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THE PLAY

It's the early 1900s. **Anna Julia Cooper** is the principal of M Street High School, the first all-Black public high school in Washington, D.C. She believes that education is the greatest tool against racism and has the power to prevent history from repeating itself. She pushes her students to excel beyond society's expectations and to pursue the path that will help them meet their goals.

Despite the great achievements and academic rigor Cooper has brought to M Street High School, she comes under attack by members of the African-American community and by D.C.'s largely white Board of Education. The Board of Education challenges her authority to serve as a principal, threatening to replace her at the M Street School. With the support of her community, Cooper pushes against the false accusations and injustices. Will she defeat the odds and keep her position as principal of the M Street School? Or will discrimination dismantle what she's built so far?

ARENA'S PAGE

STUDY GUIDE

TEMPESTOUS ELEMENTS

BOOK BY KIA CORTHON

DIRECTED BY PSALMAYENE 24

FICHANDLER STAGE | FEBRUARY 16 – MARCH 17, 2024

Arena Stage thanks **Tiffany Sanchez** and **Reg Brown** for their generous sponsorship of *Tempestuous Elements* and their tremendous support of Black storytelling in DC.

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This project is supported in part by the **NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE ARTS**.

“We come to be educated together, to learn to be critical thinkers from one another. It is our most powerful weapon.”

— Anna Julia Cooper, *Tempestuous Elements*

MEET THE PLAYWRIGHT: KIA CORTHON



Kia Corthon is a playwright and author based in New York City. Originally from Cumberland, Maryland, Corthon grew up in a working-class community and loved writing from a young age. On the first day of rehearsal for her play *Tempestuous Elements*, the director asked everyone to name a favorite teacher. “The first idea that comes to me is my second-grade teacher, Mrs. Proudfoot,” Corthon recalled. “She was the person who told me I should be a writer. Part of my play as a child was to write my own stories and staple them into little books. Mrs. Proudfoot was first to make me conscious of this as something I can do with my life.” Arena Stage commissioned Corthon to write *Tempestuous Elements* as part of its Power Play Cycle, a project creating one play for each decade of U.S. history.

“I was really interested in the public school system,” Corthon says, “because, the thing is, it’s always timely. There’s always controversies about it.” Some of those issues today include banning books about the African-American experience or avoiding the history of racism in the classroom altogether. For Corthon, the importance of telling Dr. Anna Julia Cooper’s story today is connected to the right for African Americans to have access to a valuable education that prepares them to be leaders and professionals who will advance and uplift their communities. Corthon believes that it’s the students’, teachers’, and parents’ right to work together towards addressing problems, and to hold the government accountable for providing necessary resources for schools.

Corthon is also a novelist. Her books are set in the 19th and 20th centuries and touch on themes related to African-American identity and freedom. Her novels include *The Castle Cross the Magnet Carter*, which won the 2016 Center for Fiction First Novel Prize, and *Moon and the Mars*.

DR. ANNA JULIA COOPER: THE MOTHER OF BLACK FEMINISM

She was a civil rights activist and influential educator, the fourth Black woman in the U.S. to receive her PhD, and the first Black woman to receive her PhD from the Sorbonne in Paris. She is known as The Mother of Black Feminism, and her words are in every U.S. passport, but few know her name. *Tempestuous Elements* brings Dr. Anna Julia Cooper centerstage.

Cooper was born into slavery on August 10, 1858, in Raleigh, North Carolina. Her mother emphasized the importance of gaining an education at a very young age. Passionate about learning, Cooper taught her mother how to read and write. After slavery ended, Cooper’s mother enrolled her in St. Augustine’s Normal School and Collegiate Institute in 1868.

In the early 1900s, women weren’t allowed to study the same subjects as men. Cooper excelled in the studies allowed for women and believed that the male-only courses – like Latin and Greek – should be open to women. She fought her school’s policy, causing the administration to change its policy and allow women to study the same subjects as men.

After experiencing the impact of sexism at her school, Cooper advocated for the right of Black women to pursue higher education. After receiving her degree in advanced mathematics from St. Augustine’s, Cooper earned her bachelor of arts and master of arts in mathematics from Oberlin College in Ohio. With the 1894 publication of her book *A Voice from the South, By A Black Woman of The South*, Cooper became known as “the Mother of Black Feminism.”

She became principal of M Street High School in 1902. Many of her students went on to study at top Ivy League schools. Cooper paid special attention to her female students and was known for having sensitive heart-to-hearts with them. Her legacy lives on through numerous educational organizations, schools, and consultancy groups who are dedicated to enriching the lives of African-American youth through education and self-awareness.



Anna Julia Cooper lived to the age of 105.



FROM THE DIRECTOR’S NOTEBOOK

“Dr. Anna Julia Cooper fought for the benefit of her students, she fought for the uplift of Black people, even when the odds were historically stacked against her favor. This play is illuminating her legacy but also bringing her into popular consciousness.”

– Psalmayene 24

THE ELEMENT OF DESIGN: COSTUME DESIGNER LEVONNE LINDSAY

LEVONNE LINDSAY is the costume designer for *Tempestuous Elements*.

The job of a **costume designer** is to create distinct looks that tell the story of the play and depict the personality of a character. This process is done through research, creativity, and collaboration.



RESEARCH & INSPIRATION

A costume designer begins by reading the play to examine its themes, study the characters, uncover historical context, and imagine the overall look of the show.

Some of LeVonne's ideas came from the title. *Tempestuous* means "stormy" or "to be characterized by strong and turbulent or conflicting emotion." LeVonne believed that this image (left) of a stormy sky could represent Anna's inner life. The shades of purple and grey reflect the changing moods and events of the story. These colors became the palette for the show. A *palette* is the combination of colors that give the costumes a unified look.

After creating her initial costume design concept, LeVonne met with Psalmayene 24, the director of the show. Together, they formed a shared vision for the show.

Combining Historical and Modern Design

Researching historical and modern design informed LeVonne's choices. *Tempestuous Elements* takes place in the 1900s – the Victoria era – when women would wear corsets, full skirts, blouses, and lace. During her research LeVonne discovered modern, fashion runway dresses that had Victorian elements.

"I found these Dior dresses on the runway that mixed modern and Victorian elements," LeVonne said. "The clean lines were very 40s. But then there were fuller skirts and some details that made me think of Victorian dresses. Maybe we could marry these two ideas. We can get our Victorian lace and everything into the costumes and still have this sort of clean, outer Victorian line."

Designs by LeVonne Lindsay.



DESIGNING ANNA'S LOOK

A character's costume should reflect their beliefs, identity, occupation, and goals to help reveal clues about their personality - even before they say their first line.

The first costume look for Anna is inspired by this famous photograph. LeVonne wanted to display Cooper's spirit of excellence and integrity and convey her roles as a teacher, principal, and society leader.

"...she feels very feminine to me. Very classy," LeVonne said. "She's not a pushover, and she's very well-respected. Her whole focus is that education will pull you out from poverty, from the lower class, from people looking down on you, and that was her sensibility. That was key to her, that getting a good education could take you places. She's conservative in that sense, and that informed a lot of her costumes."



Look at the two pictures shown above. What are the similarities or differences that you notice between the original photograph of Anna and LeVonne's costume design sketch?

Designs by LeVonne Lindsay.



Conveying Character: LeVonne costumed Anna's foster daughter, Lula, in pants that look like a skirt to show how Lula pushes against society's norms and expectations. This photograph of a woman in pants was part of LeVonne's research.



CREATIVITY

One of a designer's most important tools is their creativity. Creativity is key to solving problems and developing new ideas.

Costuming Double Casting

Double casting is when an actor plays more than one role in the same play. In this play, actors play as many as three characters, and each needs a unique look. This can be achieved by adding or replacing elements, like hats and jackets.

"We keep going back to the script and making sure that everybody has a costume for every look," LeVonne said. "The challenge is, if we've seen this skirt before, if we've seen this blouse before, when we see it again with this hat, will the audience understand that this person is playing a different person?"

There are 47 costume changes in the play, and some must happen quickly.

"Victorian costumes have so much detail: the corset, the lace, the blouse, and the trim- they're not very conducive to quick changes," LeVonne said. She planned for these "quick changes" by layering costume pieces and by using snaps and zippers rather than buttons.

Sketching the Rough Draft

After completing her research and brainstorming, LeVonne sketched her rough designs on paper, then scanned them to her computer to finish editing on a program. These pictures, called "renderings," guide the costume shop in making the costumes.

LeVonne's JOURNEY

"I started out as a fashion design major. I was always interested in clothing and fashion. I got into it from watching old movies from the Hollywood era and there was always a mixture of costumes and fashion in that too. I thought that I would either work for movies or be the person that designed a dress that someone would wear for a red carpet. Then one summer I volunteered at a community theater as crew. As soon as they figured out I knew how to sew I got into costuming. Then I got my MFA at University of Maryland, and I came to Arena Stage as a costume fellow."

The Allen Lee Hughes Fellowships at Arena Stage give emerging theater professionals an opportunity to train at Arena Stage for a year in their area of interest. LeVonne spent a year with Joe as her mentor, learning how a costume shop runs and how the design process works. Returning to Arena Stage 22 years later as a designer is an exciting homecoming.

COLLABORATION

Working as a team, the Arena Stage costume shop makes the designer's renderings a reality. They use their artistry to create, communicate, and problem solve.

Pull-Borrow-Buy-Build

Costume pieces can be pulled, borrowed, bought, or built. Some costume pieces are "pulled" from within the costume shop's existing inventory. If the team can't pull a costume piece, they will "buy" or "borrow" it. Some pieces are so special or specific that they must be made or "built" at Arena Stage.

Costume Shop Roles

Joe Salasovich, the **costume director**, leads the team in turning the designer's renderings into an actual wearable item. He is responsible for managing the costume shop, dividing the work amongst the team, and making sure that everyone has the material they need, and the process stays on schedule. LeVonne remains in frequent contact with Joe to ensure that the design process runs smoothly, and the costumes reach their elevated finish. The **associate costume director**, Cierra Coan, tracks the details and keeps the budget.

The drapers (Erika Krause & Carol Ramsdell) create patterns for costumes based on the designer's renderings, cut fabric, and fit the costumes to the actors.

The first hands (Michele Macadaeg & Elizabeth Spilsbury) are responsible for the creation of costumes, assisting the draper with costume fittings, and supervising stitchers on how to best alter or sew costume pieces.

The stitchers sew a costume by hand or machine to finalize the designer's concept.

The wigs, hair, and makeup supervisor (Jaime Bagley) manages the care and organization of wigs, training the hair and makeup crew, and overseeing their duties for the show.

The craftsperson (Deborah Nash) is in charge of creating accessories such as hats or using paint and other materials to create special effects on costume pieces.

The wardrobe crew helps actors get in and out of costume during a show (including quick changes), keeps the costumes organized, and makes sure that they're clean and ready before every performance. (Wardrobe Supervisors: Adelle Gresock & Alice Hawfield)



HAIR & CULTURE

Hair is another way to express the personality and culture of a character.

"There's also a big hair component to this. If someone has locs, a style that can't be taken out of your hair and put back in, can we still use them? Can we do a Victorian look with their locs?" LeVonne said. "We [the Black Community] have our flavor, the way we do things is a little bit different than everyone else. You go to a Black church on Easter Sunday, it's going to be a fashion show. The hat, the hair, the nails, that's what the director wants to see come across. Plus, a lot of plays about African Americans in this period are slave stories, or about lower classes, or in rural locations. So, there's not a whole lot of plays where we get to see middle, upper middle class, and upper-class African-American characters. So, he said let's take advantage of that and make these people look fly!" LaShawn Melton is the **hair and wig designer** for the show.

HISTORICAL FIGURES

In *Tempestuous Elements*, we encounter many important 19th and 20th century historical figures. Meet the notable people in the play who worked alongside Anna Julia Cooper.

COLORED WOMEN'S LEAGUE MEMBERS

The Colored Women's League was founded in June 1892 in Washington, D.C. during Cooper's tenure as a teacher at M Street. The group's focus was to advance African-American women and youth by working to improve their economic, moral, religious, and social welfare. In 1896, The Colored Women's League merged with the Federation of Afro-American Women to form the National Association of Colored Women.



Charlotte Forten Grimké (1837-1914): First northern African-American woman to go South to teach formerly enslaved people. A poet, abolitionist, educator, and founder of the National Association of Colored Women.



Mary Church Terrell (1863-1954): Writer, educator, advocate for women's voting rights, activist, and co-founder of the National Association of Colored Women. She also served as the organization's first president. One of the first Black women to earn her master's degree.



Mary Jane Patterson (1840-1894): Educator and assistant principal at M Street High School, helped found Colored Women's League of Washington D.C., first African-American woman to earn a bachelor's degree when she graduated Oberlin College with high honors.



Helen Appo Cook (1837-1913): Educator, advocate for women's voting rights, co-founder of the National Association of Colored Women, and one of the wealthiest Black women of her time.



Josephine Beall Willson Bruce (1853-1923): Educator, club leader and socialite, race activist, advocate for women's rights, and the first vice president of the National Association of Colored Women.

FRIENDS & COLLEAGUES



Francis James Grimké (1850-1937): Leading advocate for civil rights, one of the first African-American leaders to challenge Booker T. Washington's view of education, minister of 15th Street Presbyterian Church in Washington D.C. for 50 years, and founder of the American Negro Academy.



Dr. W.E.B. DuBois (1868-1963): Educator, first African American to earn a Ph.D. from Harvard University, the first sociologist to study African-American life in urban areas. He believed that education was crucial to racial equality.



Representative George H. White (1852-1918): Graduate of the Howard University School of Law, member of the 55th and 56th U.S. Congresses from North Carolina's Second Congressional District, lawyer in Washington, D.C. and Philadelphia.

W.E.B. DUBOIS VS BOOKER T. WASHINGTON

W.E.B. DuBois and Booker T. Washington were two important civil rights leaders who fought for the equality of African Americans in the early 1900s. They had different opinions on the best way for African Americans to seek their own advancement, sparking a countrywide debate on which man's argument garnered the best results. Characters in the play engage in this debate. Below is a compare-and-contrast table of their independent beliefs and backgrounds.

W.E.B. DUBOIS

- Former schoolteacher in the South
- Pursued higher education and attended an HBCU- Fisk University
- Traveled hot roads in the South and went door to door to find students in rural areas who needed a teacher
- Experienced discrimination and prejudice during his time as a teacher in the South
- Wrote an autobiography about his life- *A Soliloquy on Viewing My Life from the Last Decade of Its First Century*
- Believed in the equal rights of African Americans

BOOKER T. WASHINGTON

- Former schoolteacher in the South
- Pursued higher education and attended HBCU- Hampton University. Was also the first principal of Tuskegee University
- Taught children of freed slaves in the daytime, and adults in the evening from 8 a.m. - 10 p.m.
- Experienced discrimination and prejudice during his time as a teacher in the South
- Wrote an autobiography about his life- *Up from Slavery*
- Believed in the equal rights of African Americans

COMPARE

CONTRAST

• Believed that education and power in politics were key for African Americans to obtain their constitutional rights. By building the mind through education, African Americans can use their knowledge to surpass societal stereotypes, gain positions of power in fields dominated by white Americans, and educate the youth to build their intellectual power.

• In the fight for civil rights and racial justice, DuBois believed that African Americans deserved freedom from segregation and a right to equal opportunities in work, life, and education.

• "Education is that whole system of human training within and without the schoolhouse walls, which molds and develops men." - W.E.B. DuBois

• Publicly spoke against white racism and segregation, strongly protesting the idea of compromise in the fight for civil rights

• Believed that acquiring labor and trade skills were key for African Americans to obtain their constitutional rights. By building financial power and business ownership, African Americans can find equality in opportunities for success, fund the needs of their communities, and build resources for a healthy life.

• Known as "The Great Accommodator," Booker T. Washington believed that African American should compromise with the segregation laws

• "Dignify and glorify common labor. It's at the bottom of life that we must begin, not at the top." - Booker T. Washington

• Never publicly spoke against segregation but secretly contributed funds to the fight against Jim Crow laws

1900S: SEGREGATION AND AFRICAN AMERICAN EDUCATION

PLESSY V. FERGUSON: "SEPARATE BUT EQUAL"

Despite the abolition of slavery and the passage of the Fourteenth Amendment, the United States continued to be a racially segregated society. Segregation is the enforced separation of different racial groups. This segregation existed by law in housing, transportation, business, education and other areas, particularly in Southern states. For example, Black people were not allowed to attend white schools, live in white neighborhoods, or share waiting rooms or drinking fountains with white people. Segregation was one of the ways white people oppressed and discriminated against African Americans.

In 1892, Homer Adolph Plessy decided to sit in the "Whites Only" section of a train going from New Orleans to Covington, Louisiana. After refusing to sit in the section allocated for African Americans, Plessy was arrested for breaking the law. Plessy argued that it was against his constitutional right to have to sit in separate seating sections and sparked a debate on whether African Americans should be able to have the same rights as white Americans. His case eventually made it to the Supreme Court, where they decided that racial segregation was constitutional and was allowed to continue.



The "separate-but-equal" doctrine also opened the door for states to enforce what were called "Jim Crow" laws. Jim Crow laws were named after a minstrel stereotype of African Americans as lazy, stupid, untrustworthy, and a threat to society. During this time African Americans were being victimized by lynch mobs, race riots, offensive stereotypes in media, and being denied the right to vote. African-American leaders were at the forefront of fighting these laws and demanding equality, encouraging African Americans to use their newfound freedom for collective advancement and opportunity.

AFRICAN-AMERICAN EDUCATION

Because of the "separate-but-equal" doctrine and Jim Crow laws, African-American children went to schools that were separate from white children. Segregated schools for African-American students often lacked proper school supplies, had poor facilities, and paid low salaries for teachers. For example, some classrooms didn't have desks, lacked proper lighting, or had books that were hand-me-downs from white schools. Many schools were not easy to get to. In the South, there were few schools for African-American children, and many were uneducated as a result. In a time where African Americans were viewed as lower-class citizens, gaining an education provided a sense of pride against racial stereotypes.

Tempestuous Elements shows some of the obstacles Black children faced in pursuing their educational rights. The character Lucretia Tate must walk four and a half miles to school every morning, arriving late when she must care for her siblings or assist her mother with her job serving white families. There were also families who were farm workers and needed their children at home to work.

Despite the impact of segregated schools, there were Black institutions that strived for excellence, rivaling the education and conditions of predominantly white institutions. While there were schools

that focused on academics, there were others that were created for teaching different trades such as sewing, carpentry, and other skills that created opportunities for African Americans to find jobs or create their own businesses.

Black high schools and Historically Black Colleges and Universities around the country built a foundation of self-awareness, integrity, and an advanced education to stand against racism by improving the mind and building skills for independence. By focusing on mental development and academic achievement, many African Americans became scholars and civil rights activists who championed the success of creating more opportunities for the African-American community to thrive.



Many schools for African Americans were started with low funding, yet still produced great academic success. In Florida in 1904, Mary McLeod Bethune opened the Daytona Educational and Industrial Training School for Negro Girls with only \$1.50. Her passion for teaching attracted additional resources from many donors, including the United Methodist Church. The school then merged with the Cookman Institute of Jacksonville in 1923, a school for boys. Bethune-Cookman College became a four-year school in 1942 and is known today as Bethune-Cookman University.

Most schools taught different trades and skills along with subjects such as math, science, and reading. This photo from circa 1899 shows young female students learning to sew as part of their curriculum in a D.C. Public School.





M STREET HIGH SCHOOL

M Street High School's senior class of 1914. Due to its prestigious reputation, many African-American families moved to Washington D.C. so that their children could earn a quality education at M Street High School.

“The cause of freedom is not the cause of a race or a sect, a party or a class – it is the cause of humankind, the very birthright of humanity.”

— Anna Julia Cooper

This quote from Anna Julia Cooper appears in United States passports.



SCAN TO WATCH A VIDEO FROM
**BLACK HISTORY
IN TWO MINUTES (OR SO):
ELITE BLACK PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOLS**



The Preparatory High School for Negro Youth was originally founded in 1870 in the basement of the 15th Street Presbyterian Church in Washington, D.C. The first public high school for Black students, the school began with four students and one teacher in its first year. The school changed locations as it continued to grow. In 1891 it relocated to 124 M Street Northwest and became known as M Street High School.

M Street High School was the elite training ground for African-American students seeking in-depth teaching in math, art, literature, business, and science. These subjects are part of a “classical education” which sought to cultivate leadership qualities and prepare students to pursue higher education. Colleges and universities hired few Black professors, so many of these accomplished Black scholars and educators taught at M Street, making it one of the nation’s top schools.

When Anna Julia Cooper became principal in 1902, she enhanced the school’s rigorous curriculum and challenged students to work hard for their educational rights. Her passionate teaching and mentorship skills brought great student success. Many African Americans at the time questioned whether there was value in pursuing higher education or not. Booker T. Washington, one of the most important leaders and educators of the time, advocated for vocational training and did not believe that a classical education would benefit most African-American students. M Street High School continued to push their students forward into academic success. The school’s reputation led to the rapid growth of its student body.

M Street High School was split into two schools in 1903: M Street High School and Armstrong Manual Training School. Armstrong focused on teaching trade skills to African-American students pursuing a career in carpentry, foundry, and blacksmithing. Armstrong Manual Training School was an option for students who preferred to learn trade skills rather than pursue a classical education.

In October 1916, the school moved to O Street Northwest, and its name was changed to Paul Laurence Dunbar High School, honoring the poet, novelist, and short story writer who illuminated his reality of African-American life. Dunbar High School opened with an enrollment of 1,117 students, 35 teachers, 35 classrooms, and a library that could hold 1,400 volumes.

Special thanks to the Perry Center, which is based in the original M Street High School building. Part of their mission is to preserve the legacy and history of the school. Learn more at www.perryschool.org/the-m-street-project

Gina Daniels as Anna Julia Cooper in *Tempestuous Elements* (photo by Tony Powell).

THREE BIG QUESTIONS

1

What is the power of education?

2

How can standing up for your beliefs impact your reputation?

3

What person or period in history would you write a play about?

RESOURCES

"Armstrong Manual Training School - the Armstrong Manual Training School Is Illustrative of the National Campaign for Vocational Training for African Americans Promoted by Booker T. Washington." DC Historic Sites, historicsites.dcpreservation.org/items/show/831.

"Booker T. Washington and W.E.B DuBois: Crash Course Black American History #22." YouTube, www.youtube.com/watch?v=zHn-vSTMOWE.

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"The Struggle against Segregated Education." National Museum of African American History and Culture, nmaahc.si.edu/explore/stories/struggle-against-segregated-education.

"Voices of the Civil War Episode 9: 'Port Royal Experiment.'" YouTube, www.youtube.com/watch?v=A0vAo4uQr2E.

"Welcome to Blackpast • BlackPast." BlackPast, 2019, www.blackpast.org/.

HELPFUL HINTS FOR THEATER AUDIENCES

As an audience member at the theater, YOU are part of the show! Just as you see and hear the actors onstage, they can see and hear you in the audience.

To help the performers do their best, please remember the following:

- Arrive early.
- Visit the restroom before the show starts.
- Sit in the seat indicated on your ticket.
- Ushers are there to help you!
- Before the show begins, turn off your phone, watch alarms, and any other electronic devices. If anything rings by accident, turn it off immediately.
- Do not use your phone for texts, calls, games, pictures or recording.
- There is no food allowed in the theater.
- Intermission is the best time to discuss the show and visit the restroom.
- If you must leave during the show, wait for a scene change and exit quietly and quickly.
- Respond to the show; you can laugh, cry, and gasp. However, don't distract the performers on stage.
- Be sure to applaud at the end! During a musical, audiences sometimes clap after a song or dance. If you love the show or a performer, you can give a standing ovation. The actors bow to thank you.



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Visit www.arenastage.org for more information on Arena Stage productions and educational opportunities.

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