



PAUL LAWRENCE  
DUNBAR HIGH  
SCHOOL

Green Cove Springs, Florida

History  
of  
Dunbar  
High  
School

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Augusta Savage Arts and Cultural Center

**Paul Lawrence Dunbar High**  
**A History of Separate and Unequal Education**  
**Clay County, Florida**



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### Introduction

Since the beginning of the United States, public education has been connected with the principles of democracy. Consequently, after the Civil War, whites, and blacks both supported education as a means of facilitating the transformation of the new Freedmen to citizens. The education promoted at the time fully explained the significance of the mission. Churches, aid societies, and numerous organizations, beyond the control of local powers that be, had for their purpose industrial, social, intellectual, and religious improvement of the Freedmen. The capstone of the structure they would build had as its principle foundation in moral and religious instruction.

During Reconstruction, Green Cove Springs, Florida, like most southern communities, was assisted by the Freedmen's Bureau and the African Methodist Episcopal and Baptist Church, who

established local schools for the children of former slaves. The Colored School of Clay County, later named after Paul Lawrence Dunbar, originated during this era.

After the Civil War, in 1873, the Florida Legislature passed a law that provided that "no citizen of this state shall, by reason of race, color or previous condition of servitude" be "excluded from the full and equal enjoyment of...common schools and public institutions of learning." Nevertheless, such noble sentiments ended with the passage of the 1885 Florida Constitution that required that "white children and colored children shall not be taught in the same school, but equal provision shall be made for both."

One should note that "Florida's "separate but equal" policy predated the official establishment of the "separate but equal" doctrine by the U.S. Supreme Court in Plessey v. Ferguson (1896) by more than a decade.

*"While education was necessary for the Negroes, as for all other persons, the chief need of the Negro, as most of these workers observed it, was religion."*

CG Woodson: The History of the Negro Church: 1921

### The History of Paul Lawrence Dunbar High School

The 50 years following emancipation saw the establishment of an oppressive racial code in the South, the elimination of blacks from the political process and the establishment and subsequent constitutional validation of a "separate but equal" black school system. When a system of free public education for blacks was created in January 1866, two schools existed in Clay County. There were two for whites and none for blacks.

The education of African Americans in Clay County, Florida, had its beginnings thirty years later in 1896 with one teacher, Carl Edwards, and a school term of four months. This took place at the Masonic Hall on Palmetto Avenue, near the present-day Wells Fargo Bank building and the Locket House.

A few years later, Mr. Gail Borden, one of the wealthy residents of Green Cove Springs, provided the Negro Citizens of Green Cove Springs with land for a public school at the corner of Walberg and Cypress. The school expanded to three teachers - Professor John Wright, Mrs. Carrie Wright, and Mrs. Emma Bailey. During this period, the school term increased to six months. It was during the period that noted residents such as Sidney Tillinghast and Augusta Fells (Savage) attended school.

In addition to Carl Edwards and John Wright, the following persons served as principal from 1896 through 1924.

- ❖ **John Anderson**
- ❖ **James Williams**
- ❖ **John Hopps**
- ❖ **B.P. Hartwell**
- ❖ **O.F. Wiles**
- ❖ **N.W. Ross**
- ❖ **Edwin Groover**
- ❖ **H.C. Williams**
- ❖ **E.J.W. Day**

In 1924 one of the school's former elementary graduates, W.N. Zander, was engaged to serve as principal. Under his leadership, the first Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) was formed with J.P. Tillinghast, J.C. Willis, and J.W. Locket serving as school trustees. Monthly meetings were held and monies were raised for supplies and more. Because of the lack of textbooks and paper, the school emphasized recitation and elocution - memorizing speeches, poems, and stories as a mental exercise. Students at the same level of reading could share the same book, one memorizing while the other recited for the teacher. Recitation, memorization, copying, and reading went on in the room simultaneously.

The first Junior High School graduation was held May 8, 1908, during the administration of B.P. Hartwell. The graduates were Sarah Collins, Anna Willie, Edwin Carter and William Hall.

The Senior High School had its beginnings in 1931, during the administration of the late R.C. Bannerman. It is Bannerman who is credited for naming the school Dunbar, in honor of the Poet Paul Lawrence Dunbar. The first graduate of Dunbar High School was Mrs. Celia Bannerman, in 1934, wife of the principal.



The typical school day began at the ringing of a bell. Commonly, students lined up outside the door, girls and boys in separate lines, and walked in to stand beside their bench until all were in place. Children of all ages learned in the same room under the guidance of one teacher, with the older students helping the younger ones.

Recess was a time for free play. Typical games involved little equipment and a lot of activity. Games such as kick-the-can, drop-the-handkerchief, hide-and-seek and steal-the-bacon. The playground at the school was bare except for several large oak trees.

At lunch, a drink of water from the communal dipper accompanied the food brought from home. Carried in a bucket or pail or tied in a cloth, lunch was predictably a sweet potato with biscuits and syrup, with an occasional hard-boiled egg. With that, black citizens of Clay County joined in the proliferation of educational opportunities in the Reconstruction Era taking place throughout the South.

Other regional schools during the same time period:

<b>Stanton High School</b>	<b>Jacksonville</b>
<b>Cookman Institute</b>	<b>Jacksonville</b>
<b>Balin Haven School for Girls</b>	<b>Jacksonville</b>
<b>Excelsior High School</b>	<b>St. Augustine</b>
<b>Murray High School</b>	<b>St. Augustine</b>
<b>Harris High School</b>	<b>Hastings</b>
<b>Central Academy</b>	<b>Palatka</b>
<b>Color Normal School</b>	<b>Palatka</b>
<b>Milton High School</b>	<b>Crescent City</b>
<b>Peck High School</b>	<b>Fernandina Beach</b>
<b>Pine Forest High School</b>	<b>Callahan</b>
<b>Keller High School</b>	<b>MacClenny</b>
<b>Campbell Street</b>	<b>Daytona Beach</b>

<b>Edward Waters College</b>	<b>Jacksonville</b>
<b>Florida Normal Memorial College</b>	<b>St. Augustine</b>
<b>Collier-Blocker Junior College</b>	<b>Palatka</b>

Exclusion from white society forced blacks to build their own social institutions, churches, schools and social clubs. For example, Huff Memorial Club, Masons, Eastern Stars, VFW, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), American Woodsmen, Knight of Piteous, which were vital to fighting segregation, improving black economic conditions and generally "uplifting" the community.

Throughout the entire history of Dunbar High School, racial segregation in public schools was common in the United States. While all the schools in the district were supposed to be equal, the support provided to Keystone Heights, Orange Park, and Clay High School was far superior to that provided to Dunbar students.

While the story of Dunbar High School is one of limited resources, little money and hand-me-downs, by no means should anyone believe that attending Dunbar was not a joyous and celebrated privilege. Despite the obstacles, the Black residents of Clay County assembled a vibrant social and educational system that nurtured and inspired its students to great heights. One only needs to look at the number of Dunbar graduates who returned to Dunbar as faculty and administrators as proof.

### **Normal School of Negro in Clay County, Florida**

The American Missionary Association has been credited with the opening of several local area schools for Negro's such as in St. Augustine, Florida, in 1867. It is said also to be responsible for the beginning of Stanton Institute in Jacksonville, Florida in January 1867, the control of which was later transferred to the Board of Education in 1874.

Furthermore, the American Missionary Association, at the request of one Reverend Newton, established a (Negro) Normal School in Orange Park. The people of Orange Park made the association a gift of some land near present-day Moosehaven, on which was erected a central school building and a chapel. When the property was given to the association, it was with the understanding that the white people of the community should have the privilege of attending the institution, if desired. Be that as it may, the attendance of white children at Fessenden was very small, probably due to the location of the school. This, on the other hand, did not meet with the approval of local authorities. It was the state superintendent of public instruction who was foremost among those who vigorously strove to have the school close its doors to white patronage.

In referring to this institution, Raphael O'Hara Lanier said in her 1928 dissertation on the "History of Negro Education in Florida":

"The school continued its work, but owing to the pressure which was started, it was finally forced to abandon its efforts. All of the evidence indicates that good work was done at the school. There were a variety of subjects offered. The Normal Department of four years offered advanced arithmetic, physiology, grammar, astronomy, pedagogies, theory and practice, methods, psychology, and rhetoric. Typewriting and stenography were required of all students in attendance. Manual training, mechanical drawing, and domestic science were also included. The training of the faculty was superior to that of the faculties of other schools, regardless of color, in Florida at the time. Some of the best New England colleges were represented on the faculty. It is a pity that this school could not continue its work, but its graduates went out as a leavening influence."

One could only imagine that, if allowed to continue, Clay County could have been the home of an educational institution similar to the likes of a Hampton, Howard, or Fisk University.

<b>Dunbar High School Timeline:</b>
1896
May 18. In Plessy v. Ferguson the Supreme Court gives legal backing to the concept of separate but equal public facilities for blacks.
1896
<i>Dunbar High School began in what was known then as the Masonic Hall located on Palmetto Avenue.</i>
1896
<i>It had one teacher, Professor Carl Edwards, and a small group of children, with a school term of four months in duration.</i>
1896
<i>The following persons served as principals from 1896 to 1924: John Anderson, James Williams, Johns Hopps, B. P. Hartwell, O. F. Wiles, N. W. Ross, Edwin Groover, H. C. Williams, and E. J. W. Day.</i>
1900
<i>A few years later, tourist and dairy magnate, Mr. Gail Borden, moved to Green Cove Springs and donated to the Negro Citizens land for a Public School on Walberg and Cypress streets.</i>
1900
<i>At which time the school had three teachers: Professor John A. Wright, Mrs. Carrie Wright, and Mrs. Emma Bailey. The school term increased to six months.</i>
1905
July 11-13. W. E. B. Du Bois and William Monroe Trotter were among the leaders of the meeting from which sprung the Niagara Movement, the forerunner of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.
1908
<i>The first Junior High School graduation was held May 8, 1908, with the late B. F. Hartwell as principal. The following persons graduated: Sarah Collins, Anna Willie, Edwin Carter, and William Hall.</i>
1910
April. The National Urban League was established.
1915



September 9. Carter G. Woodson founded the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History.
1918
February 19-21. The First Pan-African Congress met in Paris, France, under the guidance of W. E. B. Du Bois.
1920
August 1-2. The national convention of Marcus Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Society met in New York City. Augusta Savage
1922
From 1922 to 1929 are the years usually assigned to the Harlem Renaissance, which marks an epoch in black literature and art.
1924
<i>One of the school's Elementary graduates, W. N. Zanders, was brought back as principal.</i>
1924
<i>The first P.T.A. was organized during this term. In the meetings held monthly, monies were raised to purchase school supplies. The trustees then were: J. P. Tillinghast, J. C. Willis, and J. W. Locket.</i>
1925
May 8. A. Philip Randolph organized the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters.
1931
April 6. Nine young blacks were accused of raping two white women in a boxcar. They were tried for their lives in Scottsboro, Alabama, and hastily convicted. The case attracted national attention.
1931
<i>The Senior High School had its beginning under Professor R. C. Bannerman as principal, who named it "DUNBAR" in honor of Paul Lawrence Dunbar.</i>
1934
<i>The first graduate of the NOW acquired high school was Mrs. Celia Bannerman, the wife of the principal.</i>
1936
August 9. Jesse Owens won four gold medals at the Summer Olympics in Berlin.
1937

June 22. Joe Louis defeated James J. Braddock to become heavyweight boxing champion of the world.
1938
<i>1938-39 The P.T.A. lead by Mrs. Estelle Trumpler, President, Mrs. Hattie Flowers, Vice President, Mrs. Rosa Lee Stewart, Secretary, and Mrs. Ruth Bennett, helped raised money which bought utensils for the lunchroom and helped to purchase the present site of the building.</i>
1940
October 16. Benjamin O. Davis, Sr., became the first black general in the United States Army.
1940
<i>Old Dunbar having been condemned for several years, Principal Bannerman interceded with the Clay County Board of Public Instruction for getting a new building on a new site.</i>
1940
<i>The Negro Citizens and teachers, namely, Bernice Hall Forde, Martha Robinson Jones, Rosa B. Aarons, Theresa Redmond Marie, Virginia Clayton Ray, Susie Small, and Mozelle Francis Peters, were sent out to select a site.</i>
1940
<i>The site selected was the home site of the renowned Augusta Fells Savage. Miss Savage was happy to sell for this purpose and sold for \$500.00, which the teachers and citizens raised.</i>
1940
<i>During this year the old building was torn down and the school was held in the Mt. Zion A.M.E. Church and Hall.</i>
1941
June 25. President Franklin D. Roosevelt issued an executive order forbidding discrimination in defense industries after pressure from blacks led by A. Philip Randolph.
1942
June. Some blacks and whites organized the Congress of Racial Equality in Chicago. They led a sit-in at a Chicago restaurant.
1944
<i>Female graduates of Dunbar High are trained at Bethune-Cookman College to work in war industry jobs with Westinghouse, in Bridgeport, Conn.</i>
1944
April 24. The United Negro College Fund was founded.

1945

*Professor Bannerman, having worked hard these many years, became suddenly ill was unable to complete the task, and resigned due to illness.*

1945

*Thursday morning, October 25, 1945, a fire completely demolished Mt. Zion A.M.E. Church*

1945

*The Church hall being too small to house the children, classes were moved into the incomplete building that was being erected on Middleburg Avenue.*

1945

*Given that the site had no doors, windows, or heat, classes are held outdoors with fire being built of tire tubes. Through hardship and toils, teachers and students endeavored to have school.*

1945

*The Principal, Theresa R. Marie, became ill in 1946 and Homer Williams came to this school as a principal with no new members added to the faculty.*

1946

*1946 Upon Professor Bannerman's resignation in 1945, Theresa R. Marie, a teacher at this time, became principal in the old school.*

1946



*The following teachers were added to the staff: Eugenia Powell Argrett, Jerusha Major, and Josephine Strong. All graduates of Dunbar High.*

1947
April 19. Jackie Robinson became the first black to play major league baseball.
1947
<i>In 1947, N. W. Campbell became principal along with the arrival of a new teacher, Pearl Crump.</i>
1948
<i>In 1948, James A. Ellerbe was appointed to serve as a principal with F. W. Hinson as a new teacher. Mr. Ellerbe served the term and the following term,</i>
1949
<i>1949-50, Thomas Breen was added to the staff.</i>
1950
September 22. Ralph J. Bunche won the Nobel Peace Prize for his work as a mediator in Palestine.
1950
<i>Mr. Hinson became principal, and remained until 1954, with new teachers being added as follows:</i>
· <i>1950-51, Moreen Thomas, Mildred Bannerman, and Cornelia Hinson,</i>
· <i>1951-52, Joseph Johnson.</i>
1951
<i>Classes are overcrowded; teacher loads are over the minimum, and no provision for the teaching of Science in the High School.</i>
1951
<i>The Home Economics teacher has been attempting to teach without equipment, supplies, and limited seats.</i>
1951
<i>Minimum classroom supplies are furnished through the efforts of the teacher's purchases.</i>
1951
<i>The newly built Industrial Arts Shop was equipped with new electric machinery but did not have the everyday hand tools, hammer, saws, etc., which boys would need to learn to use.</i>
1951
<i>During the school year the following buildings were erected; The Industrial Arts, and Cafeteria, as well, the setting up of the first Library Unit.</i>
1952

After keeping statistics kept for 71 years, Tuskegee reported that this was the first year with no lynching.
1952
<i>August 17, 1954, Maxwell W. Saxon was appointed principal.</i>
1954
May 17. In Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas, the Supreme Court completed overturning legal school segregation at all levels.
1954
<i>1954-55 Dunbar High School took on a new life by, enriching the curriculum improving and beautifying the physical plant and surroundings, and increasing the personnel.</i>
1955
<i>The citizens and organizations of the community purchased electrical appliances, complete with refrigerator, stove, sink, etc., matching the gas kitchen purchased by the school board; with two electric sewing machines have been given to the department by friends.</i>
1955
<i>The newly built Industrial Arts building was dedicated on April 4, 1955, and named W. N. Zanders, graduate and former principal of this school.</i>
1955
<i>The Cafeteria, which had been in use for a year, was dedicated at this time also, April 4, 1955, and named T. R. Marie, former student, principal, and teacher.</i>
1955
<i>During the dedication the following distinguished school administrators and citizens were honored with Meritorious Service Awards:</i>
<i>Hon. Harris C. Long, Superintendent of Public Instruction, Clay County, Green Cove Springs, Florida;</i>
<i>Mrs. Hannah B. Miller, Civic and Religious Leader, Green Cove Springs, Florida;</i>
<i>Mr. Joseph L. Muldrow, Fraternal and Civic Leader, Green Cove Springs, Florida;</i>
<i>Mrs. Rosa B. Aaron, Retired Teacher, Green Cove Springs, Florida:</i>
*
<i>Rev. W. N. Zanders, Graduate of Dunbar, former Principal, Missionary, and Evangelists.</i>
1957

February 14. The Southern Christian Leadership Conference was formed with Martin Luther King, Jr., as president.
1957
August 29. Congress passed the Voting Rights Bill of 1957, the first major civil rights legislation in more than 75 years.
1959
<i>In 1959 Dunbar saw the appointment of Mr. Gavin Brown, Sr. who served as principal until Dunbar's close in 1968.</i>
1960
February 1. Sit-ins in Greensboro, North Carolina, initiated a wave of similar protests throughout the South.
1960
<i>Dunbar graduate one of its most renowned graduates, Mr. Bernard Fennell, who went on to distinguish himself as a member of the United States Diplomatic Corps.</i>
1960
April 15-17. The Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee was founded in Raleigh, North Carolina.
1962
<i>In 1962 the long-awaited gymnasium became a reality and named in honor of Clay County District School Superintendent, Harris Long.</i>
1963



April 3. Under the leadership of Martin Luther King, Jr., blacks began a campaign against discrimination in Birmingham.

1963

August 28. The March on Washington, led by was the largest civil rights demonstration ever. Martin Luther King, Jr., delivered his "I Have a Dream" speech.

1964

***The Lady Panthers Basketball team brought home the first State Championship to Clay County. The same year the boys finished second in state competition.***

1964

August 11-21. The Watts riots left 34 dead, more than 3,500 arrested, and property damage of about 225 million dollars.

1964

January 23. The Twenty-fourth Amendment forbade the use of the poll tax to prevent voting.

1964

March 12. Malcolm X announced his split from Elijah Muhammad's Nation of Islam. He would be assassinated on February 21, 1965.

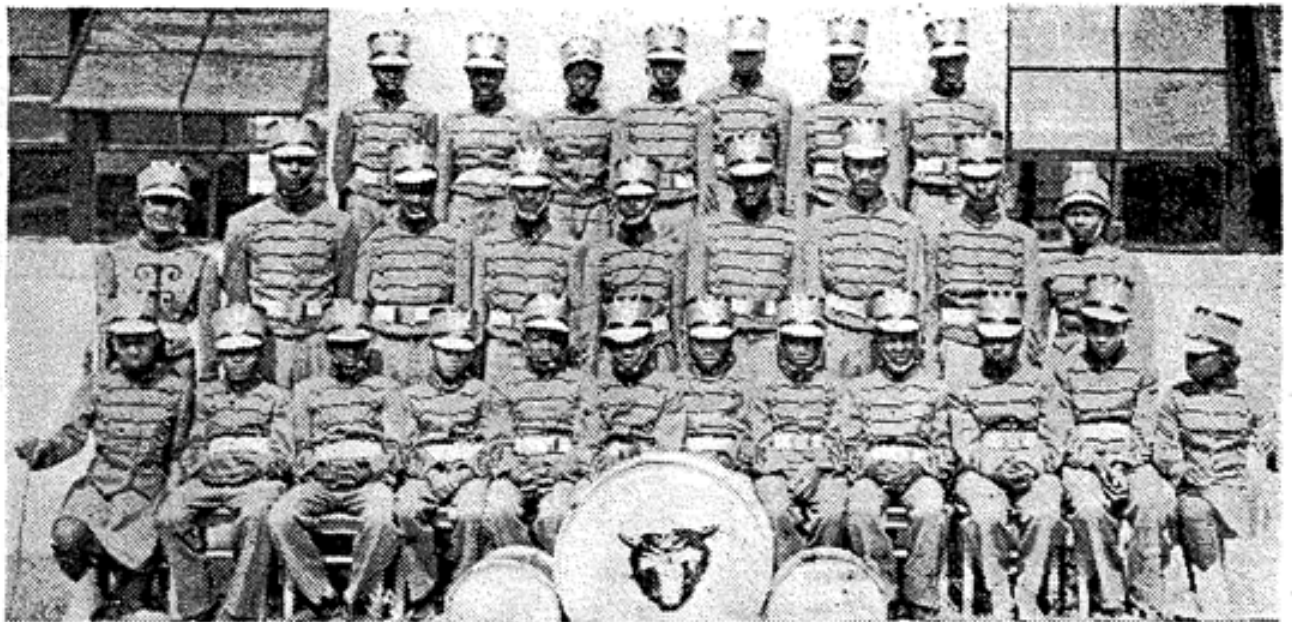
1965
January 2. The SCLC launched a voter drive in Selma, Alabama. Which escalated into a nationwide protest movement?
1965
February 21. Malcolm X was assassinated in Harlem by members of the Nation of Islam.
1965
<i>Dunbar graduated its largest graduating class with well over fifty (50) students.</i>
1965
August 11-21. The Watts riots left 34 dead, more than 3,500 arrested, and property damage of about 225 million dollars.
1967
<i>In 1967 Dunbar High School graduated its last senior class.</i>
1967
May 1-October 1. This was the worst summer for racial disturbances in United States history. More than 40 riots and 100 other disturbances occurred.
1968
April 4. Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated in Memphis, Tennessee. In the following week, riots occurred in at least 125 places throughout the country.
1969
October 29. The Supreme Court ruled that racial segregation in schools had to end at once and that unitary school systems were required.

Photo Gallery









**BAND MEMBERS**

