Amherst in the World

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Remembering Dunbar

Amherst College and African American Education in Washington, DC

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Charles Drew Memorial Cultural House, the only dormitory on Amherst College’s campus named after a black alumnus, reminds passersby of Amherst’s extensive African American history. Charles Drew’s lifesaving innovations in blood preservation contributed to the Allied effort during World War II, and Drew was also an unforgettable football and track legend during his Amherst days. In 1987, Charles Drew Memorial Cultural House officially became a themed residence hall at Amherst as a “testament to [Drew’s] continuous inspiration and example.” Beyond Drew as an individual is the larger story of a long-standing connection between Amherst and his black public high school in Washington, DC.

Across the twentieth century, Amherst graduated more students from Paul Laurence Dunbar High School than any other college outside of Washington, DC. Dunbar men frequently entered Amherst in pairs or larger cohorts. They included men who would go on to become household names in African American history such as William Hastie, a groundbreaking federal judge, and Montague Cobb, a president of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP).

For some class years, Dunbar students made up the majority, if not the entirety, of black students attending Amherst. Harold Wade (class of 1968) wrote in his posthumously published *Black Men of Amherst* that “the school’s reputation was so great, it is reported, that Amherst College would accept any student recommended by the Dunbar administration without the student even having to take an entrance examination.”

As a black public high school in a separate and unequal school system, Dunbar upended the traditional notion of feeder schools as private, predominantly white institutions like Exeter, Deerfield, and Andover. The legacy of Dunbar students gave (and continues to give) Amherst an early twentieth-century precedent for black students’ potential for success on its campus, an experiment in student diversity that predates the racial history of peer institutions of higher education.

Yet the question remains: Why and how did so many black students from Dunbar
end up enrolling at Amherst during the first half of the twentieth century? What forces—both at Amherst College and in Washington, DC—enabled and sustained this academic pipeline?

Dunbar was the first black public high school in the nation, “the jewel in the crown of the black school system” in Washington, DC, during the age of segregation. Dunbar’s teachers included several notable experts in their fields such as Carter G. Woodson. Known as the “Father of Black History,” Woodson balanced teaching at DC public schools with his doctoral studies. In 1912, he became the second African American to earn a PhD from Harvard University after W. E. B. Du Bois. Not surprisingly, with teachers of such caliber, as one alumnus from the Dunbar class of 1957 recalled, Dunbar became “the place to go if you thought you were college material and wanted to be prepared to go.”

From 1870 until the Supreme Court finally ruled the segregation of public schools unconstitutional in 1954, Washington, DC, operated a dual school system. The black division of the school system operated with a notable degree of independence under the supervision of a black assistant superintendent. As George Derek Musgrove and Chris Myers Asch explain in Chocolate City: A History of Race and Democracy in the Nation’s Capital, black Washingtonians adapted to the challenges of segregation by striving “for black autonomy and equated educational excellence with their ability to run their schools relatively free from white interference.”

Founded in 1870, the Preparatory High School for Colored Youth—Dunbar’s original name—initially operated out of a Presbyterian church basement in Washington, DC. The school became M Street High School in 1892, when students moved to a building on M Street, which still stands today. M Street High School was renamed Paul Laurence Dunbar High School in 1916. The renaming anticipated yet another location change in 1917: this time to a castle-like brick building that was demolished in the 1970s, to be succeeded by more modern replacements in 1977 and 2013.

It is difficult to discuss the connection between Dunbar and Amherst without also recognizing the radical origins and policies of Oberlin College in Ohio. In the 1830s, the trustees of Oberlin agreed that students should be admitted to the college “irrespective of color.” Unlike Amherst, Oberlin, from its inception, also accepted women as well as men. At a time when few American colleges educated either African Americans or women, Oberlin was responsible for training several black women who would become teachers and principals at Dunbar.

Mary J. Patterson, the first African American woman to receive a bachelor’s degree in the United States, graduated from Oberlin College in 1862 and served as principal of Dunbar twice between 1871 and 1884. She initiated a program of rigorous coursework, based on her experience at Oberlin. Patterson was followed by the well-known educators and activists Anna Julia Cooper and Mary Church Terrell. Both Cooper and Terrell graduated from Oberlin and then headed to Washington, DC, to teach at Dunbar. These women, like other college-educated African Americans in the Jim Crow era, had limited opportunities to use their advanced credentials in higher education outside of historically black universities.

Teaching positions at black public high schools attracted black college graduates who
dreamed of making a fair wage and applying their education to their careers. However, the bar for black teachers was set high, partly as a consequence of segregation. Terrell, who taught at Dunbar from 1887 to 1891, described the struggles black women faced in seeking employment under Jim Crow:

Unless I am willing to engage in a few menial occupations, in which the pay for my services would be very poor, there is no way for me to earn an honest living, if I am not a trained nurse or a dressmaker or can secure a position as a teacher in the public schools, which is exceedingly difficult to do. It matters not what my intellectual attainments may be . . . if I try to enter many of the numerous vocations in which my white sisters are allowed to engage, the door is shut in my face.

Adding to black women’s difficulties in finding work was the policy that married women could not be teachers in the nation’s capital. Terrell left her position at Dunbar in 1891, when she married the school’s principal at the time. She would go on to lead the National Association of Colored Women in 1896, contributing to the suffrage movement and challenging racial segregation in Washington, DC, until she died in 1954.

Dunbar’s teachers in the early twentieth century were brilliant, devoted, and creative, despite limited resources. Among the most extraordinary was Angelina Weld Grimké, who taught English courses at Dunbar even as she pursued a parallel career as a poet and playwright. Her father, Archibald Grimké, was born into slavery in antebellum South Carolina, and later rose to prominence as a leader of the NAACP. Inheriting Archibald’s dedication to racial justice, Angelina built a reputation within the DC black community for her production of plays like Rachel in 1916, with an antilynching theme.

Dunbar teachers not only encouraged students to apply to competitive colleges beyond Washington, DC, but also prepared them for entrance examinations. Amplias Glenn graduated from Oberlin in 1902 and served as both an educator and a counselor at Dunbar from 1904 until his retirement in 1927. As a fellow teacher recalls, Glenn “conducted college guidance with no clerical aid for two decades,” while simultaneously teaching Latin and heading the foreign language department. Thanks to Glenn’s efforts, Dunbar students received scholarships to northern colleges, including Bowdoin, Brown, Dartmouth, Harvard, and Yale, as well as Amherst.

Dunbar graduates heading to institutions like Amherst were certainly a minority of college-bound students. It was much more likely that Dunbar students would attend local and historically black institutions, like Howard University and Miner Teachers College. Nonetheless, it is remarkable that even a small minority of early Dunbar graduates had the confidence and guidance to leave DC for predominantly white colleges.

Anna Julia Cooper deserves much of the credit for fostering an academic climate that prepared students equally for local universities as well as northern institutions far from home. Cooper was born into slavery in Raleigh, North Carolina, in 1858. Her father was probably her master, who also owned her mother, Hannah Stanley Haywood. After studying at Oberlin in the 1880s, Cooper moved to Washington to teach at Dunbar and served as principal from 1901 to 1906. Given her ascent from slavery to higher education,
Cooper had full confidence that hard-working black students could succeed alongside their white peers at colleges beyond the nation’s capital.

Cooper engaged actively in contemporary conversations on the future of education for black Americans. Given the unfulfilled promises of emancipation and Reconstruction, several prominent thinkers of the time debated what kind of education would best help black communities in the United States. Booker T. Washington, founder of the Tuskegee Institute in Alabama, believed blacks should strive for economic self-sufficiency and championed vocational education over classical learning. He saw the best path forward for blacks as one that created the least resistance.

On the other hand, W. E. B. Du Bois often challenged Washington’s educational philosophy. Du Bois was an intellectual, trained as a sociologist, and the first African American to acquire a PhD from Harvard. He opposed Washington’s willingness to sacrifice “the higher education of Negro youth . . . and concentrate all their energies on industrial education and accumulation of wealth and the conciliation of the South.”

Cooper corresponded with Du Bois regularly and attended the 1900 World Exhibition in Paris with him and his wife. Later, she also contributed to *The Crisis*, the magazine Du Bois edited for the NAACP. Finding a kindred spirit in Du Bois, Cooper viewed classical education and lifelong learning as critical to black freedom and progress. Her vision also melded Du Boisian ideas with mindfulness of women’s development. Cooper advocated for the inclusion of women in intellectual and academic life, “making it a common everyday affair for women to reason and think and express their thought.”

The friendship and solidarity between Du Bois and Cooper guided the trajectory of Dunbar’s curricular development. Cooper insisted on a classical curriculum for Dunbar, an oddity for any public school in the United States at the time, and that curriculum persisted for decades after her tenure as principal. Without such a foundation, Dunbar students would not have met the particular requirements of northern colleges. Accordingly, the 1922 Dunbar student handbook included course offerings in both ancient and modern languages. Amherst still required applicants to be proficient in Greek and Latin through the 1920s.

Cooper triumphed in fashioning Dunbar as an educational institution in the tradition of Du Bois. However, her steadfast protection of the curriculum led to conflicts with the school board and her eventual removal as principal in 1906. Cooper defended her record, claiming that, throughout her administration, “there have been boys to enter Harvard, Yale, Amherst, Brown, and other colleges from Dunbar without conditions . . . [and] there had never been any attempt to enter Harvard direct from the Dunbar High School previous to my administration.”

Cooper went on to get a PhD in history in 1924, from the Sorbonne in Paris, making her the fourth African American woman to earn a doctoral degree. Cooper then returned to DC to teach at Dunbar until her retirement in 1930. More than thirty years after her principalship, Dunbar’s 1944 philosophy echoed the ethos of the liberal arts colleges for which Cooper sought to prepare her students: “We believe that in a democracy free secondary education should be provided for all, regardless of race . . . the pupils should be prepared to meet effectively the changing situations in their present and future lives . . .
adapted to their capacities, the curriculum should be broad and modern enough to meet the requirements of all pupils.” Thanks to Cooper’s leadership, Dunbar was uniquely positioned among public schools in DC, black or white, to sustain a pipeline to New England colleges for years to come.

Under Cooper, the first Dunbar students to attend Amherst were Robert Mattingly and James Le Count Chestnut, who completed their degrees in 1905 and 1907, respectively. In the Amherst College yearbook, classmates remembered “Mat” as one of the “mighty few fellows in Amherst who can enjoy Mathematics.” Mattingly finished his college coursework in only three years and graduated Phi Beta Kappa, an honor that six other Dunbar-Amherst alumni would later claim. After graduating, Mattingly and Chestnut returned to Washington, DC, to pursue lifelong teaching careers at Dunbar and other DC public schools.

William Tecumseh Sherman Jackson, an African American Amherst graduate (class of 1892), succeeded Cooper as Dunbar’s principal in 1906. Upon stepping down from the principalship in 1909, Jackson taught mathematics and coached sports through the 1920s. Although Jackson grew up in Virginia and did not attend Dunbar himself, as an Amherst College graduate, he was committed to maintaining and facilitating the pipeline from Dunbar to Amherst that had begun under Cooper’s leadership.

In the fall of 1888, Jackson enrolled at Amherst alongside two other black students: William Henry Lewis, his classmate at the Virginia Normal School, and George Washington Forbes from Mississippi. US Senator George Frisbie Hoar of Massachusetts covered Jackson’s college tuition and was known for his progressive beliefs. In spite of the inclusive politics of his benefactor, Jackson encountered classmates at Amherst with degrading perceptions of African Americans. While Jackson attended Amherst in the 1880s and 1890s, the college’s athletic culture was infused with racism. The baseball team organized annual blackface minstrel shows as part of their fundraising efforts.

In April 1889, during Jackson’s first year, an Amherst-orchestrated minstrel show took place in the city hall of nearby Northampton. In the promotional flyer, the baseball team even sold “round-trip [train] tickets including admission to minstrels” and proclaimed the racist comedy show as “all for base ball.” A few years later, in May 1893, student journalists reported in the Amherst Student that “their plantation melodies were received with hearty applause, and were repeatedly encored.”

One can only imagine the discomfort and disappointment, if not fear and outrage, that Jackson probably experienced as some white classmates mocked black people for profit. In spite of these dynamics in Amherst’s athletic culture, Jackson excelled as a track athlete, and after graduation, he became an advocate for Amherst, encouraging students at Dunbar to attend his alma mater.

Probably the best-known Dunbar pupil that Jackson guided to Amherst was Charles Hamilton Houston, the legendary lawyer who participated in practically all of the civil rights cases leading up to the Brown v. Board of Education ruling. He mentored other lawyers who advocated for racial justice in courts across the country. Through his faculty position at Howard, Houston encouraged talented graduates of the university’s law school to join the NAACP’s legal efforts, including his most famous protégé Supreme Court justice Thurgood Marshall.
Thanks to his academic aptitude and engaged parents, Houston completed middle school at the age of twelve and graduated from Dunbar in 1911, when he was only fifteen. Houston’s parents, William, a law clerk, and Mary, a hairdresser, relocated from Kentucky to Washington, DC, in search of a better life. They worked hard to provide their only child with an upbringing that they had never received. Although he received a scholarship to the University of Pittsburgh, his parents wanted him to be educated at Amherst College, despite the greater expense.

As the only black student in the Amherst College class of 1915, Houston faced daunting social hurdles. Amherst’s unofficial policy of keeping black students housed apart from whites meant isolation. The white-only fraternity life further separated him physically and socially from his classmates. Out of solitude, Houston became more self-reliant, converting a vacant room in his dormitory into a study and focusing his time on excelling academically.

Like Mattingly, Houston completed his courses at Amherst quickly, graduating as valedictorian at the age of nineteen. He then left western Massachusetts and headed across the state to attend Harvard Law School. The staff writers of the Olio, the Amherst yearbook,
remembered “Charlie” as an academic star, deeming him “one of the hard workers of the class . . . [who] deserves anything that his scholarship may bring him.”

In the following decade, Dunbar alumni comprised the majority of the black men who received their Amherst College diplomas. As a mathematics instructor and a track coach, Jackson taught these students both inside and outside the classroom. A gifted runner during his own Amherst days, he prepared several young Dunbar men to continue with athletics at the collegiate level. Lacking the appropriate facilities of its own, Dunbar relied on Howard University, the premier historically black university in the district, a little over a mile away, to share its athletic fields. Nonetheless, in the spring of 1921, Dunbar won third place in the annual Penn Relays in Philadelphia, defeating high school track teams from around the country.

Frederick Allen Parker from the Amherst class of 1920 was an unforgettable runner. Olio writers noted that “when he gets going his spikes are about the only things that keep him back.” The Olio also praised the athleticism of another Dunbar-Amherst track star, Robert Percy Barnes. Barnes graduated Phi Beta Kappa in 1921, and the college appointed him as a chemistry instructor after his graduation. This would technically situate Barnes as the first African American member of the Amherst faculty. Amherst would not hire a black faculty member for a tenure-track professorship until the arrival of Dr. James Q. Denton in 1964.

Charles Drew (class of 1926), Montague Cobb (class of 1925), and William Henry Hastie (class of 1925) all made the Amherst College varsity track team in 1923. These three scholar-athletes had probably been warned about the slights they would experience as they traveled away from Amherst to less-welcoming venues for competitions. Even if they built some camaraderie with white students during Amherst track practices, the realities of racial difference quickly reasserted themselves off campus.

In 1925, Cobb, Drew, and Hastie ate alone at the Brown University dining hall while the rest of their team dined at the Narragansett Hotel. The hotel management heard there were “colored boys on the Amherst team and sent word that they would not serve them.” The ride back to Amherst from Providence was shrouded in silence.

Even if sports failed to connect them with their white peers, the Dunbar-Amherst men created spaces for themselves for bonding and solidarity. Drew organized a ukulele group, probably the first of its kind in Amherst history. The ensemble necessarily included the musically gifted Will Mercer Cook, one of Drew’s Dunbar classmates who also attended Amherst. Although Cook did not join Drew on the track team, he became an invaluable comrade when it came to the arts. When he was growing up, “Merc,” as he was known by his Amherst classmates, had traveled with his father, Will Marion Cook, a violinist and composer, as he toured across the United States and Europe.

W. Mercer Cook composed a song called “Sweetheart of All My Dreams” that the ukulele group performed at their 1924 prom. It was so successful that Cook had to sue to get his royalties when it was plagiarized. Nonetheless, his talents were not always recognized by the college at large. Cook’s son Jacques recalls that his father told him that the head of the Amherst choir thought he had “the best voice on campus,” yet the choir forbade blacks from joining.
Figure 2. A group of African American students after an Amherst College church service in 1923, including several Dunbar-Amherst men. From left to right: Charles W. Lewis (class of 1923), W. Montague Cobb (class of 1925), William Henry Hastie (class of 1925), William B. D. Thompson (class of 1927), Gaius C. Bolin (class of 1925), and W. Mercer Cook (class of 1925). Courtesy of the Amherst College Archives.
Cook went on to earn a PhD in French from Brown University in 1936. His passion for the French language led him to become a professor at both Howard University and the University of Haiti. In the 1960s, Cook served as the US ambassador to three African nations: Niger, Senegal, and the Gambia. Both Amherst and Brown ultimately took note of Cook’s accomplishments, granting him honorary degrees in 1965 and 1970, respectively. He encouraged his sons Mercer and Jacques to enroll at Amherst, and his grandchildren carried on the Amherst legacy as well.

William Hastie, another Dunbar-Amherst track star, studied at Harvard Law School after Amherst just as Charles Hamilton Houston had done. Hastie, who happened to be Houston’s cousin, became a member of the Amherst College Board of Trustees. Throughout his life, he used the law as a tool to fight racial injustice, first as a dean at Howard University Law School and later as the first black federal judge.

In the foreword to Harold Wade’s Black Men of Amherst, Hastie speculated on the sharp decline in black students at Amherst in the two decades immediately after his own. Only nine black students attended Amherst in the 1930s and 1940s, including four young men from Dunbar who did not ultimately graduate. According to Hastie, the roots of Amherst College’s struggles with its black student graduation rates rested with the college leadership. He asserted that “the then President of the College [Stanley King, president from 1932 to 1951] adopted a practice of inviting successive groups of seniors to social evenings at the President’s House until this hospitable gesture had been extended to all seniors who were not black.”

It is also true that black people suffered disproportionately more from the Great Depression than other groups, which deterred the pursuit or completion of higher education in general. Dunbar teacher Mary Gibson Hundley ascribed students’ lack of admission to competitive northern colleges during this era to “the failure of the administration and faculty and because of the financial depression.” Amherst College would not experience a resurgence in black student enrollment until the late 1940s.

In 1946, Eugene Wilson (class of 1929) became the college’s dean of admission, a position he held until his retirement in 1972. A 1971 interview in the Amherst Student noted that Wilson ultimately “reversed the percentages of public and private school graduates of the college.” Under Wilson’s leadership, Amherst admission deans made efforts to diversify incoming classes, including organizing frequent trips down to Washington, DC, to meet with Dunbar students in person.

Amherst faced competition from rivaling northern colleges for the best and brightest Dunbar seniors. Williams College, near Amherst, had its own history of recruiting Dunbar men going back to the early twentieth century, with about fifteen Dunbar students enrolling between 1909 and 1944. In response, Wilson sought out local leaders in the black DC community who could identify talented young men who might be a good fit for Amherst. Wilson strategically collaborated with the Drew family that embodied Dunbar’s connection with Amherst. Nora Drew Gregory, Charles Drew’s sister, served as a liaison between Amherst and the black Washington community. After her brother died in an automobile accident in 1950, Gregory diligently promoted his alma mater. (Gregory’s father-in-law, James Francis Gregory, also graduated from Amherst in 1898 and was one
of the first African Americans in the United States to be elected captain of a college baseball team."

Before his senior year at Dunbar in 1953, Harold Haizlip (class of 1957) simply remembered Nora Drew Gregory as his elementary school teacher. However, in Haizlip's senior year, Harvard, Yale, Williams, Amherst, and Dartmouth all accepted him. Gregory persistently advocated for Amherst to be his top choice. Haizlip recalled that she invited him to her home: "[There was a] very nice white gentlemen Eugene Wilson . . . the dean of admission! . . . This was at a time when it was unusual for college administrators, and white college administrators, to be so aggressive. . . . I'm sure they knew Nora Gregory's lineage. . . . Her son . . . became the first African-American astronaut, Frederick Gregory." After Haizlip, Amherst recruited a cohort of three Dunbar seniors for the class of 1959, who happened to also be neighborhood friends: Lawrence Burwell, Robert Jason, and Raymond Hayes. Hayes remembered that "we were all interested in science and medicine and were encouraged by the opportunity to attend Amherst together." Both Hayes and Jason received $700 each through an Amherst College scholarship, while Burwell received $500. These were all relatively significant contributions at the time. Annual tuition at Amherst was $1,425 during the 1955 to 1956 school year.

Like so many of his predecessors, Mansfield Neal (class of 1961), the last Dunbar-Amherst man in this story, received encouragement from a network of Dunbar-Amherst alumni. One of the men who encouraged Neal to attend Amherst was Chauncey Larry (class of 1927). Larry followed the career trajectories of several Dunbar-Amherst predecessors like Jason, Mattingly, and Chestnut. He taught at many Washington, DC, public schools, including Dunbar, from 1944 to 1950. Larry took action to ensure graduates of his high school could have the same opportunities that he did, all the way through his retirement in 1968. In the pamphlet for Larry's retirement celebration, a colleague remarked that "his extreme interest and dedicated service on the Amherst scholarship committee are manifest in the number of students, sponsored by him, who have since matriculated at that college and have entered public service." As Neal remembered, earlier generations of Dunbar-Amherst men wanted to "make sure we were aware of Amherst, had information about Amherst, and considered Amherst."

Dunbar alumni like Neal looked back on their high school days with gratitude. They cherished their memories of a building full of brilliant black teachers who looked like them, who believed in them, and who wanted them to change the world. Still, these same alumni also wished for a world where a segregated school system would not be necessary in the first place. Like Houston and Hastie, Neal became a lawyer to work against the legal and social regime that had made Dunbar a necessary countermeasure:

My mom had taken me and my brother Stu, who was a year younger than me, to shop downtown. On our way back, it was rush hour and we took a trolley car. Here's my mom, with packages and two little boys (4 and 5 years old). She had to walk to the back of a trolley car to try to find a seat, walk past empty seats. And I said, "Mom, why can't we sit here?" And all she could do was cry. And that, if nothing else, really motivated me to say "I'm going to kill this system no matter what it takes."
Ultimately, segregation and an ambitious African American community created Dunbar. In *First Class: The Legacy of Dunbar*, journalist Alison Stewart reminds us that although Dunbar stands out as a “winner” during the time of school segregation in Washington, students and teachers alike were making the best of a demeaning, cruel, and unconstitutional system that kept African Americans as second-class citizens and sought to limit their potential.67

The mission of Dunbar, predicated on what Hayes called a “selective college prep program for black students in a segregated system,” became antiquated after the 1954 Supreme Court ruling.68 *Bolling v. Sharpe* was part of a collection of court cases in 1954 that were considered along with the more well-known *Brown v. Board of Education* case. *Brown* declared state laws establishing separate public schools on the basis of race to be unconstitutional but specifically applied to states, not to a federal district like Washington, DC. After the *Sharpe* decision, doors opened to previously white-only private and public schools for both black students and teachers in Washington.69 Opportunities expanded beyond Dunbar for black children in the district seeking a college preparatory education.

Although Dunbar remains predominantly black today, the reshuffling of the DC public school system quickly turned Dunbar and other institutions into neighborhood schools. While the principle of equal opportunity behind desegregation was noble, its implementation radically changed the educational landscape of Washington, DC, and the nation at large. Dunbar stopped taking promising black students from throughout the district and adapted to serve students in the immediate zone around it.70

As Dunbar’s capacity to produce students academically prepared for elite liberal arts colleges faded, Amherst found alternative sites of recruitment in the 1960s. Dean Eugene Wilson worked with the guidance counselor at Andrew Jackson High School in New York to recruit Harold Wade and Cuthbert Simpkins for the Amherst class of 1968.71 Simpkins and Wade cofounded the Afro-American Society (the predecessor to the contemporary Amherst College Black Student Union). The long-standing pattern of admitting no more than four black students per class gave way in the 1970s to classes with at least twenty entering black students.72

Since Amherst would not become coeducational until the 1970s, the relationship between Amherst College and Dunbar High School in the early twentieth century may seem like a story of men. However, many Dunbar women simultaneously attended prestigious liberal arts colleges throughout the country such as Smith, Mount Holyoke, Oberlin, and Spelman.73 Moreover, as educators, mothers, and community leaders, black women in the nation’s capital from Anna Julia Cooper to Nora Drew Gregory empowered both young men and women at Dunbar to shoot for the stars.

The Dunbar-Amherst men of the early twentieth century found community at Amherst but still did not always feel welcome. Their complicated experiences at Amherst connect to the contemporary tension of belonging and frustration that many students of color have felt toward Amherst. As Diane Lee writes in the *Amherst Student* regarding the Amherst Uprising of November 2016, “while it started as an hour-long moment of solidarity with black students facing violence at Yale and the University of Missouri, it expanded into a powerful weekend in which black, brown and other marginalized students shared
their stories of institutionalized racism and oppression at Amherst.”\textsuperscript{74} A desire to belong at Amherst was at the heart of the Amherst Uprising—a continuation of the struggle that Dunbar-Amherst men of past generations knew all too well.

Not until their fiftieth class reunion would Hayes and Burwell call out the separatist housing practices that continued into the 1950s. At that point, Hayes reflected that “our requests for roommates were denied and single rooms in different dormitories were assigned to us.” He recalled that there were also no black faculty, administrators, or mentoring programs. Hayes and Burwell “duly acknowledged” how Amherst encouraged their successes, but “so much could have been offered to ease the discomforts of those formative years.”\textsuperscript{75}

Today, Dunbar students typically do not attend liberal arts colleges after graduation, but the Amherst legacy lives on.\textsuperscript{76} Near a banner with the school’s motivational motto, “Keep A-Pluggin’ Away,” three alumni plaques honor graduates of Amherst: Houston, Hastie, and Cobb.\textsuperscript{77} Perhaps as the story of Amherst College unfolds into its third century, the two institutions can revive the dormant connection and adapt to the contemporary realities of the public school system in Washington, DC.

\textbf{Table 1.} Paul Laurence Dunbar High School Students at Amherst College by Class Year, 1906–2005

\begin{tabular}{|l|}
\hline
1906 & Robert Nicholas Mattingly \\
1907 & James LeCount Chestnut \\
1909 & James Blaine Hunter \\
1911 & John Randolph Pinkett \\
1912 & *Edward Gray \\
1915 & Charles Hamilton Houston \\
1916 & Francis Morse Dent \\
1920 & Frederick Allen Parker \\
1921 & Robert Percy Barnes \\
1923 & *George Nolen Calloway  \\
 & *Charles Dudley Lee  \\
 & Charles William Lewis \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
William Montague Cobb
*George Winston Harry
Will Mercer Cook
William Henry Hastie
1926
Charles Richard Drew
*Thurman Luce Dodson
1927
Chauncey Baker Larry
1928
Clarence Reed White
1929
Harold Over Lewis
David Utz
George Williams
1931
*Carl Curtis Beckwith
1934
*Harry Greene Risher
1940
*Highwarden Just
1943
*John Hurst II
1951
Mercer Cook
1956
Ralph Edward Greene
Karl Sinclair Atkinson
1957
Harold Cornelius Haizlip
1958
Edward David Crockett
1959
Lawrence Rogers Burwell
Raymond Lewis Hayes Jr.
Robert Stewart Jason Jr.
1961
Mansfield Castleton Neal Jr.
1962
*Frederick Drew Gregory
2005
Lynettra Artis
*Did not graduate from Amherst
Notes

1. Edward Jones was the first African American graduate of Amherst College. He received his diploma in 1826, five years after the college’s founding in 1821.


11. Other Oberlin graduates after Patterson would also serve as principal in years to come. In total, between 1870 and 1964, Dunbar recruited principals with degrees from a range of prestigious colleges, including three from Oberlin, two from Harvard, one from Dartmouth, and one from Amherst.


16. As a playwright, Angelina Weld Grimké hoped her play *Rachel* could convince white audiences of the immorality of lynching. The drama committee of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) brought the play to the stage, sponsoring a production in Washington, DC, in March 1916.


21. In the 1895 “Atlanta Compromise,” Booker T. Washington articulated his philosophy in one of the first African American speeches recorded in sound, arguing that blacks should focus on building self-sufficient communities through vocational trades: “In all things, purely social we can be as separate as fingers, yet one in the hand as all things essential to mutual progress.” In Washington’s compromise, Southern blacks would accept segregation to focus on their economic progress, postponing concerns for legal equality, civil rights, and integration.


28. Cooper lived a long life that spanned the scope of the emancipation of enslaved blacks to the struggle for civil rights in the United States. She passed away at the age of 105 in 1964 (living through the 1961 college graduation of the final Dunbar-Amherst man discussed in this essay).


30. Other black public schools in DC would take different paths. Armstrong High School, where Booker T. Washington gave an address during the school’s dedication ceremony in 1902, specialized as a vocational institution in the spirit of the Tuskegee movement. In 1928, Cardozo, the business department of Dunbar, originally organized in 1886, would become a separate high school in its own right.


32. Robert Mattingly, "Birth of M Street High School" (self-published pamphlet by the author, 1976), Amherst College Archives, Amherst College, Amherst, MA, 22.


34. "Albright, Evan J." *Amherst College Biographical Records*, 1939 ed., Amherst College Archives, Amherst College, Amherst, MA.


36. "Minstrels: Special Train to and from Northampton, April 26" (promotional flyer of the Amherst College baseball team from 1889), Amherst College Archives, Amherst College, Amherst, MA.


41. *Olio*, 1915 ed., Amherst College, Amherst, MA, 244.


44. *Handbook*.


49. Wade.


53. Wade, *Black Men*, 112. Note that four Dunbar alumni did not graduate from Amherst College in
the 1930s and 1940s: Carl Curtis Beckwith (class of 1931), Harry Greene Risher (class of 1934), High-
warden Just (class of 1940), and John Hurst II (class of 1943).

54. Wade, Black Men, xvi.
55. Hundley, Dunbar Story, 70.
57. The Dunbar-Amherst pipeline was renewed with the arrival of a second Mercer Cook—Amherst
class of 1951 and son of W. Mercer Cook—who graduated from Dunbar and enrolled at Amherst in
1947, just one year after Wilson’s arrival.
58. In 1924, Allison Davis, a Dunbar alumnus, graduated summa cum laude from Williams College
as valedictorian and pursued an illustrious career in anthropology and psychology. Davis was the first
African American to secure a faculty position at a major university, earning tenure at the University of
Chicago in 1947.

62. Hundley, Dunbar Story, 125.
63. Amherst College Catalogue, 1955/1956 ed., Amherst College Digital Collections, Amherst Col-
lege, Amherst, MA. 35.
64. “A Tribute to Mr. Chauncey B. Larry upon His Retirement,” December 31, 1968, Amherst Col-
lege Archives, Amherst College, Amherst, MA.
66. Neal, interview.
67. Stewart, First Class, xii.
68. Raymond Lewis Hayes, email correspondence with the author, July 28, 2018.
Post, January 23, 1957.
70. Rogers, “Dunbar High.”
72. Wade, Black Men, appendix 1.
73. Otelia Cromwell served as head of Dunbar’s English department in the 1920s and taught for
many years. Cromwell forged a connection with the all-women’s Smith College. She became the first
African American graduate of Smith College in 1900 and inspired several young women at Dunbar to
attend her alma mater.

75. Raymond Lewis Hayes, personal communication with the author, “Young, Gifted and Black at
Amherst College, 1955–59,” 2009. This reflection was originally written in 2009, when it was shared dur-
ing Hayes’s fiftieth reunion at Amherst College.
76. Since Mansfield Neal enrolled at Amherst College in 1957, Lynettra Artis was the only graduate
from Dunbar to attend Amherst in 2005. Artis pursued a legal career attending Howard University’s law
school.

77. The motto is derived from “Keep A-Pluggin Away,” a poem by Paul Laurence Dunbar, the school’s
namesake. Paul Laurence Dunbar, “The Complete Poems of Paul Laurence Dunbar” (New York: Dodd,
Mead, and Company, 1913).