



About Alice Dunbar-Nelson:

Dates: July 19, 1875 - September 18, 1935

Occupation: writer, poet, journalist, teacher, activist

Known for: short stories; tumultuous marriage to Paul Laurence Dunbar; figure in Harlem Renaissance

Also known as: Alice Dunbar, Alice Dunbar Nelson, Alice Ruth Moore Dunbar Nelson, Alice Ruth Moore Dunbar-Nelson, Alice Moore Dunbar-Nelson, Alice Ruth Moore

Background, Family:

- Father: Joseph Moore (merchant marine)
- Mother: Patricia Wright (seamstress)

Education:

- Straight College, New Orleans (nursing, teaching; graduated in 1892)
- Pennsylvania School of Industrial Art
- University of Pennsylvania

Marriage:

- Paul Laurence Dunbar (married 1898, separated 1902; he died in 1906; writer)
- Henry Arthur Callis (married 1910-1911)
- Robert J. Nelson (married 1916; journalist)

Alice Dunbar-Nelson Biography:

Born in New Orleans, Alice Dunbar-Nelson's light-skinned and racially-ambiguous appearance gave her entrance into associations across racial and ethnic lines.

Alice Dunbar-Nelson graduated from college in 1892, and taught for six years, editing the woman's page of a New Orleans paper in her free time. She began publishing her poetry and short stories at age 20.

In 1895 she began a correspondence with Paul Laurence Dunbar, and they first met in 1897, when Alice moved to teach in Brooklyn. Dunbar-Nelson helped found the White Rose Mission, a home for girls and, when Paul Dunbar returned from a trip to England, they were married. She left her school position so they could move to Washington, DC.

They came from very different racial experiences. Her light skin often allowed her to "pass" while his more "African" appearance kept him out where she was able to enter. He drank more heavily than she could tolerate, and he also had affairs. They also disagreed about writing: she denounced his use of black dialect. They fought, sometimes violently.

Alice Dunbar-Nelson left Paul Dunbar in 1902, moving to Wilmington, Delaware. He died four years later.

Alice Dunbar-Nelson worked in Wilmington at Howard High School, as a teacher and administrator, for 18 years. She also worked at State College for Colored Students and Hampton Institute, directing summer classes.

In 1910, Alice Dunbar-Nelson married Henry Arthur Callis, but they separated the next year. She married Robert J. Nelson, a journalist, in 1916.

In 1915, Alice Dunbar-Nelson worked as a field organizer in her region for woman's suffrage. During World War I, Alice Dunbar-Nelson served with the Women's Commission on the Council of National Defense and the Circle of Negro War Relief. She worked in 1920 with the Delaware Republican state committee, and helped found the Industrial School for Colored Girls in Delaware. She organized for anti-lynching reforms, and served 1928-1931 as executive secretary of the American Friends Inter-Racial Peace Committee.

During the Harlem Renaissance, Alice Dunbar-Nelson published numerous stories and essays in *Crisis*, *Opportunity*, *Journal of Negro History*, and *Messenger*.

Selected Writings:

- Alice Ruth Moore, *Violets and Other Tales*, 1895, short stories and poems
- Alice Dunbar), *The Goodness of St. Rocque and Other Stories*, 1899, stories about Creole life

- Alice Moore Dunbar, editor, *Masterpieces of Negro Eloquence: The Best Speeches Delivered by the Negro from the Days of Slavery to the Present Time*, 1914
- Alice Dunbar-Nelson, *Dunbar Speaker and Entertainer*, 1920
- stories and essays in *Crisis*, *Opportunity*, *Journal of Negro History*, *Messenger*
- "As in a Looking Glass," column, 1926-1930
- "A Women's Point of View," column, 1926
- "So It Seems to Alice Dunbar-Nelson," column, 1930
- Alice Dunbar-Nelson, *Give Us Each Day: The Diary of Alice Dunbar-Nelson*, posthumous publication

See: [Books By and About Alice Dunbar-Nelson](#)