THE PEDDLER AND THE PEDAGOGUE

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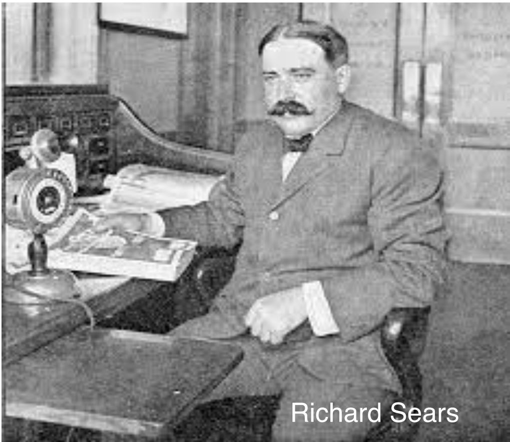
There are a number of places to begin this story, but I am choosing the summer of 1895, because it marks a pivotal point in the lives of both protagonists.

Sometime that July a man named Aaron Nusbaum walked into the cluttered office of Richard Sears, founder and president of Sears, Roebuck & Company to sell him some pneumatic tubes, devices that could speed orders between floors in Sears warehouse. Sears wasn't interested in the tubes, but he liked the enterprising salesman, and he was looking for an investor to buy out his partner, watch expert A. C. Roebuck, who had become disenchanted with a business that, while growing rapidly, was deeply in debt and whose model, mail order, was unproven.


Richard Sears

Sears made his first sale – a lot of canceled watches to his fellow trainmasters in the North Redwood Falls, Minnesota area – back in 1886, rapidly expanded his assortment of merchandise, moved to Chicago, began producing a catalog which soon grew to 322 pages (and for which he wrote all the copy), and was now being inundated by a volume that was exceeding his capacity to manage.

Sears offered Nusbaum a half interest in the business for $75,000. Nusbaum was intrigued but reluctant to commit such a large sum himself. He went to his brother-in-law, thirty-three-year-old Julius Rosenwald, and asked him if he wanted a quarter-share for $37,500.

Julius Rosenwald's route to Sears from his birthplace in Springfield, Illinois, one block from the home of Abraham Lincoln, had taken him to New York to work in his uncles' and his own retail stores and back to Chicago, where he achieved a modicum of success as a clothing manufacturer. But he saw the mail order business as an opportunity to meet the burgeoning demand for consumer goods generated by rural customers who had few options other than country stores with meager selections and high prices. With financing assistance from his parent firm – which was already one of Sears's largest creditors – on August 18th he and Nusbaum signed the agreement which would become a landmark in American business history.

Richard Sears was a brilliant marketer, a "mail-order Barnum" who "could sell a breath of air," according to Harry Goldman. His carefully crafted persuasive descriptions, incredibly low prices, and imaginative ad campaigns and promotional gimmicks churned out thousands of orders, which doubled between 1895 and 1896. If the volume was enviable, it also overwhelmed Sears's abysmal administrative skills.

The company's office was hopelessly disorganized. "Orders poured in faster than the factories could supply the goods, faster than they could

be cleared through warehouses and shipping rooms," resulting in errors, misplacements, cancellations, and returns. Julius Rosenwald supplied the discipline necessary to tame Sears's impetuosity, exuberance, and often outlandish advertising claims. He had "a feel for internal efficiency as superlative as Sears had for sales," wrote historian Cecil Hoge.

In spite of differences in ideology and tactics, the unwieldy partnership continued to thrive. With Rosenwald overseeing finances, merchandising, facilities, and quality control and Sears still in charge of marketing, sales totaled $10 million in 1900 ($350 million in 2022 dollars). From 1900 to 1905, they increased at a rate of thirty percent per year, reaching $38 million in 1905.

The growing business needed more space and more capital. In 1904 the company purchased a forty-acre tract five miles west of Downtown Chicago, and constructed a complex consisting of a power plant, a railroad depot, a printing and mailing facility, and a massive administration building that, among other services, enabled it to process 27,000 orders per hour. Two years later Rosenwald and Sears journeyed to New York hoping to secure a loan from Goldman, Sachs; instead, senior partner Harry Goldman advised a sale of stock on the open market. Within months, both men were multimillionaires.

The following year, in the midst of a nationwide recession, the Rosenwald-Sears marriage fractured under the weight of the company's first-ever sales decline and conflicting views as to how to react. In November 1908, Sears resigned as president, and sold his stock to Harry Goldman. Sales revived, doubling within the next five years to $90 million with a ten percent profit margin and motivating Julius Rosenwald to launch a secondary career that would almost overshadow his first.

Emil Hirsch

If he far exceeded the capacity for giving he anticipated when he remarked to a friend around the time of his marriage in 1890, "The aim of my life is to have an income of $15,000 a year -- $5000 to be used for my personal expense, $5000 to be laid aside, and $5000 to go to charity," he stayed true to the percentage of his wealth he would devote to that cause.

Rosenwald would identify two spiritual mentors who nurtured his philanthropic inclinations. The first was his rabbi at the reform Temple Sinai, Emil Hirsch, who taught that the rights of society must never be compromised for the cause of individual rights. "Charity," he said, "is not a voluntary concession on the part of the well-situated. It is a right to which the less fortunate are entitled by justice." Rosenwald's first significant gifts, made in 1904, to the University of Chicago (where Hirsch was professor of Hebrew studies), to the Associated Jewish Charities of Chicago, and to Michael Reese German Jewish Hospital, were most likely at the behest of Hirsch.

Equally impactful in Rosenwald's evolution as a humanitarian was William Henry Baldwin, Jr., whose biography he found enlightening and inspiring. The president of Southern Railway, Baldwin strove to succeed as a businessman without sacrificing personal morality and idealism. Rosenwald was particularly impressed by Baldwin's "study of the Negro problem along common sense, helpful lines," his friendship with Booker T. Washington, and his support of the YMCA movement.

Having met L. Wilbur Messer, general secretary of the Chicago YMCA, Rosenwald became so enamored of the organization that through Sears, Roebuck, he essentially underwrote fifty percent of the cost of a

branch near its new campus. Upon learning of the dearth of YMCA buildings for blacks across the country – most were banned from “white only” facilities – he pledged first $25,000 towards the construction of a black YMCA in Chicago and afterwards an equal amount to any YMCA in any major city that could raise an additional $75,000 for the same purpose.

On May 18, 1911, Messer persuaded Rosenwald to host a luncheon for forty-five civic leaders at the Blackstone Hotel preceding a dinner that same evening recognizing the Chicago YMCA’s fifty-third anniversary. As his honored guest, Messer invited Booker T. Washington, whom he had recently encountered on a train and who had asked him to recommend a prominent white Chicagoan for the Tuskegee Institute board of trustees.

Messer hadn’t hesitated. The only candidate was the host, and to cement the partnership, he asked him to make the introduction. Rosenwald spoke of Washington as a “wise, statesmanlike leader” who “is helping his own race to attain the high art of self-help and self-dependence . . . and the white race to learn that opportunity and obligation go hand in hand.”

After the luncheon, Rosenwald and Washington adjourned to the Auditorium for the celebratory dinner. Washington assured the audience that “any inferiority in blacks was not intrinsic but the result of two hundred years of slavery . . . and could be overcome.” He foreshadowed the model that would launch a white philanthropist and a thousand black communities on a school-building mission when he compared blacks’ financial support for their own YMCAs to that for their churches. “We inherited no church houses since we became a free people,” he said. “Within forty-five years we have erected 35,000 churches and in 90% of cases the money . . . has come out of our pockets.”

Rosenwald responded that he was particularly gratified by the work he had been able to do with the YMCA because “it has the tendency toward bringing together the two races which have to live side by side. And in my opinion, there is no problem which faces the American people that has more importance than this problem of how to have these two races live congenially and try to uplift each other.”

On September 18, 1895, one month after the Rosenwald-Sears merger, Booker T. Washington stood before an audience of sympathetic white northerners, suspicious white southerners, and hopeful blacks seeking a leader and spokesperson to celebrate the opening of the black exhibit at the Atlanta Cotton States Exposition. Though only five minutes, his speech that day is the most famous of the hundreds he delivered in his lifetime.

In it he attempts to articulate a solution to the race problem different from that espoused by many whites: removal or erasure. He recalls the parable of the sailors lost at sea and out of drinking water. Hailing a passing ship and instructed to “Cast down your bucket where you are,” they find themselves in the midst of a huge fresh-water river. With that one metaphor, Washington is telling blacks that their home in America is the best place for them to improve their living conditions, rather than a distant colony, and he is reminding white capitalists that their best source of labor is not immigrants but native blacks who have already worked their farms and built their cities and railroads.

Washington emphasized black achievements since the end of slavery, and predicted greater progress if racial animosity could be mitigated. Contrary to prevailing sentiment, he described blacks as “faithful,

law-abiding, and unresentful," whose "education of head, hand, and heart" would yield material benefit for both races. Disavowing any claim to social equality, he raised his hand with his fingers spread wide apart, and, referring to black and white southerners, exclaimed: "In all things that are purely social we can be as separate as the fingers, yet as one in all things essential to mutual progress."

His remarks, delivered conversationally, with no podium, and only a note card in his pocket, were illustrative of his effectiveness as a public speaker. He offered his pro-black perspective with humility, sincerity, and a dose of humor and storytelling reminiscent of Abraham Lincoln.

Responses to the speech presaged the controversies that were to bedevil Booker T. Washington throughout his career as an advocate for better treatment for his black brothers and sisters. Acclaim for his accomplishments would inevitably be undermined by criticism for his emphasis on vocational education and his failure to denounce more aggressively racial prejudice and oppression. Hailed by one notable black journalist as the successor to Frederick Douglass and destined "to be the single figure ahead of the procession," he was accused by another of taking positions detrimental to blacks and encouraging to whites.

From his earliest years, Washington saw education as his own and his race's path to progress. Born a slave in 1856 on a farm near Hale's Ford, Virginia, never knowing his white father, he moved after emancipation with his mother to Malden, West Virginia. His putative stepfather allowed him to attend the local school for blacks provided he put in a full day's work in the town's coal mine. At the age of sixteen, he journeyed three hundred miles by foot, rail, and stagecoach to Hampton Institute, where he obtained enrollment and a janitorial job by scouring the recitation room. He would graduate as co-valedictorian of his class, and later be invited by the school's founder, General Samuel Chapman Armstrong, to join the faculty.

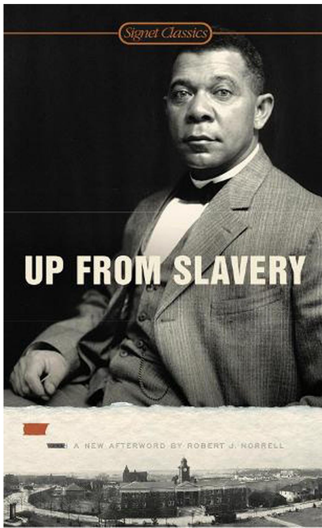
When Armstrong received a letter asking him to recommend "a well-qualified white man" to organize a black teacher's college in Tuskegee, Alabama, he replied that he knew of no good white candidates, but had "a very competent, capable . . . modest mulatto . . . and thorough teacher and superior man . . . I know of no white man who could do better." The inquirers telegraphed back: "Booker T. Washington will suit us. Send him at once."

On July 4, 1881, when the twenty-five-year-old headmaster and thirty students showed up for opening day, Tuskegee Institute was little more than a dilapidated church building with a leaky roof. Seven years later, by means of the manual labor supplied by every enrollee and the money Washington could obtain by borrowing or solicitations, the campus had grown to six hundred acres, and included a three-story academic building, two dormitories, three teachers' cottages, a foundry, a blacksmith, and a brick works. By 1895, the acreage had tripled, and the enrollment, numbering eight hundred, exceeded that of all institutions of higher learning in Alabama and perhaps in the South. The school's success can be attributed to the relentless fundraising efforts of Washington; not only did he crisscross the Northeast speaking night after night and knocking on doors, he also shifted his curriculum to vocational education, which greatly appealed to wealthy industrialists, their heirs, and their special funds.

Washington's prominence made him a focal point as, outside a few bright spots like Tuskegee, the situation of blacks across the south deteriorated rather than improved. Southern states rewrote their

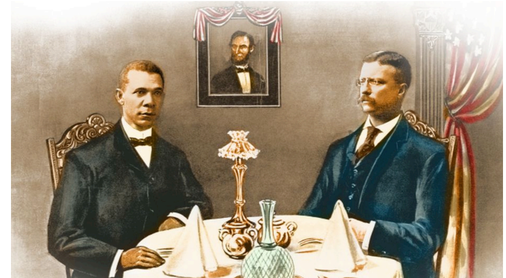
constitutions to deprive blacks of their voting rights. The U.S. Supreme Court affirmed the right of states to enforce by law the separation of races in public places. White-controlled school boards were authorized to direct tax receipts disproportionately towards the education of white children. Whites utilized lynching and the destruction of blacks' property to demonize, intimidate, and subjugate those whom they perceived as threats to their social order and economic security.

Confronted by escalating violence, Washington sought to tread a fine line between angering whites for protesting too strongly and exasperating blacks for not speaking loudly enough. In defiance of the Wilmington riot of 1898 and the emasculation and live burning of accused killer and rapist Sam Hose, he optimistically insisted, "I do not think we have any reason to despair." When Alabama rewrote its constitutional in 1901 to strip ninety-eight percent of blacks from the voting rolls, his failure publicly to oppose it evoked accusations of weakness and even tacit approval.



With the political avenue foreclosed, Washington turned to the power of the pen to stem the rising tide of white antipathy to blacks and to bolster black morale. He issued press releases, submitted editorials to newspapers, composed magazine articles, and authored three books, the most famous of which, *Up From Slavery*, his autobiography, was an instant success and has never been out of print since its publication. In it he acknowledged the bleak legacy of slavery – blacks deprived of a stable family unit, education, meaningful work, and the capacity for self-rule – yet persisted in exuding hope for the future, pointing to his own trajectory and "blacks' emerging self-mastery" as evidence "that the race is constantly making slow but sure progress materially, educationally, and morally."

When Washington did venture into the political arena, it exposed him to further censure. Barely one month after succeeding to the presidency upon the assassination of his predecessor William McKinley, Theodore Roosevelt invited Washington to dine with him and his family at the White House. Hoping to garner support for the Republican Party, Roosevelt intended to consult Washington on candidates for patronage appointments who might be blacks or whites sympathetic to their cause. The editor of the Richmond *Times* echoed the sentiments of many whites north and south when he interpreted the dinner as the president's condoning "Negroes mingling freely with whites in social circles and white women receiving attentions from Negro men." William Trotter, founder of the Boston *Guardian*, attacked Washington on the patronage matter, claiming he was promoting the appointment of white men to office in place of blacks.



W.E.B. DuBois

One of Washington's most outspoken critics was W. E. B. Du Bois. In *The Souls of Black Folks*, Du Bois said Washington had won the favor of whites by encouraging blacks to surrender political power, civil rights, and higher education for economic opportunity. Washington's program, he wrote, "practically accepts the alleged inferiority of the Negro race," absolves whites of any responsibility for the Negro problem, and places the burden of blacks' progress entirely on their own shoulders.

Unbeknownst to his critics, Washington worked quietly to advance the cause of black equality. He personally funded five lawsuits challenging the constitutionality of Alabama's voting restrictions ultimately to no avail, as Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Homes ruled that relief could come only from the state legislature or the U.S. Congress. Washington did achieve two modest victories when the Senate confirmed his choice for revenue collector of the Port of Charleston, a black physician named William Crum, and when the Supreme Court overturned the conviction of a black man whose appeal he paid for on the grounds that the jury "of his peers" included no qualified blacks.

From 1905 to 1911, a series of events would tarnish Washington's image as the leader of the race. In July 1905, Du Bois and Trotter convened at Niagara Falls twenty-nine black professionals whom they deemed the "Talented Tenth." While agreeing with Washington by affirming black voting rights and opposing racial restrictions in public venues, they broke with him in calling for vocal protest, stating that "the voice of ten million Americans must never cease to assail the ears of their fellows, so long as America is unjust."

Late in 1906, Washington's trusted confidant and adviser and a member of his Tuskegee board for over fifteen years, William Henry Baldwin, Jr. – the same man who stirred Julius Rosenwald's admiration – died at the age of forty-two. Over time Baldwin had developed a deep sympathy for the lamentable condition of blacks in the south, and had publicly voiced his distress at the suppression of their civil rights and the neglect of their schools by hostile whites. The loss of Baldwin's counsel would impair Washington's fundraising efforts and handicap his decision making in the future.

In September of that year, fueled by allegations of black-on-white rape, a white mob invaded a middle-class black neighborhood in downtown Atlanta. The ensuing clash resulted in the death of thirty blacks and two whites. Washington's failure to support retaliation by force and demand federal intervention energized his enemies and disappointed his followers.

On November 7, 1906, acting on orders from President Roosevelt, Secretary of War William Howard Taft dismissed 167 black soldiers from their infantry regiment at Fort Brown, Texas. The shooting of a bartender and a policeman three months earlier had prompted an investigation by the U.S. Inspector General, who alleged a conspiracy of silence among the soldiers and pronounced them guilty without a trial. In what may have been the worst mistake of his public career, Washington refused to disavow the president's decision, and was permanently stained by the Roosevelt's own "gross miscarriage of justice."

Eight months later a group of activist social workers, professionals, and intellectuals, which included Washington nemeses Trotter and Du Bois, assembled for the inaugural meeting of what would eventually become the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. In the years ahead its organizers would relentlessly impugn Washington for his political involvement, his allegiance to the Republican Party, and, in the words of Du Bois, "for his policy of non-resistance, giving up agitation, and acquiescence in semi-serfdom."

Washington's reputation was further sullied as a result of a bizarre incident that occurred on the evening of March 19, 1911, when he was assaulted on West 63rd Street in New York City by a man named Henry Ulrich. Ulrich's girlfriend accused Washington of making a lewd remark to her – "Hello, Sweetheart" – and after Ulrich observed Washington entering and leaving her apartment building three times, he accosted him and struck him with a walking stick. In a subsequent trial, Ulrich was acquitted on the grounds that his motive was not proved. Washington was never able to explain his presence at the scene to the satisfaction of either his white or black enemies.

Persevering under a relentless barrage of defamation, Washington's crusade for black education never faltered. In vain, he pleaded with the white northern press to publicize its pitiable state. "The average white child in the south had at least three times as much spent on him as the typical black child, and in the Black belts of the South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana, the ratios were usually much higher."

Part 2

"You need a schoolhouse." So intoned Booker T. Washington to the students and faculty assembled in the Tuskegee Institute chapel on Sunday, April 28, 1895, for his weekly service. "You cannot teach school in a log cabin without doors, windows, lights, floor or apparatus." (Deutsch, p. 64)

Already a leading educator and soon to be acknowledged as the spokesperson and preeminent advocate for his fellow blacks, he was known to preach on a variety of subjects including current events, preferred reading material, and proper behavior. (Deutsch, p. 64)

Whites were intent on starving black schools of funds, he had told the National Education Association in 1884, because they viewed "education as a threat to their established social and economic hierarchy." In many cases, he later wrote, children were being taught in schoolhouses which "are not fit for pigs to live in." Discrimination and segregation consigned them to churches, stores, private homes, farm buildings, abandoned former white structures, or decrepit postbellum schools "absolutely worthless, and none of them . . . furnished with anything except a few old benches." School supplies were scarce, and even if textbooks were available, they were were woefully outdated. Training for teachers was nonexistent, and their salaries were meager. (Hoffschwelle, pp. 14, 18; Ascoli, p. 135)

While Washington encouraged blacks in the south to seek their fair share of public revenue, he also urged them to address these appalling conditions on their own. (Hoffschwelle, p. 18)

Beginning in 1905, with the assistance of Tuskegee extension director Clinton J. Calloway, Washington utilized white philanthropy to underwrite a public school program. He convinced wealthy investor Henry Huttleston Rogers that "money spent for Negro education" would produce "better workers, better customers, and better citizens." Rogers's contributions helped to construct forty-six one-teacher schools in Macon County, Alabama. Calloway raised additional funds from community members, patrons, and teachers, and lured blacks to the county from other parts of the state with the promise of a robust education. (Hoffschwelle, p. 25)

Rogers's death in 1909 and his son's decision to abandon the project compelled Washington to search for a new benefactor. He found his man two years later, on May 18, 1911, when Sears Roebuck magnate

Julius Rosenwald rose to introduce him at the Blackstone Hotel in Chicago. Heralded by his recent pledge of $25,000 to any city that could raise $75,000 for the construction of a black YMCA, "Rosenwald was just beginning to broaden his philanthropic concerns to include African American needs." Among the other black causes supported by Rosenwald during 1911-1912 were the budding National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, Hampton Institute, Fisk University, and of course Tuskegee Institute. (Hoffschwelle, pp. 26-27; Ascoli, pp. 93-95)

Five months after the Blackstone luncheon, Julius Rosenwald made his first trip to Tuskegee accompanied by, among others, his wife Gussie, his spiritual mentor, Rabbi Emil Hirsch, and Wilbur Messer, general secretary of the Chicago YMCA. Serenaded by the school's brass band upon arrival, the group motored past imposing buildings bearing impressive names like Carnegie and Rockefeller; attended a reception for faculty and staff hosted by Washington's wife Margaret; visited immaculate classrooms where all students were polite, respectful, perfectly groomed, and neatly attired; and were spellbound by the evening chapel service during which hundreds of choir members vocalized the melancholy hymns of their childhood. (Deutsch, pp. 103-105)

"What I have seen here has inspired me beyond words," praised Julius Rosenwald. "Your principal, Mr. Washington, to my notion, has done the greatest work of any man in America." (Deutsch, p. 106)

Shortly thereafter Rosenwald accepted a position on the Tuskegee Board of Trustees. He immediately justified his appointment by sending Washington hundreds of remaindered or damaged hats and pairs of shoes from Sears, Roebuck for sale to students at token prices. At his first board meeting, Rosenwald pledged $5000 a year for five years, one-half of a $50,000 fund he advised Washington to create in order to alleviate his financial difficulties. (Deutsch, p. 111; Ascoli, pp. 89-91)

Three weeks later, in March 1912, Washington visited the Rosenwalds, and stayed at their home in Chicago, which, not surprisingly, "caused a great many comments," according to Gussie. "But we don't mind," she added in the letter she wrote to her daughter, "People will get over it." Washington spoke before packed houses at the Commercial Club and Temple Sinai, where Rabbi Hirsch referred to him as "a second Moses." (Ascoli, pp. 90-91)

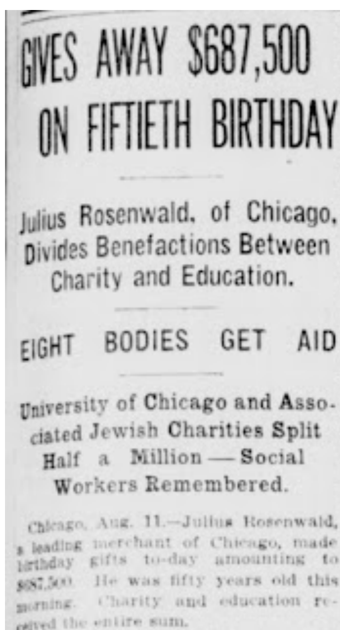
Julius Rosenwald's interest in African American affairs stemmed from his conception of citizenship, which rested not on "agitation for legal rights" but "on equality of opportunity and an individual's willingness to seize that opportunity to become a productive member of society and the economy." Access to education was fundamental to the realization of equal opportunity and the development of good citizens. He told an interviewer in 1920 that "too much injustice has been practiced against the negro. He needs education and a chance to earn a good living . . . I believe he deserves a fair chance to get a better environment [i.e. schools], and I am going to do all I can to see that he gets it." (Hoffschwelle, p. 29)
To be clear, Rosenwald's sympathy for the deplorable situation of southern blacks should not be overstated. His biographer (and grandson) characterizes him as a "cautious businessman" who in his

advocacy for the victims of racial oppression was reluctant to cross the boundaries of conventional thinking. His objective, he wrote in 1911, was to induce whites to "do what they can to make of the Colored people a decent, respectable element, if not from a sense of justice, at least in self-defense. Equality is furtherest [sic] from my mind, but a nearer approach to justice toward these people must, in my opinion, be brought about by one method or another." (Morey)

Rosenwald's growing reputation as a philanthropist mindful of the conditions of black Americans garnered him hundreds of requests for money, and led him to seek counsel from Booker T. Washington. By the summer of 1912 his ongoing communications with Washington, which comprised both direct conversation and a voluminous correspondence which occasionally reached three letters a week, had narrowed his focus to the lack of adequate schooling for southern blacks, especially in small rural communities. (Deutsch, p. 111)

In June, Washington wrote a long letter to Rosenwald on the subject. He expressed concern that local authorities might take advantage of a donor's generosity and use it to replace rather than amplify their penurious investment in black education. He wrote that "a good strong man [should] be employed" to supervise the use of contributed funds. At the same same time, white administrators should be invited to participate in the project, and a case should be made that it was to their benefit "to help educate the Negro." The southern white man, he continued, "likes to be talked to but does not like to be talked about. Great care should be exercised to let county officials feel as far as possible that they are doing the work -- in a word, to place the responsibility on them." (Deutsch, p. 113)

In his July 15th response, amidst details of his money-raising efforts on behalf of Tuskegee, Rosenwald "dropped a bombshell." He wrote: "If you had $25,000 to distribute among institutions which are offshoots from Tuskegee or doing similar work to Tuskegee, how would you divide it?" One can only imagine the paroxysms of joy with which Washington drafted his reply: "Such a sum of money will prove a Godsend to those institutions, and can be made to accomplish more good just now than any one realizes." (Ascoli, pp. 129-130)



GIVES AWAY $687,500 ON FIFTIETH BIRTHDAY

Julius Rosenwald, of Chicago, Divides Benefactions Between Charity and Education.

EIGHT BODIES GET AID

University of Chicago and Associated Jewish Charities Split Half a Million — Social Workers Remembered.

Chicago, Aug. 11.—Julius Rosenwald, a leading merchant of Chicago, made birthday gifts to-day amounting to $687,500. He was fifty years old this morning. Charity and education received the entire sum.

Rosenwald was not posing a mere hypothetical. By now he had amassed a fortune of $23 million (equivalent to $700 million today), and was determined to deploy his wealth responsibly and creatively to promote social welfare and civic reform. On August 12, the front page headline in the Chicago *Tribune* proclaimed his $687,000 fiftieth birthday gift to the public. The two largest grants were to the University of Chicago and the city's Associated Jewish Charities (which each received $250,000) but none was more historic or significant than the one that fulfilled his impromptu commitment to Booker T. Washington. (Deutsch, pp. 4, 114)

Three months later, in a speech to the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences in Philadelphia, Rosenwald explained the philosophy that informed his beneficence. His first point was "that the accumulation of large fortunes in a few hands was wrong and could have serious social repercussions . . . Second, he urged people not to make anonymous gifts," stating that the name of the donor can motivate others to give. Finally, he argued against the establishing of perpetual foundations paying out only their 4.5 percent annual earnings, as the purposes for which they were endowed often lost their relevance in future years. (Ascoli, p. 123)

By September 12, all but $2,800 of the $25,000 gift to Tuskegee having been dispensed in accordance with Rosenwald's wishes, Washington suggested "an experiment in the direction of building six school-houses at various points, preferably near here." He estimated the cost of construction at $600 each, half of which he asked Rosenwald to contribute (plus $50 for a traveler "to get people stirred up"), "provided the people in the community or the public school authority would raise an equal amount." (Hoffschwelle, pp. 33-34)

Washington concluded: "One thing I am convinced of . . . is that it is the best thing to have the people themselves build houses in their own community," whether by giving money, "a half day or a day's work," or materials. "I feel there is nothing just now more needed in the education of the colored people than the matter of small schoolhouses and I am very anxious that the matter be thoroughly planned for and well worked out and no mistake be made." (Hoffschwelle, p. 34)

As a matter of economy, Rosenwald proposed that Sears furnish the construction materials for the schools, perhaps already assembled, similar to the company's prefabricated homes. Washington delayed his reply for several months, but finally recommended "that all of the rough and heavy lumber, bricks, etc., be gotten in the vicinity of the schoolhouses," which would minimize transportation costs and benefit local businesses and sawmills. Besides, Tuskegee architect Robert Taylor had already submitted a set of plans, while extension director Clinton Calloway was well into fundraising from at least three communities. (Ascoli, pp. 130-140)

By May 1913 the first three schools were complete. Washington sent Rosenwald an exact accounting of the funds expended as well as letters of appreciation from leading white citizens, adding, "You do not know what joy and encouragement the building of these schoolhouses has brought to the people of both races in the communities where they are being erected." Rosenwald was most impressed by the accompanying photographs, which he found "tremendously interesting" and which he thought could inspire other communities and attract more donors. (Ascoli, p. 139; Hoffschwelle, p. 39)

The following year, June 10, 1914, bringing photographs of all six new schools, Washington traveled to Chicago, where he and Rosenwald reached an agreement whereby the latter pledged up to $30,000 to help construct one hundred more. With black newspapers trumpeting headlines like the New York *Age*'s "Rosenwald of Chicago Will Duplicate All Money Raised for Country Schools," both men were inundated by a flood of letters from southern teachers, ministers, shopkeepers, and local activists pleading for funds. Many falsely assumed that Rosenwald had promised a dollar-for-dollar match to any community, prompting Washington to clarify the matter. (Hoffschwelle, pp. 42-44)

His one-page "Plan for the Erection of Rural Schoolhouses" limited Rosenwald's commitment to a total of $30,000, up to $350 per school. The funds were "to be used in a way to encourage public officials and the people in the community in erecting schoolhouses . . . by supplementing what the public school officials or the people themselves may do." The contribution per school would shrink to between twenty-five and thirty-three percent of its cost, and would be made available only after the other monies had been collected. Community members had to obtain approval for projects from school authorities and participation from (white) rural state agents. Schools must be larger than the original one-room structures, and must operate eight months a year. (Ascoli, p. 141)

In February 1915, during his annual visit to Tuskegee for a Board of Trustees meeting, Rosenwald had his first opportunity to see the schools to which Clinton Calloway and other Institute officials were now appending his name. Traveling with such notables as social worker Jane Addams, Jewish fundraiser Jacob Billikopf, Chicago YMCA business manager William Parker, and professors Grace and Edith Abbott of the

city's School of Civics and Philanthropy, he and his thirty-six other guests were met at the Montgomery train station by James Sibley, the state agent for black schools, and loaded into a fleet of eighteen automobiles for a sixty-mile trip through the Alabama countryside. (Ascoli, pp. 143-144)

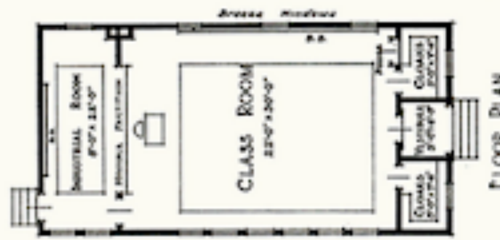
At each of the four stops, wrote one observer, "not only the children, but all the colored community in the vicinity and, and many whites were there to greet the party . . . At each of these stations definite reports were made of receipts and expenditures, length of school term, attendance, and the number of whitewashed and painted houses in the vicinity." The last point was particularly gratifying, as it indicated that the new buildings were motivating residents to make further improvements in the community. (Ascoli, p. 144)

At a meeting several days later which featured a slide presentation by Washington's son Booker Jr. contrasting the old and new schools, the most inspiring moment belonged to Mrs. Mary Johnson, an elderly black woman from nearby Notasulga. For nine years she and her friends and neighbors labored to raise money from bake sales and even a minstrel show so "those poor little children wouldn't have to freeze in that old schoolhouse." She refused to be discouraged when the treasurer of her organization ran off with the proceeds. She went back to work, and eventually "accumulated enough to buy the lumber and pay for the construction. Every day she visited the site, and with her own hands passed boards or shingles to the carpenters." With Rosenwald's help, the school was finished. (Ascoli, pp. 146-147)

One month after Rosenwald's return to Chicago, Washington sent him a letter proposing that the program be expanded from its three original counties (Lee, Lowndes, Montgomery) to eight and that an aide be hired to oversee the enlarged area, communicate with local officials and teachers, and help with fundraising. With Rosenwald's approval, the position was awarded to Booker Jr. at a salary of $125 a month. He proved to be conscientious and effective, traveling extensively, drumming up support from blacks and whites, recruiting leaders, and filing detailed reports with William C. Graves, to whom Rosenwald had delegated responsibility for his philanthropic projects. (Ascoli, pp. 147-148).
In the summer of 1915 the Tuskegee Extension Department published a manual on school building: *The Negro School and its Relationship to the Community*. Its authors -- Sibley, Calloway, architect Taylor, and faculty agronomist George Washington Carver -- provided architectural plans and other guidance for the

creation of the Rosenwald one-teacher school (as well as for a larger central school and a county vocational training school) that would be the focus of the program in its early years. (Hoffschwelle, pp. 53-57)

The design would be replicated in hundreds of counties across the south: a rectangular structure resting on short piers covered by a hipped roof and featuring a dark facade pierced by massed windows framed in white. The building should be situated with an east-west orientation to maximize lighting. It should include a classroom, a workroom, a library, a kitchen, and a cloakroom. All children should have individual desks even if they were handmade locally. Advice on how money could be raised included calling mass meetings, organizing festivals and food sales, and even appealing to white landowners. (Deutsch, pp. 131-132; Hoffschwelle, p. 64)



ONE-TEACHER
COMMUNITY SCHOOL PLAN No I-A
To face North or South Only

By this time, Washington had made the decision to expand the program. In July the first Rosenwald school outside Alabama was constructed in North Carolina despite the lack of formal consent from the sponsor. As November approached, the number of schools completed or in process numbered seventy-eight in three states. Washington wrote to Rosenwald inviting him to Tuskegee: "I wish you could hear the expressions of approval that now come from white people . . . who a few years ago would not think of anything bearing upon Negro education. I wish you could hear the expressions of gratitude uttered over and over again by the most humble class of colored people." (Ascoli, pp. 151-152)

But as Rosenwald journeyed south first to Nashville for the inauguration of Fisk University's new president, Fayette McKenzie, and then to Montgomery for quick visits to four new schools, Washington lay dying in a New York hospital, a victim of exhaustion, hypertension, arteriosclerosis, and kidney failure. Rosenwald headed for New York, but Washington's wife Margaret wrote that it would not be possible for him to see her husband, as he was too ill and wanted to return home. After a twenty-four-

hour train ride, the couple arrived in Tuskegee on the evening of November 13. The next morning Booker T. Washington died at the age of fifty-nine. (Deutsch, pp. 134-135)

The relationship between Julius Rosenwald and Booker T. Washington was symbiotic in nature. Both men were self-made entrepreneurs, although the latter faced far more formidable obstacles. Each continually sought the other's advice; Rosenwald might ask for recommendations on books about blacks, while Washington wanted to know if his fundraising budget was adequate. Rosenwald's material support for Tuskegee was invaluable, whether in the form of hats, shoes, ovens, and accounting services provided by Sears or through direct monetary gifts like $10,000 for a heating system or $5000 for faculty and staff bonuses. Rosenwald regularly introduced Washington to a host of wealthy potential donors, and solicited many of them himself. (Ascoli, pp. 153-154)

Both men were personally committed to education, and believed not only in its power to develop the best in people but also that it was fundamental to a well-functioning democracy and the natural right of each and every citizen. Both men were pragmatists, eager not just to conceptualize and analyze but to act. They had sprung from vastly different backgrounds, but had come to share the conviction that purpose in life involves service to others and that service is best accomplished by giving people the tools to help themselves. (Deutsch, pp. 164, 170)

In the eulogy he delivered at Washington's memorial service at Tuskegee on December 12, 1915, Rosenwald said, "I have tried . . . to think of someone whose life means more to the welfare of this country than his life. I am unable to think of one." (Ascoli, p. 156)

Calloway

Washington's death deepened Rosenwald's commitment to the rural school-building program. Confident in the leadership of the experienced Clinton Calloway, he subscribed to a second one hundred schoolhouses in February 1916 and another hundred by November as more communities organized to apply for aid. Calloway's expanded duties included reviewing those applications, monitoring the efforts of his state field agents and of white Negro school agents, assuring that building plans and specifications met Rosenwald standards, and inspecting completed schools. (Hoffschwelle, pp. 65-66)

The following year, 1917, a committee composed of Robert Russa Moton, Tuskegee's new president, Emmett J. Scott, Washington's former secretary, and James Sibley, Alabama's agent for black schools, drafted an ambitious new "Plan for the Erection of Rural Schoolhouses." Grants were increased to $400 for one-teacher schools and $500 for two-teacher schools. An extra $30 a year was offered to jurisdictions extending their terms to six or seven months. In November Rosenwald approved the plan, and authorized funding for three hundred more schools and for Calloway to hire building agents for six more states, bringing the total eligible for assistance to nine. (Hoffschwelle, pp. 67-71)

The pace of the school-building program slowed dramatically in 1918 due to a wartime shortage of supplies and labor. Its failure to revive the next year fueled concerns about Tuskegee's administration practices which had recently come to the attention of Rosenwald and his assistant William Graves. State agents had reported that numerous schools were poorly constructed, as evidenced by inadequate windows and misplaced doors and walls, and that rigorous inspections were not being performed. A

1919 audit revealed a failure to keep proper account books, the loss of data, and the misapplication of funds. (Ascoli, pp. 231-232; Hoffschwelle, p. 74)

Dresslar

Rosenwald hired Dr. Fletcher B. Dresslar, professor of hygiene and schoolhouse planning at the George Peabody College for Teachers in Nashville, to assess the Rosenwald schools completed under Tuskegee and state supervision. The report, released on January 31, 1920, was scathing. (Ascoli, pp. 233, 235)

The Tuskegee plans did not meet Dresslar's standards for lighting, ventilation, and sanitation. County officials and contractors altered plans at will, and bought cheap materials to stretch their dollars further. Many one-teacher buildings were functioning with two teachers by the conversion of the industrial room to a classroom. In conclusion, "Dresslar recommended that the Rosenwald program require more on-site supervision, multiple inspection reports, and complete adherence to its approved designs as conditions of financial assistance." (Hoffschwelle, pp. 76-79)

In February 1920, over the objections of Margaret Washington and Robert Moton, Rosenwald announced that he would be transferring the management of the school building program to the Julius Rosenwald Fund, a foundation he had established in 1917 with a gift of 20,000 shares of Sears stock (worth $1 million) for the purpose of promoting "the well-being of mankind." If those associated with Tuskegee viewed the act through a racial lens, that is, as a consequence of faulty black stewardship, for Rosenwald it was simply a business decision made to improve the quality of his philanthropy's product. (Deutsch, p. 142; Ascoli, p. 217)

As part of the program's reorganization, its offices were moved to Nashville, and a new white chief administrator was hired, Samuel L. Smith. Smith had attended a one-room schoolhouse himself, had studied under Dresslar, had been the Tennessee state agent for Negro schools since 1914, and was considered an expert on school construction. (Ascoli, p. 235)

The choice of Smith was an inspired one. In the words of Edwin Embree, the president of the Rosenwald Fund from 1928 to the mid-1930's, he was "disarming, sincerely friendly, instinctively tactful . . . He had a gift for establishing friendly relations with people at all levels . . . and of transferring his enthusiasm to community leaders . . . Negroes came to look on him as a personal symbol of Julius Rosenwald and to love and trust the northern philanthropist they had not seen because of the kindly Southerner they knew." (Ascoli, pp. 237-238)

In 1921, with Smith's guidance, the Rosenwald Fund published its *Community School Plans*, which applied Dresslar's professional expertise to rural school architecture. Among the elements incorporated into the new designs were taller windows stretching to the eaves and facing east or west by specified building orientation; breeze windows under the eaves to draw air into the buildings; unadorned facades to save costs and give the appearance of modernity; rectangular floor plans that could be expanded

easily by adding rooms to the rear or sides; multi-tone painted exteriors and interiors; and four-seat privies with ventilation grills and privacy fences. (Hoffschwelle, pp. 94-115)
The availability of the *Community School Plans* free of charge to southern school boards, their practical designs, and their cost-efficiency made them desirable models for white school construction, ironically blurring "the racial boundaries that Jim Crow had inscribed on the southern landscape." (Hoffschwelle, p. 112)

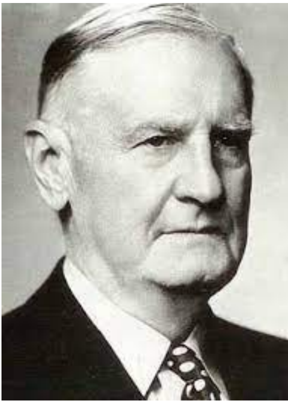
During the five Tuskegee years, six-hundred-forty-nine Rosenwald Schools had been built. From 1920 to 1927, after relocation to Nashville, the program produced an average of four-hundred-sixty-seven schools per year. Grant amounts rose to $500 and $800 for one- and two-teacher schools, and additional support was made available for teachers' homes, vocational buildings, classroom additions, and book purchases by school libraries and colleges. By 1927, rural school building had consumed eighty-five percent (or $3.4 million) of the Rosenwald Fund's total expenditures of $4 million. (Hoffschwelle, pp. 116-125, 285)

The decade had posed significant challenges for Julius Rosenwald's personal and professional life. A nationwide depression in 1921 caused Sears stock to drop eighty percent, and left the company with a $16 million operating loss and unable to pay its guaranteed dividends. At the behest of his long-time associate, Albert Loeb, Rosenwald agreed to donate $5 million to the company in the form of a stock gift and loan it another $4 million as part of an arrangement to purchase the land underneath its principal Chicago plant. His single-handed rescue was hailed by one business leader as "one of the sublime sacrifices and splendid examples of altruism and regard for those who cannot afford to take a loss." (Ascoli, pp. 222-224)

In August 1926 Rosenwald pledged $3 million (later raised to $5 million) toward the establishment of an industrial museum in the former Palace of Fine Arts in Jackson Park on Chicago's South Side. Sadly, several issues -- cost overruns, the lengthy search for a director, the procrastination of the architect, protracted litigation over the use of the building, and controversy as to attaching Rosenwald's name to the museum (which he objected to) -- would frustrate Rosenwald for years, and delay the completion of the project until after his death in 1932. (Ascoli, pp. 327-334)

Also in 1926 Rosenwald made a $1 million pledge (later raised to $2 million) to a program conceived by Russian-born American agronomist, Joseph Rosen, and endorsed by financier Felix Warburg whereby Russian Jews -- newly emancipated by the Soviet government -- would be relocated from towns and villages to rural colonies in Ukraine and the Crimea and trained in agricultural production. Rosenwald's payments ultimately went for naught as Jewish charitable organizations failed to raise the requisite matching funds, Rosen spent money carelessly, and the Russian government defaulted on its promises to settlers and on the bonds it issued to American donors. (Ascoli, pp. 274, 338-339)

Rosenwald's philanthropic interests and some minor health problems prompted him to announce his retirement from Sears in October 1924. With his two vice-presidents close to him in age and his son Lessing young, inexperienced, and too symbolic of nepotism, he identified two successors outside the



company. He named Charles Kittle of the Illinois Central Railroad company president and General Robert E. Wood vice-president for factories and retail stores. Wood had performed with distinction in the U.S. Quartermaster Office and at Montgomery Ward; when Kittle died unexpectedly in 1928, he became president. (Ascoli, pp. 261, 357)

The following year, when the collapse of both the stock market and Sears stock pushed many employees who had purchased on margin to the verge of insolvency, acting upon the advice of Lessing, Rosenwald bought thousands of shares to shore up the price, and guaranteed a $7 million loan so the borrowers could pay off their brokers and banks. While his own fortune shrunk by $100 million, wrote Edwin Embree, "He saved hundreds of persons from immediate bankruptcy." (Ascoli, pp. 359-360)

Rosenwald's selection of Embree in 1928 as president of the Fund signaled a new direction. Embree, formerly vice president of the Rockefeller Foundation, was determined to transform the Fund into an agent for social change, to advance equality of opportunity for black southerners by addressing economic, educational, and medical deficiencies. (Hoffschwelle, pp. 126-128)

After solidifying the rural school building by authorizing new grants for permanent brick or concrete construction, for bus service, for vocational equipment and teachers, and for "backward" counties (those with no Rosenwald schools), Embree made it clear in 1928 that the focus of the program would shift to large schools in urban settings. A typical one was the Dunbar High School in Fort Myers, Florida, a two-story structure for eighteen teachers in Spanish Mission white stucco, which offered elementary and secondary grades and was the only black high school in the county. (Hoffschwelle, pp. 136-137)

In 1930 the Fund trustees adopted a new name for their mission, the southern school program, and thus redefined a Rosenwald school as any African American school in any southern community. A revised *Community School Plans* was released with updated designs and building standards. Libraries, community rooms, auditoriums, and vocational space incorporated into the main structure were prescribed. More elaborate facades featured Georgian-Colonial styling, a projecting pediment supported by columns at the entrance, and a centrally placed cupola rising above the roof line. (Hoffschwelle, pp. 138-140, 148-151)

In truth Embree had become disillusioned with the school building program. He "believed that, in the United States in the 1930's, white people bore the responsibility for solving the problems created by racist white domination." In a memorandum to his Fund colleagues, he wrote: "Our own rural school program has been well conceived and effectively carried out, but we can easily drift into the position of simply helping Southern communities do what from now on they should be ready to do for themselves." (Hoffschwelle, p. 155)

Embree

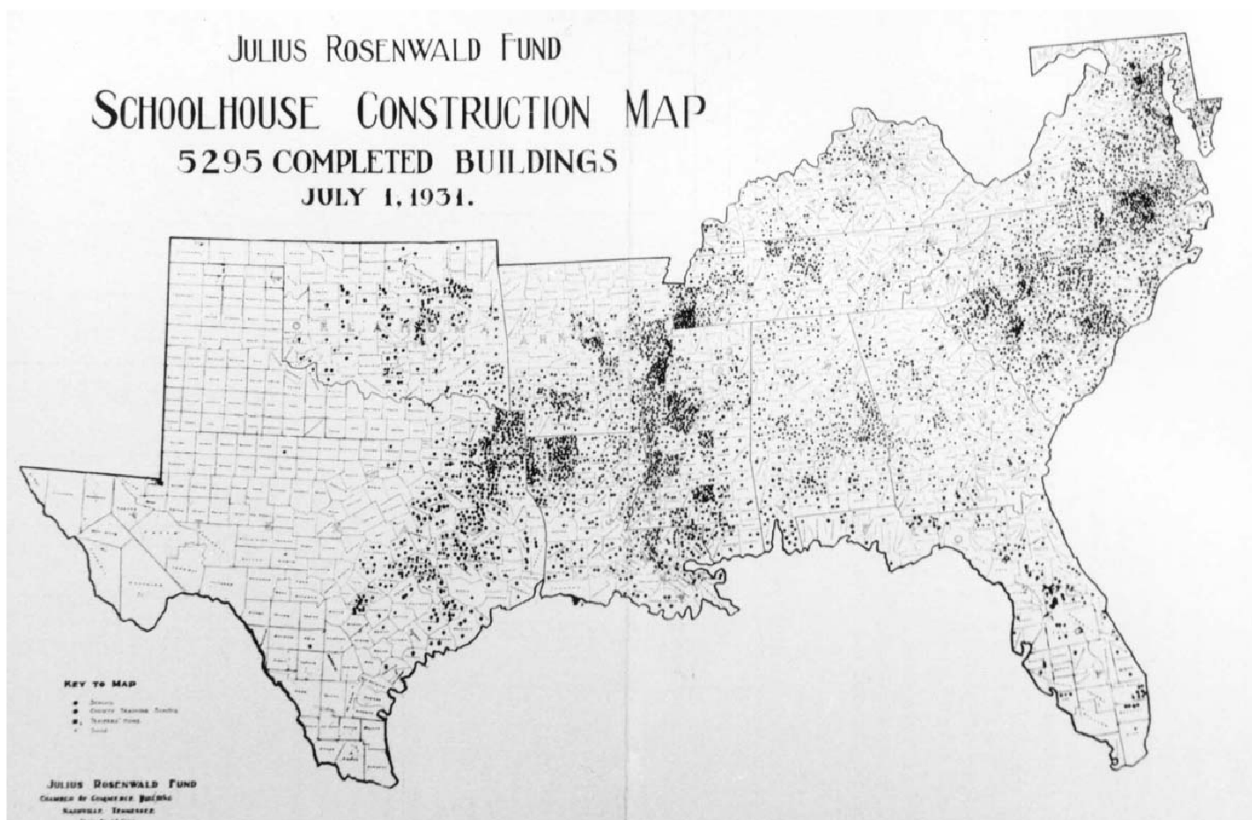
At the same time Embree was expressing these sentiments, other factors were undermining the program's viability. The stock market crash decimated the Rosenwald Fund's assets, all of which were invested in Sears stock. As "the economic crisis widened, state and local governments abandoned school construction projects." In a report commissioned by the Fund in May 1931, the instruction received by students in Rosenwald schools was

described as mediocre at best and primarily a function of the quality of the teachers rather than the newness of the buildings. Having exceeded his original goal of building five thousand schools, wrote Embree to Rosenwald, the Fund should now redirect its resources to African American higher education, to studies in public health and medical economics, and to race relations projects. (Ascoli, p. 372; Hoffschwelle, pp. 154-160)

The Fund terminated aid for one-teacher schools as of July 1930 and for two teacher-schools as of July 1931, which amounted to sixty percent of the program. Six months after Rosenwald's death on January 6, 1932 -- he had been suffering from heart failure for over a year -- Fund administrator Samuel Smith notified state superintendents of education that that year's appropriation would be their last and that no further assistance would be forthcoming. (Hoffschwelle, pp. 157-159)

Thus ended a great American philanthropist's involvement in reshaping the South. He and his Fund had contributed $4.3 million (worth $80 million today) toward the construction of 5,357 school buildings and had served over 600,000 students. (Deutsch, p. 156; Hoffschwelle, p. 158)

By the time of his death, Julius Rosenwald had given away $62 million (over one billion in today's dollars).



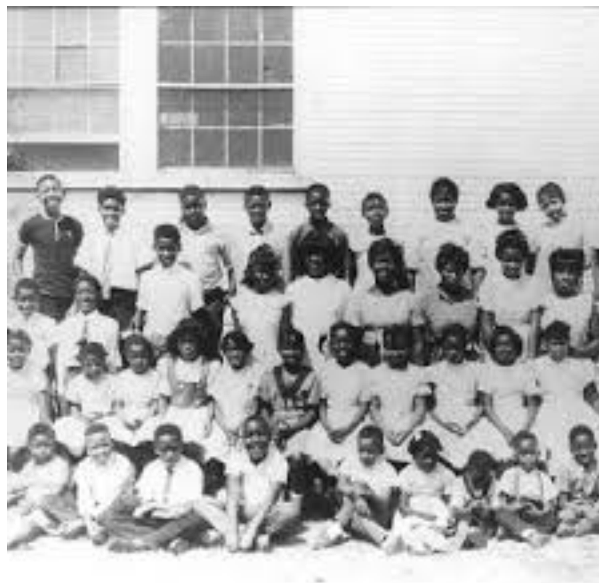
Among the many tributes that appeared in the press was this statement from Walter White, secretary of the NAACP: "No name is more revered and deeply loved among American Negroes than that of Julius Rosenwald, and I know of no one whose passing is more sincerely mourned." Wrote Graham Taylor: "When asked why his interest and gifts were so large in promoting the welfare and progress of the Negro

race, he said it was because he was interested in America and did not see how it could go forward if its Negro people were left behind." Added Tuskegee president Robert Moton: "It was a fortunate day for black people when Julius Rosenwald and Booker T. Washington met and trusted each other." (Ascoli, pp. 383-384; Deutsch, p. 153)

Compounding the pain was the dire condition of the Rosenwald Fund. At the time of Rosenwald's death, Sears stock was selling at $32 a share, down from $190 in 1929; six months later it had fallen to $10. Unable to pay the millions of dollars of pledges Rosenwald had made, which included $45,900 for forty schools, shops, and teacher homes, the Fund officers in desperation appealed to the Rockefeller-funded General Education Board. The Board agreed to appropriate $257,000 (seventy percent of which was repaid in 1934 as Sears stock recovered), which, supplemented by a $200,000 grant from the Carnegie Corporation for library commitments, enabled the Fund to honor its obligations and to continue active work for another sixteen years. (Ascoli, pp. 390-395)

The Fund earned well-deserved recognition for the fellowships it awarded to promising young black artists and intellectuals. Included among the recipients who would achieve notoriety were singer Marian Anderson, sculptor Augusta Savage, historian John Hope Franklin, photographer Gordon Parks, and writers Ralph Ellison, Zora Neale Houston, Langston Hughes, James Baldwin, and W. E. B. Du Bois. (Ascoli, p. 399; Deutsch, p. 151)

Despite the continued under funding of black public schools compared to white, black southerners, scholars, and activists have regarded the Rosenwald school building program "as a significant step in the development of African American and universal public education in the modern United States." It "instigated a public investment in black schools that otherwise would not have taken place or would have been much smaller." At its zenith, "Rosenwald schools housed one-third of the South's African American students and accounted for . . . just under one-third of the South's black public schools property value." They made it possible for more children to attend school for longer terms and to advance through higher grade levels. They were partly responsible for the shrinkage in the gap between whites' and blacks' "years of school completed" from three years in 1910 to half a year in 1940. (Hoffschwelle, pp. 271-273, Morey)



If the Rosenwald program sought to make black schools an integral part of the South's public education systems, it succeeded by requiring county ownership and by using grants and black self-help to secure public funding. As a result, tax revenues eventually accounted for 63.7 percent of the schools' cost, with the balance made up by Julius Rosenwald and the Rosenwald Fund (15.4 percent), by local blacks (16.7 percent), and by local whites (4.3 percent). (Hoffschwelle, p. 272)

According to Leo Favrot, Alabama state agent for black schools, "the Rosenwald program stimulated unity, pride, and autonomous development in black communities." By uniting people "regardless of denominational difference around a common cause, it fostered a community spirit among blacks." (Ascoli, p. 238)

From its origin, "Booker T. Washington had built self-help and community participation into the school building program." This entailed repeated sacrifices from black school patrons, whose voluntary contributions amounted to a double tax. Black property owners donated their land for schools, while other men cut timber, hauled it to the sites along with bricks, roofing materials, and equipment, and assembled and painted the buildings. In fields and towns, people came together for rallies, suppers, and campaign meetings, donations in hand, often at the cost of going deeply in debt. (Hoffschwelle, pp. 230-237)

Coordinating local fundraising and construction activities in each state was the Rosenwald building agent. In nine states -- Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, Tennessee, and Virginia -- the African American appointees became the first men of their race to hold professional positions in post-reconstruction southern state departments of education. The power of the state and the financial influence of the school building program enabled these officials to bolster their professionalism, embed black education in local school systems, and validate the leadership role that African Americans could play in public administration. (Hoffschwelle, pp. 169-170)

Rosenwald schools sent implicit messages about black opportunity in the Progressive South, one of which was that education was not only a personal and community value, but also a public right of citizenship. If reform efforts for blacks' education were predicated on their disenfranchisement, they were able to deploy the building program to leverage their social rights. Campaigns for Rosenwald schools allowed southern blacks to achieve a portion of their educational objectives despite their exclusion from formal politics. (Hoffschwelle, pp. 226, 248-249, 253)

Rosenwald schools signaled a new stage of community life in the South's cultural landscape. Their exemplary quality and appearance sharply contrasted with "the shabbiest and shoddiest types of cabins, churches, and halls" endemic in black education. Both participants and outsiders viewed them as symbols of community values, collective achievement, independent black identity, and of black hopes for the future. They embodied an institutional alternative to racism with a meaning so powerful that it was with great reluctance that local people surrendered them and their successor buildings to school desegregation plans. (Hoffschwelle, pp. 253-4, 259, 270)

In spite of their accomplishment, it must be acknowledged that, in their collaboration, Rosenwald and Washington were content to abide by the rules that defined the Jim Crow South and conform to its repressive norms and expectations. They were unwilling to challenge the embedded structure of white supremacy. They insisted on the cooperation and approval of white school officials, and required substantial monetary contributions from local blacks. In doing so, they sustained the corrupt system by

which taxes were allocated disproportionately to white schools and blacks had to resort to private funding. (Morey)

In the wake of the May 1954 Supreme Court ruling that separate education for black children was unconstitutional, as school districts moved to consolidate their facilities they generally ignored black schools in favor of formerly all-white buildings. The Rosenwald schools which had been a source of pride for black communities were no longer needed. Many simply vanished, either falling apart from neglect or the victims of demolition. Others stood empty for decades. But some have come back to life. (Deutsch, p. 157)

In April 2009 sixteen alumni of the Scrabble School in Sperryville, Virginia, and a host of neighbors, politicians, and representatives of the National Trust for Historic Preservation and the Lowe's Charitable and Educational Foundation gathered to dedicate the Rappahannock County African-American Heritage Center and the County Senior Center at Scrabble School. Spearheaded by alumnus E. Franklin Warner, who returned to the area after a career at the Office of Management and Budget in Washington, D.C., the Scrabble School Preservation Foundation worked for years to raise money and renovate the building. Another alumnus, Samuel Glasker, a college graduate and thirty-year veteran of the U.S. Army as an ordnance and automotive specialist, recalled how he and his twelve siblings would walk three miles to school and back every day at the insistence of their parents, who could neither read nor write. (Deutsch, pp. 158-159)

At her funeral in November 2010, Elizabeth Sims was eulogized as the "mother of the movement to preserve Shiloh School" in Notasulga, Alabama, which had been built in 1921 on the ashes of one of the six original Rosenwald schools. Having vowed to get an education so "she wouldn't have to pick cotton forever," she went on to become a contracts administrator at Auburn University. Among her mourners were a dozen graduate students from Auburn's school of architecture who had worked with her developing plans to turn Shiloh into a technology, community, and heritage center. One remarked on what the school's history meant to him: "Not often are communities united around a common theme as strongly as when they are asked to contribute not only finance but labor." (Deutsch, pp. 159-160)

In Round Rock, Texas, just north of Austin, the relocated and restored Hopewell school, once slated for demolition, now sits on a corner of the county education administration complex, a venue for meetings and ACT test-preparation classes. "The school existed during a period of segregation in America," writes a former student, "but somehow all the obvious things like violence, racial hatred, and disdain were not apparent. Students . . . received a quality education from dedicated and caring teachers and administrators who did their best in a separate and unequal environment." (Deutsch, p. 161)

In Castalia, North Carolina, a portrait of Julius Rosenwald hangs in the front hall of the school building that alumni purchased from the county for one dollar and are renovating with the help of a Lowe's grant,

the builder Angelo Franceschina, who operates the nonprofit Rural Initiative Project to raise money for such projects, and contributions from alumnae like Eunice Williams. Beginning at Castalia, she continued through graduate work at Columbia University Teachers' College to pursue a forty-year career as a first-grade teacher. "If it hadn't been for Rosenwald," her son John says, "she'd never have had that." (Deutsch, p. 162)

On June 25, 2022, local dignitaries, volunteers, and community leaders gathered at 1470 Village Highway in Rustburg, Virginia, for the opening of the remodeled Campbell County Training School Assembly Building. The 5,000 sq. ft. building contains an auditorium, a stage, dressing rooms, a kitchen, an office, a wallpaper exhibit, and a loft with a sound and light booth. It is open and available to all citizens for meetings, performances, benefits, and social events.

Three other buildings sit on the nine-acre site awaiting the funds -- approximately $3 million -- necessary for their renovation and conversion to a business incubator, a child development center, and a model classroom. Commonly referred to as "The Hill," they represent the largest complex of buildings still extant and usable of the five thousand erected by the Rosenwald Fund. The original elementary school was constructed in 1922, followed by a vocational school in 1925, a secondary school in 1927, and the assembly building in 1931. Three other buildings, including an economics cottage and a teachers' dormitory, no longer remain.

Millicent Nash, docent, grant writer, historian, and fundraiser, is a storehouse of information on the Rosenwald schools, much of which she shared with me during a two-hour visit several months ago. The Campbell County Training School Complex Committee, which she chairs, was formed in 2014, when the County School Board, which had been using the buildings for storage, ceded the property to the Board of Supervisors, who two years later transferred it to the newly-organized non-profit upon learning of its historical value from the NAACP.

Three hundred eighty-two Rosenwald schools were built in Virginia between 1917 and 1932, the first in Cumberland County. Campbell County had the the second highest number, sixteen, one less than Mecklenburg County. Photographs of each school including their names, locations, costs, and amounts contributed by Rosenwald, local residents, and the county government, hang on a wall in the former vocational building.

In 2018 the city of Lynchburg erected a marker on the site of Megginson School in the Pleasant Valley community, which was built on a two-acre lot donated by former slave Albert Megginson. His great-grandson, Lorenzo “Pee Wee” Megginson, did most of the masonry work inside the Rustburg Assembly building. Its own historic marker was unveiled on May 15, 2021.

The wallpaper narrative, which Millicent wrote, highlights some of the heroes of the Campbell County Training School. Reverend Thomas Tweedy, a pastor and county agricultural agent, was the school's first principal. He mortgaged his home to help raise the Rosenwald community match, as did Gabe Hunt, a former slave and confederate soldier who worked at Court House Square and became quite prosperous despite never learning to read or write. During the tenure of Colston R. Stewart, principal from 1929 to 1936, a four-year high school was established. Two of the five members of its first graduating class are pictured: Ellis Booth and Cora Bell Rucker.

In Millicent's words: "The school was a source of pride for the community. It was a center for education but also a home for growth, friendship, and love . . . Former students remember how boys would light the fire in the wood stove each morning for heat while others walked a half a mile to a nearby spring to get water that would be needed for the school day. Some remember the school as a place for picnics, games, and lectures, while others have spoken of the festivals that parents organized to raise funds for equipment such as an overhead projector. All remember the love of the dedicated teachers who set high standards and worked diligently to prepare the students for success.”

Edith Berryman, who attended Megginson School, recalls the county-wide May Day Celebrations that were held at the Training School Assembly Building. Students from every school would prepare exhibitions, and would "be on their best behavior so they could ride the school bus" to find out if theirs had won an award. (Koerting)

Delores Hicks remembers the bazaars that were held in the auditorium. "It was a special night, and each classroom had a special booth." They "created such a friendship and fellowship among the African-American community. I don't think we have that today, and I miss it." For her, the school "is the foundation of what I am today. I would love that it is passed on to the students of today and tomorrow." (Koerting, Jackson).

Millicent Nash agrees, which is why she is devoting her retirement years to bringing the School Complex back to life. She says preserving history is important for the youth in the county; it enables them not just to learn about their past but to be proud of it. (Koerting)

As I'm preparing to leave, Millicent asks me how I got interested in this subject.

There's only a handful of people who, when they call, make you smile and then make you listen. One of them is Bill Jamerson. He's almost ninety years old, and he's still working every day on behalf of individuals, families, and organizations -- like this one. I pick up the phone, and after some brief pleasantries, Bill says, "Marc, have you heard of the Rosenwald Schools?" to which I reply, "I've heard of them, but I really don't know much about them."

Bill proceeds to unload his five-minute version of the history of the Rosenwald program before delivering the *coup de gras*: there's one of these schools ten miles down the road in Rustburg, and would I like to help him and some other generous folks restore it. Well, you can't say "no" to Bill, so I pledge the amount he asks for and wish him luck on raising the rest of what he needs. "Wait a minute, Marc," he says. "Don't you want to see it?" Once again, he won't take no for an answer, for which I am now forever grateful. For without that fateful call, I would never have been introduced to this hidden historic treasure and the amazing story of how a peddler and a pedagogue formed the most unlikely of partnerships to provide citizenship's most basic right -- a decent education -- to two generations of black schoolchildren.

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