



## Paul Laurence Dunbar High School

Grade Level: 9-12

Objectives:

- \* To understand one example of educational opportunity available to African-American students prior to the *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* decision in 1954.
- \* To illustrate and understand one strategy that African-Americans used to combat racial segregation.
- \* To analyze the feelings of students who attended Dunbar.

### Arkansas History Guidelines:

TCCI.2., TCCI.3., TCC2.2.,  
TCC2.3., SSPSI.1., SSPSI.2.,  
SSPSI.3., SSPSI.4., SSPSI.5.  
SSPSI.6.

### NCSS Guidelines (US History):

NSS-USH.5 -12.6, NSS-  
USH.5 -12.7, NSS-USH.5 -12.9,  
NSS-USH.9-12.10

*Not everyone wanted to attend Central. Dunbar should have been allowed to operate as a high school; it was too important a symbol in the black community to close.*

### *-Dunbar graduate*

In 1929, African-American high school students in Little Rock could not attend Little Rock Central High School due to **segregation**. Instead, they attended **Paul Laurence Dunbar High School**. Between 1929 and 1955, Dunbar provided a quality education for African-American students, not only within the City of Little Rock, but also from far-reaching corners of the state. Students who lived in areas that did not have secondary schools for African-Americans could pay tuition to attend Dunbar.

The new facility at the corner of Wright Avenue and Ringo streets opened as Paul Laurence Dunbar High School in the fall of 1929. The building housed a junior high school, a senior high school, and a junior college, and averaged a yearly enrollment of around 1,700 students. The entire program of work emphasized vocational and liberal arts training for all pupils. Students could earn a high school



diploma, a trade certificate, or both. The students were prepared to enter college or the world of work, equipped with a marketable skill. A marketable skill, such as bricklaying, was important during this time because if an African-American student stayed in Arkansas, his or her job opportunities were limited in the professional fields. Therefore, a vocational education offered the students a way to support themselves.

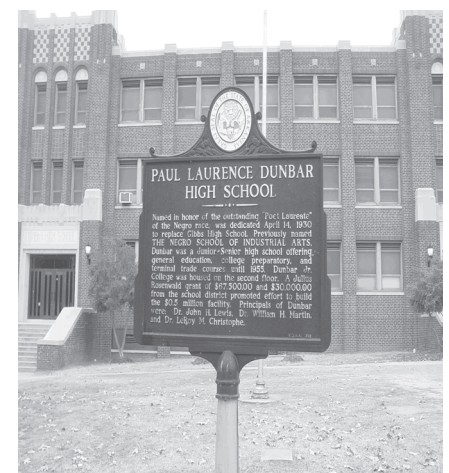


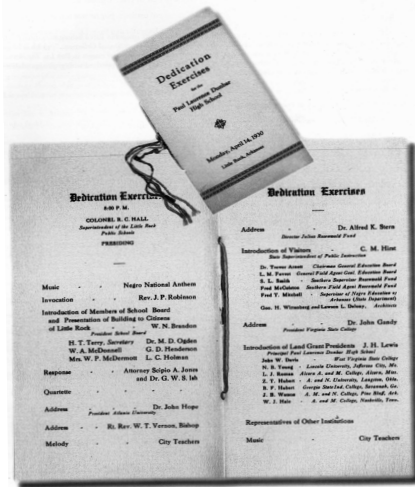
### A Little History...

Considered by alumnae and others the “most modern and complete public high school building in the United States erected specifically for Negroes,” Dunbar was one of several African-American schools in Little Rock when segregation was the law. The first African-American school in Little Rock was reportedly organized in 1863 by the Reverend William Wallace Andrews. In 1864, Governor Isaac Murphy called for a “system of universal education” for every child, regardless of race, but it was never implemented. Instead, it was the **Freedmen’s Bureau** that built schools to serve the educational needs of former enslaved people. As a result, many schools were built in Arkansas during the late 1800s for African-Americans.

The **Common School Act** of 1867 laid the foundation for Arkansas’ public school system. The Act established a state board of education and provided \$3.00 a year for all white children’s education. The Freedmen’s Bureau and the Society of Friends (Quakers) helped to fund the education for African-American students at the newly opened Union School in Little Rock. The Arkansas General Assembly expanded the Common School Act in 1868 to include African-American children. Union School is considered the precursor to Dunbar High School and for many years had only two teachers. In 1877, the first “high school” for African-Americans was organized and had a graduating class in 1880 of five students. By the early 20th century, the high school and lower grades expanded. The school moved to Capitol Hill at 11th and Wolfe Streets and the name was changed to Capitol Hill School. In 1907, the school moved again and changed its name to Mifflin Gibbs High School (today, Gibbs is an elementary magnet school for international studies in Little Rock). The first manual labor classes were added to its curricula at this time. By the late 1920s, Gibbs could not accommodate the growing class sizes.

Little Rock School District officials hoped to keep from building a new structure by enlarging Gibbs. However, these buildings burned. Local African-American leaders sought private funding from the **Rosenwald Fund** and the Rockfeller General Education Board to promote a secondary industrial/education institution that resembled schools set up by **Booker T. Washington**. The Little Rock School District received the funds gratefully since it had used most of the available construction funds to help build the newly opened, all-white Little Rock Senior High School (known now as Central High





School). Dunbar’s projected cost was around \$400,000 compared to Central’s \$1.5 million budget. Ultimately, the Rosenwald Fund paid only \$67,000 and the General Education Board paid \$30,000 for construction of a new building on three-fourths of a block at Wright Avenue and Ringo Streets, its current location.

Many African-American parents were not happy that the focus of Dunbar High School would be industrial education. They demanded that college preparatory courses be included. After studying the issue, the school board decided to name the new school the “Negro School for Industrial Arts” when it opened in 1930. After parental pressure, the name of the school was changed to Paul Laurence Dunbar High School,

the “finest school building in the South for Negro boys and girls,” housing grades seven through twelve. In 1931, Dunbar was fully accredited by the North Central Association - the only African-American school to receive this honor in Arkansas.

In 1955, Dunbar became a junior high school when a new African-American school opened - Horace Mann. Mann became the last of the five exclusively African-American high schools to exist in Little Rock and its final graduating class was in 1971. Afterwards, Mann became a junior high school and now serves as a fine arts magnet school.

Dunbar not only contained a high school, but also a junior college. This was a two-year institution that focused on teacher training. It provided the first two years of a four year college curriculum for those who majored in home economics, teacher education, or liberal arts and sciences. The junior college was a member of elite professional organizations, including the North Central Council for Junior Colleges and the American Association of Junior Colleges. The junior college component ended in 1955.

Photos: (page 1) Paul Laurence Dunbar High School, ca. 1990s. NPS Photo; Dunbar High School Bearcats mascot. Courtesy of the National Dunbar Alumni Association (NDAA) Collection, UALR; (page 2) Dunbar Junior High School, January 2006. NPS Photo; Historic plaque at Dunbar Junior High School, January 2006. NPS Photo; (page 3) Dedication booklet for Dunbar High School, April 14, 1930. Courtesy of the NDAA Collection, UALR; (page 4) First Dunbar High School Band, ca. 1934. Courtesy of the NDAA Collection, UALR; Dunbar Majorettes marching down Main Street Little Rock, undated. Photo courtesy of the NDAA Collection, UALR; Dunbar Chemistry Class, ca. 1948. Photo courtesy of the NDAA Collection, UALR; Dunbar Bricklaying Class, ca. 1930s. Photo courtesy of the NDAA Collection, UALR.

### Sources and Additional Reading:

*Dunbar National Alumni Association Collection*, Special Collections, University of Arkansas at Little Rock, Little Rock, Arkansas.

*Paul Laurence Dunbar*, Ohio Historical Society ([www.ohiohistory.org/places/dunbar](http://www.ohiohistory.org/places/dunbar)).

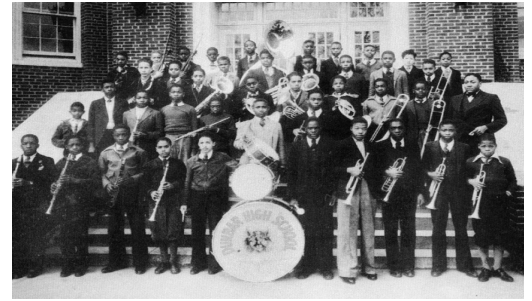
*Paul Laurence Dunbar High School, Little Rock, Arkansas* by Faustine C. Jones - Wilson, Erma Glasco Davis, and Bobby Works for the National Dunbar Alumni Association of Little Rock, Arkansas (2003).

*Rosenwald School Initiative* by the National Trust for Historic Preservation ([www.rosenwaldschools.com](http://www.rosenwaldschools.com)).

*Self-Taught: African American Education in Slavery and Freedom (The John Hope Franklin Series in African American History and Culture)* by Heather Andrea Williams (2005).

## Life at the School...

Teachers, principals, and students made Dunbar High School successful. The first principal was Dr. John H. Lewis. Dr. Lewis and those who followed him claimed many achievements with the smallest of budgets: purchasing pianos and band equipment, beautifying the grounds, obtaining up-to-date equipment and furnishings for the school, hiring more teachers and giving them in-service training, encouraging teachers to pursue master's degrees, and improving reading and discipline among students, to name a few. However, there were still many discrepancies between Dunbar High School and Little Rock Central High School that glaringly illustrated the legacy of segregation:



	<u><i>Paul Laurence Dunbar High School</i></u>	<u><i>Little Rock Senior High School (Central)</i></u>
<b>COST</b>	\$400,000	\$1,500,000
<b>HOW FUNDED</b>	Rosenwald Fund, Rockefeller General Education Fund (in part)	Little Rock School Board
<b>STUDENT CAPACITY</b>	1,700	3,000
<b>TEXTBOOKS</b>	"Hand-me-downs" from Little Rock Senior High School	Purchased new
<b>LIBRARY BOOKS</b>	5,000	11,000
<b>SQUARE FOOTAGE</b>	200,000	600,000
<b>CLASSROOMS</b>	34	100
<b>ATHLETIC FACILITIES</b>	No gymnasium and no practice fields	Gymnasium and stadium
<b>PRINCIPAL SALARIES</b>	\$344 per month	\$500 per month
<b>LEVELS OF INSTRUCTION</b>	Junior High, High School, and Junior College	High School and Junior College



## **Classes Offered at Dunbar**

### **English**

grammar, composition, business and trade English, literature

### **Mathematics**

intro courses, business arithmetic, algebra, geometry, trigonometry

### **Social Sciences**

World and American history, civics, government, economics

### **Science**

introduction and general courses, biology, chemistry, physics

### **Languages**

French and Latin

### **Trade Courses**

auto mechanics, laundry, clothing, carpentry, typing, printing

### **Physical Education**

### **Extracurricular**

band, Bearcat Newspaper and Yearbook, football, Student Council, Honor Society, Glee Club, Student Christian Association, Debate Team, Drum Corps, majorettes, Student Council, pep squad, Camera Club, Debate Team, Forensic Society, Quill and Scroll, basketball, track, and baseball

## **Times Change...**

In 1955, Dunbar divided into two schools: Dunbar Junior High School and Horace Mann Senior High School. Mann was located at 24th and McAlmont Streets. Mann assumed the purple and gold colors that previously belonged to Dunbar. The “Bearcat” mascot also went to Mann. Dunbar became the “Bobcats.”

In the spring of 1957, students from Mann and Dunbar signed up to attend Central High School under the Little Rock School District desegregation plan that called for integration of the school for the 1957-1958 school year. By the fall semester, nine students showed up for school at Central. These students are now known in history as the “**Little Rock Nine.**”

While more attention turned towards Mann High School since it was for senior high students, Dunbar was able to serve successfully as a junior high school from 1955 to 1999. In 1999, Dunbar became Dunbar Magnet Middle School, offering speciality classes in international studies.

Dunbar’s importance in Arkansas and African-American history cannot be denied. It was the symbol of excellence for African-American education at a time when segregation of races limited options for young students. Dunbar Junior High School was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in the fall of 1980. Another lasting legacy of Dunbar High School is the National Dunbar Alumni Association, headquartered in Little Rock, Arkansas. This group of students, who have satellite organizations throughout the United States, form committees to publicly support former students, graduates, faculty, and staff of Dunbar High School, Dunbar Junior College, and Dunbar Junior High School. It works to promote the civic, education, and social interests of the community and Dunbar graduates.

## A Dunbar Teacher Goes to Court The Story of Sue Cowan Morris Williams



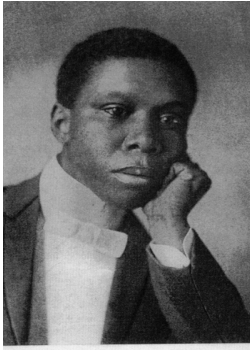
**Photos: Sue Cowan Morris Williams, undated. Photo courtesy of the African American Hall of Fame.**

With the help of Dunbar Junior High School principal, Dr. John H. Lewis, Sue Cowan Williams and other teachers filed a lawsuit to improve the pay of African-American instructors in the Little Rock School District. Williams was chosen as the plaintiff in the case by the city's Negro Teachers Association. At the time, African-American teachers lobbied the school district for the same pay as white teachers in the district. In many cases, African-American teachers held more advanced degrees than their white counterparts but were paid less because of their race.

Thurgood Marshall, the lawyer who would become the first African-American justice on the U.S. Supreme Court, represented the plaintiffs. They lost the initial suit in 1942. The city's Negro Teachers Association won an appeal in the District Court of the United States, Western Division of Arkansas, in 1943. The case brought greater pay for many African-American teachers and administrators in the Little Rock School District

However, winning the case brought a high price for Williams. She was fired from her job and Dr. Lewis resigned at the end of the school year. In 1952, Williams was reinstated as a teacher in the Little Rock schools after repeatedly requesting that the district rehire her.

### Teacher Notes:



Paul Laurence Dunbar

## Who Was Paul Laurence Dunbar?

Paul Laurence Dunbar (1872-1906) was born in Dayton, Ohio to Joshua and Matilda Dunbar in 1872. Taught to read by his mother, Dunbar published his first poems by the age of 14.

A gifted poet, Dunbar was a precursor to the artists of the Harlem Renaissance. During his lifetime, he published poetry in mainstream literary journals like *Century*, *Lippincott's Monthly*, *Atlantic Monthly*, and the *Saturday Evening Post*.

Dunbar married a young writer, Alice Ruth Moore, of New Orleans, and worked at the Library of Congress in Washington D.C. from 1897 to 1898. Unfortunately, Dunbar's life was cut short when he died at the age of 34 from tuberculosis in 1906. His complete work of poetry was published posthumously in 1913.

**Photo: Paul Laurence Dunbar, undated. Courtesy of Dodd, Mead, and Company.**

### We Wear the Mask

We wear the mask that grins and lies,  
It hides our cheeks and shades our eyes.  
With torn and bleeding hearts we smile,  
And mouth with myriad subtleties/

Why should the world be otherwise,  
In counting all our tears and sighs?  
Nay, let them only see us, while  
We wear the mask.

We smile, but, o great Christ, our cries,  
To thee from tortured souls arise.  
We sing, but oh the clay is vile,  
Beneath our feet, and long the mile;  
But let the world dream otherwise,  
We wear the mask!

Taken from the *Complete Poems of Paul Laurence Dunbar*

## What is a Rosenwald School?

In 1917, Julius Rosenwald, the president of the Sears and Roebuck Foundation, initiated a school building program that was to have a dramatic impact on the rural South and on the lives of African-Americans. Through the **Julius Rosenwald Foundation**, over 5,300 schools, shop buildings, and teacher residences were built by and for African-Americans across the South and Southwestern United States, until the program was discontinued in 1932. The foundation gave more than \$4.3 million to construct schools and raised more than \$4.7 million for African-Americans to build schools during this time.



Many of these schools are now gone, victims of changing times and communities. Many were abandoned since the majority were located in rural areas that had insufficient funding for upkeep or preservation. A few survive, including Dunbar Junior High School in Little Rock, Arkansas. As a result, Rosenwald Schools have been named to the list of America's Most Endangered Historic Places in 2002.

*“Treat people fairly and honestly and generously  
and their response will be fair and honest and generous.”*

*Julius Rosenwald  
(1862-1932)*

Julius Rosenwald was born in Springfield, Illinois, in 1862, where his parents ran a clothing store. Rosenwald joined a cousin in 1885 to manufacture men's clothing. One of his clients, Richard Sears, ordered the clothes for his men's catalog. In 1895, Rosenwald became a partner in the Sears, Roebuck and Company after Sears offered him interest in the company. In 1896, Rosenwald became vice-president of Sears. By 1907, the company boasted over \$50 million in annual sales due in part to Rosenwald's management philosophies. He became president of Sears in 1908 and served on its governing board until his death in 1932.

Rosenwald's personal philosophy with Sears was “satisfaction guaranteed or your money back.” Through these practices, he brought the Sears Company back from bankruptcy after World War I. After stepping down as president of the company in 1924, Rosenwald devoted his time to philanthropy. He gave millions of dollars to public schools, colleges, universities, museums, Jewish charities, and African-American institutions. He is most famous for the more than 5,000 “Rosenwald Schools” built in the South, as well as 4,000 libraries added to existing schools. He received the special gold medal from the William E. Harmon Awards for Distinguished Achievement in Race Relations for his contributions to the education of African-Americans in 1927.

Do you want to know more about Rosenwald Schools in Arkansas? Contact the Arkansas Historic Preservation Program at:

323 Center Street  
Little Rock, Arkansas 72201  
(501) 324-9880 (phone)  
[www.arkansaspreservation.org](http://www.arkansaspreservation.org)

**Photo: Julius Rosenwald, ca. early 20th century. Courtesy of the Sears Archives.**



## Suggested Activities for Teachers:

1) Define the block: Explore the history of African-American schools in your area and do the following:

\* Use maps to define the area in which they were located (place a pin on these locations). Identify what is there now (Hint: information from the county assessor's office, city planning departments, library reference departments will give you parcel plats, plat maps, and Sanborn maps).

\* Present findings of the area to students through: photos, "base map" or other means to illustrate what happened to these schools.

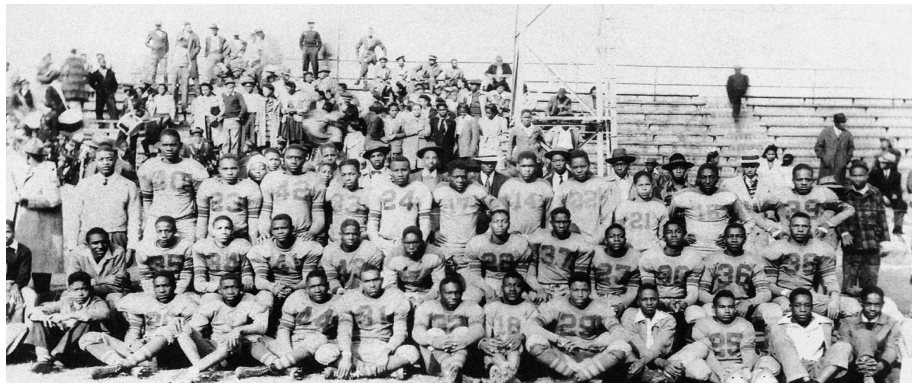
2) Investigate how schools function as vehicles for political and social integration and apply to the case of Dunbar Junior and Senior High School.

3) Compare and contrast Dunbar Junior and Senior High School to all-white Little Rock Central High School prior to 1955 (school facilities, class offerings, administration, etc.). Illustrate the differences through a class project, writing exercise, or role playing a student at one or the other schools and write a paragraph about your experience.

4) Conduct an in-depth research project on Rosenwald Schools. Pretending you work for a historic preservation agency, create a brochure to help save these structures (even if they are gone and all you have left are pictures).

5) Compare and contrast through additional research the disparity in pay and benefits for white and African-American teachers throughout the 20th century. Cite cases where these issues were brought to court and their outcomes.

**Photo: Dunbar Football Team, a. 1940s. Courtesy of the NDAA Collection, UALR.**



**Join the Little Rock Central High School  
National Historic Site  
Mailing List!**

Fill out the bottom and return to the following address:

Education Specialist  
Little Rock Central High School National Historic Site  
700 West Capitol Avenue, Suite 3527  
Little Rock, AR 72201

501 -374- 3067 (phone)  
501-301-7762 (fax)  
www.nps.gov/chsc (web site)

**To schedule a guided tour, please contact:**

Little Rock Central High School National Historic Site  
2125 Daisy L. Gatson Bates Drive  
Little Rock, AR 72202

501 -374- 1957 (phone)  
501-376-4728 (fax)  
Chsc\_visitor\_center@nps.gov  
www.nps.gov/chsc



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people so that all may experience our heritage.**