

## Chapter 3

### **The Crucible-Working towards excellent in Black Educational Theatre**

NADSA approached the decade of the sixties like a space ship shooting into the heavens, hoping to view the essence of something great. However, this association was confronted with much turmoil as the years of integration began to take its toll, coupled with issues similar to questions about the validity and quality of performing Black works that primarily surfaced during the Harlem Renaissance. However, as the era evolved, Black theatre evolved professionally and academically, causing the leaders of NADSA to develop a workable plan that could address their “separate but equal” national organization. But in order to have a clear view of what was happening in the United States during this period, Ellen Foreman, in her article about the Negro Ensemble Company (NEC), described the 60s as:

The 1960's stand out culturally as the most explosive decade in modern American Life. No other period swept across the country with such a devastating tide of social, political and racial ferment. A shocked world witnessed the process of change in the entire social fabric of one of its most powerful nations. Deafening demands for a new America echoed in the highest political corridors in Washington and in the tiniest sharecropper's shack in Mississippi. Angry demands for a more just distribution of the country's economic wealth were translated into direct violent action: state troopers and citizens waged military warfare in the streets, often in the shadow cast by skyscraper corporation buildings. Psychologically and sociologically, volcanic forces erupted in a multiracial society which historically had never really understood the complexities of cultural pluralism. Ethnic minorities who had been murdered, exploited and despised for centuries reached for rifles and revolvers to settle ancestral grievances. It was Revolution in the etymological sense of the word: a turning around and over, a new circle. At the epicenter of that circle were Black Americans. (Hill, 270)

It was a time when, all eyes were on Black people, and many unfortunate events occurred to make changes in a society where white supremacy was important. Two of

the most influential persons in support of that change were John F. Kennedy, the thirty-fifth president of the United States, and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., the civil rights leader, both of whom were assassinated for their support of equality in America. Of course, this era was a period of civil rights, equal rights for all minority people in America, equal rights for children in education, equal rights for men and women in the workforce, and human rights that guaranteed Blacks the opportunity to be treated like human beings. Although, this movement was positive in many ways, this equality flashed so fast that many Blacks forgot for what they were fighting. Integration had set in really well, but the question is, what impact did the movement have on Blacks in educational theatre

This chapter explores the status of NADSA during the period wherein many Blacks felt the need to disband Black organizations for the total integration of mainstream associations. It also examines the influences that political and social events had on NADSA and investigates NADSA's legitimacy as a national educational theatre association in America. As the story is told, the themes are organized chronologically from the 60s through 90s, decade by decade, placing particular focus on important events that validate the existence of NADSA, an organization that serves the needs of professional Blacks in educational theatre. This chapter is more relevant today, as our society seems to have begun a backward movement toward segregation. We watch our struggle for equality become nonexistent and our fight for civil rights become a historical event. Seeing the decline for equality come full circle provides the necessary agenda of why an organization like NADSA is needed.

### **1960s--I Am Black and I Am Proud**

Integration had positive and negative impacts on NADSA. As the organization moved into the 60s, its members began to be influenced by an interest in what life might be like for members of mainstream theatre organizations, primarily in search of something that could establish their credibility and professional position in educational theatre. The Civil Rights Movement began to take its toll on society and the leaders of NADSA began to spread their wings as they each strove for professional development in mainstream organizations.

During the 60s many of the leaders of NADSA were trying to achieve the optimum success in their own respective careers. So many members began to focus on joining mainstream organizations, leaving NADSA behind with the challenge of surviving with less support and members. The decade of the 60s introduced changes that could have proved instrumental in NADSA's structure and direction for the next forty years. But something happened. Between the members' searching for more opportunities, the lack of strong leadership in the association, the assassinations of John F. Kennedy, Jr. and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., the fire that destroyed NADSA's archives which were then housed at Kentucky State College, and the total integration period for Blacks in America, NADSA was almost destroyed (Fletcher 36). But, somehow NADSA survived the turmoil and issues affecting the organization during this period.

Not only did integration challenge NADSA but it also challenged every aspect of society. In 1960, integration had taken America by storm and some organizations began to ask similar questions about the need for the service that they were providing. One such organization which had similar goals and missions as NADSA, was the Negro Intercollegiate Drama Association (NIDA, which became IDA when they took the Negro out of their name). IDA (NIDA) held its annual conference in 1960 at South Carolina State College, in Orangeburg, South Carolina. IDA was having problems with membership, hosting sites, and general interest in educational theatre. Therefore, at that conference the little membership that IDA had left decided to join NADSA. NADSA, however, did not have a conference in 1960 due to a resolution passed to have a festival once a year and a conference in opposite years (Fletcher 36).

At the silver anniversary (1961) of NADSA with Tuskegee Institute, in Tuskegee Alabama as host, it became evident that many of the northern schools that participated with IDA began to join the membership of NADSA. The membership began to grow; however, the visionary scholars who had led the organization through the 30s, 40s, and 50s were now integrated into mainstream theatre organizations. This move hurt NADSA because those visionaries were the best practitioners that Black educational theatre had to offer. Meanwhile, NADSA's leadership had the opportunity to set in motion a plan that would move the association successfully through the decades to come. Unfortunately, that did not happen. NADSA had new problems and new issues to arise that needed

immediate attention. NADSA was confronted with an identity crisis, loss of the archives, and several societal issues that became overwhelming.

During the 1960s the theme of defining the Black race emerged for both society in general and for NADSA specifically. Schools, students, and directors began to question the all-white material that was being presented at the conferences. There was a return to the Harlem Renaissance era, when Blacks began to focus on all aspects of arts. But Blacks wanted the arts to be by them, for them and about them (Stevenson 3). “This seemed to be a major struggle for the old heads of the organization because many of them felt that the new material that was being developed did not warrant their attention and many of the themes were too contemporary for educational theatre and that kind of agitation and propaganda should be left to those who possessed no training” (Williams, Telephone Interview). This experimental type of material was not received well at the conferences, and many schools were upset because the national association took a stance that condoned this type of activity. This point of view was not welcomed by the majority, and it caused many schools not to participate in the conferences because the national executive board tried to censor material presented at the conference.

It seemed to be the general feeling of the leadership that in order to compete in society one must be well versed in proven literature before investing time in unseasoned, untried, and uncouth material which might be offensive to the audience. Many of the schools continued to come to NADSA and present plays by white writers with little or no problem. However, although NADSA was adjusting to the Black/white issue, society did not conform as easily.

During the 1968 conference at Kentucky State College, the most renown civil rights activist, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., was assassinated. Dr. H. D. Flowers, II, remembered the incident very well. He recalls:

That was my first conference as a director. We were at Kentucky State College the night that Dr. King was killed. My students from South Carolina State College were on stage presenting Summer and Smoke by Tennessee Williams. Dr. Kilimanjaro was about to announce to the audience that Dr. King had been assassinated. I asked them not to announce it until I got through with my play because I knew people like

Sam Wright, Sandra Bowie, Lawrence James, and others could have not finished that play if they had known. After that show was over with, the announcement was made and all hell broke loose in Frankfort, Kentucky. The next morning the members of the conference quickly departed for their respective schools. Although most people at that time drove to NADSA, we had flown from Columbia, South Carolina. That was my first time in attendance at a NADSA Conference without an awards banquet being held. When we arrived back to Columbia, South Carolina, the school had people there waiting on us. Panic was widespread all over the country. (Flowers PI)

The assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was a turning point in both the Civil Rights Movement and in NADSA. People of Color started to search for a new leader of the Civil Rights Movement. They started to work as a unit--they worked on projects together. As a result of NADSA's officers and directors, a proposal for a grant from the Department of Education to fund an Institute of Dramatic Arts to assist in the training of minorities in theatre was written and approved.

The Institute of Dramatic Arts' (IDA) proposal was presented in the Consortium Report in the 1969 Encore Magazine. This single event alone was in direct relation with the purpose of the Association and clearly established that NADSA could, in fact, develop funding to produce these types of activities that would benefit historically Black institutions and their theatre programs. IDA was truly a major milestone for NADSA.

Winona Fletcher commented on NADSA's rallying around the IDA proposal to the National Endowment for the Arts for a summer institute in dramatic arts:

Out of the ashes of despair from that 1968 convention, however, like the phoenix, arose the concept and planning for one of the major contributions NADSA has ever made to educational theatre--The Institute of Dramatic Arts (IDA). I prefer believing that some consuming spirit caused us to name it after the original soul organization rather than our lack of creativity. (36)

IDA truly made a major impact on educational theatre in America, and the funding received for IDA was a preview of what was to come, support for African Americans and their theatre programs at HBCUs.

### **1970s--Looking in the Mirror of NADSA**

In reviewing NADSA's past, especially during the turbulent decades of 50s and 60s, Winona Fletcher summed it up most eloquently in her speech, "And Its Soul Goes Marching On: A Tribute to the Oldest Surviving Educational Theatre Organization in America--NADSA," at the National Conference of African American Theatre's annual meeting in April 198 back at the decades of the 50s and 60s, one can now see with clearer vision some of the pitfalls not so apparent then. Lured by the promises of integration, blinded by our own naive views of progress, torn by student cries for "freedom" brainwashed into believing that we had to sacrifice a large share of our identity in the name of "equality" many of us began to neglect our own organizations. NADSA's soul was shaken by the very force for which Blacks had so long fought--what irony! This occurred, also, despite the shining example of its founder Edmonds who knew the wisdom of choosing "both" and not being lured into the "either-or" syndrome that proved fatal for so many others. Serious re-examination and self-appraisal became top priorities and NADSA's leaders tried to answer the call. President Tom Pawley, retiring at the end of 1955, urged the association to find ways to serve the needs of speech teachers as well as theatre people; to bring wayward colleges back into the NADSA fold; to make the "regional concept" really work, and to plan annual conventions in advance. Other voices urged a year-round program for the organization, not just a once-a-year program for the organization, not just a once-a-year opportunity to fraternize no matter how fulfilling; better public relations on publicity in national journals, careful scrutiny of the festivals which were viewed by many as "competitive events" closer ties with professional theatres; and ways and means for giving the association a firmer financial foundation. (Fletcher 35)

In 1970, the 34<sup>th</sup> annual convention at Florida A & M University, Tallahassee, Florida, was the scene of a national meeting to honor S. Randolph Edmonds, who was retiring from academia. As he had throughout his career, Dr. Edmonds was highly involved in helping solve NADSA's problems. The year, 1970, was a year on many

college and university campuses in which there was much student unrest. The tension of the times was felt at this annual meeting. The tension expressed itself in criticism of the competitive system of awarding trophies for various theatrical and speech events. Some directors and their students felt that their groups were being subjected to biases and prejudices when they were the recipients of an award (Flowers PI). Thus, it was unanimously voted to discontinue the awarding of trophies in all events. Edmonds' commentary on the occasion indicated that in the founding of NADSA, there had never been any intention to make the conference as competitive as it had become. Its main objective had been to assist students and their directors in improving their productions and giving recognition to those who excelled (Flowers, PI).

In the summer of 1970, NADSA and the member institutions continued the Institute of Dramatic Arts (IDA). IDA was designed for the developing institutions. IDA did not really end with the Institute because it was continued by the participants, carrying back to their institutions a wealth of information derived from the actual participation of the exciting and challenging experience made possible by the United States--Office of Education, Bureau of Higher Education, Division of College Support, Developing Institution Branch; Office of Economic Opportunity; The Southern Education Foundation, Incorporated; the North Carolina Arts Council, and Winston-Salem State University, Winston-Salem, North Carolina. Mrs. Juanita B. Oubre of Winston-Salem State University directed the Institute and Joan W. Lewis of Fayetteville State University was the associate director (Oubre 1970).

Similar in tone to the preceding conference, the 1972 annual meeting at North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University at Greensboro, North Carolina, also reflected the tenor of the times by showing strong interest in Black studies and Pan-Africanism. Arthur Smith, Professor of Communications at the University of California at Los Angeles; Frederick Garrett of the Negro Ensemble Company in New York; Ed Peterson of Kliegel Brothers; and W. D. Cox from Tennessee State University produced a lighting session designed to show how to light Black actors. Singer Buchannan, coordinator of Black studies at Purdue University and Tony Brown, executive producer of the Black Journal and Dean of the School of Communication at Howard University, were also featured. George Wesley of Grambling College spoke on "Media and Black

Depiction: Do It Yourself or Have Someone Else Do It Against You,” Dr. Baldwin Burrow, chairman of the Department of Drama at Spelman College who served as visiting professor at the University of Ghana (Africa), spoke on “The African Playwright and His Society.” An interesting session on “The Playwright Speaks Out” featured Carlton and Barbara Mollette, co-authors of “Rosa Lee Pritchett,” and Loften Mitchell, author of A Land Beyond the River, Tell Pharaoh, Black Drama. Several others also contributed to the session. The conference highlight occurred when Ossie Davis, author of “The Need for More Talented Blacks in All Facets of the Theatre” spoke to the crowd. This convention ended the tenure of Dr. John Marshall Kilimajario’s presiding as President.

The 1973 annual conference at Kennedy-King College, Chicago, Illinois was historical in the sense that it was the first time NADSA’s annual meeting had been held in the north. Yet, despite a well-organized conference, the attendance was low since most of the member institutions’ drama budgets prevented their delegates from attending (Flowers, PI).

Looking back into the mirror of NADSA, I see several themes that evolved right after integration. As Blacks in America strove to become a part of the great white way, many mainstream theatre organizations like the American Theatre Association (ATA) developed subsidiary entities (Asian Afro Theatre Project) to meet the needs of the increasing number of Blacks entering their organization. Meanwhile, as NADSA members became excited about being accepted into mainstream America, they forgot about what the struggle of the two decades that had just passed had provided. They began to focus on inclusion from white organizations so much that the history and continuity for their own organization was being neglected (Fletcher 35). It is hard to fathom how the promise of integration, after so many years of oppression, made so many Blacks drop everything that they had worked so hard to achieve.

Due to integration and the birth of the Black Theatre Program (BTP) of the American Theatre Association (ATA), fright and resentment went through the membership of NADSA. And when NADSA was asked to become a segment of BTP/ATA, many NADSAians became disgusted with the creation of aims and purposes set forth by BTP members who were former and past members of NADSA (Flowers,

Personal Interview 1-2). As a result, Joan W. Lewis, NADSA's president, wrote a letter to Winona Fletcher in support of saving NADSA from such intrusion.

The true irony was the development of another Black theatre association, especially one within the auspices of the American Theatre Association, when in fact NADSA could have very well met the challenge.

The American Theatre Association (ATA), formerly an entity of the Speech and Communications Association, took a major progressive step in 1965 when it created the Afro-Asian Project, now known as the Black Theatre Program (BTP). Obviously the spirit of the times, including the revolutionary atmosphere in the country and the cry for civil rights, perpetuated the new direction ATA took. In a large context, however, the inclusion of minorities into the parent body meant a more liberal treatment of minority theatre into schools, communities, professional, and amateur programs. For the Black participants of ATA this new direction meant a chance at attempting to fully integrate into the system and to make meaningful contributions to theatre outside the realm of the Black communities in which they normally worked. For the Black descendants of the early Afro-Asian Project, the members of the Black Theatre Program, an important part of the future is understanding and evaluating the events of the past. The leaders of this new movement including Errol Hill, Thomas Pawley, Esther Jackson, Carlton Molette, Randolph Edmonds, Thomas Poag, Baldwin Burroughs, Herbert Shore, Floyd Gaffney, Winona Fletcher, and Floyd Sandle understood the necessity . . . (Walker 9)

In reading the BTP Bulletin, it was interesting to find that the primary goals of NADSA and the BTP were very similar. The only differences between the organizations were the aspect of focusing on having a professional or student orientation. Nevertheless, the need to establish another theatre entity to serve Black educational theatre was unfounded, if not ridiculous. Note the similarities of BTP's primary aims and objectives to those of NADSA:

To collect and disseminate information on Black theatre activity,

particularly in Africa, United States, Central and South America, Caribbean.

To encourage research in Black theatre arts.

To stimulate teaching of Black theatre, drama and film.

To encourage production of plays in the public schools and at the university level.

To provide a forum for discussion of the Black experience in theatre and the potential contribution of Blacks in the theatre arts.

To bring together a body of Black artists and scholars to share common interests and exchange valuable information and experiences in Black theatre. (Walker 10)

The only difference in NADSA's and BTP's objectives was that NADSA focused on educational theatre and BTP focused on professional theatre. But, who in professional theatre is really concerned with scholarly activity? It must be said that the professional/scholarly side of NADSA had not been truly developed; however, the development of another Black theatre entity is only a scapegoat for those persons who wanted to achieve in white theatre. The reason for this assumption is as plain as day. Looking at the aims and objectives, one would think that NADSA could not afford the scholars of this era an opportunity to develop professionally. This is simply not true. The attempt was still the issue of segregation, but only in a different form. This form was the need to feel that white is right and that, because one worked at a mainstream institution, one should forget the struggle that had built the bridges for others to cross.

Another interesting fact was the attempt by BTP to develop an Institute in African Theatre, primarily because of the lack of material on Black and African Theatre, and the members "felt it was long overdue to present the contributions of Blacks in this art form. Therefore, an Institute in African theatre was one means of training those interested in teaching and performing African Theatre" (Walker 12). This idea was similar to the Institute of Dramatic Arts created in the 60s for NADSA. Ethel Walker states:

The final proposal was drafted by Thomas Pawley and submitted to NEH in September, 1973. Although the basic concept of the Institute was valid, and the creative and imaginative format was undisputed by NEH officials,

unfortunately, the foundation denied funding for the project, claiming lack of money. The tragedy of the denial can only be fully understood if one realizes the tremendous magnitude and scope of the Institute and long-range advantages that such an experience could have provided, particularly to those theatre professionals from small Black colleges who had limited libraries, facilities, and funds to explore this area of theatre. (12-13)

The question is whether or not this Institute was for the Historically Black Colleges and Universities. It was true that many Black educators from HBCUs began to become a part of the new trend and many of the NADSA leaders became leaders of the BTP. But, the same issues that evolved with NADSA became the same issues with which BTP had focused on. So, the question arose again at the 1975 Conference in Washington, DC, by NADSA's founder Randolph Edmonds, Ethel Walker described the events:

Randolph Edmonds raised another important question regarding BTP's role. Edmonds contacted Errol Hill about publishing an essay on Black Educational Theatre. Hill suggested an essay on Black Historical Figures. This discussion led Edmonds to questions BTP's role in ATA and the conflict that apparently existed between BTP and the National Association of Dramatic and Speech Arts (NADSA). Edmonds questioned whether NADSA should not schedule Black Panels for ATA, and raised the speculation that perhaps the Washington BTP panels merely illustrated a return to "jimcrowing." In a response to Edmond's questions, Winona Fletcher suggested the issues be discussed fully at the 1976 convention in L.A. and stated there be no conflict between the two organizations since each essentially sought the same goals, only utilizing different means. Fletcher felt NADSA and BTP should enrich each other's program. Fletcher also suggested to C. Bernard Jackson, one of the planners for the LA convention, that he include a panel on development of theatre in predominantly Black colleges on the 1976 agenda. Unfortunately, there is no record of any further discussion of this crucial issue that involved such a large segment of the Black Theatre Program. However, in July 1976,

Carlton Molette wrote a letter to ATA President, Oscar Brockett, protesting the exclusion of Blacks from predominantly Black Colleges to the Wingspread Conference. Although Fletcher, Gaffney, C. B. Jackson, and Darwin Turner were selected to participate in the conference, Molette charged racism in the selection since no one represented the Black colleges. This protest is significant because it again addresses the issue of conflict between ATA and the predominantly Black colleges, most belonging to NADSA (Was there a response?) (19-20).

As stated earlier, there was a conflict between NADSA and BTP. This conflict existed primarily because BTP members felt that they were superior to NADSA members because the BTP members taught at mainstream institutions (Flowers PI). When mainstream organizations began to open their doors to minorities, many Blacks rushed to those organizations in search for something new when they should have focused on avenues that would have negotiated NADSA's path more clearly and a path for Black educational theatre in America. In essence, NADSA needed the time, energy, and ideas, as well as a chance to establish itself as the oldest national educational theatre association in America, NADSA having been founded a couple of months before ATA (Edmonds PI). It is still difficult to understand how a generation of people who fought for equality through NADSA were so willing to leave and become a part of the larger group when they had no active voice in the decision making processes. As many Black theatre and speech educators took to organizations other than NADSA for equality, many changes were occurring in NADSA as the organization struggled to survive without the membership of many of its former leaders.

The 1974 NADSA convention was held in New Orleans, Louisiana, the city of NADSA's founding; but for the first time in thirty-eight years, the annual meeting was not held on a member college campus. Both Dillard College and Grambling College co-sponsored the conference in a hotel. Joan Lewis read Winona Fletcher's letter at the conference and appointed a committee to review and make recommendations to include most points made by Fletcher (Fletcher). NADSA had wanted its meeting centrally located in one building. Since that convention, most NADSA conferences have been held in hotels.

In 1975, NADSA's membership was very low in attendance. It was the consensus of most schools attending that poor membership was due to the discontinuation of the individual and group awards for competition. Thus conference members voted to reinstate theatre awards by adding a dimension for student directed works, especially in directing and playwriting (Flowers, PI). Joan Lewis' presidency ended at the conclusion of the 39<sup>th</sup> conference at Lincoln University in Jefferson City, Missouri, where Thomas Pawley had built a respectable theatre program. Lewis' administration will be remembered during the "turbulent years" wherein NADSA weathered the storm of dismantling. Lewis' zeal and zest for survival held this organization together. NADSA's members continued to move forward in meeting the challenge that integration had delivered. Strides in equality were being made in playwriting. Judi Ann Mason of Grambling College was awarded an American College Theatre Festival (ACTF) citation for writing and winning the National Norman Lear Award for her play, Livin Fat ( ACTF Bulletin 1975 ).

In 1976, when NADSA met to celebrate 40 years of existence, Professor Edmonds felt sufficient stability to brag a bit about the inter-collegiate sports and drama, and how they had succeeded and how we could, thus, look forward to a bright future. NADSA's affiliation with other national organizations continued to expand with less fear of being "absorbed out of business" (Fletcher 36-37).

During the 1977 conference held at Texas Southern University under the presidency of Alex Marshall, NADSA voted to reinstate the Encore Magazine. Horace Caple of Shaw University was elected editor. Judi Ann Mason was presented an ACTF citation for writing and winning the Lorraine Hansberry Playwriting Award for A Star Ain't Nothing but a Hole in Heaven. To win an award in the mainstream theatre organization meant that the worth of Black theatre was being appreciated and forward movement was not only possible, but was actually occurring.

The 1978 conference was held in Memphis, Tennessee, with LeMoyne-Owen College as the host institution (see Appendix A-153-158). Approximately twelve plays were presented during the play festival. Six plays were directed by students and six by faculty members. Awards were given for each division. The University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff and Philander Smith College, both of Arkansas, were in attendance after more

than a ten-year absence. Also, Black students representing the University of Tennessee, Memphis State University, and Northern Illinois University participated. Christine Houston of Kennedy-King College was awarded a citation for receiving the Norman Lear Award for writing for the television sitcom, "227" and Farrell Foreman of Northern Illinois University received a NADSA citation for winning the Lorraine Hansberry Playwriting Award from the ACTF for The Ballad of Charlie Sweet (Flowers PI).

In 1979 Kennedy King College of Chicago, Illinois, served as host to the convention. President Patricia Caple ended her tenure, and Allen Williams became the first NADSA president to be elected for a second non-consecutive time. Mrs. Caple was applauded for the leadership given to NADSA. Her charisma convinced the membership that the organization could continue to thrive despite the competition with the older and financially more sound theatre organizations that now accepted Blacks. (Caple PI)

Certainly, NADSA was changing in leadership and direction. However, the quality of theatre presented lessened. Dr. Allen Williams provides an idea of the climate of NADSA during the 70s:

Well, during the 70s, coming out of the latter part of the 60s, there were a lot of sit-ins around campuses and the student tension was at an all time high. The effects of the early 70s play a large part in NADSA wanting to re-build as an organization that presented quality programs and workshops with a lot of emphasis placed on securing consultants to bridge the gap between professional and educational theatre.

And it was during the 70s that Judi Mason wrote the play Living Fat, which was funded by and selected by the Norman Lear Play writing Contest and received the Norman Lear Award. Of course, the young lady from Kennedy King also received the Norman Lear Award in the 70s. And I can't recall anyone in NADSA after that receiving the Norman Lear Play writing Award. But it was during the 70s that there was a shift to other kinds of materials that seemed to have had some value, in terms of something that would be great for the organization and for our students who were pursuing careers in theatre. Several students at different universities got parts on Broadway during the 70s. And they succeeded in

the area. And of course, many of teachers and students continued to get scholarships. They went to some of the major universities, received their masters and terminal degrees, and of course they're now out working at universities. Some of them are at the high schools training young people to pursue their educational careers in theatre. The 70s, I think, were good. There was quite a bit of money available. Many people were able to travel during that time, and of course we still had some of the schools that were selecting material that antagonized the administration of the schools. However, it posed a conflict with those organizations securing successful monies that they needed to support their programs at the universities. It was interesting that some brought those types of plays to NADSA, and then, of course, we could see why they were not successful at their own universities simply because of the kind of materials that they were presenting. However, because of the drastic movement in selection of material, many of the programs began to focus on the message and not the training, emphasizing poor diction, poor directing, and just poor performance on the part of many of the students. An effort was made on the part of the administration of NADSA to try to encourage directors to do a better job in providing training for their young people at their universities, which meant that competition shows presented at NADSA should also encourage better artistic quality. That's one of the reasons we called it competition, because we wanted everyone to succeed which meant that they had a better chance at succeeding in the field. And, in order to renew that philosophy, we invited scouts to look at auditions of our students. It was this philosophy in the 70s that instilled in directors the focus and dedication to provide quality work for their youth in our organization. (Williams PI)

NADSA provided the drawing board for many Blacks to develop and pursue careers in the arts. It was through many leaders like Dr. Allen Williams that these avenues developed. But with every organization there is a moment where the organization begins to flourish. That time often

occurs when different leaders take the helm and simply meet the challenges of the association. Professor Adkins of Fort Valley State College reflected in his article, "Reflections on NADSA" When I look into NADSA's mirror, what do I see? REFLECTIONS! These bring to mind one of my favorite piano selections entitled *Reflections on the Water* by Claude Debussy. This music begins with a light hesitating touch and proceeds gradually with increased velocity, then a dramatic starting chord, surprising flowing finish. Here sight and sound merge, for when I think of this beautiful melody there comes to mind a striking comparison of what I call the NADSA experience. When I realize that I am looking at almost half a century, I do not marvel at what I see. In the NADSA mirror I see streaks, spots of quick Silver flaking, and some times blurred figures. I see outstanding personalities, the most unforgettable-character types. I see hidden talent unleashed. And most promising, I see youth, eager, wide-eyed, impressionable, and ready to inherit the mantle that becomes theirs. As I reflect back to 1936, the year NADSA was founded, I see myself in the senior class at Dillard College, NADSA's birthplace. Through English classes, courses in theatre, and some acting, I gained one of the richest experience of my life by coming to know Dr. S. Randolph Edmonds as a teacher and as a friend. I came to know and to love him and his family while his children were still toddlers. Physically he was a giant-like man, a size which symbolizes his ideas, his work, and his writing. Because of the dominance of playwriting a contest is named in Edmonds' honor. His plays appeared frequently on the playbills of the annual conference. Some of the more popular ones were Gangsters Over Harlem, Breeders, and Nat Turner.

Clearly, I recall the impressive personalities--Dr. Lillian Voorhees, Thomas Poag and others who met on Dillard's campus for the founding of SADS (now NADSA). Some of those light, crisp, fluid tones that I hear in *Reflections on the Water* reminding me of some of NADSA's most valuable persons like Dr. Lillian Voorhees. Most vivid

in my reflections are the work, love, and devotion rendered by her, our only Caucasian member at that time, who played such an important role in the stabilization of the organization. Read the purpose of the organization and you will note that it has not changed. It was after graduate studies and military service that I attended my first SADS conference as a director with students from Fort Valley State College. The purpose for which NADSA was organized is as relevant today as it was in the beginning. In fact, it is even more relevant as demonstrated by the recent influx of Black students from drama departments of predominantly white colleges and universities.

Along with the streaks and blurs, I see many clear, shiny spots. There is the Institute of Dramatic Arts that was conducted through a Title III Grant in 1969 and 1970. There are many outstanding persons in the field serving as teachers, speakers, critics, and judges of dramatic and speech competitions. There is our *NADSA Newsletter* and *NADSA Encore*, our magazine, listed in leading indexes. Interspersed through all of this are the faces of the officers over the years who have made this cohesive unit. Many of the NADSA officers throughout its history came up through the ranks--from students to teachers to NADSA leaders. I see, also, the faces of the student membership, glowing with eagerness, who have been nurtured by our organization. Many have become outstanding playwrights, actors, directors and teachers.

So, the ridiculous and the sublime of our experience are bound together by accord of memory. You recall one and the other comes sliding down out of its storage rack. So it is when I look in the Mirror of NADSA, for it gives me the opportunity to look backward with pride and, at the same time, to look forward with hope toward an undiminished future. May God bless us all. (Adkins 7-8)

### **1980s--Rebuilding Bigger, Better and Stronger: Redefining NADSA**

During the 70s NADSA had taken a beating with integration, poor finances, poor quality in presentations, and poor leadership in some cases. The organization had lost

many of its members to organizations like BTP, ATA, and the Southeastern Theatre Conference. To provide an idea about the financial structure, an editor of the NADSA Newsletter gave this commentary about NADSA in the February 1980 issue: “First and foremost, NADSA is just about broke. So, if you haven’t sent in your 1980 membership money, you should do so immediately. The organization needs the money. If you are not sure about the amounts or anything else, you should contact Joe Adkins at Fort Valley State College, P. O. Box 4579, Fort Valley, GA 31030” (NADSA Newsletter 1980).

Over the years, NADSA had constantly overcome many obstacles and setbacks. The organization had always snapped back when adversities presented themselves. It can be said that this was truly the case during the 80s, because like no other period, this era tested the true foundation for what this organization stood. This period questioned whether NADSA had served its purpose. This period also brought about a higher level of theatrical quality where NADSA excelled in producing more publications that outlined the policies and procedures for the association to utilize. Even though many Black theatre programs were afforded the necessary funding to promote and produce theatre in the 70s, it was not until the 80s that HBCUs provided substantial support for their theatre programs.

At the 1988 conference of NADSA, members celebrated its 52<sup>nd</sup> (see Appendix A-204-206) year of existence with the national convention being held in Culver City, California. The conference reflected the pride in its greatest accomplishment, with the theme of “Preserving a Heritage.” At this conference, seven educational seminars were presented: (1) “The Status of Bachelor of Arts or Bachelor of Science Degree Programs in Speech and Theatre at Historically Black Colleges and Universities,” (2) “Black Theatre: Do We Deserve an Audience,” “Problems in Administering and Producing Theatre at Black Liberal Arts Colleges with Non-Theatre Degree Granting Programs,” (3) “Tech Students: Where Do We find Them? How Can We Get Them? How Do We Keep Them?” and (4) “Status of the Two-year Theatre Programs at Community Colleges and Its Relationship with Community-Based Arts Programs,” and four workshops on (5) “Job Opportunities in the Penal System for Speech and Theatre Graduates,” (6) “Waiting for Stage and Screen” by Christine Houston,” and (7) “Technical Aspects of Theatre” by W. Dury Cox, III and “Make-Up for the Black Performers” by Deana Nye of Ben Nye Make-

up. Apparently, the focus was on training NADSA students to become more proficient practitioners of the theatre .

The highlight of the conference was the awarding of the Lifetime Achievement award to W. Dury Cox of Tennessee State University. Many of his former students, then in the theatre profession, attended the ceremony and/or sent video tapes to show their appreciation. This conference included the normal competitions but was cited by the members as keeping in line with the intention of the founders. As Fletcher pointed out, “I sincerely hope, therefore, that NADSA will spend time reflecting on the warnings heard over the years for those who have borne its spirit of survival” (37).

What was important about this conference came when Dr. Lawrence James presented his platform, which was to analyze all aspects of NADSA. Attention was given to the constitution, the financial status of the Encore Magazine in reference to NADSA’s annual budget, and the questions NADSA should answer in a self-study.

Dr. H. D. Flowers, II, executive secretary, was given the task of committee chairman for this self-study. At the 53<sup>rd</sup> Conference hosted by the Theatre of Afro Arts in Miami, Florida, the self-study was reported as follows:

**What is NADSA?** The National Association of Dramatic and Speech Arts (NADSA) was founded in 1936. It is a professional affiliation of performers, administrators, educators, students, technicians, and craftsmen of the theatre, communicative arts, and allied areas of interest.

**What is its purpose?** NADSA’s general purpose is to provide a professional organization for educators, students, and practitioners of theatre and the communicative arts. More specifically the purpose of NADSA is two fold: to encourage the establishment of programs in theatre and the communicative arts at member institutions, and to 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.

**What distinguishes NADSA from other similar organizations?**

NADSA is unique in that it affords students an opportunity to participate in professional activities and not just observe them. This special feature attracts the attention and interest of persons from all over America.

**Who belongs to NADSA?** NADSA includes professional theatre practitioners, community theatre, secondary schools, and members of college and university speech, theatre and communicative arts departments. The basic requirement is genuine interest in theatre and communicative arts and a desire for professional growth.

**What are the activities of NADSA?** NADSA is divided into five geographical regions each composed of several states. Programs are coordinated by a regional director. Activities at the regional level traditionally include inter- and intra-state exchange programs. The Association meets as a conference body in the Spring of each year. The conference brings together consultants and conference leaders from the professional theatre, other professional organizations, and teacher/student leadership from NADSA.

A major part of the conference program is dedicated to the production of One-Act plays usually produced and directed by students. Conference sessions include demonstrations in areas such as costuming, lighting, make-up, acting, public speaking, debate, media, playwriting and choric speech. Students are given an opportunity to compete for honors in acting, playwriting, dramatic reading, extemporaneous speaking, and directing.

**What are the publications of NADSA?** The primary instruments of communication among NADSA's membership are the Newsletters, a quarterly publication, Encore, an annual journal, The Update, a review of NADSA activities.

**How are conference participants chosen?** Institutions and organizations wishing to participate in conference competition should notify the proper regional director. The director in turn, submits

recommendations to the Vice President who is conference program chairman. The chairman and his committee make final selections and notify all participating directors by sending them a copy of the tentative conference program. Professional participants are selected by NADSA executive committee in consultation with the organization.

**How can NADSA benefit the student?** NADSA benefits the student by exposing him to standards of the professional activity in communicative areas; the student has an opportunity to develop insights into his training which should result in his becoming a better teacher, actor, or technician. NADSA gives students that all-important bridge between formal training and professional experience.

**How can NADSA benefit the educator and the director?** NADSA provides for the educator and the director an opportunity to test new ideas, to become acquainted with the innovations in communications, and generally to help prevent his becoming professionally stale. Consultants view each presentation made by the performers and the offer constructive criticisms for the actor and the director as well. In many instances, educators and directors have developed greater skills through these critique sessions. Fellowship with professional peers often spawns significant ideas for personal and professional development.

**How can NADSA benefit an institution or organization?** When NADSA benefits the student and the educator/director, it has made a real contribution to the institution or organization they represent. However, NADSA does even more for the organizations among its membership. It provides a professional constellation for its member institutions. Students receive a wide variety of experiences through NADSA in the practical arts of theatre, as performers, technicians, administrators, managers, playwrights and media, both on and off campus, and most of all, experience in human communication. NADSA through its program of student participation makes a real contribution to the humanities.

(NADSA Self-Study, 1988)

Most of the 80s were dedicated to the re-development of NADSA. The above self-study report really established the purpose of why this organization was important. It also answered many questions that people had during the years of its existence. The organizational members actually knew the answers, but they had never been articulated in written form to be distributed to persons who were interested. With the focus on rebuilding, NADSA began to look at what publications would carry the organization to the next level. NADSA needed to have a sound administrative unit and the publications contributed to the level of administrative quality.

There are several publications that have been developed during the history of this organization. The only publications to evolve before the 80s were the Encore Magazine and the NADSA Newsletter. It was during the 80s under the leadership of Dr. H. D. Flowers, II, that the NADSA Handbook for hosting a conference, the NADSA Update, the NADSA Competition Handbook, and the NADSA Annual Report were all created (see the Appendix-C). All of these publications were developed single-handedly by Flowers, who took the time to configure certain publications that would carry this organization into the next millennium. All of these publications are important to NADSA and the reasons why they were created are equally important to know.

The first publication developed in the 80s was the NADSA Conference Competition Handbook. NADSA had developed several competitions over the years and brief directions for each competition were outlined in the constitution. However, that material did not provide detailed instructions and evaluation forms so that the competitors would have the information beforehand. Therefore, the NADSA Conference Competition Handbook was developed for the conference competition in 1982. The handbook was divided into categories for descriptions of events, instructions for administrative staff, and the evaluation forms for each competition.

In 1983, the Handbook for Hosting a Conference was developed. This handbook was particularly useful because it included requirements for a NADSA host, information about accommodations, special services, social events, budgetary information, orchestration of workshops, information on displays, emergency information, the constitutional guidelines which included program, business arrangements, and awards,

and even an example of notes from production meetings about the conference. This handbook provided all the details and specific requirements that a host institution should use. Unfortunately, many host institutions did not follow the guidelines, which contributed to what may have been some bad experiences by hosting institutions.

After each conference, there were many reports, minutes, and information that happened during the conference but no one source that gathered the information collectively to send to the membership and keep for archival purposes. The NADSA Update was developed, therefore, to keep members informed of changes that had occurred during the conference. The leadership saw this update as an economically efficient way of submitting several aspects of the organization like reports, resolutions, directories, and other post-conference information to the membership. This document provided the necessary tools needed to maintain some order to the association.

With the development of these communication tools, NADSA was ready to handle the next fifty years of existence, but as frequently occurs many members did not use the information provided. This inattention caused many hard feelings, management of funds, and simply a lot of confusion that was not only bad for the membership but for the association as well. After the self-study had been done and publications for communication had been developed, NADSA was confronted with the biggest challenge ever: the evolution of new Black theatre organizations created by dissatisfied members of NADSA. With these new organizations emerging, NADSA should have evaluated its own efforts in providing services that their membership expected to happen in the 80s. NADSA truly needed a face lift to compete with the other organizations that had more scholars and more resources to meet the needs of Blacks who wanted more of a professional approach rather than just being merely student focused.

During the 80s two national Black theatre organizations formed. The National Conference on African American Theatre (NCAAT) formed to focus on the scholarship in Black theatre, and Black Theatre Network became the “baby” of the dissatisfied members of the Black Theatre Program, a subsidiary of the American Theatre Association. Around 1983, the Incorporation (NCAAT) was founded by Dr. Sam Hay, Professor of Theatre at Morgan State University in Baltimore, Maryland, and incorporated in the state of Maryland on December 18, 1992 (Roar IV). The mission of

NCAAT was to promote meaningful historical, theoretical and critical research of African American theatre by providing speaking and publishing opportunities for interested scholars, teachers, performers, and lay-persons interested in theatre history and criticism.

NCAAT's annual conferences were normally held in April and consisted of two major sets of activities: (1) a convocation honoring the recipient of the Mister Brown Award and (2) lectures analyzing the development of African American theatre.

The Mister Brown Award for Lifetime achievement was presented at the convocation of the same person (s) deemed by the Executive committee to have made extraordinary contributions to the development of African American theatre as epitomized by Mr. James Brown, founder and manager of the African Grove Theatre Company from 1816 to 1823 (Roar 57-70). In each of NCAAT's conferences, lecture series and keynote speakers set the tone for the other lectures as well as the standards for research on African American theatre history.

The Black Theatre Network (BTN) rose like the phoenix out of the ashes of the American Theatre Association's (Black Theatre Program) demise in 1986 (1986 Conference program, 7). The seeds of the BTN, according to their 1994 conference program, were planted by the pioneers of NADSA, and those educators who joined the ATA when it became more receptive to people of color. In 1965, under the ATA organization, the Afro-Asian Theatre Project was founded. The group within the project interested in Black theatre formed the Black Theatre Project which ultimately became the Black Theatre Program (BTP)/ Black Theatre Network (BTN). With the demise of ATA in 1986, BTP members voted to form an independent organization called Black Theatre Network (American Theatre Conference Program, 7). The organization described itself thusly: "BTN is a non-profit/tax exempt corporation. The aim of this organization is to expose all people to the beauty and complexity of Black Theatre. Comprised of those who perform, direct, teach, research and publish, BTN works to preserve this unique art form so future generations may inherit a theatre worthy of its African roots" (BTN 1986).

The objectives of BTN were as follows:

To establish a networking system with artist and scholars across the nation

in order to provide an opportunity to interchange ideas.

To collect and disseminate information regarding Black theatre activity through the publications of a newsletter, directory, and resource books.

To provide a forum for meeting, discussing, and viewing Black theatre.

To encourage and promote Black dramatists and the production of plays about the Black experience.

To encourage research, scholarship, and publications in Black theatre arts.

(BTN Constitution 1995)

Among the numerous activities sponsored by BTN at their annual conferences are the Shepp Randolph Edmonds Young Scholars Competition, BTN news (newsletter), the Black Theatre Directory, Catalogue of Dissertations concerning Black Theatre, the Minority Job Bulletin, and the Black Voices (BTN 1986). BTN normally holds its conference with the Black Theatre Festival bi-annually in Winston Salem, North Carolina. Though BTN attendance includes all persons attending the National Black Theatre Festival, it claims to be the largest Black Theatre organization in the United States (Brochure 1995).

Understanding the founding of these three organizations, NADSA, BTN, and NCAAT provides the rationale why there was a need for Black theatre organizations to get together. In essence, they all have similar missions and goals, but some people contend they have different purposes. A close review of the three organizations, however, reveals that they may have different approaches, but that the missions are still very similar. So, the question still exists. Why do they not join forces? Is this situation analogous to the Black store front churches where, when some members disagree about how things should be done, they simply re-organize and establish another store front church down the street. Could there be any similarities in the way these three Black theatre organizations have conducted their relationships?

In 1989, the largest meeting of national Black theatre organizations met for the first time at the Black Theatre Festival in Winston Salem, North Carolina, to discuss the possibilities of becoming one unit. This meeting was comprised of the leading national Black theatre organizations: National Conference of African-American Theatre

(NCAAT); Black Theatre Network (BTN); and NADSA. Dr. Flowers, one of the leaders of NADSA, reflected on what actually happened at the meeting:

At the NCAAT Conference we had in Baltimore, Maryland, Thomas Pawley (President) of NCAAT wanted all of us to meet together to have one national meeting to help each other out. We arranged to have all of the executives from each organization to meet at the National Black Theatre Festival in Winston Salem, North Carolina. Meanwhile, the executive board of NADSA met at North Carolina A & T State University first, and then we went over to the festival for the meeting. I think that Lawrence James was the president at that time; however, I was executive secretary during this period (which from 1930 to the present was the most powerful position in NADSA). We went to the conference, and at the meeting the idea was put on the floor that a person could join all of the organizations so that everyone could benefit from each other, but it was a problem establishing a cohesive meeting date for each entity.

The first item on the agenda at the meeting, which was proposed by the Black Theatre Network (BTN), wanted NADSA to lose its identity and thus become a component of the new organization, which would be BTN. However, NADSA's executives had a problem with that because NADSA had a history and a legacy; it was the oldest theatre organization in the country, and it was larger than BTN. So, the question was posed to BTN about its participating in NADSA. This created a problem because many of the members of BTN worked at white institutions, and they simply felt that they had more resources and better programs which made them feel superior to NADSA institutions. Of course, they had better resources, but in most cases, they were not in charge of their programs and could not make recommendations. So, as a result the organizations decided that they would meet at the same time, but they never came together to determine when that meeting would or could occur. Although this agreement was not set forth to meet as an unit, it was arranged that students could attend some of every one's festival. NADSA welcomed

their participation. It was a festival where everyone would pay separate dues but could attend all of the festivals. At the end of the meeting all of us took membership in each other's organization to show our loyalty to the purpose of this meeting (Flowers PI).

Evidence from several talks and interviews, leads to the conclusion that there was some tension between NADSA and BTN. It can be surmised that the tension may have even been racially generated, which is quite interesting when one considers that both groups are predominantly Black theatre organizations that were founded on the principles of supporting Black Theatre in America. But somehow, as was the case with NADSA and BTN, throughout history, Blacks have always been divided by color barriers. Many feel that this division can be traced back to days of slavery when some fair complected slaves known as "house niggers" were allowed to live within the "master's" quarters, cook food for his family, dress better than other slaves, and sometimes even learned how to read, while the darker complected slaves known as "field niggers" were the slaves who lacked in every area where the "house nigger" did not. Because the "house niggers" were accepted by the masters, they felt that they were superior to the "field niggers." Even in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, BTN (the "house niggers" if you will) and NADSA (the "field niggers") still suffered from the problem of feeling superior or inferior once accepted or not accepted by mainstream white institutions. So, the three organizations did not merge primarily because of the disagreements between BTN and NADSA. BTN continued meeting with a focus on professional theatre, and NCAAT continued to meet focusing primarily on scholarly papers, and NADSA continued to meet focusing on grass roots development in educational theatre. All three entities brought excellent ideas to the table, but because no middle ground could be reached, each group was able to share its benefits only with its small membership.

### **1990s--A Personal Reflection**

The first couple of years during the decade of the 90s were very turbulent years for NADSA. The organization had been confronted with several conferences where there had been disagreements, resignations, and even leaders pulling their institutions out of the fold, saying that they would never participate with NADSA again. During these years,

NADSA experienced a roller coaster ride in membership and in the early part of the decade its financial stability was seriously diminished.

In 1990, NADSA's 54<sup>th</sup> annual conference was held in our nation's capital, Washington, D.C. Henrietta Edmonds, daughter of the founder was host director. For the first time in history, NADSA held its conference in Washington with a gala affair at the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts. The attendance was marvelous with thirty-two institutions present. The lifetime achievement award was presented to Marla Gibbs, (professional actor, of *227* and *The Jeffersons*). Also receiving awards, Horace Caple of Shaw University for ten years of service as editor of the NADSA Encore and Larry Leon Hamlin, founder and executive director of the National Black Theatre Festival that is held every other year in Winston-Salem, North Carolina. Despite the "hoopla" and excitement of the conference, NADSA took a financial beating. Luckily the next year's conference was at Grambling State University in Louisiana, because every year that Grambling hosted the conference, NADSA had no expenses to incur.

The 1991 55<sup>th</sup> annual conference was held at Grambling State University, Grambling, LA, on April 10-13, 1991. It has always been said that when NADSA has experienced a catastrophe in anyway, it always seems to end up at Grambling for rejuvenation. At this conference there was a conscientious effort to find avenues that would sustain NADSA for the next 50 years, for example the development of grants and a NADSA endowment (Directors meeting minutes). Christine Houston, creator/writer of T. V.'s *227* who was very instrumental in the idea of an endowment, and Steven Williams star of *21 Jump Street*, were some of the celebrities that were present at this conference NADSA business went on as usual at Grambling.

The 1992 56<sup>th</sup> annual conference at Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University, Tallahassee, Florida (FAMU). At this conference FAMU invited some of its alumni to the conference: celebrities like Meshach Taylor as Anthony Bouvier from Designing Women and T' Keyah, who was one of the stars from In Living Color. The conference theme was Charting New Directions in Theatre and that is what happened at FAMU. There were many workshops and activities to participate in. This conference was well organized and planned, and everyone who attended was pleased.

It was at the 1993 57<sup>th</sup> conference in Pine Bluff, Arkansas, that it became a commitment for me to assist NADSA in again becoming a viable organization. Not that I thought I could do it by myself, but I felt that I could make small contributions that would lead the organization into the new millennium. Having followed the recipe for joining the ranks of NADSA's leadership, I could no longer sit idly by and watch this organization that had nurtured me theatrically suffer at the hands of people who seemed not sincerely interested in its survival or growth. So, it is important to discuss how NADSA regained its momentum after the breach of many professional relationships of some of its major leaders in the 90s. It is also important to reorganize the members who began to dedicate time to assist in the healing of NADSA's wounds and to note the changes brought about by visionaries who were courageous enough to go against the norm because they were somehow able to see the bigger picture.

It was the 1994 conference at Fort Valley State College in Georgia that provided the spark that assisted in placing NADSA on track again. During this conference NADSA had workshops, scholarly paper presentations, social gatherings, great speakers, and an increase in competition and membership. But, most importantly, the organization left with almost \$5,000 in the bank. The organization went from being in debt to becoming financially sound again. Dr. Virgie Noble Harris, Host Director from Fort Valley State College was directly responsible.

In April 1995 NADSA celebrated its 59<sup>th</sup> conference in Miami, Florida, at the Caleb Center. This was an election year and many of the members were brewing about who would be elected as the new officers of this organization. More specifically members were concerned about the two candidates for vice president. The nominations for vice president were Dr. Virgie Harris and A. Clifton Myles. Dr. Harris was a seasoned member of NADSA and had just hosted the previous highly successful conference. She had assisted NADSA in re-establishing itself financially and had more experience. At the last general session, the announcements were made for all the elected positions. When the new vice president- president elect was announced as A. Clifton Myles, the Caleb Center was eerily quiet. My heart was pounding because this was an opportunity that I had lived for and wanted. I wanted to be able to move NADSA into the new millennium. However, I knew it would be a difficult task because there was so

much opposition from some of the “old heads” with having the youngest person to ever serve in a leadership position of this organization. But I believed that I was ready for the challenge!

The conference did not end on such a good note. One of the all-time supporters of NADSA, the host director Sandrell Lindsey, had gone out on a limb to make this the best conference ever, but the membership was low and NADSA had not fully recovered from the blows it had taken at the beginning of the decade. So as the conference ended, the organization had again lost financially.

The 1996 60<sup>th</sup> annual conference was hosted by Norfolk State University, Norfolk, Virginia, April 3-6. This conference seemed to have gotten NADSA on the right track after Miami. The host institution produced several workshops and events that made the conference exciting. Workshops were presented by well-known professionals such as Curtis Hodge from Crossroads Theatre, Felix Cochran, who designed the world premiere productions of the Pulitzer Prize winning drama A Soldier’s Play at the Negro Ensemble Company, Autry Jackson, who is the Program Administrator for the Missouri Arts Council, and the conference speaker Loften Mitchell, who is the foremost Black American theatre historian in this country. There was low student attendance at the workshops. It seemed as if the major focus was primarily on competitions. But nonetheless this was a successful conference in the sense that the financial stability of the organization increased and the moral of the organization was uplifted.

The 1997 61<sup>st</sup> annual conference was hosted by Grambling State University, Grambling, Louisiana. The executive board of the organization announced that the organization had been incorporated and would be run as an incorporated organization (1997 NADSA minutes). This conference was a homecoming for many, because the strength in the latter years of NADSA was primarily supported by graduates and faculty members from Grambling State University. Many of the graduates came back to this conference, including the award winning playwright Judi Ann Mason who was know for writing scripts for such television shows as Generations, I’ll Fly Away, Beverly Hills 90210, A Different World, Good Times, American 2-Night, Palmerstown, USA and American Gothic. She was also noted for her first screen-play Sister Act 2. One of the high light of the conference was Ms. Mason workshop on playwriting, the students were

immersed in her oration, simply because her accolades proved that she knew what she was talking about. This conference ran smooth as it always did when it was hosted by Grambling State University.

The 1998 62<sup>nd</sup> annual conference of NADSA was hosted by the Albany State University, Albany, GA April 15-18, 1998. This conference was one to remember. The honoree for the NADSA lifetime achievement award was Ms. Esther Rolle who is known for her role as the mother in *Good Times*. The conference was full of exciting workshops and auditions. The conference chair Mr. Willie L. Todd, Jr. (national publicity director) had spent numerous hours planning and implementing the agenda for the conference. A major panel from the Alliance theatre presented a discussion on show business, with featured guest like Whitman Mayo who played Grady in *Sanford and Son*, and Carol-Mitchell Leon who was an accomplish actor from Atlanta, Ga. Other guest included Richard Garner of the Georgia Shakespeare Festival, Larry Hamlin of the National Black Theatre Festival, Sandrell Rivers former president and area arts and youth director for the Metro-Dade Park and Recreation in Miami, Florida.

However, the last four years of NADSA was focused on the business of theatre once again. But there were some inherent problems it had to face. Many older members began to lessen their commitment and dedication to the organization. Many member institutions believed that NADSA's credibility was lost, and many of the former leaders began to disseminate negative information about individuals affiliated with NADSA and to discourage others from joining the organization

In an effort to recruit more member institutions, NADSA began to focus on competitions rather than the mission and activities of the organization. Documentation of important events was being lost and no history was being maintained in minutes or any type of publication. An analysis of the minutes from the first five years of the 90s provided information about competitions and what bills needed to be paid. However, some exciting things were happening. Several outstanding educators of the organization were honored during this time period and NADSA hosted the following well known celebrities: Outstanding Educators--Horace B. Caple, William Dury Cox, II, H. D. Flowers, II., and Alex C. Marshall; Celebrities--Tonea Stewart, Jo Marie Payton, Esther Rolle, Melvin Johnson, Loften Mitchell, John Patton, Jr., Meshach Taylor, T' Keyah

“Crystal” Keymah, and Marla Gibbs. But still the organization’s major focus was on the conference and the conference only. As I reflect over the decade of the 90s, there were only three major accomplishments that stood out about NADSA: First, It became financially stable; second, it became incorporated as a national organization in 1998; and third, it honored Esther Rolle at the 1998 conference before her death in 1999 (see Appendix A-305-306). Even though NADSA’s road has been difficult, the organization can still be proud that it is the oldest surviving national educational theatre association in America. This organization needed to be created, because If it had not, those of us in black educational theatre would have to create one in order that a story could be told, a story that included the black experience in theatre. And it is my belief that NADSA has much to offer those involved with educational theatre and black theatre in the twenty-first century.