casts; his favorite was *Nine Girls* a melodrama written by Wilfred H. Pettitt. The play takes place in the lounge area of a sorority house in the California Mountains during the spring of the year. The plot of the play is about the murder of a sorority member. Although the police are called in to investigate, sorority sister Mary decides to do some sleuthing on her own to find the killer. "A great drama, intriguing plot, one of my favorite all-female plays" (Sandle interview 2002).

The Black population was skeptical about the United States sending help abroad when they found it difficult to lead normal, healthy, self-sustaining lives at home. Theatre at some of the major Black colleges like Talladega, Spelman, Tuskegee Institute, and Howard University

flourished during World War II. Thomas Montgomery Gregory (1887-1971), was key in cultivating and nurturing legitimate drama at Howard University. He became the first director of the newly organized division of Dramatic Art and Public Speaking, collaborating with playwrights such as Paul Green and Eugene O'Neill. Through his Howard Players, Montgomery created a critically acclaimed forum for student written work.

Overcoming the perils of the war, low male enrollment and the financial hardship that hit the community, Sandle never relinquished his enthusiasm for developing theatre at Grambling. His enthusiasm is like that of renowned Christian writer Oswald Chambers (1874-1917) who stated, “we tend to lose our enthusiasm when there is no vision, or uplift; but the thing that keeps us in the long run is the steady persevering work in the unseen” (Our Daily Bread 1999). Sandle kept his focus on what was not visible at the time, but was slowly taking shape, a Speech and Drama Department.

After his theatre program rebounded, Sandle accepted an invitation to join SADSA in 1942. He immediately began rehearsal of *Circumstantial Evidence*, his first of many SADSA play festival entries. The seventh annual conference was hosted by Wiley College in Marshall, Texas. Sandle was excited because he was a student at Dillard University when Edmonds organized this association on the campus in 1936. Sandle was disappointed that Edmonds had decided to step down as president. Yet, there was a feeling of accomplishment because only six short years prior to this conference, he had observed the creation of SADSA as a student, and now he stood poised to become its second president, building upon the foundation laid down by his mentor.

Although this was Sandle's first appearance at a SADSA conference, his outstanding work in theatre had preceded him. His name had been submitted as a nominee to succeed Edmonds as president, along with Dr. Thomas E. Poag and Vice-President, Melvin B. Tolson. Poag had



established the Drama Department at Tennessee State and became the first Black to earn a Ph.D. in Theatre (1942) from Cornell University.

During the conference, delegates voiced their concern regarding Sandle's nomination because he was new to the association, and many felt he simply could not fill Edmond's shoes. Without an explanation to the delegation, Sandle withdrew his name. Dr. Thomas Poag of Tennessee State was voted in unanimously as president (Myles 16). At the conference dinner hosted by Wiley's President, Dr. Dogan, SADSAs' President-elect Poag congratulated Sandle and his cast for an outstanding interpretation of the English play, *Circumstantial Evidence* (Sandle *The Negro in the American Educational Theatre* 60).

Sandle recalled the moment, "we were given a standing ovation, I was quite humbled by their response." After the dinner, Sandle called Prez Jones to share the news. Jones congratulated him and told him that he would spread the word about the accolades the troupe had received. Sandle ended the night on a theatrical high, and he reflected on something his grandmother told him back in Magnolia, "Floyd, don't try to be great; go for the poetry in you. You can be great in what you love, love something" (Sandle *A Memoir* 260 ). It was theatre that Sandle loved, and now more than ever he realized that.

### **Going to War**

On August 12, 1943 Sandle received his draft notice. He had hopes of entering Officer's Candidate School due to his educational status and the exceptionally high scores he earned on the entrance and the officer's exams. But his high scores were never acknowledged, and he was assigned to the Navy and shipped to Great Lakes, Illinois. His first assignment was that of a company clerk. After passing a series of academic tests, he was selected to train at Hampton Institute (Virginia) Navy Training Base Service School to become a Coxswain, Boatswain's

Mate and ultimately Ensign. Sandle soon realized that racism was as prevalent in the military as it was in civilian life. He had taken the test for Officer's Candidate School for the scored time, scored exceptionally high, and once again his scores were ignored (Sandle *A Memoir* 26). He was frequently reminded that there were no officer's positions available for Blacks in the Navy.

While stationed at Hampton Sandle wrote a one-act play, *The Yellow Coxswain* at the request of Lieutenant Schmidt who was in charge of the Coxswain's School. Sandle recalls in his *Memoir* that "writing the play was a labor of love; but staging it wasn't easy" (28). The cast respected the craft, but had little knowledge of, and no experience, in acting. The rehearsal schedule was a rigorous one. Sandle was not in charge as he was accustomed to being, but had to follow the Navy's strict night schedule for rehearsing. This venture was a much-needed outlet for Sandle. It provided him with the same zeal he felt back at Grambling. He later learned that it was Yeoman J.B. Henderson who informed Lieutenant Schmidt of his theatre background. Henderson had previously taught at Grambling and knew of Sandle's work in educational theatre. With the cooperation of Dr. Anne Cook, who was chair of the drama department at Hampton Institute, *The Yellow Coxswain* was presented on the campus for military service personnel and the student body as well.

After graduating from basic training, Sandle was transferred to the New Orleans base at Algiers; he could now spend time with his wife Marie, and visit their home in Lake Providence. Sandle never relinquished the hope of becoming a Naval Officer. After studying for, and successfully passing, a series of written and oral exams for a commission as Ensign, he was informed that there were no openings, he knew too well that it translated to, "no openings for Black officers" (Sandle *A Memoir* 32). A few weeks after passing the Board exams, he was shipped to the South Pacific and stationed in Hollandia, New Guinea. His assigned duty was

Master-at-Arms and literacy teacher. He taught enlisted sailors to read and write, and was given the unauthorized title of Education Officer. Sandle was amazed that there were as many White illiterate sailors as there were Black ones. He remembered specifics about each of the sailors he tutored; Black sailors from Mississippi, Missouri and Illinois, and Whites from Texas and Tennessee, all striving to obtain what Sandle had, an education. By this time, Sandle's first child, Gail Synetta was born on February 4, 1945 in Lake Providence. Mrs. Sandle worked as a Jeanes Supervisor in the parish school system during her husband's service in the Navy.

When Harry Truman became President, Sandle was completing his tour of duty with the United States Navy. He completed his service and was processed out at Camp Johnson in New Orleans. On his final day of processing, he was asked, rather sarcastically by one of the officers, "Do you have any hard feelings toward the Navy?" Standing with Sandle's folder in full view of him, it was his intention to let Sandle know he was aware of his pursuit to obtain officer's rank. Sandle, in his intellectual tone, replied, "Why should my feelings or disappointments be any different than yours, if you had encountered the same negative experiences I encountered?" (Sandle interview 2001). Sandle served in the United States Navy from September 1943 until December 1945 as a Seaman Petty Officer and received an Honorable Discharge.

With great anticipation, Sandle's wife Marie, and their ten-month old daughter Gail, along with his extended Grambling family prepared for his return to his home and to the drama.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **CENTER STAGE: IN PURSUIT OF EXCELLENCE**

I believe in the American theatre.  
I believe in its power to inform about the  
human condition, I believe in its power to heal,  
to hold up the mirror as 'twere up to nature,  
to the truth we uncover, to the truths we wrestle  
from uncertain and sometimes unyielding realities.

August Wilson  
*The Ground on Which I Stand*

Returning home to Grambling, Louisiana Normal Institute, and drama, Floyd Sandle resumed his duties in January of 1946. Things were different on the campus, much different from what he had witnessed during his initial arrival in 1938. The campus had taken on a new face, there were more students hustling about, and significant changes had had taken place during his three-year military leave. The institution became a senior college in 1944, about fifty-one percent of the male enrollment was veterans, and the school had attracted students from some of the most outstanding high schools in the state (Gallot 84).

The Workshop Players had remained together during Sandle's absence. Only a few plays had been presented, directed by English instructors, however, the members were committed to theatre, and upon Sandle's return they worked closely with him to rekindle the fire that had produced high theatrical performances before his departure. Not only did Sandle train his students in Speech and Drama, he mentored them as well. He taught them valuable life lessons through the plays they performed in. He taught them that the history of drama is the history of the human race (Sandle interview 2001). It was his aim to nurture his students, in the same manner in which Edmonds had nurtured him, academically, intellectually and morally. It was

Edmond's belief that students were being turned out of colleges and universities with trained minds but with neither culture nor manners (Williams 135). Sandle aimed to correct that.

When he returned to Grambling, Sandle immersed himself in his work, teaching, preparing for the spring NADSA conference, and developing Speech and Drama courses. He was anxious to complete his work for the Master's Degree in order to "be on the same level" as his colleagues (Sandle interview 2001). Black college instructors in Louisiana who obtained advanced degrees were given stipends provided by Act 142 of 1946. This Act appropriated \$50,000.00 per fiscal year from the General Fund to the State Department of Education for the purpose of providing educational opportunities in schools and colleges located outside the state of Louisiana for the specialized, professional or graduate education of Black residents of Louisiana (Act No. 142, House Bill 577, 1946). As a result of this Act, Floyd Sandle received the Master's degree and Allen Williams obtained both a Master's and doctorate degree from Indiana University. Sandle returned to the University of Chicago during the summer and fall quarters of 1946. In his *Memoir*, Sandle shares a conversation he had with one of his professors, a reminder of the same issues that confronted him while in the Navy. I quote this at length to show Sandle's keen awareness of racism in America.

Professor: Is it true that Black men like yourself, come to the University of Chicago, get your master's and doctorate degrees and go back South and closet yourselves from other people who are semi-illiterate or at best not as well educated as you?

Sandle: I doubt that is true. However, I do think you ought to know the educated Black man wants to be as much an individual as the educated White man.

Professor: Well, I know that, and I can appreciate what you are saying. But what I want to know is, will you be concerned about the uneducated Black people after you get your degree as you are before you get it?

Sandle: I feel I will. But I still believe you don't understand what I am saying. Let me give you an example. I read a story in the paper yesterday about a young

German student who mutilated the bodies of three White women here in Chicago. When the police apprehended him, they learned that he was a student here. I was stunned when the paper did not become sensational about the heinous way in which this German student had committed these murders. Nowhere in print did I see nor hear it on the radio such statements as, "This is what the country should expect from a German," or "This is the consequence of giving Germans or foreigners an education in our best universities."

Professor: No, I didn't see that either. It was a very unpleasant situation. But we have murders committed every day. I doubt the fact the he was German had anything to do with.

Sandle: That's my point! But suppose I had committed the murders? I'm sure the papers would have read, "Black graduate student at the University of Chicago Murders White Women." Or maybe this, "Why send these Blacks to our best universities to excite them into wanting to become something that they can never become?"

Professor: But this German is an individual. He doesn't represent the whole German race.

Sandle: You get the point! I, too, am an individual. I can no more represent all Black people than can this German represent all Germans. A Black man with a Master's or Ph.D. is just as much an individual as the White man with the same education. He is concerned about his race and improving it when he puts himself through the hazardous experience of obtaining degrees. And while the ivory tower may strike some as being a way of escape from a mean-spirited world, it may just be that the Black man becomes quite a little sophisticated and sometimes silent about the things that are going on around him. The educated Black Man never forgets the hurt and heartaches he has lived through. He is always a part of his past and his people. But every Black man is different. He is an individual; just as every White man is an individual. (41-44)

Sandle's response to his professor's observation shows his honest admission of the limitations of an individual and it also demonstrates the balance with which he approached life. This is why Sandle was able to achieve as much as he did; he was focused and driven, yet able to retain perspective. Also, it is clear that he could tactfully relate to other people. This was demonstrated when Sandle used a series of questions and comments which caused his professor to logically answer his own question and concur with Sandle. The professor became more

enlightened about making broad generalizations about educated Blacks and other ethnic groups. Sandle surely could not have touched and influenced as many people as he did without mastering the art of being people savvy.

Sandle completed requirements for the Master of Arts degree in Education and Reading, and graduated from the University of Chicago during the spring quarter of 1947. Invigorated with renewed energy, having received an advanced degree and support from President Jones, he immediately began rehearsing for his fall play, *The Sacred Flame*. On September 30<sup>th</sup>, Sandle and his wife celebrated the arrival of their second daughter, Ava Leslie.

*The Sacred Flame*, the three-act melodrama by Somerset Maugham brought the students, faculty, staff and the community together for the season opener. Sandle decided to abandon the standard curtain time of 8:00 p.m. and instead start the play at midnight on Saturday. Since there was no activity in town after 8:00 p.m., except during basketball season, Sandle wanted the community to experience theatre with a “city touch,” late night entertainment (Sandle interview 2001). When Sandle asked Prez Jones for permission to start the play at midnight, he agreed, but firmly said that he and Mrs. Jones would not be attending the production, it was too late. There were some concerns about the time not appealing to the community. It was evident by the number of advance tickets sold that the time was in fact appealing to the student body and residents of the community. Sandle stated in a 2001 interview, “The auditorium was packed, I was pleasantly surprised of the turnout, there were no seats left in the house.”

In the play, Maurice Tabert who is paralyzed from the waist down has only love and pity for his wife Stella. He feels that she has been denied a normal life and children due to his paralysis. Stella falls in love with Maurice’s brother Colin, and becomes pregnant by him. When Maurice

dies in his sleep, Stella is accused of murdering him. Before she is arrested, Maurice's mother confesses that she killed her son out of love for him (Flowers interview 2003).

Sandle recalled that bright and early Sunday morning, two Priests from the Catholic Church stopped by to tell him that the Catholic Church was against mercy killing. The Priests asked him not to produce that type of play again, and suggested that he be careful when selecting plays in the future (Sandle *A Memoir* 46). Sandle had always been meticulous in his selection of plays. He chose plays that portrayed life's issues on stage, issues that were not restricted to the Black population. It was issues like mercy killing in *The Scared Flame* that taught lessons. Although mercy killing was not prevalent in the Black community, Sandle wanted the audience to be cognizant that these types of problems were prevalent in society.

By the end of 1947, Sandle's dream of creating a separate department for theatre became a reality when the Speech and Drama Department was officially established at Grambling. The elective courses offered were: Educational Dramatics, Community Drama, and Play Production. The following speech courses were developed by Sandle and added between 1946-1949:

English 131-132 Fundamentals of Written and Spoken English  
6 semester hours.

English 231 Speech Education- Speech Problems and Practice  
6 semester hours.

Community Drama had been added to the curriculum in 1942; this course was actually developed around three one-act productions, all of them with religious themes. This may explain why the course was not offered for credit until 1949 (Sandle interview 2002).

It became apparent to Prez Jones that Sandle was being courted by other colleges due in part to his speaking engagements, and invitations to judge play contests, and consult with English Professors about integrating drama courses into their curriculum. Sandle had received offers



from five colleges to develop or head their Speech and Drama Departments. His pioneering work in theatre was being recognized by some of the most outstanding educators in the state. Dr. Felton G. Clark, President of Southern University had on several occasions attempted to persuade Sandle to move to a bigger academic setting, from the rural area of Grambling to the capital city, Baton Rouge. Dillard University President, Dr. Albert W. Dent, played on Sandle's allegiance to his alma mater (Sandle *A Memoir* 53). However, Sandle decided that Grambling was where his heart was, with his family, the students, and the community. His work was being recognized and his plays had been presented across the state, garnering numerous awards. Additionally, The Workshop Guild was featured in several articles in the Ruston, Winnfield, Minden and Shreveport newspapers.

While Dean E. L. Cole was on sabbatical leave at Columbia University in New York, Sandle was appointed Acting Dean of the College from 1948-1949. With a bulging notebook of financial, academic, and personnel matters to attend to daily, he still found time to hold play rehearsals, and continued to build his Speech and Drama program. Sandle kept the momentum of the thespians moving by meeting with them on a weekly basis, for he knew that the Workshop Guild was, in fact the nucleus that held the program together (Wade 21). With the hustle and bustle of wearing two hats, the fall semester was a demanding one, and amidst all of this the Sandles celebrated the arrival of their third daughter Wanda Marie, on November 4, 1948.

Sandle had made a name for himself in the ranks of educational theatre throughout Louisiana. When Dr. Edmonds left the state in 1949 for Florida, Sandle was elected to serve as state director of the drama section of the LIALO. As director, one of the first items on his agenda was to encourage the state drama group to participate in NADSA. An article that appeared in the *Baton*

*Rouge News Leader* highlighted the Players of Capitol High, directed by A.C. Odell, one of Sandle's former students:

The Drury Lane Players of Capitol Avenue High School were judged the top state drama group over 15 other first place district winners in the Annual Drama Festival of the LIALO held at Grambling College last weekend. Under the direction of A.C. Odell, the Players received an invitation to participate in the National Association of Dramatic and Speech Arts to be held April 11-14.

Randolph Edmonds, head of the Department of Speech and Drama at Florida A&M University in Tallahassee, and guest critic judge. After the festival, Edmonds wrote Principal Keel, "These state winners from Capitol High School well deserve the encouragement of such a trip." (Young 66)

President Jones had given Sandle permission to host the SADSAs conference in 1949. Jones had always supported Sandle's endeavors, and was elated about the amount of positive publicity this conference would generate, especially since this was the year that SADSAs had received an invitation to join the predominately White American Educational Theatre Association (AETA). The association had assured the SADSAs Executive Board that there would be no discriminatory practices in the association. Their past practices did not allow Blacks to gain full membership in the association, which prohibited them from voting or holding an office (Myles 21).

According to NADSAs historian Dr. H.D. Flowers, SADSAs members agreed to join the AETA, but would not relinquish their membership with NADSAs as suggested by AETA. There had always been competition between the two organizations, because AETA founded in 1936 three months prior to NADSAs, AETA felt that they were the premier theatre organization, even though Blacks were not welcome. SADSAs had been founded in response to the exclusionary practices of AETA. In his book, *The Negro in American Educational Theatre*, Floyd Sandle

states, “The Negro College was probably not so poorly directed from its beginning as the Negro drama. But one finds in almost all of the recorded literature that the Negro college like the Negro drama was born of a desperate need” (1).

SADSA had relationships with White theatre professionals and organizations prior to AETA’s invitation to join them. Dr. Edmonds and Dr. Poag had participated in the Paul Green Festival at the University of North Carolina, however they did not present Black plays because they felt their plays would not be accepted by the festival’s all-White audience. Paul Green (1894-1981), dramatist, teacher, and author had served as guest speaker, consultant, and critic judge during several SADSA conferences. His first Broadway play, *In Abraham’s Bosom*, won a Pulitzer Prize, followed by six more Broadway plays over a lifetime. He was the recipient of two Guggenheim Fellowships, the National Theatre Conference Plaque, an American Theatre Association citation, the Frank P. Graham Award, and the North Carolina Award for Literature. In 1979 he was named North Carolina’s dramatist laureate. Also, SADSA had two White active members in the association for a number of years, Dr. Lillian Voorhees and Dr. Boyers (Flowers interview 2004).

The organization charted a new course when Sandle hosted the Thirteenth Annual Conference in 1949. The conference theme was, “Joining Forces for the Improvement of School and Community Life- Through Speech and the Educational Theatre.” There was no doubt in the minds of the delegates that President Jones supported Sandle’s Drama department and his new agenda for the association. For the first time in SADSA’s history, the executive board was relieved of the conference’s financial responsibilities. Grambling’s administration had secured sufficient ticket sales for the two-day play festival, which covered all expenses of the conference.

Also several amendments to the constitution were proposed which would ultimately change the mission and scope of the organization (Sandle interview 2001). The following amendments were proposed during this conference.

1. That Article II of the constitution concerning the purpose of the organization be amended so that part 4 shall read: “To stimulate interest in the writing and production of good plays, striking out the phrase “with emphasis on Negro life.”
2. That Article III section A part 1 concerning membership be amended to read: “That member schools shall be: 1. Any college, Normal or high school or organization interested in Dramatic and Speech Arts.
3. That the phrase “our particular area in Article III Section A, part 1 be further clarified by adding Missouri and Ohio to the states already named in the three areas, Missouri in the Southwestern and Ohio in the South Central region. (Sandle *The Negro in the American Educational Theatre* 81)

Proposed amendment number one did not eliminate the presentation of plays about Black life, rather, the membership wanted to expand their offerings beyond subjects on Black life (Flowers interview 2004). Adoption of these amendments was significant to the organization because they would serve to broaden the scope of the organization’s mission and broaden membership potential.

The 1950 SADSA conference at Kentucky State hosted twenty-six schools from as far south as Florida and as far north as Ohio. At this conference, the three amendments proposed during the 1949 conference were adopted, and members gave reports regarding their attendance at integrated theatre conferences. Randolph Edmonds reported that he had been appointed chairman for the AETA constitution committee, and Thomas Poag announced his new position as regional director for the Southeastern Theatre Conference (Myles 23). The association needed expansion, however the membership could not envision that through the eyes of segregation.

During the business session, the membership engaged in serious debate about changing the name of the association in view of its growing relationship with other theatre organizations, but

no agreement could be reached. The question posed was whether to keep their identity as a southern association whose membership consisted of Blacks from Black led organizations. There were two positions taken: those who believed SADSAs could in fact be national, and those who believed that a national presence would destroy the organization.

It is ironic that the leaders of the debate were the organization's founder, Randolph Edmonds, and its current president, Thomas Poag. Poag was in favor of the name change, and Edmonds was against it (Sandle interview 2001). Other names that were suggested were American Association of Dramatic and Speech Arts (AADS), and National Association of Dramatic and Speech Arts (NADSAs). It was voted by the membership to refer the matter to the Executive Board for consideration. The name change was tabled until the next conference.

The 1951 SADSAs conference met at Alabama State in Montgomery. The conference theme, "The Southern Association of Dramatic and Speech Arts in the Next Fifty Years" foreshadowed the future of this fifteen year-old theatre organization. By a unanimous vote, the delegation voted in favor of the name change to The National Association of Dramatic and Speech Arts, NADSAs, which would allow for greater recognition with integrated national and regional associations, expanding membership, and a change in attitude, philosophy and activities (Sandle *The Negro in American Educational Theatre* 84-85). SADSAs, the acronym by which the association had been known since 1936 became NADSAs. The name change became effective at the end of the fiscal year, October 1, 1951. Sandle was in favor of the name change for the association. He believed that it would lead to membership growth and national recognition for the organization.

Sandle's work in SADSA/NADSA did not diminish his drive for a solid Speech and Drama Department at Grambling. By 1950, Sandle had increased the program course offerings to six courses:

Speech 231- Speech Problems and Practice

Effective oral communication as required of the teacher.

A required course for all students in all areas of the college.

3 semester hours.

Speech 232- Interpretative Reading and Dramatics for Teachers

Introductory course to the techniques of interpretative reading.

Vocal expressiveness and the study of dramatic literature is emphasized.

3 semester hours.

Speech 321- Stagecraft- Principles of Play Construction

Emphasis is placed on a study of the use of areas of the stage.

The student also experiences laboratory practice and demonstration.

2 semester hours.

Speech 431- Educational Dramatics

Studies in the selection, direction and production of plays for children in the elementary school. The laboratory work is coordinated with the work of the Children's Theatre and the Little Theatre Workshop.

3 semester hours.

Speech 422- Community Drama

Emphasis placed on the use of drama in imaginative recreation for the enrichment of community life. Students have the opportunity to direct and produce plays and programs in a school community. Emphasis is placed on religious plays, with community churches as laboratories.

3 semester hours.

Speech 432- Experimental Speech and Dramatics

A workshop problems course designed for the elementary school teacher and director of dramatics.

2 semester hours.

Speech and Drama was a program or division of Grambling's Education Department until it was established as a degree-granting department in 1951 (Williams interview 2002). Sandle then

hired a second instructor, Eddie Ray Williams, who was a recent graduate of Tennessee State University who had studied under Dr. Thomas Poag. It was Dr. Paog who established the first Master of Arts Theatre program at a Black university, Tennessee State University, and who became one of NADSA's most vocal presidents (Flowers interview 2004).

With an additional faculty member, Sandle could devote more time to implement his plans for the theatre department, and to fulfill touring obligations. Mrs. Sandle who had been her husband's right hand in all of his theatre endeavors, was expecting their fourth child, and was unable to assist with rehearsals and sew costumes as she had in the past. On August 31, 1950, the Sandles welcomed their fourth child, and first son, Floyd, Jr.

A lady of distinction, Mrs. Marie Synetta Johnson Sandle was born January 11, 1914 in Baton Rouge, Louisiana to Perkins and Mattie Johnson. After she graduated high school, she attended Tennessee State University in Nashville where she earned her Bachelor's degree in Home Economics. Her professional career began in the Lake Providence, Louisiana school system where she was employed as a Jeanes Teacher Supervisor. She later relocated to Grambling to join her husband, and was employed at Grambling High School as an English teacher and later as a Home Economics instructor at Grambling College.

Mrs. Sandle supported her husband's work and assisted him in all aspects of the theatre. On the night of the performances, she would stand in the lobby beautifully dressed and greet the audience as they entered. There would be two performances, due to the large number of people who wanted to see the production, and the limited number of seats. Following the productions she prepared refreshments, complete with lace table clothes, cloth napkins, glass crystal punch bowls and fine china (Jones interview 2004). She also trained young ladies to serve as hostesses for the school's social events.

She was a dedicated mother who gave complete attention to the development of her children's mental, physical and academic development. A devote Catholic, Mrs. Sandle was one of the founding members of the St. Benedict Catholic Church in Grambling, where she served as a Eucharistic minister and a lector. Dr. and Mrs. Sandle chose to educate their children in some of the best Catholic schools in Louisiana. Like her husband, she wanted to initiate change in Grambling, to offer something fresh to the community. With that drive, she developed the idea of a book club, and hosted book readings in the women's dormitory. As President of the Catholic Circle, she implemented the monthly Birthday Celebrations for children at the Ruston State School, a home for children with special needs. She provided gifts, ice cream and cake for their birthday parties. One of her most elegant and widely publicized affairs was the "Kiddie Fashion Show" held each Easter at the Catholic Church. "It was like a Broadway production," according to Mrs. Hazel Jones. Mrs. Sandle certainly epitomized the cliché, "Behind every good man is a good woman," she was exactly that to her husband for sixty years. She even gave him input on course development.

Upon the approval of the curricula for secondary teacher education in 1952, Sandle's Speech and Drama curriculum was also approved. With the increase in student enrollment and the growth of the Speech and Drama Department, Sandle then hired a second instructor, Alfonso Sherman in 1952. Like Eddie Ray Williams, Sherman had received the M.A. degree from Tennessee State University in Nashville, Tennessee (Williams interview 2002).

With courses and faculty in place, Sandle felt the time was right to begin work on his doctorate. President Jones reminded him that Grambling was now attracting more doctorates to head departments. Sandle knew it would only be a matter of time before he would be required to hold the terminal degree in order to keep his position as head of the Speech and Drama



Department. The department was a labor of love for Sandle and he had no intention of allowing someone else to come in and take over what he had established. He was granted leave with pay beginning in the summer of 1951, through the fall semester of 1952. He recalled that taking off that time wasn't one of the smartest decisions he's made because his wife was expecting their fifth child in December.

Sandle enrolled in New York University for the summer session of 1951, and quickly adjusted to life in New York. Privately he vented his discontent about the segregation issue in the South; it was this ugly phenomenon that had prohibited him from attending school at Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge (Sandle *A Memoir* 78). LSU's segregation policy prohibited Blacks from enrolling until the 1950s. In 1953 A.P. Tureaud, Jr. was the first Black to enroll in LSU's Law School under court order, but his enrollment was cancelled when a higher court overturned the ruling. The U.S. Supreme Court ultimately decided his case, and he was allowed to return in 1956. The courts did not mandate full integration for LSU until 1964 (Case 8: African-Americans in Baton Rouge 2003).

Sandle enjoyed his classes at NYU, and the workshops that were conducted at Sarah Lawrence College, a small private college in the suburbs. Juggling two jobs and attending classes left little time and no money for leisure activities, such as attending a theatre production. The American theatre of the fifties was more conscious of Blacks than ever before because the nation as a whole was being made more conscious of them. In the 1952 June edition of *Equity Magazine*, an article titled, "Integration" by Frederick O'Neal, pointed out that the theatre and all other forms of American entertainment are among the most powerful and influential media of communication and education (Simmons 177). Therefore, it was increasingly important that the role of Blacks be adequately portrayed to reflect their actual representation in American society.

Sandle foresaw this as early as 1936 as a drama student at Dillard University. Through his vision of positive representation of Blacks on stage, he taught his students that theatre could be a powerful force for social change. While in New York, Sandle exchanged correspondence with his faculty, Williams and Sherman who kept him informed about the progress of the department, and the business of the association. NADSA was vitally important for Sandle's theatre program, and it was his intention to return to the ranks of the association once he had received his doctorate.

In 1951, while Sidney Poitier like many other actors was trying to keep a footing in the theatre, William Branch was having his *A Medal for Willie* produced at Club Baron. The work received critical acclaim and provoked a great deal of controversy among Blacks, who objected to certain aspects of Black life being revealed for public scrutiny (Andrews 11). *A Medal for Willie* tells the story of rejection and bravery in the Jackson family. Willie Jackson, a Black teenager who grew up in a single parent home in a small southern town, and who was labeled a 'troubled kid' is expelled from school, joins the army and is killed in action. The school that had expelled him three years earlier is the setting where the action of the play takes place. A hero's program has been planned by the school and town officials to honor Willie's bravery. Mrs. Jackson, Willie's mother is given a prepared acceptance speech to deliver upon receiving the medal for her son from a three-star Army General during the program. However, she changes her mind and declines to accept the medal, and delivers a startling speech to the audience telling why she refuses the medal. She told the school's principal, the mayor, and the White army officials that they were all liars pretending to be patriotic and represent the cause of equality. She hurls the medal at the three-star Army General and exits the stage, leaving everyone in awe.

Sandle would read play reviews in the daily newspapers, and he visualized staging some of these productions at Grambling. Sandle maintained his work schedule at the New York Library in the afternoons, and the Cornell University Medical Center late nights, the graveyard shift. As Christmas was approaching, he received a telegram that his wife had delivered a boy. He immediately left New York to spend the holidays with his family. The spring of 1952 was a difficult year financially for the Sandle family, with the head of the household away. Through these very difficult times he remained focused and did not allow circumstances to make him lose sight of his goal, of obtaining the doctorate degree. A number of professors provided Sandle with directives, expressing their interest in his career. One in particular was Dr. Myers, Head of the Department of Education at NYU. When Sandle met him at a workshop, he encouraged Sandle to think about pursuing Higher Education Administration. He mentioned that Grambling might become diversified, and there could be a place for Sandle as a quality president (Sandle *A Memoir* 87-88).

When Sandle returned to his position at Grambling in 1953, Dr. Claude Shaver, head of LSU's Theatre Department, contacted him about transferring to the doctoral program there, and said that he would sponsor his candidacy. Dr. Shaver had been to Grambling as a consultant and judge for the NADSA conference and knew of Sandle's work in building a theatre program there. After discussing Dr. Shaver's offer with his wife, Sandle decided to attend LSU provided they accepted his credits from NYU. When he was notified that all of his courses would transfer, he enrolled for the summer session in 1954 marking a new beginning for Sandle as well as LSU (Sandle interview 2002).

Sandle earned nine semester hours the first summer he attended LSU. He made an A, B, and C in his course work. He jokingly stated that he added a K and knew that meant BACK to NYU.

The C grade he received was in advanced Phonetics taught by Dr. C.M. Wise, who was a nationally known phonetician, and head of the LSU Speech Department. Wise had also served as a NADSA consultant. Sandle decided to slow his pace somewhat, and registered for one course in the fall semester. The class met at 7:00 pm on Tuesday night, therefore he worked out the logistics with President Jones and was able to leave Grambling at 2:00 pm. Sandle dreaded the long drive, but was fortunate to have his student, Allen Williams, drive him to Baton Rouge on Tuesday nights (Sandle interview 2001).

While Sandle was pursuing the doctorate at LSU, Grambling's Theatre Department participated in the eighteenth annual NADSA Conference at Tennessee State in Nashville, April 24-30, 1954, Dr. Thomas Poag host director. On the first night of the conference, President's Poag's drama troupe presented *Death of A Salesman* by Arthur Miller. The play had been a success on Broadway, and Sandle envisioned staging that play at Grambling.

Sandle maintained his scheduled evening class at LSU during the fall and selected *Death of A Salesman* as the season's premier performance. Eddie Ray Williams and Alfonso Sherman both had seen the play at Tennessee State during the spring conference, so Sandle decided to cast them along with student actor Joseph Dyer in the lead roles. After four weeks of rehearsal, the play was staged at Grambling to an enthusiastic audience for three consecutive nights. Over five hundred dollars was collected at the door. Proceeds from the door receipts were used to purchase make-up kits, costumes, and building supplies (Sandle *A Memoir* 92-93). After the success of the production at Grambling, the play toured Natchitoches, Monroe, Alexandria, and Baton Rouge by a chartered Greyhound Bus.

By 1955, Sandle and his faculty began to finalize the Speech and Drama course offerings that offered majors a strong, solid foundation in the area. Sandle knew that major course offerings

would enhance the department's accreditation (Sandle *A Memoir* 95). The electives developed for Speech and Drama majors included:

Speech Foundations  
2 semester hours credit.

History of the Theatre  
2 semester hours credit.

Radio and Speech Production  
2 hours semester hours credit.

Speech Arts  
3 semester hours credit.

Interpretative Reading  
2 semester hours credit.

As the years progressed, Sandle had encountered many episodes in his life that could be labeled inspirations or irritations. The year 1956 featured both for him. Beginning his reign as NADSA President, he listened as out-going president Dr. Thomas Pawley, addressed the delegates during the Nineteenth NADSA conference, and stated:

I would be dishonest if I said that I regret leaving office after nearly four years as acting president and as president. To the contrary, I anticipate with relief relinquishing the responsibilities of this office to Floyd Sandle and returning to the ranks. Not that the experience has been an unrewarding one; but it also has had its tribulations. (Sandle *A Memoir* 106)

With that statement, Sandle's enthusiasm diminished somewhat. He pondered if becoming NADSA's fifth President was the glamorous thing that he had anticipated since attending the first conference as a student under his director, Dr. Edmonds. Sandle was aware of NADSA's financial tribulations and the strife it had caused among many of the board members. It was as troubling to Sandle as the newly elected president, as it had been to previous NADSA presidents.

The debt of the *Encore* Magazine had been an issue at previous conferences, and now President Floyd Sandle wanted to relieve the association of the lingering debt. He recommended that each member organization conduct some type of a fundraising project during the year and designate a minimum of \$25.00 to the association for that effort. Sandle received positive feedback from the member schools in the amount of \$350.00 that helped settle the debt of the magazine.

The Twentieth Annual Conference convened on the campus of Fayetteville State University in 1956, under Sandle's leadership. He wanted to incorporate changes in the speech component of the NADSA conference. This area had previously received little or no attention and Sandle knew that could potentially reduce participation of speech instructors and other speech professionals in the future conferences. It is ironic that past president Dr. Thomas Pawley had voiced these same concerns along with concerns about the financial deficits that threatened the existence of the organization. The conference theme, "Drama and Speech in the Preservation of Our Democratic Heritage," addressed the areas of choral speaking, speech training for the classroom teacher and speech correction. Playwright Paul Green was the guest speaker, and delivered an explosive speech on "Our Democratic Heritage." He shared the following with the delegates:

Here in the South the challenge of the future is as sharp and relentless as any place on the globe...The majority of our political, educational and even religious leaders are continuing to deny the very democratic heritage which has helped to make them what they are...The theory of prideful and unearned racial superiority has been exploded as a myth, not only religiously but scientifically...Democracy is a philosophy of government fitted to men full grown, fitted to acknowledge themselves as morally responsible beings, as well as free, and who accept the duties that go with that responsibility. (Sandle *The Negro in American Educational Theatre* 109)

Through his life and writing, Green spoke in support of the basic rights of all humanity, and he was recognized by NADSA for his contributions.

As membership in NADSA grew, the association turned its attention to placing theatre in the college curricula by removing it from departments of English where untrained faculty directed an annual production. NADSA recommended that drama be woven into the fabric of other speech arts such as debate, oratorical contests, and verse reading (Sandle interview 2001). It was the hope of the organization driven by Sandle, that separate departments of Speech and Theatre be created with their own budget and facilities.

Inspirations in 1956 brought Sandle encouragement when he witnessed the May graduation of the first Speech and Drama Education majors; and in September of that year, the Speech and Drama Department relocated into a new, spacious facility, The Fine Arts Building (later renamed Dunbar Hall, and in 1990 became the F.L. Sandle Theatre). The two-level brick building consisted of five classrooms, a Speech Clinic, a 212-seat theatre, scene shop, costume room, two dressing rooms, a practice theatre, studio, and control room for KGRM-FM radio station (Williams 2). This new modern facility provided Sandle with the conveniences needed to host the state high school drama festival and other local and state drama meetings and conferences including NADSA. Also in 1956, Sandle and his family moved into their new brick home on Richmond Drive in Grambling, only five blocks from the campus; and for the first time in Grambling's history, the enrollment surpassed 2,000.

Frustration occurred in 1956 as well. Sandle received a slap in the face when the Louisiana State Legislature reversed its admission policy that allowed Blacks to attend LSU. This was discouraging news to Sandle, but he took comfort in his Grandmother's words, "When God closes one door, He opens another" (Sandle interview 2001). Sandle realized the substance of

that statement during the 1958 NADSA conference at Florida A&M University, Tallahassee, Florida. Sandle had an interesting conversation with Dr. William P. Halstead of the University of Michigan. He told Sandle that he had heard about the legislature's decision to reverse LSU's admission policy for Blacks. He then assured Sandle that he would welcome him to the University of Michigan and sponsor him as a Ph.D. candidate in the event that LSU did not readmit Black students (Sandle *A Memoir*). It was that conversation that helped Sandle to be optimistic about completing his doctoral work at LSU.

Racism in education seemed constant, but the outlook for Blacks in educational theatre was optimistic. NADSA's 1958 conference featured representatives from White theatre associations including: AETA, SETC, and ANTA. William P. Halstead, (Director of Theatre, University of Michigan), Dick Campbell, (Field Consultant, International Cultural Exchange Program, the American National Theatre Academy), Frances Cary Bowen (Director of Children's Theatre, John Hopkins University), and Dr. James Brock (Director of Drama at Florida State University) were guest consultants and critic judges (Sandle *The Negro in the American Educational Theatre* 118-19).

Sandle did quite a balancing act for the next couple of years, teaching and directing, working state-wide with the LIALO, fulfilling his obligations with NADSA, and spending quality time with his family. He did not want to be consumed with anger over the decision that suspended his doctoral work at LSU. However, when he least expected it, Dr. C.M. Wise called from Baton Rouge to inform him that he could enroll at LSU during the 1959 spring semester (Sandle *A Memoir* 136-37).

The news was the answer to Sandle's prayers. He had waited patiently during the three year suspension of his studies at LSU, and finally he was on the road to Baton Rouge to complete his



doctoral work. From his first semester at New York University, to the last day he had attended class at LSU in 1956, Sandle was faced with challenges. Rather than flee, he faced them with common sense and a clear vision. Sandle made arrangements to live with his father-in-law, Mr. Perkins Johnson while in Baton Rouge, and his sister-in-law, Lee agreed to prepare his home cooked meals.

The first night of his arrival, Sandle immediately began to prepare himself for the written part of the examination the next morning, which he passed without any problems. Dr. Shaver, his major professor, assisted him in scheduling classes and worked with him to select a dissertation topic. That wasn't a difficult task because Sandle knew early on exactly what he planned to research. After a few days of discussing topics, he and Dr. Shaver agreed on, "The Negro in the American Educational Theatre" (Sandle interview 2001). It was not an easy task for Sandle to secure records from the secretaries of SADS/NADS, "it proved to be a mean chore," he recalled (Sandle *A Memoir* 138).

With the help of a rented typewriter, the assistance of Dr. Shaver, and the support of his family, Sandle was able to work day and night in order to complete his coursework in Phonetics of Language and Advanced Speech, and to meet the dissertation deadline. About ninety percent of Sandle's time was spent in the LSU library, and on the weekend he rode the bus home to Grambling in order to spend time with his family. This left little, and very often no, time for interaction with other students on campus. Sandle never felt intimidated by the younger White students in his classes. He recalled in a 2001 interview that his classes were challenging, and the campus atmosphere was uncomfortable at times, but said he never faced hostility or threats of any kind. Incredible as it may seem, by the end of that spring semester 1959, Sandle had completed all the required courses for the degree, and finished a rough copy of his dissertation.

Often times Sandle felt overwhelmed, but he did not allow himself to think about the “impossible.” Instead he concentrated on this thought, “ the impossible is my area of expertise, doing the impossible must now become the basis of my career” (Sandle *A Memoir* 140).

Sandle returned to Grambling and taught two classes during the 1959 summer session, Public Speaking and Phonetics. At night he worked diligently on the dissertation, editing and typing in order to get a complete copy to Dr. Shaver. Time was of the essence because he wanted to get his name placed on the tentative August 1959 graduation list. Sandle arrived in Baton Rouge on Friday, for his defense that was scheduled for Saturday morning, July 12 at 11:00 am. The dissertation committee members were: Dr. Braden, Head of the Speech Department, Dr. Deer, Dr. Hunter, Dr. Francine Merritt, and Dr. Shaver.

Sandle was surprised that the committee members had read so much of his work. He remembered specific questions asked by Drs. Hunter and Deer, both Education professors: “What applications do you plan to make in Black schools to meet the needs in Public Speaking?”...in Speech and Drama? ...Speech Correction? ...Playwriting? ...Debate? Sandle then began to relax after he answered those questions. Dr. Braden, whose specialty area was British Oratory, asked, “Compare or distinguish between the speaking styles of Franklin D. Roosevelt and Winston Churchill.” Sandle answered the question, and added that he knew from Dr. Braden’s class lectures which of the two speakers he admired the most.

Dr. Shaver asked Sandle to discuss the message in Edmonds’ *Breeders*, *Bad Man*, and *Death of a Salesman*. He also asked him to elaborate on the morals and motivation in the plays *A Raisin in the Sun* and *Green Pastures*. Dr. Hunter’s question, “What is Grambling College’s mission in education as a state function” was the only question Sandle had trouble with, but he managed to provide an answer. Sandle stated that Dr. Hunter smiled after he finished, so he

assumed he was satisfied with his answer” (Sandle interview 2001). Dr. Francine Merritt, the only female committee member, did not direct any questions.

The defense lasted two hours, and afterwards Sandle was directed to wait in Dr. Shaver’s office. Within ten minutes, Dr. Shaver entered the room and announced, “Congratulations, Doctor Sandle.” At that moment Sandle’s entire body was engulfed with relief, he felt ten feet tall as he walked with pride back to the conference room to receive congratulations from the other committee members. Dr. Merritt extended her hand and began to cry with Sandle. She told him, “I know how you feel.” After talking with the committee, Dr. Braden told Sandle that he would contact him about graduation. Sandle left Baton Rouge and drove back to Grambling, and celebrated the accomplishment with his family (Sandle interview 2000). The next day, Dr. Braden called to inform him that his name was on the August graduation list.

As Sandle and his family begin to make preparations for the trip to Baton Rouge for the ceremonies, he received a call from Dr. Branden to ask, “Do you plan to march?” The question was piercing. He went on to explain that he wasn’t sure how some White legislators in North Louisiana who were LSU supporters would react to him marching in the commencement ceremony. Sandle answered with confidence, “yes sir, I do plan to march.”

Overt racism was prevalent in the South in 1959, and LSU was the shining example of segregation in higher education. Sandle was aware of the negative comments that had been made regarding him participating in the commencement ceremony, but was not surprised by them. He had lived with racism as a child growing up in Magnolia, Mississippi, as a sailor in the U.S. Navy, as a graduate student at the University of Chicago, and at LSU.

It is a fact that Black students on predominantly White college campuses face struggles. The worries that average college students have to deal with are hard enough, but Black students are

often faced with isolation, and the role of being different. During the two and half years of my course work at LSU, I was faced with race and gender issues in class; being the only female and the only Black I was subjected to ethnic slurs, gender jokes, and isolation from group members on class projects. I accepted the challenges, for I realized they were a part of my unique situation at LSU. It has been said, “that which does not kill us, makes us stronger.” If I experienced this in 2000, image what Dr. Sandle experienced in the 1950s.

Floyd Sandle’s graduation was a momentous occasion for his family, so he decided to purchase a new Chevrolet station wagon to drive to Baton Rouge for the ceremony. It was a beautiful Saturday morning in Baton Rouge, the ceremony was held in the LSU Agriculture Complex. Sandle surveyed the crowd as he stepped in the line of march. There were only a couple of Black students receiving the Master’s degree, and he was the only Black to receive the Ph.D. Dr. Braden walked beside Sandle in the line until they reached the auditorium. He never knew exactly why, and he never asked. In his heart he felt that this action was a result of his question, “do you plan to march?” That chapter in Floyd Leslie Sandle’s life was finished, from 1953 until 1959 Sandle had stayed focused and accomplished another goal he set for himself, earning the doctorate degree, thus becoming the first Black student to receive a Ph.D. from LSU

## **CHAPTER FIVE SHIFTING SCENES**

The 1960s stand out culturally as the most explosive decade in modern America life. No other period swept across the country with such a devastating tide of social, political, and racial ferment. The world witnessed the process of change in the entire social fabric of one of its most powerful nations (Myles 31-32). The Civil Rights Movement played a major role in the Black theatre, and had a great impact on its performers. The direct beneficiaries of this movement were the theatre artists themselves. The artists were allowed an opportunity to work without compromising their personal or collective vision. Black culture was reaffirmed as in no other period in history, cutting across lines to embrace the collective consciousness (Andrews 12).

The college sit-ins of 1961 spurred young Blacks to demand their full civil rights and when that access was slow in coming, they joined the Black Power Movement led by Stokely Carmichael. The students demanded Black autonomy, the establishment of Black Studies Departments and plays presented on stage that would teach Black pride. It was The Free Southern Theatre that developed out of the Tougaloo (Mississippi) College drama workshop that set forth the principle of a legitimate Black theatre in the Deep South. This effort stimulated creative thought, and related to problems in the Black community (Bean 159).

Under Sandle's direction, Grambling's Speech and Drama Department did not change with the 1960s era. Sandle refused to stage plays that ridiculed family values nor would he stage the Black race plays laced with profanity, or plays that glorified drug use. He did not give in to student requests to present plays with these type themes. He continued to stage quality performances of plays with morals and with stories that uplifted and taught lessons. Plays directed by Sandle during this era are listed in Appendix B.

Academic and administrative changes were instituted during the 1960s at Grambling College. Allen Williams earned the Master's degree in technical theatre from Indiana University, and in 1964 Sandle was named Dean of the Division of General Studies. Additionally, the college was reorganized into the divisions of Applied Sciences and Technology, Education, and Liberal Arts (Gallot 99). The enrollment in the Speech and Drama Department remained constant from 1963 through 1968. The faculty made great strides in their academic development by obtaining advanced degrees in their discipline.

Dr. Sandle, along with Allen Williams and the Players, attended the 1961 NADSA Silver Anniversary Conference at Tuskegee Institute. This was an outstanding conference with Dr. C.M. Wise as conference consultant and critic judge, and noted Broadway Director Lloyd Richards as keynote speaker. In his speech Richards challenged the student delegates to ponder the question, "What are you educating yourself for?" He then issued a challenge to the NADSA association: "Find new playwrights to provide outlets such as summer theatre for its young theatre people so as to bring these young artists to fulfillment; so that together NADSA would have not just a National Theatre, but a Theatre National"(Sandle *A Memoir* 153-54).

Dr. C.M. Wise had been a part of Dr. Sandle's academic career since his junior year at Dillard. Wise was invited to speak at the first NADSA conference and had been one of Sandle's graduate professors at LSU. Wise, a nationally recognized speech and phonetics scholar, gave NADSA a renewed focus in his opening remarks to the delegation:

I am glad to be able to say it is a pleasure to be here.  
I thoroughly enjoyed the bright alertness of your well-read  
well-prepared students, as well as the professional contact  
with teachers. I enjoyed equally the warmth of friendship  
which good occasions as your conference always generate.  
(Sandle *A Memoir* 155)

Dr. Sandle was invigorated by the conference and by the outstanding performances of his students, especially Molly Smart who received the Best Actress Award. Dr. Sandle was elected Publicity Director for the next two years. In order to fulfill the obligations of this position, he proposed strong regional programs as a means of strengthening the program at the grass roots level and by implementing a proposal that the regional programs must include:

1. A meeting of NADSA's schools at least every two years.
2. Annual exchange of plays between colleges of the region.
3. A touring program by each school, also a coalition with NADSA colleges, which include the high schools of each state.
4. An annual high school Speech and Drama festival.
5. An effort by each college's Speech and Drama or English Department to place teachers with special training or competence in Speech and Drama.

Dr. Sandle worked closely with NADSA president, Dr. G. M. Sawyer to implement his regional program proposal. After the conference in Tuskegee, President Sawyer had put together a five-year prospectus for the development of NADSA (Sandle *A Memoir* 156-57). He charged everyone to work together in order to see the fulfillment of the project. Sandle's vision mirrored that of President Sawyer, to implement a NADSA program which would prepare students for professional theatre.

In 1962, the Grambling Speech and Drama Department was selected to tour the Northeast Command Labrador, Greenland, Newfoundland and Iceland with Noel Coward's *Blithe Spirit*. The tour was made possible through the Defense Department and the American Educational Theatre Association under the sponsorship of the USO (Williams interview 2002). The troupe performed for United States Military of the Army, Navy, Marines, and Air Force for five weeks beginning February 25, 1962.

President Jones had directed Dr. Sandle not to discuss the tour until final confirmation was received from the Defense Department. This of course was difficult for Dr Sandle because he had bragging rights, and he wanted the NADSA directors to know about the tour. However, officials from the American Educational Theatre Association said that the announcement had to come from President Jones. Receipt of the confirmation was dependent upon Grambling's ability to guarantee \$25,000. The Defense Department would reimburse the college once the tour was completed and the group returned to Grambling. Without hesitation, President Jones guaranteed the money for the tour. Dr. Sandle recalled that President Jones wrote the check from his personal account at the Gambling Credit Union (Sandle interview 2002).

Before the overseas tour Dr. Sandle, technical director Allen Williams, and the casts of *Marriage-Go-Round* and *A Raisin in the Sun* toured Tennessee State, Lincoln University, and Arkansas AM&N Colleges to raise supplemental funds for their tour. Upon their arrival in Nashville, Dr. Poag and his students greeted them with the announcement of the USO tour. Dr. Sandle of course was shocked, but what he didn't know was that Tennessee State had toured the Northeast Command the year before.

Dr. Poag and his students talked about their experiences on the tour, and the changes made to their itinerary. They attempted to convince Dr. Sandle that he would not be allowed to perform in Iceland, but that his group would be made to tour Nova Scotia instead. They said the change would be made because no Black artists, band, singers, or entertainers had ever performed in Iceland. They continued with the nonsense that Blacks were banned because of the strict "policy" of the White men to keep the Icelandic race pure (Sandle *A Memoir* 165). Sandle was shocked by the explanations offered regarding the schedule change, but maintained that the Grambling Players would in fact tour Iceland.



When the group returned from their three-college tour, President Jones had received confirmation for the tour and was asked to submit the titles of three plays to the American Educational Theatre Association. Sandle submitted, *A Raisin in The Sun*, *Blithe Spirit*, and *Marriage-Go-Round*; the AETA selected *Blithe Spirit* as the touring production. Rehearsals began immediately with a double cast of Speech and Drama majors. The cast was also tutored in phonetics to assist them with the British dialect used in the play. After a tedious rehearsal schedule, the play was presented two nights on the campus for the college and community.

Dr. Sandle invited an English and Speech Professor from Louisiana Tech, as well as Professors from the Speech and Drama, and English Departments at Grambling to critique the performance. He was quite pleased with the feedback he received from the professors. Technical director Allen Williams designed a collapsible set and scaled all props down to fit into three trunks. The group performed the play for high schools in Monroe, Baton Rouge, Alexandria and Kentwood.

The excitement generated by the tour was evident on the campus and throughout the community. Everyone was talking about the overseas tour. However, the group was disappointed to learn that the second cast would not be permitted to make the trip. A representative from the AETA visited Sandle at the theatre to finalize plans for travel, which included nine students and one director. The cast members included: Billy Joe Mason, Mollie Smart, John Honroe, Erma Kelly, Joan Neville, Evelyn Delafonse, Sylvia Evans, Georgia White and Isaac Pamplin.

The day before the group departed, KNOE Television station in Monroe, aired the show (Sandle interview 2002). The group departed from the Monroe airport at 5:00 am on February 26, 1962. Sandle's pastor, Reverend Williams of the New Rocky Valley Baptist Church in

Grambling conducted a short, inspirational message for the occasion. When word quickly spread across the airport that Grambling's Theatre Department was going overseas to perform for the military, other passengers came to wish them well, while others joined the short praise service.

Atlanta was the first stop for a quick dinner, then on to New Jersey to change planes for Thule, Greenland, where the first performance of *Blithe Spirit* was presented for the military. The performance was held in one of the Command's selected makeshift theatres. Billy Joe Mason said, "wherever there was sufficient space, we adjusted, we performed. After each performance we did a variety type show, complete with dances, songs and one-liners (Mason interview 2004). Sandle was proud of the work the students had put into developing the variety show that he said contained a touch of "Broadway" (Sandle interview 2001). The base commander prepared a reception for the cast, with invited officers, and asked Sandle to accompany the students wherever they went, especially the young ladies. On many occasions, the servicemen offered money to Dr. Sandle for dates with the young ladies. Sandle ignored the bribes, and maintained a strict chaperoning schedule with the women as well as the men. The cast did not hide the fact that they had become irritated with their director's watchful eye, however, they understood that he was responsible for them during the tour. Billy Joe Mason recalls that Dr. Sandle was like a father to the cast, he paid attention to everyone's needs (Mason interview 2004).

From Labrador, the group flew to Newfoundland, where they were well received. Following the performance a reception was held featuring a local band. The lead guitar player had heard cast member Mollie Smart sing earlier, and was persistent about his band playing background music for her during her vocal presentations that night. One of the band members inquired about the racial make-up of Grambling when he asked Dr. Sandle, "I thought Grambling

was an all-Black college? I noticed that you have two White students.” He was referring to John Honroe and Evelyn Delafonse, who looked White. Dr. Sandle did not try to correct him or explain, he simply said, “Grambling is open to all students” (Sandle *A Memoir* 173). It was Dr. Sandle’s contention that the reason they were flown to Iceland was because it appeared Grambling had a mixed cast.

After thirty days of touring, flying over the Atlantic Ocean and performing for servicemen at eight isolated military bases, Dr. Sandle and his students returned to home, completing another chapter in Grambling’s history books. The quality productions of the Speech and Drama Department had been recognized as a recruiting mechanism for the college, as well as a vehicle for community and national service (Mason interview 2004).

Due to the change in the school’s structure and the influx of new students, President Jones appointed Dr. Sandle Dean of the Division of General Studies in 1964. President Jones and Dr. Cole met with Dr. Sandle to discuss how this newly organized division could address the school’s high attrition rate. They also addressed the need to develop General Education requirements, as well as orientation activities to bridge the gap between high school and college. Dr. Sandle, along with Dr. Cole, spent a day visiting the Junior Division at LSU in Baton Rouge. There were no remedial or developmental programs at LSU. All freshmen were required to enroll in the Junior Division and those who failed the General Education requirements of 30 hours were dropped. Sandle knew if Grambling followed this model, they would loose too many students and it would be detrimental to the college (Sandle *A Memoir* 178).

Sandle assumed his new position with enthusiasm and the determination to shape the division to meet the needs of the freshmen at Grambling. He and his lone counselor, Faye Williams began their assignment in Dunbar Hall, the Fine Arts Building. They were to share

accommodations with the Speech and Drama Department. This created a very crowded work environment. There was not enough space to conduct business with a large group of freshman on a daily basis. Finally, the Division relocated temporarily to the second floor. That move resolved the space issue with the Speech and Drama faculty, however it created a problem with the Art Department. The department had displayed artwork throughout the halls and became aggravated with the number of students standing against the walls, which disturbed their work. After months of waiting for additional space, a large room for the counselors was added when President Jones intervened (Sandle interview 2002).

At the time, Dr. Sandle was still Department Head of Speech and Drama, and with his new role, he now served in dual positions. This was not the kind of promotion Dr. Sandle had envisioned; he was overloaded. Nevertheless, he remained in the dual role until 1968, as a tenured professor of Speech and Drama from 1968 to 1978. Allen Williams was appointed Acting Head of Speech and Drama in 1968, which freed Sandle from the additional role (Williams interview 2002). Dr. Sandle had done a tremendous job in developing courses in Speech and Drama and by 1968, the curriculum had grown to a total of forty-four courses. A student could major in Speech and Drama Education, Speech Correction, or Liberal Arts. The course requirements for an education major in Speech and Drama totaled one hundred twenty-eight to one hundred thirty hours. All majors and minors were required to participate in the Theatre Guild as performers or members of production crews and to attend all cultural events, such as, art shows, choir and band concerts, and book reviews on the campus (Wade 68).

Dr. Sandle remained close to the everyday operations of the Speech and Drama Department, not only because his office was located upstairs, but because his love for the theatre had not diminished with his new role of Dean. He continued to work with Allen Williams on matters in

the theatre area. On March 25, 1965, Dr. Sandle established the Louisiana Gamma Chapter of Theta Alpha Phi, National Theatre Honors Fraternity. This honors society confers nationally recognized honor on graduate and undergraduate students who earn a specified high level of quality in theatre study and production. Theta Alpha Phi is the only honorary theatre organization restricted entirely to that level of education where students can be expected to have a serious purpose in theatre work and study. Founded in 1919, it is the oldest, nation- wide, educational theatre honors society in the world (Theta Alpha Phi Handbook 1976).

Dr. Sandle contacted Dr. H.B. Menagh who was then National President of Theta Alpha Phi, and made the necessary arrangements for the new chapter to be established at Grambling. The only other chapter located in the state was at Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge. Five students and three honorary persons were initiated at the first ceremony that took place in the Little Theatre of Dunbar Hall. Theta Alpha Phi did not make an inroad to Grambling by accident. The chapter was established due to the quality of theatre activities that had taken place at Grambling under the theatrical leadership of Dr. Floyd L. Sandle (Williams interview 2002).

The General Studies Division finally found a home of its own, when the Division was relocated to the new Charles P. Adams Education Building. There was now enough space for each of the counselors to have an office, a large classroom, and a reception area. The division was still in the developing stage, addressing such problems as freshman enrolling in advanced major courses and having difficulty with their General Education courses.

After an exhaustive search for orientation course materials, Dr. Sandle developed a tentative course outline that was used by the counselors for two years; he then wrote a textbook for the course, *Orientation: The Image of the College*. Although the book was written specifically for Grambling, other schools adopted the book, including Norfolk State University

(Sandle *A Memoir* 182). The Division staff grew, providing academic support services to freshman students. In an effort to build additional support for his unit, Dr. Sandle wrote a proposal for a Title III grant. With the assistance of Dr. Cole and Dr. Kara Vaughns Jackson, the Division received a grant for \$100,000 per year from 1970-1976, in cooperation with Institutions for Services to Education (ISE), a Thirteen College Consortium. The Consortium included: Alcorn; Bethune-Cookman; University of Maryland, Eastern Shore; Jarvis Christian College; Southern University-New Orleans; Grambling College; Houston-Tillotson; Southern University-Shreveport; Langston University; Elizabeth City College; Texas College; and St. Augustine College (Sandle *A Memoir*).

The Grant allowed discipline teachers of Math, English, Biology, Chemistry, Physics, History, Art, and Music to spend six weeks during the summer first at Bishop College in Texas, and then Pine Manor in Boston. The ISE Consortium program was successful. The freshman dropout rate went down, and students began to appreciate the counseling services as they encountered fewer problems with their program of study.

The Division of General Studies became a part of the mission and scope of Grambling College (Sandle interview 2001). In 1973, the Division set the wheels in motion to enhance the quality of its program with the installation of the High Ability Program, open to high school seniors. Principals and counselors recommended high school seniors with a 3.0 – 4.0 grade point average. The students would enroll in college freshman-level courses during the summer session, and were invited to attend Grambling in the fall. The High Ability courses could be credited towards graduation at Grambling (Sandle *A Memoir* 191).

Dr. Sandle continued to maintain a busy schedule with community work, church obligations, speaking engagements, and his responsibilities as Dean of the Division of General Studies. Some

men have imagined themselves as having super strength, however we know that real men have limited strength. They stumble and they fall. They can't see through walls, or leap through buildings. But that is not to say that men should be content to be less than they can be. Dr. Sandle's inner strength was exhibited through his work, and his work was his life. In 1969 and 1970 he was invited to lecture on Black Theatre History for LSU Theatre students and faculty. During the spring of 1971, Dr. Shaver extended him an invitation again, only this time it was different,

Floyd, you've done an excellent coverage in your two lectures here at Louisiana State University. LSU's speech students and faculty have expressed considerable interest and appreciation for the quality of your preparation and presentation. We here at LSU's Speech Department are prepared to invite you to join this faculty as a Visiting Professor of Speech for the 1972-73 school year. If you accept, LSU is prepared to pay you a full Professor's salary. (Sandle *A Memoir* 204)

Dr. and Mrs. Sandle accepted the invitation, and Dr. Shaver explained his responsibilities: teach one undergraduate course and one graduate course, The Art and Craft of the Theatre, and Black Theatre History. Dr. Shaver worked with President Jones on the logistics of Dr. Sandle's leave and Dr. Sandle completed the transition in his Division. Rev. Andrew Mansfield, one of the Division's counselors was named Acting Dean, and Director of the Title III Consortium Grant. Dr. Allen Williams accepted the responsibilities of teaching Dr. Sandle's Public Speaking and Phonetics classes.

Sandle noted major differences between LSU and Grambling that went beyond the size of the campus. First the students came to class on the first day with books, and the salary at LSU was considerably higher. In addition to teaching, Sandle served on the committee of four doctoral students. During Sandle's one year on the campus, he had an opportunity to meet with a Black

Student Association in the assembly hall of the Catholic Center. The Student Government President, who was Black, extended the invitation. Two of Sandle's White graduate students, husband and wife, Janet and Vernon Carroll, attended the meeting as well. They were there to solicit support for their directing project, *Day of Absence* by Douglas Turner Ward. The play is a satire on White bigotry and discrimination, and they asked Dr. Sandle to assist them in their directorial debut. They expressed to Dr. Sandle their desire to stage a first class production, and told him they needed his theatrical expertise (Sandle interview 2001).

After discussing the play and soliciting actors, the Carrolls left the meeting. Sandle then addressed the Black Student Association. He encouraged the Black students not to isolate themselves, and to take advantage of the wealth of knowledge among the professors on the campus. He challenged the students to rise to the pinnacle and become qualified academically, socially, and financially. He solicited their support of Carroll's play by asking them to please attend and tell other Black students to attend the play (Sandle *A Memoir* 212). The play was presented to the student body and it was a successful venture. The students enjoyed it because it was different, so much so that the Chancellor attended the performance. Dr. Sandle's year at LSU as a Visiting Professor was much different from what he had experienced as a graduate student there in the 1950s. That was the message to his students, "changes occur daily, adapt to change" (Sandle interview 2001).

Dr. Sandle returned to Grambling for the 1974 school term and returned to his work with the ISE Program. As before, he attended the six-week summer workshop in Boston. Emphasis was still on developing General Education programs that focused on curbing freshman failure and dropout rates. During that summer session, Sandle detected a change in the atmosphere of the directors many of whom had initially been ISE Directors, and were now college presidents or



vice-presidents. Sandle knew that there was not a hurricane strong enough that could displace President Jones at Grambling. It was then that he contemplated retirement, but was reminded, “a man doesn’t sit still and not think, he thinks about something” (Sandle interview 2001). With that thought, he brought the deans of Louisiana’s Junior and Basic College together for a conference.

The Association of Louisiana College and Universities began to embrace the Junior Divisions of colleges and universities across the state. The problems of the Junior Divisions were an integral part of the Association’s agenda (Sandle *A Memoir* 219). In 1975, the buzzword was that President Jones would retire within the year. Dr. E.L. Cole was Sandle’s choice for the presidency, however President Jones had remained in the position too long, therefore it wasn’t feasible for Dr. Cole to become a candidate because of his age.

In 1976, Sandle submitted his name for the presidency of Grambling; it had become apparent that this was about politics, not educational improvement. Until that experience, he felt that a college or university sought a president, not the other way around. Sandle recalled a 1952 conversation he had with Mr. L.D. Land, a Professor of Education at Grambling who shared,

Sandle, you and E.L. Cole are working yourselves to a frazzle academically, preparing for the top leadership of this university. But mark my word, while you are away pursuing the impeccable preparation, the politics of this campus will upstage you! Grambling is dominated by the politics of athletics, not education and humanities. (Sandle *A Memoir* 221)

Sandle remained focused, but he knew there was merit in what Professor Land had shared with him. The politics surrounding the presidential issue at Grambling prompted Sandle to think more about retirement. Grambling needed a cataclysmic restructuring from the top to bottom;

the school needed academic and financial character with a leader who would lead, and not be a puppet to any special interest group (220-22).

The University of Louisiana System appointed Joseph Johnson as Grambling's third president in 1977. Sandle served as the Master of Ceremonies for the combined retirement gala for President Jones and Dr. E.L. Cole at the Ruston Civic Center. "In an effort to eliminate my hurt of not being named president, I was asked to deliver the commencement address at the 1977 spring graduation" he said (Sandle interview 2001). Sandle served the 1977-78 school year under President Johnson's administration as Professor of Speech and Drama and Dean of the Division of General Studies.

As Dean of the Division of General Studies, Sandle attended the annual meeting of the Conference of Louisiana Colleges and Universities held on the campus of Louisiana College in Pineville. Sandle was nominated and elected vice president. Normally the office of president, which Sandle would assume the following year, went to the president of the college who hosted the Association the following year. It was obvious by the vote that Sandle had the support of his colleagues.

The consent to host the conference the following year was approved by Vice President Cole in the absence of President Jones. The conference was held at Grambling in 1977, and Sandle asked newly elected President Joseph Johnson to make the welcoming address at the opening session and to preside over the session on college and university presidents. Sandle and his committee had planned workshops to address attrition, curriculum, budget, grant writing, and remedial courses. There were over one hundred in attendance for this two-day conference. The conference was a success, and placed Grambling's name among the top conference sites for the Association (Sandle interview 2001).

Sandle retired from Grambling at the end of the summer term of 1978. The mandatory retirement age was sixty-five then, and he did not ask for an extension (Sandle *A Memoir* 223). He was honored with a gala retirement banquet in August of 1978 in the Black and Gold Room of the Favort Student Union on Grambling's campus. All of his children attended, Gail, Wanda, Ava, Floyd Jr., and Anthony, as well as his sister-in-law, Mildred Piques from Chicago, Illinois. He was moved by tributes from: Dr. E.L. Cole, former Vice President of Academic Affairs; Dr. R.W.E. Jones, former President of Grambling; Dr. Claude Shaver, of LSU Theatre Department; Dr. Joseph B. Johnson, current President of Grambling; and Dr. Frank Morgan, Dean of Northeast's School of Arts and Sciences.

The tributes were moving, and Sandle knew there were three things he was not to do: talk too long, tell a bad joke, and cry. As he walked to the lectern, he surveyed all the familiar faces in the audience, and thought about the wonderful years and the special stories that each shared. For fifteen minutes, Sandle shared with the audience highlights of his career at Grambling and how much he loved, and depended, on his wife and children. He proceeded to tell the audience that in 1941 at his wedding, "Marie had on a show-stopper wedding gown, I had on a rented tuxedo. At my LSU graduation, my wife and three daughters had on brand new dresses, and the boys new suits, I as usual, had on a rented gown. Now, tonight, my wife and daughters have on new, expensive dresses. I again have on a rented tuxedo and had to pay to rent the tuxedos my sons and son-in-law are wearing." With a burst of laughter in the room, Sandle took his seat.

Sandle remembers the good and the bad, during his forty years at Grambling. The virulent cycles, the friends, the enemies, the steps forward and the steps backward. He had no regrets for the decisions he made and the path he traveled. His inner strength revealed his character as he

pondered the words of Robert Kennedy who said, “Some men see things as they are and ask why? Other men dream of things as they could be and ask why not?”

Dr. Floyd Sandle often asked why not? Why can’t it be done? Why can’t it be achieved? When Sandle’s goals seemed unobtainable to others, he obtained them. Equipped only with a passion for theatre, and an innovative idea to present plays during the school term, Sandle established a state certified Speech and Drama Department and changed the cultural outlook of the Grambling community. Through his tactic of bootlegging plays, he established a state certified Speech and Drama Department.

Sandle presented plays that taught lessons, plays rich in dialogue and morals. He staged plays that reflected the community, that touched and revealed truths to its audience. He was not afraid of challenges, he dealt with them. When others refused to help, he did it alone. He organized a high school dramatics club, forensics club, children’s playhouse, and college dramatics guild. When it was said he couldn’t, he did. The strength and courage that Sandle exhibited during his lifetime reminds me of a poem I learned at a very early age,

Someone said that it couldn’t be done,  
but I with chuckle replied,  
That maybe it couldn’t, but I would be one  
who wouldn’t say until I tried.  
So I buckled right in with a bit of a grin,  
I started to sing as I tackled the thing,  
that couldn’t be done, but I’ll do it!  
There are thousands to say that it can’t be done,  
there are thousands to prophesy failure.  
There are thousands to point out to you,  
one by one the dangers that assail you.  
But just buckle right in, with a bit of grin,  
just start to sing, as you tackle the thing,  
that couldn’t be done, but you’ll do it.

Edgar A. Guest

Sandle was not ready to ride into the sunset after his retirement from Grambling. There was a new administration in place moving this school in a new direction; Sandle also wanted to move forward, he wanted to remain active in theatre, and work with students. Dr. Elton C. Harrison, Vice President for Academic Affairs at Dillard University had contacted Sandle about coming to Dillard as Chair of the Humanities Division. As always, Sandle discussed the invitation with his wife, and with her blessings, he decided, “why not”? He accepted the position and reported to work August of 1978 (Sandle interview 2002).

Dillard University in New Orleans is where Floyd Leslie Sandle began his educational career as a student in 1934, and it is where he concluded it as an administrator in 1986. After his retirement from Grambling State University in August of 1978 with forty years of service, he accepted a position at Dillard University as Chair of the Division of Humanities in the fall of 1978. As a graduate of the Drama Department, Dr. Sandle accepted the position in order to return Dillard’s Drama Department to prominence and to uphold the legacy of theatre pioneers, Dr. S. Randolph Edmonds, Ted Gilliam and Ted Shine (Dr. Henry Lacy interview 2002).

The theatre program at Dillard had not been productive for a number of years. Very few productions had been presented, and few students had graduated from the discipline in the previous eight years. As a result, the program was under consideration for elimination as a major in the Division of Humanities. When Sandle was contacted about the status of the Speech and Drama Department, he readily accepted the challenge to save the program. His family supported his decision to return to Dillard. They knew that he was not ready to retire and that he wanted to return to the department where he received his theatre training.

The Humanities Department at Dillard focused on producing highly employable graduates and providing the knowledge and understanding necessary for the humanities major to perform

successfully in the business world, education, mass communications, performing arts, and in religious ministries. The division's goals were:

- 1) To prepare students to demonstrate oral and written communication skills, in both their native and foreign languages;
- 2) To prepare students to think and read critically and analytically;
- 3) To prepare students to obtain employment or admission to graduate and professional schools; and
- 4) To spearhead the University's effort to assure that all students are exposed to a variety of literary and cultural experiences. (Dillard Catalogue 1979)

The eight major programs of instruction were: Art, English, Speech and Drama, Foreign Languages, Music, Mass Communication, Philosophy and Religion, and Sandle oversaw all of these programs. As part of his responsibilities Sandle also directed a \$240,000 Lilly Foundation Grant for equipment, supplies and faculty improvement (Sandle interview 2002).

The Lilly Foundation, organized in 1968, is a nonprofit corporation made possible by the profits of Eli Lilly and Company. The majority of the foundation's contributions program is employee directed through the Matching Gifts Program of the United Way initiative. Recipient organizations, like accredited educational and cultural care institutions are selected by employees and retirees according to the program's guidelines. The foundation supports organizations that have a well-defined sense of purpose, a demonstrated commitment to maximizing available resources, and a reputation for meeting objectives and delivering quality programs and services (Lilly Foundation Brochure).

One of Sandle's first administrative decisions was a recommendation to President Samuel DuBois Cook for faculty promotion. It was Sandle's belief that faculty should either be promoted or terminated, especially those who had been employed for a number of years. President Cook concurred with the recommendation. There were more promotions in rank for faculty in the Humanities Division than any other division on the campus (Sandle *A Memoir*

234). With an established leadership record in theatre and administration, he sprinkled some of his innovative seasoning in Dillard's educational community. He secured financial support to enhance the division by hiring additional personnel, he ordered books and supplies for classroom instruction and he ensured student participation in speech, theatre and music competitions, while encouraging professional development for the faculty (Sandle interview 2001).

In addition to his administrative duties, Sandle taught Public Speaking and Phonetics, and during his second year, his teaching load had increased to five classes. Sandle's teaching fifteen hours was reminiscent of Mr. Alexander, his high school principal, math teacher, and football coach who had minimal time to teach math due to his numerous responsibilities. Sandle knew the ramifications of 'wearing too many hats,' but did not allow that to diminish his determination to breathe life into a dying drama program. According to Dr. Henry Lacey, the Drama Department had been unproductive for a number of years, and Sandle came to Dillard fully committed to reviving Edmond's legacy (Interview 2003).

Sandle was gratified to return to his alma mater, and to the department from which he had graduated. When he assumed leadership of the division, the objectives of the Speech and Drama Program were to: 1) provide theatrical enrichment for the college and community; 2) prepare talented and capable students for graduate study in speech and drama; 3) prepare students for community and professional theatre work; and 4) teach students to speak with clarity and correctness. Speech and Drama majors were required to participate in all phases of stage productions as members of casts and the crews. They were also required to participate as judges for the annual High School Speech and Drama Tournaments held on the campus (Dillard University Catalogue 1976-78).

Sandle found the program's objectives rooted in those developed by Edmonds in 1935. The Fine Arts Program, as it was called under Edmonds' leadership had had three objectives: 1) to refine abilities of self-expression; 2) to prepare students for school instruction; and 3) to provide opportunities for the perfection of literary craftsmanship (Sandle interview 2001). The dramatics program involved participation in the writing and production of plays and aided the students in learning both the mechanics of the theatre and its cultural possibilities as a vehicle of Black self-expression (Dillard University Catalogue 1935).

In a 2001 interview Dr. Sandle, said that the Drama Department had not presented a quality production since 1983, had not graduated a major in five years prior to his arrival and that their last NADSA appearance was in 1980. "The program was withering for lack of care. I guess I was brought in to nourish the program, to restore it, to revitalize it." In his initial assessment of the division, Sandle decided that a technical director was needed for the Drama program. Sandle contacted his former student, Clyde Kay who was an Assistant Professor of Theatre at Texas Southern University in Houston. Kay, a 1965 Speech and Drama graduate of Grambling, was one of Sandle's most versatile students with expertise in technical theatre. Kay joined the Dillard faculty in 1979 as technical director and director of the Dillard University Players Guild. The Players Guild was the university's official performance group and one of the most productive student organizations on the campus. The goal of the Players Guild was to nurture and expand the artistic talents of its members (Sandle interview 2001). The group presented three plays per year, one of which was directed or written by a Speech and Drama major.

Sandle encouraged his students to write plays through which to share their voice and their vision on stage. One incentive that provided students with a forum for their plays was participation in the Lorraine Hansberry Playwriting Award. Established by Robert Nemiroff in



1976, with the sponsorship of McDonalds, the award is given to the best play on the Black Experience and is produced at the Kennedy Center's annual American College Theatre Festival (ACTF). The first place recipient is awarded \$2,500 and \$750 is given to the producing college (Bean 161).

NADSA member schools presently support the Hansberry playwriting contests as well as its own playwriting contest, the S. Randolph Playwriting Contest. The winning play of this contest is presented by the host school of the NADSA conference the following year and published in the *Encore* journal. Sandle entered several of his student's plays in the various contests during his tenure at Dillard. In 1976, Judi Ann Mason of Grambling won the Lorraine Hansberry Award for her play *A Star Ain't Nothing but a Hole in Heaven*, and Christine Houston of Kennedy-King College (Chicago) received the Norman Lear Award for her play, "227" which subsequently became a television sitcom.

After Sandle's arrival, the first production staged by the Players Guild was the three-act comedy, *Livin' Fat* written by Judi Ann Mason and directed by Clyde Kay. Mason received the Norman Lear Award for this play during her senior year at Grambling when the play was presented in the Regional Festival in Fort Worth, Texas in 1976. The play was later presented by the Negro Ensemble Company, directed by Douglas Turner Ward at the St. Mark Theatre in New York (Gallot 129). *Livin' Fat* ignited the spirit of theatre going for the Dillard community. Both Sandle and Kay knew that the play would be well received by the Dillard family as well as the local community, due to the national recognition of the play and the playwright, but most importantly, due to its plot.

The play is about the Coopers, a poor but happy Black family who accidentally wins the lottery, of sorts. David Lee Cooper, who works part-time as a bank custodian, picks up a bag

that he thinks contains trash, only to discover that the bag contains \$50,000, dropped by a nervous bank robber. The family morals are tested when David Lee takes the money home to his grandmother who wants to keep it, and his mother who feels there is evil behind it.

Theatre had returned to the campus where Edmonds made an impact on the crescent city in 1936. Although New Orleans is a metropolitan city and Grambling a small town, there was no difference in the preference of the Black audience, they wanted to see a reflection of their culture on stage. Audiences packed the theatre each night to see this hilarious production and each night howls of laughter from students, the administration, community residents, and visiting high schools filled the Lawless Memorial Chapel during the production's five day run.

After the successful run of *Living ' Fat*, the Players Guild presented *Purlie*, the powerful Black musical written by Ossie Davis. The play was presented the spring of 1980 directed by Kay, who also designed the set and costumes. Performing multiple tasks was not difficult for Kay, because Sandle had trained him to use whatever resources were available in order to get the job done. He worked collaboratively with the music and art departments to stage this production, which was the first and only musical presented during Sandle's eight-year tenure (Kay interview 2003).

Collaboratively, Sandle and Kay returned the Speech and Drama program to prominence and as a result, the enrollment increased in the Division of Humanities (Harrison interview 2003). Kay directed the Players Guild, taught theatre history, acting, and technical theatre courses. He tailored a repertoire for the Players Guild to use exclusively as a vehicle for recruitment in the New Orleans schools and surrounding parishes.

During the spring semester of 1981, a play exchange program with Southern University was implemented in the Speech and Drama Program as a creative writing initiative for all humanities

courses. Students enrolled in humanities courses were required to read literature (books, plays and poetry) written by Black authors, and then write their own works that were subsequently presented for chapel program.

Once again, Sandle in his own ingenious way, succeeded in his effort to stage plays written by Blacks and addressing their issues. Sandle embraced the student's work, designating specific chapel days for students to present their creative pieces. Material with worthwhile themes had been a concern of NADSA since the 1930s. Sandle used the chapel idea to develop the craft, and produce playwrights from the division. Historically, only freshmen were required to attend weekly chapel, however Sandle made attendance mandatory for all students in the Division of Humanities (Harrison interview 2003).

Sandle's writing proposal prompted him to pen a play during the fall semester of 1983. Initially, it was to be presented as a chapel program, but after several revisions he decided to present it as a main stage production. The one-act play, *Grounds For Reprieve* was presented November 29, 1983, with a of cast non-majors. The play tells the story of Jerome Essex who has been sentenced to die for the alleged murder of his father-in-law, Wade Hampton. The deck is stacked against Essex early in the trial because he is Black and Hampton is White. However, it is Linda Essex's love and loyalty to her husband, and her unshakable faith in his innocence that troubled Judge Dunnings. It was difficult for the Judge to understand why Mrs. Hampton was distancing herself from her family to support the man who is accused of killing her father. As a symbol of law of order, the Judge believes that capital punishment is the best means of upholding the law. The play comes to a dramatic conclusion when the Judge refuses to consider pleas to re-examine some of the evidence presented in court and sentences Essex to die in the

electric chair (Sandle interview 2002). The play introduced Dr. Sandle, the playwright to the Dillard family.

Following the evening's production, a freshman approached him as he was being congratulated by the audience, and commented, "Dr. Sandle, I had no idea you were a playwright too, I would like to have my play presented at chapel" (Sandle interview 2002). The students were eager to have their work showcased on stage after Dr. Sandle had incorporated writing into the Humanities courses (Lacey interview 2002). The students could now look at the bigger picture, they were not just writing poetry and prose in class, but they were also developing story lines for plays. Eventually these plays would be entered in the NADSA playwrighting contest and staged for production on campus. By seeing Sandle's play, *Grounds for Reprieve*, the students were motivated, and their instructors embraced their work by presenting poetry readings on Thursday evenings, and submitting their students' plays to Dr. Sandle for production consideration (Sandle interview 2002).

Of all of the creative initiatives Sandle implemented at Dillard, the highlight of his tenure there was hosting the annual NADSA Conference in April of 1986. Sandle chose to host the association's golden anniversary to help celebrate the renaissance of theatre at Dillard, and to return NADSA to its birthplace. The conference theme, "Onward Through Difficulties" exemplified the commitment of those members who had been active throughout some of NADSA's most difficult times. The conference attendance was one of the highest in a number of years. Fifteen schools registered, many of them directed by NADSA alumni, and former students of Sandle. The schools in attendance were: Arkansas-Pine Bluff, Bowie State, Dillard, Fayetteville State, Florida Memorial, Fort Valley State, Grambling State, Hampton Institute, Kennedy-King College, Los Angeles Southwest College, Miami Performing Arts Center,

Norfolk State, Northern Illinois, North Carolina A & T, and Tennessee State (Flowers interview 2004).

As the host director, it was Sandle's task to extend greetings during the opening session. Fighting back tears, the emotional Sandle welcomed more than two hundred conferees to Dillard University, the small private, faith based liberal arts college that was the birthplace of Black Educational Theatre in 1936. He recognized Henrietta Edmonds and introduced her as the daughter of NADSA's founder Dr. S. Randolph Edmonds, and director of the Howard University's Children Theatre. Ms. Edmonds was the keynote speaker for the conference and the play festival's critic judge (Flowers interview 2004).

The play festival featured fifteen plays that year, the most entries since the early 1970s. *Quite of The Land*, presented by North Carolina A&T University and directed by Dr. H.D. Flowers placed first in the festival, Los Angeles Southwest College placed second with *The Owl Killer*, and *Breeders* by Grambling State University placed third.

Dr. Joseph Adkins of Fort Valley State University conducted a workshop on "Selecting Plays." Many of the seasoned directors who studied under Randolph Edmonds, Floyd Sandle, Thomas E. Poag, and Thomas Pawley had voiced concern about the language in plays presented at the play festival. Earlier that year, Adkins had written an article for the *NADSA NEWSLETTER* on play selection, and was asked by NADSA President, Phillip Williams to conduct a workshop during the conference for the directors. The common thread in the fabric of the discussion by the younger directors was that the world had changed from that of the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s. One director commented that during the 1960s, Blacks were involved in the Civil Rights Movement, and much of the material written during that period contained graphic language. (Flowers Interview 2004).

Sandle did not change his production standards to accommodate a more radical agenda for the students. While Tennessee State and Lincoln University were touring Black plays like *Dutchman* by LeRoi Jones, *The Amen Corner* by James Baldwin, *Take a Giant Step* by Louis Peterson, and *Native Son* by Richard Wright, Dillard staged *Antigone* and *The Bad Seed*. Many of his students voiced their dissatisfaction with the kinds of plays he selected and they labeled Sandle as being “too White.” Sandle was not ‘too White’ he was a stickler for producing quality material. He set standards for his plays and did not deviate from those he established in the 1930’s. His plays contained, worthwhile themes, positive characters, and sharply drawn conflict.

The four-day conference culminated with a surprise tribute to Sandle as the NADSA Director who had produced more Ph.D. ’s than any other Black director in educational theatre. Sandle thanked the NADSA Executive Board, students and colleagues. He proudly called the names of each of his students who had earned the Ph.D: Dr. Arthur Allen, Dr. Clayton Arceneaux, Dr. Emma Bradford, Dr. Jimmy Cato, Dr. Dana Carpenter, Dr. Adeline Lemelle Evans, Dr. Edward Fisher, Dr. H.D. Flowers, Dr. Geneva Facen-Gaston, Dr. Cynthia Hammond, Dr. Eva Cole-Lewis, Dr. Alex Marshall, Dr. Anita McAllister, Dr. Carolyn Calloway-Thannas, Dr. Louise Hall-Wade, Dr. Allen Williams, and Dr. Eddie Ray Williams. The delegates departed with a renewed commitment to NADSA, the organization that had nurtured their talents and careers. This conference provided Sandle an opportunity to fellowship and reminisce with some of the most brilliant minds in educational theatre, many of whom he had not seen in over twenty years. This conference was a mirror for him, one that reflected his accomplishments.

Sandle was pleased that he was able to complete his assigned task of rebuilding the Speech and Drama Department at Dillard. Sandle decided to retire from Dillard at the end of the school

year in 1986 with no regrets. He says in his memoir, “One must know up front, at the beginning, what results he expects from his effort. Know at the beginning the results he expects at the end” (Sandle *A Memoir* 241). After eight years at Dillard, he knew the results of his effort; when asked to come and revive an almost nonexistent theatre program, he succeeded and he also succeeded in rebuilding and strengthening the Humanities Division. The results of his efforts were visible. Sandle’s students and colleagues are still driven by NADSA’s mission:

To encourage the establishment and conduct of programs in theatre and the communicative arts at member institutions, and provide pre-professional and professional experience for students, faculty, and practitioners who have an interest in or special recommendations for professional work in theatre and the communicative arts. (NADSA Handbook)

An elegant retirement banquet was held for Dr. Sandle in the Presidential Ballroom on the campus. Mrs. Marie Sandle was by her husband’s side, as she had been for the last forty-five years. Fifteen of Sandle’s friends, colleagues and former students spoke about their relationship with the honoree. Each had a unique story, creatively, they each described him by using his initials, **F.S.** Fine scholar, fabulous director, stimulating speaker, superior teacher, and super father were only a few of the adjectives the speakers injected in their jovial salutes to the honoree. Sandle concluded the evening with a short speech of thanksgiving to all who had welcomed him and supported him during his eight years at Dillard (Moore interview 2004).

After a total of forty-eight years in higher education, theatre and administration, Dr. Floyd Leslie Sandle’s enthusiasm had not waned. In a personal interview in his Grambling home on July 6, 2002, two days after his 89<sup>th</sup> birthday, Sandle’s articulate delivery was now a whisper as he said he had no regrets about any of the decisions he had made during his lifetime. He exhibited strength through some very difficult times, and obstacles had not weakened his drive.

Sandle's success and influence as a theatre pioneer can be best felt by the indelible impact he had on the development of his student's careers. Ask any of his former students today about the impact he had on their lives, and they will reply, "Had it not been for Dr. Sandle, I wouldn't be where I am today." From the seeds Sandle planted sprouted a state certified Speech and Drama Department at Grambling and students who have graduated from that program have accomplished so much.

Here are a few examples: At Grambling, the department bore the branches of Dr. Allen Williams, who was one of its first five graduates. Williams became acting head of the department in 1968 and was named head after he received the Ph.D. degree in 1973. Williams will retire in July 2004 after forty-four years in Grambling's Speech and Drama Department.

Dr. H.D. Flowers, who guided theatre departments at South Carolina State University, North Carolina A&T, University of Arkansas-Pine Bluff, Bowie State University, Virginia Tech University, Livingston College and Bennett College has published several Speech and Theatre books. He has had more students attend graduate school on theatre scholarships than any other NADSA Director.

Dr. Edward Fisher is responsible for guiding the Fayetteville State University Theatre Guild to excellence with the high demands that he placed on his students to achieve academically, as well as artistically. One of his students who continue to excel in theatre and film is Tommie Stewart, Chair of Drama at Alabama State University. Professor Stewart whose stage name is Tonea Stewart portrayed Samuel L. Jackson's wife in *A Time to Kill*. She also portrayed Aunt Etta in the television version of *In the Heat of the Night*, starring Carroll O'Connor, and had a recurring role on *Walker, Texas Ranger*.



Judi Ann Mason became the youngest person to have a play produced on Broadway when The Negro Ensemble Company staged her play, *Living 'Fat*. Mason was tabbed to write for *Good Times*, *Sanford and Son*, *The Cosby Show*, *A Different World*, *Palmerstown USA* and *American Gothic*. She became the head writer for America's first Black soap opera, *Generations*. Her film credit includes *Sister Act II* starring Whoopi Goldberg.

Joseph Dyer is the first Black journalist hired by a Los Angeles network owned and operated by CBS, and he is the author of the book, *Lifetime of Memories: From the Cotton Fields to CBS*.

Other artists whose careers branched from the Grambling Speech and Drama tree are: Dr. Carolyn-Calloway Thomas, Associate Professor of Speech at Indiana University in Bloomington, Indiana; recording artist Eryka Badu (Erica Williams); Natalie Deselle of BABS; Arara Threats of the stage play, *Beauty Shop*; Sylvia Young Davis, professional storyteller; comic performer, Ed Anderson; and actress Sylvia Jackson King. The list is too extensive to name each student whose career was impacted by Dr. Floyd Leslie Sandle. Dr. Sandle embraced his students and their dream was his dream. In an interview with Dr. Allen Williams, he said, "I'll be waiting in the wings, not to take your place, but, if you need me. I will watch you as you continue to take wings and soar" (Sandle *A Memoir* 258).

## CONCLUSION

On Thursday, August 22, 2002, Dr. Floyd Leslie Sandle died at the Lincoln General Hospital in Ruston, Louisiana. He was eighty-nine years old. A funeral service was held at the New Rocky Valley Baptist Church in Grambling on August 29, 2002 at 11:00 a.m. Attending were family, friends, colleagues, Brothers of Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, members of the Lions Club, Grambling State University officials, Grambling town officials and former students.

As the first Black student to receive a Ph.D. degree from Louisiana State University (1959), this gentle man fought a continuous battle for the development of Black Educational Theatre in Louisiana. Sandle served the theatre unselfishly for over forty-eight years as an actor, teacher, director, administrator, theatre organizer and humanitarian. His pioneering work in all of these areas brought numerous challenges, and very often disappointments, but immeasurable rewards for his contemporaries and for those who followed him in the profession. Sandle's status is clearly reflected in the list of honors and awards presented to him over his lifetime (Appendix B). A fitting summary of Dr. Sandle's work in theatre is reflected in August Wilson's *The Ground on Which I Stand*,

The theatre in its fullest sense, is created from the lives of the people, and expresses the very foundation upon which the life is built. Each nation and each people has a contribution to make such a theatre of the people. (41)

Grambling's Speech and Drama Department played a vital role in the development of Grambling State University through its productions, and through the legacy of Dr. Sandle and his students. As a part of Dr. Sandle's legacy through his student, Dr. Allen Williams, I reflect on my journey in educational theatre. It has been a journey that has taken me to classrooms in the states of Louisiana, Arkansas, Illinois, Tennessee, and to my present position as Associate Chair

of the Division of Arts and Sciences and Director of Theatre at Wiley College in Marshall, Texas. Founded in 1831, this small liberal arts HBCU is a member school of the United Methodist Church and the United Negro College Fund. Located in the heart of east Texas, Wiley hosted the 1938 and 1942 NADSA conferences.

In many ways I can see Dr. Sandle's journey interwoven with my own journey. In 2002, with a desire to bring theatre to the Black inner city youth of Baton Rouge, I established UpStage Theatre Company, Inc., the city's first African American Theatre Company. As Dr. Sandle struggled to gain acceptance in rural Grambling, the novelty of a Black theatre company slowly gained acceptance from the Baton Rouge community. On a shoestring budget, I was able to maintain office space, conduct weekly theatre classes and travel throughout the state presenting productions. Several of my UpStage members are currently featured in commercials and have landed parts in movies starring Jamie Foxx, Bernie Mac, Angela Bassett and John Travolta.

As Dr. Sandle developed a theatre department at Grambling, I am currently doing likewise at Wiley College in a program that was nonexistent; I have developed a curriculum for a minor in theatre, staged several productions and established relationships with the community. As I reflect on my journey, I draw on lessons learned from Dr. Sandle. As I encounter challenges, difficulties, and obstacles, as I labor to maintain excellence in educational theatre, I am encouraged by his motto, "Stay Focused." The future history of Black Educational Theatre rests in the hands of those who will follow me, just as I have followed those who have blazed trails before me. My task then is to prepare those who will maintain the legacy of the work of Dr. Floyd Leslie Sandle.

Dr. Sandle often engaged me in encouraging conversations about perseverance. When I shared my frustrations with him about LSU, the course work, and the unfriendly atmosphere, he

would remind me that if he made it during the 1950's, surely I could make it in the 2000's, the 21<sup>st</sup> century. He said that there was nothing that I couldn't accomplish if I stayed focused and kept my eyes on the prize, the doctorate degree.

This dissertation has explored the life and works of Floyd Leslie Sandle and his contributions to the development of Black Educational Theatre in Louisiana. Documentation reveals that it was Sandle's continuous drive to develop a theatre program at Grambling that ignited the pursuit for reputable theatre programs at other HBCUs. In 1987 Grambling's theatre program became the first HBCU to be accredited by the National Association of Schools of Theatre and the only program in Louisiana to be so accredited. During the 2003 NADSA Conference at Fayetteville State University (NC), President Jacqueline Davis-Gilmore paid tribute to the memory of Dr. Sandle as a "Hallmark in the Communicative and Performing Arts." Standing on the shoulders of giants like Dr. Floyd Leslie Sandle, theatre programs at HBCUs continue to produce artists who are soaring.

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---. Personal interview. 24 January 2001.

---. Personal interview. 16 March 2001.

---. Personal interview. 12 September 2001.

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---. Telephone interview. 21 October 2003.

---. Telephone interview. 11 January 2004.

---. Telephone interview. 15 February 2004.

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**APPENDIX A**  
**HONORS AND ACHIEVEMENTS**

- 2000 NADSA Pioneer Award
- 1997 Who's Who Among African Americans
- 1990 Grambling State University Little Theatre renamed  
The Floyd L. Sandle Theatre
- 1986 Inducted into Grambling State University Hall of Fame
- 1985 University Street in Grambling renamed Sandle Street
- 1977 President, Association of Louisiana Colleges and Universities
- 1976 Wrote proposal for a \$100,000 Title III Grant for Grambling State  
University's Division of General Studies.
- 1969 Created the Louisiana Junior Division Conference of Deans
- 1959 First Black to receive Ph.D. from Louisiana State  
University
- 1955 President, National Association of Dramatic and Speech Arts
- 1947 Established Speech and Drama Department at  
Grambling

#### Professional Organizations

AARP

American Educational Theatre Association

Kappa Delta Phi

Lion's Club

Louisiana State Literacy Task Force

Louisiana Council on Aging

National Association of Dramatic and Speech Arts, Inc.

Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Inc.

Southern Speech Association

Theta Alpha Phi, Inc.

**APPENDIX B**  
**STAGE WORKS**

Plays written by Floyd Leslie Sandle

1983	GROUNDS FOR REPRIEVE
1960	THE LORDS'S DAY
1943	THE YELLOW COXSWAIN

Plays directed by Floyd Leslie Sandle

1968	GOODBYE, MY FANCY
1967	NEVER TOO LATE
1966	GUEST COTTAGE THE PUBLIC EYE KISS ME KATE
1964	HOW TO CAPTURE AND KEEP A HUSBAND HE'S DEAD ALRIGHT THE THIRD ANGLE SOME WOMEN TALKING THE MARRIAGE-GO-ROUND RHO KAPPA EPSILON BAD SEED
1963	BLITHE SPIRIT
1962	BLITHE SPIRIT
1961	AFRAID OF THE DARK A RAISIN IN THE SUN
1960	FALLEN ANGELS LITTLE SCANDAL
1958	ST. JOAN
1957	THE RIGHTEOUS ARE BOLD
1956	WUTHERING HEIGHTS THE RED KEY A MAN CALLED PETER



1955	DEATH OF A SALESMAN THE WELL
1954	ON VENGEANCE HEIGHT
1953	THE EMPEROR JONES MINOR MIRCLE
1952	A LIGHT FROM ST. AGNES
1951	CRAIG'S WIFE A MESSAGE FROM KHUFU OUT OF THIS WORLD
1950	THE FAMILY DOCTOR
1949	CANDIDA
1948	GUNS AGAINST THE SNOW
1947	THE SCARED FLAME OLD ACQUAINTANCE
1946	CHARLIE'S AUNT
1942	NINE GIRLS CIRCUMSTANTIAL EVIDENCE
1941	DEATH TAKES A HOLIDAY
1940	BREEDERS
1939	THE HOUSE OF SHAM NAT TURNER
1938	OLD MAN PETE BAD MAN SUBMERGED THE SOUND AND THE FURY

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- 1998 *Grambling: My Years in Drama and Speech Revisited, 1938-1978*
- 1965 *Orientation: An Image of the College*
- 1964 *The Negro in The American Educational Theatre  
An Organizational Development (1911-1964)*

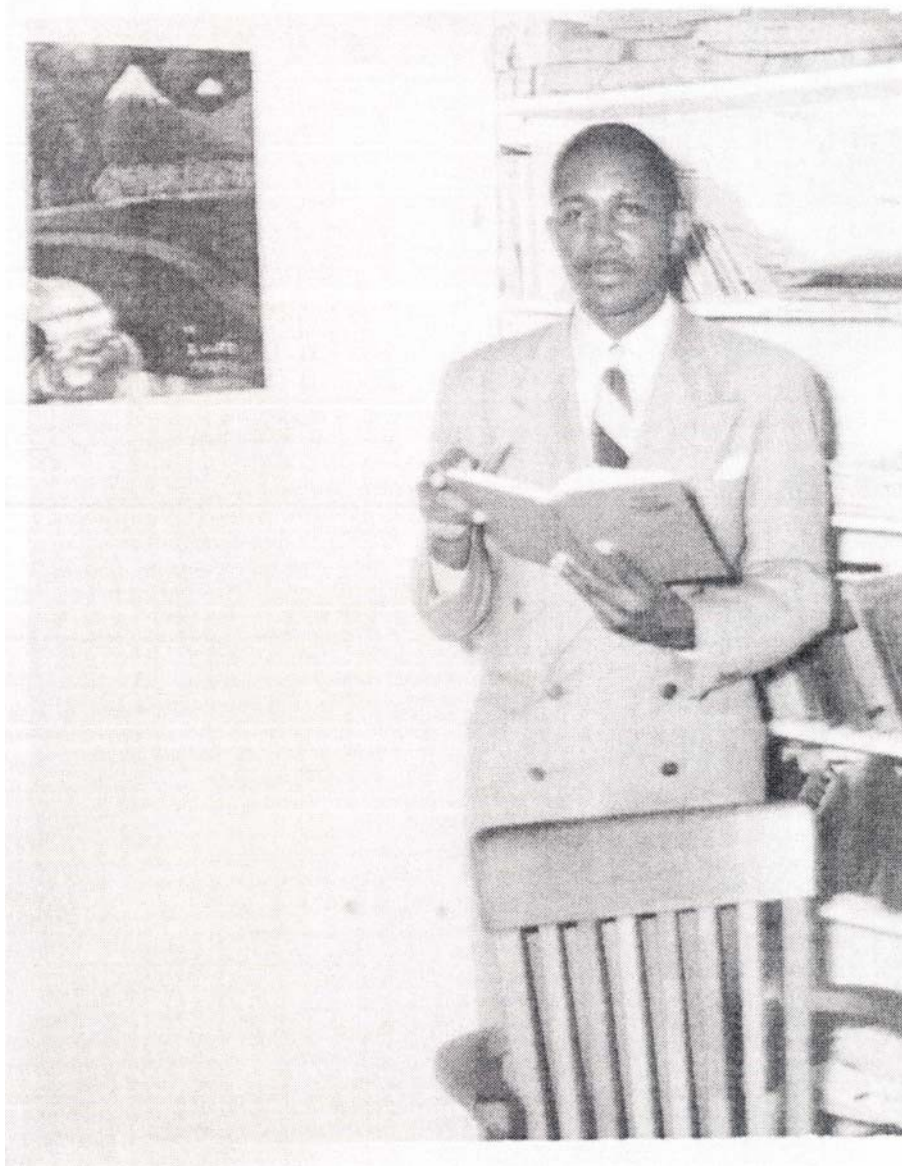
### Articles

- 1978 "Black Theatre: Attitudes and Concepts"
- 1973 "Development in Speech"
- 1957 "Community Relations and Community Recreation  
Through Community Drama"
- 1956 "Emphasizing Dramatics at the Elementary Level"
- 1955 "Administrating the High School Drama Program"
- 1950 "Preparation For The Drama Festivals of the LIALO"
- 1948 "Grambling Dramatics Workshop"

**Appendix C**  
**REFLECTIONS IN PICTURES**



*Death Takes A Holiday*  
First Three Act Play at Grambling  
1941



*Floyd L.Sandle  
Grambling College  
1943*



*Floyd L. Sandle  
Seaman Petty Officer  
1945*

**The University of Chicago**

CHICAGO 37, ILLINOIS

The Department of Education

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY

March 7, 1947

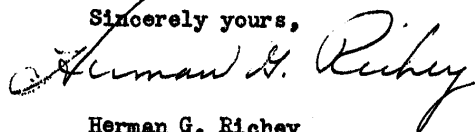
Mr. Floyd L. Sandle  
Grambling College  
Grambling, Louisiana

Dear Mr. Sandle:

It is a pleasure to report to you that you have passed your Master's Comprehensive Examination and that the faculty of the Department of Education has recommended you for the degree.

Convocation will be held March 21. If you are unable to be present, you should apply to Professor Stephen M. Corey, Dean of Students, Social Science Division, 208 Cobb Hall, for permission to take the degree in absentia.

Sincerely yours,



Herman G. Richey  
Secretary  
Department of Education

HGR:ERC



University of Chicago  
Master Degree Ceremony  
1947



*A.L. Sandee*  
*3-21-47*

The University of Chicago

FOUNDED BY JOHN D. ROCKEFELLER

THE  
TWO HUNDRED TWENTY-EIGHTH  
CONVOCATION

The Winter

MARCH TWENTY-FIRST  
A.D. NINETEEN HUNDRED FORTY-SEVEN



ROCKEFELLER MEMORIAL CHAPEL

*Greene* **Blithe Spirit**

IN THREE ACTS AND SEVEN SCENES  
BY NOEL COWARD



*Featuring*

THE OVERSEAS TOURING CAST OF  
GRAMBLING COLLEGE

January 20, 1968

8:00 P.M.

Dillon High School Gymnasium

Dillon High School

C. B. Temple, Principal

Kentwood, Louisiana

The USO Tour

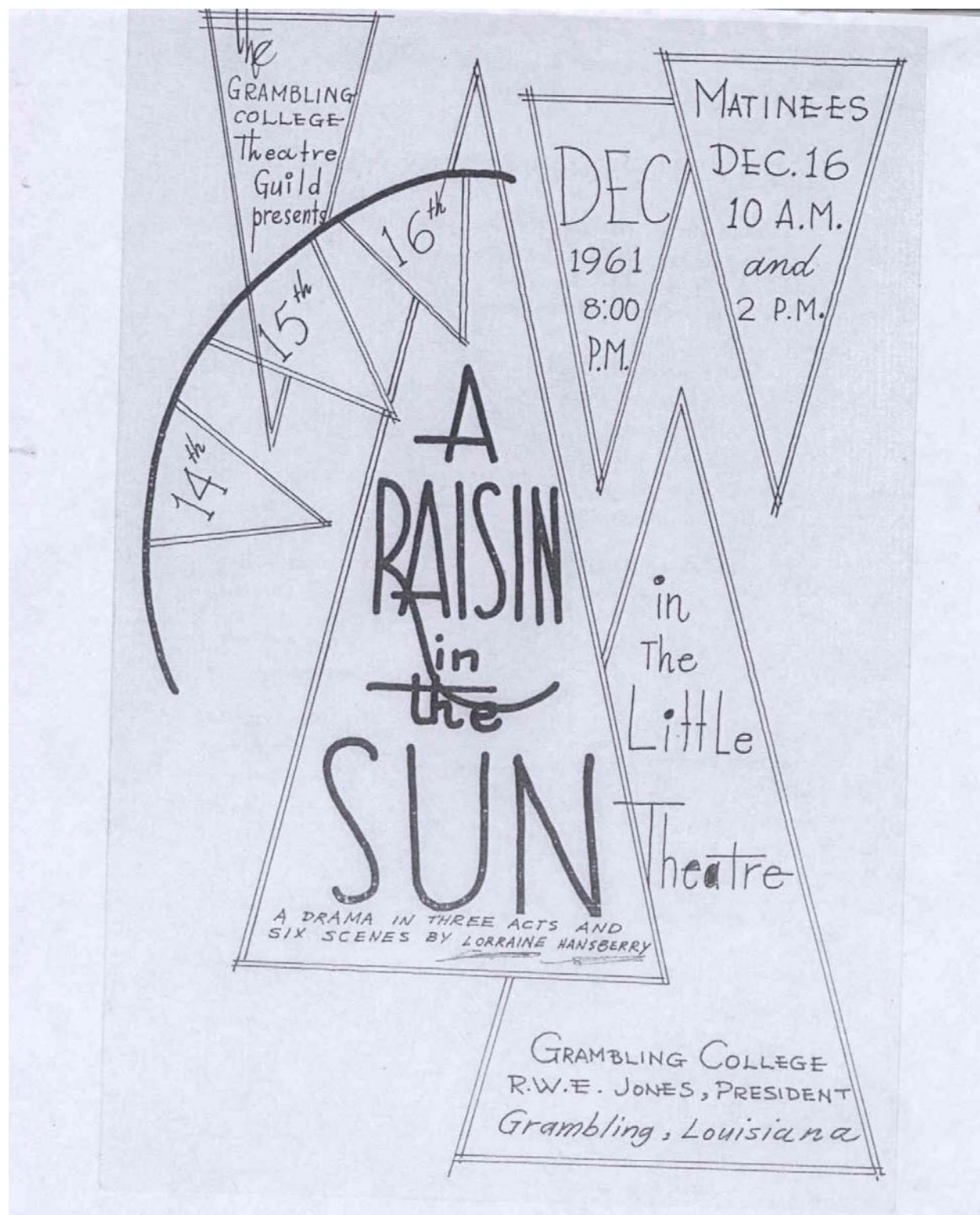


Prez Jones and the cast of *Blithe Spirit*  
1963





*Blithe Spirit* in Iceland



GRAMBLING COLLEGE LITTLE THEATRE GUILD  
PRESENTS

# SAINT JOAN

Grambling College Little Theatre

Floyd L. Sandle, Director

MARCH 25, 26, 27



The Theatre Guild

of

Grambling College

Presents

*"Craig's Wife"*

By

George Kelly

A Drama in Three Acts

Floyd L. Sandle, Director

College Auditorium

Sunday, March 18, 1951

6:00 P. M.





The Theatre Guild traveled on the "Blue Bird"



SOUVENIR PROGRAM . . .

# "Death Of A Salesman"

by Arthur Miller

Presented by

The Grambling College Theatre Guild

Floyd L. Sandle, Director



Thursday, February 24, 1955  
8:00 P. M.

In The Grambling College Auditorium  
GRAMBLING, LOUISIANA

The Dillard University Drama Department

*DIVISION OF HUMANITIES*

*PRESENTS*

# GROUND FOR REPRIEVE

*(IN ONE-ACT AND TWO SCENES)*

WRITTEN *AND* DIRECTED  
BY

FLOYD L. SANDLE, Sr.

**8:00 P.M.**

**NOVEMBER 29, 1983**

LAWLESS MEMORIAL CHAPEL

DILLARD UNIVERSITY

## **Reflections of the Sandle Family**



Dr. and Mrs. Sandle  
Grambling Coronation  
1940s



Mrs. Marie Sandle and Gail  
1945





Gail  
(Deceased 1995)



Sandle Children  
L to R Floyd Jr., Ava, Gail, Wanda, and Anthony

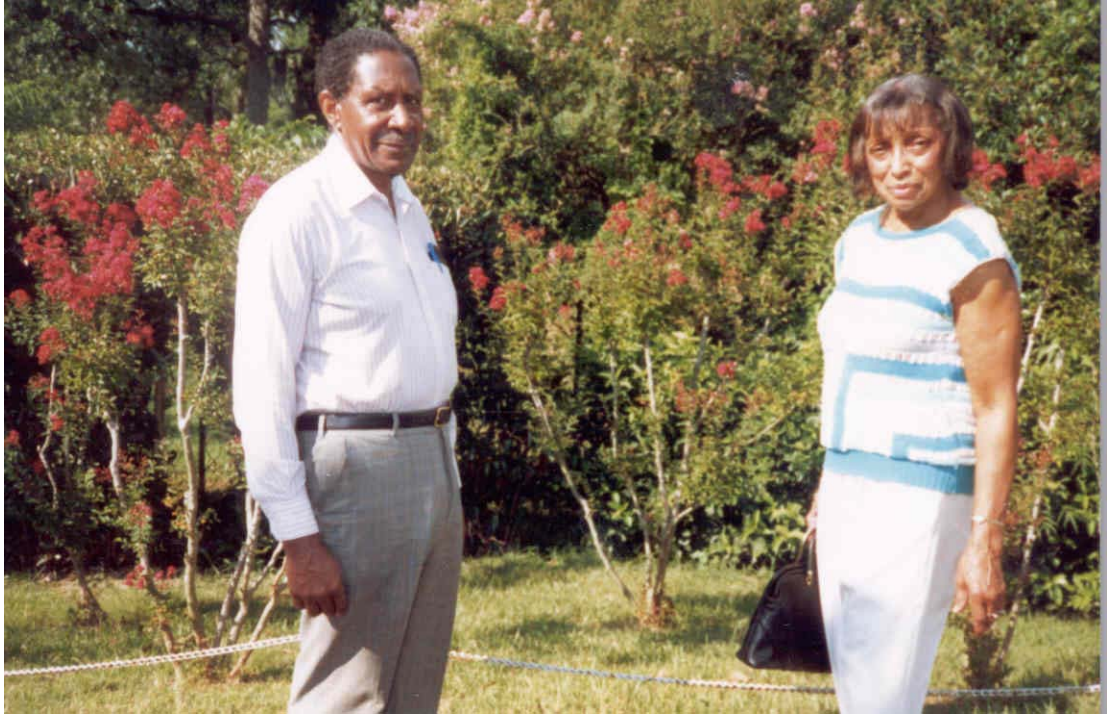


The Sandle Children  
L to R Ava, Anthony, Floyd Jr., Wanda and  
Back row Gail





The Sandle Children 2002  
L to R Wanda, Floyd Jr., Ava and Anthony



Dr. and Mrs. Sandle at their home in Grambling  
1985

**DR. FLOYD LESLIE SANDLE IN THE NEWS**

## Meeting of State Junior Divisions Set Here Mar 25

Grambling College and the Division of General Studies will host the Conference of Deans and Directors of Junior Divisions in Louisiana Colleges and Universities March 25, in the Black and Gold Room of the Student Union Building, beginning at 9 a.m.

The conference participants will discuss current problems common to the institutions' junior divisions, and that affect the senior divisions.

The following representatives are expected to attend the meeting:

Dr. J. W. Ellis, dean, Junior Division, Louisiana State University, New Orleans; Dr. J. H. Perry, dean, Junior Division, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge; Dr. Leonard I. Keller, dean of Freshman Studies Southern University, New Orleans; Dr. Leonard Spearman, dean, Junior Division, Southern University, Baton Rouge; Dr. Charles C. Cain, director, Freshman Division, University of Southwestern Louisiana, Lafayette; Dr. Frank Morgan, dean, School of Liberal Arts, Northeast Louisiana State College, Monroe; Dr. C. F. Thomas, Vice President,



DR. FLOYD SANDLE  
... Host Dean

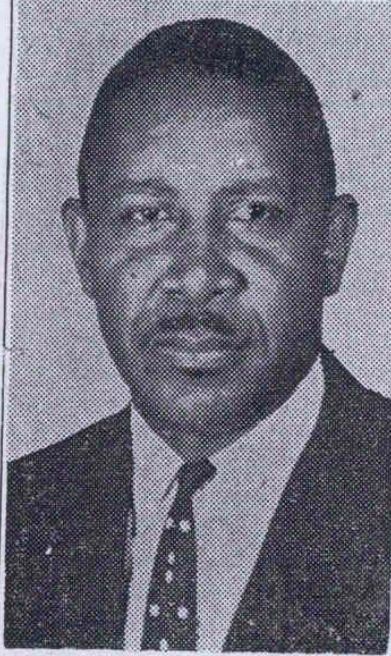
counselors in the Junior Divisions, directors of high school relations, and liaison personnel who work with the junior division will participate in the discussions.

It is a one-day conference which will be in session from 9 a.m. through 3 p.m. All participants will register in the Black and Gold Room of the Student Union Building, where the conference will be held. Visitors will be greeted at the opening session by an



## Grambling Dean Speech Slated On LSU Campus

Dr. Floyd L. Sandle, professor of speech and dean of the division of general studies at Grambling College, will speak at LSU tomorrow at 1:30 p.m.



DR. F. L. SANDLE

Topic of Dr. Sandle's talk, which will be held in the Workshop Theater in the LSU Music and Dramatic Arts Building,

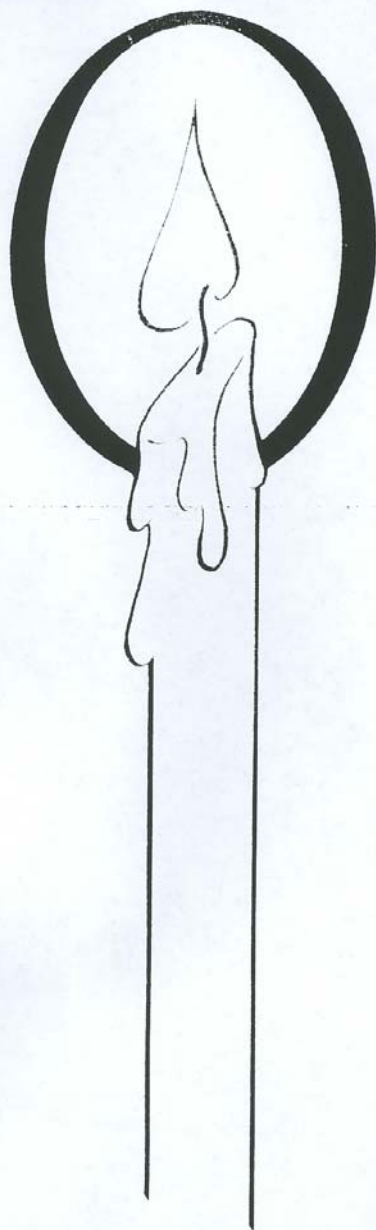
will be "Black Actors: The Image of Black Determination."

Dr. Sandle is credited with developing the speech program to degree status at Grambling and served as head of the college's speech and drama department until 1968. A past president of the National Association of Dramatic and Speech Arts, he was appointed dean of general studies at Grambling in 1963.

In addition to articles in professional journals, Dr. Sandle is the author of two books, "The Negro in the American Educational Theater" and "Orientation: An Image of the College."

He is currently a member of the alumni cabinet of the University of Chicago, where he earned his M.A. degree. His other degrees are the A.B. from Dillard University and the Ph.D. in speech from LSU.

The United Nations has designated 1971 as "International Year for Action to Combat Racism and Racial Discrimination."



# RIENTATION

AN IMAGE OF THE COLLEGE

WITH EMPHASIS ON BOOKS  
AND  
LIBRARIES

Floyd L. Sandle

*Dean of The Division of General Studies*

Grambling College

WM. C. BROWN BOOK COMPANY

*An Atlantic City*

WM. C. BROWN COMPANY PUBLISHERS ■ Dubuque, Iowa



GRAMBLING STATE UNIVERSITY  
PRESIDENT'S OFFICE  
GRAMBLING, LOUISIANA 71245

May 31, 1978

Dr. Floyd L. Sandle  
Dean, Division of General  
Studies  
Grambling State University  
Grambling, LA 71245

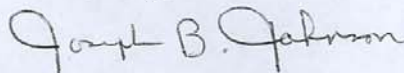
Dear Dean Sandle:

I have your letter of May 23, 1978 announcing your plan to retire at the end of the summer session -- July 31, 1978.

Needless to say you have been an innovating force at Grambling State University as a teacher, department head and division dean. Your effectiveness as an administrator is known statewide and nationwide, and your dedication to the profession has been felt by numberless students who have passed through Grambling. I want to express appreciation for all of these things; but as President of Grambling State University, I wish to express my appreciation for your cooperation with the new administration during the past academic year. I want you to know that neither your labor nor your loyalty has gone unnoticed or undervalued.

Retirement for you will probably be in name only, but may whatever avenue you choose to enter be personally satisfying for you.

Sincerely,



Joseph B. Johnson  
President

JBj/mah



## Sandle authors paper on Black theatre

A paper on Black theatre by Dr. Floyd Sandle, dean of the Division of General Studies at Grambling College, has been published in connection with a special symposium at Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge.

Dr. Sandle, a visiting professor at LSU in 1972-73, said it is the responsibility of the large state university theatres to help Blacks achieve upward mobility in theatre with the same vigor as in athletics, marching bands and in other fields.

Papers at the symposium were delivered by Dr. Sandle and three other graduates in speech at LSU.

The symposium was part of a three-day program at LSU

honoring Dr. Claude L. Shaver, a professor at the institution for

40 years. Dr. Sandle received his Ph. D. in speech at LSU in 1959 and Dr. Shaver was his major professor.

Sandle's paper was entitled "Black Theatre: Ideas That Matter in the Pursuit of Human Dignity."

Sandle emphasized the broad responsibilities of state colleges and universities in responding to the needs of educating black theatre workers. His thesis was that Black theatre workers must be trained in the art of the profession no matter where they choose to go to college, predominately white or predominately black.



NEW BOOK

## Dr. Sandle Is Author

Dr. Floyd L. Sandle, head of the department of speech and drama at Grambling College, is the author of a new book published this month on "The Negro in the American Educational Theater."

The text contains 225 pages and examines the organizational development of speech and theatre in predominately Negro colleges.

**It presents a step-by-step analysis of the educational theatre program from 1911 to 1964.**

Dr. Sandle stresses the work of pioneers in the field, underscores curriculums for developing strong theatre programs, attempts to improve the image of the Negro as a serious actor, and emphasizes contributions of playwrights and dramatic organizations.

The book is published by Edward Brothers, Inc., Ann Arbor, Mich.

**Dr. Sandle has been a member of the Grambling faculty since 1933.**

Immensely versatile, he has directed the Grambling Little Theatre Guild for the past 20 years.

A graduate of Dillard University, New Orleans, Dr. Sandle holds the M.A. degree from the University of Chicago, and the Ph.D., from Louisiana State University.



# Little Theatre to be named for Dr. Floyd Leslie Sandle

BY MARVIN J. HURST  
Contributing Writer

The Department of Speech and Theatre at Grambling State University will dedicate its performance theatre to Dr. Floyd Leslie Sandle, Saturday, March 24.

Billing Dr. Sandle as a "Living Grambling Treasure," the department has scheduled a gala black tie affair in the Little Theater of Dunbar Hall.

The event will also serve as a fundraiser for the Floyd L. Sandle Scholarship Fund.

Chairpersons Linda West-Onyemen, Sheryl Joshua, and Thomasina McMurry issued the following statement comment on the dedication and renaming of the theatrical auditorium:

"He is a 'living treasure' and is considered the father of theatre at Grambling. Therefore, this is an honor that is long overdue. He was the founder of the drama department at Grambling. He set the standard by which all educational theatre is measured. Dr. Sandle was the first department

chairperson and all firsts should be recognized."

Sandle is a native of Magnolia, Miss.

In 1937, he received a B.A. in English and Drama from Dillard University in New Orleans.

Sandle received his M.A. in Reading and Speech from the University of Chicago in 1947; and a Ph.D. degree in 1959 in Speech from LSU in Baton Rouge.

While at Grambling, Dr. Sandle was Dean of Basic Studies (now Academic Support Services), Department head of Speech and Theatre, Associate Professor of Speech and Drama and Director of Drama.

Sandle took a group of theatre students representing Grambling College on tour of the Northeast Command for the U.S. Defense Department. They traveled to Labrador, Greenland, Newfoundland, and Iceland with the Three Act Play "Blithe Spirit" and a variety show.

In addition to Sandle's forte in theatrics he is a prolific writer as well. He authored one

play called "Ground for Reprieve." He has also written articles that have been published in such journals as the NADSA Encore; Southern Speech Journal; Louisiana Educational Journal; the Speech and Teacher, and others. Dr. Sandle also wrote two books both of which have been used as texts.

He served as the publicity Director, Vice-President, and President of the National Association of Dramatic and Speech Arts (NADSA).

Sandle has also been inducted into the GSU Hall of Fame.

While they welcome all contributions (which should be received by March 16th), the space is limited. Therefore, the seating arrangements and reception invitations can only be issued to contributors in the following categories: \$100 or more - Sandle circle, \$75 or more - Black and Gold Circle, \$50 - Blue & White Circle, and \$25 - General seating.

Dr. Sandle is happily married to Marie J. Sandle and the father of five; three daughters and two sons.



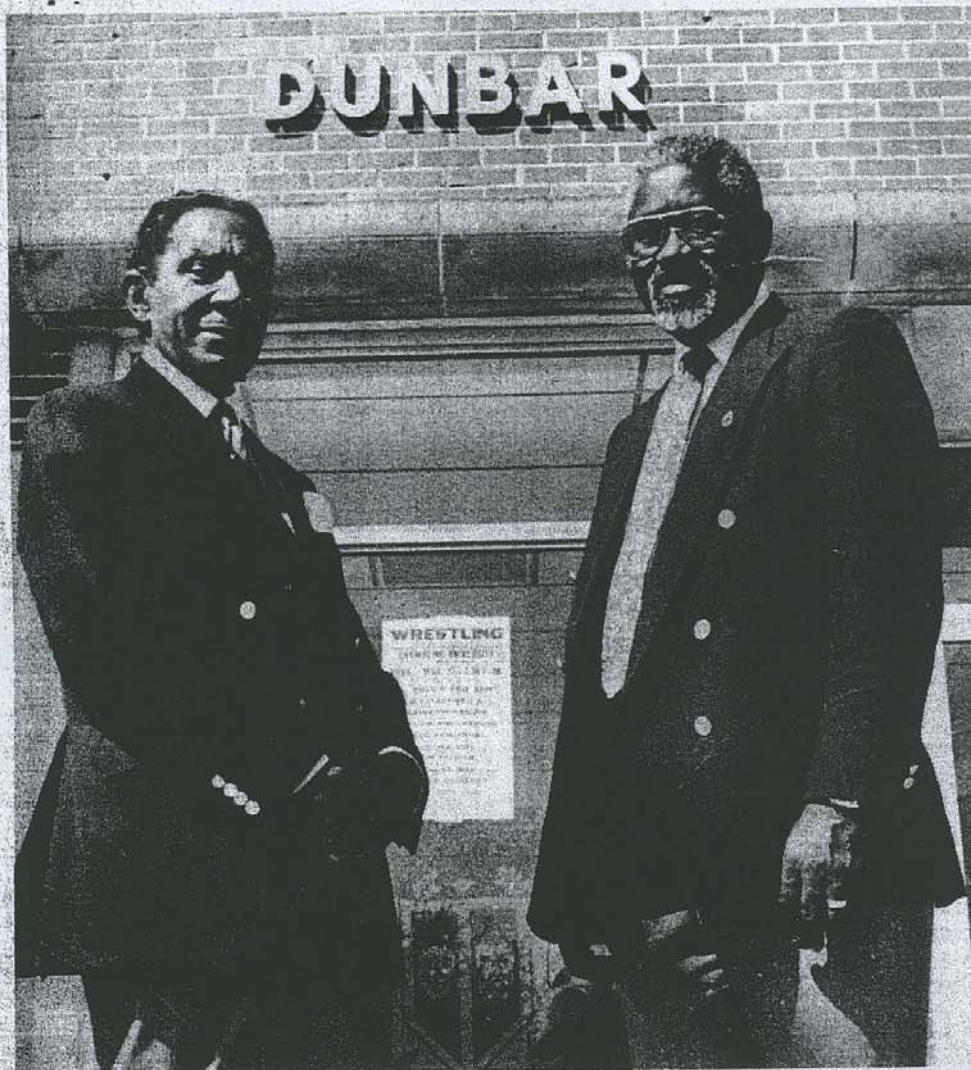
Volume 58 No. 20

March 22, 1990

Grambling State University

# The Graml

An Award-Winning Uni



Dr. Floyd Leslie Sandle(left) and Dr. Allan Williams stand in front of Dunbar Hall where the university's performance theater is located. The theater will be dedicated to Dr. Leslie on Saturday, March 24. The event will serve as a fund raiser for the Speech and Theater Department. Dr. Williams was one of his students. For more information call Thomasina McMurray at 2773.

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Sandle Street in Grambling



GRAMBLING STATE UNIVERSITY  
PRESIDENT'S OFFICE  
GRAMBLING, LOUISIANA 71245

Dr. Floyd L. Sandle  
P. O. Box 63  
Grambling, LA 71245

Dear Dr. Sandle:

It is altogether appropriate and fitting, that the Grambling State University Little Theatre should be named in your honor.

Grambling State University has amassed an illustrious history in these 89 years with men who accepted the challenge, and you are one of these men. If we think in terms of years, there were the fonding years, followed by what can be called the formative, building and crystallizing years, and what I like to think, are the sustaining and expanding years. Although you missed the founding years, you came to Grambling during the formative years.

Dr. Sandle, you have always been a dramatist, and I imagine as you surveyed the gigantic job to be done and the limited resources to accomplish the task, you may have para-phrased Robert Frost:

"The woods are not lovely, but dark and deep  
Yet, I have promised to keep  
And miles to go before I sleep . . ."

Grambling College, as it was known at the time, had only elementary education, but many innovative practices were in effect even then. You were a part of those years.

Then in 1948, a secondary teacher education program was initiated - Grambling was in the building years. Faced with the difficult task of teaching the basics to students with impoverished backgrounds, in those days for speech and drama, one could say in the words of James Weldon Johnson --

"Hope unborn had died."

Dr. Sandle, you were a part of those years when the faculty was too small, when the appropriation was scanty and the physical facilities inadequate. And yet, to para-phrase John Fitzgerald Kennedy:

"You did not ask what Grambling College could do for you,  
but what you could do for Grambling College."

And what you did was establish a speech department and a dramatic unit that was second to none. This you did without the benefit of acoustics; of an elaborate stage; of an adequate budget.

You could have waited until the time was "ripe" or until working conditions were better. You could have refused the challenge to make something of nothing. But like Robert F. Kennedy (quoting Bernard Shaw) - you seemed to have said:

"Some men see things as they are and say, Why?  
I dream things that never were, and say, Why not?"

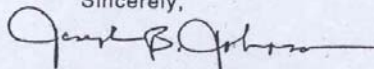
And your dreams became reality. Your dramatic units made us cry; they made us laugh; made us think; pricked our consciences; in short, their perfection in performance evoked whatever response they were fashioned and directed by the hands of a 'master' - Dr. Sandle.

When a man is diligent in his work, sooner or later he is faced with new challenges. And so, Dr. Sandle, you moved from one challenge to another and handled them all well.

And dramatists, deans, like old soldiers, "never die." They don't even "fade away." But with their talent, courage, character, and faith, they etch their place in infinity. Tonight's activities provide one occasion for the "etching."

Mrs. Johnson and I offer our sincere congratulations and best wishes.

Sincerely,



Joseph B. Johnson  
President



BUDDY ROEMER  
GOVERNOR

State of Louisiana  
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HOSPITALS  
OFFICE OF HUMAN SERVICES  
DIVISION OF MENTAL RETARDATION/DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES  
RUSTON STATE SCHOOL  
P.O. BOX 907  
RUSTON, LOUISIANA 71273  
TELEPHONE: (318) 247-3721 LINC 268-1011

DAVID L. RAMSE  
SECRETARY

March 29, 1990

Dr. Floyd L. Sandle  
102 Richmond Drive  
Grambling, LA 71245

Dear Dr. Sandle:

On behalf of the clients and staff of the Ruston State School, I would like to offer our sincere congratulations to you for the honor bestowed upon you by Grambling University last week. We feel truly honored ourselves to have such a "Living Grambling Treasure" as part of our volunteer program at this facility.

Just as scores of your former students have benefitted from your dedication, knowledge, and love, we feel that our clients are fortunate to have the opportunity to grow with your guidance. We are proud to know that while Grambling honors you for your many dedicated services to their community that you honor us by serving our clients through your volunteer efforts.

Our sincere congratulations and best wishes go to you and your family.

Sincerely,

Vince Spione  
Director of Staff Development

James R. Lee  
Regional Administrator

JRL/VS/joy



BUDDY ROEMER  
GOVERNOR

State of Louisiana  
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HOSPITALS  
OFFICE OF HUMAN SERVICES  
DIVISION OF MENTAL RETARDATION/DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES  
RUSTON STATE SCHOOL  
P.O. BOX 907  
RUSTON, LOUISIANA 71273  
TELEPHONE: (318) 247-3721 LINC 268-1011

DAVID L. RAMSEY  
SECRETARY

March 21, 1990

Dr. Floyd J. Sandle  
102 Richmond Drive  
Grambling, Louisiana 71245

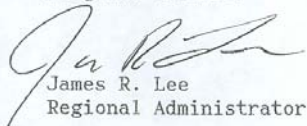
Dear Dr. Sandle:

How pleased we were to learn that the Grambling State University Little Theater is being dedicated in your honor. I personally believe there is no more deserving individual and consider Ruston State School is privileged to have benefitted from your expertise during the past three years. Your caring, humanitarian service has touched clients and staff at this facility.

God bless you and congratulations.

Sincerely,

  
Robert P. Allen, Jr., BCSW  
Programs Director

  
James R. Lee  
Regional Administrator



# GSU theater named for retired prof

By KAREN JONES  
Leader Staff Writer

GRAMBLING — Grambling State University's Little Theater was renamed in honor of retired GSU professor Dr. Floyd L. Sandle in dedication ceremonies held here Saturday night.

The theater, located in Dunbar Hall on GSU's campus will now be known as the F.L. Sandle Theater.

"I thank you for this great honor," Sandle said. "I thank you for your love."

Sandle was the founder of the speech and drama department at GSU when he came to the university in 1938.

"There were no courses at all in speech and drama," Sandle said, adding that the department was able to move from a small frame building on the west side of the campus to the Fine Arts Building during his tenure at the university.

Sandle directed several plays at GSU, including "Beyond Reason" and "Death Takes a Holiday."

Even though he was named Dean of Basic Studies in 1963, Sandle still taught courses in speech and drama.

Also in 1963, Sandle headed a group of students on a month-long tour of Newfoundland, Labrador, Greenland and Iceland performing plays under a program sponsored by the U.S. State Department and the American Educational Theatre Association.

Sandle retired from GSU in 1978 and then served as a professor at Dillard University until 1986.



Leader photo by KAREN JONES

Dr. Floyd Sandle (center) receives guests at a reception following the dedication of the GSU theater.

in speech and drama from Loui- Sandle and his wife, Marie, ceremonies. "I don't feel that I have to spend the rest of my





Dr. and Mrs. Sandle at the renaming of the Little Theatre

FLOYD LESLIE SANDLE—

**PROGRAMME of DEDICATION**

SATURDAY, MARCH 24, 1990

7:00 P.M.

*A Living Treasure*



LITTLE THEATRE  
DUNBAR HALL

GRAMBLING STATE UNIVERSITY  
GRAMBLING, LOUISIANA

# Lifetime revisited

## Former GSU dean writes autobiography

By Mary Margaret van Diest  
Staff Writer

Some may consider it a memoir, some may consider it a how-to book on success: either way the book "Grambling: My Years in Drama and Speech Revisited, 1938-1978," tells the story of part of a remarkable man's life.

The author, Floyd L. Sandle, began his time at Grambling State University teaching. Later he became dean of the Division of General Studies.

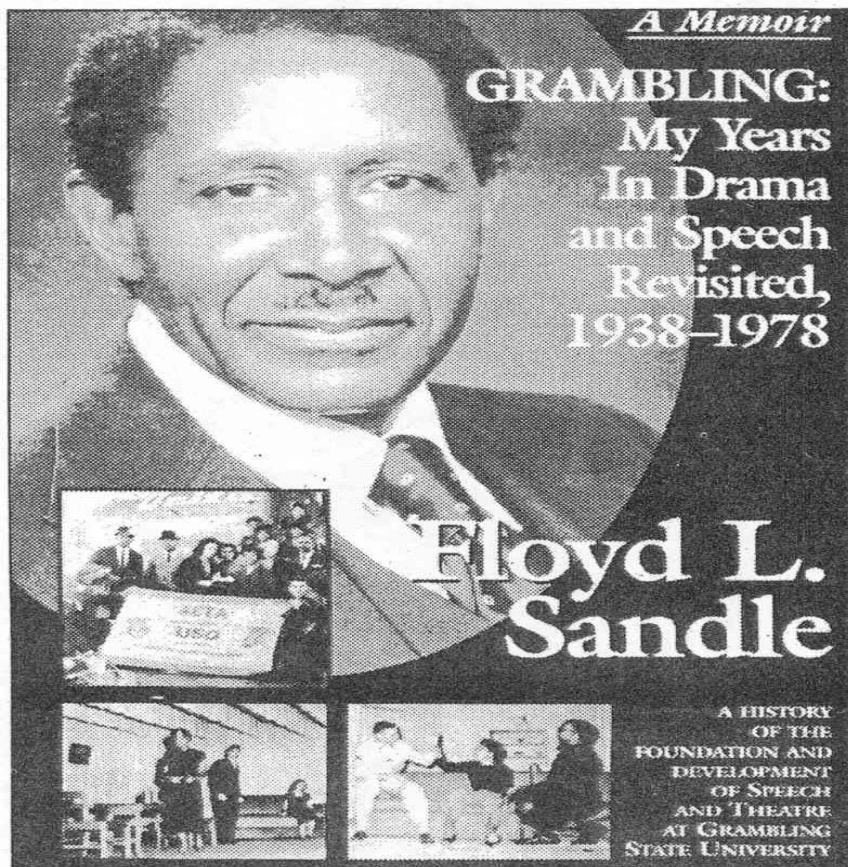
Along the way to those Grambling years, he accomplished a lot in getting degrees from Dillard, the University of Chicago, and Louisiana State University. In fact, he was the first black student to receive a Ph.D. from LSU. When he was invited to be a visiting professor at LSU, he was asked how he felt about that appointment. He replied, "If I'm not qualified to teach at LSU, I'm not qualified to teach at GSU."

In addition to the Ph.D. from LSU, Sandle is also proud of being invited to be a member of the National Association of Dramatic and Speech Arts. Before that organization was national it was a southern regional group without as much prestige.

Sandle added that the ultimate reward for a good teacher is to learn later in life that his students have succeeded, in part because of their teacher's influence. Right now there are seven or eight Ph.D. department heads all over the United States who studied under Sandle.

Sandle has many successes to relive in his book, but he is not afraid to share some of the disappointments, too.

"My first year teaching at Grambling I wanted to teach speech and drama but I had to teach general science. I did that because that was my job but I also bootlegged plays because it was not in my contract but it was in my heart. Even then we lost the first district drama festival. The next year we won at



Sandle's book recalls his journey from undergraduate school through his years with GSU students.

district and lost at state."

"We had to stay intense, dedicated, and focused. In a way that is how my life has been — a kind of parallel to the growth at Grambling State University. I felt that it was important to look the part and to live up to it. It was all part of the communication skills needed to succeed later on," said Sandle.

Sandle said that he was particularly hard on the males and especially the ball players. He felt that they would appreciate it later when perhaps they would have a harder row to hoe.

"We were trying to develop men and real gentlemen at the same time. I used to give long readings from the Bible to improve speaking habits. I remember betting a ballplayer a dime that he could not recite the 12th chapter of Ecclesiastics. I still remember how proud he was to march to the front of the class and do it perfectly and then collect his bet," recalled

Sandle.

One of Sandle's former students is the current head of Grambling's Department of Speech and Theater. Allen Williams remembers his former professor:

"Dr. Sandle was always professional. He never bragged, he felt that if you were doing well that you would be noticed. He also taught us to aim for the top, that there was more room there than at the bottom. He also taught us to communicate with our entire personalities. He always dressed and acted the part. We learned how to deal with people from watching him."

Williams added that even in his retirement Sandle still helps conduct freshman orientation sessions. Williams said, "We consider Dr. Sandle one of our Grambling legends. He is still at work giving his positive impact on young people."



Dr. Sandle and Ava Brewster-Turner  
GSU Black and Gold Room  
1991





Dr. Sandle, Ava Brewster-Turner and Dr. Allen Williams  
55th NADSA Conference at Grambling 1991



Dr. Sandle and Ava Brewster-Turner  
GSU Homecoming 2000

Dear Dr. Sandle:

If this correspondence catches you by surprise, then its mission will have been accomplished. True, it has been such a long time since we last communicated. Let me quickly eliminate the suspense: **I am Joseph Dyer, your former drama student from Bogalusa, Louisiana.** I obtained your address from another of your former students, **Sidney Butler, from Baton Rouge.**

Do convey my best to Mrs. Sandle. Here's hoping the two of you are fairing well and enjoying your richly deserved retirement.


Much has happened to me since I left Grambling so many years ago. After four years in the Air Force, I relocated to Los Angeles and became the first African – American journalist hired by a Los Angeles network owned and operated television station (CBS). After I scored another first by becoming a member of the station's senior management team, I registered an even greater first by becoming the first man of color to write and broadcast station editorials in Los Angeles.

Needless to say, much of my success can be directly attributable to that early training in drama I received at Grambling---and the old Central Memorial High School in Bogalusa. These and other particulars have been documented in my upcoming memoir slated for publication in late May or early June. In fact, I will be doing a book signing at my wife's family reunion in June in Shreveport. Time permitting, I do plan to dash over to Grambling.

A rough, unedited copy of the book cover is enclosed. The final product will have a black background with red lettering. You can bet, I will get a copy to you when the book becomes available. I will also drop an informational note to Grambling's president. Incidentally, my private home telephone number is \_\_\_\_\_ My wife's name is Doris, a Southerner, although I don't hold that against her---until the Bayou Classic! By the way, tell Doug Williams to continue to make us proud.

Thanks a million for everything, Dr. Sandle. I shall never forget your quiet dignity and overall professionalism. You were an exceptional role model at a time when it was most needed. Thanks again. And, may God continue to bless your household.

With fond memories,

  
Joseph Dyer

Dr. Floyd L. Sandle  
102 Richmond Drive  
Grambling, Louisiana 71245

Letter from former Speech and Drama student  
June 2002





Dr. Sandle at home in Grambling  
February 2002



## MEMORIAL

Grambling  
mourns  
former  
dean and  
department  
head

*REFLECTIONS*  
Page 7





Office of the Chancellor  
Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana 70803

August 27, 2002

To the Family of Dr. Floyd Leslie Sandle,

The LSU community was saddened to hear of Dr. Sandle's recent passing. Truly a man of distinction, Dr. Sandle's lifetime of work dedicated to creating and bettering theater programs across our state has benefited many. The impressions he made are lasting ones.

At LSU, we are immensely proud that Dr. Sandle was the first African-American to receive a Ph.D. in Theatre, which he did in 1959. He is forever a part of the University's history. And, we were fortunate to have him return to us ten years later as a guest lecturer, and then as a Visiting Professor in the Department of Theatre, to share with our students his experiences and ideas.

LSU, though, was not the only university to benefit from Dr. Sandle's hard work and vision. He was a leader at Dillard University, his alma mater. But it was at Grambling State University, where Dr. Sandle spent forty years, that he brought to life a program that was the first of its kind in Louisiana. By establishing, in 1951, our state's first certified speech and drama program for African Americans, Dr. Sandle created theater at Grambling, and made it accessible.

A student, a writer, a teacher, and a mentor, Dr. Sandle's passion for his art was magnificent. The impact he made on the presence and celebration of theater in Louisiana will continue to be felt and appreciated. We are grateful to have known him.

Sincerely,

Mark A. Emmert  
Chancellor

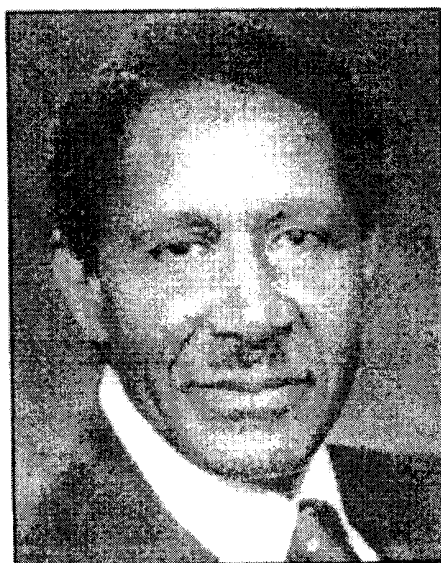
Celebration of the

Life

Of

Floyd Leslie Sandle, Sr.

July 4, 1913 – August 22, 2002



New Rocky Valley Baptist Church  
2155 Martin Luther King, Jr. Avenue  
Grambling, Louisiana

Friday, August 30, 2002  
11:00 a.m.

Reverend Julius M. Sumler, Pastor

## VITA

Ava Marie Brewster-Turner was born in West Memphis, Arkansas, on November 6, 1955, to Eddie Mason Brewster and Berlin Paige Brewster. After graduating from Augusta High School (Arkansas) in 1973, she attended Grambling State University where she graduated with a Bachelor of Science degree in speech and drama education in 1976. She taught in the public schools of Arkansas for several years, and was then accepted into the Master of Arts program in communication and theatre at the University of Illinois-Chicago. After completing one year of study, she returned to teaching full time in Louisiana. She later entered graduate school at Southern University (Baton Rouge) where she received the Master of Education degree in Mass Communications in 1992. In 1997 she was awarded a tuition scholarship from the Graduate School of Louisiana State University to pursue the doctorate degree in theatre.

For the past twenty-five years she has taught, developed, and directed speech and theatre programs at high schools, a community college, and faith based community organizations in Arkansas, Illinois, Tennessee and Louisiana. In October 2002 she opened UpStage Theatre Company, Inc., recognized as the first African American theatre company in Baton Rouge.

She holds memberships in Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc., Theta Alpha Phi, NADSA, Louisiana Speech League, Southwest Theatre Conference, and the National Association of University Women. Her awards and achievements includes Who's Who Among America's Teachers, Who's Who in Black Theatre, Outstanding Professor of the Year (Baton Rouge Community College), Delta Sigma Theta Service Award, and the NAFEO Distinguished Alumni Award. Presently she is Associate Chair of the Division of Arts and Sciences, and Director of Theatre at Wiley College in Marshall, Texas. She is married to Lloyd Turner and has one child, Terrance Lloyd Turner.