

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**National Register of Historic Places Registration Form**

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions.

1. Name of PropertyHistoric name: Dunbar Junior and Senior High School and Junior College Additional DocumentationOther names/site number: PU3232

Name of related multiple property listing:

N/A

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

2. LocationStreet & number: 1100 Wright AvenueCity or town: Little Rock State: AR County: Pulaski (119)Not For Publication: ☐ Vicinity: ☐**3. State/Federal Agency Certification**

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,

I hereby certify that this X nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property X meets does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

X national statewide X local

Applicable National Register Criteria:

X A B X C D_____
Signature of certifying official/Title:_____
DateArkansas Historic Preservation Program

State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

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In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of commenting official:

Date

Title :

**State or Federal agency/bureau
or Tribal Government**

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

- ___ entered in the National Register
___ determined eligible for the National Register
___ determined not eligible for the National Register
___ removed from the National Register
___ other (explain:) _____

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

Private:

☐

Public – Local

☒

Public – State

☐

Public – Federal

☐

Category of Property

(Check only **one** box.)

Building(s)

☒

District

☐☐

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Site

Structure

☐

Object

☐

Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing

Noncontributing

1

buildings

sites

structures

objects

Total

1

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 1

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

EDUCATION/schools

EDUCATION/college

EDUCATION/education-related (gymnasium)

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

EDUCATION/schools

EDUCATION/education-related (gymnasium)

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7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

MODERN MOVEMENT/Art Deco

MODERN MOVEMENT/Mid-Century Modern

Materials: (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property:

CONCRETE

BRICK

WOOD

STONE/marble

GLASS

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Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

Summary Paragraph

Dunbar Junior and Senior High School and Junior College, completed in August 1929, stands as a testament to architectural ambition tailored for Black education in the segregated South. Located at 1100 Wright Avenue in Little Rock's historically Black Paul Laurence Dunbar School Neighborhood Historic District (NR Listed 2013), the 2.95-acre campus occupies the south end of Parcel No. 34L0201414700 in Block 278, lots 4-15 and part of 16, bounded by Wright Avenue to the south, S. Cross Street to the west, W. 18th Street to the north, and S. Ringo Street to the east. Designed by George H. Wittenberg and Lawson L. Delony in the Art Deco style with subtle Collegiate Gothic influences, this three-story brick-and-concrete Dunbar School Building built in 1929 was constructed by Stewart-McGhee Construction Company for \$421,791.11 with funding from the Rosenwald Fund (\$67,500), the General Education Board (\$30,000), and the City of Little Rock.¹ Originally called the Negro School of Industrial Arts, the school was renamed before 1930 to honor Black poet Paul Laurence Dunbar, serving as the first of three urban Rosenwald industrial trade schools built between 1928 and 1932 and one of 17 surviving Rosenwald schools in Arkansas.² The d. 1950 Physical Education Building, designed by Bruce R. Anderson in the Mid-Century Modern style, was originally detached until connected by a ca. 2004 addition and is considered part of the contributing resource. Together, the d. 1929 Dunbar School Building and the d. 1950 Physical Education Building retain strong historic integrity, exemplified by the grand Florence Price Auditorium and functional gymnasium. In 1955, Dunbar School transitioned to a junior high, with the junior college closing and the high school moving to Horace Mann High School, marking the end of its period of significance (1929–1955). A 2024 Little Rock School District project replaced 160 ca. 1990 windows with energy-efficient, period-appropriate designs that closely resemble the original configurations, enhancing the historical façade as a positive step toward restoration, though not an exact replication due to modern material and efficiency standards. For clarity in this nomination, the institution will be referred to generally as “Dunbar School,” while the contributing buildings will be identified as the “Dunbar School Building” and the “Physical Education Building” in architectural discussions.

¹Higgins, Holly and Hallie Hearnese, *National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form for the Paul Laurence Dunbar School Neighborhood Historic District in Little Rock, Pulaski County, Arkansas*, Submitted to the National Park Service, Prepared by Cultural Resource Analysts, Inc., 2012.

²Brown, Don and Ethel Goodstein, *National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form for the Dunbar Junior and Senior High School and Junior College in Little Rock, Pulaski County, Arkansas*, Submitted to the National Park Service, Prepared by Arkansas Historic Preservation Program, NR Listed 1980.

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Additional Documentation: Summary

This Additional Documentation for the Dunbar Junior and Senior High School and Junior College, originally listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1980, aims to comprehensively update and expand the understanding of the property's historical and architectural significance. The 1980 nomination recognized the property at a local level for its role in education within Arkansas's segregated school system from 1929 to 1955 and for its Art Deco architectural design by George H. Wittenburg and Lawson L. Delony, focusing on its physical description and historical role as a center for Black education in Little Rock. This update elevates the property's significance to the national level under Criterion A for its contributions to Education and Law, highlighting its role as the first of three Rosenwald urban industrial trade schools with a junior college, its association with the landmark *Morris v. Williams* (1942–1945) equal-pay case for Black teachers, and its connection to the Little Rock Nine and the 1957 Central High desegregation crisis. It also retains and expands the property's local significance under Criterion A for Ethnic Heritage/Black, emphasizing its role as a cultural and educational hub for Little Rock's Black community, and under Criterion C for its architectural distinction as an Art Deco and Mid-Century Modern educational complex designed by prominent local architects. Additionally, it provides an updated description of the campus, including the 1929 Dunbar School Building and the 1950 Physical Education Building, and incorporates new historical context on its role in African American education, civil rights, and cultural heritage, supported by recent scholarship and documentation.

Narrative Description

Designed by the Little Rock architectural firm Wittenberg & Delony, the building echoes the layout of Little Rock Central High School, completed two years earlier in 1927 for white students and only 9 blocks west of the Dunbar School, though it is notably less ornate and smaller in scale. Wittenberg & Delony were childhood friends that both received degrees in architecture from the University of Illinois. They began their own architectural firm in 1919, with the d. 1927 Little Rock Central High School being their first large project. Early in the firm's history, Wittenberg & Delony were known for their auditorium architecture. The Little Rock Central High School Auditorium was used for community events and concerts prior to the d. 1940 Robinson Auditorium (d. 1940) being completed. Other landmark buildings they designed include the d. 1940 Robinson Auditorium (Little Rock), the d. 1933 Arkansas State Hospital (Little Rock), the d. 1980 Little Rock Statehouse Convention Center (Little Rock), the ca. 2008 Stephens Building (Little Rock), and the d. 1965 Hot Springs Convention Center (Hot Springs). The architectural firm is still in business today as Wittenberg, Delony, & Davidson. Since the firm's inception, they have won numerous awards and completed project such as offices, public schools, colleges, hospitals, and prisons.³

³Satterfield, W.W., "Wittenberg, Delony & Davidson Architects," Encyclopedia of Arkansas. Published online by the Central Arkansas Library System. June 16, 2023, Available at <https://encyclopediaofarkansas.net/entries/wittenberg-delony-davidson-architects-7384/>. Accessed on February 24, 2025.

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The d. 1929 Dunbar School Building (see Figures 6 to 8) reflects a pragmatic yet proud response to limited resources, especially when juxtaposed with Central High School's \$1.5 million price tag. The school's exterior has an Art Deco influence, characterized by its smooth brick facade, vertical massing, and subtle geometric detailing.⁴ While primarily Art Deco, the building also exhibits subtle Collegiate Gothic influences, similar to Wittenberg & Delony's earlier work on Little Rock Central High School, which blends Collegiate Gothic and Art Deco elements. The exterior façade is clad in smooth, red brick laid in a running bond pattern, a straightforward design that emphasizes durability over ornamentation. The brickwork features vertical piers that have slightly projecting rectangular columns that rise between window bays, adding a subtle verticality and rhythm to the three-story structure. These brick piers are capped with minimal stone or concrete coping, which frame the facade and give a sense of height, though they lack the intricate corbelling or decorative headers seen in more ornate contemporary structures.⁵

In 2024, the Little Rock School District completed a window replacement project, replacing over 160 ca. 1990 deteriorated windows for new, energy-efficient ones that exemplify its historic charm. While exact specs are not public, the upgrade, costing \$1.9 million and through a voter-approved extension of the Little Rock School District's debt, aimed for "time period appropriate" designs.⁶ The replacement windows are double hung with twelve-over-twelve and nine-over-nine lights and the rear have a few casement windows with nine-over-nine lights. Although the replacements are not wood, they closely resemble wood and mimic the original appearance of the original windows seen in historic photos of the Dunbar School.

The building features a flat roof with parapet and is oriented along a northeast-southwest axis. Its front façade, serving as the administrative block, is located on the southeast elevation flanked by two classroom wings at the northeast and southwest ends. These wings form a courtyard in front of the school building, facing Wright Avenue. The front façade at the southeast along Wright Avenue spans roughly 300 feet northeast-southwest and has two main entrances that have nearly crenellated towers at the entrance level and at the third-floor level. The main entrances have concrete steps with large brick balustrades capped with stone leading to large ca. 2000 glass and metal double doors with sidelights and a transom; however, the original entrances featured wooden double doors, sidelights, and transoms with square lights (see Figure 8). The original stone header still reads "DUNBAR HIGH SCHOOL" above both entrances. The second and third floor above the main entrances have 3 sets of windows encased in recessed arches separated by thin brick pilasters. Between the first and second floor windows are decorative brick in a basket weave pattern. Arched decorative cast concrete is located above the third-floor windows at the arch with a brick and cast concrete checkerboard patterned wall above the arch. The section with the main entrances houses the administrative offices and auditorium.

⁴*Ibid.*

⁵*Ibid.*

⁶Taylor, Jurnee, "Renovations highlight legacy of historic Little Rock school," THV11 News, August 13, 2024, Available at <https://www.thv11.com/article/news/local/renovations-highlight-legacy-historic-dunbar-school/91-ea4a9b17-f52a-434a-817b-16c152703db7>, Accessed on February 23, 2025.

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On either side of the central front façade section with the main entrances, there are shorter two-story sections connected to the larger three-story wings. The three-story wings have their own prominent entrances under slightly less grand towers that do not have arched windows or decorative brickwork. These recessed double metal door entrances lead into interior stairwells on the east and south elevations of the building. The east wing originally housed the Dunbar Junior College classrooms, and the west wing originally housed the Dunbar Junior and Senior High School classrooms.

The rear section is located on the west and north end of the building and is less ornate than the front and side elevations. The rear has a solid brick exterior with a running bond pattern with brick pilasters and parapets capped with stone. A section of windows in recessed brick have been boarded since the 1970s at the rear that would have originally let light into the auditorium. Two areas on the west side show enclosed garage bays that are now concrete block where the original vocational classrooms were located.⁷ In 2004, the Dunbar Magnet School (formerly Dunbar Junior and Senior High School and Junior College) constructed a one-story frame addition with brick veneer walls and the north side has a semi-circular design. This addition is located at the north elevation (rear) and connects the original Dunbar School Building to the Physical Education Building. The addition does alter the original footprint of either structure; however, it is located on the rear where it is not visible from the front façade and features brick pilasters separating rows of double windows that mimic the historical design of the Dunbar School Building. This addition contains classrooms and a media center.

The original building totaled 140,000 square feet and housed 34 classrooms across three stories, including specialized laboratories and industrial shops. The interior design prioritized functionality and educational uplift, which blended the industrial emphasis with college-preparatory aspirations. The interior included laboratories for chemistry, biology, and physics; an 8,000-volume library; a food laboratory; three clothing laboratories; a 1,000-capacity auditorium with modern lighting equipment; a cafeteria; laundry facilities; seven industrial shops for carpentry, woodworking, plumbing, electricity, auto mechanics, bricklaying, and printing; and 1,600 lockers in the hallways.⁸ The interior has changed little since it was constructed in 1929. The interior still has its original terrazzo flooring with black marble from Belgium, yellow marble from Italy, and white marble from the United States that line the hallways and main entrances. The hallways have the original segmental archways adjoining the main section to the wings, wooden display cases, and wooden hopper transom windows above walls and entrances to classrooms with eight lights that let natural light into the hallways. The lobbies near the entrances still have their large wooden display cases. Drop ceilings along the corridor are the only alterations visible on the interior, installed for lighting and ventilation. The corridor walls have the original brick veneer below and plaster above. The classrooms have vinyl composite tile (VCT) flooring that replaced the original hardwood flooring. The cafeteria is now located on the ground level in an area that was originally for trade classes with visible pillars supporting the ceiling.

⁷Little Rock School District, "Dunbar." Little Rock School District Website, Available at <https://www.lrsd.org/page/history-dunbar>, Accessed on February 9, 2025.

⁸Jones-Wilson, Faustine C. (Editor), *Paul Laurence Dunbar High School of Little Rock, Arkansas*. National Dunbar Alumni Association. Virginia Beach, Virginia: The Donning Company Publishers, 2003, 45.

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The crown jewel of the school's design is the Florence Price Auditorium (see Figures 17-18), a grand space with a stage that hosted performances and was a community venue, its scale and permanence symbolizing the Dunbar School's role as a cultural hub. The auditorium was named in honor of Florence Price (1887-1953) by the Little Rock School Board in March 2022. She was a native of Little Rock and a composer admitted to the New England Conservatory of Music at the age of 14 that became the first Black woman to compose a symphony performed by a major orchestra, the Chicago Symphony Orchestra in 1933. Although she never attended the Dunbar School, she performed her music in the auditorium in 1934.⁹ The auditorium, built in 1929 as part of the original design by Wittenberg & Delony, was outfitted with 1,000 opera chairs purchased from the Guss Blass Company, as recorded in a 1930 audit conducted by a local CPA firm.¹⁰ This expansive space features high plaster ceilings, a wooden stage framed with a proscenium arch, and cushioned theater seating. The plaster walls and wooden stage create better acoustics.¹¹ The auditorium still has its original chandeliers, pillars with decorative woodwork, latticework for speakers and around the stage, hardwood flooring on the stage, and orchestra box. The enclosed windows in a recessed arch are still visible from the interior.

The Physical Education Building (Figure 16) reflects a functional, Mid-Century design typical of educational buildings of this era, with clean lines and minimal ornamentation. Bruce R. Anderson designed the gymnasium, and G.W. May acted as general contractor. Anderson worked as a draftsman at Wittenberg & Delony early in his career and established the firm, Burks and Anderson, with his close friend, H. Ray Burks, in 1946. He oversaw the restoration of the Old State House in Little Rock from 1947-1951 when it was converted to a museum. He also designed buildings at the University of Central Arkansas (Conway), Harding University (Searcy), and Ouachita Baptist University (Arkadelphia). He spent his later years as a prolific watercolor painter.¹² The Physical Education Building was completed in 1950 to address the lack of athletic facilities for the school since its completion in 1929.¹³

The Physical Education Building was originally separate from the Dunbar School Building on the northwest corner of the lot. The building has concrete block construction with brick veneer. The main section that houses the gymnasium is two stories in height with a broadly sloped front gable

⁹Howell, Cynthia, "Little Rock School Board to vote on renaming auditorium for trailblazing 20th-century composer," *Arkansas Democrat Gazette*, March 12, 2022.

¹⁰Hennegin, Croft, & Company, CPA, "Audit Report to Mrs. W.P. McDermott, President & Directors School District of Little Rock, Arkansas." June 19, 1930. Fisk University, John Hope and Aurelia E. Franklin Library Special Collection, Julius Rosenwald Collection Box 294, Folder 9.

¹¹Higgins, Holly and Hallie Hearnese, *National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form for the Paul Laurence Dunbar School Neighborhood Historic District in Little Rock, Pulaski County, Arkansas*, Submitted to the National Park Service, Prepared by Cultural Resource Analysts, Inc., 2012.

¹²Teeter, Thomas A., "Bruce Roy Anderson (1907–1985)," *Encyclopedia of Arkansas*, Published online by the Central Arkansas Library System, June 16, 2023, Available at <https://encyclopediaofarkansas.net/entries/bruce-roy-anderson-7980/>, Accessed on February 24, 2025.

¹³Little Rock Public Schools, "Dunbar Physical Education Building, 1950, Little Rock Public Schools, Architect Bruce R. Anderson, Contractor G. W. May," plaque at Dunbar Physical Education Building, Little Rock, AR, viewed October 23, 2024.

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roof. The original front façade on the west elevation is on the one-story section has a flat roof with a central recessed entrance with a flat roof canopy on metal posts on a brick column sandwiched between two aluminum double door entrances with a transom and single sidelight. A terrace supported by a brick retaining wall is in front of the main entrance with access stairs on both sides of the terrace. Two original wooden casement windows with four-over-four-over-two lights are located south of the entrance, and the sides of the front façade both have original wooden casements with four-over-two lights. The corners of the building have a Mid-Century style decorative brick in a horizontal alignment creating projecting bands. The top windows on both the north and south elevations (sides) have been covered with metal and the lower level on the south elevation has replacement glass block windows where casement windows would have originally been located. HVAC systems have been added at the east and south ends of the building. The east elevation (rear) has a one-story flat roof maintenance room with ca. 2004 stucco walls. The interior walls have exposed concrete block and brick veneer at the lower level of the gymnasium. Renovations conducted in 2004 included new HVAC and reinforcements to the interior ceiling of the gymnasium.¹⁴

CONCLUSION

The Dunbar Junior and Senior High School and Junior College exemplifies a restrained yet purposeful style, tailored to its role as an urban Rosenwald industrial trade school. This three-story, flat-roofed building features a smooth brick facade with brick pilasters and subtle geometric detailing, complemented by concrete and stone accents. Its primarily Art Deco design is enhanced by subtle Collegiate Gothic influences, such as subtle crenellated towers and vertical massing, which evoke the traditional academic aesthetic often associated with educational architecture. Its northeast-southwest orientation centers on a southeast-facing administrative block with two flanking classroom wings, forming a courtyard along Wright Avenue. The facade's twin crenellated towers, basket-weave brickwork, and arched concrete ornamentation highlight Art Deco influences, while the interior boasts functional spaces with its 34 classrooms and the Florence Price Auditorium. The corridors have retained their original terrazzo floors and wooden transoms. The Physical Education Building introduces Mid-Century Modern simplicity with its concrete block and brick veneer construction, clean lines, and minimal ornamentation, connected to the original structure via a sympathetic d. 2004 addition.

INTEGRITY

The Dunbar Junior and Senior High School and Junior College campus retains exceptional historic integrity from its period of significance (1929-1955). The d. 1929 Dunbar School Building and d. 1950 Physical Education Building remain at their original location at 1100 Wright Avenue, anchored within the Paul Laurence Dunbar School Neighborhood Historic District, preserving its urban residential setting amidst a historically Black community south of downtown Little Rock. Its Art Deco design features a three-story layout with administrative block, flanking classroom wings, and a southeast-facing courtyard that remain largely intact with the d. 2004 rear connector to the d. 1950 Physical Education Building as the primary alteration. This unobtrusive addition

¹⁴Little Rock School District, "Dunbar," Little Rock School District Website, n.d., Available at <https://www.lrsd.org/page/history-dunbar>, Accessed on February 9, 2025.

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respects the original footprint and facade. The exterior materials, including smooth red brick in a running bond pattern, vertical piers with stone coping, and concrete accents, endure, while the d. 2024 replacement of over 160 windows with energy-efficient, period-appropriate designs (e.g., twelve-over-twelve and nine-over-nine double-hung units) closely mimics the originals, maintaining visual continuity. Interior materials like the terrazzo flooring with black, yellow, and white marble from Belgium, Italy, and the U.S., along with wooden transoms showcase workmanship through precise brick detailing and durable construction. Despite minor updates that include drop ceilings in corridors, VCT flooring in the classroom replacing hardwood, and boarded auditorium windows since the 1970s, the building's feeling as a proud educational and cultural hub for Black students and its association with Rosenwald ideals and Civil Rights milestones like Morris v. Williams remain vivid, reinforced by its continuous use as a school.

The Physical Education Building, also at its original location on the northwest corner of the campus, retains its Mid-Century Modern design with clean lines, a broadly sloped gable roof over the gymnasium, and a flat-roofed entrance section. Its setting complements the Dunbar School Building, enhancing the campus's educational scope. Exterior materials include concrete block with brick veneer and original wooden casement windows (some now covered with metal or replaced with glass blocks) reflects its functional aesthetic, while workmanship is evident in the horizontal brick bands and sturdy construction. Alterations like HVAC additions and the d. 2004 connector do not obscure its standalone identity. Its feeling as a vital athletic space and association with the post-World War II expansion of the Dunbar School's programs endure, reinforced by its continued use. Together, these buildings maintain a cohesive historic character, with the d. 2004 addition's brick pilasters and sympathetic design ensuring minimal impact on their integrity.

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8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- ☒ A. Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- ☐ B. Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- ☒ C. Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- ☐ D. Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

- ☐ A. Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes
- ☐ B. Removed from its original location
- ☐ C. A birthplace or grave
- ☐ D. A cemetery
- ☐ E. A reconstructed building, object, or structure
- ☐ F. A commemorative property
- ☐ G. Less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions.)

ARCHITECTURE

EDUCATION

LAW

ETHNIC HERITAGE/Black

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Period of Significance

1929-1955

Significant Dates

1929-1930 – Construction of school

1942-1945 – Morris v. Williams Civil Rights Case

1950 – Construction of Physical Education Building

1955 – Closure of school

Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

Cultural Affiliation

Architect/Builder

George H. Wittenburg, architect

Lawson L. Delony, architect

Stewart-McGhee Construction Company, general contractor

Bruce R. Anderson, architect

Walter R. McCormick, consulting architect

G.W. May, general contractor

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Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

The Dunbar Junior and Senior High School and Junior College holds **national** significance under **Criterion A** for its role in **Education** as the first of only three Rosenwald urban industrial trade schools in the segregated South and the only one with a junior college. Partially funded by the General Education Board, it elevated Black education with a unique curriculum of vocational and collegiate training, reflecting the GEB's mission to advance Black educators. Additionally, the Dunbar School holds **national** significance under **Criterion A** in the category of **Law** with Sue Cowan Williams, an English Teacher at the Dunbar School, being the main plaintiff in the landmark Civil Rights *Morris v. Williams* case (1942-1945) for equal pay for Black teachers. Students at the Dunbar School played a pivotal role in advancing this legacy, as seven of the Little Rock Nine (Ernest Green, Elizabeth Eckford, Terrence Roberts, Carlotta Walls, Gloria Ray, Thelma Mothershed, and Melba Pattillo), and likely all nine, given Minnijean Brown and Jefferson Thomas's probable attendance and ties to the community, chose to be the first Black students to enroll at Central High School in 1957, a nationally transformative event known as the 1957 Crisis at Central High that tested *Brown v. Board of Education* and prompted federal intervention.

Dunbar Junior and Senior High School and Junior College also has **local** significance under **Criterion A** in the category of **Ethnic Heritage/Black** stemming from its role as the sole Black high school in Little Rock from 1929 to 1955 and serving as a cultural and educational cornerstone for the city's Black community. Located in the Paul Laurence Dunbar School Neighborhood Historic District (National Register Listed 09/27/13), its Black pride through its renaming to honor poet Paul Laurence Dunbar, its Florence Price Auditorium hosting historical and cultural figures like Eleanor Roosevelt and Duke Ellington, Count Basie, Florence Price, General Benjamin O. Davis, Sr., and its programs fostering Black excellence via athletics, extracurriculars, and a junior college. Community leaders' advocacy for its academic and vocational offerings, alongside its alumni's local impact (e.g., Little Rock Nine, National Dunbar Alumni Association), highlight its enduring role in Little Rock's Black heritage, which reflects its resilience against segregation's constraints, desegregation's challenges, and civil rights violations.

Dunbar Junior and Senior High School and Junior College is **locally** significant under **Criterion C** for its distinctive Art Deco and Mid-Century Modern **architecture**, reflecting Little Rock's educational architectural heritage. The d. 1929 Dunbar School Building, designed by local architects Wittenberg & Delony, exemplifies Art Deco restraint with its smooth brick facade, vertical piers, geometric detailing, and courtyard layout, enhanced by the Florence Price Auditorium's grand design, a testament to the firm's auditorium expertise also seen in Little Rock Central High School. The d. 1950 Physical Education Building, by Little Rock architect Bruce R. Anderson, adds Mid-Century Modern simplicity with its concrete block construction, clean lines, and functional gymnasium, complementing the campus's postwar expansion. Together, these works by prominent local architects distinguish the Dunbar School as a landmark educational complex, its preserved design integrity with the only alterations seen being the d. 2004 addition

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connecting the two contributing resources at the north end and d. 2024 replacement windows that replaced over 160 ca. 1990 deteriorated windows for new, energy-efficient ones that closely resemble the original d. 1929 windows. The period of significance (1929-1955) encompasses the construction and use of both buildings as integral parts of Little Rock's Black educational architecture, ending when Dunbar transitioned to a junior high school in 1955.

Narrative Statement of Significance (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

Areas of Significance: Criterion A

Education, Ethnic Heritage/Black, and Law

The Dunbar School's significance under Criterion A stems from its role as a beacon of Black education and social progress in Little Rock, shaped by local efforts, northern philanthropy, and legal battles for equality. The following contexts illustrate its contributions to Education, Ethnic Heritage/Black, and Law.

Early History of Black Education in Little Rock

The beginning of public education in Arkansas began when Governor Isaac Murphy called for a universal education system in Arkansas in 1864. In 1865, the federal government provided financial assistance to build Black schools throughout Arkansas with the establishment of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands (also Freedmen's Bureau). The passing of the Common Schools Law by the General Assembly of Arkansas in 1867 to fund public schools only extended to white students. The Reconstruction Act of 1868 extended the funding of public schools to both white and Black students; however, it introduced a law requiring the segregation of schools based on race. The Freedmen's Bureau and the Society of Friends spearheaded the effort to finance and build the first public school for Black students in Little Rock, which led to the completion of the Union School in 1867 at 6th and State streets. Union School began as a grammar school with only white teachers until 1869 when Charlotte Andrews, at 15 years old, became the first Black teacher in Little Rock. Union School became Union Grammar and High Schools when it expanded to provide junior and senior high grades in 1877. In 1903, the school moved to the Capitol Hill School due to the need for larger facilities as the size of enrollment grew with an increasing population. Union School was renamed the Capitol Hill School, which was located at 11th and Wolfe streets.¹⁵

Only a few years later in 1907, a new high school was built for the Black students at 18th and Ringo streets. This school became M.W. Gibbs High School, including grades 8-12 with Domestic Science and Manual Training Departments. A 1920s postcard of M.W. Gibbs High School (Figure 1) shows its brick structure with handwritten labels for rooms like 'Senior Class,' 'Junior Class,' 'Auditorium' in the attic, 'Manual Training,' and 'Sewing,' highlighting its cramped facilities and vocational focus, yet it struggled to meet the growing Black student population. The school's

¹⁵Jones-Wilson, Faustine C. (Editor), *Paul Laurence Dunbar High School of Little Rock, Arkansas*. National Dunbar Alumni Association. Virginia Beach, Virginia: The Donning Company Publishers, 2003, 27-29.

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enrollment doubled by 1910. In 1917, the school expanded to include Commercial, Laundry, and Sewing Departments. An Athletic Department and the school's first newspaper were added under Professor I.T. Gilliam around 1920. The first school newspaper was known as *The Gibsonian News*, but later the newspaper and school mascot became *The Bearcat*.¹⁶

The school had outgrown the M.W. Gibbs High School building by 1927; however, the Little Rock School Superintendent, R.C. Hall, and the Little Rock School Board wanted to avoid the construction of a new school, so frame buildings were constructed on the M.W. Gibbs High School property. The frame buildings were destroyed by fire that same year, which many believed to be caused by arson. Despite M.W. Gibbs High School being in poor condition and too small of a facility for its ever-increasing enrollment, the Little Rock School Board diverted funds meant for the Black school system to build the all-white Little Rock High School (now Little Rock Central High School; NR Listed 1977; NHL 1982). Little Rock High School was designed by George R. Mann, Eugene John Stern, John Parks Almand, George H. Wittenburg, and Lawson L. Delony and completed in 1927 at a cost of \$1.2 million.¹⁷ By 1927, M.W. Gibbs High School's dilapidated state and the diversion of funds to white schools set the stage for the Dunbar School's emergence as a transformative solution.

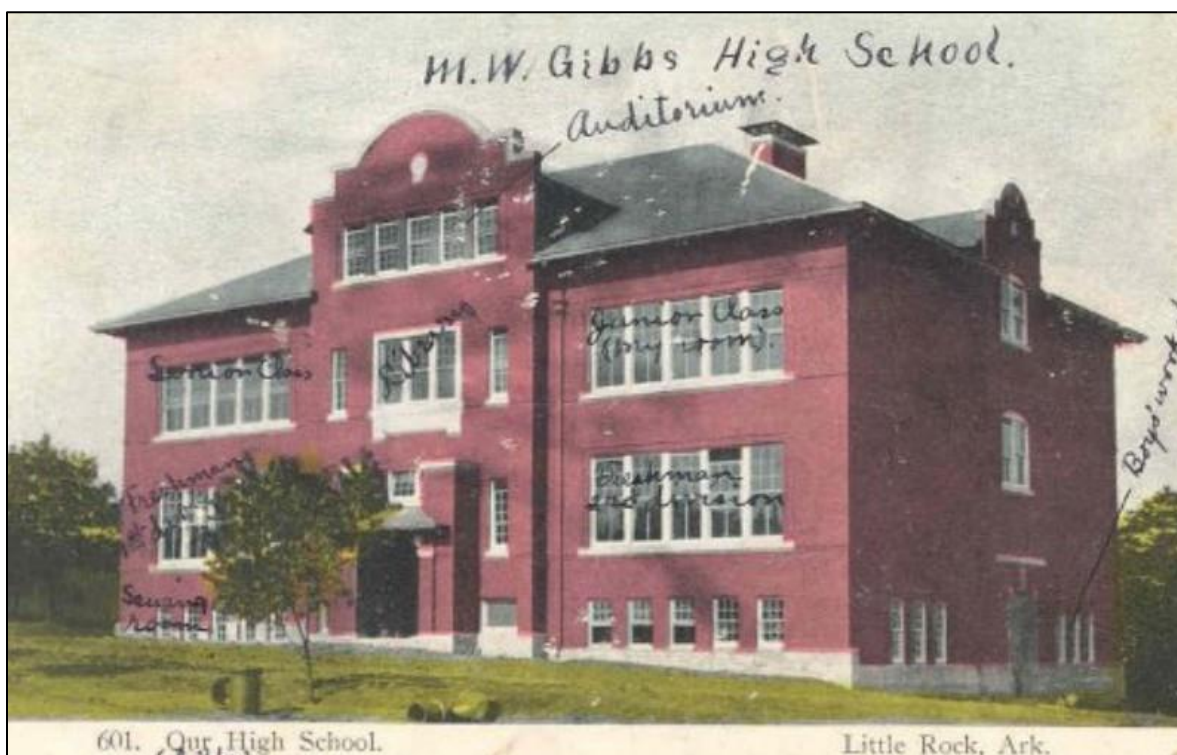


Figure 1. 1920s Postcard of the d. 1907 M.W. Gibbs High School (Courtesy of the Little Rock School Board Archives).

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 29-31.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 29-31.

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History of the General Education Board and Julius Rosenwald Fund

In order to highlight the significance of the philanthropic organizations' role in the funding and development of the Dunbar School, brief histories of the organizations and the key people managing these funds are discussed below.

General Education Board

During the early 20th century, wealthy entrepreneurs in the north began philanthropic endeavors not only to help communities but also to shape society. The first of these philanthropic funds to help education in the South was the General Education Board (GEB). John D. Rockefeller, Sr., founder of Standard Oil Company, established the GEB in 1903 as a charitable organization to support Black and white education in the South with its mission being "the promotion of education within the United States of America, without distinction of race, sex, or creed." Rockefeller initially contributed \$1 million to the new fund, and by 1907, his collective contributions totaled \$43 million, which equaled the largest contribution of any organization at that time. During the early years of the organization, the focus was on the South, since it remained economically and socially depressed into the 20th century.¹⁸ Rockefeller had been influenced by other philanthropists, such as Robert C. Ogden, George Foster Peabody, Albert Shaw, and Walter Page, that led efforts during the late 19th century to improve the economy and education in the South after the Civil War. During the first decade, the GEB funded over 2,000 high schools for Black and white students in the South.¹⁹

Prior to 1913, state agents had only been funded to promote white schools in rural areas of the South. W.T.B. Williams, a GEB agent, conducted a survey in 1904 in the South and determined that most of the Black schools were overcrowded, in poor condition, and teachers were being inadequately compensated. He stated that, "There is in fact but little interest in negro education among the whites, I am led to believe, save in the cases of the very best elements, who are sadly in the minority." Williams and Wallace Buttrick, Secretary of the GEB, spearheaded efforts over the next decade to stimulate economic conditions and public education in both white and Black rural areas of the South.²⁰

In 1913, the GEB began funding and hiring state agents to advise and oversee Black schools within the Department of Education for states receiving aid from their fund. The first six states with GEB state agents included Alabama, Arkansas, Kentucky, North Carolina, Tennessee, and Georgia. By 1916, state agents were in all the southern states. Jackson Davis, vice-president and director of the GEB, expanded the project by also allocating funds and hiring "field agents" to work with state

¹⁸Iacobelli, Teresa and Barbara Shubinski, "The General Education Board," January 5, 2022, Rockefeller Archive Center. Available at <https://resource.rockarch.org/story/the-general-education-board-1903-1964/>, Accessed on January 30, 2025.

¹⁹Smith, Samuel Leonard, *Builders of Goodwill; the Story of the State Agents of Negro Education in the South, 1910 to 1950*, Nashville, Tennessee Book Co., 1950, Available at Fisk University Special Collections and Archives at the John Hope and Aurelia E. Franklin Library, 3-5.

²⁰Iacobelli, Teresa and Barbara Shubinski, "The General Education Board," January 5, 2022, Rockefeller Archive Center. Available at <https://resource.rockarch.org/story/the-general-education-board-1903-1964/>, Accessed on January 30, 2025.

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agents to advise and oversee Black schools within their respective state. Jackson Davis affectionately became known as the “Dean of state agents.”²¹ In 1913, the GEB approved employment for its first state agent for Arkansas. Leo. M. Favrot was chosen by the State Superintendent of Education to serve as the state agent of Black schools for the Arkansas State Department of Education. In 1916, he took a position as state agent in Louisiana, and John A. Presson succeeded him as the new state agent for Black schools in Arkansas. Upon Mr. Presson’s death, Fred McCuistion became the new state agent in Arkansas in 1924. Mr. McCuistion served as state agent until 1929 when he took a position as the associate director of the Julius Rosenwald Fund. He only served as the associate director for a few years until he took a position at the Southern Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools in 1932 to evaluate the accreditation of schools throughout the South. Dr. Nolen M. Irby served as state agent in Arkansas from 1930-1938. Ed McCuistion, twin brother of Fred McCuistion, served as the state agent from 1938 until the 1950s after Mr. Irby left the position.²²

The GEB contributed a total of \$325 million during its existence between 1902 and 1964 on education, agricultural development, and economic growth in the South with a total of \$60 million spent on Black education that included over 412 high schools for Black students built in southern states.²³ As the largest of the northern philanthropic foundations, the GEB wielded its influence over the other foundations. They worked closely with the Anna T. Jeanes Foundation, the Julius Rosenwald Fund, and the Southern Education Fund. Although one cannot quantify influence, the GEB intentionally influenced the direction of Black education in the South by funding state agents for Black education that worked in the Departments of Education and field agents in all 15 southern states. State agents and field agents effectively ensured Black schools conformed to the approved curriculum that focused on vocational education.

Additionally, the professionals working for the GEB and other foundations had a close-knit community that all knew one another and many worked at several foundations in their careers.²⁴ This network of philanthropists and agents across Arkansas culminated in the GEB’s \$30,000 contribution in 1929, which supported the construction and establishment of the Dunbar School’s junior college and advanced its mission to elevate Black educators, which is a distinctive feature among Rosenwald schools.

²¹Smith, Samuel Leonard, *Builders of Goodwill; the Story of the State Agents of Negro Education in the South, 1910 to 1950*, Nashville, Tennessee Book Co., 1950, Available at Fisk University Special Collections and Archives at the John Hope and Aurelia E. Franklin Library., 7-9.

²²*Ibid.*, 17-19.

²³Goldberg, Barry and Barbara Shubinski, “Black Education and Rockefeller Philanthropy from the Jim Crow South to the Civil Rights Era,” September 11, 2020, Rockefeller Archive Center. Available at <https://resource.rockarch.org/story/black-education-and-rockefeller-philanthropy-from-the-jim-crow-south-to-the-civil-rights-era/#:~:text=The%20GEB%20began%20with%20a,Show%20Citation%2055>, Accessed on January 30, 2025.

²⁴Anderson, James D., “Northern Foundations and the Shaping of Southern Black Rural Education, 1902-1935,” *History of Education Quarterly*, Vol. 18, No. 4 (Winter, 1978), 1978, 380-381.

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Julius Rosenwald Fund

The most prolific and well-known philanthropic fund during this time was the Julius Rosenwald Fund. Julius Rosenwald, born to immigrants in Springfield, Illinois in 1862, began working his brother-in-law's clothing store before moving to New York City in the late 1870s where he was educated on the clothing business by his uncles. He moved to Chicago and began his own clothing business in the 1880s with his brother-in-law and cousin. He saw an opportunity and bought a half interest in Sears, Roebuck, and Company in 1895 with his brother-in-law, Aaron Nusbaum, when Alvah Roebuck left the company. By 1901 he had bought out his brother-in-law and in 1908 he became the company's president when Richard Sears resigned. Rosenwald became one of the most successful businessmen in the country and took up charitable causes in 1910.²⁵

Rosenwald first begun his charitable work with Jewish charitable causes and other local charities. Inspired by William H. Baldwin, Jr.'s biography, *An American Citizen: The Life of William H. Baldwin, Jr.* by John Graham Brooks, and his belief in the improvement of the lives of Black Americans. By 1911, Rosenwald turned his focus to helping the Black community. He raised funds for a YMCA for Black men in Chicago that led to him raising funds to construct 26 more YMCAs and YWCAs for the Black community throughout American cities. After reading Booker T. Washington's autobiography, *Up From Slavery*, Rosenwald was also inspired to increase his philanthropic efforts toward Black education and sought to improve their country life in rural areas and small towns and not just in the cities. Washington, who had been born a slave, spent his life as an educator, was principal of Tuskegee Institute, and had developed the Tuskegee model of education, which was a vocational and industrial training program that sought to improve the lives of Black people.

In May 1911, Washington and Rosenwald first met during a private lunch Rosenwald arranged in Chicago.²⁶ Rosenwald took a trip to visit the Tuskegee Institute in Alabama in December 1911, which is when he joined the Board of Trustees of the Tuskegee Institute. In 1911-1912, Rosenwald donated \$675,000 to various charities, which included \$25,000 to the Tuskegee Institute to be used to build six rural schools each in Alabama for Black children. Rosenwald and Washington worked together over the next few years until Washington's death in 1916 (Figure 2). Rosenwald funded the schools with the agreement that these local communities would contribute to the construction of the schools. This early era, known as the Tuskegee Phase (1912 to 1920), was when the offices for the Fund were operated out of Tuskegee Institute under the supervision of Clinton J. Calloway.

²⁵Hoffschwelle, Mary S., *The Rosenwald Schools of the American South*, Gainesville, Florida: The University Press of Florida, 2006, 26-27.

²⁶*Ibid.*, 27-28.

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Figure 2. Julius Rosenwald (left) and Booker T. Washington (right) at the Tuskegee Institute d. 1915 in Alabama (Courtesy of Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library).

From 1912 to 1917, Rosenwald personally funded the Rosenwald Schools building program. The Julius Rosenwald Fund was officially established on October 30, 1917 to distribute funds to the program to build schools. Robert R. Taylor acted as the funds first architect. Taylor was the first Black person to graduate from the architecture program at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and recruited by Washington in 1892 to work at the Tuskegee Institute. William A. Hazel, head of Tuskegee's architectural and mechanical drawing division, assisted Taylor in designing the buildings. Additionally, George Washington Carver, the famous botanist and a professor of the Tuskegee Institute, advised the building program with input on the grounds and gardens. The first six schools in Alabama, funded by Rosenwald in 1911, were completed between 1913 and 1914 as simple wood framed structures with locally sourced material and pre-fabricated components (i.e. windows, doors, hardware) from Sears & Roebuck.

The building program ramped up in 1914 when Rosenwald contributed another \$30,000 to build 100 schools. Local communities had to submit a grant application and each award totaled \$300. The program expanded beyond rural Alabama in 1915, and applications were accepted from Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, North Carolina, and Tennessee. In 1915, the building program developed architectural guidelines that included three types of structures that were published in a pamphlet entitled *The Rural Negro School and its Relation to the Community*. These included (1) a one- and two-teacher schools, (2) consolidated schools, and (3) county training

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schools.²⁷ By 1915, a total of 78 schools had been constructed by the Rosenwald Schools building program in three southern states. Rosenwald approved funding for another 200 schools in 1916 with donations of \$300 per school. As the building program expanded, agents were hired in each state to oversee building projects and work with communities and local and state agencies. Clinton J. Calloway, who ran the operations for the building program out of Tuskegee, acted as the first General Field Agent (Figure 3).

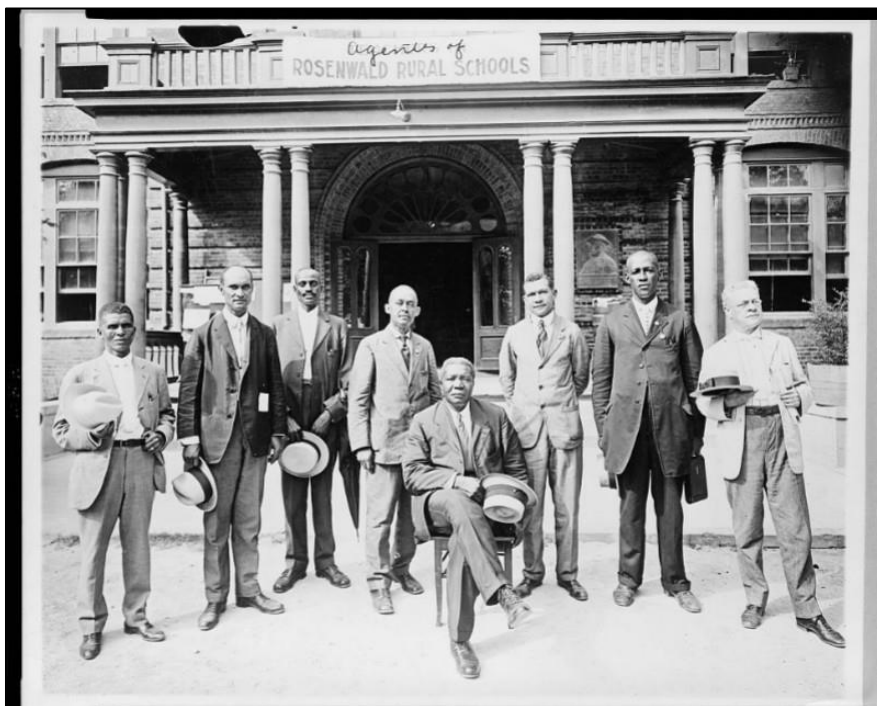


Figure 3. Photograph at Tuskegee Institute in Alabama taken ca. 1920 of the Agents of the Rosenwald Rural Schools with Robert Russa Moton, principal of Tuskegee, seated at center with Clinton J. Calloway at left center standing (Courtesy of the Library of Congress).

The Julius Rosenwald Fund was officially created in 1917 for the “well-being of mankind.”²⁸ The Fund continued to grow, which led to the need to better facilitate, organize, and uphold the building standards in the program by 1919. In response, Rosenwald hired Fletcher B. Dresslar, who was a professor of school hygiene and architecture at George Peabody College in Nashville and specialized in rural school architecture. Dresslar had been recommended to Rosenwald by the GEB. Dresslar reviewed the architectural standards of the existing school designs and improved upon them. He updated the selection of school building designs that would allow local school boards options to expand in the future, and he modernized designs to include options for

²⁷EHT Traceries, *Identifying and Evaluating Rosenwald School Facilities Recommended for Inclusion in a National Historical Park*, Volume 1: The Campaign to Create a Julius Rosenwald & Rosenwald Schools National Historical Park. Washington, DC: EHT Traceries, Inc., 2021, Available at https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5bb4f279797f742bb3f1f662/t/6168599f5a26414bb321bfeb/1634228651973/Rosenwald+Schools+Report_Final_2021.08.31_Vol+1.r.pdf, Accessed on February 4, 2025.

²⁸Wilcox, Ralph S., “Arkansas Listings in the National Register of Historic Places: Rosenwald Schools,” *The Arkansas Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 78, No. 1 (Spring 2019), 2019, 85.

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basements, heating systems, and indoor plumbing with septic tanks that were absent in previous plans.²⁹

The Fund officially moved all offices out of Tuskegee Institute to Nashville and Chicago in 1920. Samuel L. Smith, who was a student of Dresslar's and former Tennessee State Agent for Negro Schools (funded by the GEB), was hired as the General Field Agent for the Nashville offices of the Fund.³⁰ In an attempt to prevent local communities from needing an architect to build their school, Smith designed a set of school plans with specifications published in a book entitled *Community School Plans* in 1921. Many of the smaller schools still retained the small wood-framed design, while many of the larger schools contained brick construction. The school designs also included requirements on the building's orientation and requirements for fenestration to improve natural lighting. These plans became the standard for most of the Rosenwald schools; however, it was not required to use these plans and local communities could request the Fund review any plans outside of the approved school designs.³¹ Smith also developed a new plan for distributing funds to schools that included increased allocations per school, increased construction standards for schools, and different sized facilities.

A gradual shift happened between 1920 to 1927 from Rosenwald and Tuskegee's original concept of building simple, rural one-and two-teacher schools to larger, more consolidated rural schools. The first grants for four- and five- teacher school facilities were awarded in 1921-1922. By 1927, the categories for grants included larger school buildings and even included secondary school buildings.³² The Fund began to encourage more applications for larger facilities, which can be seen in the grant funding award records. Elementary schools received up to \$200 for one-teacher schools and up to \$1,400 for six-teacher schools, and secondary schools and county training schools received between \$1,500 to \$2,100 for seven- to ten-teacher schools. Between 1920 and 1928, 400 to 500 Rosenwald schools were constructed annually with yearly budgets of \$301,341 to \$414,106.³³

Prior to 1927, the Rosenwald Fund's executive board included Rosenwald as President and Treasurer, Francis W. Shepardson as Secretary and Acting Director, Alfred K. Stern as Director,

²⁹Hoffschwelle, Mary S., *The Rosenwald Schools of the American South*, Gainesville, Florida: The University Press of Florida, 2006, 74-79.

³⁰EHT Tracerics, *Identifying and Evaluating Rosenwald School Facilities Recommended for Inclusion in a National Historical Park*, Volume 1: The Campaign to Create a Julius Rosenwald & Rosenwald Schools National Historical Park. Washington, DC: EHT Tracerics, Inc., 2021, Available at https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5bb4f279797f742bb3f1f662/t/6168599f5a26414bb321bfeb/1634228651973/Rosenwald+Schools+Report_Final_2021.08.31_Vol+1.r.pdf, Accessed on February 4, 2025.

³¹Wilcox, Ralph S., "Arkansas Listings in the National Register of Historic Places: Rosenwald Schools," *The Arkansas Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 78, No. 1 (Spring 2019), 2019, 85-86.

³²Hoffschwelle, Mary S., *The Rosenwald Schools of the American South*, Gainesville, Florida: The University Press of Florida, 2006, 116.

³³EHT Tracerics, *Identifying and Evaluating Rosenwald School Facilities Recommended for Inclusion in a National Historical Park*, Volume 1: The Campaign to Create a Julius Rosenwald & Rosenwald Schools National Historical Park. Washington, DC: EHT Tracerics, Inc., 2021, Available at https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5bb4f279797f742bb3f1f662/t/6168599f5a26414bb321bfeb/1634228651973/Rosenwald+Schools+Report_Final_2021.08.31_Vol+1.r.pdf, Accessed on February 4, 2025.

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and Stephen L. Smith as General Field Agent out of Nashville. The Rosenwald Fund entered a new era in 1927 when Julius Rosenwald hired a new president, Edwin R. Embree, former Vice President for the GEB. Julius Rosenwald became chairman of the board in 1928, essentially deferring all administrative duties to Embree and stepping back to focus on his health. Stephen L. Smith became General Director around 1929-1930.³⁴

The Fund had focused on the rural school building program prior to Embree being hired. Embree's goal for the Fund was to broaden the mission of enacting real social change in the South and not just being an educational building program. Perkins stated the following:

Embree, Julius Rosenwald, and the fund's board became concerned that school boards might become overly dependent on external aid, thereby failing to take full responsibility for properly educating their youth. In the fund's view, the primary purpose of the program was not to put up buildings, important as that was, but to dramatize educational needs and to establish understanding throughout the South that education of all its young citizens was a public duty, to be funded through taxation.

The Fund began phasing out its original mission of building rural schools due to its new mission and lack of available resources after the Great Depression. The funding ended for one-teacher schools in 1930 and for two-teacher schools for 1931, as well as a reduction in the number of larger rural schools in its last four years.³⁵ In 1928 and 1931, the Fund released an updated version of the *Community School Plans* that included larger consolidated school plans. Larger school designs included multiple classrooms, an auditorium, a library, an "Industrial Room" or "Boys Shop," and a Home Economics Room.³⁶ Walter J. McCornack, an architect specializing in educational architecture out of Cleveland, revised school designs that introduced Colonial Revival styles for larger eight-, ten-, and twelve-teacher schools in the revised 1931 *Community School Plans* (Figure 4).³⁷

From 1928 to the termination of the Fund in 1932, the Fund shifted to focusing on contributions for fellowship, healthcare, national associations, social service work, colleges, and secondary education in urban areas. However, the focus of the Fund in its last four years of existence became higher and secondary education for the Black community in the South. The idea to fund industrial training schools in urban areas arose from technological advances in agriculture during the 1920s

³⁴McCormick, J. Scott, "The Julius Rosenwald Fund," *The Journal of Negro Education*, Vol. 3, No. 4 (Oct., 1934), 613.

³⁵Perkins, Alfred, *Edwin Rogers Embree: The Julius Rosenwald Fun Foundation Philanthropy and American Race Relations*. Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2011, 100.

³⁶Stephen L. Smith, *Community School Plans*, Julius Rosenwald Fund Southern Office, Nashville, Tennessee, Rev. 1931.

³⁷EHT Traceries, *Identifying and Evaluating Rosenwald School Facilities Recommended for Inclusion in a National Historical Park*, Volume 1: The Campaign to Create a Julius Rosenwald & Rosenwald Schools National Historical Park. Washington, DC: EHT Traceries, Inc., 2021, Available at https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5bb4f279797f742bb3f1f662/t/6168599f5a26414bb321bfeb/1634228651973/Rosenwald+Schools+Report_Final_2021.08.31_Vol+1.r.pdf, Accessed on February 4, 2025.

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that led to a large number of Black and white rural farmers being forced off their farms and moving to urban areas in search of work. Additionally, the onset of the Great Depression made industrial education even more necessary for the younger generations of the Black population in the South to be trained in industrial fields to compete with skilled white workers moving to the South from the North. This led to an urgent need for the population to be educated beyond elementary school in vocational areas to provide the younger generation with skills that could allow better opportunities for employment.

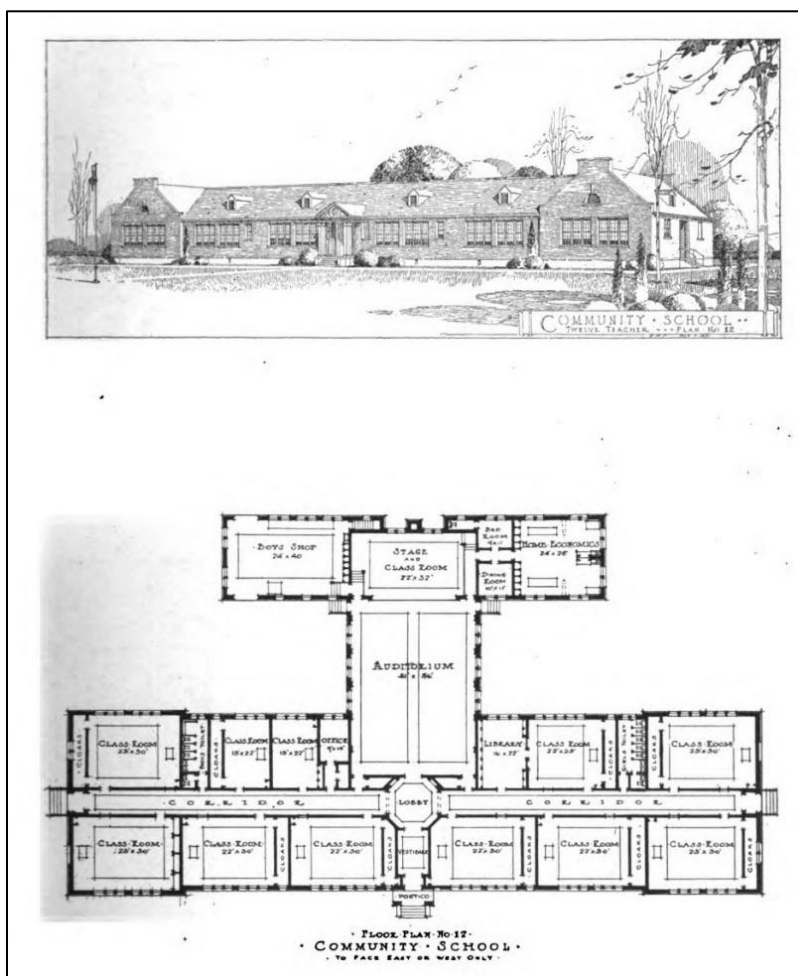


Figure 4. Illustration of a 12-Teacher Community School in the revised 1931 Community School Plans (Haiti Trust Digital Library).

Alfred K. Stern and George R. Arthur, former YMCA executive hired at the Rosenwald Fund to head the “Negro Welfare” programs in 1928, spearheaded the initiative to build urban high schools with an industrial focus with the goal of updating the school building program to meet the economic needs of the times.³⁸ Although Embree agreed with the need to diversify education, he

³⁸Hoffschwelle, Mary S., *The Rosenwald Schools of the American South*, Gainesville, Florida: The University Press of Florida, 2006, 132-133.

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believed in the necessity to also focus on making a well-rounded academic curriculum and believed that industrial training should be integrated alongside a classical education and that vocational or industrial education alone was not appropriate for the entire Black population. He wanted to ensure that Black students that excel in academics should have the opportunity to attend college and have a professional occupation.

In the fall of 1928, the Rosenwald Fund Board approved grant funding that would pay up to 25% of the total cost for an urban high school if they agreed to incorporate a full trade program. The trade program would incorporate carpentry, brick masonry, plumbing, plastering, and auto mechanics for young Black men and housework, needlework, millinery, and cooking for young Black women. Between 1928 and 1932, the Fund had carefully selected five industrial training high schools to be constructed in Little Rock, Arkansas; Columbus, Georgia; Maysville, Kentucky; Winston-Salem, North Carolina; and Greenville, South Carolina. Embree stated that municipalities that were not serious about “strengthening Black education and could not be trusted to use funds wisely” were not chosen, as well as cities that did not secure proper local and state funding prior to applying for grant assistance. Within only 18 months of the industrial high school project first approving grants, the Board of Directors at the Fund voted to pause any current or future grant funding for the project. The Fund had become increasingly apprehensive of the urban industrial trade school project that focused more on trades than classical education. By the time the Great Depression hit in 1932, Embree recommended funding for any industrial education facilities be terminated.³⁹ A total of \$202,708 had been awarded in grants for the industrial high school program from the Fund.

Neither the Maysville, Kentucky, or Greenville, South Carolina, industrial high schools were completed. Thirty-nine (39) Rosenwald Schools and Shops were completed in Kentucky between 1928 and 1932; however, no record of an industrial high school being completed between 1928 and 1932 in Maysville in Mason County, Kentucky, exists.⁴⁰ Eleven (11) Rosenwald Schools were constructed in Greenville County, South Carolina, between 1928 and 1932. None of these schools were industrial training high schools and the largest school listed was the Fountain Inn School, which was a five-teacher school built in 1928-1929.⁴¹

The Fund chose Little Rock, Arkansas as the first location for these industrial training high schools in 1928 and completed in 1929, which today is known as Dunbar Junior and Senior High School Junior College⁴² (See section *Development of Dunbar Junior and Senior High School and Junior College* for more details). The Dunbar School was completed in 1929 in Little Rock, Arkansas, as

³⁹Perkins, Alfred, *Edwin Rogers Embree: The Julius Rosenwald Fun Foundation Philanthropy and American Race Relations*. Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2011, 96-102, 299.

⁴⁰Turley-Adams, Alicestyne, *Rosenwald Schools in Kentucky: 1917-1932*, Prepared for the Kentucky Heritage Council, the Kentucky State Historic Preservation Office, and the Kentucky African American Heritage Commission, 1997, 28-29.

⁴¹Weathers, Lindsay C.M., *National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form for The Rosenwald School Building Program in South Carolina, 1917-1932*, Prepared by the University of South Carolina Public History Program, Submitted to the National Park Service, 2008.

⁴²Hoffschwelle, Mary S., *The Rosenwald Schools of the American South*, Gainesville, Florida: The University Press of Florida, 2006, 132-133.

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the first of the 5 industrial high schools with \$67,500 in grant money from the Rosenwald Fund and \$30,000 from GEB grant funds for its junior college program. The two- and three-story Art Deco building was designed by local architects Wittenberg & Delony.⁴³ The William H. Spencer Industrial High School was completed on November 29, 1930, as the first high school for Black students in Columbus, Georgia, as the second of the 5 industrial high schools partially funded by a \$22,000 grant from the Rosenwald Fund. The two-story Art Deco building was designed by local architects E. Oren Smith and J.W. Biggers, Sr. The school had a total of 15 teaching staff. The building no longer exists and a historical marker was placed in its previous location in 1990.⁴⁴ Atkins High School (NR Listed 1999) in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, was completed 1931 as one of the 5 industrial trade high schools that combined academic and industrial education in its curriculum partially funded with a \$50,000 endowment by the Rosenwald Fund with a total cost of approximately \$400,000. The 3-story Classical Revival style school building was designed by local architect Harold Macklin.⁴⁵

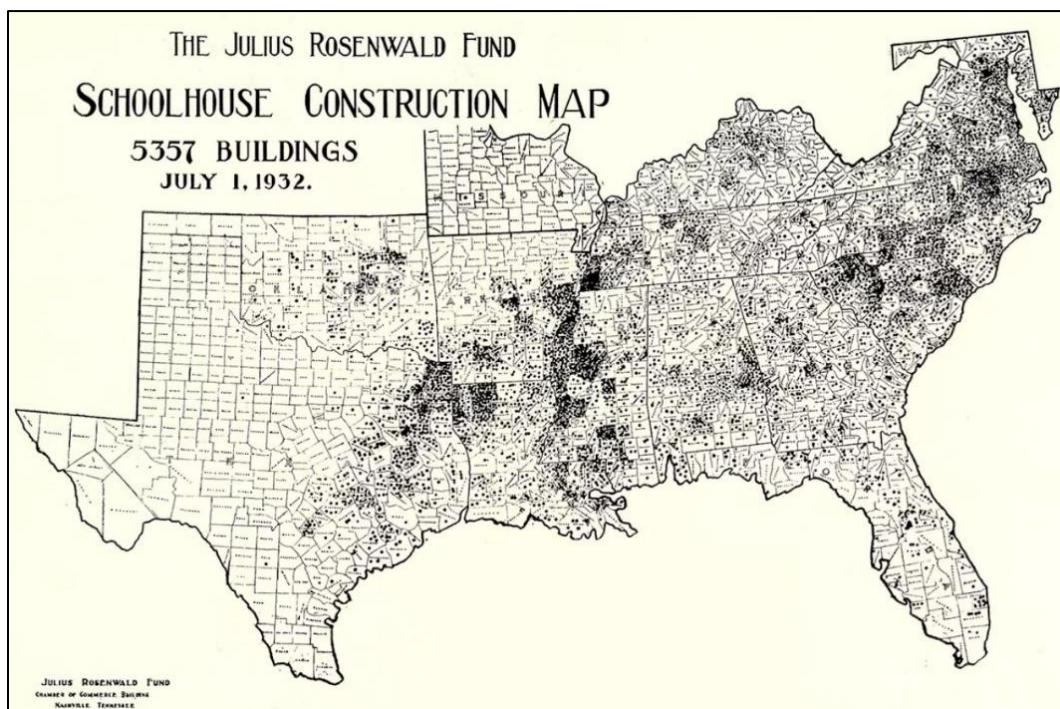


Figure 5. D. 1932 Map showing all buildings constructed by the Julius Rosenwald Fund throughout the South (Courtesy of Fisk University, John Hope and Aurelia E. Franklin Library Special Collection, Julius Rosenwald Fund).

⁴³Little Rock School Board, "Report on Dunbar High School, Little Rock, Arkansas," November 11, 1930, Fisk University, John Hope and Aurelia E. Franklin Library Special Collection, Julius Rosenwald Collection Box 294, Folder 8.

⁴⁴Seibert, David, "William H. Spencer High School," The Historical Marker Database, 2017. Available at <https://www.hmdb.org/m.asp?m=58783>, Accessed on February 16, 2025; Kimberly J. Brown, "A Narrative Analysis of Desegregation at Spencer High School in Columbus, Georgia," Dissertation for Doctor of Education at Columbus State University, Columbus Georgia, 2024, 75-76.

⁴⁵Opperman, Langdon Edmunds, *National Register of Historic Places Nomination for Atkins High School in Winston-Salem, Forsythe County, North Carolina*, Submitted to the National Park Service, NR Listed 1999.

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Ultimately, only 3 of the 5 industrial high schools that had initially been planned by the Fund were completed in Little Rock, Arkansas; Columbus, Georgia; and Winston-Salem, North Carolina. Today, only the Dunbar Junior and Senior High School and Junior College (Little Rock, Arkansas) and the Atkins High School (Winston-Salem, North Carolina) are still extant. The Dunbar School is the first of only 3 industrial high schools completed that were partially funded by the Rosenwald Fund; it is also the only Rosenwald School that contained both a secondary educational program and junior college.

During the entire existence of the Rosenwald Fund, the Fund contributed a total of \$4.3 million, which accounted for 15% of the total cost of the construction of each school building, enabling the local community to have a hand in producing the remaining funds and constructing the schools. The Julius Rosenwald Fund built 4,977 schools, 217 homes for teachers, and 163 shops across 15 states in the South from 1912 to 1932 (Figure 5).⁴⁶ Ralph Wilcox, National Register/Survey Coordinator, Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer at the AHPP, stated that “By the time a school was finished, local residents had a great sense of pride in what they had been able to accomplish. They had worked and given of themselves in order to get a school for their children.”⁴⁷ A total of 338 schools, 19 homes for teachers, and 32 shops in 45 counties were constructed in the state of Arkansas, including Arkansas having the first of only 5 industrial training high schools.⁴⁸ According to the National Trust for Historic Preservation, only 500 of the Rosenwald Schools, including 18 in Arkansas, remain extant.

Development of Dunbar Junior and Senior High School and Junior College

In 1927, due to the dire need to replace the dilapidated M.W. Gibbs High School and after the Little Rock School Board had used nearly all their funds allocated for capital improvements on the \$1.2 million all-white Little Rock High School (now Little Rock Central High School), G. DeMatt Henderson, Sr., a Little Rock attorney and Little Rock School Board member, traveled to Chicago to lobby Julius Rosenwald for grant funding for a new high school for the Black community in Little Rock. Correspondence between Superintendent R.C. Hall, the Arkansas Department of Education, and the Rosenwald Fund formalized the effort in June 1928.⁴⁹ M.W. Gibbs High School, with its auditorium relegated to a cramped attic, epitomized the inadequacy of facilities for Black students, yet the 1939-1950 Sanborn map shows it still standing adjacent to the Dunbar School, underscoring the urgency for replacement (Figure 6). No evidence substantiates that Henderson’s visit was the deciding factor in Little Rock being chosen for the Rosenwald Fund’s first location of the three industrial high schools built between 1928 and 1932, and Henderson’s visit was prior to Julius Rosenwald hiring Edwin E. Embree as President of the Fund and the Fund shifting its focus toward secondary education in urban areas.

⁴⁶Deutsch, Stephanie, *You Need A Schoolhouse: Booker T. Washington, Julius Rosenwald, and the Building of Schools for the Segregated South*, Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2011, 156.

⁴⁷Wilcox, Ralph S., “Arkansas Listings in the National Register of Historic Places: Rosenwald Schools,” *The Arkansas Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 78, No. 1 (Spring 2019), 2019, 85.

⁴⁸Hoffschwelle, Mary S., *The Rosenwald Schools of the American South*, Gainesville, Florida: The University Press of Florida, 2006, 283.

⁴⁹Little Rock School District, “Dunbar.” Little Rock School District Website, Available at <https://www.lrsd.org/page/history-dunbar>, Accessed on February 9, 2025, n.d.

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Prior to the Rosenwald Fund approving financial assistance to the Little Rock School Board to build a new industrial high school, a substantial flurry of letters began flowing between the Rosenwald Fund, the Arkansas Department of Education, and the Little Rock School Board in June 1928. The correspondence on file in the Julius Rosenwald Fund Collection at Fisk University began with R.C. Hall, Superintendent of the Little Rock School Board, requesting funds from the Fund in a letter to Alfred K. Stern, Director of the Rosenwald Fund, requesting a field agent to visit Little Rock to discuss the proposed construction of a "semi-state" high school that offered industrial arts courses and teacher training courses for the city's Black students.⁵⁰ Fred McCuiston, State Agent for Negro Schools for the Arkansas Department of Education, wrote to Edwin E. Embree, President of the Rosenwald Fund and former Vice President of the GEB, in June 1928 telling him the Little Rock School Board and the Arkansas Department of Education were extremely interested in the Fund's consideration to become a Rosenwald School. Embree's response expressed the Fund's willingness to seriously consider Little Rock as a location for the new program by stating that the Fund suggested to send someone from their Nashville office to visit Little Rock to conduct a study on it being a viable option for their first urban industrial trade school. He also gave McCuiston well wishes and recounted his time visiting Mr. McCuiston and his brother fondly, divulging their personal acquaintance.⁵¹

By the summer of 1928, the Fund had not committed to choosing Little Rock as the first location for the industrial high school. The letters on file in the Julius Rosenwald Collection at Fisk University show that the Little Rock School Board and the Arkansas Department of Education had secured partial funding and had engaged Wittenberg & Delony to draft the preliminary construction plans. Interoffice correspondence at the Rosenwald Fund show extensive deliberation over Little Rock being chosen as the first school.⁵² Hall then wrote to Stephen L. Smith, General Field Agent for the Rosenwald Fund out of Nashville, Tennessee, in June 1928 stating that the preliminary construction drawings had been completed by Wittenberg & Delony for the new high school and asking what would be needed to have the Fund's assistance on the project.⁵³ Draft architectural plans were completed by Wittenberg & Delony in late August 1928 and reviewed by the Fund the following month. After the Fund reviewed the plans, Alfred K. Stern requested the Little Rock School Board gather information on the number of students the proposed school would accommodate, what factors would potentially affect the Black population in Little Rock, local industries that would potentially employ students trained in certain vocations, and any other potential employment opportunities within the Little Rock economy that would hire graduating students.⁵⁴ C.R. Hamilton, Superintendent of Negro Schools for the Arkansas Department of

⁵⁰Hall, R.C., "Letter to Mr. Alfred K. Stern, Sears-Roebuck, Chicago, Illinois," June 22, 1928, Fisk University, John Hope and Aurelia E. Franklin Library Special Collection, Julius Rosenwald Collection Box 294, Folder 8.

⁵¹Embree, Edwin E., "Letter to Fred McCuiston," June 27, 1928, Fisk University, John Hope and Aurelia E. Franklin Library Special Collection, Julius Rosenwald Collection Box 294, Folder 8.

⁵²Stern, Alfred K., "Letter to Stephen L. Smith," June 27, 1928, Fisk University, John Hope and Aurelia E. Franklin Library Special Collection, Julius Rosenwald Collection Box 294, Folder 8.

⁵³Hall, R.C., "Letter to Mr. Stephen L. Smith," June 22, 1928, Fisk University, John Hope and Aurelia E. Franklin Library Special Collection, Julius Rosenwald Collection Box 294, Folder 8.

⁵⁴Stern, Alfred K., "Letter to R.C. Hall," June 27, 1928, Fisk University, John Hope and Aurelia E. Franklin Library Special Collection, Julius Rosenwald Collection Box 294, Folder 8. No documentation was found in the Julius

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Education, responded to Mr. Stern with a list of the planned departments for the proposed school and estimated number of student capacity for a school year that included bricklaying (15 students), first year auto mechanics (17 students), second year auto mechanics (17 students), manual arts first class (151 students), manual arts second class (134 students), laundry (60 students), vocational sewing (40 students), regular sewing first class (205 students), home making first class (115 students), and home making second class (174 students).⁵⁵

The first visit an official from the Rosenwald Fund made to Little Rock was when George R. Arthur visited October 11, 1928, to meet with all parties involved in the planning of the new high school. This included Mr. I.T. Gillim, principal of M.W. Gibbs High School; Fred McCuistion, State Agent of Negro Schools for the Arkansas Department of Education; Wittenberg & Delony, architects; R.C. Hall, Superintendent for the Little Rock School Board; and J.H. Moreau, Director of Vocational Education for the Little Rock School Board. Arthur's report asserted the dire state of M.W. Gibbs High School and the overwhelming need for a new school for Black students in Little Rock. The meetings during his visit were successful. Wittenberg & Delony agreed to adapt the plans to include vocational classes to be in the basement but definitive direction from the fund on the extra units would still be needed. The Little Rock School Board confirmed \$200,000 to \$250,000 had been secured toward the construction of the new school, and that the school was meant to be similar architecturally to the new high school for white students, except on a smaller scale. Hall and Arthur agreed to specifically add accommodations for auto mechanics. Arthur made it clear to everyone that in order to submit an application to the Fund and to be chosen as the location of the first industrial trade school, they would need estimations of all costs.. He also stated that having additional trading courses could result in the Fund giving additional funding. Course suggestions included auto mechanics, plastering, brick masonry, carpentry, electricity, sheet metal work and plumbing.⁵⁶

In 1928, R.C. Hall introduced the idea of adding a junior college, which helped him secure funding from the GEB since they prioritized teaching programs. This shows the Little Rock School Board was motivated to incorporate any requests from these northern philanthropic foundations to secure funding.⁵⁷

After the Little Rock School Board submitted the Wittenberg & Delony's draft architectural plans to the Rosenwald Fund in November 1928, Walter R. McCornack, the consulting architect for the Fund, gave recommendations needed to Alfred K. Stern. McCornack's suggestions included adding a gymnasium, adding a medical examination room, adding teacher's rooms, reducing the size of the shops, reducing the corridor of the stairwells, moving the cafeteria and kitchen to the

Rosenwald Collection at Fisk University regarding Hamilton's response to Stern's other requests about factors affecting the Black population, local industries, or additional employment opportunities.

⁵⁵Hamilton, C.R., "Letter to Alfred K. Stern," September 28, 1928, Fisk University, John Hope and Aurelia E. Franklin Library Special Collection, Julius Rosenwald Collection Box 294, Folder 8.

⁵⁶Arthur, George R., "Report on Trip to Little Rock and Pine Bluff," October 11-13, 1928, Fisk University, John Hope and Aurelia E. Franklin Library Special Collection, Julius Rosenwald Collection Box 294, Folder 8.

⁵⁷Hall, R.C., "Letter to Alfred K. Stern," October 12, 1928, Fisk University, John Hope and Aurelia E. Franklin Library Special Collection, Julius Rosenwald Collection Box 294, Folder 8.

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main level to double as a study hall, reducing the ceiling height in the auditorium, reducing the science and cooking rooms, and increasing the size of the sewing rooms.⁵⁸ Stern relayed the information from McCornack's review of the architectural plans in a letter to Hall in December 1928 where he officially announced Little Rock as the first location for an urban industrial trade school sponsored by the Rosenwald Fund, writing:

We [Rosenwald Fund] have selected Little Rock as the first of the cities in which we are willing to participate in the experiment of providing an industrial high school for Negroes. We are anxious, therefore, that in so far as possible, this be made a satisfactory building, both for its usefulness in Little Rock and as a model for development in other cities."⁵⁹

In January 1929, the final architectural plans were approved by Mr. McCornack, and the Fund agreed to match a dollar for every five dollars of the total cost of construction. Construction began in April 1929.⁶⁰

Concerns from the Black community in Little Rock over the name of the school were exposed in a letter from W.A. Booker, local attorney and leader in the Black community. The community was against the name, "Negro Industrial High School" and wished to keep the M.W. Gibbs name. Booker wrote in his letter to George R. Arthur of the Rosenwald Fund in September 1929 that "Our people here have been waiting patiently over a span of years for a real high school, one that would not be a subterfuge; one that would give a thorough educational training and literary background, and a curriculum upon which a college education could be well predicated."⁶¹ Arthur responded in complete agreement with Booker and even suggested that "Perhaps the name of some more recent outstanding colored citizens of Little Rock should be honored."⁶² Although correspondence continued between Arthur, Hall, Hamilton, Embree, and Smith over the next year that emphasized calling the school the Negro Industrial Trade School, no official change to the name is noted until after the school's construction was complete. Booker wrote again to urge the Fund to help the Black community convince the Little Rock School Board to remove "Industrial" from the new school's name. Booker went on to state that "to attempt to inscribe the name of 'Industrial,' because of certain Negro penal institutions in the State, would cause the colored people in addition to the reasons set out in the copy of my letter, to resent the name 'Industrial.'"⁶³

⁵⁸McCornack, Walter R., "Letter to Alfred K. Stern," November 20, 1928, Fisk University, John Hope and Aurelia E. Franklin Library Special Collection, Julius Rosenwald Collection Box 294, Folder 8.

⁵⁹Stern, Alfred K., "Letter to R.C. Hall," December 18, 1928, Fisk University, John Hope and Aurelia E. Franklin Library Special Collection, Julius Rosenwald Collection Box 294, Folder 8.

⁶⁰Hall, R.C., "Letter to Edwin E. Embree," January 12, 1929 and Edwin E. Embree, "Letter to R.C. Hall," January 10, 1929, Fisk University, John Hope and Aurelia E. Franklin Library Special Collection, Julius Rosenwald Collection Box 294, Folder 8.

⁶¹Booker, W.A., "Letter to George A. Arthur," December 10, 1928, Fisk University, John Hope and Aurelia E. Franklin Library Special Collection, Julius Rosenwald Collection Box 294, Folder 8.

⁶²George A. Arthur, "Letter to W.A. Booker," December 18, 1928, Fisk University, John Hope and Aurelia E. Franklin Library Special Collection, Julius Rosenwald Collection Box 294, Folder 8.

⁶³Booker, W.A., "Letter to George A. Arthur," September 30, 1929, Fisk University, John Hope and Aurelia E. Franklin Library Special Collection, Julius Rosenwald Collection Box 294, Folder 8.

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Ultimately, the school only briefly held the name, "Negro Industrial Trade School," prior to the school's opening ceremony on April 14, 1930. The first time the name "Dunbar" was seen was in a telegram dated April 10, 1930, from Edwin E. Embree to R.C. Hall stated, "the new Dunbar High School Little Rock is making history [STOP] This is by far the best industrial school for negroes yet built in America [STOP] Using best modern facilities it will offer training for life and for making a living to one great group of the population and will serve as a model for the whole south."⁶⁴ The Dunbar School was named in honor of Paul Laurence Dunbar (1872-1906), who was a Black poet from Dayton, Ohio, that wrote 12 books of poetry, 5 novels, 4 books with short stories, and a play. He wrote in standard English and the dialect of the Black community.⁶⁵

The cost for the construction of the school totaled \$421,791.11. This total included architectural fees, general contractor fees, insurance, additional land purchased, furniture and fixtures, and landscaping. Wittenberg & Delony, architects, subcontracted a local contractor, Stewart-McGhee Construction Company, to build the school. Gus Blass Company, a company founded in Little Rock in 1871, provided much of the furniture and fixtures for the school including the opera chairs for the auditorium.⁶⁶ The contribution from the Rosenwald Fund totaled \$67,500, the GEB contributed \$30,000, and the Little Rock School Board paying the remaining costs. The first-year enrollment was 1,050 students. The auditorium was furnished with 1,000 seats and a modern stage. The library contained over 5,000 books, which were funded by the Arkansas Department of Education, the Rosenwald Fund, and the Negro Parent-Teacher Association of Little Rock. The building originally contained 1,600 individual recessed lockers, and a cafeteria that seated 510.⁶⁷

History of Dunbar Junior and Senior High School and Junior College

From 1929 to 1955, Dunbar School's accredited programs and 1,600-student capacity made it Arkansas's premier Black high school (Figures 6 to 8). It served as the only high school for Black students in Little Rock for the three decades until it transitioned to a junior high in 1955. Although the dedication ceremony did not happen until April 14, 1930, the school began offering classes in the fall of 1929.

The Little Rock School Board may have spearheaded the efforts to construct one of the largest secondary schools for Black students in the country during this time, and they boasted Dunbar as the "finest high school building in the south for Negroes;" however, the Black community in Little Rock should be attributed with the caliber of education offered at the Dunbar School. Several community leaders, such as R.C. Childress, Isaac T. Gillam, Charlotte A. Stephens, and Scipio A. Jones, insisted the educational curriculum included college preparatory classes and vocational

⁶⁴Embree, Edwin E. "Telegram to R.C. Hall," April 10, 1930, Fisk University, John Hope and Aurelia E. Franklin Library Special Collection, Julius Rosenwald Collection Box 294, Folder 8.

⁶⁵Jones-Wilson, Faustine C. (Editor), *Paul Laurence Dunbar High School of Little Rock, Arkansas*. National Dunbar Alumni Association. Virginia Beach, Virginia: The Donning Company Publishers, 2003, 11.

⁶⁶Hennegin, Croft, & Company, CPA, "Audit Report to Mrs. W.P. McDermott, President & Directors School District of Little Rock, Arkansas," June 19, 1930, Fisk University, John Hope and Aurelia E. Franklin Library Special Collection, Julius Rosenwald Collection Box 294, Folder 9.

⁶⁷Little Rock School Board, "Report on Dunbar High School, Little Rock, Arkansas," November 11, 1930, Fisk University, John Hope and Aurelia E. Franklin Library Special Collection, Julius Rosenwald Collection Box 294, Folder 8.

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coursework.⁶⁸ The building had a total of 34 classrooms; laboratories for chemistry, biology, and physics; an 8,000 volume library; a food laboratory; 3 clothing laboratories; a 1,000 capacity auditorium with modern lighting equipment; a cafeteria; laundry facilities; 7 industrial shops for carpentry, woodworking, plumbing, electricity, auto mechanics, bricklaying, and printing; and 1,600 lockers in the hallways.⁶⁹

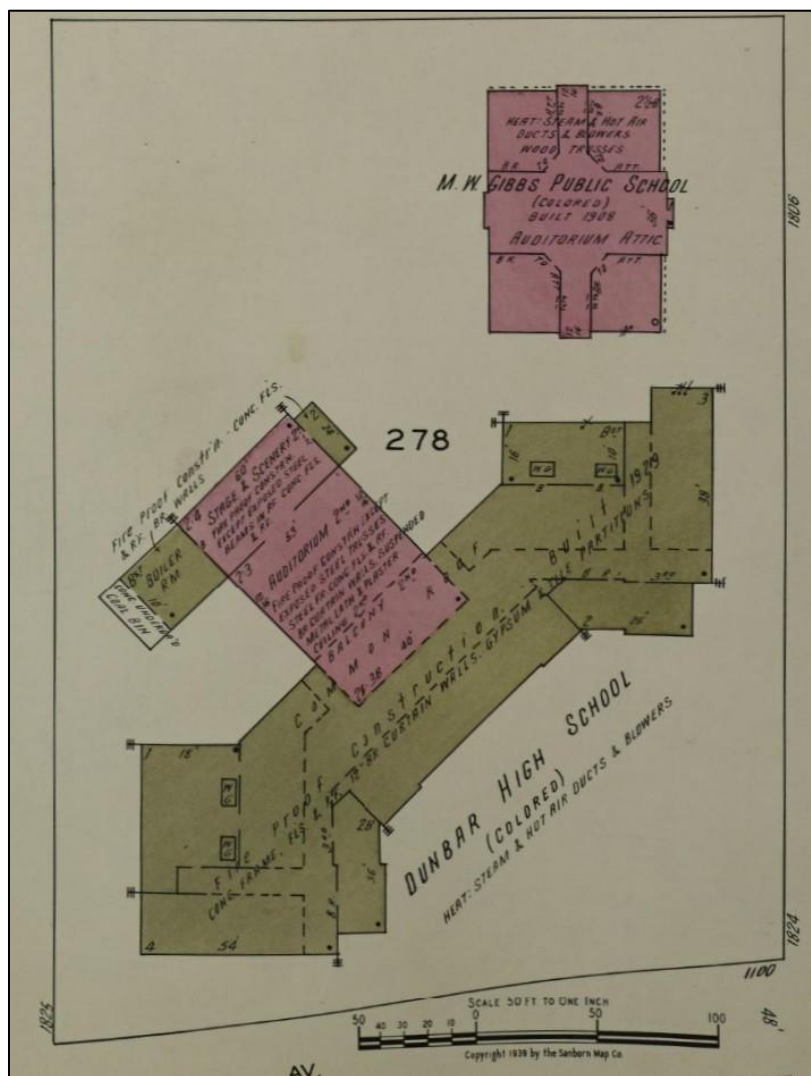


Figure 6. Sheet 49, Sanborn Fire Insurance Map 1939-1950, Vol. 1 showing the Dunbar Junior and Senior High School and Junior College prior to the d. 1950 Physical Education being built in the northwest corner of the lot and when the M.W. Gibbs Public School was still extant in the northeast corner of the lot (Courtesy of the Library of Congress).

⁶⁸Jones-Wilson, Faustine C., *A Traditional Model of Educational Excellence: Dunbar High School of Little Rock, Arkansas*, Washington, D.C.: Howard University Press. Available in the Roberts Library at the Butler Center for Arkansas Studies, 1981, 4-5.

⁶⁹Jones-Wilson, Faustine C. (Editor), *Paul Laurence Dunbar High School of Little Rock, Arkansas*. National Dunbar Alumni Association. Virginia Beach, Virginia: The Donning Company Publishers, 2003, 45.

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Figure 7. d. 1935 photograph of the Dunbar Junior and Senior High School and Junior College (Courtesy of the University of Arkansas Little Rock Center for Arkansas History and Culture).



Figure 8. Dunbar High School Class of January 1945 from The Bearcat Yearbook (Courtesy of the University of Arkansas Little Rock Center for Arkansas History and Culture).

When Dunbar Junior and Senior High School and Junior College opened, it had 32 teachers for the 1929-1930 school year. Dr. John Henry Lewis served as the first school principal from 1929 to 1943 and Mrs. Lessie V. Arnold served as assistant principal from 1929 to 1943. A Little Rock School Board Census Report from May 1930 showed that 1,084 students were enrolled in the

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Dunbar Junior and Senior High School and 74 students were enrolled in the Dunbar Junior College.⁷⁰

Course offerings for the junior and senior high school included a well-rounded curriculum for classical education. English courses included grammar, composition, business English, trades English, and literature. Mathematics courses included introductory mathematics, business arithmetic, algebra, geometry, and trigonometry. Social science classes included world history, American history, civics, occupations, government, and economics. Science classes included general sciences, biology, chemistry, and physics. Language classes included only Latin in the beginning for 10th, 11th, and 12th grades. A wide variety of trade classes were offered. These included carpentry, millwork, electric wiring, plumbing, plastering and concrete, bricklaying, cabinet work, auto mechanics, laundering, sewing, cooking, dietetics, and printing. The male trade classes (carpentry, millwork, electric wiring, plumbing, plastering and concrete, bricklaying, cabinet work, auto mechanics) were located in the basement and rear side of the school building (Figures 9 to 14). The Dunbar School's academic program sought out to "pass the accumulated, organized knowledge of the human race to its young." It offered three options for obtaining a high school diploma. These options included a classical academic curriculum for students aspiring to go to college, a combined high school diploma with special vocational certificates that included enough credits to be admitted to college, or a vocational/industrial curriculum where students could earn enough credits for a high school diploma but not enough credits to be admitted to college.⁷¹ Dunbar High School became the first Black secondary school in the state of Arkansas to be accredited by the North Central Accreditation Association in 1931-1932, a significant achievement given the systemic barriers faced by Black schools in the segregated South.⁷²

A 1930 brochure of Dunbar High School published by the Little Rock School Board listed the extensive extracurricular activities offered. These included Student Council, Health Club, Thrift Club, Citizenship Club, Monitor's Club, Library Club, Boy Scouts, Girls Reserve, Campfire Girls, Boys Athletics Club, Girls Athletic Club, Girls' Glee Club, Boys' Glee Club, Orchestra, Story Tellers Club, Dramatic Club, and Science Club. *The Bearcat*, Dunbar's School Yearbook, showcased all the extracurricular activities. A study done by Faustine Jones-Wilson (1981) showed that only 5 of 91 graduating seniors in the May 1944 high school class at Dunbar High School did not have any extracurricular activities listed, which highlights the level of involvement students had and what a well-rounded education that it offered. All students attended a Home Room with an assigned teacher. This was seen as the home base for students where they could leave books and papers, as well as planning assembly programs, student-teacher consultations, announcements, tickets sales, and pep meetings. The school also had weekly assemblies that were planned and presented by home room groups.⁷³

⁷⁰Hall, R.C., "Superintendent's Report, 1929-1930," Little Rock, Arkansas, Butler Center for Arkansas Studies, Little Rock School District Records, Series II, Box 45, Folder 10, 1930.

⁷¹Jones-Wilson, Faustine C. (Editor), *Paul Laurence Dunbar High School of Little Rock, Arkansas*. National Dunbar Alumni Association. Virginia Beach, Virginia: The Donning Company Publishers, 2003, 48.

⁷²*Ibid.*, 5, 32.

⁷³*Ibid.*, 26-27, 35-37.

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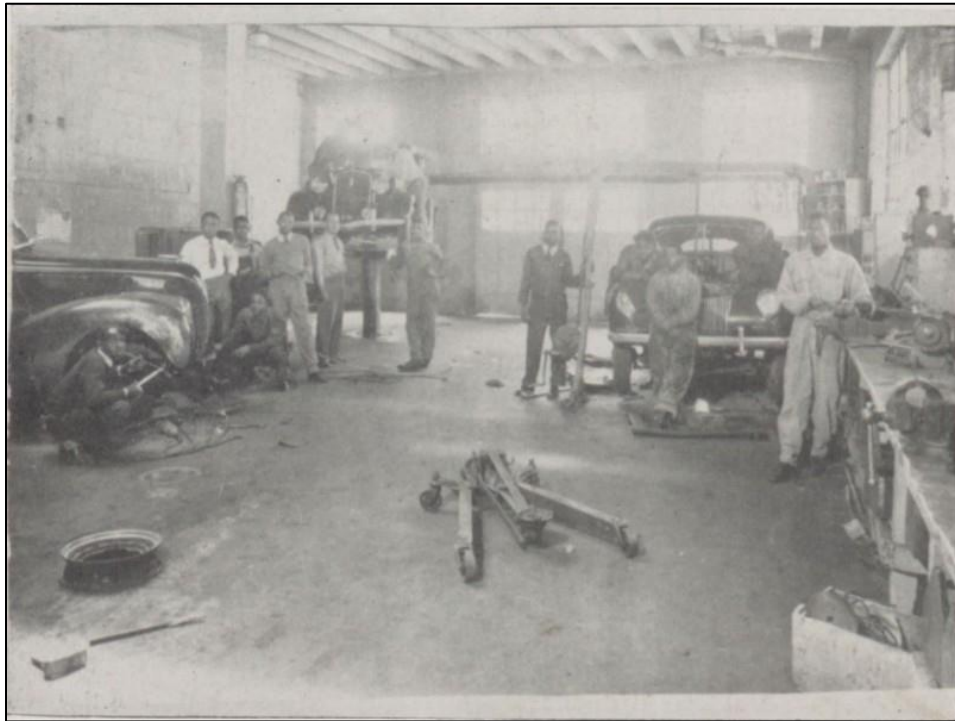


Figure 9. Auto Mechanics Department from the 1944 The Bearcat Yearbook (Courtesy of the University of Arkansas Little Rock Center for Arkansas History and Culture).

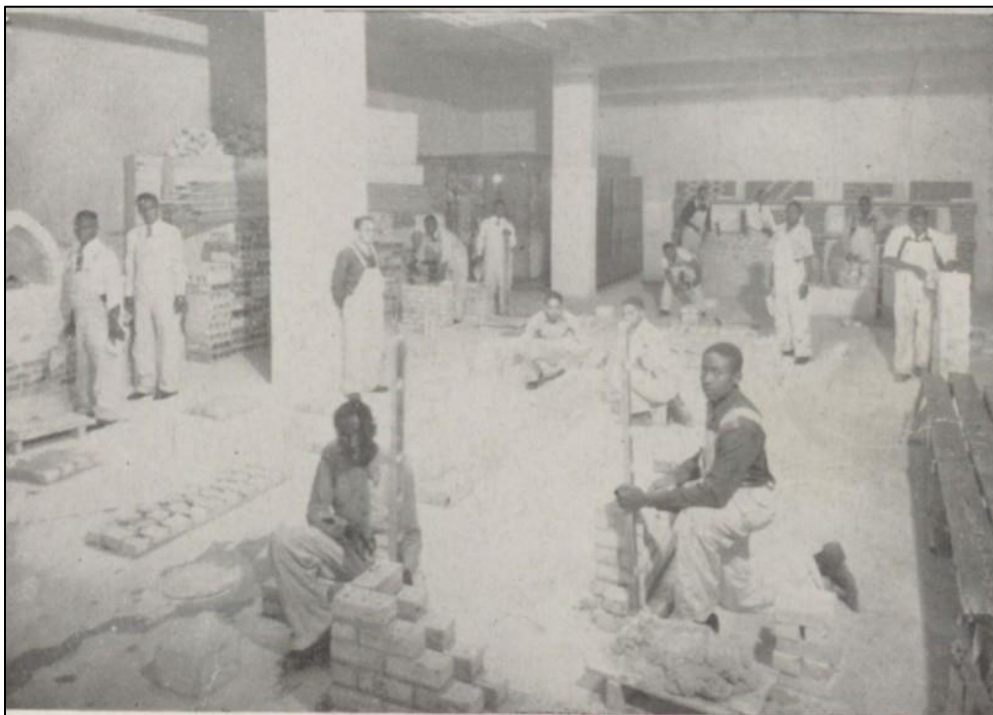


Figure 10. Bricklaying Department from the 1944 The Bearcat Yearbook (Courtesy of the University of Arkansas Little Rock Center for Arkansas History and Culture).

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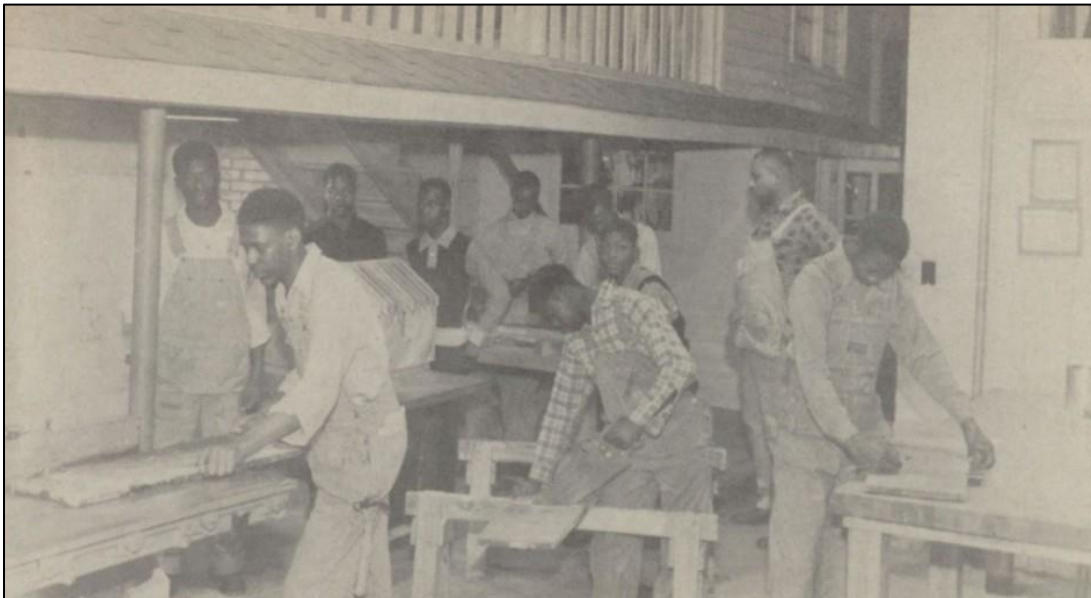


Figure 11. Carpentry Class from the 1952 The Bearcat Yearbook (Courtesy of the University of Arkansas Little Rock Center for Arkansas History and Culture).



Figure 12. Biology Class from the 1944 The Bearcat Yearbook (Courtesy of the University of Arkansas Little Rock Center for Arkansas History and Culture).

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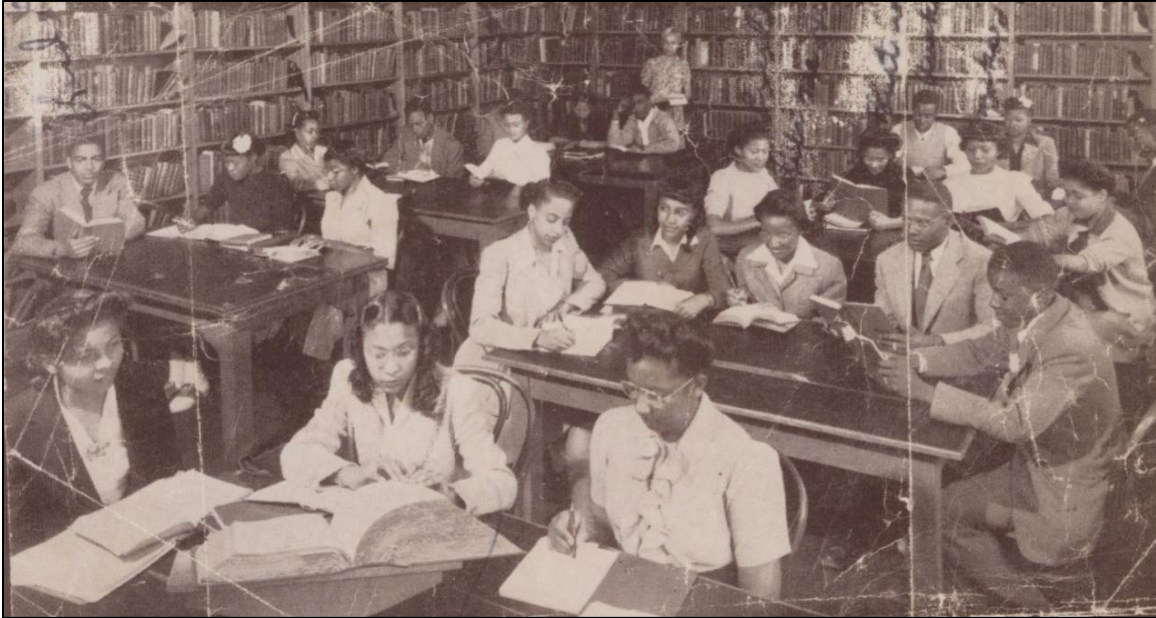


Figure 13. 1930s Photograph of the library at the Dunbar School (Courtesy of the University of Arkansas Little Rock Center for Arkansas History and Culture).



Figure 14. Scene from *The Goose Hangs High* on the stage in the Auditorium from the 1944 The Bearcat Yearbook (Courtesy of the University of Arkansas Little Rock Center for Arkansas History and Culture).

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The original school facilities at the Dunbar School did not include a gymnasium, but the curriculum still included a physical education department that included exercising when weather permitted and included boys' football, basketball, volleyball, tennis, and track teams. The athletic department that was established in the 1910s to 1920s by Principal Gillam when M.W. Gibbs High School still existed. The M.W. Gibbs High School athletic program continued at Dunbar High School with the Bearcats as their mascot. The Dunbar School's football team became the Southwest Champions in 1929 (Figure 15). The football team won their first state championship in 1941. Despite its history as dominating in football, segregation limited any of the football players from considering professional athletic opportunities such as the National Football League. The Dunbar School had the largest basketball team in the entire state but the team did not have the same level of success as the football team. Much of this was due to a lack of a gymnasium until 1951. The team had to practice outside or off campus and home games were played at the Dreamland Ballroom in the Taborian Temple at 800 W. 9th Street (NR Listed 1982) or at Kavanaugh Field (now Quigley Stadium on the Little Rock Central High School campus). In 1950-1951, the Physical Education Building was constructed (Figure 16). The building was designed by Bruce R. Anderson and built by general contractor, G.W. May and was dedicated during the 1951-1952 school year. The gymnasium finally gave the students a place to compete in sports and not be completely dependent on the weather.⁷⁴

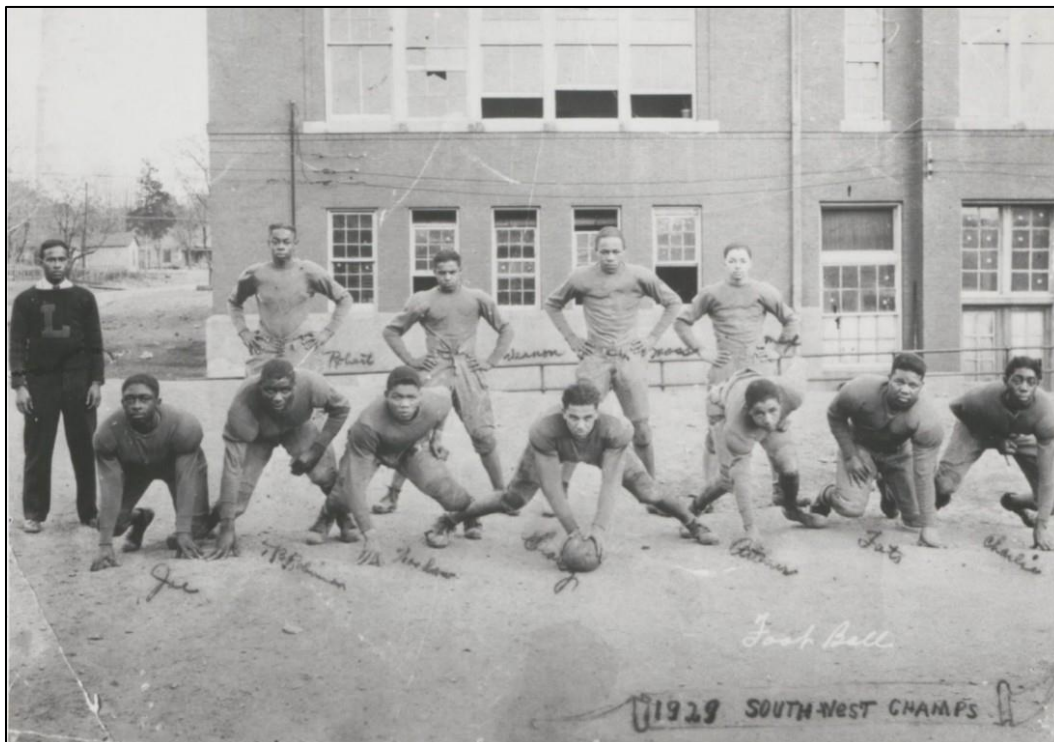


Figure 15. Photograph of the d. 1929 football team at the Dunbar School (Courtesy of the University of Arkansas Little Rock Center for Arkansas History and Culture).

⁷⁴*Ibid.*, 103.

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Figure 16. Photograph of the Physical Education Building from the 1952 *The Bearcat Yearbook* (Courtesy of the University of Arkansas Little Rock Center for Arkansas History and Culture).

Dunbar Junior College offered the first two years of college required for a four-year college degree and had 74 students enrolled in 1930. The curriculum included home economics, teacher education, and liberal arts and sciences. The junior college was in one of the two story wings of the building.⁷⁵ In 1933, Dunbar Junior College became accredited by the Arkansas Department of Education and was recognized by the Southern Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools.⁷⁶ Additionally, it was also a member of the National Association of Collegiate Deans and Registrars in Negro Schools. These accreditations allowed students receiving a two-year degree to receive professional teaching certificates in the state or be admitted to a four-year institution. The junior college, conveniently located in the same building they had attended high school, provided an affordable pathway to higher education for Black students in Little Rock, who could continue their studies at nearby institutions such as Philander Smith College, Arkansas Baptist College, Shorter A.M.E. College, and Arkansas Mechanical and Normal College (now University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff), all located in the region, all located in the region.⁷⁷

⁷⁵*Ibid.*, 33-34.

⁷⁶Hall, R.C., "Superintendent's Report, 1929-1930," Little Rock, Arkansas, Butler Center for Arkansas Studies, Little Rock School District Records, Series II, Box 45, Folder 10, 1930.

⁷⁷Jones-Wilson, Faustine C., *A Traditional Model of Educational Excellence: Dunbar High School of Little Rock, Arkansas*, Washington, D.C.: Howard University Press. Available in the Roberts Library at the Butler Center for Arkansas Studies, 1981, 15-16.

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During the existence of the Dunbar School from 1929 to 1955, it only had three principals. These included Dr. John H. Lewis (1929 to 1943), Dr. William H. Martin (1943-1945), and Dr. LeRoy M. Christophe (1945-1955).⁷⁸ The Dunbar faculty consisted of well-educated, qualified teachers with a strong sense of community that they instilled in their students. The school had an extremely low turnover rate. Students that graduated from Dunbar Senior High School went on to become corporate executives, entrepreneurs, college presidents, college professors, ministers, doctors, attorneys, government officials, tradesmen, housewives, and public-school teachers.⁷⁹

In 1955, the Dunbar School transitioned to being only a junior high school, the junior college closed its doors, and the high school moved to the newly constructed Horace Mann High School. The closure of the junior college, which focused on teacher training, ended its program for preparing Black educators, while the high school's industrial and technical programs, such as carpentry, auto mechanics, and bricklaying, left the Dunbar School Building with the move to Horace Mann High School, where vocational education likely continued. Horace Mann High School was built to accommodate the growing population of Black high school students in Little Rock and to provide a modern facility amid the pressures of the pre-desegregation era, just one year after the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision. Dunbar Junior High School operated in the building from 1955 to 1989, serving students in grades 7 through 9. After a period of transition, the building was repurposed in 2000 as Dunbar Magnet Middle School, which continues to operate today. The Dunbar Magnet Middle School became recognized as a "Magnet of Distinction" by the Magnet Schools of America in 2004.⁸⁰

The National Dunbar Alumni Association (NDAA) was founded to foster connections among graduates of Dunbar High School and to safeguard its lasting legacy. The first alumni association emerged by 1949, with the modern NDAA taking shape during its inaugural national reunion in 1973, followed by formal incorporation in 1978. Over time, the association expanded, establishing local chapters in cities across the United States as graduates relocated, including Chicago, Denver, Detroit, Kansas City, Little Rock, Los Angeles, Philadelphia, San Francisco, St. Louis, Seattle, and Washington, DC. These chapters formed a robust network committed to preserving the school's community and heritage. For years, NDAA members diligently collected documents, photographs, and memorabilia from alumni, amassing a significant historical archive. This effort culminated in the donation of a large collection to the University of Arkansas at Little Rock (UALR) at the Butler Center, ensuring that the Dunbar School rich history is preserved and accessible for future generations. In addition to this donation, the NDAA maintains a Memorabilia Room at the school, which preserves artifacts and memories from the school's early years, further enriching the association's efforts to honor its past. Beyond archival contributions, the NDAA supports the school's legacy through scholarships, mentoring programs, special projects like landscaping the school grounds, regular reunions, and advocacy for its historical recognition. These initiatives keep the legacy of the Dunbar School alive and celebrated, while NDAA

⁷⁸*Ibid.*, 32, 146.

⁷⁹*Ibid.*, 4, 72.

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members remain dedicated to perpetuating the "Dunbar spirit of excellence" in their own lives and the lives of others, ensuring that the school's history and values continue to inspire.⁸¹

The Dunbar School was a cornerstone of Black education during the early to mid-20th century. Despite the challenges of segregation, it fostered a remarkable array of talent across diverse fields, producing alumni who excelled in aviation, law, sports, theater, music, and civil rights. Below is a list of a few of the notable alumni that matriculated at the school.

Notable Alumni:

- *Milton Crenshaw*: Known as the "father of Black aviation in Arkansas," he was a Tuskegee Airman and flight instructor who trained generations of aviators, breaking racial barriers in aviation.⁸²
- *L. Clifford Davis*: A pioneering civil rights attorney and judge who played a key role in desegregating the University of Arkansas School of Law, advancing equal access to education and justice.⁸³
- *Sammy Drake and Solly Drake*: Brothers who were among the early Black players in Major League Baseball, with Sammy playing for the Chicago Cubs and New York Mets, and Solly for the Cubs and Philadelphia Phillies, helping pave the way for future Black athletes.⁸⁴
- *Gertrude Jeanette*: A trailblazer in theater, she was an actress, playwright, and director who founded the Harlem Experimental Theatre and became one of the first African-American women to write, produce, and direct a Broadway play.⁸⁵
- *Robert Lee Williams II*: A distinguished psychologist known for his pioneering work in the education of African-American children and his efforts to address cultural biases in standardized IQ testing. His background includes attending Dunbar High School and later pursuing higher education and a notable career in psychology.⁸⁶
- *Woody Crockett*: A pioneering African-American pilot and Tuskegee Airman, among the first Black military aviators in the U.S. Armed Forces. Born in 1918 in Homan, Arkansas, he joined the Army Air Corps in 1940, training at the Tuskegee Institute and earning his

⁸¹Little Rock School District, "Dunbar," Little Rock School District Website. n.d., Available at <https://www.lrsd.org/page/history-dunbar>, Accessed on February 9, 2025.

⁸²Davis, Edmund, "Milton Pitts Crenshaw (1919–2015)," *Encyclopedia of Arkansas*. Published online by the Central Arkansas Library System, October 6, 2023, Available at <https://encyclopediaofarkansas.net/entries/milton-pitts-crenshaw-4925/>, Accessed on February 24, 2025.

⁸³Pruden, William H. (III), "L. Clifford Davis (1924–)," *Encyclopedia of Arkansas*, Published online by the Central Arkansas Library System, November 6, 2023, Available at <https://encyclopediaofarkansas.net/entries/l-clifford-davis-8222/>, Accessed on February 24, 2025.

⁸⁴Jones-Wilson, Faustine C. (Editor), *Paul Laurence Dunbar High School of Little Rock, Arkansas*. National Dunbar Alumni Association. Virginia Beach, Virginia: The Donning Company Publishers, 2003, 114

⁸⁵Hoge, Rachel, "Gertrude Hadley Jeannette (1914–2018)," *Encyclopedia of Arkansas*, Published online by the Central Arkansas Library System, June 16, 2023, Available at <https://encyclopediaofarkansas.net/entries/gertrude-hadley-jeannette-7989/>, Accessed on February 24, 2025.

⁸⁶Central for Arkansas Library System Staff, "Robert Lee Williams II (1930–2020)," *Encyclopedia of Arkansas*, Published online by the Central Arkansas Library System, June 16, 2023, Available at <https://encyclopediaofarkansas.net/entries/robert-lee-williams-ii-7742/>, Accessed on February 24, 2025.

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wings in 1943.⁸⁷ Serving with the 100th Fighter Squadron and 332nd Fighter Group in Italy during World War II, Crockett flew 149 combat missions in a P-51C Mustang named "Daisy Mae" after his wife, contributing to breaking racial barriers in the military. He later flew 45 missions in the Korean War, retiring as a lieutenant colonel in 1970 with over 5,000 flight hours. His honors include the Distinguished Flying Cross and, in 2007, the Congressional Gold Medal, recognizing his role in advancing aviation and civil rights (Figure 17).⁸⁸

- *Art Porter*: He attended Dunbar High School during a time when it served as a vital hub for education and cultural development amidst segregation. His formative years at the school were instrumental in shaping his musical journey. Porter's passion for jazz was ignited while at Dunbar High School, influenced by a rich environment that included the legacy of his father, a musician himself. This foundation propelled him toward a career that would elevate him to national and international acclaim, underscoring the school's significance as a cradle of artistic achievement.⁸⁹

Porter's accomplishments as a jazz musician, pianist, and educator that rose to prominence in the 1980s and 1990s, he became a celebrated artist known for his virtuosic saxophone skills and soulful performances. His career boasted collaborations with jazz luminaries such as Ray Brown and Clifford Brown, international tours that showcased his talent on global stages, and a tenure as a music educator at institutions like the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff (Figure 18).⁹⁰

These individuals exemplified the extraordinary diversity of achievements among the Dunbar School's alumni, underscoring the school's critical role in providing African Americans with the education and opportunities to excel during an era of systemic inequality. Their enduring legacy highlights the profound impact of the school on African-American history and culture.

⁸⁷Polston, Debra, "Woodrow Wilson Crockett (1918–2012)," *Encyclopedia of Arkansas*, Published online by the Central Arkansas Library System, August 27, 2020, Available at <https://encyclopediaofarkansas.net/entries/woodrow-wilson-crockett-4017/>, Accessed on February 24, 2025.

⁸⁸Francis, Charles E., *The Tuskegee Airmen: The Men Who Changed A Nation*, Boston, Massachusetts: Branden Publishing Company, Available in the Roberts Library at the Butler Center for Arkansas Studies, 1988, 104-105.

⁸⁹Porter, Eugene, "Art Porter Sr. (1934–1993)," *Encyclopedia of Arkansas*, Published online by the Central Arkansas Library System, August 26, 2023, Available at <https://encyclopediaofarkansas.net/entries/art-porter-sr-4011/>, Accessed on February 24, 2025.

⁹⁰Caillouet, Linda S., "Arthur Lee Porter," *Arkansas Democrat Gazette*, January 31, 1993.

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Figure 17. Photograph of Woody Crockett, alumni of Dunbar High School and a Tuskegee Airmen, in front of *Daisy Mae* while stationed in Italy during World War II 1944-1945 (Courtesy of the Woody Crockett Papers Collection at the University of Arkansas Little Rock Center for Arkansas History and Culture).



Figure 18. Photograph of Art Porter, Sr. from the 1980s (Courtesy of the University of Arkansas Little Rock Center for Arkansas History and Culture).

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During its operation from 1929 to 1955, the Dunbar School served as a significant cultural and educational center for the Black community, attracting several notable figures who either visited or performed at the institution. Composer Florence Price, a pioneering Black female musician and Little Rock native, performed her music at the school in 1934 to support its programs.⁹¹ Jazz legends Duke Ellington and Count Basie are also recorded to have performed in the Florence Price Auditorium, their visits reflecting the school's role as a venue for prominent Black artists during the segregation era.⁹² Additionally, General Benjamin O. Davis, Sr., the first Black general in the U.S. Army, visited the school, likely to inspire students with his groundbreaking military career. Eleanor Roosevelt, former First Lady and a renowned advocate for civil rights and education, is noted to have visited the Dunbar School as well, underscoring its importance to national political and civil rights history.⁹³ These documented visits and performances highlight the school's significance as a hub for Black education, culture, and inspiration in Arkansas during the era of segregation.

Morris v. Williams (1942-1946) Civil Rights Case

The 1942-1945 *Morris v. Williams* case, led by Dunbar High School teacher Sue Cowan Morris (later Sue Cowan Williams) with NAACP backing from Thurgood Marshall, won equal pay for Black educators in Little Rock after a successful appeal in 1945 in the Eight Circuit court of Appeals in St. Louis, Missouri, despite an initial loss in 1942 in the court of Judge Thomas C. Trimble, III. Sparked by salary gaps between Black Dunbar School teachers (\$400-\$600 annually) and white Central High teachers (\$800-\$1,200 annually), this federal victory against the Little Rock School District emerged from the Dunbar School's faculty, cementing its role in civil rights beyond education.

The lead-up to *Morris v. Williams* kicked off in 1941, when the Little Rock Classroom Teachers Association (CTA), who were predominately Black women, started investigating pay gaps. Despite the "separate but equal" doctrine, the compensation numbers revealed significant inequity. The CTA, with the backing of Dunbar School's principal John H. Lewis as a community leader (though not directly documented as a plaintiff), filed a petition with the Little Rock School Board in March 1941, demanding parity. The board disregarded the petition, and later in 1941, voted to increase salaries for white teachers at Central High School by \$50 a year, further exacerbating the pay disparity. This decision likely reflected the board's prioritization of white schools, a common practice during segregation that perpetuated systemic inequities in education funding..⁹⁴

⁹¹Howell, Cynthia, "Little Rock School Board to vote on renaming auditorium for trailblazing 20th-century composer," *Arkansas Democrat Gazette*, March 12, 2022.

⁹²No author, "Dunbar High School Event Programs, 1930–1950," University of Arkansas at Little Rock Center for Arkansas History and Culture, National Dunbar Alumni Association Historical Collection, 1880-2016, Series 1, Box 3, Folder 5.

⁹³Brown, Don and Ethel Goodstein, National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form for the Dunbar Junior and Senior High School and Junior College in Little Rock, Pulaski County, Arkansas, Submitted to the National Park Service, Prepared by Arkansas Historic Preservation Program, NR Listed 1980.

⁹⁴Kirk, John A., "Sue Cowan Morris (1910–1994) An Educator and the Little Rock, Arkansas, Classroom Teachers' Salary Equalization Suit." *Arkansas Women: Their Lives and Times*, Edited by Cherrisse Jones-Branch and Gary T. Edwards. Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 179-196.

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When the board refused to act, the NAACP saw a chance to test their salary equalization campaign, and Sue Cowan Williams (Figure 19) was the ideal plaintiff. Born in 1910 in Eudora, Arkansas, to teachers J.C. and Lucy Gibson Cowan, she graduated from Spelman College, studied at Talladega College, and earned straight A's in a graduate course on English pedagogy at the University of Chicago in 1935. By 1935, she was teaching at Dunbar High School, and by the early 1940s, she chaired its English Department. Her impeccable record and leadership as English chair, evidenced by her advanced education and long tenure at the Dunbar School, made it difficult for the district to discredit her as an unqualified teacher.⁹⁵ She married Julius F. Williams in 1938, but they were later divorced by 1942.⁹⁶



Figure 19. Photograph of Sue Cowan Williams in 1991 (Courtesy of the University of Arkansas Little Rock Center for Arkansas History and Culture).

⁹⁵Stewart, Rhonda, "Sue Cowan Williams (1910–1994)," *Encyclopedia of Arkansas*. Published online by the Central Arkansas Library System, June 23, 2023, Available at <https://encyclopediaofarkansas.net/entries/woodrow-wilson-crockett-4017/>, Accessed on February 28, 2025.

⁹⁶*Ibid.*, 179-196.

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Thurgood Marshall, then NAACP counsel, supported Williams in filing the suit on February 28, 1942, against the Little Rock School District. Though the initial ruling flopped, her appeal won in 1945, cementing her as a civil rights pioneer.⁹⁷

In 1942, federal Judge Thomas C. Trimble, III, presided over the week-long trial, ruling against Morris by accepting the district's "merit" defense, despite clear evidence of racial bias. Retaliation followed, and contracts for Morris, CTA president John Gipson, and Dunbar School's principal John H. Lewis, a Pine Bluff native who had led the school since its 1929 opening, were not renewed for 1942-43 school year. Lewis, a former Arkansas Teachers Association president, was not a plaintiff but supported the push as the head of the Dunbar School, making his dismissal a clear message. Undeterred, Morris appealed, and on June 19, 1945, the Eighth Circuit Court of Appeals, likely including Judges like John B. Sanborn or Seth Thomas, reversed Trimble's decision, and mandated equal pay. Although the 1945 appeal mandated equal pay for Black teachers, Little Rock and other southern school districts began using the National Teacher Examination to claim they were objectively testing teachers to determine pay, a practice that delayed full salary equalization until after desegregation in the late 1950s.

This victory, born from Dunbar School's faculty and the CTA's resolve, marked a significant civil rights win, with Morris returning to teach at the Dunbar School in 1952 and leaving a legacy honored by Little Rock's Sue Cowan Williams Library.⁹⁸ Today, Sue Cowan Williams's original classroom is located just outside the south end of the administrative central section of the building, in the first classroom on the north side of the south wing. This classroom, where Williams taught, serves as a tangible link to the school's role in the fight for civil rights, preserving the legacy of her activism within the building's walls. The *Morris v. Williams* victory inspired similar equal-pay lawsuits across the South, galvanizing Black educators nationwide and demonstrating the power of collective action in challenging systemic inequities. In Arkansas, it led to the establishment of the *Arkansas State Conference of Branches* of the NAACP in 1945, which coordinated civil rights advocacy and desegregation efforts across the state. Daisy Bates was named its president in 1952, and when *Brown v. Board of Education* outlawed segregation in 1954, Bates organized the state and local community to desegregate schools, ultimately leading to the desegregation of Central High School in 1957. John A. Kirk argued that despite not having an immediate impact on salaries, the *Morris v. Williams* case had a lasting impact in Arkansas, inspiring the Black community to advocate for change and fight for equality (Kirk 2018). The *Morris v. Williams* case was considered a precursor to *Brown v. Board of Education*, as it contributed to the NAACP's broader strategy to dismantle 'separate but equal' policies through legal challenges to educational inequities.⁹⁹

⁹⁷Ibid.

⁹⁸Stewart, Rhonda, "Sue Cowan Williams (1910–1994)," *Encyclopedia of Arkansas*, Published online by the Central Arkansas Library System, June 23, 2023, Available at <https://encyclopediaofarkansas.net/entries/woodrow-wilson-crockett-4017/>, Accessed on February 28, 2025.

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Dunbar School's Role in Desegregation and the Little Rock Nine

The Dunbar School, operational as a junior and senior high from 1929 to 1955 and as a junior high thereafter, played a pivotal role in educating members of the Little Rock Nine, who desegregated Central High School in 1957.¹⁰⁰ Documented evidence in the 1954 and 1955 *The Bearcat*, the Dunbar Junior and Senior High School yearbook, shows that seven of the Little Rock Nine—Ernest Green, Elizabeth Eckford, Terrence Roberts, Carlotta Walls, Gloria Ray, Thelma Mothershed, and Melba Pattillo—attended Dunbar Junior High. As native residents of Little Rock, Minnijean Brown and Jefferson Thomas were also part of the Dunbar neighborhood community, which served as the educational and cultural hub for Black students during segregation. Secondary sources confirm Jefferson Thomas's attendance at Dunbar Junior High (ca. 1953–1955) with athletic involvement, and Minnijean Brown, given her residency and educational timeline, was similarly connected to the neighborhood before attending Horace Mann High School in 1955. These nine students, shaped by the rigorous academic and extracurricular programs of the Dunbar neighborhood community, challenged segregation at Central High in 1957, prompting federal intervention by President Eisenhower and galvanizing national civil rights efforts post-Brown v. Board of Education (1954).

Horace Mann High School principal and former Dunbar School principal, Edwin Luther Hawkins, Sr., supported their integration efforts, offering guidance noted in his administrative correspondence, later becoming Central High School's first Black principal, which is a testament to the Dunbar School's legacy of fostering civil rights leaders. This connection highlights Dunbar School's critical role in shaping individuals who advanced educational equity, linking it to broader Civil Rights milestones. The period of significance (1929–1955) spans the Dunbar School's construction and operation as a high school and junior college, ending in 1955 when it transitioned to a junior high and Horace Mann assumed the high school role, marking a shift in its educational function amid the desegregation era's onset.¹⁰¹

The Criterion A significance of the Dunbar School stems from its transformation of Black education in Little Rock, its embodiment of Ethnic Heritage/Black through community-driven excellence, and its legal and civil rights legacies, collectively marking it as a cornerstone of social progress in the segregated South from 1929 to 1955. Replacing the inadequate M.W. Gibbs High School with a state-of-the-art facility funded by the Rosenwald Fund and GEB, the Dunbar School emerged in 1929 as Arkansas's premier Black high school and the nation's only Rosenwald industrial trade school with a junior college, elevating educational opportunities amid segregation's constraints. It fostered a proud Black heritage through cultural milestones by hosting luminaries like Florence Price and Eleanor Roosevelt, as well as producing notable alumni such as Tuskegee Airmen Milton Crenchaw and Woody Crockett, civil rights attorney L. Clifford Davis, and jazz artist Art Porter, whose achievements reflect its enduring impact. The Dunbar

¹⁰⁰No Author, "The Bearcat, Dunbar High School Yearbook, for 1954," and "The Bearcat, Dunbar High School Yearbook, for 1955," University of Arkansas at Little Rock Center for Arkansas History and Culture, National Dunbar Alumni Association Historical Collection, 1880-2016.

¹⁰¹Jones-Wilson, Faustine C. (Editor), *Paul Laurence Dunbar High School of Little Rock, Arkansas*. National Dunbar Alumni Association. Virginia Beach, Virginia: The Donning Company Publishers, 2003, 146.

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School's faculty, including Sue Cowan Williams, drove the 1942–1945 *Morris v. Williams* case, securing a federal equal-pay victory for Black teachers, while its students, including at least seven of the Little Rock Nine (e.g., Carlotta Walls, Jefferson Thomas, Gloria Ray), advanced the Civil Rights Movement by desegregating Central High School in 1957, an event of national import that tested *Brown v. Board of Education*. The period of significance (1929–1955) spans Dunbar School's construction and operation as a high school and junior college, ending in 1955 when it transitioned to a junior high and Horace Mann High School assumed its high school role, signaling a shift toward desegregation that redirected its educational mission and culminated in the integration battles of 1957.

Area of Significance: Criterion C

Architecture

Criterion C significance of the Dunbar School lies in its local significance as an educational complex in Little Rock, blending Art Deco and Mid-Century Modern styles. The d. 1929 Dunbar School Building, designed by local architects Wittenberg & Delony, showcases Art Deco restraint with its smooth brick facade, vertical piers, and geometric detailing, reflecting a pragmatic yet elegant design for Black education in the Paul Laurence Dunbar School Neighborhood Historic District. A standout feature of this building is the Florence Price Auditorium, a 1,000-seat space exemplifying Wittenberg & Delony's auditorium design expertise, which is evident in their earlier Little Rock Central High School (completed 1927), with its high plaster ceilings, proscenium-arched wooden stage, original chandeliers, and decorative latticework, elevating the structure's cultural and architectural prominence. The d. 1950 Physical Education Building, by Little Rock architect Bruce R. Anderson, adds Mid-Century Modern simplicity with its concrete block construction, clean lines, and functional gymnasium, addressing postwar needs. Together, these works by notable Little Rock architects distinguish the Dunbar School as a significant educational complex, its design integrity preserved despite modern updates with the d. 2004 rear addition connecting the two contributing buildings and d. 2024 window replacements.

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Dunbar Junior and Senior High School and
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Dunbar Junior and Senior High School and
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Pulaski County, Arkansas

Name of Property

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Previous documentation on file (NPS):

☐ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested

☒ previously listed in the National Register

☐ previously determined eligible by the National Register

☐ designated a National Historic Landmark

☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____

☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

☐ recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # _____

Primary location of additional data:

☒ State Historic Preservation Office

☐ Other State agency

☒ Federal agency

☒ Local government

☐ University

☐ Other

Name of repository: _____

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): PU3232

10. Geographical Data

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Acres of Property 2.95

Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

Datum if other than WGS84: _____

(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

- | | |
|--------------------------|------------------------|
| 1. Latitude: 34.733128 N | Longitude: 92.286658 W |
| 2. Latitude: 34.732906 N | Longitude: 92.285597 W |
| 3. Latitude: 34.731944 N | Longitude: 92.285777 W |
| 4. Latitude: 34.731983 N | Longitude: 92.286880 W |

Or

UTM References

Datum (indicated on USGS map):

☐ NAD 1927 or ☐ NAD 1983

- | | | |
|----------|----------|-----------|
| 1. Zone: | Easting: | Northing: |
| 2. Zone: | Easting: | Northing: |
| 3. Zone: | Easting: | Northing: |
| 4. Zone: | Easting: | Northing: |

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

The Dunbar Junior and Senior High School and Junior College is located at 1100 Wright Avenue in Pulaski County, Arkansas on the south portion of Parcel No. 34L0201414700 in Block 278, lots 4-15 and part of 16. It is bounded by Wright Avenue to the south, S. Cross Street to the west, W. 18th Street to the north, and S. Ringo Street to the east.

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

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The boundary encompasses the original Dunbar Junior and Senior High School and Junior College campus that includes the main school building and gymnasium. A parking lot east of the original school campus and Gibbs Magnet School to the north of the original school campus are part of the parcel owned by the Little Rock School District but were not included as part of the NRHP boundary, since they are not part of the original campus.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title: Angie Clifton Thiel
organization: Clifton Historic Resources, LLC
street & number: 140 Caney Hollow Road
city or town: Linden state: TN zip code: 37096
e-mail: angie@cliftonhistoricresources.com
telephone: 901-634-7441
date: February 24, 2025

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A USGS map or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO, TPO, or FPO for any additional items.)

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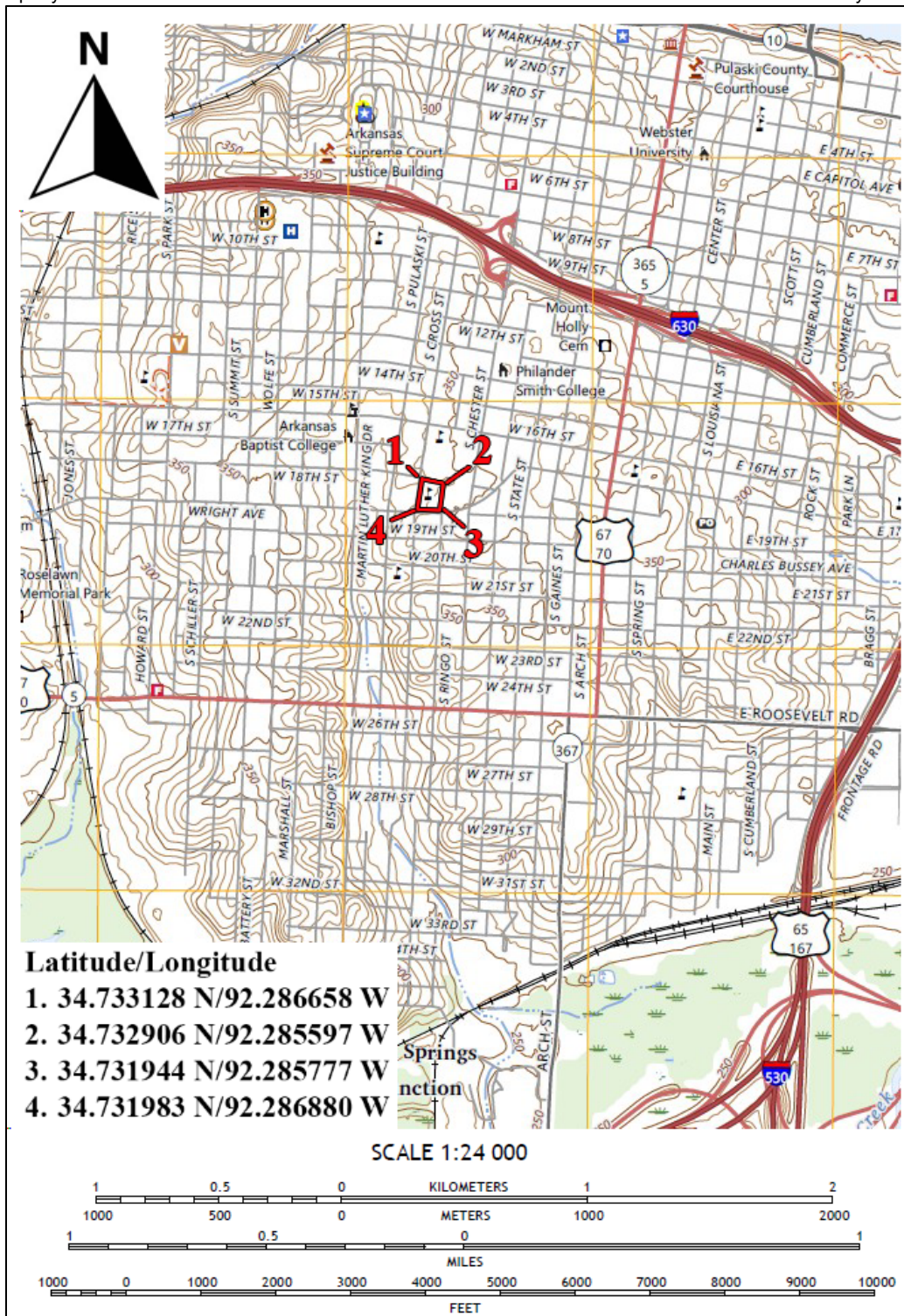
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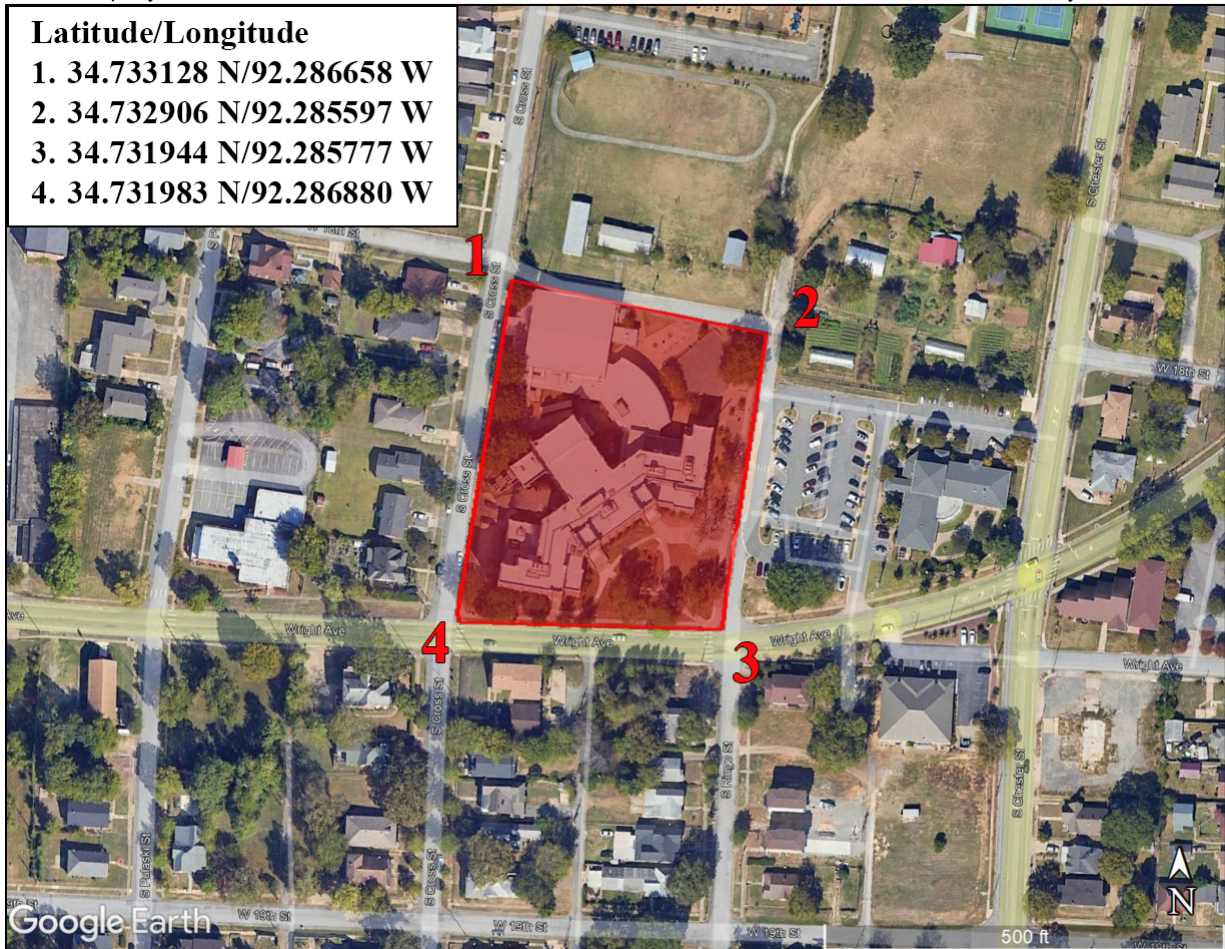
Topographic map locator for Dunbar Junior and Senior High and Junior College boundary in red with the Latitude/Longitude Coordinate numbers in red (Little Rock, AR [2024] USGS 7.5-minute quadrangle).

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Name of Property

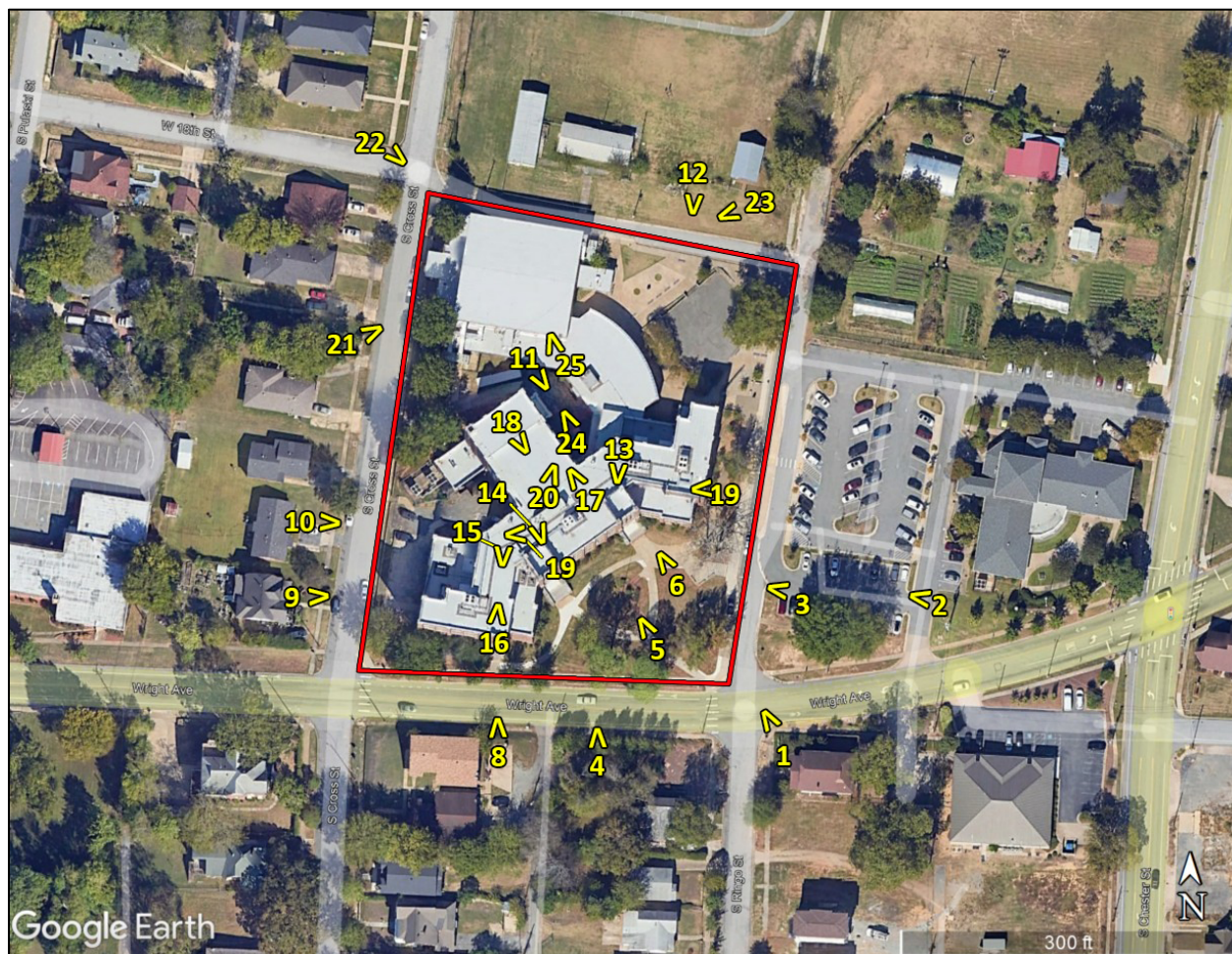
County and State



Aerial map locator for Dunbar Junior and Senior High and Junior College boundary in red with the Latitude/Longitude Coordinate numbers in red (Courtesy of Google Earth).

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Aerial map locator for Dunbar Junior and Senior High and Junior College boundary in red with keyed photographs in yellow (Courtesy of Google Earth).

Photographs

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels (minimum), 3000x2000 preferred, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. Each photograph must be numbered and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and doesn't need to be labeled on every photograph.

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Photo Log

Name of Property: Dunbar Junior and Senior High School and Junior College

City or Vicinity: Little Rock

County: Pulaski

State: AR

Photographer: Angie Clifton Thiel

Date Photographed: October 2024

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera:

Photo No.	Description	View
1	Front façade (southeast elevation) of Dunbar School Building at Wright Avenue and S. Ringo Street	facing northwest
2	Front facade (southeast elevation) and east elevation of east wing of Dunbar School Building from S. Ringo Street	facing west
3	Front façade (southeast elevation) of Dunbar School Building from S. Ringo Street	facing west
4	Front façade (southeast elevation) of Dunbar School Building from Wright Avenue	facing north
5	Central section of front façade (southeast elevation) of Dunbar School Building	facing northwest
6	Close view of east entrance on central section of front façade (southeast elevation) of Dunbar School Building	facing northwest
7	East elevation of the east wing from S. Ringo Street	facing northwest
8	South elevation of the west wing of Dunbar School Building from Wright Avenue	facing north
9	West elevation of the west wing of Dunbar School Building from S. Cross Street	facing east
10	Southwest elevation of the Florence Price Auditorium and rear of Dunbar School Building from S. Cross Street	facing northeast
11	Northeast elevation of the Florence Price Auditorium and rear of Dunbar School Building	facing east
12	Rear (north end) overall view of Dunbar School Building and c. 2004 north side addition	facing south
13	Interior of lobby at north front entrance of Dunbar School Building	facing southeast
14	Interior of lobby at south front entrance of Dunbar School Building	facing southeast
15	Interior of first floor hallway in west wing of Dunbar School Building	facing southwest

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Photo No.	Description	View
16	Interior of second floor hallway in southwest wing in Dunbar School Building	facing northeast
17	Interior of Florence Price Auditorium toward stage in Dunbar School Building	facing southeast
18	Interior of Florence Price Auditorium toward balcony and lobby entrance in Dunbar School Building	facing northwest
19	Interior of Sue Cowan Williams classroom in west wing in Dunbar School Building	facing northwest
20	Interior of cafeteria in Dunbar School Building	facing west
21	West and south elevations of Physical Education Building	facing northeast
22	North and west elevations of Physical Education Building	facing southeast
23	East and north elevations of Physical Education Building	facing southwest
24	South elevation of Physical Education Building connecting to c. 2004 north side addition	facing northwest
25	Interior of gymnasium in Physical Education Building	facing northwest

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for nominations to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.). We may not conduct or sponsor and you are not required to respond to a collection of information unless it displays a currently valid OMB control number.

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for each response using this form is estimated to be between the Tier 1 and Tier 4 levels with the estimate of the time for each tier as follows:

- Tier 1 – 60-100 hours
- Tier 2 – 120 hours
- Tier 3 – 230 hours
- Tier 4 – 280 hours

The above estimates include time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and preparing and transmitting nominations. Send comments regarding these estimates or any other aspect of the requirement(s) to the Service Information Collection Clearance Officer, National Park Service, 1201 Oakridge Drive Fort Collins, CO 80525.