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Introduction

Black Americans have a long and vital history in Southern Illinois. However, despite this strong legacy, Southern Illinois schools subjected black students to racial discrimination. Attached to the southern United States both culturally and geographically, the Southern Illinois region had institutionalized racism and discrimination similar to what occurred in the south, a region known for its history of racism and prejudices like slavery and Jim Crow Laws. Southern Illinois communities like Cairo and many others had segregated public school systems.¹ Southern Illinois villages and towns have for generations faced significant racial violence and oppression. Cairo is one of these communities plagued with racial violence and oppression. Throughout Southern Illinois, these towns and villages represented a region within Illinois where the black community experienced numerous obstacles to attending public schools. At Southern Illinois University Carbondale, black Americans had the opportunity to attend the university since its inception, but they still faced a wide range of obstacles due to racial discrimination. Housing segregation, segregated student organizations, and sports teams were just a few of the obstacles black students had to face. This paper argues that in 1925, black students at Southern Illinois University created the Dunbar Society to address blacks' students' plight on campus. The Dunbar society was a student organization that promoted students' literary, social, and athletic abilities at Southern Illinois University. Through the Dunbar Society, black students on campus were finally able to find an outlet and express themselves through academics, athletics, and social pursuits, which helped shape the university's black student population and Carbondale's black community.

Brief History of Education in Southern Illinois

The Dunbar Society had a rich and vibrant history at Southern Illinois University (SIU). It was a black student organization on campus that organized

1 Christopher K. Hays, "The African American Struggle for Equality and Justice in Cairo, Illinois, 1865-1900," *Illinois Historical Journal* Vol. 90, No.4 (1994), 278.

academic and social events, primarily for SIU black students². There is a scarcity of information about the Dunbar Society outside Southern Illinois University walls, nor is their shared history knowledge to many students and faculty. Black life in Southern Illinois helped shape the university's black student population and Carbondale's black community. The Dunbar Society provided black students and members of the black community of Carbondale a social entertainment outlet that previously was unavailable to them through the university and limited and scarce in Carbondale's black community. This paper uses a collection of both primary and secondary sources to paint a picture of what education opportunities existed for black students in Southern Illinois and how these inequities helped lead to the Dunbar Society formation. Primary sources include pictures of members of the Dunbar Society and other SIU student organizations from the Southern Illinois University yearbook. Other primary sources such as newspaper articles from the SIU school newspaper "*The Egyptian*" (now known as the *Daily Egyptian*) used throughout the paper. Secondary sources come from peer-reviewed history journals and a Ph. D. dissertation written by an SIU student regarding black students' impact on the SIU campus.

In his article "The African American Struggle For Equality and Justice In Cairo, Illinois, 1865-1900," historian Christopher K. Hays helps lay the foundation for the history of black education in Southern Illinois. Black education in Southern Illinois is pivotal to understanding the Dunbar Society. Understanding the obstacles in education that black Americans faced throughout Southern Illinois in communities such as Cairo, Carbondale, and Alton are crucial to the Dunbar Society's history and understanding and its formation. Education among African Americans is also particularly true since, during the early years of what is now known as SIU and during the Dunbar Society era, a significant majority of African American students came from the surrounding Southern Illinois region³. Hays talked about Joel G. Morgan and TJ Shores' founding of Cairo's first black school in 1867. Morgan and Shores named the school "The Colored Union School of Cairo"⁴. He discussed the progression of racial segregation in Cairo schools and the struggle the African American community endured to end segregation in their community. During the Reconstruction Era, there was a massive influx of blacks from the South into Cairo and Southern Illinois. As the southernmost city in Illinois and right

2 The Little Egypt Chapter of the Afro-American Historical and Genealogical Society and the Graduate History of Photography Seminars (1988-1997), Dept. of Cinema & Photography, Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, comps., *In Unity There Is Strength: A Pictorial History of The African American Community of Carbondale, Illinois* (Paducah, KY: Turner Publishing Company, 1999), 54.

3 Ibid, 54.

4 Hays, "The African American Struggle", 278.

along the Mississippi and Ohio rivers, Cairo was a popular destination for migrating blacks. Black migration created a booming economy in Cairo for a few decades as there was plenty of work and high demand for labor.⁵

In another article, Bonita H. Valien, a professor at Fisk University, wrote about educational segregation in Southern Illinois. The article "Racial Desegregation of Public Schools in Southern Illinois" talks about segregation in the city of Cairo, but also school segregation across the state and how it was able to survive past *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) and numerous laws at the state level banning segregation in education based on race or color.⁶ Legal segregation and other racially discriminatory practices in public accommodations across the United States ended with the 1964 Civil Rights Act under President Lyndon B. Johnson.⁷ However, as previously mentioned, racist and segregationist tactics remained through subtle and often covert means such as sundown laws. Education discrimination based on color occurred on the campus of Southern Illinois University, and members of the Dunbar Society and other black students experienced racial discrimination on campus.⁸

The city of Carbondale, Illinois, also had a long and turbulent history regarding black education, related to the black community's general education and the racial segregation they faced in their schools at the hands of the white community of Carbondale. The Little Egypt Chapter of the Afro-American Historical and Genealogical Society wrote the book, *In Unity There Is Strength: A Pictorial History of The African American Community of Carbondale, Illinois*, narrating the black history education both in the community as well as at Southern Illinois University. The Dunbar Society planted its roots in Carbondale's black education system and the surrounding Southern Illinois region. As stated previously, during the university's early years and the beginning years of the Dunbar Society, many African American students at the university hailed from Carbondale or neighboring Southern Illinois communities.⁹ In 1866, Carbondale became the first city in Jackson County to have an all-black school. Once school enrollment started to increase, the local community raised funds to purchase and renovate an official school building. In 1871, the school changed its name to Eastside school, which would later

5 Hays, "The African American Struggle", 265-279.

6 Valien, "Racial Desegregation of Public Schools", 303-309.

7 The Civil Rights Act of 1964 Public Law 88-352, 78 Statute. 241.1964 accessed 7/15/2020, <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/STATUTE-78/pdf/STATUTE-78-Pg241.pdf>.

8 The Little Egypt Chapter and the Graduate History of Photography Seminars, *In Unity There Is Strength*", 54.

9 *Ibid*, 54.

be known as Attucks School.¹⁰ From its inception, blacks were able to attend Southern Illinois University. Former slave Alexander Lane would become the first black student to graduate from Southern Illinois Normal University (now SIU) in 1881. Lane served as the principal of the Carbondale Eastside School from 1881-1891.¹¹ However, black students faced racism and discrimination both in the classroom and around campus. Southern Illinois University also enforced segregation in their sports teams. This discrimination led to the creation of the Dunbar Society.

The Dunbar Society was an organization that became the cornerstone of the black community on campus. It addressed racial inequality on campus by providing opportunities such as sports teams and social events like concerts and a homecoming. Previously, the university had barred black students from attending these functions¹². While the Dunbar Society wanted to bring inclusion and diversity to the SIU campus, the campus administration's mentality still forced the Dunbar Society to operate within the confines of an institutionally racist university. Instead of integrating sports teams, the university only included black athletes with exceptional prowess.¹³ The Dunbar Society was the only choice outside of a church league or community-sponsored sports team. The Dunbar Society specifically designed events so that black students would have an outlet on campus that otherwise would not have been possible.

The Dunbar Society had an enormous legacy and impact on Southern Illinois University. The Dunbar Society was rooted in the struggle against racial discrimination that many black students faced in Southern Illinois. The legal segregation on education throughout Southern Illinois and the discrimination and racism on the Southern Illinois University campus helped shape the Dunbar Society.

Segregation in Southern Illinois Schools

The Southern region of Illinois had a racial legacy like the Southern United States in terms of segregation in education. As mentioned previously, it is crucial to investigate the systemic racism in Southern Illinois education to understand the Dunbar Society and what it stood for. Many Illinois school districts racially segregated their public schools. Segregation in Southern Illinois was ironic since,

10 Ibid, 34.

11 Pamela Smoot, "Alexander Lane: From Slavery to Freedom: The Life of Alexander Lane, Educator, Physician and Illinois State Legislator, 1860-1911" (2012). *The Simon Review* (Occasional Papers of the Paul Simon Public Policy Institute). Paper 29, 10.

12 "Once Upon a Time SIU Homecoming," *The Egyptian*, November 10, 1994.

13 Stalls, Madlyn, "A History of African Americans At Southern Illinois University at Carbondale 1915-1987," (PHD dissertation, Southern Illinois University Carbondale, 1990), 50-51.

in 1874, the Illinois General Assembly passed a law eliminating segregation in public schools. To avoid desegregation, in Southern Illinois schools, the districts deployed two different tactics upholding segregation. The first tactic was that they convinced black children to attend a segregated school regardless of where they lived (known as “black busing”). Southern Illinois public school districts also used a second tactic known as residential segregation. Residential segregation used sundown laws to isolate black communities, forcing black students to attend segregated schools. During the 66th General Assembly (1949), Illinois lawmakers passed an amendment to the Distributive Fund Appropriation Bill (HB no. 1066). This amendment called for the state to withhold all funds to any school that followed a segregationist policy. The Illinois State General Assembly further expanded this amendment in 1951 when state legislators created an additional Amendment, which required all Illinois District Superintendents to present testimony under oath that their school districts comply with state and local segregation laws during their appropriations hearing before the state legislature. Furthermore, in 195, the Illinois State General Assembly passed HR 34 (House Resolution no. 35), which created a legislative committee tasked with investigating school compliance with non-segregation policies established in HB 1066.¹⁴

Christopher K. Hays, the author of “The African American Struggle For Equality and Justice In Cairo, Illinois, 1865-1900,” discussed school segregation in Cairo, the county seat for Alexander County. Hays referenced the first black school in Cairo, “The Colored Union School Of Cairo” (CUSC). Founded in 1867 by Alexander County Superintendent of School Joel G. Morgan and notable black Cairo and Alexander county activist TJ Shores. Mount Orange Baptist Church housed the school. On October 6, 1867, classes formally began, and the Cairo Colored School found its home in the original schoolhouse building that was used by the white “Thirteenth Street Grammar School” founded in 1853. Until the hiring of more qualified teachers, Shores served as a teacher at the school. The school did not charge fees for students’ instruction, and during the school’s first few weeks of having lessons, Cairo’s black community tried to fund the school by hosting a community festival. Although an initial success, this did not last long. The desire to integrate Cairo schools was strong within the black community.¹⁵

On October 11, 1867, after only five days of class instruction, TJ Shores gathered Black parents to the CUSC to demand school integration¹⁶. The fact that after only five days of instruction, parents and Shores grew tired of the accommodations provided at the original Thirteenth Street Grammar schoolhouse speaks volumes for three reasons. First, this uproar in the

14 Bonita H. Valien, “Racial Desegregation of Public Schools in Southern Illinois,” *Journal of Negro Education* Vol. 23, No.3 (1954), 303-304.

15 Hays, “The African American Struggle”, 278.

16 *Ibid*, 278.

community strongly suggested that the fourteen-year-old schoolhouse had become outdated and in a state of disrepair inappropriate to accommodate students for learning. Second, the demands for integration within the African American community only five days after the school opened for instruction show that Cairo's black community strongly believed and wanted an integrated school system that would serve Cairo's community as a united whole. Third, the school did not charge fees for students to attend, and the fact that the school received funds through community donations that ultimately failed showed the discriminatory separate, and unequal mindset that the white residents of Cairo had. White Cairo residents and the respective Cairo public school district specifically wanted to create an institutionally racist separate and unequal education system that would benefit white residents and disadvantage, black residents.

Shores and the black parents argued the Republican Party and white Cairo citizens refused to provide equal funding to CUSC. Although Shores and other notable members of the black community had numerous talks with Cairo officials and leading members of the Alexander County Republican Party, their efforts were futile. Cairo residents used numerous arguments to justify segregation in their schools.¹⁷ The local newspaper, the *Cairo Democrat* on October 17, 1867, stated the opinion of many of the white residents throughout the city:

Every negro in Cairo of ordinary reasoning faculties knows that the time will never come when white and black children will be educated under the same roof, in the same room and by the same instructor. Natural, mental and physical differences and incompatibilities render this impracticable - forever impossible.¹⁸

Cairo's white community believed blacks were inferior and physiologically different from white men and therefore needed education separate from white students. Another common perception held by the white community in Cairo was that it was economically a poor decision to integrate the Cairo schools.¹⁹

The Republican Party, which championed black suffrage and equal rights during the Reconstruction Era, now changed its tune towards blacks. The Alexander County Republican Party argued that black families had little to no taxable property and, therefore, could not afford the fees necessary for their children's education. Alexander County Republican leaders, including Joel G. Morgan, who was Superintendent of Schools for Alexander County

17 Ibid., 279-280.

18 Ibid.

19 Ibid, 280.

and helped establish The Colored Union School of Cairo, argued that blacks should not be allowed to attend integrated white schools because Republican Party officials believed blacks did not contribute to the general welfare and maintenance of schools.²⁰

By the 1870s, Cairo added a black school, "Greeley Grammar School" (GGS). Unlike CUSC, community donations, and tax dollars funded GGS. The school accommodated students from First through Fifth Grade, and a two-story apartment building housed four additional classes. Only five teachers taught at the school with a student body of over 200 students. Greeley Grammar lacked proper funding, although it had a more extensive revenue base than The Colored Union School; it also suffered significant structural issues. There was a shortage of coal during the winter, so classes often were canceled as it was too cold to stay in the classroom.²¹

For roughly another decade, education for blacks did not make any significant improvement. Eventually, black parents had enough and staged a sit-in at Thirteenth Street Grammar School. They refused to leave until the city agreed to improve the black schools. Black parents agreed to end their strike if the school district agreed to integrate the schools. To preserve black votes to the Republican Party and maintain the segregated school system, Cairo officials and key Alexander County Republican Party members agreed to improve the black schools²². However, many white citizens of Cairo reacted negatively. A local woman, Maud Rittenhouse, wrote in her diary:

Cairo would not be Cairo without some excitement on hand. We've got done with yellow-fever, cyclones, small- pox, earth-quakes, and floods, so now we've an insurrection by the colored element. [...] The white people have built them a nice commodious school-house and employed the finest talent the country affords to instruct them [...] Instigated by an ignorant, unreasonable 'preachah', they burst . . . upon our two school buildings yesterday morning and demanded that their school children be entered right with the white ones.²³

The attitude that Maud Rittenhouse showed in her diary was quite common among white citizens in Cairo. Superintendent Joel G. Morgan shared similar views to Maud Rittenhouse, believing it to be an absolute necessity to have schools segregated. The local newspaper, the *Cairo Democrat*, also shared similar views, believing it imperative that whites and blacks be segregated in

20 Ibid.

21 Ibid, 281.

22 Ibid, 282-283.

23 Ibid, 283.

schools.²⁴ However, Cairo's mayor agreed to renovate GGS; he also agreed to build another black school.²⁵

Sumner School (SS) was the first high school built in Cairo for its black students. Although SS only had a principal and three teachers who had initially faced many issues, the school developed into a vibrant educational community. SS emphasized vocational training for its students despite inadequate funding for books, new science equipment, and other school resources. Sumner School had a vibrant extra-curricular community. It had several Glee Clubs, numerous athletic programs, and even a school newspaper, the *High School Autocrat*.²⁶

Some Southern Illinois school districts implemented partial segregation policies. It was not uncommon for communities to have a segregated elementary and junior high and an integrated high school. This case of integration was the case in Alton, Illinois, which had an integrated high school and segregated elementary and middle school. Neighboring Edwardsville and Harrisburg also had a dual segregation policy like the city of Alton. East St. Louis had a segregated education system like Cairo, where the East St. Louis public school district had completely segregated the public-school system. In some instances, public school districts so heavily ingrained into society segregation that the white school administrators forced black high school students to bypass the local high school, cross county lines, and travel over twenty-five miles to attend the segregated school. Although some Illinois public school districts had integrated their high school, many black students faced a wide range of systemic discrimination. After Sparta's public high school's integration, the high school authorities still segregated black students during study hall.²⁷

During the 1949-1951 legislative sessions, there was an effort by several Southern Illinois school systems to end or reduce segregation in education. In some instances, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) even got involved in issuing lawsuits against school districts that were fervently engaged in education segregation.²⁸ Although some Illinois counties eliminated segregation in their education system, the Illinois legislative committee on segregation in Illinois school still had much to say:

Neither the County Superintendent of Schools nor the District Superintendents, nor the School Trustee Boards are doing anything about obeying the law. The parents

24 Ibid, 279-280.

25 Ibid, 283-284.

26 Ibid, 284.

27 Valien, "Racial Desegregation of Public Schools", 304.

28 Ibid, 305.

of colored students fear bodily violence for their children seeking to attend the school nearest their residence.²⁹

Alexander (where Cairo is) and Pulaski counties were two Illinois counties that grossly disobeyed Illinois anti-segregation laws. Failure to follow the was particularly alarming since more than thirty percent of Alexander and Pulaski counties' population was black.³⁰

Black Americans in Carbondale, Illinois

Black Americans have a rich and vibrant history in Carbondale, Illinois. Evidence suggests that blacks have resided in Jackson County since 1806, where there is documentation of the first free blacks moving to Jackson County. The 1870 US census showed that 38.44% of blacks in Jackson County lived in Carbondale. Furthermore, in 1880, Carbondale had the highest increase of black residents in Jackson County. The black population in Carbondale was 283 in 1870. By 1880 there were 597 blacks in Carbondale. There were 125 black households in the city by 1880. Public and personal records indicate blacks were vital to the development of Carbondale since its 1852 founding. The first black school in Jackson County started in Carbondale. Two Baptist ministers founded the school in 1866 in an abandoned shop, then used as a church. As enrollment rapidly increased, a Carbondale church donated a building as a new schoolhouse. By 1871, the newly renovated Eastside School opened its doors for the first time. This newly renovated school is where Alexander Lane, the first black graduate from Southern Illinois Normal University, would serve as principal for ten years. This school eventually became Attucks School, named after Crispus Attucks, a victim of the Boston Massacre. Eastside School or Attucks stayed open until desegregation forced it to close its doors in 1964. A large percentage of blacks from the area attended Attucks school. Carbondale black schools began to experience an overcrowding problem in 1914. The Attucks schoolhouse hosted 250 students housed in only six classrooms. The school district eventually had to rent space from a church to accommodate the high student volume.³¹

Southern Illinois University Dunbar Society

On October 6, 1925, Carl Lee established the Paul Lawrence Dunbar Society. Mr. Lee was a student in the class of 1926.³² The Dunbar Society

29 Ibid.

30 Ibid 304-305.

31 The Little Egypt Chapter and the Graduate History of Photography Seminars, *In Unity There Is Strength*", 4-34.

32 Southern Illinois University Carbondale Special Collections [herein SIUC-SC], Southern Illinois Normal University, *The Obelisk* (Carbondale, IL:1927), 178.

was a student organization that promoted the literary, athletic, and social growth of black students on the SIU campus.³³ The society had a basketball team, a separate homecoming, and sponsored events and other social functions. Also, the Dunbar Society hosted literary debates. Membership in the Dunbar Society quickly exploded, and, by 1926, only a year after its formation, the organization already had forty-three members. Participation of the Dunbar Society in campus events also quickly blossomed. On October 31, 1926, the Dunbar Society partook in the university's homecoming parade with their float, finally proudly displaying black students' contributions to SIU campus life.³⁴ Frequently elections were held to elect members to lead the society leadership. On October 5, 1945, the SIU school newspaper *The Egyptian* discussed the then-recent Dunbar elections. The Dunbar Society held this meeting in Room 107 of the Main Building. The newly elected Dunbar President was Willie Dee Anderson, Vice President Phyllis Ray, Secretary Merdes Weathers, Assistant Secretary Beverly Garner, and their Treasurer Dorothy Syhes.³⁵

The Dunbar Society's mission emphasized racial equality on campus. On May 8, 1942, Earle Brooks, a fellow member of the Dunbar Society, wrote a letter to the editor of *The Egyptian*. In the letter, Brooks discussed a recent undergraduate Student Council election and responded to a recent article "The Problem Again Discussed" by Mr. Watson. In his article, Mr. Watson wrote about the recent election and why black students could not serve on the student council. Brooks opened his letter with a powerful statement, "I speak for the Negro." He eloquently mentioned that he wrote this letter to point out Mr. Watson's published article's numerous flaws. Brooks acknowledged for a democratic system to thrive, there must be fair, equal, and proper representation for the people. However, Brooks noted that their Student Council, particularly their newly elected council, aimed to oppress black students by writing, "The adoption of the system based on our class system would merit the Negro nothing."³⁶ Brooks talked about how the elections stacked the deck against black students. He argued that representation on the Student Council did not represent the people's needs since many black students on campus voted but had no representation within the Student Council. Brooks said a powerful statement to Mr. Watson:

No Mr. Watson, we cannot see it your way. We ask for no segregation, no discrimination, or any other form

33 Madlyn Stalls, "A History of African Americans", 50.

34 SIUC-SC. Southern Illinois Normal University, *The Obelisk* (Carbondale, IL: 1926), 174.

35 "Elects Officers," *The Egyptian*, October 5, 1945, 3.

36 *Egyptian Staff*. "The Egyptian, May 8, 1942." (May 1942), 2.

of the suppression we receive. I am of the opinion that you would again make us the victim of "Yankee Statesmanship."³⁷

If the student council effectively implemented proportional representation, then the Dunbar Society and black students would have supported this wholeheartedly. If given the opportunity to have actual representation within Student Council and student government, then black students and the Dunbar Society would have supported student government. The reason is that proportional representation would have meant that black students would finally have a real voice within the student government and thus would have been able to work together to bring change across the SIU campus that would benefit blacks and SIU students as a whole. They would finally be able to work towards a more fair and equitable university. As the Student Council showed no interest in changing their current constitution and procedures, this meant nothing to black students on campus. Calling the Dunbar Society "the child of segregation,"³⁸ Brooks believed that the Dunbar Society was born out of racial oppression at SIU. He pointed out that the university's slogan "Parity for Southern and Equality" did not apply to black students at SIU. Brooks understood that racial relations would not change overnight. However, without equal representation within the Student Council, it would have been difficult for black students to initiate activities and campaigns to remove racial barriers and eradicate racial discrimination on this campus. Earle Brooks ended his letter:

Give to this child of segregation the Dunbar Society, a means of representing the Negro at Southern. When you cry 'Parity For Southern' remember to give parity to the Negro at Southern. The courts have said that in order to get equity one must do equity. The Negro on this campus joins the cry. 'Parity for Southern.' YOU join the echo 'Parity for the Negro at Southern.'³⁹

Brooks believed that the time for SIU to act on behalf of its students, regardless of color, was overdue. Essentially, in his letter, Brooks argued that it was critical that instead of asking black students to improve SIU, SIU should devote itself to improving the lives of its black students. When Brooks referred to SIU, he meant the entire SIU community, including professors and administrators and not just the student council. Black students had been contributing to the university since its inception. Now it was time for

37 Ibid.

38 Ibid.

39 Ibid.

the university to help black students have a better living environment on the SIU campus.

Dunbar Society Athletics

Black students could not partake in athletics on campus. To counter this, many black students participated in intramural club sports and sporting events and activities in the greater black community in Carbondale and the surrounding area. Many of the black churches in the area had sports teams as well.⁴⁰ However, exceptions were made for students with exceptional athletic capabilities. As a result, there was sporadic participation of black students on sports teams.⁴¹ A black athlete named Kenneth Stokes was a member of the Dunbar Society. Kenneth was also affiliated with the university track team in 1928, according to a school yearbook photo.⁴² The Dunbar Society had its own sports teams, most notably a basketball team. References to the Dunbar's team dated back as early as 1927 when the school newspaper *The Egyptian* published an article describing the recent victory of the Dunbars' against Du Quoin. The Dunbars' gave Du Quoin a tough challenge, reigning superior with a final score of 20-13. *The Egyptian* even noted that the Dunbars' were one of only two teams who arguably challenged Du Quoin during the season truly.⁴³ Some basketball team members included team Captain B. Hines, W. Bowers, J. Hays, and A. West.⁴⁴

A 1930 edition of *The Egyptian* also showed that the Dunbars' participated in intramural tournaments playing high schools and other sports clubs. According to *The Egyptian*, the Dunbars' even played the "Freshman IV" intramural basketball team.⁴⁵ During the same tournament, the Dunbars' defeated the Senior College team, winning 10-7. Noted in the article was the strong potential of the Dunbar team during the tournament.⁴⁶ The Dunbars' faced the "Freshman Group 2," where the Dunbars' decimated their opponents with a final score of 24-4.⁴⁷ In 1930 but in February, the Dunbars' participated and dominated another basketball tournament. In that tournament as early as February 12, the Dunbars tied for second place with the "Road Hogs", with a 6-1 record. The Dunbars' next game in the tournament was the following day

40 Madlyn, "A History of African Americans", 41.

41 Madlyn, "A History of African Americans", 50-51.

42 SIUC-SC. Southern Illinois University, *The Obelisk* (Carbondale, IL: 1928), 217, Southern Illinois Normal University Carbondale Special Collections.

43 "Dunbars Conquer Du Quoin", *The Egyptian*, February 22, 1927, 8.

44 Ibid, 8.

45 "Team Rankings in Intramural Tournament," *The Egyptian*, January 22, 1930, 5.

46 Ibid, 5.

47 "Week's Games and Scores of Intramural Tournament," *The Egyptian*, February 5, 1930, 1.

against the “House of Andusus” team, who had a 4-2 game record preceding their game against the Dunbars.⁴⁸

On January 7, 1932, the Dunbar basketball team had another crushing victory when they defeated the “Mud Wamps” 16-9.⁴⁹ By January 27, the Dunbars were in third place in the National League Division, with a 3-1 record.⁵⁰ The 1935 January 16 *Egyptian* published an article detailing the Dunbar victory against Attucks High School in Carbondale, with a 21-18 victory.⁵¹ During the 1940s, there is little mention of Dunbar athletics in *The Egyptian*. The only mention of Dunbar athletics was on December 21, 1945, regarding an SIU complete intermural basketball tournament.⁵² After 1945 there is no further mention of Dunbar athletics in the school newspaper or the school yearbook. Dunbar athletics had faded away, possibly due to the integration of SIU sports teams. The 1961 SIU yearbook photo for the basketball team shows two black players.⁵³ The image suggested that the university during the late 40s early 50s had begun integrating their sports teams. However, from the vast array of stats and articles detailing their success during the late 1920s and throughout the 1930s, it is accurate to portray the Dunbar Society basketball team as a powerful force to be reckoned with in the black basketball community. Frequent reference to Dunbar basketball games and activities in *The Egyptian* showed that the basketball team was widely popular across the campus for whites and blacks. These frequent references and heavy news coverage also provided evidence to suggest that the Dunbar basketball team’s popularity may have also played a role in the integration of university sports.

Dunbar Society’s Social Events

The Dunbar Society had a rich social history on campus. During their weekly Tuesday meetings, members would bring 25cents to pay for weekend parties.⁵⁴ The Dunbar Society also hosted plays and other theatrical and musical events. In 1936 the Dunbar Society performed a play called “Murdered alive.”⁵⁵ Interestingly all Dunbar social events were self-funded. Frequently

48 “Road Hogs and Dunbars Tied for Second Place. Leaders Clash Tuesday,” *The Egyptian*, February 12, 1930, 2.

49 “Intramural Results,” *The Egyptian*, January 13, 1932, 6.

50 “Intramural Teams Tighten Race for League Titles,” *The Egyptian*, January 27, 1932, 5.

51 Egyptian Staff “The Egyptian, January 16, 1932.” (Jan 1932). 1.

52 “From the Press Box,” *The Egyptian*, December 21, 1945, 6.

53 SIUC-SC. Southern Illinois University, *The Obelisk* (Carbondale, IL: 1961), 131, Southern Illinois Normal University Carbondale Special Collections.

54 Madlyn, “A History of African Americans”, 96-97.

55 Ryan, Daniel Martin, “A Historical Analysis of Women Student Activities during the Inter War Years 1918-1941,” (Ph.D. Dissertation, Southern Illinois University Carbondale, 2014), 34.

the events were funded with members paying for the event outright.⁵⁶ The November 8, 1933, edition of *The Egyptian* mentions a dance the Dunbar Society was holding. Hosted on a Saturday evening in the old university gym, the decorations maintained a strong SIU theme. A Cairo orchestra provided music.⁵⁷ Regular Dunbar meetings occasionally had an event included. The November 9, 1932 issue of *The Egyptian* mentioned that singer Jessie Bill performed at a Dunbar meeting. Bill was a highly acclaimed musician and pianist who was also a member of the Dunbar Society and drew a large crowd of students to listen to him play at the Dunbar meeting.⁵⁸

On February 2, 1932, the Dunbar Society hosted a musical event at a university faculty member's private home.⁵⁹ On Saturday, October 24, 1942, Musician Bob Strong and his band played at the SIU "Swingphony" with the Dunbar Society in attendance. This event took place at Shyrock Auditorium with the Dunbar Society in attendance to consider if they would hire Bob Strong for their homecoming.⁶⁰ The November 8, 1933, edition of *The Egyptian* implies that although blacks had a separate homecoming through the Dunbar Society, they still were able and did participate in the homecoming parade for SIU. Jesse Bell and Lawrence Douglas, both members of the Dunbar Society, won first prize in the homecoming stunt parade.⁶¹ Unfortunately, the article did not mention what constituted the homecoming stunt parade. In 1944, after fighting with the President of SIU to admit black students into the official university homecoming, the Dunbar Society and other student organizations got together and created a fundraiser to hold the first integrated SIU homecoming dance. At this time, the SIU President, Roscoe Pulliam, was also the first President of the University and an alumnus.⁶² Students entirely funded the dance; the university did not provide a single penny. Eventually, a black woman, Hazel Scott, became the first black SIU Homecoming Queen in 1968.⁶³ After integrating SIU's homecoming in 1944, the school newspaper and the school yearbook did not refer to a Dunbar homecoming. This disappearance most likely was because the Dunbar Society and other SIU students campaigned to integrate the homecoming dance funding the first

56 Madlyn, "A History of African Americans", 96-97.

57 "Dance Sponsored by Social Committee Complete Success," *The Egyptian*, November 8, 1933, 1.

58 "Jessie Bill Entertains at Dunbar Society Meet," *The Egyptian*, November 9, 1932, 2.

59 "Faculty," *The Egyptian*, February 10, 1932, 2.

60 "Bob Strong to Give Music 'With Strong Appeal' Saturday Eve," *The Egyptian*, October 23, 1942, 1.

61 Egyptian Staff "The Egyptian, November 8, 1933." (Nov 1933), 1.

62 Southern Illinois University Carbondale. "Roscoe Pulliam." October 16. <https://chancellor.siu.edu/hall-of-chancellors/pulliam.php>.

63 Madlyn, "A History of African Americans", 106.

integrated homecoming entirely by themselves. Like Dunbar athletics, the school newspaper's heavy coverage strongly suggests that the Dunbar Society events were open to blacks and attended by white SIU students and faculty, too.

The Demise of the Dunbar Society

The Dunbar Society was a vibrant organization at SIU for over two decades. However, by the mid-1940s, as SIU began integration at the university level, the Dunbar Society's popularity began to decline. From 1950 onwards, the Dunbar Society does not appear in the school yearbooks. From 1945 until 1989, *The Egyptian* (known as the Daily Egyptian by 1989) never mentioned the Dunbar Society. In 1989 *The Daily Egyptian* daily mentioned that the Dunbar Society morphed into the Black Affairs Council created in 1973. The predecessor to the Black Affairs Council was the Black Student Union created in 1969.⁶⁴ From 1950-1970, the Dunbar Society's legacy practically disappeared until the Black Student Union's formation, thus reviving interest in student rights for blacks on the SIU campus.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the Dunbar Society had a rich history at Southern Illinois University. Leading up to this organization's formation, blacks' education in Southern Illinois differed as they experienced racism, segregation, and poor educational resources. Although at SIU, black students experienced racism and mistreatment, they were able to rise above it and create the Dunbar Society to help deal with SIU's social climate. The Dunbar Society promoted the literary abilities of students via hosted debates, provided entertainment through social activities like theatrical and musical events, including a Dunbar homecoming, which led to the first integrated homecoming solely funded by student organizations, and even provided athletic opportunities for Black athletes who could not play on the university teams. The Dunbar Society battled the impositions of oppression at SIU and fought for equal student opportunities. Today, contemporary student organizations like the Black Affairs Council follow in their footsteps, having benefitted from those efforts, a testament to the Dunbar Society's legacy. The Dunbar Society's creation and significant gains in social and racial equity for black students at SIU acted as a response to the call for parity, promised by the school slogan. By making inroads for black students, it positively affected the entire student population at SIU. Installing real parity instilled real hope in the broader community, illustrating a successful framework for more considerable societal change.

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