

Alone atop the Hill: The Autobiography of Alice Dunnigan, Pioneer of the National Black Press

Alice Dunnigan

Carol McCabe Booker, Editor

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This revised edition of Alice Dunnigan's story deservedly elevates her to the pantheon of African American and female pioneers of American history.

Alice Dunnigan was a journalist who blazed trails for women and African Americans in the national corridors of power during the pre-Civil Rights era. Her autobiography received limited recognition when it was first published in 1974, in part perhaps because of its length. Editor Carol McCabe Booker has trimmed it down and retitled the work *Alone atop the Hill: The Autobiography of Alice Dunnigan, Pioneer of the National Black Press*. The result focuses on her hardscrabble early years in rural Kentucky and her work as chief of the Associated Negro Press's (ANP) Washington Bureau during the 1940s-60s.

Booker summarizes Dunnigan's post-ANP years briefly in the volume's epilogue. Extensive footnotes place Dunnigan's achievements in historical context and highlight just how remarkable some of them were, not just for a woman, not just for an African American, but for any journalist.

Dunnigan's lonely life on her parent's sharecropper farm offers haunting insights into how limited opportunities were for African Americans living in the rural South before World War II. She writes with a concise but descriptive style, and it is inspiring to read how she overcame a staggering number of obstacles in obtaining her education and employment as a school teacher, including resistance from her own family. With wartime personnel shortages, she secured a typist job with the Federal Labor Department in Washington, DC, which she soon parlayed into a half-cent-per-word position at the ANP.

Dunnigan's huge store of grit and persistence made this fairly non-remunerative job (augmented by numerous freelance writing assignments and a weekly ritual of pawning her watch) into a rewarding career. This smiling but resolute dynamo, demurely dressed in lace-trimmed dresses, gloves, and smart little hats, broke down Old Guard networks to obtain White House, Supreme Court, and other lofty press credentials.

Alone Atop the Hill gives deserved recognition to a principled and hardworking reporter whose array of singular accomplishments makes her worthy of further scholarship and public attention.

RACHEL JAGARESKI (Spring 2015)

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