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### Frederick Douglass Junior and Senior High School

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## Frederick Douglass Junior and Senior High School

Douglass High School stood as a pillar in the community for over 70 years. The school, named after abolitionist Frederick Douglass, was also the social heart of the community. Past graduates remember the school as a close-knit community with supportive teachers who expected the best from their students.

After the Civil War and prior to the Brown vs the Board of Education of Topeka, KS decision in 1954, educational opportunities for African Americans were limited and, when available, segregated. African Americans set up “self-help” schools meaning that black folk held classes where they could – in churches and private homes – with the aid of white allies, missionary organizations, and the U.S. Freedmen’s Bureau.

In 1863, WV established a free public school system for free black children though legislators did not appropriate funds for these efforts. In his January 1922 article in the Journal of Negro History, Carter G. Woodson wrote that in 1864 School Superintendent William R. White declared in a report that West Virginia’s “negroes had been too long and too mercilessly deprived of” the privilege of a free education. The state legislature responded in 1866 and passed a law creating public schools for black students opening the way for the establishment of the first black high school, Lincoln High School, in Wheeling, West Virginia that same year. The law gave agency to local school boards to create schools for black students in areas where there were more than fifteen black students between the ages of six and twenty-one.

The 1896 Plessy vs Ferguson case, which reinforced the common practice of separate facilities for blacks and whites, established the “separate but equal” doctrine and led to the establishment of black high school in West Virginia. R. Charles Byers writes that, among the southern states, West Virginia was one that did attempt to deliver acceptable educational opportunities for its black citizens. Prior to the Plessy decision, black schools existed in West Virginia including black high schools such as Lincoln High School in Wheeling and Frederick Douglass High School in Huntington.

Huntington leaders heeded the charge from the state and, in the fall of 1873, the Huntington City Council approved the first school for black children in the city which was located in a church on 12<sup>th</sup> street and 6<sup>th</sup> avenue and had 43 students.

In 1875, the school moved to a log cabin on Norway Avenue across from Spring Hill Cemetery then to Holderby Chapel a few years later. In 1882, Mr. and Mrs. W. F. James (Susie James), educated in Ohio, arrived to run the school and succeeded in growing the curriculum to include not only grammar school staples but advanced high school classes as well.

William T. McKinney became principal of the school in 1891. In 1892, McKinney and some leaders in the African American community induced the Huntington Board of Education to establish Frederick Douglass Junior and High School named in honor of

abolitionist Frederick Douglass. The city built a six room brick structure on the corner of 8<sup>th</sup> avenue and 16<sup>th</sup> street (now Hal Greer Boulevard) at a cost of \$15,000. In 1893, the first class, composed of 3 students (Mathew Colley, Belle Turner, and Boston Scott), graduated from the school. McKinney resigned in 1897 and Carter H. Barnett, son of Reverend Nelson Barnett, became principal. Barnett was a graduate of Dennison University in Granville, Ohio where many students, faculty, and graduates were involved in the anti-slavery movement. Barnett added classes and extended the high school curriculum to 4 years enabling the school to serve grades 7 through 12.

Carter G. Woodson, before he became a famed historian and the Father of Black History, took over principalship of the school in 1900 when he graduated from Berea College in Kentucky. Berea College was established by Reverend John G. Fee who believed strongly in education for men and women of all races. Woodson was one of the first students at of Douglass High School where he finished the curriculum in just 18 months and was one of two graduates in 1896. Goodson established a library at the school.

When Woodson left the school in 1903, R. P. Sims became principal. Sims attended Hillandale College in Virginia. He was able to add a teacher to the ranks increasing the number of faculty to 8. Sims was succeeded in 1905 by J. W. Scott who was Vice-Principal under Carter H. Barnett. Under Scott's watch, two rooms were added to the school when the building was remodeled. The remodel cost was \$8,000. Scott also expanded the courses available for students. Within the next several years, two building projects took place. First, a two room building was constructed on Tenth Avenue and Bruce Street for \$5,000; the structure was named for Reverend Nelson Barnett, a leading pastor in early Huntington who established the First Baptist Church in 1872. The second project involved the erection of a portable building on the Douglass school yard. This paved the way for a major construction project including a fire proof, two story addition to Douglass with laboratories, a library, and an assembly room. The cost of the project was \$40,000. At the same time, teachers were added to the faculty increasing their number to 20.

Reports during the period 1910-1920 indicate that enrollment grew and the curriculum included English, beginning and advanced algebra, science, Latin, physics, French, music and art. The faculty of 14 teachers all had college degrees.

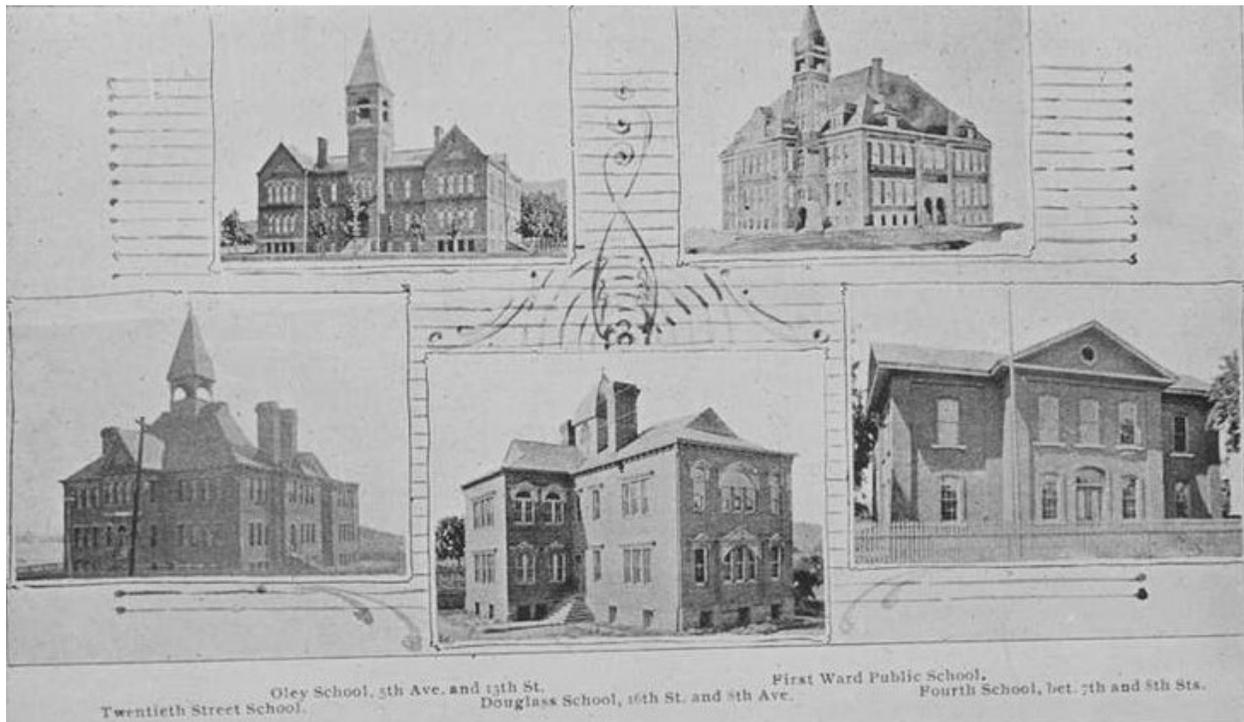
In 1924-5, Douglass Junior and Senior High School moved to a three story brick building erected on 10<sup>th</sup> Avenue and Bruce Street. The former Douglass building on 8<sup>th</sup> Avenue was renamed Barnett Elementary and catered to grades 1 through 6. The new Douglass was headed by Harry David Hazlewood who was the longest serving principal, remaining at the school for 24 years. In 1927, Douglass was accredited by the North Central Association of colleges and Secondary Schools establishing the school as a full fledged high school and affirming its place among high schools across the country.

Two notable faculty members during this period were Revella Hughes and Zelma L. Davis who supervised music and coached sports respectively (see chapters X and X). Douglass' last principal, Joseph A. Slash was also a graduate. Mr. Slash went on to become the first black school superintendent in West Virginia history.

Douglass continued to grow through the years but the 1954 Brown v Board of Education decision marked the decline of the school and the last class graduated in 1961. Since 1963, the school has housed a special education school (Fairfield School), Cabell County Board of Education Offices, and a medical outreach center. In 2015, Marshall University School of Medicine acquired the building and uses it for medical outreach among other things.

Notable Douglass graduates include: Hal Greer and Roy Goines (athletes who broke the color barrier at Marshall University), Dr. Joseph Slash, and of course Dr. Carter G. Woodson. This list is far from exhaustive.

The Douglass High School building is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.



From Marshall University Special Collections



From Wikipedia

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