CROSSING THE COLOR LINE: A BIOGRAPHY OF PAUL
LAURENCE DUNBAR, 1872-1906

DISSERTATION

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By
Felton O’Neal Best, B.A., M.A.

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The Ohio State University
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Dissertation Committee:
Warren VanTine
Merton L. Dillon
Paul C. Bowers

Approved by
Advisor
Department of History
DEDICATION

To My Parents

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents, Mr. Moses James Best and Mrs. Ethel Grace Best of Greenville, North Carolina. Thanks for all of your endeavors throughout the years to provide me with a good education. I also appreciate the confidence that you instilled within me to be an achiever. I am fortunate to have parents of your caliber to make my dream of obtaining a Ph.D a reality.
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VITA

October 7, 1956....... Born-Greenville, North Carolina

1978.................. B.A., North Carolina A&T State University, Greensboro, North Carolina

1979-1982.............. Production Supervisor, Union Carbide Corporation, Asheboro, North Carolina


1986.................... M.A., Social Science Education, North Carolina A&T State University, Greensboro, North Carolina

1986-1987.............. History Teacher, Randleman High School, Randleman, North Carolina

1987.................... M.A., Educational Administration, North Carolina A&T State University, Greensboro, North Carolina

1987-1988.............. Instructor, Department of History, North Carolina A&T State University, Greensboro, North Carolina


1988-1989.............. Minority Fellow, Department of History, The Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio
1990-Summer............ Researcher, The Ohio Historical Society, Columbus, Ohio

1989-1991............. Teaching Associate, Department of History, The Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio

1991-Present.......... Assistant Professor, Department of History, Central Connecticut State University, New Britain, Connecticut

FIELDS OF STUDY

Major Field: History

Sub Fields: United States History to 1877
United States History since 1877
African-American History
Religious History
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INTRODUCTION

This is not the first dissertation written on Paul Laurence Dunbar. However it is the first one which has utilized a full run of the records from The Paul Laurence Dunbar Papers, The Life and Works of Paul Laurence Dunbar, The Booker T. Washington Papers, The W.E.B. DuBois Papers, and Dunbar's correspondence with Frederick Douglass and James Weldon Johnson. In addition it is the first one to analyze Dunbar's effectiveness or ineffectiveness in "crossing the color line" in the literary profession during the era of Jim Crow. Likewise, it refutes the arguments made by many authors- that Dunbar was an "Uncle Tom" because he wrote in Negro dialect which negatively reflected upon black Southerners, wrote short stories which featured white characters, and refused to write protest literature despite the lynchings and Jim Crow Laws as an endeavor to promote his career.

African-American historians and historians of African-American literature have developed opposing perceptions of Paul Laurence Dunbar. In addition to the
argument that he promoted "Uncle Tomism" by failing to agitate for black civil rights, and by depicting black Southerners as ridiculous and frivolous beings, these authors who include Vernon C. Parrington and Gossle H. Hudson, have suggested that Dunbar's relationship with Booker T. Washington led him to advance an accommodatiationist culture. Other authors, such as Waldo Phillips, Theodora W. Daniel, and Darwin Turner are sensitive to the criticisms of Dunbar and contend that Dunbar's relationship with W.E.B. DuBois led the writer to an increased sense of "African cultural awareness" - thus making him eventually more African than he was American.

Neither description accurately fits Dunbar's character and motives. Unlike Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. DuBois, both of whom supported various aspects of black nationalism, Dunbar became an advocate of full racial integration. Dunbar wanted to be perceived as an American writer having African ancestry rather than a Negro poet who was handicapped by the limitations of his race. His writings, letters, and literature reviews, along with his actions, reveal his advocacy of race integration and race advancement. Dunbar developed an audience of both black and white readers and became noted as the most accomplished
American writer of African descent of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In this context Dunbar was successful in his endeavor to "cross the color line."

The concept of the "color line" has been developed by several scholars, who also focus on Ohio as a microcosm for the North. Frank Quillan’s, *The Color Line in Ohio: A History of Race Prejudice in A Typical Northern State* (1913) traces the development of race relations in Ohio from statehood in 1803 until 1912. Quillan drew upon Alfred Holt Stone’s earlier study, *Studies in the American Race Problem* (1908), and came to similar conclusions. Quillan concluded that race prejudice against blacks increased with the growth of Ohio’s population, blacks were worse off in the North than the South since they were isolated from industrial opportunities, social equality between the races in the North, as in the South, was a myth, the North was just as oppressive as the South in denying civil rights, and that there was more prejudice against blacks in 1913 than there had been at the end of the Civil War. David Gerber’s *Black Ohio and the Color Line 1860-1915* (1976), however, argued that "Growing and shifting black populations posed an important threat to the existing racial status quo, challenging both black and white attitudes towards racial advancement, accelerating the pace of black community
development in the cities, and complementing national and regional forces in setting the pattern of race relations and racial progress." Leonard Erickson's dissertation, "The Color Line in Ohio Public School's 1829-1890" determined that race prejudice was strongly woven into Ohio's state supported educational system.

The aforementioned works use Ohio as a case study of the status of blacks in the north between 1865-1920. Few studies, however, have analyzed the successfulness of some African-Americans in escaping their oppression. Paul Laurence Dunbar is an example of the latter. Dunbar, the offspring of slave parents, denied a college education, nonetheless managed to achieve national renown as a writer and a poet during a period in which "Jim Crowism" was at its peak.

This biography of Dunbar is a record of human effort -- a case study of an American who, due to his stance on race integration, paved the way for other African-American writers and scholars who followed his path. Dunbar, who was from a background of poverty, managed to gain entrance into a white public high school, became the editor of the school's newspaper, was the only black to graduate in his class, developed lifelong friendships with whites such as
the Wright brothers, and became a successful poet-novelist as well as a productive member of America's black middle class.

By age twenty-four, Dunbar had become a symbol of the intellectual and creative potential of African-Americans. William Dean Howells, one of America's most respected literary critics, praised his second book, *Majors and Minors* as, "the first instance of an American Negro writer who envinced innate distinction in literature."

In the 1960's, however, with the growth of black nationalism in America, Dunbar was censured by radical African-American scholars for tarnishing the personality of blacks by perpetuating derogatory caricatures of the minstrel show of Southern slaves. One such critic of Dunbar was Robert Bone, author of *The Negro Novel in America* (1958) who claimed that Dunbar, "resorted to the subterfuge of employing white characters, rather than attempting a serious literary portrait of the Negro." This dissertation contends, however, that a careful examination of Dunbar's actions as an advocate of integration, together with an analysis of his writings shows that Dunbar used his literature to demonstrate how African-Americans have historically used covert and overt forms of resistance and racial protest. Such an examination will reveal Dunbar to
be far more bitter towards racism and much more a part of the turn-of-the-century protest tradition than his critics suggested.

One major aspect of the dissertation is to explain Dunbar in terms of the unique racial environment of the Dayton-Springfield-Wilberforce Ohio area in which he spent most of his life. African-Americans settled in this Southern region of Ohio known as the Miami Valley in significant numbers by the end of the nineteenth century. The Miami Valley, which comprised the towns of Dayton, Springfield, Xenia, and Wilberforce, witnessed the growth of autonomous black institutions in the forms of educational, civic, religious, and political organizations as well as numerous African-Americans who purchased houses. The experience of blacks in the Miami Valley in terms of community power and interaction with whites differed greatly from both the rural Southern and the urban Northern stereotypes. The Miami Valley did not witness the rise of urban ghettos. Historically poor blacks and white residents in late nineteenth and early twentieth century Northern ghettos experienced race riots due to the frequent competition for menial jobs and low income housing. As a result interracial alliances almost never occurred. Likewise, Southern rural regions historically have not witnessed a large
concentration of black residents thus making the possibilities for racial interaction less likely and desirable. In this context, Paul Laurence Dunbar, who benefitted from the social composition of the Miami Valley, and his ability to appeal to white benefactors, found social interaction with white audiences less difficult than some blacks had experienced in neighboring Ohio and other Northern towns which explains, in part, Dunbar’s ability to cross the color line.

Dunbar’s experiences, as well as those of his family, did not compel or predispose him to hate whites as a group or the South as a region. After age twenty every publication or major job that he received, as well as all the national recognition he gathered resulted directly from the assistance of white benefactors. In this context, Dunbar assumed that race integration was an essential element of black success. Dunbar, who was aware of the assistance of Northern benefactors, was also aware that some of them had economic ties with Southerners. However, Dunbar’s critics have erroneously suggested that he stood alone in this type of reasoning. For example, the militant W.E.B. DuBois in *The Ordeal of Mansart* described the
manner in which intelligent freedmen sought racial
advancement with the assistance of Southern aristocrats.

Dunbar's parents' experience in slavery was milder than
the lifestyle that some slaves had undergone, but not
necessarily uncharacteristic of the experience of others.
Therefore his parents were not directly hostile to
Southerners. As a result Dunbar was free from hatred
against Caucasians as a group. Dunbar's father in addition
to being trained as an artisan, had learned to read, write,
do mathematics. His father, a skilled slave who was
occasionally hired out, experienced a less oppressive
lifestyle than the average field hand. In Dunbar's "The
Ingrate", a story he based upon his father's life, irony
rather than bitterness is the dominant tone. Likewise,
Dunbar's mother's experience as a house slave in Kentucky
was undoubtedly easier than that of a field hand in the
deep South.

Dunbar believed that African-Americans could only
prosper if they recognized their interdependence with
whites. He sought to win white respect for blacks by
demonstrating that, instead of complaining and sulking about
the past, they were willing to participate in a joint
endeavor to create a new America. Dunbar's stories and
poetry including *Folks From Dixie* and *Majors and Minors*
repeatedly emphasized the willingness and ability of blacks to forgive white America for previous injustices.

In summary, Dunbar's experiences, his social and economic ideas, and his artistic style limited his criticism of the South in particular and whites in general. This fact, however, should not imply, as some have supposed, that Dunbar accepted the myth of the plantation tradition as projected by George Fitzhugh. In reality, he was no more willing to assume the romanticized plantation to be characteristic of the entire South than he was willing to admit that he did not fully understand or embrace much of Southern slave culture. Likewise, it should not be assumed that his hunger for fame and money silenced his protest against unjust treatment. Actually he vigorously castigated conditions familiar to him in the North. Reviews of Dunbar's writings which appeared in early twentieth century African-American periodicals complimented Dunbar for his ability to reflect positively on the black experience. Simultaneously Dunbar, who developed an audience with the radical black abolitionist Frederick Douglass, discovered that Douglass was an admirer of his works and publicly made reference to Dunbar's positive reflection upon blacks.

The majority of the monographs and articles on Paul Laurence Dunbar have been published by literary scholars.
To this day there is not a published historical biography of Dunbar. However, Goslee Hudson's unpublished dissertation "A Biography of Paul Laurance Dunbar" (The Ohio State University, Department of History, 1970) was such an endeavor. Hudson has published several articles which bear witness to Dunbar's historical significance.

Hudson's dissertation focuses upon Dunbar's writing as a reflection of black culture in America during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The objective of his study is to investigate the environmental influences that shaped this gifted poet. Hudson gives considerable attention to the degree in which his life and works related to the concept of "black identity." Hudson's dissertation contains two chapters that focuses upon the life of the poet from his birth until his graduation from high school in 1891. The last part of Hudson's dissertation focuses upon Dunbar's presentation of black slave culture in his writing. Hudson did not seek to answer Dunbar's critics who painted him as an "uncle tom", nor did he endeavor to analyze Dunbar's successfulness in crossing the color line. The latter is an issue which I addressed in this dissertation.

Studies of Dunbar as well as articles focusing upon his life began to appear shortly after his death in 1906. He has been both lauded as a writer in the vanguard of the crusade
for black rights, and also damned as an accommodationist. Few black Americans in the nineteenth century were asked by so many to represent so much. There are many literary biographies of Dunbar. Linda Keck Wiggins’s, The Life and Works of Paul Laurence Dunbar, published in 1907, which was probably the first extensive study of the poet, portrayed Dunbar as a representative of black gentility and a genius. In 1913, Julia L. Henderson published A Child’s Story of Dunbar based upon Linda Keck Wiggins earlier study. By 1914 Mrs. Paul Laurence Dunbar, Prof. W.S. Scarborough, and Rev. C. Ramsom had published Paul Laurence Dunbar: Poet Laureate of the Negro Race. This work was a pamphlet reprinted from articles in the October issue of the A.M.E. Church Review which contained an account by Alice Dunbar of some of the sources for various poems written by her late husband.

After the mid 1930’s the monographs written on Dunbar were directed specifically to an academic audience. Benjamin Brawley’s Paul Laurence Dunbar: Poet of His People (1941), a critique of the literary content of Dunbar’s poetry, is a prime example. Victor Lawson’s Dunbar Critically Examined, examines Dunbar’s effectiveness and ineffectiveness in using "Negro dialect" in portraying Southern blacks. Virginia Cunningham’s 1947 monograph, Paul Laurence Dunbar and His
Song, was based upon interviews with several of Dunbar’s associates and manuscripts at The Ohio Historical Society. Like Lawson, Cunningham’s major endeavor was to examine Dunbar’s performance in writing black dialect. Despite some inaccuracies, scholars regard it as one of the best biographies of the poet.

The Civil Rights Movements of the 1960’s affected the type of scholarship which would appear on Paul Laurence Dunbar in the 1970’s. Prior to this movement most scholars examining Dunbar’s life and character determined that he was a great poet and represented his race in a positive manner. During and after the movement he was accused of abandoning significant race issues that would have promoted racial integration. In addition, Dunbar’s endeavor to integrate into white mainstream America indicated to black nationalists that he lacked race pride. They viewed critically his desire to write poetry which was favorably received and reviewed by white audiences. The most ardent such critic of Dunbar was Addison Gayle Jr., who in *Oak and Ivy: A Biography of Paul Laurence Dunbar* (1971) portrayed the poet as a tragic black figure that, “might have been a great poet if he had been allowed to write the kind of poetry he wished to write.” In *A Singer in the Dawn: Reinterpretations of Paul Laurence Dunbar*, a collection
of papers first delivered at the Paul Laurence Dunbar
Centenary Celebration at the University of California,
Irvine in 1972, and edited by Jay Martin, the 17 essays,
including one written by the historian Gossie Hudson, either
praised Dunbar as a writer of great literary talent or
determined that he did not possess the talent that William
Dean Howells and others declared that he had. From the early
1980's until present there has not been a single article or
monograph published on any aspect of Dunbar. This
dissertation, "Crossing the Color Line: A Biography of Paul
Laurance Dunbar, 1872-1906" sheds new light on a
controversial figure.

William Dean Howells was the most noted man of American
letters in the late nineteenth and early twentieth
centuries. Brand Whitlock was mayor of Toledo, Ohio during
Dunbar's writing career. Both of these individuals were
chief among the white benefactors that helped Dunbar's
writing career. This dissertation also argues that the
motivations of such benefactors to promote Dunbar's career
were not inspired by paternalism. Both Howells and Whitlock
had track records of openly writing and speaking against
social racial injustices in the North. Whitlock often
purchased suits for Dunbars when he had to make public appearances. Dunbar received national fame when his Majors and Minors was favorably reviewed by William D. Howells in Harper’s Magazine. Dunbar merely gave Howells and Whitlock the opportunity to support their earlier claims that there were African-Americans of ability and talent who were being excluded from mainline professions solely because of race. William Dean Howells, who was often criticized by nineteenth century American newspapers for taking a paternalistic attitude towards Dunbar, responded to the press that Dunbar’s talents and skills stood on their own merit. On one occasion he stated, "The world is too old now, and I find myself too much of its mood, to care for the work of a poet because he is black, because his father and mother were slaves, because he was, before and after he began to write poems, an elevator boy. These facts certainly draw me to him as a man, if I knew him to have literary ambition, but when it comes to his literary art, I might judge it irrespective of these facts, and enjoy or endure it for what it was in itself." (Southern Workman April 1897)

Paul Laurence Dunbar reached the peak of his career by the turn of the century. Dunbar managed to obtain such success, in part, by his ability to write in "Negro dialect"
that simultaneously appealed to black and white audiences. The fact that Dunbar wrote in such dialect did not necessitate his being critical of the African-American experience. Dunbar and many of his black counterparts such as the noted historian W. E. B. DuBois perceived that the use of such dialect was a means of preserving aspects of African-American culture. Dunbar did object however to the refusal of some editors who did not want to regard his writing in straight English prose seriously. Dunbar broke this barrier in the twentieth century when several of his short stories that were not written in black dialect were published.

The early twentieth century was an era which witnessed black progress. W. E. B. DuBois became the first African-American to obtain a doctorate degree. Booker T. Washington received the reputation of an educator and spokesman for black America. In the same context Dunbar, by 1899, had received national and world acclaim as a writer in America and England. Dunbar, who was employed at the Library of Congress, resigned from this position on December 31, 1899. On January 3, 1890 he was invited as a speaker for a banquet in honor of George H. White, Congressional Representative of North Carolina.
Dunbar was also highly regarded among his African-American counterparts. W. E. B. DuBois considered Dunbar to be the most noted black American writer of the twentieth century. By February of 1890 he was invited to Tuskegee by Booker T. Washington for the annual convention of black farmers. While at Tuskegee he provided a series of lectures to the advanced composition classes. Later that year he also lectured at Atlanta and Fisk universities.

Dunbar in 1899 at the Hoillis Street Theater in Boston, where a notable meeting was held in the interest of Tuskegee Institute, recited several of his poems while on platform with W. E. B. DuBois and Booker T. Washington.

One of the peak points of Dunbar's career was his reception of an honorary Master's degree from Atlanta University. In May of 1899 the Board of Trustees voted to confer upon him the degree of Master's of Arts. This degree was of extreme importance for Dunbar who desired to attend college but was handicapped by his need to care for his mother after his father's death. James Weldon Johnson, another African-American writer, referring to Dunbar at the time of his reception indicated, "the hallmark of distinction was on him... he carried with him that dignity
of humility which never fails to produce a sense of greatness."

Geneva C. Turner, in 1953, published an article in the May 1953, volume sixteen issue of *The Negro History Bulletin*. Turner's thesis argued that many of America's public schools are named after Paul Laurence Dunbar which demonstrates Dunbar's historical significance. Turner's research did not reveal, however that many more institutions, public and private, have been named after Dunbar. Libraries, civic halls, theaters, etc. bear the name of the noted author. More importantly, this trend continued in the 1980's despite the writing of black nationalists scholars in the 1960's.

Editorial reviews from "The Life and Works of Paul Laurence Dunbar" were used to demonstrate that Dunbar was favorably reviewed by both black and white journals during the early twentieth century. Dunbar then cannot be judged based upon mid-twentieth century radical black values, but his contributions must be reviewed within the time periods and constraints in which he lived. Despite such constraints he did not allow himself to become victimized by them. He made an early decision that racial integration was essential for black success. Dunbar effectively crossed the color line but not at the expense of losing racial pride or
failing to protest against unjust racial conditions in the North. Dunbar’s decision and endeavor to become an integrationist is of prime importance to African-Americans as the twenty-first century approaches. Presently African-Americans are debating if the integrationist Civil Rights Movement of the 1960’s was an asset or a liability. On this issue Dunbar will have to be a point of reference.

The Ohio Historical Society in Columbus, Ohio houses the “Paul Laurence Dunbar Collections” which consists of nine rolls of microfilm and over 10,000 items arranged in 23 boxes. An inventory to this collection was developed by Sara S. Fuller, archivist in the library division of the society in 1972.

There are ten series to the microfilm collection. They include:

Series 1: Paul L. Dunbar Correspondence (Rolls 1 to 2)

The Dunbar correspondence includes letters to Paul Laurence Dunbar (1885-1905) and to his mother, Maltilda Dunbar (1873-1934). They are arranged separately. Also included in this correspondence are photographs of Paul and Matilda Dunbar and letters (1892-1903) written by Dunbar to James N. Matthews of Mason, Illinois.
Dunbar's letters to James A. Matthews are important because they consist of the largest segment of his correspondence. Dunbar reveals his private life in these letters. He discusses the problems he had encountered in the pursuit of his career, his despairs, hopes, and ambitions.

After Dunbar published Oak and Ivy (1893) and Majors and Minors (1895) he began traveling throughout the country reading his poetry. As a result, Dunbar received letters and financial aid from William Dean Howells, James Whitcomb Riley, Henry A. Tobey and Charles Thatcher indicating their support and admiration of the young poet.

The letters that Paul L. Dunbar wrote to his mother are also included in this section. They describe Dunbar's social and literary activities, and simultaneously reveals the close bond of affection which existed between them. Correspondence which Matilda received after Dunbar's death in 1906 reveals the affection and esteem that friends and prominent individuals held for him. Dunbar's correspondence with Booker T. Washington is also contained within this section. These letters present Washington's and Dunbar's perceptions on the "state of Negroes in America" as well as
document Dunbar’s authorship of the Tuskegee Institute school song.

The final section of this correspondence contains letters written by Paul L. Dunbar and Brand Whitlock, former mayor of Toledo, Ohio to each other. Dunbar revealed to Whitlock the social proscriptions of living in white America. In one such letter Dunbar writes, "Unless we live our lives of protest, and few of us are willing to do that, we are as guilty as the lynchers of the South-- we are all tarred with the same stick." This letter, and others like it, are significant examples of evidence that I intend to use to challenge the arguments made by black nationalist scholars that Dunbar was not a part of the early twentieth century black protest tradition.

Series 2: Dunbar’s Legal and Financial Records (Rolls 2-3)

Dunbar’s legal documents, (1893-1911), consist of publisher’s contracts and various private papers. The series begins Joshua Dunbar’s (Paul L. Dunbar’s father) military discharge papers. After Johhua’s death Paul and Matilda endeavored to obtain a pension from the government. The pension requests are included in this section of the microfilm collections. Dunbar’s publication contracts which are included in this collection are with Dodd, Mead and
Company. The remainder of the series includes bills and receipts for personal goods and services, cancelled checks, royalty reports from Dodd, Mead and Company, insurance records, savings account books, and hotel and restaurant bills.

Series 3: Paul L. Dunbar Miscellanea (Roll 3)

The miscellaneous items in the Dunbar collection include copies of The Tattler for December 13 and 20 of 1890. The Tattler was published in Dayton by Wilbur and Orville Wright, classmates and lifelong friends of Dunbar. In addition, various achievement certificates, grade reports, recital schedules, calling cards, and biographical material are included in this collection. Finally, a scrapbook entitled, An Appreciation of Matilda Dunbar (May 9, 1926) contains newspaper clipping of the Dunbar family’s significance.

Series 4: Paul L. Dunbar Literary Manuscripts (Rolls 3-4)

Dunbar’s books, poems, and short stories, are included in this section.
Series 5: Paul L. Dunbar's Newspaper Clippings and Scrapbooks (Rolls 4-5)

The newspaper clippings, (1898-1906), consists of book notices and reviews, poems, articles, clippings about Dunbar's death, and news items regarding his health, social and literary activities. This section of the primary documents will be used with E.W. Metcalf's, Paul Laurence Dunbar A Bibliography, which contains complete copies of Dunbar's editorial reviews, to evaluate Dunbar's literary perceptions.

Series 6: Alice Nelson Dunbar Correspondence (Rolls 5-6)

The collection begins with the letters of Paul Laurence Dunbar to Alice Ruth Moore in 1894, letters written while Dunbar was in England in 1897, and later in Washington D.C. They provide an excellent source of documentation for the months Dunbar spent in England. These letters will be used in addition with Eugene Wesley Metcalf's unpublished dissertation, "The Letters of Paul and Alice Dunbar: A Private History" (1973) which contains more than 300 personal letters which reveals Dunbar's deep affection for Alice and additional significant historical information.
Series 7-10: Paul Laurence Dunbar and Alice Nelson Dunbar Correspondence (Rolls 6-9)

This series includes financial records from 1902-1931, bulletins, and newspaper clippings. The diaries kept by Ms. Nelson from 1921-1931 reveals detailed information concerning her marriage to Dunbar. She discusses her husbands political and social activities as well as her own. Likewise she discusses notable friendships with W.E.B. DuBois, Frederick Douglas, James Weldon Johnson, and Adam Clayton Powell, Sr. The Dunbar scrapbook from 1895-1930 consist mainly of newspaper clippings. Included in the scrapbook are Ms. Nelson’s activities as a suffrage worker, and her work for the American Interracial Peace Committee.

The Life and Works of Laurence Dunbar Papers contains most of Dunbar’s published literature as well as literary reviews. It also includes various newspaper articles relating to Dunbar as well as much of the letters of correspondence between Dunbar and other figures such as Frederick Douglass and James Weldon Johnson found in the Paul Laurence Dunbar Papers.
The correspondence between Dunbar and Washington was established by *The Booker T. Washington Papers* edited by Louis Harlan. The W.E. B. DuBois Papers which are on microfilm at The Ohio State University Black Studies Library was used to examine Dunbar's relationship with DuBois as well as the institutions named after Dunbar which DuBois deliberately aligned himself with after Dunbar's death.
CHAPTER I

Approaching the Color Line: Paul Laurence Dunbar's
Childhood, Intermediate, and High School Years
1872-1891

By January 1, 1863, with Lincoln's Emancipation
Proclamation, approximately four million slaves in the
Confederate States were declared free. Even as slaves,
black people had endeavored to conceptualize a lifestyle
outside of the bondage to which they had become accustomed.
However, when it came to acting out their vision of freedom
and independence, their aspirations of freedom finally
caught up with the reality that while they were no longer
chattel slaves, they were second class citizens.

A former Virginia freedman described the newly
emancipated slaves to be: "Like a bird let out of a cage."
He added:

You will know how a bird that has been in
a cage will act when the door is opened;
he makes a curious fluttering for a while.
It was just so with the colored people.
They didn't know at first what to do with
themselves. But they got sobered pretty
soon.
Even in the states that remained in the Union, resentment towards blacks, slave and free, was expressed in the press. The *Cincinnati Enquirer*, a newspaper distributed within the Miami Valley region of Ohio during the nineteenth century, reported: "Slavery is dead, the negro is not, there is the misfortune. For the sake of all parties, would that he were." Other papers including the *Cleveland Leader* reprinted this quote.  

Racial hostility against African-Americans intensified in the North after the Civil War as a result of the increased black population within various states. The most blatant hatred came from lower-class white immigrants who felt that the newly freed blacks would work for lower wages in menial positions—thus presenting an economic threat to them. 

Considering the hostility of many Northerners towards former slaves, to what, then, could freed blacks aspire in a society dominated by whites intent on perpetuating racial domination? In one Virginia household, a former servant expressed her disappointment over the failure of emancipation to allow blacks to cross a color line in which African-Americans would have equal access to goods and services enjoyed by their white counterparts. The realization that despite emancipation, her skin color carried with it a second class status, was a major
disappointment to the former slave. Her former mistress once informed her, "You must not be ashamed of the skin God gave you. Your skin is all right." The former servant replied, "I druther be white." 4

In reality this former slave probably did not literally desire to be a Caucasian but in her own unique way she expressed the despair of former slaves when endeavoring to integrate into American society. In short, blacks were forced to accept the fact that emancipation did not grant them social equality. George G. King, a former South Carolina slave, expressed this point well by stating, "The Master he says we are all free...but it don't mean we is white, and it don't mean we is equal...just equal for to work and earn our own living and not depend on him for no more meats and clothes." 5

Paul Laurence Dunbar, like the former slaves he would write about, would also eventually, but reluctantly, have to face the reality that the place of African-Americans within the United States was not equivalent to that of whites. He was born to a poor family which was less than a decade removed from slavery. Moreover, Dunbar was an African-American of an extremely dark complexion. He was of pure African lineage and the descendent of several generations of slaves. However, despite these apparent
handicaps Dunbar would become one of the few blacks in Dayton to graduate from high school, and to embark upon a career as an international writer. In the years to come, Paul Laurence Dunbar would commit his life to endeavoring to cross the color line which kept black Americans subservient.

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Paul Laurence Dunbar was born in Dayton, Ohio, on June 27, 1872. His roots in Ohio went back to the 1840’s when his great grandmother, Becca Porter, was manumitted by a Dayton abolitionist. Dunbar’s grandmother, Becca Porter’s daughter, came to Dayton in the 1850’s after she had been released from her master—a Kentucky slave holder. Dunbar’s mother, Matilda Glass, was born in Shelbyville, Kentucky around 1844. She was owned by David Glass, a wealthy planter at Shelbyville, until the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation. While a slave Matilda Glass married R. Weeks Murphy, also a slave from the neighboring Murphy plantation. This marriage produced two sons, William T. Murphy, born February 12, 1864, and Robert S. Murphy, born August 1, 1866. After separating from her husband,
Matilda and her two sons moved to Dayton in the Spring of 1866, and moved into her mother's residence at 311 Howard Street. 7

Dayton offered Matilda a new start in life. She earned a living doing laundry work and eventually met Joshua Dunbar. From this second marriage came two children, one was Paul Laurence Dunbar and the other was Elizabeth Dunbar who died when she was two years old. 8

Paul Laurence Dunbar's father, Joshua Dunbar also had roots in Kentucky, for he was born in Garret County Kentucky in 1823. As a slave in Kentucky, he became a plasterer and was allowed to do outside work in order to purchase his freedom. Joshua was an ambitious man. He managed to obtain a copy of the alphabet from his owner's children. By repeating the sounds of the alphabet over continuously and pronouncing the sounds of consonants and vowels he finally learned to read.

Joshua's success at obtaining employment outside of his plantation and learning to read sparked a desire within him to gain freedom. Eventually he ran away from the plantation by escaping into the woods on a dark and rainy night. Prior to leaving the plantation Joshua obtained some "cayenne pepper," which was used by fugitive slaves in order to
deceive hound dogs endeavoring to find them. The heavy pungent odor of cayenne pepper caused the dogs to sneeze, paw at their noses, and sometimes discontinue their search.9

Assisted by Quakers, Joshua managed to escape to Detroit and then onward into Canada. Such Quakers, explained Joshua, were associated with the Underground Railroad, which consisted of black and white abolitionists who ran various rescue "stations" that were established between the North and the South.10 Joshua, upon reaching Canada, continued to read and looked for additional means whereby he could advance his education. Finally he made the decision to use the skill that he learned as a plasterer to support himself financially and studied at night. Eventually he was able to read the newspaper.

It was through the newspaper that Joshua learned of the conflicts between the North and the South which inspired him to leave Canada for America to assist in the emancipation of his black brethren. Although he never learned how to write his name legibly, he managed, during the Civil War, to serve for three years in the Company F 55th Regiment of the Massachusetts Voluntary Infantry under Colonel Norwood Penrose Hallowell, the second regiment of black soldiers to be created in the North.11
By June 5, 1863 when Joshua Dunbar enlisted to serve in the 55th Regiment he was forty years old, stood five feet ten inches tall, and resided in Troy, Ohio. Joshua Dunbar's active service was terminated as a private on June 15, 1863, and on October 28, 1863 he was medically discharged from the military. Joshua Dunbar somehow managed to re-enlist for another three years, finally being promoted to sergeant on January 9, 1864 in the Massachusetts Regiment of cavalrymen. On October 3rd, 1865 he was discharged at Clarksville, Texas, receiving twenty-five dollars per month as a pension.

Joshua Dunbar moved to Dayton Ohio after the Civil War. He eventually met Matilda and they were married in 1871. To support his new family Joshua followed his normal trade as a plasterer. Joshua joined Matilda at the Howard Street residence after they were married and witnessed the birth of their first child, young Paul Laurence Dunbar on June 27, 1892.

The name "Paul" was selected because Joshua perceived that it had a spiritual meaning. Matilda Dunbar initially thought that the name was too old fashioned, but changed her mind when Joshua argued, "Matilda Madam, don't you know that..."
the bible says that Paul was a great man? This child will be great some day and do you honor."15

Eager to fulfill the prophetic words of her husband, Mrs. Dunbar learned to read so she could eventually tutor her son. For a brief period she attended night school. A central part of her reading was the bible and during certain moments she had entertained the idea of young Paul becoming an African Methodist Episcopal Church minister, while at other moments she dreamed of him as a prominent Dayton attorney. Matilda wanted to do all that she could to assist her son in utilizing his talents to his fullest potential. Matilda taught young Dunbar to read at the age of four by teaching him the alphabet and phonetics. In an interview given in 1897 Dunbar reflected upon his early development:

My mother who had no education except what she picked up herself, taught me to read when I was four years old, and my parents being both fond of books, used to read aloud to us in the evening as we sat around the fire. To this I owe a great deal, but, generally speaking, the early influences surrounding me were not conducive to growth, and any development in myself came from fighting against them.16

The social forces affecting Dunbar's early life, excluding his parents and his church, were not positive. Black
Daytonians were overwhelmingly impoverished. Most Blacks found positions in menial jobs which did not offer either remuneration or permanent employment. While Black women normally could find steady employment as maids and cooks, black men were normally not as fortunate. The inability of black men in Dayton to find permanent jobs placed the major financially responsibilities on their spouses, thus causing low self esteem within black men, and in many cases the breakup of families as a result of economic hardships.

Dunbar’s father, for example, never found a permanent job in Dayton, whereas as his wife, Matilda, managed to earn a regular income as a laundress and cook for the city’s white community. Dunbar’s father’s inability to earn a consistent income equivalent to that his wife earned sparked frequent arguments.

Joshua Dunbar was a good educational role model for his son. At times, upon seeing his father read a newspaper or a book, young Paul obtained the reader provided him by his mother and began pronouncing the alphabet by his father’s side. Joshua also told his son stories about the Civil War and life on the slave plantations in Kentucky material that, no doubt, found its way into Dunbar’s later stories.17

Young Dunbar constantly witnessed the reoccurring arguments between his parents, most of which were triggered
by their financial difficulties. Joshua looked for work as a plasterer almost everywhere but he was unable to find a steady job. The family's lack of money, especially considering the fact that Paul's little sister, Elizabeth, was constantly ill and in need of medicine, led to repeated confrontations between Matilda and Joshua. Troubled by these scenes young Paul always left the house when these arguments began.

Whether Joshua Dunbar physically abused his wife during these fights is not known. Quite possibly, Paul Dunbar's later difficulties in behaving properly in his own marriage had roots in these childhood experiences. Finally, in 1875, Joshua became so angry during an argument that he stormed out of the house never to return. Upon leaving his family Joshua moved to the Soldier's Retirement Home in Dayton where he lived off his Civil War pension. Paul visited his father regularly at this residence until his death.

In January, 1876 Matilda petitioned and received a divorce from Joshua Dunbar. She also got custody of Paul. Despite family hostilities, Paul Laurence Dunbar, by 1900, commemorated his father in a poem entitled, "The Colored Soldier (1900)." Honoring his father and additional African-Americans who fought in the Civil War, Dunbar wrote:
I would sing a song heroic
Of these noble sons of Ham
Of the gallant colored soldiers
Who fought for Uncle Sam 21

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After his mother’s divorce from his father, Paul Laurence Dunbar developed an intense devotion and sense of responsibility for Matilda. Matilda Dunbar was a strong woman. She realized that Paul was different from the rest of her children. First of all, he was the only child, with the exception of his younger sister who died prematurely, who was born free. Secondly, she invested many hours with young Paul to equip him with the essential skills necessary for entering primary school—an activity that she had not been able to fulfill with her older sons who were born in slavery. Finally, she knew that Paul was bright. He learned quickly and appeared interested in the stories regarding life on the slave plantations in Kentucky that she recited to him. Matilda therefore decided that she would push young Dunbar to his fullest potential. Matilda purchased books of short stories and poetry by Twain and Longfellow for her son to read during his adolescent years. When possible, she also
provided him with books relating to the history of the Civil War, the South, and slavery. By the time that he was seven she had organized his room to include a desk and several book cases. Matilda never let anyone, including relatives, in young Paul’s room, which was a tradition that she upheld until she died. She felt that her son was destined for greatness and she worked exceedingly hard to do everything possible to ensure his success. She made an early decision that Paul would not only attend Dayton’s public school system, but that he would excel in his studies and graduate. Matilda’s determination that her son would graduate with a high school degree was momentus considering that most of the city’s white high school aged students never proceeded past the ninth grade, and that Dunbar was an impoverished African-American male from a single parented family during the era of Jim Crow. Matilda Dunbar, more than any one else, became the most important force in the life of her son.

Paul usually accompanied his mother everywhere that she went. His mother had developed a friendship network of former slave women who spoke with a southern dialect. Paul remembered their conversations regarding life on the plantation, and would eventually draw on them in his writings. As a child many of the stories that Dunbar
heard regarding plantation lifestyles were told to him by his mother, who did not bear much hostility towards former slave holders.

Matilda Dunbar's unwillingness to project a hostile picture of slavery stemmed from her brief experience as a house servant, which involved less taxing work than the labor performed by a field slave.23 Nonetheless, she saw nothing good in slavery and told one interviewer: "I know for I was in it. It was wicked, inhuman. I never permitted Paul to go South until he became a man and I couldn't help it."24 His mother's stories no doubt led young Dunbar to project an image of slavery which was less oppressive than the incidents described in Uncle Tom's Cabin.25 Dunbar eventually revealed his socialization to a reporter for the Dayton Daily when he stated, "I have heard so many fireside tales of that simple, jolly, tuneful life. Down in the county districts of Kentucky I have seen it all."26

Along with an explanation of the black experience in the "peculiar institution," Dunbar's parents passed on to him a realization that white people, like blacks, came in all types. Abolitionists aided Paul's mother and grandmother to obtain freedom and move to Dayton. Likewise, it was through the efforts of Whites and Blacks in the Underground Railroad that Dunbar's father escaped bondage. Both
parents, then, had reasons to appreciate as well as distrust whites.

Reading became a tradition in the Dunbar family. Before the divorce, Paul’s father, who was a student of history and literature, spent nights reading to the family *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* and *Robinson Crusoe* as well as other books. Dunbar’s first attempt to write poetry was at age six. As he related in one interview:

> My first attempt at rhyming was made when I was six years old. I came across a verse from Wordsworth and a gentleman living in Dayton happening to have that name, I thought it was written by him. This impressed upon my mind, as I crossed the railroad track, in going home from school, I remember trying to put words together having a jingling sound. After that I rhymed continually, my mother writing down my productions and preserving them in pasteboard boxes. My father used to tell her that I was not an ordinary boy, and one of my regrets is that he did not live to realize any of his hopes in regards to me.27

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The Eaker Street African Methodist Episcopal Church, which Dunbar attended and joined by the time that he was twelve, was central to his educational and social development. An annual tradition during Easter and
Christmas at Eaker Street A.M.E. Church was to allow adolescent youth to recite poetry, perform skits, sing songs, or engage in any other talents appropriate for these holiday programs. Such programs were one way that black elders in the church instilled religious morality within teenagers and simultaneously trained future leaders. Dunbar recalled vividly his debut in these circumstances:

What I call my first poetical achievement grew out of an Easter celebration at the Sunday School to which I went, when I composed the verses I had been asked to recite. I was then thirteen years old... 28

The black church became the most important and resourceful institution within the African-American community. Black churches established private colleges and academies to counter segregation, provided refuge for fugitive slaves, and organized benevolent societies to assist newly free blacks in their transition from slavery to freedom. Next to Philadelphia, nowhere in nineteenth century America was the black church in the North more prevalent than the Miami Valley, the region in Ohio where Dunbar was reared. 29

Before and after the American Revolution, the most stable African-American institution, next to the family, was the black church. Blacks were mainly concentrated in the Methodist and Baptist denominations which during the Second
Great Awakening sought to convert both slaves and free blacks. After the American Revolution many Northern states abolished slavery giving rise to a numerous free black population. Such free blacks desired to obtain positions in white controlled evangelical denominations after their conversion. Whereas many white, northern and southern churches willingly admitted blacks as members, they were not willing to grant them positions of leadership as pastors and board members. In response free blacks founded separate autonomous churches. Philadelphia witnessed two of the earliest such movements when Richard Allen founded the African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME), and Absalom Jones founded the Methodist Episcopal Church.

By 1830, the black church movement had spread to Ohio and other regions of the Northwest Territory. Ohio became the episcopal seat of the African Methodist Episcopal Church in 1832 and in 1836 the nation’s first black independent Baptist conference developed within the state. The AME Church, between the end of the Civil War and 1872, increased its membership in Ohio by fifty-five percent.

During the years of Dunbar’s childhood and youth, the African Methodist Episcopal Church was transforming the Miami Valley into a center of higher education for African-Americans. The movement for the higher education
of blacks in America had its origins in the North prior to the Civil War. Black Ohioans were admitted to Western Reserve University in 1833 and to Oberlin College in 1835. In 1847 the African Methodist Episcopal Church founded Union Seminary in Xenia, Ohio for the purpose of educating black ministers. By the early 1850's the Cincinnati Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church was considering the establishment of a black college. This enterprise, which was led by John F. Wright, John T. Mitchell, Charles Elliot, and Mansfield French adopted the name of the Ohio African University. Upon incorporation in 1856, however, the college which was located in the town of Wilberforce approximately five miles from Xenia, received the name of Wilberforce University.33

Wilberforce University, located only twenty miles from Dunbar's home, was dedicated in October 1856 by Rev. Edward S. Thompson, president of Ohio Wesleyan University. Within four years the university was enrolling 207 black students with a majority of them coming from the South. With the outbreak of the Civil War in 1861, the southern students withdrew thus greatly reducing the income of the school. As a result Wilberforce was closed from 1862-1864.34

Officials of the African Methodist Episcopal Church recognized the importance of having an autonomous black
college and proceeded to purchase Wilberforce University. In March 1863 the Board of Trustees of the Cincinnati Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church sold Wilberforce University to Bishop Daniel A. Payne, James A. Shorter, both representatives of the African Methodist Episcopal Church. Bishop Daniel A. Payne assumed the university’s presidency, and a new student body was recruited with a significant number of them coming from the Miami Valley. The African Methodist Episcopal Church, whose members included such prominent nineteenth and early twentieth century leaders as Frederick Douglass, W.E.B. DuBois, John Mercer Langston, Mary Church Terrell, Ida B. Wells Barnett, Daniel A. Payne, and Paul Laurence Dunbar, served to develop the leadership and social skills of blacks as well as to elevate the overall social and political importance of African-Americans. The black church became a power base which assisted African-Americans in becoming self-reliant and politically strong, at least to the extent that they could agitate for the removal of laws that promoted a color line.

Paul Laurence Dunbar would never be a student at Wilberforce. Yet the college’s presence in the Miami Valley was very important to Dunbar’s development. It set an intellectual "tone" for the area’s black community. As a
youth Dunbar undoubtedly met many of Wilberforce's faculty, students, and alumni. These were role models of "learned" Blacks, intellectually sophisticated individuals who demonstrated to young Dunbar the value of a developed mind. Just as Dunbar would later serve as a international role model of the black intellectuals, individuals from Wilberforce University served as role models for him in the local environment.

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Dunbar's brothers Robert and William introduced young Paul to his first experience in formal education when they took him as a visitor into the first grade at the Fifth District school on east fifth street. Paul immediately became attracted to school and once enrolled he repeatedly impressed his first grade teacher with his academic abilities. On one occasion, while endeavoring to teach the class the alphabet, Paul's teacher discovered that he knew and could pronounce each letter as she pointed to it. Paul enjoyed all areas of his elementary school curriculum except mathematics. He felt math to be boring and would much rather spend his time skipping "through the columns in his
spelling book and pick out the ones he wanted to put together, jotting down the rhymes he liked best."

Paul changed school several times as a result of the family relocating. He remained at the fifth district school for two years, until his mother decided that she would move to Magnolia Street, near the county fairgrounds, where she found a small cottage for her family. This relocation required young Paul to attend the Third District school. One year later the Dunbar family moved to Sycamore Street which placed him in the "all black" Tenth District school. The following year the family moved to Scott Street, a dead end road beyond the railroad tracks in Dayton. However, this relocation did not require a change in Dunbar's school since his new residence fell within the tenth district.

While attending the Tenth District school, Paul Laurence Dunbar met William "Bud" Burns. Paul and William became best friends. Paul, who loved the humanities, would become a man of letters whereas William, who became interested in math and science became the first black doctor in Montgomery County admitted to the County Medical Society. Dunbar's academic performance at the various schools he attended was better than average. His report card grades ranged from 85-100, with his lowest grades being in mathematics and his highest in English. He preferred to read and write as well
as to discuss issues which most children his age felt to be too sophisticated.43

Prior to Dunbar's thirteenth birthday he started attending the intermediate school. Chief among his friends there were Orville and Wilbur Wright, a future aviation inventor, whose father performed the wedding ceremony for Joshua and Matilda Dunbar. While at the Dayton intermediate school, Paul was able to present numerous readings of his poetry and short stories at the regular Friday assemblies.44

Samuel C. Wilson, a poet, and Dunbar's white teacher at the intermediate school recognized Dunbar's literary talent. Before he was twelve, Dunbar had written several short stories, which he kept in a box beneath the kitchen sink, including one entitled, "An Easter Ode" which was reviewed favorably by Mr. Wilson.45 Later in his life Dunbar observed, "A teacher at the intermediate school (Mr. Samuel Wilson) under whose care I was placed when I was thirteen years old did more in the beginning to keep the poetic fire within me burning than anyone else....giving me directions to the literary impulse." Dunbar added, "even after I had left his department I often came back to him."46 In another interview Dunbar noted:
I was then thirteen years old, and at that time, Mr. Samuel Wilson, a teacher at the intermediate school which I attended, did much to shape and influence me. He was a wonderful writer of verse, and refined, travelled and wonderfully well read, he criticized my work and encouraged me both to compose and recite.47

Records are not available to explain Mr. Wilson's motivation for taking an interest in Dunbar's educational and professional development. Apparently he was impressed by Dunbar's literary promise, especially considering the fact that he was a black male who was an achiever at a time when most of Dayton's male residents, black or white, were not entering high school. Wilson, then, more than likely decided that Dunbar was willing to work hard to further perfect his literary skills and thereby perceived the lad as a good investment.

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Paul left the intermediate school with an excellent social and academic record. Dunbar had earned high marks in literature and grammar in particular. Dunbar's intermediate school principal indicated that Dunbar was a "kind
gentleman" who possessed a "great personality and good literary talent." Several of Dunbar's teachers added that he was truthful, thoughtful, honest, and committed to literary scholarship.

When Dunbar entered Central High School in 1897, he received a warm reception from his classmates. "The boys were very kind to me" Dunbar remarked. This treatment was especially important, since Dunbar was the only African-American in his class. Dunbar indicated, "After I entered high school the fact of my being the only Negro in my class was a great spur to my ambition." Dunbar's popularity grew with his stay at Central High School. During his sophomore year he was admitted to the Philomathean Society, a literary organization of which he became the president during his senior year. Reflecting back on this experience, Dunbar stated, "...during the second year (at Central High), I was admitted to their literary society, of which I afterward became president. At this time I contributed frequently to the high school paper, later being the editor."

Paul earned his first publication fee of six dollars while serving as editor of the High School Times. He wrote a western dialect story entitled "The Tenderfoot" which was sent to the A.N. Kellog Syndicate in Chicago. Dunbar
became the first African-American to be published by this institution. The Kellogg Syndicate was so impressed with his initial submission that it solicited and published additional stories.

Dunbar was successful in finding additional publishers for his works prior to his high school graduation. Many of Dunbar’s pieces were published in the high school humor magazine, Tomfoolery. This journal, which was edited by classmates Ernest Blumenschein and George Compton, also contained the details of a meeting of the Philomathean Society during which Dunbar led his classmates in debating "Which is the butt end of the goat?" Mr. Watkin’s, Dunbar English teacher, advised him that some of his poetry was good enough to be printed commercially.53 Spurred on by such encouragement, Dunbar sent several poems to the Dayton Herald, which included a poetry section. The Dayton Herald usually did not publish literature from an unknown figure, unless it could compete with the works of Tennyson or Browning, whose poetry was normally featured in the newspaper. The Dayton Herald did not compensate writers for the use of their poetry. However, Dunbar perceived that having his poetry appear in the same publication as the established poets was more important—especially considering that he was a impoverished black teenager who
had not finished high school. In the June 8, 1888 issue of the *Dayton Herald* Paul’s poem "Our Martyred Soldiers" was published on the back page.54 Five days later, on June 12, 1888, an additional poem by Dunbar entitled, "On The River" appeared in the *Herald*. 55

Paul was constantly seeking avenues for publishing his writing. The Wright brother, Paul’s high school friends, who began to publish their first newspaper, the *West Side News*, on a homemade printing press in 1889, soon thereafter solicited material from Dunbar.56 Paul, eager not to forsake the black audience even as a teenager, wondered if a newspaper aimed at a black audience would sell. He suggested the idea of such a newspaper to the Wright brothers, who decided to publish the *Dayton Tattler*, a newspaper marketed to Dayton’s black population, with Dunbar as the editor.57

The *Dayton Tattler*, which was four pages in length, appeared weekly. Dunbar worked very hard to obtain subscribers for the *Tattler*. He was successful in persuading a few black businessmen to purchase advertisements. In addition to original stories and poetry by Dunbar which were included in the paper, the Dayton *Tattler* also covered the local news featuring Dayton’s African-Americans which Dunbar wrote. The initial issue of
the *Tattler* carried a western tale called "The Gambler's Wife", and the second issues promoted a romance mystery entitled "His Bride of the Tomb." None of the stories featured in the paper included black characters or depicted scenes highlighting aspects of black life. Dunbar's mission for the paper was multiple. He wanted to cover black news in Dayton, while simultaneously demonstrating that a black author could write about white characters and build a demand in the African-American communities in the same manner that a white writer could write about blacks and build a demand for this literature within the white community. 58

Dunbar tried hard to find agents to market the paper at five cents a copy. The *Tattler*, Dunbar declared was "an organ representative of the colored population of the city which should go into every family of our race in this state...politically it will represent republicanism and will do all in its power to otherwise promote the interests of the people it represents. It ought to be encouraged ...in its proposed good works." 59 Unfortunately, the *Tattler* lasted only three issues, which included the dates of December 13, 20, and 27, 1890.

The *Tattler* failed because Dunbar could not obtain enough subscriptions to justify its continued publication and because of the depressed financial status of Dayton's
African-American population. The name "Tattler" was selected because Dunbar wanted to imply that it included information which might have been considered as gossip, a marketing strategy which he felt might boost sales among black women. Perhaps Dunbar's marketing strategies could have been improved. For example, the short stories which Dunbar included in the Tattler featured white characters. In addition the major focus of the Tattler was directed towards an intellectual community. Few black Daytonians had an education equivalent to Dunbar. One patron, who signed his name "Afro," felt that the paper was inadequately named. Perhaps "Afro" desired a name that was politically inspired or one that had an afrocentric focus. This subscriber wrote, "I am proud of your bright weekly, but I think it was poorly named. The name will eventually kill it. As a friend we advise you to change the name and it will live."60 Dunbar replied, "No, friend Afro, not even for your sake can we change our name, for it is a good one. What's in a name?"61

Dunbar's failure to build a market for his literature within the black community led him to believe that white alliances were necessary for him to have a financially rewarding career. After all, whites controlled the printing presses and had the financial resources, as the Wright
Brother had demonstrated, to underwrite his literary projects.

Dunbar's motivation in promoting the *Tattler* was not solely to have another avenue for his literature, but it was also political. While Dayton, like other regions of Ohio, had a strong abolitionist tradition, many of the city's black residents suffered from unemployment and underemployment because of segregation. Dunbar saw the *Tattler* as one avenue to combat the virulent racism of segregating African-Americans from white collar professions and limited educational opportunities within the city and state which, however, he did not experience at school.62

Dunbar was grateful to Orville Wright for financing a paper for his black brethren, and the two youths developed a genuine friendship. Dunbar wrote:

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Orville Wright is out of sight  
In the printing business  
No other mind is half so bright  
As his'n is.63
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Orville also considered Dunbar to be his close friend. In a letter to Edward Johnson on January 2, 1934 Orville wrote:
I am particularly interested to know that you are a colored boy. Paul Lawrence Dunbar, the negro poet, and I were close friends in our school days and in the years immediately following. When he was eighteen and I was nineteen, we published a five-column weekly paper for the people of his race; i.e., we published it as long as our financial resources permitted of it, which was not for long!64

In addition to serving as editor of the High School Times, Dayton Tattler, and making contributions to the Dayton Journal and the Westside News Paul Laurence Dunbar fulfilled several other editorial assignments while attending Central High School. Dunbar was recruited by a Mr. Faber to help establish a newspaper in Dayton. Faber offered Dunbar an opportunity to write articles for the Democratic Sheet if he would sell fifty subscriptions to the black residents of Dayton. The fact that Dunbar, who had argued in the Tattler that black Daytonians should support the Republican party, accepted the offer by Faber to write for the Democratic Sheet did not imply that he now allied himself politically with the Democratic party. He was simply eager to find an additional publishing avenue. Young Dunbar canvassed the east and west sides of the city in search of subscriptions. Within six weeks Dunbar had surpassed Faber's challenge with a list of sixty subscribers
Instead of the required fifty. Despite this accomplishment, Faber avoided Dunbar and refused to award him editorship as promised. In response Dunbar wrote:

After having worked the circulation of your paper up...and having placed the paper in a condition to increase steadily its circulation, I find that you willingly and persistently fail to keep your part of the agreement. Whether your action is either honest or gentlemanly, is not for me to say. Suffice it to say that your action added to the fact that I have accepted the editor-in-chiefship of the High School Times, causes me to resign. Make what you please of the sixty subscribers which you, to use a polite word, induced me to get.

Dunbar scolded Faber for his behavior, sarcastically indicating that because Faber’s family came from an impoverished background his deceitfulness was all the more unacceptable. Dunbar added:

I heard and knew you, Mr. Faber, when you were on the Record years ago. I knew your mother when you were exceedingly, yes, even distressingly, poor. And I judge that it is no more than right that you, after having struggled up through adversity to a tolerably fair place in the world, should try to crush and deceive people who can ill afford to lose, though not so poverty stricken as you were when I knew you in past years...I could not afford to walk and wear out my shoes getting news for nothing. Although by the middle of my June vacation I would have the circulation of the paper up very high as
my hands your little Democratic Sheet was becoming very popular.

Paul Laurence Dunbar was not a passive person. When offended, especially regarding his literary work, he frequently used sarcasm to strike back at his offender, as he had done with Mr. Faber. On another occasion Miss Coons, Dunbar’s English teacher for whom he had written a poem which she did not regard as polished, decided to make Dunbar’s literary flaws known to his classmates. Dunbar politely but angrily responded:

After receiving carefully your action in making of my miserable and most deplorable mistake public property, I am in some doubt as to whom an apology is due, whether to myself or you. But I am hoping that you will explain my case to the young ladies to all of whom you made well known my blunder and before whom you place me in a false light... I have not been so foolish as to expose my own blunder by putting that poem on exhibition, but if you desire it, you have only to say the word and I will go to any extreme to please you, even to nailing it to a public wall for public inspection... I hope you will not be offended if I had tried to be very frank and plain with you and it is my earnest hope that you will feel as much pleasure in showing this letter to your confidential friends, that is, the whole first and second year classes, as you felt in showing the others.

Yours
In equal indignation
Paul L. Dunbar
When Dunbar graduated from Central High School he was regarded by the faculty and students alike as a scholar who had great potential. He was the only black student to graduate in his class. Dunbar battled the odds that were against him. As a black male it was not expected that he would finish high school. Most children of high school age, black or white, did not finish high school since such degrees were not a requirement to obtain the jobs that they would most likely perform, and most did not expect to enter college. Most of the students who made the decision not to finish high school were white males who usually worked in their father's business or depended upon their father's network system to establish jobs for them. Black males usually did not obtain a high school degree because it was economically essential that their income help stabilize their families. For example, Dunbar's older brothers had dropped out earlier to seek employment. His brothers' income was utilized to subsidize their mother's earnings. However, Dunbar was not only able to finish high school, but he managed to do it in style. He had held several academic as well as social posts and had gained the confidence of his teachers, classmates, and community. He did well in most
subjects except algebra, which he passed, but detested. His best performances were in literature and history.

On June of 1891 citizens throughout Dayton came to the Grand Opera House to attend the high school graduation. The class of 1891 was the largest class yet to graduate from Central High School. The newspapers referred to this class as the "Banner Class." Paul Laurence Dunbar was selected to write the school song for his graduating class. The song he composed included the following words:

Why stirs with sad alarm the heart, 
For all who meet must some day part
So, let no useless cavil be
True wisdom bows to God’s decree

The breezes take it up, and bear
The loud refrain on wings of air.
And to the skies, the sad notes swell
Of this our last farewell, farewell.

The curtains on stage parted and there appeared the forty-three graduating seniors with the girls wearing white dresses pinned with flowers and the boys wearing dark suits. Absent from the stage however was Paul’s best high school friend Orville Wright. Orville, who became bored with classes, ended his education at Central High during the winter prior to the spring graduation and built a printing press in his back yard for the purpose of developing a newspaper.
Matilda Dunbar, Paul Laurence Dunbar’s only relative who attended the graduation ceremony, fastened her eyes upon her son with joy as he stood among his white counterparts. Paul’s brothers Robert and Bud were not present. However the excitement of his graduation overshadowed their absence. Also present at the graduation ceremony were the principal of Central High School Charles B. Stivers, the superintendent of public instruction, W. J. White, as well as thirteen faculty members.73

Dunbar graduated number thirty-eight in his class, however; this class rank is not reflective of his literary talent nor his overall high school performance.74 His grades in Algebra were not the best. In a poem he wrote:

...for all the things I ever had in Algebra were very bad.
My lessons aren’t included here
And over them I shed many a tear,
But such is life and such is school
And such is Algebra the tool. 75

Paul’s high school Algebra teacher, Alice Jennings, awarded him a certificate of proficiency in Algebra with an average of seventy-seven. This certificate was signed by his principal, Charles B. Stivers on June 21, 1887.76 However in subjects more closely related to the humanities, Paul excelled. For example, during the quarter ending June 20,
1890 Paul received a proficiency grade of 100 in Literature, 92 in Psychology, 86 in Greek, and an overall grade of 100 in the English/Humanities department. One year earlier, during the quarter ending June 1889, he had received a term grade of 97 in Literature, 83 in Latin, 81 in Chemistry, and a 93 overall average in the English/Humanities department. On June 25, 1889 Paul Laurence Dunbar was awarded a "Testimonial of Proficiency in Physics" with an average proficiency of 85.6 signed by his principal Charles B. Stivers, who was also the instructor for this course.

Dunbar graduated from high school with expectations of becoming a noted author. After all, his experiences suggested to him, despite his awareness that many blacks in nineteenth century America were victims of discrimination, that racial integration for him into the American mainstream was achievable. He also felt that such achievements would only occur through the assistance of white allies. Dunbar, who remembered the tales of his father’s and mother’s escape from slavery with the assistance of abolitionists, also felt that white allies were essential to his success. Dunbar indeed was correct in his analysis. Dunbar desired that a black newspaper would be developed for Dayton’s African-American population. However before such an operation could occur he had to convince his white friends--
Orville and Wilbur Wright--to finance this project. The inability of Dayton's African-American population to support such a project reassured Dunbar that he could only build a national market for his literature through the utilization of the white press. Dunbar was also able to develop white allies among various teachers. He was able to benefit from the literary expertise of his intermediate and high school English teachers who criticized his work in many cases prior to its presentation. Dunbar's high school English teacher made the initial suggestion that he submit his poetry to the Dayton Journal. Dunbar's awareness of being the only black student in his class at Central High School, his success in playing a key role in various school-wide literary organizations, and his acceptance by his classmates despite his race, served as a major psychological boost for him.

Along with school, the black church and family were also vital institutions to Dunbar's intellectual development. Eaker Street African Methodist Episcopal Church provided Dunbar with his initial audience for making oratorical presentations. Dunbar's parents instilled within him a love for reading. Dunbar's desire to read novels and various literary works at an early age shaped his writing skills, developed his interest in literature, and prompted his decision to become a noted author.
Despite Dunbar's ambition and preparation to become a writer, after graduating from high school he was forced to face a color line, which excluded him from the American mainstream that he had managed to enter during his days at Central High School. Dunbar, who was unable to attend college due to his family's poor financial status, set out to find employment in Dayton as a journalist for a newspaper. He could have possibly attended Wilberforce University, a black college located near his home, but there was not a professor on the faculty that had achieved national status in literature that could sponsor Dunbar's career. Dunbar soon discovered that while newspaper firms in Dayton might publish the poetry of an African-American, they certainly were not willing to employ one on a permanent basis. In fact, no one would employ him in a job that required him to use his intellectual ability. Dunbar, out of desperation, decided to work for the National Cash Register Company as a loader, yet his frail body was too weak to handle such demands. Afterwards, he was employed as an elevator boy in the Callahan building at a salary of four dollars weekly--a salary which was substantially less than his white classmates earned.
dilemma of deciding how he would embark upon a career as a writer in a society which appeared to be so unfair.
Endnotes Chapter I


3 *Cleveland Leader*, May 22, 1865.


7 Ibid.


10 Gould, 33-37.

11 Gould, 52-55.


15 Gould, 15.
16 *Dayton Journal*, July 16, 1897.
17 LW Dunbar Papers, Roll No. 3
18 Ibid.
19 Gould, 16

20 Legal and Financial Documents, Dunbar Papers, Roll No. 2. See also Department of Interior Records, Bureau of Pensions, Washington, D.C., pp. 1091, January 28, 1918. Matilda Dunbar, on January 25, 1917 petitioned to receive a pension based upon Joshua Dunbar’s service during the Civil War. Matilda’s claim was rejected based upon the ruling that she was not the legal widow of Joshua Dunbar since she divorced him on January 9, 1875.


22 Interview with Matilda Dunbar, LW Dunbar Papers, Roll No. 3.
23 Ibid.
24 Ibid.
25 Interview with Paul Laurence Dunbar, LW Dunbar Papers, Roll No. 3.

26 *Dayton Daily*, July 16, 1897.
27 *Dayton Journal*, July 16, 1897.

28 Interview with Paul Laurence Dunbar, LW Dunbar Papers, Roll No. 3.

29 Certificate of Membership, Eaker Street African Methodist Episcopal Church, LW Dunbar Papers, Roll No. 3.


Ibid.

George, 116-117.

Frederick A. McGinnis, *A History and Interpretation of Wilberforce University* (Blanchester: Ohio, 1941), 24-38.

Ibid. p.56-81 McGinnis discusses the uniqueness of the "Miami Valley" in establishing autonomous educational, civic, religious, and political institutions. This aspect of McGinnis' argument is supported by Hattie O. Brown's *Pen Pictures and Pioneers of Wilberforce* (Xenia:1937), 33-41

Payne, 103. Payne mentioned that several African-American biographical figures, during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, who were members of the African Methodist Episcopal Church agitated for the removal of the color line in America. Such members mentioned by Payne included Frederick Douglass, John Mercer Langston, Mary Church Terrell, Ida B. Wells Barnett, and Paul Laurence Dunbar along with himself.

Gould, 28-37.

Gould, 36.

Gould, 24.

Gould, 36.

Gould, 37.
42 Charlotte Reese Conover, *Some Dayton Saints and Prophets*.

43 Grade Report, LW Dunbar Papers, Roll No. 3.

44 Interview with Paul Laurence Dunbar, LW Dunbar Papers, Roll No. 3.

45 Gould, 48.

46 Interview with Paul Laurence Dunbar, unidentified newspaper clipping, Arnold Scrapbook, Dunbar Papers, Roll No. 3.

47 Interview with Paul Laurence Dunbar, LW Dunbar Papers, Roll No. 3.

48 Grade Report, LW Dunbar Papers, Roll No. 2.


50 Interview with Paul Laurence Dunbar, Unidentified newspaper clipping, Arnold Scrapbook, Dunbar Papers, Roll No. 4.

51 Ibid.

52 Ibid.

53 Ibid.

54 *Dayton Herald* June 8, 1888.

55 *Dayton Herald* June 12, 1888.

56 *West Side News*, LW Dunbar Papers, Roll No. 4.

57 *Dayton Tattler*, December 20, 1890.

58 Ibid.

59 Ibid.

59 Ibid. December 13, 20, and 27, 1890.

60 Ibid. December 20, 1890.
61 Ibid. December 27, 1890.

62 Interview with Paul Laurence Dunbar, Schromburg Collection, LW Dunbar Papers, Roll No. 3.

63 Arnold Scrapbook 1886-1996, Dunbar Papers, Roll No. 3.


65 Interview with Paul Laurence Dunbar, Dunbar Papers, Microfilm Edition, Roll No. 3.

66 Dunbar to Faber, June 9, 1890, Dunbar Papers, Roll No. 3.

67 Ibid.

68 Dunbar to Miss. Coons, Central High School, 1890, Dunbar Papers, Roll No. 3.

69 Class of 1891 Central High School Graduation Program, LW Dunbar Papers, Roll No. 3.

70 Ibid.

71 Ibid.

72 Ibid.

73 Annual School Report of the Board of Education for the School Year Ending August 31, 1886, LW Dunbar Papers, Roll No. 2.

74 Ibid.

75 School Records, Dunbar Papers, Roll No. 3.

76 Ibid.

77 Ibid.

78 Ibid.

79 Interview with Paul Laurence Dunbar, LW Dunbar Papers, Roll No. 3.

80 Ibid.
CHAPTER II

Standing at the Color Line: The Early Development of Paul Laurence Dunbar’s Professional Writing Career 1891-1895

Paul Laurence Dunbar’s early years provided him with a favorable idea of race relations in Ohio. Upon graduating from high school in 1891, however, Dunbar faced his first sharp and bitter taste of overt racial discrimination. He had hoped to find clerical work in a lawyer’s office or on a newspaper staff—the type of work his education certainly entitled him to, but nothing of the kind was forthcoming. Consequently Dunbar had to settle for a job as an elevator boy in the Callahan Building in Dayton. Despite Dunbar’s inability to initially find a job that would challenge his intellectual ability, he continued to contribute poems and short stories to local newspapers.

Dunbar’s fate changed in the summer of 1892 when he received an invitation to deliver a poetry reading at the Western Association of Writer’s meeting in Dayton. Dunbar’s former teacher, Mrs. Truesdale, who served on the program committee of this organization, scheduled Dunbar on the program. Mrs. Truesdale’s assistance reflected the fact that
In the early 1890's Dunbar continued to make interracial alliances, which came to include the noted writers James Whitcomb Riley and James Newton Matthews. Dunbar, however, did not gain full acceptance into the literary profession until he was "discovered" by William Dean Howells in 1896.

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The 1890's were among the most difficult years for African-Americans. As C. Vann Woodward has noted, in 1890 "the demand for Jim Crow legislation was rising" in America.1 The first Mohonk New York Conference, which convened in 1890, brought together an assortment of influential white clergymen, politicians, and educators whose mission was to define the "Negro Problem." Various speakers concluded that the major problem with the state of African-Americans in the United was that blacks as a group lacked racial pride and were thereby unwilling to become productive citizens. As a result blacks were lazy individuals who were more concerned with making love than obtaining financial security. The white sociologists contended that the absence of black men in African-American families was one of America's worst social problems. Their absense led to black women becoming the heads of households,
and contributed to a growing population of black children who would live their lives in poverty. Black men became irresponsible as freedmen because they were socialized to desert their families during slavery. In short, the convention speakers concluded that slavery had destroyed the black family, which consequently led to the deteriorated condition of black Americans. These speakers also concluded that African-Americans lacked the initiative to lift themselves from their poverty stricken status, thus becoming the white man’s burden. Historian Herbert Gutman indicated that:

No more prestigious group of northern and southern whites had come together to discuss the Afro-American condition than those gathered in upstate New York. With rare but important exception speaker after speaker blamed blacks’ difficulties on blacks themselves. (Such speakers concluded) the negro today is the product of his sad and dismal past...He has no history and never has been a history maker. 2

The decade of the 1890’s were also marked by the prevailing beliefs that black economic and social mobility in America had to be limited. Even before Paul Laurence Dunbar began his literary career, a wave of white racist authors had reinforced the white popular belief that African-Americans
were possessors of a warped character, which they inherited from their heathenish African past. Sterling Brown had written that:

The real world inhabited by poor rural and urban southern ex-slaves and their children between 1880 and the start of the vast northward migration after 1900 was invisible to nearly all observers. Partly that is explained by the increasing popularity in the 1880's and 1890's of the belief that essential restraining influences on unchanging Africans had ended with the emancipation, causing a moral and social retrogression among the ex-slaves.

Despite the fact that white America knew little of black life and culture at this time several so-called authorities on black life developed sizable audiences and presented an image and history of black Americans that captured the mass consciousness of the nation. During the 1890's the demand for literature which projected blacks in the minstrel manner was at its peak. Minstrel shows such as "Little Black Sambo," "Rufus Rafus," and "All Coons Look Alike to Me" were reflective of society's condescending attitude toward African-Americans. According to Donald Bogle, the noted Thomas Alva Edison "proved to be a pioneer in the exploitation and exploration of this type of 'coon' when he ... photographed some blacks as interesting side..."
Historian Larner Ziff referred to the era of the 1890s as "The Betrayal of the Negro." When the American reader was given a choice, the pastoral image was selected in an endeavor to return to the "good old days", prior to the Civil War, before regional, ethnic, and cultural differences were accentuated, or better stated, "when blacks knew their place." 6

The 14th, and 15th amendments which had been passed during the era of Reconstruction were severely challenged during the 1890's. As a result "Jim Crow" laws developed throughout the South to ensure that blacks would not enjoy the basic political rights earlier granted to them. The Jim Crow laws, coupled with the actions of vigilante groups, were effective in preventing blacks from exercising full citizenship rights, and assuring whites that their desires for racial supremacy would be realized. As a result racial hatred toward African-Americans spread. During the 1890's, for example, there were more than 2,000 lynchings in the Southern states with Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana leading in these organized murders. 7

The Northern states were not exempted from racial tensions during the 1890's. Racial discrimination intensified in the north as the black population within
Northern cities increased. John Hope Franklin indicated that blacks were often attacked even in Northern cities, especially Philadelphia and New York. "On several occasions" Franklin added:

white citizens dragged Negroes off the street cars with cries of 'Lynch him! Kill him!' Even in midwestern towns white feared that the unlimited migration of Blacks would result in miscegenation. ...Some towns tolerated them, other not. Syracuse, Ohio forbade any negroes to settle there, while several towns in Indiana, including Lawrenceburg, Salem, and Ellwood, did not permit any Negro residents within their limits. 8

Dayton Ohio, where Dunbar was reared was a unique community. During Paul Laurence Dunbar's adolescent and teenage years, Dayton was a city of approximately sixty thousand inhabitants of which five thousand were African-Americans. During the pre-Civil War years Dayton was a stop for the underground railroad, and was a leading center of abolitionist activities. 9 Historically, free blacks had resided there since the 1830's. In the 1890's, many black Daytonians were economically self-sufficient, engaging in a number of trades and manufacturing activities. 10

While the economical, political, and social status of African Americans in Dayton was less than desirable, it was
significantly better than the status of blacks in many other Northern and Southern communities during this same era. The long tradition of abolitionism in Dayton combined with the presence of Wilberforce University nearby, had helped to create an environment where a Paul Laurence Dunbar could attend a predominantly white elementary, intermediate, and high school and there receive a positive image of race relations.

Paul Laurence Dunbar believed that upon graduating from high school he would have a promising career in some aspect of the literary profession. His high school experience as the editor of the school newspaper as well as president of the Phlomaethan Literary Society, coupled with his success at publishing in several Ohio newspapers, suggested to him that there would be no reason why he could not do equally as well after graduation. While Dunbar knew that African-Americans in Dayton, despite the city's abolitionist heritage, were subjected to racial discrimination, he did not feel that he personally would have a problem in securing the type of employment that he desired.

Dunbar also wanted to obtain a college education. However, he perceived that it was not financially possible due to his need to support his mother, Matilda, who had sacrificed so much for him as a youngster. Dunbar later
observed, "I have always had the desire to go to college but must confess to having little faith in the 'on flow'ry beds of ease' method. It would do me good to be able to fight my own way through a good school but if it be denied me, why all I can do is to resign myself."12 Dunbar, in an 1895 letter to a Dr. Tobey wrote, "I hope, if possible, to spend the coming year in college, chiefly to learn what to study in order to cultivate my vein. But I have my home responsibilities and unless I am able to make sufficient to meet them I shall be unable to accomplish my purpose."13 Dunbar, while in Chicago in 1899, stated to a friend, "there are two things I have wanted badly that I could not have, college and work on a newspaper. I wanted to go to Harvard and study under A. S. Hill. I studied Hill's rhetoric and I wanted to study English under the man who wrote it. But I had a mother to support and I could not leave my mother in Dayton."14

Dunbar could only find menial employment after graduation. His initial job was with the National Cash Register Company as a loader. Dunbar quit this job after a few days due to the heavy lifting requirements as well as his desire to exercise his brain instead of his back. Eventually Dunbar found a job as an elevator boy in the Callahan Building, which housed a bank. While this job did
not present Dunbar with the amount of income that he
desired, it was much less physically taxing than his
previous position with the National Cash Register Company.
Moreover, Dunbar perceived that he could continue to write
poetry and short stories during slow periods at work.

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Dunbar's fate changed significantly in 1892 when his
former teacher, Mrs. Truesdale, a member of the Western
Association of Writers, secured for him a slot on the
program to deliver a welcome poem at the organization's
upcoming convention in Dayton. Dunbar was the first
African-American author to attend or to be included on the
program of this group. Dunbar indicated that the invitation
to make the presentation was crucial in the development of
his career in that various authors, who had built a
"national reputations", could witness that a "Negro if given
a fair chance could write literature well enough to rival
any white author."15

The Western Association of Writers consisted mainly of
writers from Indiana although many of its members came from
other western states. Prior to its 1892 meeting in Dayton,
all meeting were held in Indiana. This organization was
formed in 1886. Meredith Nicholson, in his *The Hoosiers*, states that the success of several Indiana writers, especially Maurice Thompson and James Whitcomb Riley, led to the desire to sponsor an annual conference for western writers. Journals such as the *Locomotive*, the first Indianapolis literary magazine, which flourished before the days of Thompson and Riley, published an abundance of literature written by writers from Indiana. According to Jacob P. Dunn, this journal contained "a wealth of poetical aspiration that is fairly startling. There was poetry of every class, from the most pathetic obituary to the most frivolous doggeral and on all subjects from 'Autumn' Writer to 'Pogues Run'."16 A few years after the appearance of *Locomotive*, periodicals such as the *Saturday Herald* and the *Sunday Journal*, appeared in Indianapolis, and encouraged local writers to submit thier literature. The effect was "like that of a bed of flower seeds responding to warm rains", according to Dunn. There were "generous crops of poetry and essays with occasional friction."17 During the summer of 1885 Mrs. Maria Louise Andrews, a writer from Cornersville, Indiana suggested to Mr. Ochlitree, the editor of the *Saturday Herald* that a conference be established for the purpose of bringing together his "contributors for a more intimate acquaintance."18 This idea led James Newton
Matthews, H.W. Taylor, and Richard Lew Dawson to advocate, "a gathering of the poets of the Wabash Valley in some convenient city or resort, for the purpose of enjoying whatever pleasure might result from a meeting so novel and unique." Together Richard Lew Dawson and Maria Louise Andrews published the following call in the Chicago Current to the literary profession:

A call is hereby extended to all writers of verse and general literature, and especially to the writers of the Wabash valley and the adjacent states, to meet in convention in June, 1886, at the city of Terre Haute or Indianapolis, Ind. The objects of this meeting are as follows:

1. To form an association of the literary profession for mutual strength, profit, and acquaintance.

2. To discuss methods of composition, and all topics pertaining to the advancement of literature in America.

3. To produce, publish a representative volume of western authors from the miscellaneous poems, stories and sketches read during the convention or festival.

A full attendance of all writers is earnestly desired in hope that the success of this gathering may result in permanent good to American literature and the welfare of its professional workers.
Please make known at once your purpose to attend, choice of location, and the character of your contributions.

Dunbar worked as an elevator operator after graduating from high school in 1890 and continued to write literature in his spare time. However, he did not receive an invitation to present his poetry to the Western Association of Writers until 1892. First of all, although the writers' conferences were held in Indiana prior to 1892, Dunbar did not have a sponsor to secure a position for him on the program. Secondly, Indiana, a state that bordered Ohio, was noted as being the most conservative state in the midwest, and some groups such as the Quakers felt that race hate towards the Negro was more intensified there than in many of the states in the deep south. Despite the fact that Ohio also had its share of race hate groups, Dayton had a strong tradition of being an abolitionist city, and Dunbar was regarded as an "exceptional" black who defied the myth that blacks had limited intellectual abilities. For these reasons, Dayton was the perfect setting and to introduce Paul Laurence Dunbar to the Western Association of Writers. In this context, Mrs. Truesdale, also from Dayton, and Dunbar's former teacher, secured a position on the program for Dunbar to read a welcome poem which he wrote. Dunbar, who had
continued to write literature as an elevator operator, managed to make his first presentation before an exclusively white audience outside of high school classmates. Dunbar presented the following welcome poem at the Dayton conference:

TO THE WESTERN ASSOCIATION OF WRITERS

"Westward the course of empires takes it way,"
So Berkeley said, and so to-day
The men who know the world still say.
The glowing West, with bounteous hand,
Bestows her gifts throughout the land,
And smiles to see at her command
Art, science, and the industries,—
New fruits of new Hesperides,
So, proud are you who claim the West
As home land; doubly are you blest
To live where liberty and health
Go hand and hand with brains and wealth
So here's a welcome to you all,
Whate'er the work your hands let fall,—
To you who trace on history's page
The footprints of each passing age;
To you who tune the laureled lyre
To songs of love or deeds of fire;
To you before whose well-wrought tale
The cheek doth flush or brow grow pale;
To you who bow the ready knee
And worship cold philosophy,—
A welcome warm as Western wine,
And free as Western hearts, be thine.
Do what the greatest joy insures,-
The city has no will but yours! 21

Dunbar, who learned the art of effective presentation
from his recitals at Eaker Street African Methodist
Episcopal Church and from the assistance of former school
teachers, managed to impress the audience with his unique
method of delivery as well as the "originality" of his
writing style. However this audience was most impressed by
the fact that not only was Dunbar black, but he was so dark
that it was rather obvious that he did not have an ounce of
white blood in his body. Dunbar's ability to write such
poetry was also impressive, but most puzzling was the
awareness that a person of his color "could produce a thing
of such evident merit." 22

Dunbar's participation in the 1892 Western Association
of Writers Conference in Dayton brought him into contact
with James Newton Matthews and James Whitcomb Riley, two of
America's most noted authors during the late nineteenth and
early twentieth centuries. Dunbar favorably impressed these
authors and would eventually gain national attention due to
their endorsement.
James Newton Matthews, after hearing Dunbar's presentation, was tremendously impressed with Dunbar's literary prose, especially considering the fact that he was black. After the conference, Matthews wrote a letter to the Indianapolis Journal, which was reprinted throughout the United States, boasting about Paul Laurence Dunbar, the gifted young writer. Matthews stated:

A month or two ago, while in Dayton, O., I attended a meeting of the Western authors. About half way down the informal program the presiding officer announced the reading of a poem by Paul Dunbar. Just the name for a poet, thought I. Great was the surprise of the audience to see stepping lightly down the aisle between the rows of fluttering fans and the assembled beauty and wit of Dayton, a slender Negro lad, as black as the core of Cheops's pyramid. He ascended the rostrum with the coolness and dignity of a cultured entertainer and delivered a poem in a tone 'as musical as is Apollo's lute.' He was applauded to the echo between the stanzas, and heartily encored at the conclusion. He then disappeared from the hall as suddenly as he entered it, and many were the whispered conjectures as to the personality of the man, and the originality of his verses, none believing it possible that one of his age and color could produce a thing of such evident merit.
As soon as the session ended, Matthews began to search for Dunbar in order to obtain additional information.

Matthews added:

After repeated inquiries I succeeded in locating the rising laureate of the colored race and called upon him. He was an elevator boy in one of the downtown business blocks. I found him seated in a chair on the lower landing, hastily glancing at the July Century, and jotting down notes on a handy pencil tablet. Not having time to converse with me there, he invited me into the elevator, and during a few excursions from floor to floor, I gathered from him the following facts: His parents were both slaves, his father having escaped into Canada from the South. His mother was living in Dayton and is supporting her and himself on the pitiful sum of $4 per week. He is 19 years of age. In reply to a question, he stated that he had been writing rhymes since he was thirteen. His favorite authors are Whitter and James Whitcomb Riley. Before leaving I requested that he send me some of his verses in manuscript. Yesterday I received from him a letter enclosing the promised sample of verse. His spirit seems to be broken. 24

The letter which Matthews received from Dunbar was dated July 26, 1892. In it Dunbar wrote:
Nearly a month is a long time to take in fulfilling my promises, but through your knowledge of the difficulties under which I labor, you can easily forgive my negligence. You will find enclosed herewith a few of my rhymes, two of which have been published—Ode for Memorial Day and the Easter Poem.

My hopes are no brighter than when you first saw me here, I am getting no better, and, what would be impossible, no worse. I am nearer discouraged than I have ever been. Can you blame me for doubting my ability when I have never been able to sell a single poem to any paper? But enough of myself and my disappointments; suffice it that I was pleased with one thing, and that, Pfrimmer's Driftwood... There could scarcely be a better thing than the development of a distinctly western school of poets, such as Riley represents. This may come to pass in the literary millennium, when Chicago becomes a great publishing center, as foreseen by Dr. Ridpath. Until that time the nightingales and thrushes will sing so loud that the modest piping of a homely every day meadow-lark cannot be heard.25

Matthews, after reviewing Dunbar's literature, considered him to have unusual talent and concluded that the only factor which kept Dunbar from being regarded as a national writer was his race. Matthews, who was convinced that there was not another scholar of Dunbar's age who could rival his literature, wrote:
Poor Dunbar! He deserves a better fate. Dayton the termains of the underground railway, should be proud of him, and yet with all of his natural brilliancy and capability for better things, he is chained like a gallery slave to the ropes of a dingy elevator at starvation wages. Show me a white boy of 19 who can excel, or even equal, lines like these.26

Matthews, publicly reprimanded Dayton for reducing Dunbar to such menial employment as an elevator operator. He was convinced that Dunbar was brilliant and had he been white no doubt the city’s officials would have done all within their influence to insure that his skills were effectively utilized.

After reading Matthews’ review, Paul Laurence Dunbar recognized that he had developed an additional ally in this author. Dunbar felt that his opportunity for a successful literary career was clearly in reach when Matthews not only wrote a review which informed the nation of his literary talents, but also wrote Dunbar personally encouraging him on.27

Dunbar responded to his newly acquired “friend” with the following letter:
Dear Friend:

For friend you have proven to be; your letter found me still chained to the ropes of my dingy elevator; but it came like a ray of light into the darkness of my discouragement. I want to thank you as much for that kindly, strengthening letter as for your excellent article to the Journal...They will both do me good. The letter is giving strength to my soul and the article is paving the way for a venture which I am now ready to undertake ...I had determined to publish a number of my poems in book form and try to sell them and I would not have wanted a better aid than the write up you gave me. I think it will be the mean of my selling from fifty to a hundred volumes in Indianapolis. I am not going into this without due consideration nor am I rushing blindly into expense; I will not print a single volume until I have written assurance of sufficient sales to cover all expenses, in the names of subscribers. It will cost me two hundred dollars to run out one thousand volumes and I will sell them at a dollar a copy. That I should make a large profit is of less importance than I should pave the way for better things.

Dunbar also began receiving letters from various parts of the country for poetry readings. He related to Matthews' his growing popularity:

The Chicago News has been publishing some of my verses lately, among which was 'The Ol' Tunes.' This was very widely copied, the American Press Association putting in their column of 'Gems in Verse.'...I received a letter from a stranger in Valley Falls R.I. He says he is a writer and has heard a whisper of my 'sweet gift,' and that if I send him my 'photo and some ten or a dozen of my best poems' he will 'write articles about me in the New York and Boston papers.' His name is John R. Meader. Have you ever heard of him? Do you think it safe to send him a sketch of my life and other things he asks for? I have never heard his name and know absolutely nothing about him.29

Dunbar also appeared with the famous Fisk University Jubilee Singers when they came to Dayton. Before an audience of over six hundred at the YMCA, he read several poems. In addition Dunbar began receiving numerous letters from around the country expressing interest in his literature.

Dunbar recognized that his fame as a writer had increased due to Matthews endorsement. Despite this awareness, he wanted to be assured that the motivation behind this fame stemmed from the quality of his prose and poetry rather than the color of his skin. In a letter to
Matthews he wrote, "I cannot help being overwhelmed by self doubt. I hope there is something worthy in my writing and not merely the novelty of a black face associated with the power to rhyme that has attracted attention." Matthews reassured Dunbar that his poetry stood on its own merits and deserved recognition and publication. Matthews simultaneously encouraged young Dunbar to perfect himself as a poet by continually revising his work and to "keep plugging away." Dunbar later wrote a poem based upon Matthews advice entitled, "Keep A-Pluggin' Away."32

Despite Matthew's reassurance to Dunbar that his poetry stood upon its own literary merits, some of Dunbar's patrons supported him primarily because they felt he could be a great encouragement to African-Americans. A philosopher from Montreal named Mr. Ross, for example, sent Matthews twenty dollars to buy a collection of poetry books for Dunbar. Ross wrote:

I consider that a colored poet of sufficient ability to make a name for himself would do more to enlighten and encourage the ambition of the multitude of colored people in America than almost anything else that can be done for them. They would have someone to look up to—one whose pen would diffuse many wholesome truths to the people of his race, and would imbue others with the desire to emulate his success.33
James Whitcomb Riley, the most prominent member of the Western Association of Writers, became an ardent supporter of Paul Laurence Dunbar after reading Matthew's review in the Indianapolis Journal. Riley was always the center of attention at the Western Association of Writer's conventions. His popularity was not only due to his reputation as a writer, but to his friendly personality and his humor.34

In 1890 Riley was regarded as the most popular poet in the United States.35 Riley, like Matthews, was immensely impressed with Dunbar's potential as a writer. On November 27, 1892 after hearing of Dunbar's "unique gift of prose", Riley decided to write the young black lad:

See how your name is traveling, my chirping friend. And it's a good sound too, that seems to imply the brave fine spirit of a singer who should command wide and serious attention. Certainly your gift as evidenced by this "Drowsy Day" poem alone is a serious one, and there it's fortunate possessor should bear with it a becoming sense of gratitude and meekness always feeling that for any resultant good, God's is the glory, the singer but his very humble instrument. Already you have many friends and can
have thousands more by being simply honest, unaffected, and just to yourself, and the high source of your endowment. Very earnestly I wish you every good thing.36

At the time that he received the letter from James Whitcomb Riley, Dunbar was not established as a national poet. He was, however, rapidly making progress toward this goal. Riley’s statement, "see how your name is traveling," suggested to Dunbar that his reputation as a significant writer was becoming noticeable throughout the nation. Riley added more fuel to Dunbar’s poetic fire by stating, "Already you have many friends and can have thousands more."37

Paul Laurence Dunbar demonstrated his gratitude to James Whitcomb Riley by writing a poem entitled, "James Whitcomb Riley--From a Westerner’s Point of View" in which he emulated Riley’s dialect style. This poem which made reference to Riley, the "Hoosier Poet" reads:

No matter what you call it, Whether genius, gift or art, He sings the simple songs that come The closest to your heart. Fur trim an’ skillful phrases, I do not keen a jot; ‘Taint the words alone, but feelin’s, That tech the tender spot. An’ thats jest why I love him,- Why, he’s got sech human feelin’, An’ in every song he gives us, You kin see it creepin’, stealin.’
Through the core the tears go tricklin',
But the edge is bright and' smiley;
I never saw a poet
Like the poet Whitcomb Riley.
His heart keeps baetin' time with our'n
In measures fast or slow
He tells us jest the same ol' things
Our souls have learned to know.
He paints our joys an' sorrels
In a way, so stric'ly true,
That a body can't help knowlin'
That he has felt them too
If there's a lesson to be taught
He never fears to teach it.
Now in our time, when plots rhyme
For money, fun, or fashion
'Tis good to hear one voice so clear
That thrills with honest passion.
So let the others build their songs,
And strive to polish highly,-
There's none of them kin tech the heart
Like our own Whitcomb Riley.

As a directy consequence of the Western Association of Writer's Conference, then, young Dunbar had won the endorsement of two of the most popular writers in America, James Whitcomb Riley and James Newton Matthews, which again reinforced the idea within him that white alliances were essential for black success.

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Inspired by the encouragement that he received, Dunbar set out in 1892 to publish his first book Oak and Ivy, a
collection of poems. Dunbar managed to convince William L. Blocher of the Brethren Publishing House to publish the book, with Dunbar promising to pay the printing bill with the proceeds that he generated from the book's sale. Dunbar, who became his own agent, sold this book for one dollar to individuals who purchased it directly, and for one dollar and five cents by mail. At the end of two weeks, Dunbar successfully sold the entire edition of one thousand volumes. The majority of them were purchased by individuals riding upon the elevator.

Several people of social, financial, and political prominence became benefactors for Dunbar after the appearance of *Oak and Ivy*. Chief among them was Dr. Henry A. Tobey, superintendent of the state asylum for the mentally insane in Toledo. In an endeavor to assist Dunbar in the promotion of his literary career, Dr. Tobey arranged for a reception in honor of Dunbar, where both he and his mother were introduced to some of the prominent figures in Toledo.

Another patron was Judge Charles W. Dustin, of the Dayton Court of Appeals, who secured a position for Dunbar as a court messenger. As a result of Dustin's assistance, Dunbar was able to study law by reading law journals and
observing courtroom litigations. However Dunbar decided that he was better suited as a writer.43

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In 1893, a review of Oak and Ivy appeared in the Toledo Blade, which caught the attention of Charles Thatcher, a rising attorney in that city. Thatcher eventually asked Dunbar to send him a copy of the book as well as a biographical sketch. Dunbar, who was in Richmond, Indiana at the time giving a lecture at a church for a women's social club, indicated to Thatcher that his life was simple. He wrote of his mother, his work as an elevator boy in the Callahan building, and of purchasing a small home in Dayton, which he hoped to soon pay for, although the majority of his mortgage installments went towards interest.44 Dunbar informed Thatcher that he had soon had to depart for Detroit for a poetry reading, which led Thatcher to request that he stay with him in Toledo on his way North. Thatcher, like other white benefactors that Dunbar came in contact with, became an additional racial ally for Dunbar. On April 15, 1893, Dunbar meet with Thatcher in Toledo. Thatcher was so impressed with Dunbar's intelligence and ease in speaking that he offered, along with "several interested men," to
enhance a college course. Thatcher, did not want his offer to be perceived as paternalistic and indicated that Dunbart could pay back to them at a later date. Dunbar replied, "I am very grateful for your offer however I would like to accomplish my purpose (for education) alone." Dunbar, while in Detroit, received a telegram from Thatcher, requesting that he be prepared to recite some of his poetry at the Toledo's West End Club the following Wednesday evening. The West End club was a newly formed white social group whose chief function was to arrange a weekly meeting where some prominent individual might deliver an address. On the same night that Dunbar was to close the program by presenting some of his poetry, Dr. W.C. Chapman of Toledo, who had visited the South, delivered a speech on the topic "The Negro." In a very authoritative manner Dr. Chapman expounded on his belief in the intellectual inferiority of African-Americans. Without realizing that Dunbar was present at this session, Chapman stated that there were exceptions to the Negro's intellectual inferiority and cited Paul Laurence Dunbar as the perfect example. When it was announced that Dunbar would "favor the club with several original selections" Chapman's complexion became pale.
Upon making his presentation, Dunbar eagerly demonstrated his ties to the African-American protest tradition of refuting racist stereotypes. He announced, "I will give you one number which I had not intended reciting when I came, it is entitled, 'Ode to Ethiopia.'" Then Dunbar read:

O Mother Race! to thee I bring
This pledge of faith unwavering,
This tribute to thy glory.
I know the pangs which thou didst feel,
When Slavery crushed thee with its heel,
With thy dear blood all gory.

Sad days were those—ah, sad indeed!
But through the land the fruitful seed
Of better times was growing.
The plant of freedom upward sprung,
And spread its leaves so fresh and young
Its blossoms now are blowing.

On every hand in this fair land,
Proud Ethiope's swarthy children stand
Besides their fairer neighbor;
The forests flee before their stroke
Their hammers ring, their forges smoke,—
They stir in honest labor.

They thread the fields where honor calls
Their voices sound through senate halls
In majesty and power
To right they cling; the hymns they sing
Up to the skies in beauty ring.
And bolder grow each hour.

Be proud, my Race, in mind and soul;
Thy name is writ on Glory's scroll
In character and fire
High mid the clouds of Fame's bright sky
Thy banner's blazoned folds now fly,
And truth shall lift them higher.
Thou hast the right to noble pride,
Whose spotless robes were purified
By blood's severe baptism.
Upon thy brow the cross was laid
And labor's painful sweat-beads made
A concerating chrism

No other race, or white or black,
When bound as thou wert, to the rack,
So seldom stooped to grieving;
No other race, when free again,
Forgot the past and proved them men
So noble in forgiving.

Go on and up! Our souls and eyes
Shall follow thy continous rise;
Our ears shall list thy glory
From bard who from thy foot shall spring
And proudly tune their lyre to sing
Of Ethiopia's glory. 50

Dunbar delivered the poem with a conviction and passion that he had not before shown to a public audience. Angered by the racist arguments made by Chapman, Dunbar took it upon himself to defend African-Americans from the slurs of intellectual inferiority by reciting this protest poem that he wrote an an earlier time. 51

Dunbar made no apologies to Thatcher or other club members for reading "Ode to Ethiopia" or the manner in which he recited it. Dunbar told Thatcher that since no one else at this club openly challenged Chapman's conclusions, the burden of rebuttal fell upon his shoulders. 52
By 1893, Dunbar had gained enough recognition to attract the attention of the great Black abolitionist Frederick Douglass, who offered him a position at the World's Columbian Exposition, in Chicago as Douglass' personal assistant. Exactly how Douglass came to know about Dunbar is not clear. Needless to say, Dunbar was delighted to accept the position. Dunbar's primary responsibility was to assist Douglass in arranging exhibits and editing the scripts written by Douglass, which were used to introduce various monuments to the public. Douglass was aware that Dunbar was the finest African-American writer in the late nineteenth century and thereby proceeded to utilize Dunbar's skills. He also recognized that Dunbar, although talented, was extremely poor and therefore he wanted to do all that he could to assist this gifted writer. Dunbar was also aware of the fame and prestige of Douglass. Douglass was regarded as the spokesperson for the African-American race. In addition, Dunbar perceived that working directly with Douglass, who was highly respected within the black community, would further enhance his own career. However, Dunbar initially decided not to take advantage of this opportunity because he was concerned that his mother would
be severely handicapped socially and financially in his absence. Dunbar had become the sole economic supporter of his mother. Matilda had sacrificed the greater part of her life to provide for her son's welfare, and Dunbar, considering the fact that his mother was elderly, committed himself to his mother's well being. Matilda Dunbar, however, insisted that Dunbar take the position arguing that it would give him more cultural and educational exposure.

Dunbar left for Chicago reluctantly. With a broken voice, he reassured his mother that he did not have to accept this offer, however, she insisted that if he decided not to go that she would be extremely unhappy with his decision. Dunbar's trip to Chicago was his first extended venture away from Dayton although he made three earlier short visits to Detroit.

While in Chicago Dunbar missed his mother desperately. He and his mother corresponded regularly. Matilda often sent her son flowers to alleviate Dunbar's loneliness. Dunbar upon receiving flowers wrote, "It was thoughtful of you to send them, Ma, ...knowing how I longed to see those bushes in bloom. But that's just like my little mom." Throughout his stay in Chicago, Dunbar was concerned about his mother's welfare, and urged her to peddle his publications and to "keep and use all of the money for the
books you sell." Dunbar added, "You might see Mrs. Huffman and try to sell her one and so get another dollar." 55

Matilda Dunbar took her son's advice and was able to maintain things at home with the assistance of the book sales. 56

Despite Matilda's assurance to her son that she was not suffering financially, Dunbar insisted that she join him in Chicago. "Ma," Dunbar wrote, "you shall come out here if you want to come--just as soon as I can possibly bring you. Rooms are very hard to get and board and lodging are high...I am working pretty hard and am always very tired at nights, so tired in fact that I can hardly write...I want you to come out here but I don't know how to manage it." Dunbar concluded, "What do you think of renting a furnished room here where I am staying and you do your own cooking here in this woman's kitchen?" 57

In a letter dated June 6, 1893 Dunbar wrote, "I want you to come out next week...write at once and tell me how much money you have and what day you can come because I do not intend to have you staying there alone. Your little home will cost me only seven dollars a month and you will have it to yourself." 58 Matilda Dunbar, upon receiving this letter, left Dayton and moved to Chicago.

Various African-American leaders desired that their racial heritage be represented at the 1893 World's Columbian
Exposition in Chicago. As a result they formed a World's
Congress Committee to implement this plan. Eventually an
Ethnological Congress was held in connection with the
exposition. Chief among the black leaders who were
responsible for the Congress was William Sanders
Scarborough, president of Wilberforce University. As a
noted philologist, Scarborough played a central role in
presenting African-American contributions to American
life. Scarborough, while attending the World's fair, came
in contact with Paul Laurence Dunbar.

Dunbar supplemented his income as Douglass' clerical
assistant by working as a hotel waiter, which led to his
writing "A Negro Love Song" after hearing his black
customers talk about their romantic lives.63 He also worked
as a janitor for five hour a day, which paid him a salary of
$7.50 per week.64 Prior to Dunbar's mother joining him in
Chicago, he wrote to her stating:

I am working in my old black clothes
....Ma although they do look shabby out
here for all the young colored men go
dressed up all the time...my timidity
and shyness among strangers hold me back
out here. I am much too like a green
young lad in spite of my extensive
travels. 65
Frederick Douglass strongly endeavored to promote Dunbar's career. Upon reading Dunbar's "The Drowsy Day" Frederick Douglass stated to Mary Church Terrell, who would be elected President of the National Association of Colored Women in 1895, "What a tragedy it is that a young man with such talent should be so terribly handicapped by poverty and color."66 Douglass was thoroughly impressed with Dunbar's Oak and Ivy, and made a habit of reading selections of this work before audiences at the Exposition.67 As a part of the "Colored America Day" at the Exposition, Douglass arranged for a recital where Dunbar could read his poetry. Attending this event were several black artists and civic leaders, including James Corrothers, a poet of Dunbar's age, who was employed by a Chicago newspaper, and Will Marion Cook and Harry Burleigh with whom Dunbar later collaborated with in writing musicals for black theater companies. Others included James Edwin Cambell a black dialect poet from Ohio, and Ida B. Wells and Mary Church Terrell--two African-American women pioneering the cause of civil rights for blacks women and blacks in general.68 Dunbar's employment at the Chicago Exposition proved to be a major turning point in his life. It brought him in contact with
Frederick Douglass, who was regarded as the most respected African-American figure among blacks and many whites as well. In addition, Dunbar made connections with other black artists and civic leaders.

Douglass' admiration and respect for Dunbar grew with the longevity of their friendship. During Dunbar's tenure at the Exposition, Douglass invited him to live in his home. "It would do my heart good just to have you there (at my home) and take care of you", Douglass wrote to Dunbar. "I have got one fiddler (my grandson), and now I want a poet; it would do me good to have you up here working in my study just working away at your poetry." Dunbar's friendship with Douglass helped him to develop an audience with additional young African-American intellectuals who greatly enhanced his career. Mary Church Terrell, Hallie Q. Brown, and Ida B. Wells, admired Dunbar's poetry. Such women regarded him as "a champion of the race" because of his positive reflection upon "the Negro" in his literature.

Mary Church Terrell recalled:

I first heard of Dunbar from Douglass ... One day by appointment I went to see Douglass in his Anacostia home. After we had finished our business, Douglass, who was widely known as 'the Sage of Anacostia,' asked me, 'Have you ever hear of Paul Dunbar?' I told him I had not. Then Douglass told me the story.
'He is very young,' he said, 'but there is no doubt that he is a poet. He is working under the most discouraging circumstances in his home in Dayton, Ohio. He is an elevator boy and on his meager wage of four dollars a week he is trying to support his mother and himself. Let me read you one of his poems.' Douglass left the room and returned with a newspaper clipping from which he began to read Dunbar's *The Drowsy Day*. When he had read several stanzas his voice faltered and his eyes grew moist. He was deeply moved. 'What a tragedy it is,' he said, 'that a young man with such talent should be so terribly handicapped by poverty and color.' I shall never forget Douglass' reading of this poem.'

Impressed by the manner that Dunbar, Terrell, Brown, and Wells were carving out new careers where African-American's and black women in general were excluded, Frederick Douglass stated, "A new heaven is drawing upon us, a new earth is ours in which all discrimination against men and women on account of color and sex is passing away and will pass away."73 Douglass, in essence had certified that Dunbar was challenging a color line which excluded blacks from the literary profession. In addition Douglass also felt that the aforementioned black women were simultaneously breaking the gender and race barrier. Dunbar considered his new friends to be individuals of superior talents. He once wrote in reference to his friends in
Chicago, "I am in the very highest and best society that Chicago affords...I'm invited to attend a reception at Mrs. Jone's house..." which has been organized for the purpose of assisting "five distinguished Englishmen who want to see some of the representative colored people in this country Mama, your poor little ugly black boy has been chosen as one of the representative colored people after being in Chicago for only five weeks."74

Dunbar returned to Dayton from the Exposition in late 1893 as a writer who had promise. However his financial status had not improved. On his return home, Dunbar became despondent that it was now winter and that there was a limited supply of money and food to endure the season. Most threatening of all to Dunbar, however, was that the mortgage for the house he was trying to buy was about to be foreclosed.75 Dunbar continued to seek ways in which he could preserve his property and stabilize his career. Remembering that Charles A. Thatcher of Toledo earlier had made him an offer to attend college, in desperation, he thought he would now accept. Thatcher responded to Dunbar that his offer to assist him in obtaining a college education was as firm as ever, however his counterparts, who had earlier planned to join him in this endeavor, had lost interest in this venture.76
Early in 1894, Dunbar's financial situation looked as if it might improve when he met William Edgar Easton who was organizing a black concert company and invited Dunbar to join. Corresponding with Dunbar from San Antonio, Easton wrote, "You have no idea how pleased I am to know you will act the part of Dessalines. I have listened to your readings of the lines. Dessalines is in good hands. The true source of eloquence is feelings. With your natural ability and training, Dessalines must be a success."

Dessalines was an excellent script for Dunbar. The character Dessalines was an extremely dark male of African origin, who felt that American racism prevented him from enjoying the economic benefits that his white counterparts took for granted. The fact that Dunbar showed literary promise, and like the character Dessalines was extremely dark complexioned, coupled with the fact that he did not enjoy the economic benefits of writers such as Howells and Riley, convinced Easton that Dunbar was tailor made for the part. Easton, who also read Dunbar's black protest poetry, indicated that the character of Dessalines would "be a Negro--be a man who has wrongs to avenge and you are the ideal Dessalines." Dunbar eagerly began composing and committing to memory the lines for this script only to be
Informed ten days prior to the scheduled production date that the company had gone bankrupt.

Dunbar's economic status continued to deteriorate in 1894, forcing him to ask his friends for financial assistance. Unable to obtain money from them and frustrated by the failure of the black concert company, Dunbar travelled to Detroit to give a poetry reading. To his surprise he learned that the affair for which he was called to deliver his recital was for a charitable purpose and that he would not receive financial compensation. Dunbar, who by now was on the verge of losing his house, was saved by his white Toledo ally, Thatcher, who loaned him the money to prevent foreclosure. The year, 1894 was probably one of the most difficult periods in the life of Dunbar. In a letter to a friend he wrote, "There is only one thing left to be done, and I am too big a coward to do that."78 Dunbar was referring to suicide.

Frederick Douglass, who was aware of Dunbar's depressed mental state in 1894, conversed with Rebecca Baldwin, a mutual friend of Dunbar and Douglass, regarding Dunbar's condition. In a letter to Dunbar, Baldwin wrote, "I saw your good friend Mr. Douglass not too long ago. He says you are despondent. I, too, have noticed that, and have remonstrated with you."79
Paul Laurence Dunbar had become a good friend of Rebecca Baldwin, a young public school teacher in Chicago prior to his departure from Chicago in 1893. Rebecca, who was interested in eventually becoming a writer, became fond of Paul’s poetic gift. In addition, Frederick Douglass, their mutual friend often resided in the Baldwin home where he frequently talked about the great talents of Dunbar. Dunbar and Baldwin continued their correspondence with each for two years after Dunbar returned to Dayton.80

On the surface it would appear that Dunbar and Baldwin were romantically attracted to each other. However their correspondence reveals that while they were extremely close they were not intimate. Rebecca, reflecting on her initial meeting with Dunbar, wrote "Strange it is not my friend that from the very first time that we met we were attracted towards each other. Will you forget that night on which we met? I can not-- a crowded reception room, a formal introduction and then I listened to the music of your voice."81 Baldwin ended this letter with the words "Ever your faithful friend" as she had done with many of the
letters that she wrote to him. 82 In an earlier letter she wrote, "I though of you last night 'mon ami' and tried very hard to put into action those forces or conditions by which my thoughts might reach you. It was a perfect night and I know had you been near, you would have put it into rhyme, for 'twas indeed a night fit to be made into a poem." 83 Approximately three months later she wrote, "I wish you were here just now to talk soft nonsense to me as only a poet can. I would not miss the sunshine of the day then, for your rare rich voice setting your sweet poems to music would make a sunshine in my heart." 84 Upon learning that Dunbar wrote the poem "One Life" during the same month that she wrote this letter to him, she shared it with various acquaintances and replied, "Apropos of your poem...nothing could be more sadly sweet than your 'One Life'." 85 In a later letter to Dunbar, she reprimanded him for writing such a sad poem by stating, "If you could throw off the cloak of skepticism that envelops you so completely and let the radiance of faith and trust enter your soul, how happier you would be." In conclusion she admonished him to, "go through life with a heart as light as your poetic inspiration and you will make it." 86 Baldwin, demonstrating that her relationship with Dunbar was purely of a platonic non sexual relationship wrote, "...your exquisite are like to me some
rare nosegay, the beauty of whose flowers--dazzles me and whose perfume intoxicates me when I read your letters. When I read your letters I love you. Somehow they touch a something in my heart that works its way into love for you. Be not alarmed though...I love you only when I read your letters."87

Rebekah Baldwin, like Frederick Douglass, tried very hard to assist Dunbar in securing employment. Baldwin informed Dunbar that a position as an English Literature teacher was available at the school where she taught and encouraged him to apply for it. Baldwin did not reveal the name of this school, but added that Douglass might be able to help the young poet especially considering that he had been selected as one of the Trustees of her school. The job which Baldwin was referring to paid one hundred dollars per month, which would have been a tremendous salary increase for Dunbar. Dunbar was informed that he needed to address his application to L.A. Cornish one of the trustees of the school where Baldwin taught. Baldwin, as promised, spoke to Douglass about the available teaching position at their high school, however the aged abolitionist informed her that he could not guarantee that Dunbar would receive this job. On the other hand, he offered to allow Dunbar to live with him in Washington free of expense where he could look for
available employment there. In addition Douglass expressed a willingness to endorse Dunbar's application to teach at black universities such as Wilberforce in Ohio or Tuskegee in Alabama. Baldwin informed Dunbar that Douglass sent word to him that he must not "become despondent...success must come to you." Baldwin added that her school would open on September 17th and that she would endeavor to secure an appointment for him to interview for Miss Patterson's job, one of the teachers who had become ill. Unfortunately Dundar not receive this position.

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Dunbar also sought the assistance of Reverend Alexander Crumwell in securing a position as a teacher. Rev. Crumwell, also commonly referred to as Dr. Alexander Crumwell, would eventually establish the American Negro Academy. Crumwell had travelled extensively throughout the United States and Europe promoting the issue of higher education for African-Americans. During the 1890's, next to Frederick Douglass, blacks and whites alike considered Crumwell to be the chief African-American who promoted racial advancement and integration. Dunbar requested Reverend Crumwell to use "his position of influence" to
assist him in obtaining a position as an English literature instructor for the Washington, D.C. public schools where he had already applied. Alexander Crumwell desired to organize a group of black intellectuals that would use their skills to study methods whereby African-Americans could be integrated into the American mainstream. The outcome of Crumwell's desire was the formation of the American Negro Academy which held its inaugural meeting March 5, 1897, in Washington, D.C. 89 Dunbar, wrote Crumwell that he possessed the following qualifications:

My high school course has been supplemented by special and earned study along literary lines and the appointment to this place would be a boon to me in more ways than one. 90

Crumwell, who was eager to assist Dunbar but also aware that there were barriers which might hinder Dunbar, replied:

I can't give you very much encouragement in your endeavor. There are wicked and prejudices existing here which I fear bar your success, but this shall not prevent my best endeavors in your behalf. 91

Dunbar never received an offer to teach in Washington; however, he managed to give poetry readings in various
cities of the United States which mitigated his financial plight. In 1894 he presented readings in New York, Harrisburg, Detroit, Chicago, Cleveland, and numerous cities throughout Indiana. Dunbar was always excited to give recitals in Cleveland. William Burns, Paul’s high school and life long friend, was a freshman at Cleveland University in 1894 and remained in frequent contact with Dunbar. Whenever Paul presented in Cleveland he managed to have William arrange stage appearances for him.

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Dunbar’s fate in 1895 improved immensely due to the job offers that he received and his ability to obtain publication in journals. Dunbar, who was offered a job as a clock winder in Chicago wrote a letter to his mother explaining his reasoning for turning it down. "I wasn’t strong enough to do the work" he wrote, "some of the clocks, it would take two ordinary men to wind... I was expected to do all the repairing and I do not count among my educational attainments a knowledge of the mechanisms of the clock." By October of 1895 Dunbar was contributing on a regular basis to the Century, and New York Independent.
magazines. He mentioned that it was always his goal from childhood to publish in the Century, however it took nine years of persistent effort to achieve it. Finally one of the editors of the Century accepted three of his poems, which made Dunbar exceedingly "happy and proud." Alice Moore, a writer from New Orleans, who later became Paul Laurence Dunbar's wife, congratulated him for successfully publishing with the Century Magazine by stating, "I'm delighted to know that you have been accepted to the Century." Dunbar also published two additional stories entitled, "Beyond the Waters," and "The Shallows" with the Washington Publishing Company.

Frederick Douglass, Paul Laurence Dunbar's closest African-American ally and friend died in 1895, thus causing Dunbar much grief. Dunbar attended Douglass' funeral at Metropolitan African Methodist Episcopal Church in Washington, D.C on February 25, 1895 through a "card of admission" obtained by Alice Moore, which allowed both of them to sit in the reserved seat section of the church. Alice Nelson, who was aware of Paul Laurence Dunbar's devotion to Frederick Douglass wrote, "I expected you to come...for I knew of your great love for him whose going has left such a gap in your life." On March 2, 1895, Dunbar dedicated the poem, the "Old Warrior" to Frederick Douglass:
Frederick Douglass

A hush is over all the teeming lists,
And there is pause, a breath-space in the strife;
A spirit brave has passed beyond the mists
And vapors that obscure the sun and life.
And Ethiopia, with bosom torn,
Laments the passing of her noblest son

She weeps for him a mother’s burning tears—
She loved him with a mother’s deepest love.
He was her champion thro’ direful years,
And held her weal all other ends above
When bondage held her bleeding in the dust,
He raised her up and whispered, "Hope and Trust." 102

The demand for Dunbar’s literature increased after the death of Douglass. Paul’s only regret was that Douglass was not alive to witness it. Dunbar, who was twenty-three years old in 1895, began to write various dramatic lyrics to music which would be used as show productions by Will Marion Cook, the famous composer.103 The shows produced by Dunbar and Cook were being sold in the United States, Canada, England, and additional foreign countries.104

Despite the rising demand for Dunbar’s literature in 1895, he still was not certain that he wanted to be a
writer. Dunbar’s ambivalence stemmed from his realization that he might perpetually be haunted by a color line which barred black writers from achieving national prominence. His patron Dr. H.A. Tobey, upon hearing that Dunbar had ambition of becoming a lawyer, wrote him: "The world is already full of lawyers for its good, peace or welfare. What we need is more persons to interpret nature and nature’s God." 105 Dunbar was encouraged by this letter and decided that he would continue to challenge the color line, which barred him from full entrance into the literary profession. He dreamed of one day crossing this color line and becoming regarded as an American writer of African origin rather than a black writer. Dunbar’s dream was not realized until February 1895, when his second book, Majors and Minors was published and favorably reviewed in Harper’s Weekly on June 27, 1896, by William Dean Howells, "the most influential author and critic in the United States." 106
Endnotes Chapter II


4 Ibid., 168.


8 Ibid., 443.


10 Ibid., 21.


12 Interview with Paul Laurence Dunbar, LW Dunbar Papers, Roll No.3.

13 Paul Laurence Dunbar to Dr. Tobey, July 13, 1895, Dunbar Papers, Roll No. 3. Also see Benjamin Brawley, *Paul Laurence Dunbar Poet of His People*, 36-37.
14 Interview with Paul Laurence Dunbar, LW Dunbar Papers, Roll No. 3.


16 Ibid.

17 Ibid., 189.

18 Ibid.

19 Ibid.

20 Chicago Current April 3, 1886.


22 Indianapolis Journal July 26, 1892.

23 Ibid.

24 Ibid.


29 Ibid.
30 Ibid.
31 Ibid., July 26, 1892.
32 Paul Laurence Dunbar to James Newton Matthews, LW Dunbar Papers, Roll No. 3.
35 Ibid.
36 James Whitcomb Riley to Paul Laurence Dunbar, LW Dunbar Papers, Roll No.3.
37 Ibid.
39 Interview with Paul Laurence Dunbar, LW Dunbar Papers, Roll No. 3.
40 Ibid.
42 Ibid., 29.
43 Ibid.
44 Ibid.
45 Ibid.
46 Ibid.
47 Ibid.
48 Ibid.
49 Ibid.


51 Benjamin Brawley, Paul Laurence Dunbar: Poet of His People (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1936), 31. LW Dunbar Papers, Roll No. 3.

52 Ibid.


54 Paul Laurence Dunbar to Matilda Dunbar, May 7, 1893, Dunbar Papers, Roll No. 3.

55 Ibid.

56 Matilda Dunbar to Paul Laurence Dunbar, May 7, 1893, Dunbar Papers, Roll No. 3.

57 Paul Laurence Dunbar to Matilda Dunbar, May 26, 1893, Dunbar Papers, Roll No. 3.

58 Ibid. June 6, 1893.


60 Ibid.


64 Paul Laurence Dunbar to Matilda Dunbar, May 4, 1893, Dunbar Papers, Roll No. 3.

65 Ibid.


67 Dayton Daily, July 16, 1897.


69 Paul Laurence Dunbar to Matilda Dunbar, June 6, 1893, Roll No.3.


71 Paul Laurence Dunbar to Matilda Dunbar, June 6, 1893, Dunbar Papers, Roll No.3. August Meir in his *Negro Thought in America* p.182 considered Ida B. Wells Barnett to be a black radical along the same lines as W. E. B. DuBois.

72 Cincinnati Enquirer, April 26, 1886.


74 Paul Laurence Dunbar to Matilda Dunbar, June 6, 1893, Dunbar Papers, Roll No.3.

75 Legal and Financial Documents, July 31, 1894, Dunbar Papers, Roll No.2.

77 William Eaton to Paul Laurence Dunbar, May 12, 1894. LW Dunbar Papers, Roll No. 3.


79 Rebekah Baldwin to Paul Laurence Dunbar, September 4, 1894, Dunbar Papers, Roll No. 3.

80 Rebekah Baldwin to Paul Laurence Dunbar, February 18, 1894, Dunbar Papers, Roll No. 3.

81 Rebekah Baldwin to Paul Laurence Dunbar, July 30, 1895, Paul Laurence Dunbar Papers, Roll No. 3.

82 Ibid.

83 Rebekah Baldwin to Paul Laurence Dunbar, September 24, 1893, Dunbar Papers, Roll No. 3.

84 Rebekah Baldwin to Paul Laurence Dunbar, December 3, 1893, Dunbar Papers, Roll No. 3.

85 Ibid.

86 Rebekah Baldwin to Paul Laurence Dunbar, July 18, 1894, Dunbar Papers, Roll No. 3.

87 Rebekah Baldwin to Paul Laurence Dunbar, October 7, 1894, Dunbar Papers Roll No. 3.

88 Rebekah Baldwin to Paul Laurence Dunbar, September 4, 1894, Dunbar Papers, Roll No. 3.


90 Paul Laurence Dunbar to Alexander Crummell, September 9, 1894, LW Dunbar Papers, Roll No. 3.

91 Alexander Crummell to Paul Laurence Dunbar, September 12, 1894, LW Dunbar Papers, Roll No. 3.

92 Rebekah Baldwin to Paul Laurence Dunbar, June 23, 1894, Dunbar Papers, Roll No. 3.
93 William Burns to Paul Laurence Dunbar, October 14, 1894, Dunbar Papers, Roll No. 3. See also William Weaver to Paul Laurence Dunbar, August 20, 1895, Roll No. 3.

94 Ibid., December 12, 1894.

95 Paul Laurence Dunbar to Matilda Dunbar, September 21, 1895 Dunbar Papers, Roll No. 3.


97 Interview with Paul Laurence Dunbar, unidentified newspaper clipping, LW Dunbar Papers, Roll No. 3.

98 Alice Moore to Paul Laurence Dunbar, January 19, 1895, Dunbar Papers, Roll No. 9.

99 Mrs. Eugene Fields to Paul Laurence Dunbar, April 13, 1895, Dunbar Papers, Roll No. 3.

100 Alice Moore to Paul Laurence Dunbar, March 3, 1895, Dunbar Papers, Roll No. 9.

101 Ibid.


103 Paul Laurence Dunbar to Will Cook, July 15, 1895, Dunbar Papers, Roll No. 3.

104 Ibid.

105 Dr. Henry A. Tobey to Paul Laurence Dunbar, July 6, 1895, Dunbar Papers, Roll No. 3.

CHAPTER III

Crossing the Color Line: The Major Writing Years 1895-1902

During the summer of 1896 Paul Laurence Dunbar's second book, *Majors and Minors*, was favorably reviewed in *Harper's Weekly* by William Dean Howells, the most influential author and critic in the United States. Howells' review coincidentally appeared on Dunbar's birthday, June 27, and the glowing praise by the most noted man of letters in the United States was an ideal birthday present. Howells' positive review of Dunbar's poetry assured Dunbar a national reputation as a writer—an achievement which allowed him to cross the color line in the literary profession, and to some degree socially as well. After the Howells review Dunbar's literature was in demand throughout the United States and England. He became the first African-American literary figure to earn a comfortable living from the proceeds of his writings, and his literary reputation exceeded many white established writers of his era.
Ironically, Dunbar's rise to intellectual acceptance as a Black writer occurred at a time when Black America was entering a "dark period" of existence. The Supreme Court in 1883 overturned the Civil Rights Acts of 1875. As a result white restaurants, barber shops, hotels, and theaters refused service to blacks. By 1885 most Southern states had established laws requiring African-Americans to attend separate schools. The adoption of new state constitutions by Southern states firmly established a color line between black and white Americans. The Supreme Court in 1896, upheld segregation in its "separate but equal" doctrine established in *Plessy v/s Ferguson*. Dunbar rise to intellectual acceptance, despite the harsh segregation of the times, points to his high level of preseverance and determination succeed against the odds.

The twentieth century began with overt racial hostility occuring throughout the United States. The new century witnessed 214 lynchings in the first two years. Race riots broke out almost daily in Northern and Southern cities. As a matter of a fact, rioting in the North was as vicious and prevalent as it was in the South. For example, in 1904 in Springfield, Ohio, near Dayton where Paul Laurence Dunbar was reared, two riots occurred.
Dunbar's *Majors and Minors* was published at his own expense on December 1892, in the same manner that he had published his first book of poetry, *Oak and Ivy*, on January 1886. From the publication of these books, Dunbar had earned a local and regional reputation as a writer and as a reciter of his poetry.

Dr. Tobey, Superintendent of the Toledo State Hospital, learned of *Majors and Minors* in 1895 through an unidentified friend. Impressed with the book, he wrote to Dunbar, "I must compliment you enough to say that I believe you possess real poetic instinct. I learned from the donor that in a biblical sense, God almighty has placed the stamp of Cain upon you or in other words, your skin is black." Tobey sent a check for five dollars to purchase additional copies. Dr. Tobey, who marketed Dunbar's poetry to many of his acquaintances, also provided a copy to James A. Herne, an actor and dramatist, who was in Toledo performing in his play *Shores Acres*. Dunbar, who was visiting
Dr. Tobey during the time in which Hernes' play was being featured in Toledo, was encouraged by Tobey to take a copy of *Majors and Minors* to Hernes at the hotel in which he was staying. Upon arriving at the hotel Dunbar discovered that Hernes was not in, and therefore left a copy of this book with a Mr. Childs, who forwarded it to him upon his arrival. Hernes, in a letter from Michigan, indicated that he would forward Dunbar's book to William Dean Howells as well as to other colleagues in the literary profession.

After reading Dunbar's book, Howells stated that he was pleased "by the little countryfied volume, which inwardly was full of a new world." Howells demonstrated his approval by devoting the entire 3,500 word section in the June 27, 1896 "Life and Letters" department of *Harpers Weekly* to Dunbar's book.

Dr. Tobey, upon discovering Howells' review in *Harpers Weekly*, sent Dunbar a postcard regarding its publication. Tobey wrote, "Get a copy of *Harpers Weekly* and read what William Dean Howells thinks of you." The June 27, 1896 issue of this magazine also featured an article focusing McKinley's nomination at Minneapolis. The magazine, for this reason, sold out fast in Ohio, thus Dunbar initially
had difficulties finding a copy. However upon finding a copy at a news stand Dunbar read the following review written by Howells:

There has come to me from the hand of a friend, very unofficially, a little book of verse, dateless, placeless, without a publisher, which has greatly interested me. Such foundling of the press always appeals to one by their forlornness; but commonly the appeal is to one’s pity only, which is moved all the more if the author of the book has innocently printed his picture with his verse.12

Howells emphasized that the writer was clearly an African-American, which was easily discernible from his physical features which revealed strong black ancestral characteristics. Howells was conveying to his audience that Dunbar’s intellect, which was clearly evident from his poetry, became all the more accented when one considers that he was of pure African blood. Howells added:

In the present case I felt a heightened pathos in the appeal from the fact that the face which confronted me when I opened the volume was the face of a
young Negro, with the race traits strangely accented: the black skin, the woolly hair, the thick out-rolling lips, and the mild, soft eyes of the pure African type. One cannot be very sure of the age of these people, but I should have thought that the poet was about twenty years old; and I suppose that a generation ago he would have been worth, apart from his literary gift, twelve or fifteen dollars under the hammer.13

Howells provided his readers with an analysis of Majors and Minors which established Dunbar as a dialect writer and created and a national market for his literature for the rest of his career. Howells added that while Dunbar's poetry in literary English demonstrated "honest thinking and true feelings", which was unique for a black person to attempt, it was his ability to write black dialect which he found most impressive.14 Howells wrote:

It is when we come to Mr. Dunbar's (verses in Negro dialect) that we feel ourselves in the presence of a man with a dialect and fresh authority to do the kind of things he is doing. I wish I could give the whole of the longest of these pieces...but I must content myself with a passage or two. They will impart some sense of the jolly rush of its movement, its vivid picturesqueness, its broad characterization; and will perhaps suffice to show what vistas into the simple, sensuous, joyful nature of his race, Mr. Dunbar opens.15
There were additional factors in Howell's review that made it obvious that he preferred Dunbar's dialectical poetry over his straight prose. Howells included only twelve lines of Dunbar's poetry in standard English, whereas one hundred and forty five of his lines in black dialect were published.16

According to Howells Dunbar's skill as a writer excelled that of Robert Burns, the famous Scottish poet of the late eighteenth century.
"I do not remember any English speaking Negro, at least, who has till now done in verse work of at all the same moment as Paul Laurence Dunbar", Howells opined.

Burns has long had the consecration of the world's love and honor, and I shall not do this unknown but not ungifted poet the injury of comparing him with Burns; yet I do not think one can read his Negro pieces without feeling that they are of like impulse and inspiration with the work of Burns when he was most Burns, when he was most Scotch, when he was most peasant."17

Howells continued his comparison of Burns and Dunbar by concluding:

When Burns was least himself he wrote literary English, and Mr. Dunbar writes
literary English when he is least himself. But not to urge the mischievous parallel further, he is a real poet whether he speaks a dialect or whether he writes a language.  

Throughout his career, Dunbar allied himself with white benefactors who placed him in contact with individuals of power and prestige—a factor which won him many friendships and allowed him to pass through many doors which excluded most nineteenth century African-Americans.  

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Dunbar wrote in black dialect not to develop a successful career for himself at the expense of reflecting negatively upon his black brethren. Rather his initial and major reason stemmed from his admiration of James Whitcomb Riley, a poet from Indiana, who made "Hoosier" dialectical writing popular. Dunbar, who used Riley as a model for dialectical writing, also inherited Riley’s dislike of the poet Walt Whitman, who Riley regarded as "more of a poet at heart than at soul." Dunbar, like Riley, felt that writers who revealed to the audience the dialect speech
patterns of their subjects also exposed their subjects' social and educational background. While Dunbar desired public approval of his literature, which was a trait that he inherited from Riley, he did not believe that exploitation of blacks was an acceptable route for obtaining such success. In a letter to a Miss Evaleen Stein, Riley offered a word of advice which may as well have been extended to Dunbar, considering the fact that Dunbar desperately desired to build a strong audience for his literature. Riley wrote:

...watch, too, certain words which seem to prejudice the reading world. Keep always, in all you write, one eye and ear on the audience. Never for an instant forget that it's their pleasure and approval, as well as your own, that is desired, and most necessary, in fact.

Riley believed that poets who stuck to traditional poetic diction were elitists who were, "unfit to record the living speech of the common man." 22 Dunbar, accordingly, saw the need to record the culture and speech patterns of African-Americans. Dunbar had learned the dialect of the Southern Blacks while a youth through going with his mother to visit her friends who were recent black migrants from the
South. Many of them were former slaves who reminisced about their past experiences on the plantation. Dunbar endeavored to record their history and dialect through his poetry.

Dunbar as a child also learned dialect from his mother who told him fireside stories relating to various slave experiences. As a result, Dunbar acquired a sense of intimacy for his oppressed brethren, which enabled him to write short stories and poetry relating to African-American culture.

Paul Laurence Dunbar was bidualdental. He could write in standard Anglo-Saxon English as well as write Southern black dialect. He did not, as his wife Alice Dunbar Nelson asserted, express himself only in "pure English" poetry.24 As a child Dunbar had spoke black English which he learned from his parents who were barely literate. As Dunbar interacted with his brothers, who were attending Dayton’s public schools, his parents, who with time improved their skills at speaking standard English, and his teachers, who critiqued his early literature, his ability to speak and write in standard English improved. Nevertheless, he still recalled certain dialectical phrases and sounds that he
heard during his childhood which aided him in his ability to portray black patterns of speech. It is illogical to conclude that Dunbar, who was raised by dialect speaking parents, did not during the process of language acquisition speak in dialect. In the 1960's the linguist Gordon Green effectively argued, "...Even college-educated Southern Negroes--products of the segregated educational system--have speech that is often marred with characteristics of mispronunciations and grammatical errors." Green added, "Many Negroes whose grammar is flawless nevertheless speak with an accent that identifies them as Negro, and they, even more than whites with marked regional accents, find their speech a handicap when they move to other regions." 25

Dunbar was convinced that he could write black dialect better than any other poet, and that upon producing such poetry he could maintain an stable audience. Dunbar stated, "I believe I know my people thoroughly...I know them in all classes, the high and the low." Dunbar added, "I simply came to the conclusion that I could write (black dialect) as well, if not better, than anyone else I know of, and that by doing so I should gain a hearing..." Dunbar, on the
other hand did not want to be limited to a career of being accepted only as a dialectic writer. Yet, despite his desire to be a bidialectical writer, he was constantly under pressure to stay within the limitations of black dialect. Dunbar, upon referring to the development of his career after the review in Harper’s Weekly, and the growing demand for his dialectical writing by publishers concluded to James Weldon Johnson "...and now they don’t want me to write anything else but dialect." 26

Throughout his career, Dunbar managed to write dialect literature other than black dialect despite pressures to stay within such limits. At a recital at the Lyceum Theater on September 8, 1896, for instance Dunbar annoyed the reviewer of the New York Sun because he insisted upon reciting his literature in Irish dialect. 27 Felix C. Okeke-Ezigbo, a literary scholar, determined that Dunbar, during his career, wrote more than twenty-five poems in "recognizable imitation of white dialect." 28

Dunbar was not the first poet, black or white, to compose literature in black dialect. Thomas Dunn English, a white writer, has been regarded as the first poet to write dialectical literature portraying black speech patterns.
English, who wrote four poems in black dialect in 1871, contributed them to various magazines including *Lippincott's* and *Scribner's*.29 The brothers, Sidney and Clifford Lanier, published black dialect poetry that appeared in *Scribner's* from 1875 to 1876, and likewise contributed a plantation poem entitled "Corn" to the February 1875 issue of *Lippincott's* journal.30 Joel Chandler Harris considered the nineteenth century writer Irwin Russell (1853-1879) as "the first-if not the very first- of Southern writers to appreciate the literary possibilities of the negro character, and of the unique relations existing between the two races before the war, and was among the first to develop them."31 The black poet James Edwin Cambell (1867-1895), whom Paul Laurence Dunbar met in Chicago during the Exposition in 1893, wrote dialect verse spoken by African-Americans from the sea islands of South Carolina and Georgia. Cambell's dialect poetry, which initially appeared in Ohio newspapers around the same time as Dunbar's, was collectively published in his 1895, *Echoes from the Cabin and Elsewhere.32* Daniel Webster Davis (1862-1913), another African-American black dialectical published a series
of poems reflecting upon minstrel humor in his 'Weh Down Souf,' (1897) 33

William Dean Howells was impressed by Dunbar's ability to write black dialect, and his insight into black culture. According to Howells Dunbar was "the first man of color to study his race objectively, to analyze it to himself, and then to represent it in art as he found it to be; to represent it humorously, yet tenderly, and above all so faithfully that we know the portrait to be undeniably like." Howells added, "A race which has reached this effect in any of its members can no longer be held wholly uncivilized; and intellectually Dunbar makes a stronger claim for the Negro than any Negro has yet done." 34

While Dunbar's contribution to American literature was significant, Howells was inaccurate in his conclusion that Dunbar was the first African-American to study his race objectively. Phyllis Wheatley, a black writer from Philadelphia whose literature appeared during the eighteenth century, also wrote several selections that focused upon the experience of blacks in America. In addition, the nineteenth century black writer and abolitionist Frederick Douglass, whom Dunbar greatly admired, published works which at least
equalled, if not surpassed the literature of Paul Laurence Dunbar.

Nonetheless, Howells' review of Dunbar established him as a national figure—thus allowing the remainder of his career to be a tremendous success. Thomas Smallcross, an educator, wrote to a publishing firm, "I have just noticed in Harpers Weekly a collection of poems published by you. Kindly send me word when I can obtain a couple of copies. I do not even know the name of the author, but it is a collection noticed by W.D. Howells."35 James Cotter, a black friend of the Dunbar family from Kentucky, who recognized the significance of Howells' review, wrote to Dunbar:

Mr. Howells has done you a great and just favor. Profit by it. You and Governor McKinley are close together in Harpers. Do you see their point. If he is made president, get your friends to speak for you. It may bring you a position in Washington worth a $1,000 to $1,200 a year. If you can get some New York House to bring out your book, a little fortune will be yours. Give readings in New England, go to New York and be your own manager. Why not make a visit and recite 'The Party', and 'Ante Bellum Sermon' and 'Whistling Sam'. 'Whistling Sam' will carry New England."36
Dunbar, was grateful to William Dean Howells for his review, and realized that his financial situation had greatly improved as result of it. He wrote Howells:

I have seen your article in Harpers and felt its effect. That I have not written you sooner is neither the result of the wilful neglect or the lack of gratitude. It has taken time for me to recover from the shock of delightful surprise. My emotions have been too much for me. I could not thank you without 'gushing' and I did not want to 'gush.'

Now from the very depths of my heart I want to thank you. You yourself do not know what you have done for me...The kindly praise that you have accorded me will be an incentive to more careful work...I have written to thank Mr. Herne for putting the book into your hands. I have only seen the man on stage, but have laughed and cried with him until I love him.37

Howells' review generated a demand by the reading public to purchase Dunbar's book and a desire by publishers to make it available. Dunbar received thirty six letters that contained money for the purchase of his book. He was also solicited by three New York publishers who were interested in making his volume of poetry available. Dunbar selected Dodd, Mead, and Company to publish his book since they offered him the best financial returns.38
Eager to enhance his career, Dunbar sought the assistance of a lecture manager. William Dean Howells had recommended that Dunbar select Major James B. Ponds as his agent since he had successfully arranged public speaking engagements for Mark Twain, Booker T. Washington, and Frederick Douglass. Ponds, upon hearing that Dunbar was interested in selecting him as his manager, requested that Dunbar come to New York to sign a contract. Several of Dunbar’s benefactors, including Brand Whitlock, mayor of Toledo, and Dr. H.A. Tobey, purchased him a suit for this visit. Major Ponds negotiated several lecture engagements throughout New York for the poet. Ponds also directed Dunbar to the summer residence of William Dean Howells at Far Rockaway in New York for their initial visit.39

The meeting between Dunbar and Howells proved to be pleasant and informative. After lunch on August 19, 1896, Dunbar visited the Howells family, where he received a warm reception.40 Initially Howells began conversing with Dunbar about his life in Dayton from 1849-1850, and Dunbar in return shared some of his Dayton experiences. Afterward, Howells gave Dunbar some advice for a successful literary
career: "Write what you know...Write what you feel. Analyze
detail. Build the picture. Make it real."41 Prior to the
conclusion of this meeting the coolness of the evening
prompted Dunbar to begin trembling and coughing. Howells,
in an effort to relieve Dunbar of his chills, provided him
with a coat which Dunbar would return to him. Reflecting
upon the generosity that he received from Howells as well as
the literary advice, Dunbar wrote, "Dear Mr Howells, this
note should have been written yesterday when I returned your
ccoat by National Express. Let me thank you for your
kindness, although the circumstances brought to my mind the
old fable of the ass in the lion's skin. Not withstanding
all my precautions, I have taken a cold." Dunbar concluded,
"I hope that you are more fortunate and that this note will
find both you and your family well."42 William Dean Howells
in a reply letter to Dunbar wrote, "the coat came back
safely and promptly; but I am sorry to learn that it did not
save you from taking a cold. May it cover hereafter, as
good and gifted a man as when you wore it. We were all
greatly pleased to meet you and make your acquaintance, and
we shall watch your fortunes with the cordial interest of
friends."43
By age twenty four Dunbar was regarded as a major national writer. He had published *Oak and Ivy*, *Majors and Minors*, and now most recently *Lyrics of Lowly Life*. Dunbar's latest book was published on December 2, 1896 and was marketed for the Christmas season. When Dodd Mead and Company agreed to publish it, they offered Paul fifteen percent royalties and a four hundred dollar advance. This offer was equivalent to two year of wages that Dunbar had made as an elevator boy. This contract was a liberal offer for a novice author, especially in poetry. William Dean Howells wrote a fifteen hundred word introduction for the book which restated, although with greater detail, the major points which were made in the review written for *Harper's Weekly*. Dunbar witnessed this book of poetry become an instant success. It sold 3,000 to 4,000 books annually for several years.

Paul Laurence Dunbar had obtained in William Dean Howells another white ally. Howells was so thoroughly convinced that Dunbar was a gifted writer that he wrote the introduction of *Lyrics of Lowly Life* before he had a chance to read it. Dunbar again had to express his gratitude to his newest mentor and patron. "It was no little thing for you to introduce a book of verse by an obscure black writer
and I believe that I fully appreciate the nobility of your act." Crediting Howells for his rise from near poverty, he added, "You may be pleased to know that my affairs have materially changed for the better, and entirely through your agency." 46

Howells clearly indicated that his positive appraisal of Dunbar's literature was not motivated by paternalism. In the introduction of *Lyrics from Lowly Life* he wrote, "I think I should scarcely trouble the reader with a special appeal in behalf of this book...if it had not specially appealed to me for reasons apart from the author's race, origin and condition." Anticipating that some newspaper journalist might publish an article indicating that Dunbar's literature was not as good as Howells led the reader to believe, Howells added, "The world is too old now, and I find myself too much of its mood, to come for the work of a poet because he is black, because his father and mother were slaves." 47

Dunbar's growing fame as a consequence of the success of *Lyrics of Lowly Life* created a demand for his literature and lectures in England. On his way to England, Dunbar visited Howells in New York, who supplied him with a
letter of introduction to his British friends. Howells wrote one such letter to David Douglas, a publisher. "Dear Mr Douglas, allow me to present my friend, Mr. Paul Dunbar, the first of his race to put his race into poetry. I hope he will show you his book, and let it say for his worth the things he is too modest to say for himself." 48

Prior to Dunbar's departure to England a reception was given for him in New York by his friend, Mrs. Victoria Matthews, a black social worker who had established several African-American women's settlement houses. Chief among the celebrities who attended this event were William Edward Burghardt DuBois, Booker T. Washington, and Alice Moore, a black writer from New Orleans who eventually became Dunbar's wife. Dunbar had first meet DuBois in 1896, when DuBois asked Dunbar to "come over from Dayton and read to us." 49 DuBois, who at the time was a professor of Greek, Latin, and German at Wilberforce University, was surprised to learn that Dunbar was black, especially considering his polished prose and popularity-- during an era when DuBois, a Harvard University Ph.D in History, could not land a job as a professor in a predominately white state or private college. During the 1890's Dunbar and DuBois built a friendly
relationship and appeared on programs together giving recitals and lectures. Both Dunbar and DuBois, in the years to come, became intellectual allies by arguing that the route of higher education was the best method which could be utilized to elevate the status of African-Americans rather than the industrial education approach proposed by Booker T. Washington.51

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Paul Laurence Dunbar became aware of Alice Moore in 1895 through a poem that he found in a Boston *Monthly Review* magazine. The magazine also included a picture of her. In his initial letter to her he wrote:

You will pardon my boldness in addressing you, I hope, and let my interest in your work be my excuse. I sometimes wonder if in the rare world of art, earthly conventions need always be heeded. I am drawn to write you because we are working along the same lines and a sketch of yours in the *Monthly Review* so interested me that I was anxious to know more of you and your work....I am hopeful at present both for myself and the future of our race in literature...I understand you have written for the 'Ladies Home Journal.' Will you tell me in what numbers I may find your work?...I enclose to you my verses on Douglass who was a very dear friend of mine, and also my latest lines.52
Paul Laurence Dunbar was attracted to Alice Moore not only for her beauty but also for her intellect.

Alice Moore was one of the most educated black women in the United States during the 1890's. The youngest of two daughters of Joseph and Patricia Wright Moore, Alice Moore was born in New Orleans, Louisiana on July 9, 1875. She attended the public schools of New Orleans and upon graduation from high school attended Straight College, a predominately black two year teacher's institution. Alice began teaching at the Old Marigny Elementary School in New Orleans after graduating from college. She taught there until 1896, when she decided to go to West Medford, Massachusetts and later to New York for further studies.

While living in New Orleans she was able to develop a substantial literary career. Prior to her twenty-first birthday Alice Moore had managed to publish in the New York Age, the Boston's Women's Era, the Boston Monthly Review and the New York Colored American. In addition, she was the editor of a women's column in the New Orleans's newspaper, the Journal of the Lodge. She published her first book in 1895 entitled, Violets and Other Tales.
While teaching in Massachusetts Alice arranged to live with the well known social worker, Victoria Earl Matthews. Alice also eventually taught classes at Matthews' White Rose Industrial Home in New York. She also became an officer and founding member of the National Association of Colored Women.

When Paul met Alice Moore at Mrs. Matthews "bon voyage" reception for him, then, he had already had extensive correspondence with her. Subsequently, Paul and Alice Dunbar wrote over one hundred letters to each other from the time they met in 1895 until they were married in 1897 expressing their affections and desire to live with each other on a permanent basis.55

Chief among these letters is one dated May 9, 1895, in which Alice expressed to Paul her feeling about black authors who focused their literary writings upon social issues that affected African-Americans and black dialect. Paul's initial letter to Alice asked for her opinion regarding "whether or not you believe in preserving by Afro-American--I don't like the word--writers those quaint old tales and songs of our fathers which have made the fame of Joel Chandler Harris, Thomas Nelson Page, Ruth McEnery Stuart and others! Or whether you like so many others think we should
ignore the past and so many of its capital literary materials."

Considering Dunbar's endeavor to be regarded as an noted author who happened to be black he more than likely objected to the term "Afro-American" because it led white Americans during the era of Jim Crow to justify their decisions to see blacks as individuals who desired to be American citizens, rather than Americans who happened to be black. Alice Moore, in a reply to Dunbar dated May 7, 1895 wrote:

I haven't much liking for these writers that wedge the Negro problem and social equality--and write long dissertations on the Negro in general in their stories. Somehow when I start a story I always think of my folk characters as simple human beings, not as types of race or an idea--and I seem to be on more friendly terms with them...You asked my opinion about Negro dialect in literature? Well, frankly, I believe in everyone following his bent. If it be so that one has a special aptitude for dialect work, why it is only right that dialect work should be made a specialty. But if one should be like me--absolutely devoid of the ability to manage dialect, I don't see the necessity of cramming and forcing oneself into that plane because one is a Negro or a Southerner. Don't you think so? ...I hope I am not treading on your corns"
Apparently Dunbar did not agree with Alice Moore’s views regarding black dialect. Alice made a conscious decision to avoid black dialect altogether, even when her short stories focused upon black Southern characters. The characters in Moore’s stories were usually middle class black, and when they were from the South their occupations were varied between educators, politicians, and ministers— a category which she felt did not practice black dialect speech patterns. Dunbar who was born of slave parents, on the other hand, felt that black dialect should be used as a mechanism of reflecting upon the cultural and historic experiences that black Southerners encountered in their transition from slavery to freedom. However he felt it should not be used as a means painting them as passive, ignorant beings, as was done by Joel Chandler Harris. Dunbar continued to write in black dialect and with the passing years his production of short stories, poetry, and articles that reflected black protest increased.

Alice Moore and Paul Laurence Dunbar were raised in two radically different environments. Despite the fact that both of them were supported by white benefactors who helped to enhance their educational development, their childhood experiences were rooted in separate social classes. First of
all, Alice Moore was not the offspring of slave parents and fortunately her parents did not divorce, thus making it easier for them to finance her college education. In addition, Alice Moore was a mulatto whereas Dunbar's very dark complexion supports the assertion made by various biographers that he was of "pure African lineage".58 Historian Ira Berlin has demonstrated that in many cases mulattoes in America were afforded more economic and social privileges than dark complexioned blacks although their status was never made equivalent with whites.59 Dunbar, after graduating from high school, struggled to support himself and his impoverished mother, whereas Alice Moore enjoyed a career as an educator whose only financial responsibility was to support herself. In short, Alice Moore did not feel the pains of economic want as intensely as Dunbar and therefore could not as sharply identify with the solidarity felt between black writers and their oppressed brethren. It would not be until much later in Alice Moore's life that she would join Dunbar and other African-Americans in promoting black protest.
Paul Laurence Dunbar left for London on February 6, 1897. He was encouraged by several of his friends in America to make this voyage and likewise received a letter from an unidentified Englishman stating, "Your Lyrics of Lowly Life have afforded me the greatest enjoyment,...I learned that there is a chance of your coming to England and reading these charming pieces to us--do come--you will make a great success." Referring to a black singing group from Fisk University which travelled throughout the world the writer added, "The song of the Jubilee Singers touched our hearts years ago--Surely these poems cannot fail to be appreciated here." 60 Dunbar's voyage to England was made on the Cunard Line, R. M. S. Umbria. 61 While at sea he wrote a letter to William Dean Howells asking him to recommend an English publisher for a manuscript that he was in the process of writing. Dunbar then wrote his mother informing her that, "Everything has spurred up auspiciously. I have a nice steamer trunk and major Pond has gotten me a warm overcoat. My comfort is all that either you or I could wish." 62 Dunbar also informed his mother that he and Alice Moore would soon be married. He stated, Alice is "the sweetest, smartest little girl I ever saw...the half has not
been told. Alice and I are engaged you know. This is what I
longed for a year."63

Dunbar enjoyed notable success in England. He was
continuously being booked for recitals and many individuals
and organization desired to interview him. Most memorable
among these recitals was one that he delivered for the
guests of John Hay, also from Ohio, who was serving as the
United States Ambassador to England. John Hay also became
President McKinley’s new Secretary of State in 1899.

Ambassador Hay, who was a writer, was primarily
interested in Dunbar’s dialect literature, probably because
he too wrote in dialect, as in Pike County Ballads.64

Paul Laurence Dunbar’s friendship with John Hay led the
Ambassador to do all that was within his power to promote
Dunbar’s career, and to gain him an audience among England’s
elite citizens. For instance Hay arranged for him to give a
recital before the Savage Club of London. The membership of
the Savage Club included writers, actors, musicians,
painters, scientists, and sculpters. After the recital,
Dunbar was entertained at tea with Mr. and Mrs. Henry M.
Stanly. Henry Stanley, a famous English journalist, was also
noted for his discovery of David Livingstone in 1871, a lost
medical missionary in the Southeastern sector of Africa.
Dunbar noticed that the color line in England was not as rigidly drawn as it was in America. He first noticed this when he met one of his black friends, Henry F. Downings, nicknamed "Dip" who was married to an educated, wealthy European woman. In a letter to his mother, Dunbar indicated that his race did not warrant him having substandard treatment in England. Dunbar wrote, "I am entirely white. My French waiter takes off his cap when I come up the steps. And my blooming rosy cheeked English maid kisses me as if I were the handsomest man on earth." 65 During the months of May and June, 1897, Dunbar presented nightly recitals. Dunbar's success tempted him to ask Alice, his fiancee, to come to England. However he decided that he should wait somewhat longer to determine if the demand for literary readings would continue. Dunbar, who by now was a celebrity in England, had more social activity than he desired. While in London, he dined with the daughter of the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, the Royal Society of Painters in Water Color, as well as "numerous additional English dignitaries." 66 Dunbar found the social demands that fame brought to him to be overwhelming and wrote his mother "I do not wish to go out socially but am somewhat compelled to." 67
Several factors, unrelated to race, led to a waning of Dunbar's success in England. The London reading season traditionally ended in June and would not start again until the fall. This meant a decrease in the demand for literary readings, not only from Dunbar, but for poets in England at large. Miss Ponds, Dunbar's agent, also left Europe, which meant that Dunbar was without official sponsorship. Dunbar could have appealed to John Hay for assistance but by this time England's attention was dominated by the jubilee of Queen Victoria. When referring to the preparations that England was undergoing for the seventy-fifth birthday celebration of the queen John Hay: "The town begins to grow abominable for jubilee...Six miles of lumber deform the streets." Likewise the sale of books in England were severely hampered by the activities of the jubilee to the extent that many of the most noted English novelists were complaining about the economic losses that they suffered.

Dunbar was invited to move into the home of the English writer Henry Downing. Dunbar accepted Downing's offer because the money that he had saved from the recitals was being depleted during the economic decline caused by the jubilee celebrations. Downing had offered to arrange recitals for Dunbar which he graciously accepted; however
Dunbar became angered when he learned that Downings kept more than one half of the proceeds for himself. Dunbar wrote, "the recital was a great success and was $85.00. The dirty dog paid me $40.00 nearly all of which I owed and the other $45.00 he got away with. I have moved from his home into the house with Dr. Alexander Crummell, a black American educator." 70

Crummell, who pioneered the American Negro Academy in 1897, had earlier in 1890 allied himself with the Afro-American League of the United States, which pledged to fight any and all forms of racial segregation and discrimination. Crummell, realizing that Dunbar was economically strained, suggested that he return to the United States. In addition Crummell proposed that he would gather several of his friends together for the purpose of establishing a journal which Dunbar would edit. Crummell also informed Dunbar that he would use these friends to help secure a position for him at the Library of Congress. Dunbar was not very excited about this venture because he was "afraid that it would fail like everything I put my hands to." 71

Dunbar, however, was not accurate in his assertion that all of his endeavors had failed. He was still famous in England despite being financially strapped. Even the press
noticed that Dunbar, despite his race, was a success in London. A London correspondent reported to an American Newspaper "Paul Laurence Dunbar is now being lionized in London. The color line is not drawn in English society and the colored versifier, being the latest literary novelty, is much sought for receptions, garden parties, and similar gatherings."72 Dunbar informed his mother that, "I have gained a reputation here and gained a following that will help me in the long run."73 In addition, Dunbar while in England, was able to publish his first novel, The Uncalled, in which he used a fictitious character named Fred Brandt who escaped a profession as a minister despite the pressures of his mother and community members.74 Dunbar wrote this story based upon Matilda Dunbar’s desire that her son would become a man of the cloth. She perceived that her son was a gifted writer and orator, and therefore he was a natural fit for the ministry—especially considering that such an occupation would give him financial status and community prestige. Dunbar’s novel, which included black characters and scenes focusing upon black life, was sold to Lippincott’s Magazine in September of 1897.75

The care and upkeep of Matilda Dunbar seemed to be a perpetual problem for Paul Laurence Dunbar. Dunbar, who was
in September of 1897 informed that his family was once again experiencing difficulties meeting Matilda's mortgage wrote to his mother:

You must use your own judgement about the house. I will send you some money as soon as I can do so. I think that Rob and Will should remember that I am a long way from home and do all they can to make you comfortable without the worry of little details falling upon me. For five years I did my part as bravely as possible without aid from there. I think that for six months at least they might be able to supply you with all of your needs while I am trying to get on my feet. If I am forced to I will throw everything up and come home, but if I do everything will be spoiled here and I do not know where to turn then.76

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Upon returning to the New York on August 7, 1897, Dunbar devoted himself to writing and giving recitals. However he later sought employment at the Library of Congress through the assistance of Colonel Robert G. Ingersoll.77 At the Republican convention in 1876 Ingersoll nominated James G. Blaine for the presidency of the United States. Dunbar appealed to Ingersoll for help in finding employment because of his awareness that Ingersoll favored the politics of the radical congressional republicans during Reconstruction. Ingersoll, after Reconstruction, no doubt desired to see the
fourteenth and fifteenth amendments upheld for African-Americans. Ingersoll believed Dunbar to be a talented writer whose career was hampered in the United States due to his race. Ingersoll was highly regarded by the black abolitionist Frederick Douglass, for Douglass had nicknamed him as the "Abou Ben Adams"-- thus meaning that he regarded Ingersoll as a lifelong friend of blacks in America.\textsuperscript{78} Ingersoll was an ardent opponent of racism in America and had declared more than once: "Prejudice is born of ignorance and malice and a man who cannot rise above prejudice is not a 'civilized' man; he is simply a barbarian."\textsuperscript{79}

Dunbar worked on the fourth floor of the Library of Congress in the north stacks. Working every other day from the afternoon until ten p.m. meant that he was not able to commit full attention to his writing, and his health suffered as a result of endeavoring to simultaneously juggle both activities. Dunbar earned seven hundred and twenty dollars per year, which was much less than he desired; however, the stable salary appeared attractive especially considering that he soon hoped to be married.\textsuperscript{80} Dunbar wrote, "One must eat and so I plod along making the thing that is really first in my heart a secondary matter in my life."\textsuperscript{81} On the other hand, Dunbar felt that there were
positive factors in working for the Library of Congress such as his ability to utilize library sources to assist with his writing. While working at the Library of Congress, Dunbar managed to publish two short stories, "The Case of Cadwallader" and "Sister Jackson's Superstitions", as well as several poems.82

In addition Dunbar felt Washington D.C. offered him an intellectual African-American community in which he was able to develop lasting friendships. Dunbar stated, "The best Negroes in the country find their way to the capital and I have a very congenial and delightful circle of friends."83 Mary Church Terrell and Frederick Douglass were two of the key intellectual African-American figures to which Dunbar referred. Howard University, which was located in the nation's capital, attracted hundreds of the best and brightest black minds as students from various parts of the country. As a result by the turn of the century Howard became the center of black learning in the United States.

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Paul Laurence Dunbar and Alice Ruth Moore were married a small, private ceremony, in New York on March 6, 1898. Bishop W.B. Denick of the African Methodist Episcopal Church
performed the ceremony and the famous black dramatist, Richard B. Harrison, was Dunbar's best man. The witnesses for this wedding were Joseph Derrick and J. H. Henderson. Paul and Alice had actually started addressing each other as husband and wife prior to their wedding. They wrote numerous letters to each other between January and March 1898 where he used the titles of "My Dear Wife" or "Your Devoted Husband" and she used the titles "Your Own Little Wife" or "My Darling Husband" in the salutations of their letters. Such expressions derived from their desire to be wedded—but Alice's parents would not approve of the wedding, and financial difficulties prevented Dunbar from having the large public ceremony that he preferred.

Alice Ruth Moore married Dunbar against the will of her family. The major objections that her relatives had with Dunbar were the historical class differences in their backgrounds and the extreme darkness of Dunbar's complexion. Despite these objections Alice desired to proceed with their wedding and insisted that Paul came to New York for that purpose. Alice in an effort to marry Dunbar and simultaneously appease her relatives wrote:

Paul, suppose we marry quietly in New York this month, say nothing of it to anyone and live apart for a short while until we are
both ready to be together 'for good'? I want to be yours, I want to be united to you, and yet there is an obligation I owe my friends in the schools to complete my course and get my three certificates."87

Alice, sensing that Dunbar might object to a secret wedding continued to write:

I know you don't care for this sort of thing, but won't you dear? It will simplify matters a great deal. If you will say yes, come up to New York when you can--and I will really be yours. Oh Paul, you don't know how I long to feel that nothing can separate us really!88

Amusingly, Dunbar responded to Alice's plan: "Darling I will come to New York and marry you if you agree that I bring my mother. I have sworn not to marry without her seeing me. I love you with all my heart and I want to be bound to you."89 When Alice informed Dunbar that her sister was somewhat relieved about their matrimonial plans since Dunbar had made an international name for himself, Dunbar replied, "I am glad that your sister is reconciled, dear, and I hope that your dear mother will also be satisfied soon. I can forgive you mother's hesitations, your sister's oppositions I cannot. Only my love for you dear prevents an explosion--a very quiet one, to be sure of sarcasm at this point."90 Dunbar felt that Alice's sister who was younger
and more educated than her mother should not have judged him primarily on his complexion and economic status.

In an effort to defend himself against Alice's mother's convictions that he was incapable of supporting her, as well as reaffirm his social status, Dunbar described the interior of his house in Washington and his association with college professionals at Howard University. Dunbar unnecessarily made an effort to reassure Alice by writing,

Little wife O' mine, I don't believe we need fear our social position here... Yesterday the house was alive with people. The college boys (from Howard University) want to give a dance in my rooms, but I am afraid to promise them. I have furnished the outlines of a house and left all the filling in to be done by your hands. Even in the bedrooms everything is held in abeyance until your will is consulted. I have never wanted to be rich before, darling, but now I do. I want to make your life happy and care free...Dear, there are many good friends for you here with open arms. Everyone wants to know when I am going to bring you. Even Rebekah (Baldwin) says she wants to love you & I know she will while I am sure you will like her aristocratic manners and her brilliancy.... (I) threw down dancing class last week but will attend rigorously hereafter if you want me to.

Alice really did not need such reassurance from Dunbar. She was fully aware of his fame as a writer, close association
with Frederick Douglass, James Whitcomb Riley, and his earlier lecture tour in London.

Paul and Alice engaged in sexual intercourse in mid-November of 1897 prior to their wedding in March, an event which Alice perceived to be potentially embarrassing. She wrote Dunbar in Washington and inquired if he could come to New York "if only for a few hours" before they were married and informed him that she would not marry him until "we have had our little talk." However she added that "It isn't anything of particular grave importance." Alice was referring to an incident which occurred three months earlier whereas Dunbar, while on a trip to New York, became intoxicated, had intercourse with Alice, and caused her internal injury. Alice, who had been visiting a doctor since that incident, wrote, "Things have come to such a pass here until the teachers in my school are asking to see my engagement ring...I enclose to you the Dr.'s bill. I was surprised at the smallness of it, until I learned that physicians generally treat school teachers at half rates." Alice also asked Dunbar to write the doctor and imply that they were married in order to save her from the potential embarrassment of undergoing such treatment as a single woman. She inquired of Dunbar:
Are you going to write that letter? Whatever you do, send a check, not a money order. A check looks so much more stylish and dignified. Say, dear, if you do write it, send the letter to me first. I want to laugh over it, for I want to call on the Dr. Demeurely the next day after he receives it. I am still under his treatment. It will be sometime before I am entirely well. In the meantime I long to kiss you. I know its an expensive interview, I am begging you, but you won’t regret it.96

Dunbar answered this letter and wrote, "Assuredly I will write the letter to the doctor and send him a check as soon as possible. I am no less surprised than you at the smallness of his charges and I am sure no less delighted. I will settle it as soon as possible."97

Dunbar later regretted that he and Alice did not have a public wedding which would later add to their marital frustrations. He had hoped to have the type of wedding where many of his friends and dignitaries would attend. Three days after his wedding he wrote a letter to Alice stating:

The enormity of what we have done has just begun to dawn upon me. We have taken a very bold, rash step whose only vindication will be our entire happiness and well-being. I constantly approach myself when I witness my mother’s grief and dissapointment. You argue the sacrifice you made; but then your mother has seen one of her children married. I feel now and then a flash of resentment at the whole business...I did not intend to write
this, but as I view the matter calmly and outside the intoxicating influence of your presence, my bitterness grows.98

Dunbar added:

We have disappointed everyone. Many looked forward to our marriage with pleasure, and it should have been an event. Instead we sneaked away and married like a pair of criminals of two pleblans with the fear of disgrace hanging over them. Had you cared very deeply for me, it seems you would have not placed me in such a position. I had to give way or seem selfish and uncaring...I love you and can love no less than I have ever done, but I see now that unless I temper my love with common sense, it will lead us both into innumerable follies.99

Soon after the wedding in March 1897, Dunbar was invited to appear on a program in Albany, New York where the issue of the higher education of African-Americans was being discussed. He was invited by a Mrs. Merrill, a patron of Dunbar, who inquired about his fee to give a recital for this event. Dunbar’s usual fee was fifty dollars. However Alice insisted that his services were well worth one hundred dollars plus expenses. Alice’s terms were accepted and Dunbar was scheduled to perform on November 15, 1898.

Dunbar, who arrived in Albany at six o’clock in the evening, asked the carriage trolley driver, who happened to be black, to take him to the hotel. The driver inquired of Dunbar if he was employed by the hotel and Dunbar informed him of the nature of his work and that he would be a resident for a few
days. At the hotel, Dunbar encountered a desk clerk who refused to register him for a room. It was not until the clerk checked the reservations that he learned to his surprise that Mrs. Merrill, one of the wealthiest women in New York City, had reserved the most expensive suite for Dunbar.100 Despite this awareness, the matter was not corrected until Mrs. Merrill physically came to the hotel and insisted that her guest received the best accommodations available.101

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Several African-Americans, including Paul Laurence Dunbar, W. E. B. DuBois, and Booker T. Washington had reached critical points in their careers at the turn of the century. W. E. B. DuBois, who earned a Ph.D in history from Harvard University in 1895, became the first African-American in the humanities to achieve such a distinction. DuBois' dissertation "The Suppression of the African Slave Trade" published in 1896, and his book The Philadelphia Negro published in 1899, established him as one of America's chief scholars.102 Likewise, Booker T. Washington was regarded as the leading black educator in
America, and the spokesmen for black Americans after the death of Frederick Douglass.103

Twenty-seven-year old Paul Laurence Dunbar stood among these giants as the "Poet Laureate of the Negro Race" and a leading American author whose fame reached across the Atlantic.104 With the growing demand for recitals, Dunbar was able to resign his position as a library assistant with The Library of Congress on December 31, 1899. Shortly thereafter he was the only African-American invited to speak at an otherwise totally white attended banquet honoring Congressional Representative George H. White of North Carolina.105

Dunbar was also held in high esteem among African-American leaders. In January, 1900, Booker T. Washington asked Dunbar to attend the annual conference of black farmers at Tuskegee Institute. While at Tuskegee, Dunbar presented a series of lectures on the "Effective Mechanics of English Composition".106 He also presented similar lectures at black colleges in Atlanta and at Fisk College in Nashville.107 Dunbar also appeared on the platform with W. E. B DuBois, Booker T. Washington, and Bishop Lonnie Lawrence of the African Methodist Episcopal Church at hollis Street Theater, in Boston, for a fund raising event for Tuskegee Institute.108 Dunbar recited
several poems and DuBois presented a historical lecture. Also in 1899 Dunbar was conferred an honorary degree of Masters of Arts by the Board of Trustees at Atlanta University for his contribution to American literature and history. Dunbar regarded this distinction as one of his major accomplishments since he was unable to attend college due to his responsibility for his mother. James Weldon Johnson who was present at this event observed, "the hallmark of distinction was on (Dunbar)...that dignity of humility which never fails to produce a sense of greatness." 110

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Dunbar constantly struggled with occasional pneumonia which was aggravated by his drinking habit. Apparently the long hours of writing at night, and the frequent travels to recitals, while simultaneously working at the Library of Congress, caused his frail body's immunity system to deteriorate. In 1899, Dunbar stood approximately five-feet six inches tall and weighed about one hundred and thirty five pounds. Eventually he developed a persistent cough which lingered sometimes for hours. Alcohol consumption granted him temporary relief from his coughing disorder. On
several occasions prior to giving recitals Dunbar used alcohol as medication to prevent coughing interruptions. Sometimes the irritation became so bad that he would cough up blood from his lungs.111

On May 7, 1899 Dunbar's doctor informed him that his coughing disorder was becoming progressively worse and would require him "to have complete rest for at least six months."112 Alice, who had acquired some training as a nurse, slept on a couch by her husband's bedside thus hoping to provide as much relief as possible for his illness at night. Matilda Dunbar wanted to come to New York, and nurse her son back to health. However Alice informed her that providing for such transportation to New York would be too expensive and, "I am sparing no money to make Paul comfortable and insure his speedy and complete recovery."113 In an effort to encourage Alice, Amelia Douglass, the daughter of Frederick Douglass wrote, "You have seen that dear boy very ill more than once but you have pulled him through each time and landed him safely on his feet."114 Despite Alice's hesitations, Matilda found the means to visit her son and insisted that he be placed in a sanitorium. She lectured Alice that while she was certain her efforts were well meant, "in a case like this that is not sufficient."115 Dunbar was thus sent to a sanitorium
in New York which helped him immensely. "I am being cared for so well indeed," he wrote, "that I am afraid that I shall be killed by kindness."116

Despite his illness and confinement at the sanatorium, Dunbar continued to write, although he admitted such persistence affected his health. While writing to his mother, he mentioned, "I have finished an article, done two stories, and three poems since I have been here, but I find that working does not agree with me, so I am working slowly."117

Dunbar’s friends, who were many, sent numerous cards and gifts encouraging him to make a speedily recovery. Governor Theodore Roosevelt wrote him a personal letter expressing his hope that Dunbar’s health would rapidly improve.118 Rebecca Burton, a friend of Dunbar’s wrote, "You have a wonderful future before you. People say splendid things of your work."119 William Burns, Paul’s friend from Dayton, who by now was a doctor, personally visited Dunbar and informed the concerned residents of his home town that Dunbar’s health was improving.120

Despite some improvement with the persistent coughing, Dunbar’s illness had developed into tuberculosis. In an effort to ameliorate this condition Dunbar and his family moved to the Catskills Mountains in upstate New York. The
mountains proved to be a pleasant location for Dunbar and his family. Paul and Alice and "Bud" Burns, who came to visit Dunbar, hiked in the mountains. Dunbar loved the mountains and had determined, "This place is beautiful...Bud Burns has come up to spend two weeks here and will see if the air is all right for me, if it is not I shall go further up."121

Nonetheless, Dunbar's condition did not significantly improve in the Catskills Mountains, which led his doctors to recommend that he relocated further west. Dunbar decided that he would move to Colorado. Matilda Dunbar, who was in Washington, decided that she would relocate to Colorado with Paul and Alice. Dr. Tobey, Paul's friend, wrote to Dr. Eskridge, a physician, in Colorado stating, "I take pleasure by this letter in introducing to you Mr. Paul Laurence Dunbar. Mr. Dunbar has come to Colorado on account of his health. Any consideration you can extend to Mr. Dunbar I assure you will be greatly appreciated."122 Dr. Eskridge replied "I shall be glad to extend to Mr. Dunbar any courtesy in my power when he comes to Denver, and will see that he gets the best medical help possible free of charge. I have many of his poems, and some to me especially those imitating the Negro dialect, are simply exquisite."123
Dunbar moved to Denver in 1899 and concluded it was a very positive environment. "The people of Denver who are mostly Caucasians treated me with the utmost respect" remarked Dunbar. "They know that I am a poet and have made it a point to inform me that my lyrics in dialect as well as those in straight verse has afforded me the right to go down in history as one of America's greatest writers."124 In addition he regarded the Denver area to be more beautiful than the Catskills, and mentioned that the health care which he received from Dr. Eskridge was excellent. Dunbar also mentioned that the merchants, who were aware that he was a internationally recognized poet, were overcompensating in their efforts to deliver needed products to him despite the fact that he lived two and one half miles outside of the city limits. Prior to leaving Denver Dunbar stated that the autumn season was the most colorful and enjoyable season that he had witnessed anywhere in the world and "he laid on her breast drinking pure air like a child."125

Dunbar reluctantly left Denver in the Spring of 1900 due to the failure of his mother's health, brought on by the colder climate and the higher altitude, which led her doctors to conclude that she should leave. Matilda Dunbar observed "Paul's doctors told him not to leave, he sacrificed himself for me and brought me back. He
sacrificed himself for me." 126 Dunbar, no doubt, would have continued to live in Denver if Matilda's health had not declined, although he felt that it took too long for him to get proofs back from his publishers. 127 However Dunbar would endeavor to move heaven and earth to satisfy his mother whom he loved very dearly. No one's desires, including his wife's, came before Matilda's, which in part explains the reason for his eventual divorce. Denver Colorado provided Dunbar with a happy life because it allowed him to work without restrictions. Dunbar wrote, "I can live again and for this I thank Denver with her blue skies, her wine-like air and her great all-holding heart." 128

In the Spring of 1900, the Dunbar family returned to Washington D.C. Prior to leaving Denver Dunbar purchased some artifacts which included a Navajo blanket, coyote ring, Pueblo pottery, Sioux moccasins, sombrero, Mexican rawhide shirt, and a pair of moccasins, which would be used to remind him of the culture and beauty of the region that he enjoyed so much. 129 Dunbar's health started to decline almost as soon as he returned. He struggled with coughing spells and recurring hemorrhages. As a result Dunbar's health would never return to the status that it was prior to leaving Denver.
Dunbar's experience in Colorado led him to write a novel entitled *The Love of Landry* which was published in October, 1900. The story, which reflects episodes of Dunbar's experiences in Denver, highlights the white character Mildred Osborne from New York, who was ordered by her physicians to go to Colorado to seek a cure from consumption. While in Colorado Mildred meets Landry and they engage in a romantic love affair. Dunbar wrote this novel in part based upon his struggle with consumption in Colorado and his romantic life with Alice.

Prior to *The Love of Landry* in April of 1900 Dunbar published *The Strength of Gideon and Other Stories* which was dedicated to his high school principal and teacher Charles B. Stivers. The type of stories ranged from "Viney's Free Papers" focusing upon a manumitted slave woman who refused to leave her Southern plantation because she desired to remain with her husband who remained in bondage, to "The Tragedy of Three Forks" which is a politically motivated story protesting the horrors of lynching. One of Dunbar's short stories entitled "The Case of Caline" depicts a black-working class maid who refused to be exploited by her oppressive mistress. Caline the maid, who was criticized by the lady of the house, threatens to leave
her job and manages to obtain a raise as a result of it.

Dunbar writes:

I's got to come an' ax you, has I? Look ah yeah, Mis' Ma'tin, I know I has to wo'k in yo' kitchen I know I has to cook fu' you, but I want you to know dat even ef I does I's a lady. I's a lady, but I see you do' know how to 'preclate a lady w'en you meets one. You kin jes' light in an' git yo' own dinner. I wouldn't wo'k fu' you ef you uz made o' go!'. I nevah did lak to so'k fu' strainers, nohow.

No ma'am, I cain't even stay an' git de dinner. I know w'en I been insulted. Seems lak ef I stay in hyeah another minute I'll bile all over dis kitchen.


Too many palces in dis town waitin' fu' Caline Mason.

No, Indeed, you needn't 'pologize to me! needn't 'pologize to me. I b'lieve in people sayin' jes' what dey mean, I does.

Would I stay, ef you 'crease my wages? Well--I reckon I could, but I--but I do' want no foolishness.

Huh! Did she think she was gwine to come down hyeah an' skeer me, huh, uh? Whaih's dat fryin' pan 132
During the summer of 1900 Paul and Alice Dunbar returned to the Catskills mountains for their vacation. They enjoyed the coolness of the mountains as well as fishing and hiking through the wooded trails.

The year 1900 proved to be the major pinnacle in Dunbar's career. While in the Catskills he received the June statement from Dodd, Mead, and Company which indicated that he sold approximately twelve thousand copies of *Lyrics of Lowly Life* and five thousand of his *Poems of Cabin and Field*.133

The June 1900 issue of *Current Literature* magazine, which featured Dunbar as the "American Poet of Today" and printed his photogaph, clearly indicates that he had crossed the color line in American literature.134 His popularity and reputation as a writer had surpassed his mentors, James Whitcomb Riley and Eugene Fields. Also in 1900 he was the first person of color elected into the illy white American Social Science Association for his distinction in literature.135 During this same year several of his poems were published in E.C. Steadman's *Anthology of American Literature*.136

By the turn of the century, Dunbar was regarded as a novelist, short story writer, poet, reader, as well as a "a master sentimentalist who wrung the heart of a simpler
Likewise the German newspaper *Lerpzieger Neusete Nachrichten* regarded Dunbar as an international renoun author.138

After 1900 Dunbar never had to subsidize his work as a writer with part-time employment. "I found that my pen yielded me support" remarked Dunbar.139 In addition he no longer had to borrow or accept money from white benefactors. For example, in 1900, when Dr H.A. Tobey offered to loan Dunbar money, he graciously but proudly replied that he did not need it. In a letter to his mother he wrote, "Ma, I had a nice letter from Dr. Tobey offering to lend me money, but I do not need it so there is no use in taking it."140

Dunbar’s quality of life also improved. He moved from his residence near Howard University, a respectable black middle-class neighborhood where Mary Church Terrell the noted women’s and Civil Rights activist stayed, to an integrated attractive suburban neighborhood in Washington. Dunbar’s new home was adorned with the various artifacts that he obtained in Denver as well as hardwoods floors covered in sections with animal furs. His walls included portraits of the various writers who he respected. His bookshelf included various editions of his published books, most of the published material written by his admired friend and mentor
Frederick Douglass, and copies of books from his admired white sponsors Riley and Howells. Dunbar's study, a huge room located on the second floor of this house, contained a library which had copies of the books in his bookshelf on the first floor plus works by Twain, Lowell, Whittier, and additional novelists.

Carter G. Woodson, the noted historian of African-American history, stated that Dunbar's literary reputation surpassed Longfellow's and that his literary talents were multiple. The letters that Dunbar received serve to verify Woodson's claim. A friend of Dunbar's once inquired of him, "Who has made it possible for you to loom far above any of your people? Whose fine nature do you possess? To whom are you indebted for your fine intellect? You to my mind are simply Mr. Paul Laurence Dunbar--a man with a rare talent--a most courteous gentleman may I add without presuming--my friend." The Knoxville Sentinel determined that Dunbar's poetry were genuine pieces of art deserving the same literary respect and reputation as Longfellow. The Mail Express mentioned that Dunbar's recitals were delivered with a "fervor and intensity which compelled the closest attention of his audience." James Weldon Johnson opined that, Dunbar's "voice was a perfect instrument and he knew how to use it."
Dunbar's medical condition declined in 1900. In addition to his problem with consumption he had acquired a chronic disorder of the stomach. Twenty-five percent of all people who died in America during 1900 suffered from this stomach disorder. As a result of ill health in February of 1900 Dunbar cancelled all of his recital appointments and concentrated his efforts totally to writing. Dunbar, who was discouraged by his physical condition and the pressure that he was receiving from his doctors to relocated to Denver, wrote to a friend, "They are trying to force me back to Denver, but I am ill and discouraged, and don't care much what happens."149

Black students from Southern colleges who were endeavoring to finance their education began presenting Dunbar's poetry at churches, clubs, and hotels. Dunbar was glad to know that, despite his illness, the market for his recitals was still strong and that black students would be the beneficiaries of such.150

Dunbar published his third novel in 1901, a historical monograph, entitled The Fanatics, based upon the Copperheads of the North who were opposed to the Civil War. Dunbar had stated to the Chicago Daily News in 1899, "I shall write a long story and it will be about the Copperheads of the North. My sympathies are very strongly with them."151
Dunbar also shared his own opinion regarding the role of African-American during Reconstruction. Despite the prevailing literature which painted Southern black politicians as ignorant and incapable of managing an efficient government, Dunbar argued that the image of the "illiterate and inefficient black man, whom circumstance put into Congress" was not representative of Southern black leadership.152 Dunbar's argument regarding Reconstruction further shows that he painted blacks as effective and capable leaders. Dunbar argued that the educational levels of black Reconstruction politicians in many cases surpassed their white counterparts, a point which would be made again in W.E.B. DuBois' Black Reconstruction in America 1860-1880 published in 1935.153

Despite Dunbar's accuracy regarding black leadership during Reconstruction, he made a few significant historical blunders in The Fanatics which was attributed to his limited historical knowledge. For example, Dunbar implied that the term "Copperhead" was used prior to the Civil War when in reality it was not used as a political term until the firing of Fort Sumter.154 He also regarded the Copperheads as abolitionists along the same lines as Frederick Douglass and William Lloyd Garrison. In addition, while he mentioned that they opposed the Civil War, he failed to make the
association that this term was a nickname given to Northern Democrats. Dunbar also failed to see that if the Copperhead political platform had been accepted by the North, the South would have been an independent region, thus keeping thousands of slaves in bondage. Despite making such historical blunders in this book, which was not brought to his attention by any of his contemporaries, Dunbar's literary reputation did not deteriorate.

At the turn of the century Dunbar was also regarded as an acclaimed writer in Germany. The Berliner Bo'rsencourier reported "Paul Laurence Dunbar hat einer platz in der Geschichten der englischer Literatur beansprucht" meaning that the Dunbar was highly regarded in Germany for his contribution to English literature.155 The Leipziger Neuste Nachrichten, which was referring to Dunbar likewise printed "Auch in der Philologie haben sich Neger bereits einen Namen gemacht" meaning a black writer has made his mark in literature.156

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James Weldon Johnson, a black writer of the early twentieth century and early leader of the NAACP, regarded Dunbar as the pioneering African-American who was able to
break the color barrier in the literary profession thus making it possible for America to accept black writers, such as himself and Charles Waddell Chestnut. James Weldon Johnson wrote, "Paul and I did not clash. I recognize his genius, and in a measure regarded myself as his disciple." 157 Johnson learned to write dialectical literature from Dunbar when he invited him to Jacksonville in the spring of 1900 for a recital at the St. James Hotel. Johnson, who indicated that this recital was well attended by the local white residents of the city, also recorded, "his voice was a perfect musical instrument and he knew how to use it with extreme effect. 158

Dunbar stayed with Johnson in Jacksonville for six weeks giving recitals by day and tutoring Johnson at night. Johnson reported that he and Dunbar became "intimate" friends. Johnson showed some of his poetry to Dunbar for editorial assistance. Johnson's efforts showed the influence of Walt Whitman, causing Dunbar to remark very bluntly, "I don't like them, and I don't see what you are driving at." 159 Johnson concluded that Dunbar's appraisal was justified and that he fortunately found Dunbar's writing style more admirable than Whitman's. 160

Prior to leaving Jacksonville, the black Masons of the city decided to form the Paul Laurence Dunbar Lodge. The
ceremony launching this lodge, which included thirty local residents, was regarded by Dunbar as one of the greatest emotional experiences that he had encountered.

During 1901 Dunbar published *Roly Poly* and *Lil Gal* which were additional collections of his dialectical literature. Despite these accomplishments Dunbar concluded:

> My work becomes harder, rather than easier, as I go on simply because I am more critical of it...I have never yet reached an elevated plateau, and I hope I shall never reach one. I believe when an author ceases to climb he ceases at the same time to lift his readers up with him.161

Dunbar, who crossed the color line in American literature by winning the endorsement of William Dean Howells, the most influential author and critic in the United States, had also by 1901 crossed the color line in American society by receiving an invitation from President William McKinley to attend his inauguration. Dunbar was the only African-American to participate in this event, and was commissioned by President McKinley as one of his aides, with the rank of Colonel.162 Dunbar's mother, who wore a silk evening dress, attended this event with her son. Dunbar's nephew Robert Dunbar, Jr., wrote to his grandmother, "I am glad you enjoyed the inauguration procession. I know Uncle
Paul looked like the gallant colored solider who fought for Uncle Sam."163

By the turn of the century, Dunbar had embarked on a career as an international writer. His reputation had caught up with his earlier sponsors—James Whitcomb Riley, James Newton Riley, and William Dean Howells. Most importantly, he finally reached the point in his career where the income that he received from publications and recitals was substantial enough to allow him to resign his position at the Library of Congress. He had travelled to England as a result of a growing demand for his literature, and discovered that the Englishmen regarded him as an established writer who happened to be black, rather than a black poet. Upon returning to America he eventually managed to establish a steady schedule giving recitals and his publications included *Majors and Minors*, *Lyrics of Lowly Life* and *The Strength of Gideon and Other Stories*.

In his review of Dunbar’s *Major’s and Minor’s*, William Dean Howells had concluded that Dunbar was a gifted writer who deserved the same literary merit as Robert Burns. By the turn of the century Dunbar’s literary reputation began to equal Burns—his name became a household word in America, and his fame extended to both England and Germany. He moved into an integrated suburban white neighborhood in
Washington and was also the only African-American invited to attend the inauguration of President McKinley. Likewise, Dunbar’s picture appeared on the front cover of the *Current Literature* magazine in June 1900. Apart from his health problems, which improved or decreased depending on the region of the country that he resided in, it appeared that the quality of the remainder of Dunbar’s life would continue to improve.
Endnotes Chapter III


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35 Thomas Shallcross to Hardley and Hardley Publishers, no date, LW Dunbar Papers, Roll No. 9.

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CHAPTER IV

Personal and Political Tensions: 1898-1902

The years between 1898-1902 proved to be both rewarding and tragic for Dunbar. By the turn of the century he was an international literary figure and a race representative who demonstrated that the intellectual and artistic ability of blacks could equal and in some cases surpass their white counterparts. Many intellectual figures, both black and white, concluded that Dunbar had done more to erase the myth of the intellectual inferiority of the Negro than any other person of African origin including Benjamin Banneker, Phyliss Wheatley, Frederick Douglass, Booker T. Washington, and W.E.B DuBois.

Considering such accolades one would think that the new century would have ushered in a period of jubilation for Dunbar. However, tragedy and conflict rather than estacy and fulfillment marked these years. Dunbar’s marriage, which began in 1898, ended in 1902 against his will. His alcohol consumption increased as a result of the marriage failure--thus aggravating his physical condition. The breakup of the marriage, however, allowed Dunbar to have

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more time to focus upon his literary career. His conviction that African-Americans should endeavor to enter white-collar professions from which they were excluded led him to write articles criticizing the opponents of integration. In particular, Dunbar condemned Booker T. Washington's program of industrial education. In short, Dunbar did not endeavor to advance his career by avoiding social issues relating to the second class status of African-Americans.

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Paul Laurence Dunbar's 1902 separation from Alice Dunbar was a consequence of his constant drinking, his public and private physical and verbal abuses of Alice, and his determination to be financially and emotionally responsible for Matilda Dunbar despite his wife's objections. Although they never officially divorced, Paul and Alice never reunited after this separation.

Dunbar was an alcoholic. In 1895, Maud Clark, a friend of Dunbar warned him "You are weakening your constitution...your mother requires clothes for her comfort and you have debts yourself. You cannot pay your way and drink as you do." Another friend and a writer for the Talent magazine, Paul M. Pearson, indicated that on a number of
occasions Dunbar was intoxicated while giving recitals. In 1895, Pearson arranged for Dunbar to make a presentation at First Methodist Church in Evanston, Illinois to a large audience from the neighboring university. At eight o'clock, when the recital was to begin, Pearson was informed that Dunbar had broken a dinner engagement at a women's college in Evanston, and that no one knew where to locate him. At 8:30, Dunbar finally appeared for the recital, assisted by a nurse, doctor, and his half brother Robert Murphy. The audience could barely hear the first two selections of his poetry due to his intoxication. While introducing his third selection Dunbar remarked, "I am now going to read the 'Party',...I hope there have been no requests for it, for I would not read it if there had." 2 Dunbar's performance at this recital grew increasingly worse, to the extent that he constantly repeated himself, causing the majority of the audience to leave. The Chicago Post printed the full details of this event. 3

Several factors aggravated Dunbar's drinking problem. The breakup of his parent's marriage caused Dunbar to subsidize his mother's income, beginning in his teenage years and continued throughout his life. These constant pressures led Dunbar to drink heavier later in life. Endeavoring to earn a living as a writer was also
stressful--especially for a black male living in the era of Jim Crow. Moreover, Dunbar's repetitive coughing was an early symptom of tuberculosis. As a result, alcohol consumption became a remedy which Dunbar used to control his coughing spells and simultaneously aided him in handling life's stresses.

Dunbar informed his mother that his occasional his drinking caused blackouts. He wrote "drops must have been put in my beer while I stood talking at the bar and that was the last I knew until the next day." In addition the Chicago Chronicle reported that Dunbar, while at a bar, became intoxicated and lost his gold watch, diamond ring, and other valuables. Dunbar's doctor from Washington, Dr. A.M. Curtist, in a interview with The Afro-American indicated that Dunbar had an uncontrolled drinking problem. Despite such coverage, however, Dunbar's fame as a writer did not diminish.

When intoxicated, Dunbar frequently assaulted his wife. Alice Dunbar informed Matilda Dunbar that she never knew when Paul would embarrass her publicly by slapping her at a dance or while walking along the street. She also informed Matilda that her husband had told Dr. Curtist told that he slapped her several times in Denver, and could not
understand why she was objecting to such treatment now that she was in Washington. Alice, in an interview, added:

Our whole married life was far from happy. Mr. Dunbar was a heavy drinker—there were times when he was not sober for days. When in this condition he was a different man altogether, brutal, in fact. It was an open secret, common gossip among our Washington friends, that ours part of the time was a cat and dog existence... the people in Denver, Colorado, where we went after he contracted tuberculosis, would bear me out in this statement.

Paul's relationship with Alice was also strained by his ties to his mother. Alice recognized that "there was a miserable friction between his mother and myself. She was with us always, as was right, I suppose, but she resented me generally, because he had always been her's solely, and-- well, you know, the kind of story that is..." Matilda came to Denver to care for her son despite Alice's instruction that they could not pay for her transportation. Dunbar was emotionally tied to his mother, which led to her residing with him for most of both his single and married life. Likewise Paul was upset with Alice for their private wedding, mainly because his mother was not there to witness it. Dunbar placed himself in the center of
a love triangle between his mother that bore him and his wife whom he desperately loved.

After Alice decided to leave Paul, Matilda became very angry with her, primarily because of the grief it caused her son.¹¹ Despite such resentment Alice told Matilda, "No matter what you think of me or what happens, I am going to be faithful to you, for we have been through enough to stick together until the end of time."¹² Alice, in an interview, indicated that "our married life would have been a happy one, even with Mrs. Dunbar, senior, in the case, but for the demon drink." Blaming Paul's violent behavior on his drinking, she added, "when he was himself he was a charming companion, and those sporadic moments and days when he was completely himself were delightful beyond compare...It was the memory of those days that gave me strength to stand the others."¹³

After their separation, Dunbar wrote the following poem which reflects his attitude toward his wife's departure:

AFTER THE QUARREL

So we, who've supped the selfsame cup,
Tonight must lay our friendship by;
Your wrath has burned your judgement up,
Hot breath has blown the ashes high.
You say that you are wronged--ah, well,
I count that friendship poor, at best
A bauble, a mere bagatelle,
That cannot stand so slight a test.
I fain would still have been your friend,  
And talked and laughed and loved with you;  
But since it must, why, let it end;  
The false but dies, 'tis not the true.  
So we are favored, you and I,  
Who only want the living truth.  
It was not good to nurse the lie;  
'Tis well it died in harmless youth.  

I go from you to-night to sleep.  
Why, what's the odds? why should I grieve?  
I have no fund of tears to weep  
For happenings that undeceive.  
For days shall come, the days shall go  
Just as they came and went before.  
The sun shall shine, the streams shall flow  
Though you and I are friends no more.  
And in the volume of my years,  
Where all my thoughts and acts shall be,  
The page whereon your name appears  
Shall be forever sealed to me.  
Not that I hate you over-much,  
'Tis less of hate than love defied;  
However, our hands no more shall touch,  
We'll go our ways, the world is wide.14

Alice’s major reason for permanently leaving Dubnar was not the ongoing physical and verbal abuse which she suffered, but her conviction that he was spreading rumors that were tarnishing her character. She stated:

He came home one night in a beastly condition. I went to him to help him to bed--and he behaved...discracefully. He left that night, and I was ill for weeks with peritonitis brought on by kicks. Afterwards, he went down town to a saloon in Washington and said some things about me which I heard and decided not to countenance. Then he went to New York and spread a vile story about me--and that was the reason I broke up my home and went to live with my mother and sister. I could have overlooked the brutal
treatment but the slander I could not stand. I never saw him again after that night...I was genuinely afraid of him, and disgusted too, for this was only a culmination of the misery of four bitter years.15

Despite the emotional and physical abuse that this couple experienced, and Dunbar's explicit attitude of hostility toward Alice, he desperately loved her. Prior to writing "After the Quarrel" Dunbar sent forty-three letters and telegrams apologizing for his behavior and reaffirming his commitment and love for her. On one occasion he desperately asked her to meet him at the "Wilmington Station" and she angrily replied "No."16 Dunbar informed his mother, "she is the cruelest person God ever made and I hope never to make another advance to her...I have wasted my time and efforts."17 Dunbar, in an effort to bury the pain which he felt from the separation, eagerly increased his literary production and alcohol consumption.

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During the course of his career Paul Laurence Dunbar came in contact with several African Americans who gained national reputations for their activism or for their educational contributions to their race. Among them were Frederick Douglass, Dr. Alexander Crummell, Mary Church
Terrell, W.E. B. DuBois, James Weldon Johnson, and Charles Waddell Chestnut. Each of these individuals perceived that Dunbar had unusual ability as a writer and endeavored to assist him in any manner possible. Frederick Douglass provided Dunbar with a job at the World's Fair Haitian exhibit and paid him out of his own pocket. He also insisted that Dunbar reside with him at his home in Washington, D.C. while the writer endeavored to establish his career. Dr. Alexander Crummell, founder of the American Negro Academy, provided Dunbar with career advice while both of them were in England and eventually made Dunbar a member of his organization. Mary Church Terrell, the women's rights and civil rights leader, who lead a campaign against lynching, was Dunbar's next door neighbor in Washington D.C., and maintained a lifelong correspondence with him. She frequently referred to him as the "Poet Laureate of the Negro Race." W.E.B. DuBois, who often appeared on programs with Dunbar to raise funds for Tuskegee, stated that Dunbar was a "lifelong friend, and black protest writer" who was the first of his race to gain national acclaim in his profession. Paul Laurence Dunbar was James Weldon Johnson's mentor. On one occasion, Dunbar stayed in Johnson's home for three months while giving recitals in Florida and provided Johnson with editorial
assistance. James Weldon Johnson and Charles Waddell Chestnut, both of whose literature focused upon the black experience in America, attributed their success to Dunbar, who they esteemed as the pioneer who paved the way for black writers to enter the literary profession. The fact that these activists encouraged Dunbar by providing him with job referrals, housing, emotional support, and simultaneously solicited from him literary and political advice suggests that they did not see him as an accommodationist. In fact, their correspondence reveals no conflicts on the basis of politics or his literature.

Dunbar also came in contact Booker T. Washington. While he appeared on platform with Washington and W. E. B. DuBois in an effort to raise money for Tuskegee, and while he accepted offers to lecture at Tuskegee, he did not embrace Washington’s ideas on industrial education. In fact, Dunbar published an article which criticized Washington for suggesting that blacks should pursue industrial education instead of higher education. 20

While Dunbar did not agree with Washington’s ideas, he did admire him for his ability to raise funds and to build a black educational institution which would enhance his race. For such accomplishments, Dunbar referred to Washington as “a peer of princes in the world’s acclaim.” 21 Dunbar also wrote the following poem in which he honored Washington for his accomplishments:
BOOKER T. WASHINGTON

The word is writ that he who runs may read,
What is the passing breath of earthly fame?
But to snatch glory from the hands of blame
This is to be, to live, to strive indeed.
A poor Virginia cabin gave the seed,
And from its dark and lowly door there came
A peer of princes in the world's acclaim,
A master spirit for the nation's need.
Strong, silent, purposeful beyond his kind,
The mark of rugged force on brow and lip,
Straight on he goes, nor turns to look behind
Where hot the hounds come baying at his hip;
With one idea foremost in his mind, 22
Like the keen prow of some on-forging ship.

Booker T. Washington was grateful to Dunbar for the poem.23 Washington also enlisted Dunbar to write the school song for Tuskegee Institute, which Dunbar accepted. Dunbar wrote:

Tuskegee, thou pride of the swift growing South
We pay thee our homage today,
For the worth of thy teaching, the joy of thy care; And the good we have known 'neath thy sway.
Oh, long-striving mother of diligent sons
And the daughters, whose strength is their pride.
We love thee forever, and ever shall walk
Thro' the oncoming years at thy side.

Thy hand we have held up the difficult steeps,
When painful and slow was the pace,
And onward and upward we labored with thee
For the glory of God and our race.
The fields smile to greet us, the forests are glad, The ring of the anvil and hoe
Have a music as thrilling and sweet as a harp
Which thou taught us to harp and to know.

Oh, Mother Tuskegee, thou shinest today
As a gem in the fairest of lands;
Thou gavest the heav'n-blessed power to see
The worth of our minds and our hands.
We thank thee, we bless thee, we pray thee years, Imploring with grateful accord. 
Full fruit for thy striving, time longer to strive. 
Sweet love and true labor's reward. 24

Paul Laurence Dunbar was aware that Booker T. Washington could do much to further his career. Dunbar was eventually employed as a visiting professor of English and Literature at Tuskegee, and Washington paid him a stipend of two-hundred dollars for writing the "Tuskegee Song." However, Dunbar would not allow the potential of such prestige, monetary awards, and his admiration of Washington's accomplishments to alter his criticism of a philosophy of education which he felt would cripple his race. In an article published by the Independent, Dunbar admitted that Tuskegee Institute was beneficial to blacks. "Any one who has visited the school at Tuskegee, Ala., and seen the efficiency of the work being done there," Dunbar wrote, "can have no further doubt of the ability and honesty of purpose of its founder and president." 25 However, concerning Washington's viewpoint on industrial education, Dunbar observed: "We are now in the throes of feverish delight over industrial education. It is a good thing and yet one of which we can easily have too much...I do fear that this earnest man [Washington] is not doing either himself or his race full justice in his public
utterances. He says that we must have industrial education and the world quotes him as saying we must not have anything else."26 Dunbar's major criticism of Washington's industrial education program was that it served to segregate African-Americans from career paths which were traditionally dominated by white Americans.

Washington was disturbed by Dunbar's article. In a letter to Emmett Jay Scott, Washington wrote, "I note what you say in regard to Dunbar's article. I am very sorry that he has suffered himself to fly off in this way, not because it will do Tuskegee or the cause of industrial education any harm but I regret to see a man discuss something about which he knows nothing."27 Washington, who was careful not to challenge Dunbar's literary reputation, added, "In matters of poetry and fiction Dunbar is a master; in matters of industrial education and the development of the Negro race he is a novice."28

George Washington Carver, the noted black scientist, informed Washington that he supported his position on industrial education and disagreed with Dunbar:

Mr. Washington I hope you will not let any such articles similar to that of Paul Laurence Dunbar give you a moments uneasiness but simply stimulate you to press on. You have the only solution to this great race problem. It is only
ignorance and a bit of prejudice that prompts such articles. Among both black and white, you are living several hundred years ahead of the common herd of both races. Many of our own dear teachers here are just as blind as can be and only live in the present. Three or four hundred years from now they will know and honor your greatness much more than now because they will have been educated up to it.29

Carver's claim that Dunbar was jealous of Washington was unfounded. Dunbar, who would have obtained a degree of higher education if the opportunity had presented itself, likewise felt that post secondary education was essential for African-Americans endeavoring to uplift themselves from poverty. In an article entitled, "Is Higher Education for the Negro Hopeless?" Dunbar argued, "In every section where a Negro college is located, and where there are Negro graduates, it is proven beyond dispute, whatever detractors may say to the contrary, that the moral, social, and industrial tone of the people has been raised."30 "I believe I know my own people pretty thoroughly," he continued, "I know them in all classes, the high and the low, and I have yet to see any young man or young woman who had the spirit to work in them before, driven from labor by a college education."31 Dunbar pointed out that the federal government employed college educated African-Americans and observed: "I have found them men of high intelligence,
clean morality, and undisputed ability, and men, who, but for their race, would strive for and take place among the leaders anywhere. I say this out of no partisan or racial feeling,..."32

During the last decade of Dunbar's life, his writing contained elements of political, economic and social protest. Despite his personal success, he recognized that there were millions of African-Americans who would not be allowed to cross the color line. It was in this context that Dunbar wrote short stories, articles, and poetry which protested racism in America, as we shall see in the next chapter.

Likewise, while Dunbar built alliances with many whites who were in positions to promote his career, he never did so at the expense of his black brethren. In a letter to Dr. H.A. Tobey, one of his white sponsors from Toledo, Dunbar wrote, "Unless we live our lives to protest, as few of us are willing to do, we are all tarred with the same stick."33 Nor was Dunbar just words. Apparently his actions were public enough to get Edward H. Clement, a member of the editorial staff of the Boston Evening Transcript to write Booker T. Washington stating, "I am impressed with the protest of such men as DuBois and Dunbar against the new outburst of intolerance in the South."34
Dunbar was neither an accommodationist or a black nationalist. While he maintained acquaintances with both Washington and DuBois, he supported neither's position fully, but was perhaps closer to the latter. DuBois, of course, did not become a nationalist until the latter part of his career when Dunbar was long dead. DuBois, prior to Dunbar's death was an integrationist, who like Dunbar and the much older Douglass, believed that blacks should be fully integrated into America at all levels. Both Dunbar and DuBois believed that integration could be best accomplished through higher education. Washington, on the other hand, felt that if African-Americans endeavored to integrate into America, racism would become intensified. As a result, he argued that African-Americans should not compete with whites for the sale, production, and utilization of goods, services or talents. Washington concluded that blacks should develop their own market with various commodities and services developed exclusively for the black consumer.

Through the article, "Is Higher Education for the Negro Hopeless?" Dunbar became recognized as a spokesperson for his race. In fact, Dunbar had proven to be a race representative-- a concept which he clearly understood. Dunbar defined the term "race representative" for the Denver
Daily News on September 13, 1899. He remarked, "To have achieved something for the betterment of his race rather than for the aggrandizement of himself, seems to be a man's best title to be called representative." He added, "My ambition is to make closer studies of my people. I don't want to write about the higher walks of life for I know very little in that field. The slums attract me, but at the same time I am not a missionary. If true art elevates, then I may accomplish something towards doing good in this world." Dunbar also informed the reader, "Within the last four years there have been opened two new drug stores, (by blacks) patronized by both races; a hospital and a training school for nurses has been started by the unaided efforts of the Negro people; a free kindergarten has been set going for the black children of the city (New Orleans) who are shut out from such advantages as the whites are blessed with."

Dunbar's domestic problems did not alter his reputation as a writer nor deter him from launching campaigns against racial oppression or the policies of Booker T. Washington. In fact, his literary production increased. Frustrated with his separation from Alice, he turned more heavily to alcohol consumption and likewise was more willing to take risks with his career. In addition, Dunbar's realization that America's racial problems were intensifying in urban cities, and that lynchings that were increasing in the South, led him, by 1902, to specialize in protest literature.
Endnotes Chapter IV

1 Maud Clark to Paul Laurence Dunbar, April 12, 1895, Dunbar Papers, Roll No. 4


3 The Chicago Post, (October 20, 1900).

4 Paul Laurence Dunbar to Matilda Dunbar, August 30, 1900, Dunbar Papers, Roll No. 3.

5 The Chicago Chronicle, (December 2, 1900).

6 The Afro-American, (September 28, 1935): 13

7 Alice Dunbar to Matilda Dunbar, June 26, 1902, Dunbar Papers, Roll No. 9.

8 Ibid.


10 Ibid.

11 Matilda Dunbar to Alice Dunbar, June 17, 1902, Dunbar Papers, Roll No. 3.

12 Alice Dunbar to Matilda Dunbar, June 26, 1902, Dunbar Papers, Roll No. 9.


22 Dunbar Papers, Roll No. 3.

23 Booker T. Washington to Paul Laurence Dunbar, November 3, 1900, Dunbar Papers, Roll No. 1.


26 Ibid.


28 Ibid.


31 Ibid.

32 Ibid.

33 Paul Laurence Dunbar to Dr. H.A. Tobey, December 26, 1900, Dunbar Papers, Roll No. 3.


35 Denver Daily News September 13, 1899.

CHAPTER V

The Final Years: Paul Laurence Dunbar’s Protest Literature 1898-1906

After becoming an established writer, Paul Laurence Dunbar embarked upon a campaign to protest racial injustices. While he wrote some protest pieces prior to being discovered by William Dean Howells, the bulk of his protest literature appeared between 1898 to 1906. Dunbar’s increased emphasis on race coincided with a wave of black migration to northern cities, the massive lynchings which were occurring throughout the South and Midwest, and race riots in various communities. By 1898 Dunbar had become internationally known as a literary figure, an accomplishment which allowed him to live comfortably from the proceeds of his publications. As a result, Dunbar could afford risks in his career which he could not have done earlier. In short, the racial hostility directed towards African-Americans coupled with Dunbar’s established career, led him, by 1898 to become more assertive in the type of literature he wrote.

As a teenager, Dunbar had protested situations in which he felt that whites were endeavoring to exploit African-Americans in general or himself specifically. The Dayton
Tattler, the newspaper funded by Wilbur and Orville Wright which Dunbar edited during his high school years, contained an article in which Dunbar encouraged the Dayton African-American population to demand well-paying jobs and to vote. Likewise Dunbar's forcefulness in reprimanding Mr. Faber, owner of the Democratic Sheet, for not delivering on his promise to grant him editorship of the paper demonstrates his refusal to be victimized.

In 1898, as a response to lynching and black oppression, Dunbar began to protest the social, economic, and political conditions which black Americans experienced. Dunbar has often been classified with the "Plantation School of Writers", such as Joel Chandler Harris and Thomas Nelson Page, who focused on the accommodative strategies used by slaves as a means of pleasing their masters, and who painted happy, docile slaves protected by their paternalistic owners. As the following analysis will reveal, however, Dunbar does not belong to this group of writers.

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In In Old Plantation Days, a volume of short stories published in 1903, Dunbar commented on the numerous hardships slaves experienced and showed that while some
slaves endeavored to please their masters, most covertly and overtly worked against the institution of slavery by slowing down the work pace, destroying crops, and setting the slave overseer against the slave master.3

One such essay from In Old Plantation Days was Dunbar's "Mr. Groby's Slippery Gift." This short story focused upon Jim and Joe Mordant, brothers and field hands on the Mordant plantation. While Jim was described as the "very happy and contented slave", Joe was painted as "the head of every bit of devilry that harassed the plantation." Joe often boasted that he "worked less and ate more" than any other slave on the plantation.4

The slave master, Stuart Mordaunt, and the overseer, Mr. Groby, discussed how they could curb Joe's defiance. The problem was that both the slave master and overseer were afraid of Joe since he was a "fine-appearing fellow, with arms like steel bars and the strength of a giant." Dunbar added, "It was this strength and a certain reckless spirit about him that kept the overseer from laying the lash to his back...It was better to let Joe shirk than to make him desperate, thought Mr. Groby."5 In addition to recognizing Joe's potential to be destructive, Mr. Groby and Stuart Mordaunt feared his ability to organize a slave rebellion. In light of such possibilities Stuart Mordaunt
decided that he must sell Joe because he was too great of threat to the order of the plantation.

In "Mr. Groby's Slippery Gift" Dunbar recounted one of the most oppressive aspects of slavery, the break up of the slave family. It is evident Dunbar realized the extreme loss that slaves felt when their families were separated and selected this situation to highlight the oppressiveness of slavery. He beautifully described the pain and sorrow that Jim felt when Mr. Groby decided to sell:

It was a sad time for him. As he sat by the hearth, his face bowed in his hands, Jim reached over and slapped him on the head. It was as near to an expression of affection and sympathy as he could come. But his brother looked up with the tears shining in his eyes, and Jim, taking his pipe from his mouth, passed over in silence, and they sat brooding until Mely took a piece of 'middlin' off the coals for brother Joe.

After Mr. Groby decided to sell Joe, Jim changed from being a passive, loyal, Christian slave to a determined black man plotting his brother's escape. Jim even refused to tell his wife his plans out of fear that she might reveal his secret to the slave master. Jim developed into a man full of protest and hatred of slavery to the extent that he was willing to risk his life for his brother's freedom.
In another short story from *In Old Plantation Days* entitled "Viney's Free Papers", Dunbar portrayed the effect that freedom had on blacks once they were manumitted or escaped. Viney, a black slave woman, obtained her freedom through the labors of her industrious husband, Ben. Upon gaining her freedom, Viney rejected her slave name, "Raymond," and acquired a new last name of her choice, "Allen." Dunbar wrote that Viney felt, "Evahbody dat's free has dey own name, an' I aln' nevah goin' feel free's long ez I's a-totin' aroun' de Raymonds' name."7 The rejection of the name given to her by her slave master demonstrated the desire of African-Americans to establish their own identity once freedom was acquired. Nonetheless, Dunbar criticized Viney because once free she only associated with other free blacks, who like her, have turned their backs on their slave brethren.

Viney desired to leave the South once she had gained freedom. When she informed her husband, Ben, of her decision she became angered by his refusal to go North with her. Ben replies, "No, I won't go Nawth! I was bo'n an' raised in de Souf, an' in de Souf I stay ontwell I die. Ef I have to go Nawth to injoy my freedom I won't have it. I'll quit wo'kin' fu' it."8 These words do not indicate that Ben was an accommodationist. The fact that he sought
freedom demonstrates his hatred of slavery. He simply
desired to stay in an environment in which he was familiar—
one that was close to his friends and relatives. The
marriage between Ben and Viney was rescued by a black man
named Si Johnson. Si Johnson read to Viney the formal
document that granted her freedom. It included the words
"This is a present from Ben to his beloved wife, Viney." As
a result, Viney decided to remain in the South with her
husband.

In the story "The Ingrate," Dunbar painted a picture of
a heroic slave who escaped to Canada from a plantation in
Kentucky, and eventually served on the side of the Union in
the Civil War. Dunbar wrote this story in memory of his
father, Joshua Dunbar, and called the escaped slave Josh. In
this story Josh was a plasterer like his father.9

Dunbar used "The Ingrate" to demonstrate the
oppressiveness of slavery and to reveal the true intent of
hypocritical slave masters who claimed to have the interest
of their slaves at heart. Mr. Leckler appeared to be a kind
hearted slave master who did all that he could to assist
Josh in obtaining his freedom. However, Dunbar showed that
Leckler was, underneath it all, a capitalist who was merely
endeavoring to exploit Josh's labor for his own selfish
gains. Such hypocrisy was manifested when Leckler offered to
sell Josh his freedom for two thousand dollars. Considering the fact that the profit Josh received was only one tenth of his earnings as a plasterer, and his slave master received the additional nine tenths, it became both evident that Josh would never obtain his freedom under such a proposal and that through such a scheme Leckler would become wealthy.

Dunbar, who painted Leckler as an individual who concealed his true objective, wrote:

If I had been a scheming, calculating Yankee, I should have been rich now; but all my life I have been too generous and confiding. I have always let principle stand between me and my interests... Now this is a matter in which my duty and my principles seem to conflict. It stands thus: Josh has been doing a piece of plastering for Mr. Eckley over in Lexington, and from what he says, I think that city rascal has misrepresented the amount of work to me and so cut down the pay for it. Now, of course, I should not care, the matter of a dollar or two being nothing to me; but it is a very different matter when we consider poor Josh... Every dollar that he is cheated out of cuts off just so much of his earnings, and puts further away his hope of emancipation.10

Josh was aware of his mistreatment and decided to run away. Prior to leaving the plantation, however, Josh used the trickster method to improve his situation. Josh
convinced Leckler to teach him to read despite state laws which prohibited such activity on the grounds that it might inspire the slaves to revolt. However Josh persuaded the greedy Leckler that if he knew how to read and compute he could not be cheated and Leckler's profits would increase. Dunbar portrayed Josh as "a man of more than ordinary intelligence." Until Josh was able to terminate his enslavement, he wore a mask of a nappy, conciliatory, docile, grinning slave who allowed Leckler to teach him to read while he planned for his escape.

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Dunbar's depiction of the African-American experience during Reconstruction was no more blissful than his images of plantation life. In "The Wisdom of Silence", published in *The Heart of Happy Hollow*, Dunbar depicted the racism which blacks encountered during the Reconstruction era. This story described a newly emancipated black Southerner who confronted injustice and racism after the Civil War. Jeremiah Anderson, despite his emancipation, only gained momentary respect. Desiring to provide for his family, Jeremiah was presented with two options. He could become a sharecropper for his former master, which meant that he
would have a house to stay in rent free, a garden in which he could obtain food for himself and his family, and the opportunity to receive a portion of the profits from farming without the expense of purchasing land and equipment. The second option was for Jeremiah to "buy a farm, mortgage it, and pay for it as he could." Dunbar added, "As was natural for Jerry, and not un commendable, he chose at once the latter course, bargained for his twenty acres, for land was cheap then, brought his mule, built his cabin, and set up his household." Jeremiah's desire for property demonstrated that respectability was intricately associated with the middle-class values of farming one's own land. Jeremiah's success as a farmer was too big of an accomplishment for his former slave master, Samuel Brabant, to handle. Brabant desired to put Jeremiah in bondage again. Realizing that he could not own him as chattel property, he figured that if Jeremiah had reason to become indebted to him he would be able to hold him in financial bondage for the remainder of his life. Throughout the story, Brabant constantly reminded Jeremiah that money was available if he needed a loan. Then mysteriously Jeremiah's house burned down, and Dunbar hinted that Brabant might have been the cause. When Brabant was told of the fire, he
responded "Well, Jerry's not dead yet, and although I don't wish him any harm, my prophecy might come true yet." 13

The house burning forced Jeremiah to approach Brabant for a loan. Little did Jeremiah suspect that he was tied to this peonage contract for life.

Dunbar used this story to demonstrate the manner in which blacks who dreamed of success after emancipation entered into tragic situations where they fell victims to peonage contracts. This story portrayed black men as victims of a society which enacted laws that kept them in a second class status. Dunbar's underlying message was that it was impossible for African-Americans to improve themselves economically and socially as long as exploitation and racism could run rampant. Dunbar used Samuel Brabant as a symbol of white America which economically exploited blacks during the era of Jim Crow by preventing them from gaining their fair share of the American economic pie.

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Dunbar also protested lynching. He considered lynchings to be the most savage and bloody example of racism in America. In addition to showing how African-American were innocent victims of such crimes, he demonstrated the
harm that lynchings brought to whites— to their economic condition, moral fiber, and to the reputations of the North and the South. Dunbar used the stories "The Lynching of Jube Benson" and "The Tragedy at Three Forks" to develop these points. In both stories black men were innocent victims of the crime in which they were accused. One victim was accused of arson while the other was accused of the rape and murder of a white woman.

The "Lynching of Jube Benson" appeared in *The Heart of Happy Hollow*, a collection of short stories published in 1904. The story took place in Gordon Fairfax's library, where three white men were discussing lynching. Whereas two of the men expressed their desire to see "a real live lynching", the third party, Dr. Melville did not. Jube Benson, a person whom most everyone trusted, was a loyal Black servant to Dr. Melville and a Miss. Annie. Jube Benson strongly endeavored to please his superiors, despite his awareness that he was economically exploited. Benson showed no desire to improve his condition. He accepted his economic status without resistance. Yet, Jube was assumed to be a criminal the moment Miss. Annie was murdered. Although she died before identifying, her assailent her last words were, "That black..." The whites who heard these
words automatically thought of Jube and organized a search with the intention of lynching him.

Dr. Melville, whom Jube has faithfully served for years, was the first to see him. While there was nothing in Jube's character that suggested criminality to Melville, the Doctor nevertheless doubted his innocence. In light of the fact that a white woman, his girlfriend, Miss. Annie was murdered, and that the last words out of her mouth were "That black" it became all the more apparent that Jude was her murderer. Describing the way that he felt about this situation, Melville stated:

I cannot describe the feeling I experienced as I went out that night to beat the woods for this human tiger. My heart smouldered within me like a coal, and I went forward under the impulse of a will that was half my own, half some more malignant power's. My throat throbbed dilly, but water nor whisky have quenched my thirst...I simply went forward, and watched, watched with burning eyes for a familiar form that I had looked for as often before with such different emotions.16

Dunbar informed the reader that Melville was taught the myth that blacks were evil, inhuman, and inferior to whites, and likewise that all black men subtly desired to possess a white woman.17 Dunbar painted Melville and the other white residents of this community as seeing blacks as beasts
or monsters whom whites dare not trust. Lynchings, they felt, were the only way to deal with such a problem.

Dr. Melville appeared as the worst devil of them all. Eventually Jube was caught. Melville was the first individual from this mob to pull the rope to kill a man who had been denied the right to defend himself before a court of justice. The real culprit emerged after Jube had been hanged. Tom Skinner, whom Dunbar described as, "the worst white ruffian in the town" was dragged in by Jube's brother. His face was scratched and was smeared with a black substance in order to look like a black man.

Despite Melville's realization that Skinner was the actual murderer, he maintained doubt about the complete innocence of Jube. In an effort to prove Jube's connection with the murder, he obtained particles of hair and skin underneath Annie's finger and took them to his office to examine under a microscope. Melville discovered that the skin was that of a white man which was embedded with strands of short brown hair or beard. Melville murdered the wrong man.

The "Tragedy at Three Forks" appearing in the same collection was an even more violent story than the "Lynching of Jube Benson." It was set in rural Kentucky. Like Tom Skinner in the "Lynching of Jube Benson," the real criminal
was white. Jane Hunster, a poor white girl, was jealous of Seliny Williams, who was also white, because Seliny’s father was wealthy. Jane decided to burn Seliny’s father’s house because she was publicly embarrassed by Seliny at a party. Using poor white dialect, to describe Jane Huster’s remarks prior to burning the house, Dunbar wrote:

She thinks I ain’t her ekals, does she? ‘Cause her pap’s got money, an’ has good crops on his lan’, an’ my pap ain’t never had no luck, but I’ll show’er, I’ll show’er that good luck can’t allus last. Pley-take ‘er she’s jealous, ‘cause I’m better lookin’ than she is, an’ pearter in every way, so she tries to make me little in the eyes of people. Well, you’ll find out what it is to be pore— to have nothin’ Seliny Williams, if you live.19

Two black men were arrested for the crime. Unlike Joe in the “Lynching of Jube Benson”, the two men appeared before a judge. However, despite their legal hearing, Dunbar showed that the victims were forced to admit to a crime they did not commit. The prosecuting attorney persuaded these men to falsely confess telling them:

...it is the only way out of this. If you persist in saying you didn’t do it, they’ll hang you; whereas, if you own, you’ll only get a couple in the ‘pen.’ Which ‘ud you rather have, a couple o’ years to work out, or your necks stretched?20
But accepting the blame still did the two suspects little good. The black men were hung anyway. Bud Mason, Jane's fiancee, reflected the attitude of the townspeople by stating, "somebody's got to suffer fur that house-burnin' an' it might ez well be them ez anybody else...After all they are Blacks, and niggers only commit crimes." The whites in this town would not suspect that one of their counterparts, especially a white woman, would commit arson. The fact that two blacks were running through the woods near the scene of the crime seemed ample evidence that they were guilty. Here Dunbar implied that one of the major causes of crime is class difference, rather than race. In other words, he denied the myth promoted by Thomas Jefferson that blacks were innately criminals.22

Dunbar also used this story to indicate that justice was only for whites. Later in the story Dock Heaters, a white man killed Bud Mason, Jane's fiancee, at the scene of the lynching. Despite the fact that while no one was murdered in the house burning yet several people witnessed Dock kill Bud, he was merely arrested, jailed, and later allowed to escape. When one member in the crowd yelled, "lynch him" another responded, "no...who knows what may have put him up to it? Give a white man a chance for his life." This in contrast to the black men, who were accused of a
crime in which there were no witnesses, only heard one plea, "Lynch him!"23

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Several of Dunbar's short stories dispelled the idea among Southern African-Americans that northern migration would allow them to have greater social and economic opportunities. Dunbar was responding to the migration of African-Americans northward beginning in the 1890's. While Dunbar admitted that Northern blacks enjoyed certain social privileges not found in the South, he was also aware that many Northern blacks could not secure property, business opportunities, and a satisfying income because they lacked the skills to qualify them for jobs in industries. Dunbar indicated that racial discrimination in the North confined Blacks to menial positions like elevator operators, janitors, and servants. As a result, many of his male characters became disillusioned and turned to crime as a means of escaping poverty.

Dunbar's reluctance to encourage blacks to migrate North was shaped by his observations of black life in Dayton, Chicago, New York, and Washington, D.C. While he personally managed to find an audience with an educated
African-American community, and managed a middle class lifestyle in Washington, he still recognized that the color line was severely drawn in the North. Dunbar saw the effects of racism on the black urbanite, and likewise witnessed the demoralization of blacks who left the South. Dunbar probably felt that a major reason for his own progressive lifestyle in Washington, which provided him with decent employment at the Library of Congress, stemmed from the fact that Washington was the nation's capital thereby meaning that it would have been too embarrassing for the federal government to totally exclude African-Americans from white collar positions. In addition, while Washington was sometimes felt to be a northern city Dunbar realized that it was actually located in the South. In essence Dunbar was not an enemy of black Southerners. He simply endeavored to demonstrate that northern migration would not alleviate racial discrimination and it could result in a lower standard of living.

Dunbar's first story which focused on Northern migration was entitled, "Jim's Hall," and appeared in *Folks From Dixie.* The setting for this story was New York. Dunbar used the opening paragraph to show that Mandy Mason's previous life in the South was better than the hunger and poverty which she experienced in the North. Dunbar wrote:
For the first twenty years of her life conditions had not taught her the necessity of thrift. But that was before she had come to the North with Jim. Down there at home one either rented or owned a plot of ground with a shanty set in the middle of it, and lived off the products of one's own garden.24

Dunbar insisted that the Mason family would have been better off if they had remained in the South where they would at least have had the possibility of gaining a little wealth. Dunbar described the Northern city as the cruel enemy of the Mason family. They had to work hard to pay for food and clothing which was much more expensive in the North, and they were faced with the task of paying monthly rent in a one room tenement house, whereas their home in the South had been spacious, rent free, and included a large garden. Mandy, who was faced with her first blatant experience of economic struggle stated, "I ain't a-gwine put a-tryin' to pinch along an' sta've to def at las'. I'll kill myself..."25 She became discouraged because she was paid a menial wage for her job, yet the rent for the tenement house continued to increase. During the winter, she and her husband struggled to pay the utilities and noticed that the price for meats and produce increased. Overwhelmed, by this experience Mandy quit her job.
As a result, Jim, Mandy's husband, was not financially stable enough to offer his wife the commodities essential for a comfortable lifestyle. Jim's socio-economic status left him confused. Faced with a hostile and repugnant environment in the North, Jim had difficulty determining whether his actions led to poverty, a fact that seemed hardly acceptable considering that he and his wife were hardworking, law abiding citizens. Rather, Dunbar suggested that Jim's economic plight was related to racial discrimination that produced an over concentration of unskilled men in job classifications similar to his.

Since Jim was unable to explain his economic troubles, he began to blame his wife for his lack of personal fulfillment. Jim desired to see his wife dress like the white women on Sixth and Seventh Avenues, which added to his frustrations since such garments were tremendously expensive.

Dunbar showed that despite the fact that this was a hardworking, working-class family, they were forced to live in poverty. He also showed that blacks typically worked in lower-status jobs and that their earning potential was far less than white workers performing similar tasks. Dunbar concluded that the second class status resulted in part from
the historic and educational disadvantages which blacks faced.

Dunbar did not paint Jim as a mythically lazy black man, but rather as an industrious worker victimized by the inequities that existed in a capitalistic society. Dunbar indicated that the capitalistic Northern society trained white citizens to qualify for industrial positions, but had no regard for black citizens. Jim loved his wife, and while he desired the very best for her, he could not lift himself up by his bootstraps to provide a better life style.

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Dunbar wrote several additional stories protesting social inequities in America and warning blacks against migrating northward. Two of these were "The Finish of Patsy Barnes" and "Silas Jackson," both published in The Strength of Gideon and Other Stories. In "The Finish of Patsy Barnes" Dunbar attacked Northern welfare departments for refusing to give blacks adequate medical treatment. In addition, Dunbar denounced segregated housing as "a natural instinct of colonization."26

Dunbar, in his short story "Silas Jackson," traced the career of Silas Jackson who left the South for the northern
city only to find racism more potent than the South. Upon entering the city, Silas discovered that he would have a difficult time finding meaningful employment. In addition, he became ill and could not afford adequate health care. Silas was forced to return to his rural South, where he had better housing and the comfort of friends who frequently visited him during his illness.28

Dunbar summarized his position regarding the migration of Southern African-Americans to Northern cities by stating:

It is not enough to say that there are intelligent, moral, and industrious negroes in the city. Of course there are, and about them there would be no problem. But their influence for good and respectability cannot be fully felt as long as so large a part of the race are operating in different directions... the voice of the brute who is lynched for an unspeakable crime sounds further than the voice of the man of God who stands in his pulpit Sunday after Sunday inveighing against wrong. So if the better class negro would come to his own he must lift not only himself, but the lower men whose blood brother he is. He cannot afford to look down upon the denizens of the tenderloin or to withdraw himself from them, for the fate of the blacks there, degraded, ignorant, vicious as they may be, is his fate.... The gist of the whole trouble lies in flocking of ignorant and irresponsible negroes to the great city. If they could be stopped, if the metropolis could vomit them back again, the whole matter would adjust itself...."29
Throughout Dunbar’s fiction he illustrated that blacks, Northerners and Southerners, emerged from the Civil War free but poverty stricken. They were also denied civil rights. He felt that the North was less hospitable than the South. White Northerners felt that blacks were a threat to their jobs, housing, and social life. Dunbar felt that the doctrines of segregation and white supremacy dominated the job and housing markets. Due to the limited occupational opportunities available to African-Americans and the disproportionate percentage of them who were employed in menial job categories their opportunities for social and economic elevation were virtually non-existent. The characters in his stories, instead of improving their living conditions often found themselves excluded from the jobs which would grant them home ownership and college education for their children.

Dunbar also contended that African-Americans should develop racial pride. "The Ordeal at Mt. Hope," found in Folks From Dixie, takes place in the post-Reconstruction era when the Jim Crow laws were prevalent. The main character, Rev. Dokesbury, whom Dunbar saluted, managed to obtain a college education and arrived in Mt. Hope as a second class citizen on a segregated coach and immediately sought avenues whereas he could uplift his race. Rev. Dokesbury in essence represented a member of the talented tenth as advocated by W. E. B. DuBois. Dokesbury, who graduated from a Northern college where he studied theology,
came to the South with the idea of fighting racial
oppression. Dokesbury encouraged blacks to organize
themselves through churches and other institutions and to
develop their own schools and colleges for the purpose of
racial advancement. While he encouraged blacks to start
their own businesses and become barbers and carpenters, a
message promoted by Booker T. Washington, his weightier
message was that African-Americans should pursue the route
of higher education for the purpose of educating blacks and
helping them integrate into American society at higher
levels. According to Tom Scott, a black character in this
story who was a native of Mount Hope, the black residents of
this town, were only granted employment at "odd jobs, we
saws an' splits wood an' totes bundles, an' some of 'em
raises gauhd, but mos' of us, we fishes. De fish bites an'
we ketches 'em. Sometimes we eats 'em an' sometimes we
sells'em; a string o' fish'll bring a peck o' co'n any
time."30 The sad aspect of the story was that these blacks
accepted this second class status. Tom Scott for instance
informed Rev. Dokesbury "we has pleanty to eat an' drink,
and clothes to wear, an' some place to stay. I reckon folks
ain't got much use fu' nuffin' mo".31

Through this story, Dunbar scolded blacks who became
complacent with the condition in which they found
themseleves. Dunbar portrayed Tom Scott as an individual who had been brainwashed by white America into believing that his income was sufficient to provide him an adequate lifestyle. Through the character of Rev. Dokesbury, Dunbar encouraged African-Americans to develop race pride by becoming actors instead of victims. Rev. Dokesbury informed Tom and the other residents of Mt. Hope that instead of selling their fish for menial wages they should become merchants and open fish markets where they could make a substantial profit. Rev. Dokesbury informed the Black residents of Mt. Hope that historically the state of African-Americans stemmed from their relationship with a white society, which had defined and structured the world in which they acted and reacted. Rev. Dokesbury dismissed the myth that African-Americans were innately lazy, and informed his congregation that they have been victims of a racist environment. He suggested, however, that they may break the chains which have held them in bondage by starting their own businesses and by seeking higher education.

Dunbar also wrote short stories and articles which promoted political protest. Responding to the 1898 race riots across America, Dunbar wrote:

The African is told that he is not yet ready to participate in government,
because he has not yet learned to govern himself, and the race which preaches this proves its own right to political domination by rioting, the rapine, and the slaughter with which for weeks past the civilized world has been scandalized. Since when was ever a psychological fact established by a musket? After all the question is not one of the negro's fitness to rule or to vote, but of the white man's right to murder him for the sake of instruction....America strides through the ashes of burning homes, over the bodies of murdered men, women and children, holding aloft the banner of progress. Progress! Necessity! Expediency! But why is it necessary to excuse these acts of sophistry? Is not murder murder? Is not rapine rapine? Is not outrage outrage?32

By 1898 several Southern states had disfranchised Blacks. Dunbar, who criticized these discriminatory measures, warned America of the racial violence which would occur if the vote was denied to African-Americans. He wrote:

We are confronted with the statement of the sudden enfranchisement of the negro was a mistake....the whites made it. Must the negro suffer for it.? The m stakes of life are not corrected that way. Their effects are eternal. You cannot turn back the years and put the ten millions of people into the condition that four million were thirty years ago. You cannot ignore the effects that ensued, the changes that followed and make the problem of today the problem of 1865. It is a different
one. The whole aspect of the case has changed. Public opinion has shifted. Try as you will, though it has grown awry, you cannot put the plant back into the seed. Of course, you can root it up entirely; but beware of its juice.33

Dunbar was fully aware that if the vote was taken away from African-Americans they would become powerless. Such powerlessness, he argued, would allow for the legal creation of a second-class citizenship.

A number of Dunbar’s short stories exposed the political manipulations of white politicians, who either endeavored to obtain the black vote by making promises that they never intended to fulfill, or who simply assumed that blacks would vote for the Republican party out of the tradition established during Lincoln’s presidency. Dunbar raised several questions which depicted the sad status of African-Americans in relation to the American government. His initial question focused on what could be done to prevent blacks from being denied political power. He also questioned the ability of black property owners to protect their rights if they were not able to elect individuals who were sympathetic to their causes. Lastly he was concerned about the manner in which black workers could protect themselves from the abuses of labor unions, which excluded
black workers from membership, and management who hired black workers at wages lower than whites.

In the story "Mr. Cornelius Johnson, Office Seeker," Johnson was a Southern black who sought political office in his hometown. In an attempt to receive a political appointment, Johnson accepted a bribe from Congressmen Baker to support his campaign with the understanding that should Baker win the Congressional election, Johnson would obtain a paid political appointment. Johnson arrived in Washington to congratulate Baker for winning and, to his surprise, he was ignored. The end result was that Johnson never received a political appointment. Dunbar used this story to criticize the Republican party which used blacks to help them win close elections only to ignore them. Likewise he cleverly showed the hypocrisy of white politicians who manipulated weak black men to promote their selfish ambitions.

In another story entitled "The Scapegoat", which was set in a small town whose population was fifty percent black, Dunbar protested against black politicians who manipulated black votes in their endeavor to obtain special favors from white politicians. Robinson Asbury, a black man, who rose from poverty to become a barber and a lawyer, betrayed the confidence of his African-American brethren by convincing them to vote for Republican candidates who only
desired to have black voters give them better leverage at the polls. Referring to Asbury, Dunbar wrote:

They gave him money, and they gave him power and patronage. He took it all silently and he carried out his bargain faithfully. His hands and his lips alike closed tightly when there was anything within them. It was not long before he found himself the big Negro of the district and of necessity, of the town.35

Asbury’s barber shop became a social club where black men gathered and talked. It was here that Asbury used his influence as a lawyer to convince blacks that he knew which candidates would do the better job in supporting social issues that would benefit them. Dunbar subtly suggested that Asbury was able to build his barber shop and law practice from financial gifts which he received from white politicians.

Dunbar also pointed out that Asbury could have used his barber shop as a mechanism for organizing the black community to resist white oppression. Likewise Dunbar showed that Asbury failed to see that he was a victim despite the financial gifts that he received from such politicians. It was obvious that these politicians could not accept him as their political or social equal since they
never encouraged him to seek political office. In essence, Dunbar painted Asbury as a mere puppet of the white man.

In "A Council at State" Dunbar invented a black character named Miss. Kirkman who acted as a spy for the Republican party. As a spy, who like Asbury, was given financial rewards by officials of the Republican party, Kirkman's major function was to disrupt a black political convention. The purpose of the convention was to denounce the Republican party for its failure to enforce policies that would end segregation. In an effort to achieve her objective Kirkman contacted several conservative blacks and encouraged them to reduce their opposition against the administration. One such black that she successfully recruited was her fiancee, Joseph Aldrich, whom she threatened not to marry unless he complied with her request.

She told him:

I mean if you are going to marry me I am not going to let you go to the convention and kill yourself....Look here don't talk to me about convictions. The colored man is the underdog, and the underdog has no right to have convictions. Look here you're going to the convention next week and you're going to make a speech, but it won't be that speech. I have just come from Mr. Hamilton's. That convention is to be watched closely. He is to have his people there and are to take down the words of everyone that talks, and these words
will be sent to his Central Committee. The man who goes there with the imprudent tongue goes down. You’d better get to work and see if you can’t think of something good the administration has done and dwell on that.36

During the convention many blacks, who were earlier noted for their radical political stances, toned down their positions in an effort to preserve their middle class status. For example, Bishop Carter, who presided over the meeting and was noted for speeches which outlined the manner in which the Republican party had unjustly treated black voters, gave an accommodative opening address. Dunbar, who described this speech, wrote:

....a very careful, pretty address it was, too-- well worded, well balanced, dealing in broad generalities and studiously saying nothing that would indicate that he had any intentions of directing the policy of the meeting. Of course it brought forth all the applause that a bishop’s address deserves, and the ladies in the back seats fluttered their fans and said: ‘This dear man how eloquent he is.’37

Bishop Carter, like Joseph Aldrich, muted his dissent and adopted a middle of the road approach. He informed the convention delegates that blacks must be careful not to
voice their dissent too fast. He added we must be "moderate and conservative." 38

The mention of the word "conservative" alarmed Mr. Gray, a black delegate from Ohio who shouted at Bishop Carter and lectured the convention:

Conservatism be hanged! We have rolled that word under our tongues when we were being trampled upon, we have preached it in our churches when we were being shot down; we have taught it in our schools when the right to use our learning was denied us, until the very word has come to be a reproach upon a black man's tongue! 39

Through the character of Gray, Paul Laurence Dunbar called for open resistance to the conservative politics of Bishop Carter, Miss. Kirkman, and the accommodative techniques of the Republican party. Dunbar warned blacks that they must focus their attention upon attaining the full benefits of their constitutional rights. Likewise they must put an end to the actions of the Republican party which relegated them as "crushed men of a crushed race." 40

Jim Courtney, editor of the New York Beacon joined Gray in protesting the conservative drift of the Republican party. Despite the efforts of Miss Kirtman, who approached him prior to the convention and requested that he soften his criticism of the administration, he decided to voice his
true feelings. He delivered a speech which was as bitter and radical as the one delivered by Gray. He reiterated all of the injustices suffered by African-Americans after Reconstruction while the Republican party refused to denounce the lynchings in the South and the development of Jim Crow laws.

One major difference between the speech presented by Courtney and Gray's speech was that the former advocated violent techniques in fighting racism. Courtney declared:

'And to the press of Washington, to whom I have before paid my respects, let me say that I am not afraid to have them take any word that I may say. I came here to meet them on their own ground. I will meet them with pen. I will meet them with pistol,'...Yes even though there is but one hundred and thirty-five pounds of me, I will meet them with fists.41

In this aspect, Courtney proposed the same type of protest as advocated by David Walker and Nat Turner. Here Dunbar showed that in order for African-Americans to achieve justice and equality they must abandon the traditional approach of Uncle Tomism and passive resistance to change.

Much of the oppression Dunbar wrote about was reflected in the news media during the 1890's. Newspapers used their influence and power to the detriment of African-Americans. Courtney, who Dunbar presented as an individual fearful that
white newspapers would suggest that blacks were supportive of the Republican administration, granted black reporters permission to use his New York press to report that black Republicans, at the convention, condemned their party for its failure to protest racial injustice.

Through "A Mess of Pottage" Dunbar showed that blacks were historically abandoned by both political parties. In this story, Dunbar showed that to both parties, the black vote was regarded essential for winning elections. However neither made a commitment to social and political issues that would benefit African-Americans. Dunbar exposed the strategies used to obtain the black vote. The most popular technique used would be to pay a black person whom the community held in high esteem to act as a spokesperson for a party or a particular candidate. Another strategy would be to grant some blacks important positions within the administration which were non renewable. Such blacks recognized that they would be replaced unless they demonstrated their ability to rally black voters in support of the candidate or party for which they were employed.
Dunbar cannot justly be grouped with the plantation school of writers such as Joel Chandler Harris and Thomas Nelson Page. The question of his affiliation with the plantation school arose because he used pre-Civil War southern plantation scenes as the setting for some stories as well as the fact that he wrote dialect poetry. However, under close examination of members of the plantation school of writers, it becomes apparent that Dunbar’s characters are different.

Dunbar’s slave characters used covert and overt means of resisting slavery, whereas the slaves of Harris and Page happily accepted their status. Likewise the slaves of Harris and Page were portrayed as completely free and loyal to their masters. In turn, the masters were all benevolent and paternalistic toward them. None were brutal and hypocritical like the masters portrayed by Dunbar. Black freedmen as portrayed by Harris and Page found themselves troubled and confused by the new status. Yet, Dunbar’s freedmen emerged as individuals desirous and capable of devising means whereby they could make a new life for themselves after slavery. In addition there were no elements of protest in the literature of Joel Chandler
Harris and Thomas Nelson Page, whereas Dunbar's writings were filled with such. Dunbar's protest against the disfranchisement of blacks, lynchings, political manipulation, and economic exploitation, also disproves the contention of his critics that he supported the slavery-as-civilizing opinions of the Plantation school.
Endnotes Chapter V

1 Dayton Tattler December 27, 1890.

2 Paul Laurence Dunbar to Faber, Dunbar Papers, Roll No. 3.

3 Paul Laurence Dunbar "Mr Groby's Slippery Gift" In Old Plantation Days (New York: Dodd Mead and Company, 1903), 95.

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid., 96.

6 Paul Laurence Dunbar "Mr Groby's Slippery Gift" In Old Plantation Days (New York: Dodd Mead and Company, 1903), 101.


9 Ibid., 66.


11 Ibid., 89-90.

12 Ibid., 96.


14 Ibid., 199.

16 Paul Laurence Dunbar "The Lynching of Jube Benson"  

17 Ibid., 234.


19 Paul Laurence Dunbar "The Lynching of Jube Benson"  

20 Paul Laurence Dunbar "The Tragedy at Three Forks"  

21 Ibid., 276.


23 Ibid., 279.

24 Ibid., 282.

25 Paul Laurence Dunbar "Jimsella" Folks From Dixie  

26 Ibid., 117.

27 Paul Laurence Dunbar "The Finish of Patsy Barnes"  

29 Paul Laurence Dunbar, "The Negroes of Tenderloin," Dunbar Papers, Roll No. 4.


31 Ibid.

32 Paul Laurence Dunbar, "The Race Question Discussed", Dunbar Papers, Roll No.4.


37 Ibid., 330.

38 Ibid.

39 Ibid., 331.

40 Ibid.

41 Ibid., 333-334.

CHAPTER VI

Paul Laurence Dunbar Through the Ages: 1906-Present

By the time Paul Laurence died on February 9, 1906, he was an international literary figure. To his credit were twenty-two books and scores of articles. His most popular publications included *Oak and Ivy* (1892), *Majors and Minors* (1896), *Lyrics of Lowly Life* (1896), *Folks From Dixie* (1898), *The Strength of Gideon* (1900), *In Old Plantation Days* (1903), *The Heart of Happy Hollow* (1904), and *Lyrics of Sunshine and Shadow* (1905). Critics writing while Dunbar was alive almost universally praised him for his accomplishments. Walter C. Bronson, in *A Short History of American Literature* (1900), for instance, characterized Dunbar as an American writer through whom "the Negro speaks directly." Bronson added, with the typical white supremacist undertones of the age, that Dunbar demonstrated the African-Americans' ability to participate in the "higher intellectual and artistic life." ¹

Despite Dunbar's accomplishments, since his death his character and motives have been debated by historians, literary critics, and political activists. The older treatments of Dunbar, written by individuals who supported
the goal of racial integration, presented him in glowing terms. However, this evaluation changed radically as a consequence of the Black Power movement of the 1960's. The new wave of more nationalistic Black scholars challenged Dunbar's fame as a depicter of black life and culture, arguing, for instance, that his motives for writing "Negro dialect" stemmed from his desire to obtain international acclaim through the humiliation of his race. Critiques of Dunbar published during the 1970s overwhelmingly concluded that he was more of an "Uncle Tom" than a champion and spokesman for Black rights." By the 1980s the nationalist scholars had carried the day with the consequence that Dunbar and his literature were exiled from the African-American protest tradition. This chapter, then, in addition to discussing the historical progression of opinion on Dunbar, argues that Dunbar's critics have not evaluated him in terms of his era and the restraints under which he lived, but rather they have placed him within their own contemporary context.

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Paul Laurence Dunbar died of pneumonia on Friday February 9, 1906 at 3:30 in the afternoon. His remains lay
at his residence at 219 North Summit Street in Dayton, at which time his friends paid final tribute to his memory. His funeral was held on February 15, 1906 at the Eaker Street A.M.E. Church in Dayton where he had been a member since youth. Several individuals of renown participated in Dunbar's funeral. Rev. George Bunby, rector of St. Margaret's Mission, read the scripture while the obituary was delivered by Dr. A.W. Dury of Dayton's Union Biblical Seminary. Afterwards Rev. Woodson, pastor of the Eaker Street A.M.E. Church, delivered the sermon, which was followed by a rendition of songs by the church's choir. Dr. G.A. Funkhouser of the Union Biblical Seminary delivered an address on the contributions Dunbar made to Dayton and the nation, at large. Then Dr. Tobey, Superintendent of the Toledo State Hospital, and Dunbar's patron, read a series of poems written by the poet. After Mr. Ray G. Upson's song, "The Holy City" the service closed with the benediction.

Dunbar was mourned by several of his relatives who attended his funeral. They included Matilda Dunbar, mother of the poet, Alice M. Dunbar of Wilmington, Delaware, estrayed wife of the poet, Robert S. Murphy, and William T. Murphy, the half brothers of the deceased, and John H. Burton of Lexington, Kentucky, who was an uncle. Matilda Dunbar received numerous telegrams and letters of sympathy
from admirers of Dunbar. Mrs. Eugene Fields of Chicago, who was the wife the late Eugene Fields, poet and author, wrote, "Receive my sincerest sympathy. Be comforted in your son's greatness." Brand Whitlock, mayor of Toledo wrote "You have lost a son; I have lost a friend; but America has lost more than all else, and that is a poet. In your sorrow remember that his songs will preserve his beautiful personality for the world." From Washington D.C. came a message, from President Theodore Roosevelt stating, "The nation and the race as well as yourself have sustained an irreparable loss." There were many additional messages of sympathy from equally prominent individuals.

Matilda Dunbar was also telephoned by James Whitcomb Riley, a noted writer who was partly responsible for Dunbar's successful career. Riley conveyed his dearest sympathy to Matilda and confirmed to her his belief that Dunbar was a genius and a significant American writer. Finally, Judge Dustin of Dayton concluded, "Dayton produced many distinguished men, but Paul Laurence Dunbar was probably its most distinguished citizen, not only in his own day, but in other generations in this city."

After Dunbar's funeral several citizens from Dayton meet at Eaker Street A.M.E. Church to adopt the following "Resolutions of Respect":
Paul Laurence Dunbar, poet, novelist, and philosopher has by wisdom of Divine Providence been removed from the ties and associations which bound him to earth. He lived but the average length of American life; but such was the energy, industry and activity of the man whose name today is a household word where ever American literature is known, by his indomitable will, tireless spirit and boundless ambition, he has carved for himself a name among the leaders of thought and action not only in his own race but in the world of letters and field endeavor. Born and reared in his home city, known and loved by us who knew him best, we friends, neighbors and fellow citizens of the distinguished dead, offer this tribute to his memory.

Be it resolved. That in the death of Paul Laurence Dunbar, Dayton, Ohio lost a distinguished citizen, a brilliant leader and a most eminent figure.

Be it resolved. That the invaluable service rendered by him to his race, the nation and the world of letters be held by us a precious legacy and a constant inspiration to go forward in the work of uplifting, enabling, and unifying the race.

Be it resolved. That we hereby extend to the devoted mother, brothers and other members of the bereaved family, our sympathy and profound sorrow in this beclouded hour. May the light out which went out when the son and brother died be found again beyond the dark river where no light is known.

Be it further resolved. That a copy of these resolutions be furnished the press and also to the family of the deceased.7
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For almost a half century after Dunbar’s death, the literature regarding his scholarship was plentiful and portrayed him in a positive manner. George Davis, in “The Services of Dunbar” published in *Voice of the Negro* (1906) labelled Dunbar a “Negro genius” a black scholar to whom African-Americans could look upon as a role model. Despite the problems of “Jim Crowism” Davis argued, Dunbar had managed to become an international figure. In the same year, Mary Church Terrell, the noted African-American women’s and civil rights leader, also opined that Dunbar was an “American genius.” Terrell’s article, “Paul Laurence Dunbar” argued that he was “undoubtedly the greatest poet his race has ever produced and it is certain Nature has bestowed the gift of poetry upon few, if any, Americans with more lavish hand than she did upon Dunbar.” Terrell concluded, “The more one thinks of the obstacles Paul Dunbar was obliged to surmount, the more remarkable appear both the quality and quantity of the literary labor which he performed.” Lulu Clippinger’s “Paul Laurence Dunbar, the Negro Poet Laureate” (1906) concurred with William Dean Howells in his assertion that Dunbar was a gifted poet and short story writer. Clippinger found Dunbar’s poetry to be “hopeful and joyous, reflecting in the man the spirit of his
race."\textsuperscript{10} W.E.B. DuBois indicated in "The Voice of Voices" that "with the death of Paul Laurence Dunbar the negro race loses its one poet who could interpret the soul of the black man-- his various moods and passions, his sorrows and his hopes-- better, perhaps, than any other poet of his time."\textsuperscript{11} Booker T. Washington in his \textit{Up From Slavery} (1906) indicated that Dunbar, more than any writer of his era, was able to place the Negro in the forefront of the American mind.\textsuperscript{12}

Additional commentaries prior to 1910 also made mention of Dunbar's scholastic abilities. Lida Keck Wigglin's biography \textit{The Life and Works of Paul Laurence Dunbar} (1907) portrays him as a representative of black gentility and genius.\textsuperscript{13} David Clark's \textit{Paul Laurence Dunbar Laurel Decked} (1909), a pamphlet containing addresses which were read at the unveiling of the Paul Laurence Dunbar Monument in Dayton on June 6, 1909, noted that several individuals made reference to Dunbar's intellectual achievement.\textsuperscript{14} Emerson Venable's \textit{Poets of Ohio} (1909) cites as Dunbar's greatest talent his ability to reflect the ideas and moods of black Americans.\textsuperscript{15}

More than any scholar during the decade of the 1910's, Benjamin G. Brawley applauded Dunbar for being a "positive race representative" for African-Americans. Brawley's \textit{The Negro in Literature and Art} (1910) indicated that Dunbar
was an "early race representative" who through his poetry and short stories lifted "the Negro from the stupor" of being ignored for his literary contributions to America. While Brawley recognized the literary contributions of Phyllis Wheatley, he also recognized that Dunbar was the first African-American to gain a significant white readership while simultaneously maintaining an audience among numerous African-Americans.16

Brawley's views were echoed by other critics of the era. William S. Long's American Literature: A Study of the Books That in the Earlier and later Times Reflect the American Spirit (1913) mentioned Dunbar as an author who gave "expression to the negro thought and feeling."17 Julia L. Henderson's A Child's Story of Dunbar (1913), a biography written used Lida Keck Wiggins's, The Life and Works of Paul Laurence Dunbar as a guide to portray Dunbar as a positive role model for youth.18 Likewise, Alice M. Dunbar Nelson, the former wife of Paul Laurence Dunbar, in "The Poet and His Song," graciously overlooked many of the troubled details of their marriage when she argued that biographies should be written about individuals who have "long lasting memories of greatness" and because of their existence lifted their people and humanity to a new social and intellectual level. This she concluded, "was true of
Paul Laurence Dunbar. Dr. W.S. Scarborough, former president of Wilberforce University, argued that William Dean Howells, James Whitcomb Riley, Dr. Davis W. Clark, all who were writers, and others were accurate in their decision to bestow upon Dunbar, the title "Poet Laureate of the Negro Race." Scarborough cites Dr. Davis W. Clark as stating:

But, when all is said, his true distinction lies in the fact that he interpreted the particular to the universal, the Negro to the whole human race. He demonstrated too, by his own genius that the Negro also belongs to the divine family on earth, in spite of all prejudiced denial...The accident of his seniority as a poet of his race would alone insure him a permanent place. He is the first among ten million. Again, he did not inherit, he originated...That this young Negro should take up what was heretofore been the white man's own distinctive art, and excel and surpass in it, is the marvel of the hour. The Caucasian's wealth of literary inheritance and training of several millennium's seemed to give no advantage over the meagerly furnished and heavily handicapped son of Ham. Right worthily, then, is Paul Laurence Dunbar "laurel-decked." Thus does Dr. Clark emphasize the appropriateness of the verdict.

Dr. Scarborough depicted Dunbar as an African-American scholar who was proud of his racial heritage and culture. He was not an "Uncle Tom," but a pioneer for his race:
When we come down to modern times and review the field as it is stretched out before us, there is no literary character that stands higher than Paul Laurence Dunbar. We speak of Longfellow and Whittier and Bryant and Lowell, and other great American poets, and speak of them with rightful pride; but to my mind not one of them was a sweeter singer than Paul Laurence Dunbar...In his song he helped pave the way for a future for his race. He has...trodden the ground for others to follow, and what was possible in his case is possible for others. The very fact that he has made his way to the front from humble origins and against tremendous odds shows the power of a soul. Paul Laurence Dunbar was no...no Blind Tom whose powers in one direction were miraculous and balanced by the dwarfing of all else in his nature and character...Paul Laurence Dunbar was of African ancestry. It could not be claimed that a large percentage of his ability was due to the amount of Caucasian blood in his veins. He represented the Negro in America in letters as few others who have reached eminence could do...He felt for his race...(and) sang with the heart and tongue of his people.22

Sarah E. Simon’s American Literature Through Illustrative Reading (1915) argued that Dunbar was the "first representative of the African race to attain rank as an American poet."23 James D. Corrother’s In Spite of Handicap (1916), in a chapter entitled, "Dunbar and Frederick Douglass", argued that despite the social limitations forced upon African-Americans in the nineteenth century, these two men rose as race representatives whose literary writings were among the best of the era.24
During the 1920's, with the Harlem Renaissance underway, some scholars indicated that Dunbar's usage of black dialect was the prime factor that promoted his career. These scholars did not feel that Dunbar used dialect to reflect negatively upon his people. Robert T. Kerlin's *Contemporary Poetry of the Negro* (1921) viewed Dunbar as a well known dialectical poet who "revealed to the negro youth of our land the latent literary powers of their race." Kerlin felt that Dunbar's literary dialect was effective in displaying the social and economic conditions of nineteenth century African-Americans. Charles Burch's "The Plantation Negro in Dunbar's Poetry" (1921) stated that "Aside from preserving the dialect of the plantation, Dunbar has given a true record and an honest interpretation of the black man of the south." Burch also argued in his "Dunbar's Poetry in Literary English", that Dunbar's poetry in dialect were "charming" additions to the native literature. James Weldon Johnson, the leader of the Harlem Renaissance, in his *The Book of American Negro Poetry* (1922) regarded Dunbar's usage of black dialect as a skill which he perfected that allowed him to "rightfully" be classified as the most noted black writer of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Johnson added that Dunbar was the first black poet to "rise to a
height from which he could take a perspective view of his own race." 28 The noted black author and historian W.E.B. DuBois, in his *The Gift of Black Folk: The Negroes in the Making of America* (1924), argued that Dunbar was the undoubted "laureate of the race" whose "works spoke for the whole nation." 29 DuBois, who eventually became an ardent black nationalist, did not perceive Dunbar's black dialect writing or his image of the Southern slave as reflecting negatively upon African-Americans.

By the end of the 1920's, Dunbar was regarded overwhelmingly as a successful writer. Thomas M. Henry's, "The First Black World Poet" (1929) characterized Dunbar as an international scholar and "one of America's best poets." 30 Charles Edward Russell's *An Hour of American Poetry* (1929) viewed Dunbar as a "champion and inspiration to his fellow sufferers." Dunbar's greatest success, Russell argued, was in his "dialect poetry" but he also did poetry in "straight-away' language. 31

During the 1930's critics altered the focus away from Dunbar's poetry to his short stories. Benjamin Brawley in "Dunbar Thirty Years After" (1930) called Dunbar a "true singer" and "still the foremost of all those who represent the negro in our national literature." 32 Vernon Loggin in *The Negro Author: His Development in America* (1931)
indicated that Dunbar's *The Sport of the Gods* was his "most interesting" novel, whereas *Folks From Dixie* was the "most artistic fiction book produced by a negro" until Charles Chestnut's *Conjure Woman*. Loggin's concluded that Dunbar's gift "distinguished him as the...outstanding literary figure who had by 1900 arisen from the ranks of the American negro." 33 Several authors during the Depression decade analyzed his successfulness in integrating into the American mainstream. Willis D. Weatherford's and Charles S. Johnson's *Race Relations: Adjustment of White and Negroes in the United States* (1934) indicated that Dunbar was "the first American negro poet to produce genuine poetry and to fully integrate into the American mainstream." 34 Carter G. Woodson, founder of the Association for the Study of Afro-American Life and History in his *The African Background Outlined: A Handbook for the Study of the Negro* (1936) wrote that Dunbar "approached the negro with an open mind...forgetting the race problem" and thereby sought to be regarded as a mainstream American author of African background rather than a writer who was handicapped by the perceived limitations of his race. 35 In an anonymous article entitled, "Significant Achievements in Spite of Handicaps" (1938) Dunbar was regarded as an "major example" of African-American success. 36 An additional anonymous
article, "Negro Poets: Singers in the Dawn" (1938) mentioned that Dunbar was accepted by white readers and became the "writer of most distinction among Negroes of his time."37

The trend which began in the thirties to examine Dunbar's success in integrating into the American mainstream continued in the forties. W.E.B. DuBois in his Dusk of Dawn: An Essay Toward an Autobiography of a Race Concept (1940) indicated that one of Dunbar's major strengths was his ability to obtain white supporters to help build a demand for his literature. DuBois added that Dunbar, who was proud of his racial heritage, did not believe that his race negated his ability to write well nor did Dunbar cancel his association with his African-American brethren once he gained national renown.38 Bertha Roger's Little Brown Baby (1940) made mention of Dunbar's success at gaining an integrated audience.39 Victor Lawson's Dunbar Critically Examined (1941) cites Mary Church Terrell as stating:

Whether Paul Dunbar will be rated great or not, it is certain that he was rendered an invaluable service to his race...Each and every person in the United States remotely identified with his race is held in high esteem because of the ability which Paul Dunbar possessed and the success he undoubtedly attained.40
Dunbar was continually applauded for his ability to have his literature accepted by white Americans without offending African-Americans. Philip Henry Lotz’s *Rising Above Color* (1944) and John G. Van Deusen’s *The Black Man in White America* (1944) concluded that Dunbar’s ability to write poetry and short stories that included white characters suggested Dunbar did not want to be limited in the type of literature he could offer to America.41 Van Wyck Brook’s *The Times of Melville and Whitman* (1947) indicated that "Negro literature, properly speaking, was not to begin until the 1890’s with the appearance of the poems of Paul laurence Dunbar." Brooks added, "Dunbar was not only a writer of Negro literature-- he was a writer of American literature."42 John Hope Franklin’s *From Slavery to Freedom: A History of Negro Americans* (1947) emphasized that Dunbar was an American poet instead of a "Negro poet." "Few poets in America" Franklin stated have been able to capture so completely the spirit of some aspect of American life and to distill it into such delightful verse as Paul Laurence Dunbar."43 Joel Augustus Rogers in *The World’s Great Men of Color* (1947) listed Paul Laurence Dunbar.44 W. Tasker Witham in his *Panorama of American Literature* (1947) complimented Dunbar for his ability to produce literature which appealed to interracial audiences and his gift
of describing the life style of uneducated blacks. Whitman concluded, "better than any of his race (Dunbar) has captured the speech and spirit of the uneducated Negro...The poems in literary English sometimes reach heights of lyrical outburst...his literature has mass appeal to both races." 45

During the period of 1950-1970, interest in Dunbar sharply declined. Scholars such as Philip S. Foner, Herbert Aptheker, Langston Hughes, Waldo Phillips, Arna Bontemps, and Robert Goldston continued to see Dunbar as a positive force in African-American culture. However it was during this era that others began to argue differently. 46 During the 1970's, Gossie Hudson basically became the sole supporter of Dunbar. Hudson argued in his dissertation, "A Biography of Paul Laurence Dunbar" (1970), that "during the early 1900's Dunbar offered a symbol of black leadership which young blacks admired, respected, and echoed."

Nonetheless, the criticisms of Dunbar caused Hudson to modify his praise. In "Paul Laurence Dunbar: Dialect et la Negritude", Hudson asked: "Are Dunbar's writings 'black' or do they qualify him as a chief 'Uncle Tom' writer of his race, or both? Dunbar cannot be exonerated from all charges of 'Uncle Tomism.'" 47
The literature which reviewed Dunbar critically originated in the 1930's-1940's. Such literature, however, was relatively scarce. V.F. Calvert's *The Liberation of American Literature* (1932) concluded that "Dunbar belonged all to obviously to the Booker T. Washington School of yesteryear." 48 Buell G. Gallagher's *American Caste and the Negro College* (1938) argued that Dunbar was an example of a black author who "largely" conformed to white stereotypes and then found success. 49 J. Saunders Redding's *To Make a Poet Black* (1939) argued that Dunbar became trapped by writing "Negro dialect" - which means that his endeavors to write literature in "straight English" were usually substandard to the dialectical writings in which Dunbar stereotyped southern slaves as wayward. 50 Hugh M. Gloster's *Negro Voice in American Fiction* (1948) opined that Dunbar usually chose to avoid racial issues and his short stories seldom escaped the limitations of the plantation tradition. 51

Dunbar's image, was further attacked during the 1950's. For example, Charles Glickenberg's "Alienation of Negro Literature" (1950) argued that "Dunbar was a victim who lent himself to the writings of black poetry which popularized ugly stereotypes of black southerners." 52 In addition
Charles T. Kindilien's *American Poetry in the 1890's* (1956) stated: "The more one reads the poetry of Dunbar and comprehends his peculiar dilemma, the more one wonders at his accomplishment." The dilemma that Kindilien referred to was his belief that Dunbar, who desired to be a national writer, managed to write literature that confirmed white stereotypes of black caricatures for selfish economic gains. J. Saunders Redding added in his *The Lonesome Road: The Story of the Negro's Part in America* (1958) that Dunbar's life represented a "negro" who submitted to the literary desires of his white superiors. Dunbar, Redding continually charged, wrote dialect poetry and short stories as an avenue of gaining fame at the expense of hurting the image of his black brethren.

The Black Power Movement of the 1960's witnessed increased opposition to Dunbar's literature. August Meier, a white radical historian made the following comment about Paul Laurence Dunbar in his *Negro Thought in America 1880-1915* (1963):

> When dealing with Negro characters, most notably in his short stories, Dunbar, in deference to the white reading public, limited himself almost entirely to the plantation tradition with its stereotypes of carefree slaves and paternalistic masters and Negroes preferring the rural
South to the urban North. Even his final novel, *The Sport of the Gods* (1902), while describing how a southern negro was railroaded to jail, is mainly concerned with depicting the demoralization of his family in the corrupt life of the Northern city to which they move, and ends on an idyllic note of plantation paternalism...It is doubtful that Dunbar had any real appreciation of the folk Negro."54

Meier also attacked Benjamin Brawley for depicting Dunbar as a "negro genius." Meier argued:

Even more explicit than Miller about the idea of special "Negro Genius" for the arts was Benjamin Brawley, an English professor at Morehouse College and Howard University and an ardent champion of Negro culture and Negro history. The son of a Charleston minister, Brawley had the chance to develop his cultural interests by taking degrees both Chicago and Harvard Universities. He was not primarily interested in the practical, everyday side of racial struggle, though he saw value in the work of both Washington and his critics. 56

Robert A. Walker's *The Poet and the Gilded Age: Social Themes in Late Nineteenth Century American Verse* (1963) regarded Dunbar as a "passive author" who took an accommodationist position on race advancement similar to that of Booker T. Washington. 57 David Littlejohn's *Black On White: A Critical Study of Writing by American Negroes* (1960) argued that Dunbar was guilty of creating the myth of the "plantation nigger."58 Littlejohn indicated that reading Dunbar's poetry was similar to "eating jars of
peanut butter ... only a few of his poems shows honorable emotions." Littlejohn concluded that Dunbar’s fame was not kept alive because of the merit and true literary scholarship of his writings, but that, it was racial pride "more than anything else" which kept Dunbar undeservingly in the forefront of the American mind. James A. Emanuel and Theodora L. Goss in their *Dark Symphony: Negro Literature in America* (1968) determined "as a novelist Dunbar avoided the deeper problems of the race...his short stories usually observed the limitations of the plantation tradition."

Dunbar, by the end of the 1960’s, was overwhelmingly considered by the African-American intellectual community as a black writer who assisted white racist authors to reinforce the stereotypical caricatures of the Negro. Edward Margolien in his *Native Sons: A Critical Study of Twentieth Century Black American Authors* (1968) argued, "No white racist has ever caricatured Negro folk more grossly" than had Dunbar in his dialect. Edgar A. Toppin also concluded in his *A Biographical History of Blacks in America Since 1528* (1969) that despite the mistreatment suffered by African-Americans historically, Dunbar "failed to confront sufficiently the cruel mistreatment of his people," through his literature although he had ample opportunity to do so.
Benjamin Brawley and Mannings Marable represented the extremes of the arguments which were taken on Paul Laurence Dunbar's character and motives. Brawley, an integrationist scholar whose writings on Dunbar began in the 1910's and ended in the 1960's, regarded Dunbar as a "race representative" and "role model" who made possible the careers of twentieth century black authors. To be sure Brawley was influenced by the times in which he lived. In an era when blacks were endeavoring to eradicate the post-Reconstruction Jim Crow laws-- thereby hoping to make African-Americans a part of the American mainstream-- Paul Laurence Dunbar appeared as a successful writer, who despite racism, managed to become an international figure. Integrationist scholars of the first half of the twentieth century found it easy to support Dunbar, especially when black nineteenth century role models such as Mary Church Terrell, W.E.B. DuBois, and the radical abolitionist Frederick Douglass also endorsed Dunbar as a positive figure. James Weldon Johnson's personal testimony of Dunbar's perceptive descriptions of black figures in his writing coupled with Dunbar's verbal disapproval of Booker T. Washington's accommodation platform proved to the "Brawley school of writers" that Dunbar was much more a part
of the turn-of-the-century protest tradition than many authors were led to believe.65

In his "We Wear the Mask: The Tragedy of Paul Laurence Dunbar," Mannings Marable, a black Marxist scholar, more than any author led the campaign of the 1970's against Dunbar. Marable painted Dunbar as an unhappy author who felt trapped by the type of literature that he must write. Dunbar's desire for fame, Marable argued, meant that he could not use his literature as a means of protest. Marable was convinced that Dunbar's last major work, *The Heart of Happy Hollow*, published in the autumn of 1904, was a "blithe series of essays on the spirit of laziness and the inherent happiness of Negro peoples."66 Marable criticized Dunbar because of his failure to refute racist literature in the era in which he lived. Marable asked of *The Heart of Happy Hollow*, "was this any viable refutation of Thomas Dixon's *The Leopard's Spots* or *The Clansman*, texts that depicted the Afro-American in terms of a beast or a menace of civilization?"67 "The tragedy of Paul Laurence Dunbar," Marable concluded, "was that in spite of his brilliance, the white world made his life virtually unbearable. In spite of his love for black people, Dunbar was never given—nor gave himself—the chance to fully express his love."68
Other scholars in the 1970's followed Marable's lead in negatively reflecting upon Dunbar. Doris Lucas' dissertation, "Patterns of Accommodation and Protest in the Fiction of Paul Laurence Dunbar" (1973) concluded that Dunbar was more an accommodationist than he was a champion of black rights. Lucas perceived Dunbar's willingness to write black dialect and short stories relating to the plantation tradition as evidence that he had wandered from his early cultural values. She concedes that Dunbar showed signs of protest in his poetry, but contended that his short stories were short of it. Like other scholars who were critical of Dunbar, she indicated he was influenced by the Booker T. Washington "school of accommodation." 69

Darwin T. Turner's "Paul Laurence Dunbar: The Poet and the Myths" (1974) rejected the claim of William Dean Howells that Dunbar provided the American public with a "sympathetic interpretation" of his race. 70 Turner was also convinced that Dunbar promoted negative stereotypes of blacks as "shiftless, lazy, easily satisfied people concerned with nothing except eating, sleeping, and making love." 71 He argued that in "The Deserted Plantation" and "Christmas on the Plantation" Dunbar painted an image of Southern slaves who were nostalgic before the Civil War, as well as slaves who were so emotionally attached to their masters that they
were willing to continue working for them without financial compensation.72

Todd Duncan's dissertation "White Audience, Black Artist: Paul Laurence Dunbar and the Context of Entrapment" (1974) concluded that the image of Dunbar as a genius and positive depicter of black life and culture is more mythical than factual. Dunbar's desire to be known as an American writer of African descent rather than a black writer was Dunbar's entrapment. Duncan insisted that white America would not allow Dunbar to write protest literature. In addition, he argued that Dunbar was used as an instrument of racist whites to reflect negatively on the African-American experience. As a result Dunbar's life seemed insignificant. He had been betrayed by his wife, white authors, publishers, and businessmen, but more than anything he betrayed himself. In short, Dunbar was "entrapped" by a literary profession which prevented him from writing protest literature. Dunbar thus became the worst enemy of his best potential ally--his race.73 Wallace Ray Peppers and Felix Okeke-Ezigbo's dissertations were the last scholarship completed on Dunbar. These scholars, who were influenced by the negative literature published on Dunbar during the 1970's, followed the trend. Pepper's dissertation, "Linguistic Variations in the Dialect Poetry of Paul Laurence Dunbar" (1979), while
primarily written as a study criticizing Dunbar’s literary style, nevertheless contended that Dunbar’s dialect poetry and short stories painted African-American slaves as docile beings."73 Felix Okeke-Ezigbo’s dissertation, "Eagle Against Buzzard: The Dialect Poetry of Paul Laurence Dunbar and James Weldon Johnson" (1979) pitted Dunbar against Johnson. Dunbar was depicted as "buzzard" who was more interested in pleasing his white patrons than with elevating the status of his black brethren. On the other hand, Johnson was seen as an "eagle" who through his writing deliberately and aggressively endeavored to erase many of the stereotypes that haunted African-Americans.74 Okeke-Ezigbo, a black nationalist, used the descriptions that he created to further argue that African-Americans should support the establishment of independent autonomous institutions rather than appeal to or depend upon white institutions to integrate blacks within them. Dunbar’s decision to write short stories that featured white characters, Okeke-Ezigbo argued, was a further disappointment to black radicals.
Along with being recognized and honored by the academic community, Dunbar has been memorialized through the naming of a host of institutions in his honor. Almost every major city in America today has a Paul Laurence Dunbar public school. Likewise many scholarships funds have been named after him. Next to Frederick Douglass and Martin Luther King Jr., more institutions have been named in honor of Dunbar than any other African-American in the history of the United States. Major sections of African-American communities in the United States such as neighborhoods and streets have been named after Dunbar as well. Another fact which points to Dunbar’s significance is the distinction that he received by being placed upon an American stamp—a achievement which few African-Americans have obtained.

Dunbar’s Impact on America is also witnessed by the development of the Paul Laurence Dunbar House in Dayton Ohio, which was financed by the Ohio state legislature and preserved by the Ohio Historical Society. This project, which was the former residence of Paul Laurence Dunbar, contains Dunbar’s books, furniture, and additional important artifacts.
Geneva C. Turner's "For Whom Is Your School Named?" (1953) calculated that approximately three hundred black public schools in America were named after Paul Laurence Dunbar. She used this fact to demonstrate Dunbar's significance to the American society. However Turner argued that Dunbar's most enduring contribution to African-Americans was by paving the way for the education of blacks in America by proving that blacks, if given the opportunities, could make valuable contributions through professions from which they had been historically rejected. Many of the schools that Turner listed were institutions developed during racial segregation. This fact points to his significance within the black community--another reason to refute the assertion of some scholars that Dunbar was an embarrassment to his race. Many of the black communities provided scholarships for their graduates in the honor of Dunbar--a practice which still occurs in many black communities today.

Several streets and sections of black communities are named after Dunbar or his literary works. The cities of Dayton, Washington, Chicago, New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Cleveland, Charlotte, Little Rock, Denver, Boston, and many additional cities along the eastern coast
of the United States bear such names "Dunbar Street", "Oak and Ivy", and "Heart of Happy Hollow" neighborhoods.77

The black radical intellectual W.E.B. DuBois, an ardent admirer of Dunbar, demonstrated his conviction that Dunbar was not an accommodationist, and that Dunbar should be lauded by becoming associated with several institutions which were named after him. DuBois once inquired about purchasing the Paul Laurence Dunbar Insurance Company in Newark, New Jersey and eventually purchased seven units of the Paul Laurence Dunbar Apartments (Condominiums) in Harlem, New York. In addition, DuBois became a member of the board of trustees for the Paul Laurence Dunbar National Bank and the Paul Laurence Dunbar News, in New York.

W.E.B. DuBois, who was interested in purchasing the Dunbar Life Insurance Company, inquired of Dr. Godfrey Nurse, a believed director of this company, about further information regarding its operations and status. DuBois wrote:

Dr. Godfrey Nurse
185 West 135 Street
New York City

My Dear Mr. Nurse:
Printed as one of the Directors of the Dunbar Life Insurance Company of Newark, New Jersey May I ask if you are one of the Directors and what you know about the company?

Very Sincerely Yours,
WEBD/pp78
DuBois further showed his interest in purchasing the Dunbar Insurance Company of Newark or possibly establishing one like it, with the same name elsewhere in the United States. He mentioned that one of the company's directors in his opinion was "throughly unreliable" and thereby wondered if the company was experiencing financial difficulties.79

Dr. DuBois was also connected with the Paul Laurence Dunbar Apartments in which he and his wife lived and simultaneously owned several units. These apartments mainly served a black middle class clientele. Due to a demand for additional housing in Harlem as a result of black migration which was occurring after World War One, several blacks including W.E.B. DuBois appealed to John D. Rockefeller, Jr. and other philanthropists to finance the Paul Laurence Dunbar Apartments. The decision to name these apartments after Dunbar stemmed from the belief that "Paul Laurence Dunbar had done more to raise the intellectual status of Negro before white Americans than other Negro before of after time."80 Mr. Rockefeller, who was impressed with the idea of both building apartments for blacks in Harlem and naming them after Paul Laurence Dunbar, purchased an entire block from 149th to 150th Streets and from Seventh to Eighth avenues in Harlem. The cost of the land and the erection of the apartments totaled $3,300,000.82 Included on the
grounds was a large playground for children equipped with slides, see-saws, sand piles, and drinking fountains. In addition two nurseries were developed to provide day care for the resident's children. The project received the American Institute of Architects prize in 1927.

The success of this project in Harlem led John D. Rockefeller, Jr. and other philanthropists, such as Julius Rosenwald, to build additional Dunbar apartments in Chicago, Newark, Detroit, and Washington. Eventually numerous black leaders from many northern cities began to pressure Rockefeller to build the "Dunbar projects" in their cities.83

The Paul Laurence Dunbar National Bank which was housed in the Dunbar Apartments in Harlem had a capital and surplus of over a million dollars in 1928.84 Its board of directors included W.E.B. DuBois, Roscoe Bruce, manager of the apartments, and three additional white members. The operating staff of this bank was totally black. The bank received its revenue from the savings invested by a black middle class clientele which lived in the Dunbar apartments and around Harlem, as well as black businessmen throughout the nation. The objective of the bank was for "the advancement of the Negro without limits."85 DuBois added, "We shall look forward then with interest to the
development of the bank. If it adds simply one more bank in Harlem to the banks of New York, we shall be profoundly disappointed, no matter how large its capital and how great its dividends. If it takes a real step towards an industrial democracy which includes the darker races, we shall hail it as one of the great steps of the 20th century.86

The Paul Laurence Dunbar News began as another avenue, among many black newspapers, whereby the voice of African-Americans could be heard. This paper was mainly New York based and focused upon the life and history of black residents in Harlem. It denounced social injustice and called for the integration of African-Americans in all walks of life and professions. Using Paul Laurence Dunbar as an example the paper indicated, "if the Negro was given the ample opportunities then he would demonstrate that in whatever professions the white man pursued the Negro could excel just as high."87 This paper on occasion also printed some of Dunbar's poetry.

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Paul Laurence Dunbar continued to live in the heart and minds of African-Americans after his death. He was more
than a poet or a writer. He was an example of what blacks could achieve if given the ample opportunities. He came from humble beginnings. Born the son of slave parents he nevertheless did not allow the chains of oppression to lock him out of the career that he desired to pursue. He developed a body of friends, both black and white, during his childhood and continued upon this trend throughout his life. Such childhood friends included both "Bud" Burns, who eventually became one of the few black medical doctors in America and the famous Wright brothers.

The history of America would be incorrectly written without the inclusion of Paul Laurence Dunbar. He was an early race representative, who despite the opinions of his critics during the decades of the sixties and beyond, was lauded by black protest activists and engaged in black protest as well. While on the one hand he was under the thumb of white editors who desired to see him paint a cartoon image of black Americans, on the other hand Dunbar wrote stories about plantation slavery showing that slaves used covert and overt means to attack the institution, thus in many cases "duplicating" their masters. Despite the Jim Crow laws of the era in which he lived Dunbar managed to become an international figure by refusing to write "ghettoized" literature. His decision to write literature which featured
white characters was in essence a form of racial protest. Dunbar endeavored to demonstrate that black writers could publish literature as objectively about white characters as white authors pretended to write about black characters. In this sense Dunbar successfully crossed the color line. He was an American poet who was black instead of being reduced to a "negro" poet. By using this strategy Dunbar like the slaves he wrote about duped his oppressors. While he realized that he would not become a published scholar without the assistance of white presses, he likewise decided that if he must write dialect literature and scenes focusing upon plantation slavery, then he would subtly use it as an element of protest.

Dunbar's impact upon America is seen by the institutions that were named in his honor as well as the activist African-Americans who lauded him during and after his death. Chief among such activists was the radical intellectual W.E.B. Dubois, who not only labeled Dunbar as a "protest proponent" but also clearly and deliberately allied himself with institutions which were named after Dunbar. In this context, any study which concludes that Dunbar was an accommodationist "Uncle Tom" must be thoroughly reexamined.
Endnotes Chapter VI


3 Ibid.

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid.

6 "Dunbar's Memorial Service" Dayton Journal June 27, 1909.

7 Ibid.


21 Ibid.

22 Ibid., 139-140. Dr. W.S. Scarborough added, "Paul Laurence Dunbar was a genius. Only a genius could have sung as he sung, only a genius could have triumphed as he triumphed, only a genius could have made a permanent place in American literature for himself as he has done. His death was untimely. His career was not completed. What might he not have done had more years been given to him?"


32 Benjamin Brawley, "Dunbar Thirty Years After" *Southern Workman*, 59, (April 1930), 189-191.


40 Victor Lawson, *Dunbar Critically Examined*, (Washington: The Associated Publishers, 1941), xiv-xv. This statement by Mary Church Terrell is also stated in her article "Paul Laurence Dunbar" *The Voice of the Negro*, (April, 1906), 277.


56 Ibid., 267.


59 Ibid., 64-67.

60 Ibid., 67.


64 Benjamin Brawley was the primary scholar who promoted this argument through his literature.

65 I refer to the "Brawley School of Writers" as those authors between 1930-1967 who allied themselves with Brawley arguing that Dunbar was either a genius, race representative, pioneer of effective race relations, or a positive depicter of African-Americans. See Melier's _Negro Thought in America_ (chapter 14) "The Social and Intellectual Origins of the New Negro" to gain a picture of the arguments regarding integration verses separatism during the era in which Dunbar lived, pp.256-278. Also see Lawrence W. Levine's _Black Culture and Black Consciousness Afro-American Folk Thought From Slavery to Freedom_ ("Preface" and "A note on Black Dialect") New York: Oxford University Press, 1977.


67 Ibid., 24.

68 Ibid., 39.


71 Ibid., 157.

72 Ibid., 155-168.


77 Ibid.


82 Ibid., 335.

83 Ibid., 353


85 Ibid., 379.

86 Ibid., 382.

CHAPTER VII
CONCLUSION

Paul Laurence Dunbar did not become a noted literary figure at the expense of reflecting negatively upon African-Americans in his literature. Beginning with his high school years and beyond Dunbar demonstrated that he would confront individuals and issues which he felt oppressed him individually or African-Americans collectively. His reasons for writing black dialect were multiple. Dunbar heard his parents who were slaves from Kentucky tell fireside stories of their experiences in slavery in dialect. Likewise, Dunbar as a lad, followed his mother to the homes of former slave women where he listened to various slave stories and fables in dialect. Dunbar developed a skill of writing in black dialect prior to being discovered by William Dean Howells. After meeting Howells and James Newton Matthews, who on occasion wrote in white Southern dialect, Dunbar learned that there was a demand for dialect literature and decided to use his skill of writing black dialect poetry and short stories as a means of earning a living and entering into the literary profession.
Dunbar did not limit himself to writing black dialect pieces focusing upon Southern slaves. In addition he wrote stories featuring white characters, both poor and aristocratic Southerners, who spoke in dialect. Dunbar’s motivation for writing these stories was to demonstrate his ability as an African-American to write literature other than that which dealt with his race. Through this literature Dunbar was making a statement— one which said that he refused to be ghettoized as a black writer, however; he saw himself as an American writer who happened to be black. This strategy was a form of protest used by Dunbar to stop the literary world from classifying him as a "Negro writer."

Dunbar decided that if he must write dialect literature then he would subtly use it as a means to protest the oppressive strategies used by whites to keep blacks in a second class status. Dunbar also demonstrated the manner in which many slaves duped their masters by wearing masks of being happy and conciliatory while simultaneously plotting for their escape. Dunbar wrote the poem to convey this idea:

We Wear The Mask

We wear the mask that grins and lies,
It hides our cheeks and shades our eyes,—
This dept we pay to human guile;
With torn and bleeding hearts we smile,
And mouth with myriad subtleties.
Why should the world be otherwise,
In counting all our tears and sighs?
Nay, let them only see us, while
We wear the mask.

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

While Dunbar wrote short stories and poetry protesting lynching and the continued social, economic, and political problems that African-Americans encountered during the era of Jim Crow he never emerged into becoming a separatist or a nationalist. While Dunbar developed acquaintances with the separatist accommodationist Booker T. Washington and the radical black intellectual W.E.B. DuBois, he supported neither's platform. Unlike Booker T. Washington, the nationalist, and W.E.B. DuBois who by his death had abandoned his campaign for integration, Dunbar became an advocate of full racial integration. Dunbar wanted to be perceived as an American writer having African ancestry rather than a Negro poet who was handicapped by the limitations of his race. His writings, letters, and literature reviews, along with his actions, reveal his advocacy of race integration and race advancement. Dunbar
developed an audience of both black and white readers and became noted as the most accomplished American writer of African descent of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In this context Dunbar was successful in his endeavor to "cross the color line."
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