

# Creating the Julius Rosenwald & Rosenwald Schools National Historical Park



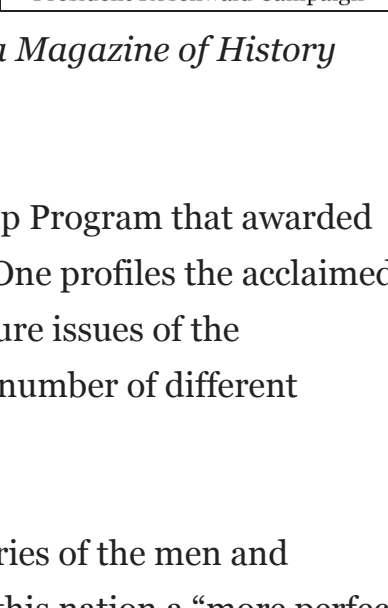
"All the other pleasures of life seem to wear out, but the pleasure of helping others in distress never does."  
JULIUS ROSENWALD



## President's Message

In observance of Black History Month this issue of the newsletter is devoted to stories of African Americans who worked to create better lives for themselves and their children, their efforts supported in ways large and small by the Julius Rosenwald Fund.

The Campaign is pleased and honored that the first article on African American educational activism in Virginia was written by professors Brian Daugherty and Alyce Miller, who kindly agreed to contribute a review of their scholarly publication in the Spring 2020 issue of *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*.



Dorothy Carter, President, Rosenwald Campaign

Three of the other articles address the Julius Rosenwald Fund Fellowship Program that awarded nearly 900 grants to highly talented individuals over a 20-year period. One profiles the acclaimed but little known chemist Percy Julian who received two fellowships. Future issues of the newsletter will contain profiles of other notable Rosenwald Fellows in a number of different fields.

We hope that you will be as inspired -- as we were -- by learning the stories of the men and women featured in these articles. They contributed so much to making this nation a "more perfect union."

We are also providing the link ([click here](#)) to the January 17 webinar sponsored by *Moment* magazine entitled "The Educational Legacy of Julius Rosenwald and Booker T. Washington." Campaign Board member Stephanie Deutsch and Advisory Council members Aviva Kemper and Andrew Feiler were on the panel, and I was honored to serve as moderator.

The year has begun very well for the Campaign, and we continue to gain momentum. The next issue will address our ongoing activities and accomplishments. So stay tuned!

## Educational Activism in Goochland County, VA by Brian Daugherty and Alyce Miller\*

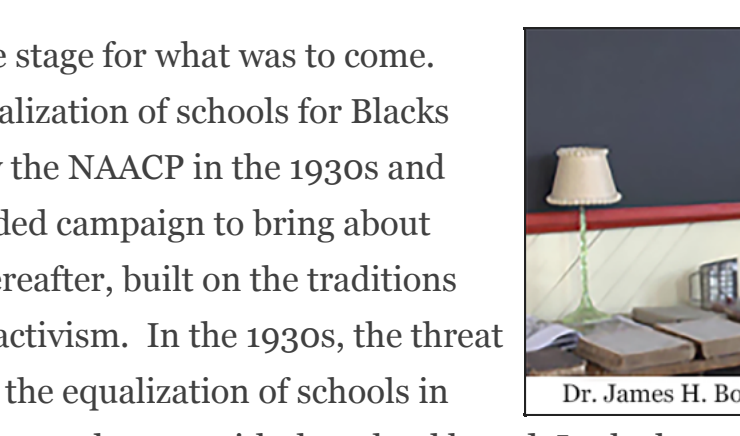
Focusing on one Virginia county, this article connects the Julius Rosenwald Fund school building program with a tradition of African American activism for better educational opportunities, which predated the Rosenwald Schools.

During the Jim Crow era, school districts throughout the American South operated two educational systems -- one for African American children and one for white ones. While professing to be "separate but equal" the two systems were, in fact, extremely unequal, a fact that was starkly reflected in the funding disparity between Black and white schools. In 1925, for example, Virginia spent an average of ten dollars a year on each African American public school student while providing forty dollars for each white one.

African American communities fought for equal educational opportunities for their children because they realized the importance of access to education, something their enslaved forebears had so long been denied. African American southerners created school support organizations, raised funds, invested labor and energy, and sought the largest possible share of resources from local and state officials for their communities. Their most urgent needs included adequate facilities, longer school terms, high-quality teachers, transportation, and education that was classical and liberal arts rather than merely industrial. This educational activism was a means of resistance to the oppression then rampant in southern governments and throughout society.

Historians refer to this burden borne by Black communities, which both paid taxes and raised private funds for schools as a "double tax."

In the early 1900s, much of this African American educational activism was funneled through school leagues or patron leagues. These were local organizations that were instrumental in pushing school boards to construct new buildings, improve facilities and equipment, lengthen school terms, and secure buses.



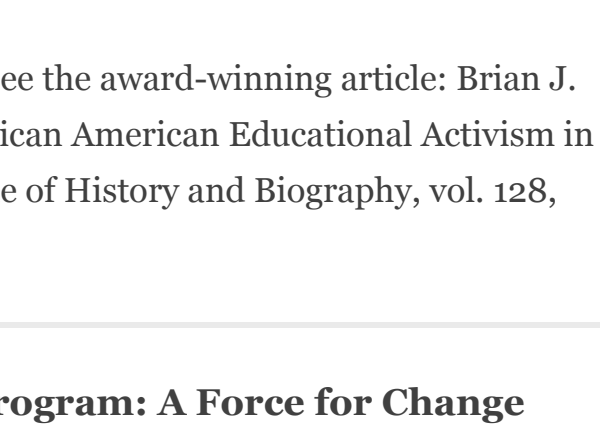
Patrons of Centreville School in Goochland County, Virginia State University Special Collections and Archives

In Goochland County, Virginia, near Richmond, the school patrons and leagues were particularly active and successful during the twenty years between 1912 and 1932, a period when ten schools for African American children were constructed with assistance from the Rosenwald Fund. The county's African American residents contributed 21% of the total costs of these buildings. Private contributions from white residents totaled 1%. The Rosenwald Fund gave 17%. By far the largest share of the funding was the 61% given by the local and state government. And the benefits of the modern Rosenwald School facilities and related funding requirements, including significantly improved building capacity and quality, increased length of school terms, and higher salaries for teachers were tangible: between 1910 and 1930 the number of African Americans over the age of ten who were illiterate in Goochland County decreased by over forty percent. And these gains came about despite the poverty of the county and the Great Depression.

These were welcome advancements for the African American community in Goochland, even if there was still significant work to be done. Former student Dr. James H. Bowles, Sr., a graduate of Fauquier Training School, medical doctor and prominent activist, explained some of the motivations behind this educational activism, stating:

My family believed in education. Like I said, my father couldn't read or write and he emphasized education, my mother emphasized education and I think it was true of most of the black community. They emphasized, "Go to school, I hope you don't have to work like me."

This activism also set the stage for what was to come. Legal efforts for the equalization of schools for Blacks and whites sponsored by the NAACP in the 1930s and 40s, as well as the extended campaign to bring about school desegregation thereafter, built on the traditions and gains of this earlier activism. In the 1930s, the threat of legal action to compel the equalization of schools in Goochland County led to a settlement with the school board. In the late 1940s, the Goochland NAACP, openly challenged segregation and voter disenfranchisement.



Dr. James H. Bowles, Sr. (Photo by Eric Silvers)

Over the decades, continuing activism by African Americans brought about progress and a better life for their children and grandchildren leading to even greater progress toward the goal of "a more perfect union."

\* For more information on this important history, please see the award-winning article: Brian J. Daugherty and Alyce Miller, "A New Era in Building: African American Educational Activism in Goochland County, Virginia, 1911-1932," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, vol. 128, issue 1, 44-85 (Spring 2020).

## The Julius Rosenwald Fund Fellowship Program: A Force for Change

It is almost a hundred years since scholar and activist Carter Woodson, a Harvard-educated historian, launched Negro History Week, an annual recognition of the fact that African Americans have a long, important and not well-known history in this country. Choosing mid-February because it holds the birthdates of both Abraham Lincoln and Frederick Douglass, Woodson built on traditions that already existed in many places of holding celebrations of the two men. In 1976, in honor of the American Bicentennial, Black History Month was officially recognized as an opportunity, in the words of then President Gerald Ford, "to honor the too-often neglected accomplishments of Black Americans in every area of endeavor throughout our history." It is celebrated in Canada and Great Britain as well as the United States.

The accomplishments of African Americans was a subject of great interest to the Julius Rosenwald Fund and an area in which the Fund had a particularly profound and lasting impact. In 1928, at his first meeting as the new president of the Fund, Edwin Embree proposed a program of fellowships to be offered to highly talented individuals to provide them with opportunities for further study or independent work. The program was enthusiastically adopted by the Fund's board, and between 1928 and 1948 the Fund made awards to nearly 900 individuals, two thirds of whom were African Americans.

Awards were made in over 40 different fields of endeavor. Many were in the arts -- creative writing, visual arts, music and dance. The social sciences and journalism were well represented. Grants in rural education, agriculture, home economics and library science spoke to the Fund's beginnings with the rural school building program; grants in medical fields and public health supported its long commitment to improving African American health and medical services. And a large number of grants went to scholars studying history, economics, international relations, science, mathematics, religion and law.

Significant numbers of Rosenwald fellows went on to extraordinary accomplishments from Marian Anderson becoming a world-renowned singer, to Ralph Bunche receiving the 1950 Nobel Peace Prize, to Charles Drew's discovery of the method for long-term storage of blood plasma and to Jacob Lawrence's enduring paintings of the Great Migration.

The most striking example of the fellows' impact was the insight and scholarly research contributed by fellows under the leadership of Thurgood Marshall to the Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka lawsuit. Pauli Murray, valedictorian of her class at Howard University Law School in 1944, used her fellowship to continue her legal studies at Berkeley where the restrictive housing covenants she encountered led to her book on segregation that Thurgood Marshall later called the "Bible of Brown v. Board." Attorney Robert Lee Carter, psychologists Mamie Phipps Clark and her husband Kenneth B. Clark, political scientist John Aubrey Davis, economist Mabel Murphy Smythe, historians John Hope Franklin and C. Vann Woodward and scholar and college president Horace Mann Bond were all Rosenwald fellows whose work contributed to the second legal brief that resulted in the 1954 Supreme Court decision declaring "separate but equal" public education unconstitutional. Their work, advanced by Rosenwald fellowships, had an enduring, positive impact on our country.

The fellowship program gave African Americans the opportunity to excel in nearly every field of human endeavor. Their accomplishments demonstrated that they could perform at the same levels as White Americans and helped to dispel the widespread but unfounded belief in racial inferiority. It also opened doors for them to enter mainstream American life in the academic, government and corporate sectors, thereby enriching our national culture.

Telling the stories of Rosenwald fellows and so many other talented African Americans is what Black History Month is all about!

## Collaborating for Success: The Rosenwald Fund Fellowship Program and Percy L. Julian

Born in Montgomery, Alabama, in 1899, the grandson of a slave, Percy L. Julian was driven by a strong desire to excel. He attended DePauw University in Indiana, where he was not allowed to live in a college dormitory or eat at most restaurants. He eventually exchanged work in a fraternity house for a place to sleep in its attic and meals. He graduated as a member of Phi Beta Kappa and class valedictorian.

Although he deeply wanted to become a research chemist, he was not encouraged by his professors who suggested to him that there were few opportunities for African Americans in the field. So Julian was a chemistry instructor at Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee, until receiving an Austin Fellowship to Harvard University where he obtained his masters' degree. He became the head of the department of chemistry at Howard University in Washington, DC, and oversaw the building of the university's chemistry department building.

Upon receiving a Rockefeller Foundation fellowship, Percy Julian studied under the renowned scientist Ernest Späth at the University of Vienna, where he received his doctorate in 1931. He returned to DePauw University and started synthesizing the drug physostigmine, but wasn't able to obtain continued funding for his research. Disillusioned, he even briefly considered accepting "the early verdict of my professors that there was no future for a Negro scientist -- and start making an honest living driving a truck."

It was at this point that Rosenwald Fund fellowships in chemistry in both 1934 and 1935 enabled him to continue his research. That led the Glidden Company to hire him to lead its research on the soybean. There he supervised a team of white and African American scientists. Julian designed and supervised the construction of the world's first plant for the production of industrial-grade, isolated soy protein. The foam form "Aer-O-Foam" was used by the Navy in WWII to smother oil and gasoline fires aboard ships, saving the lives of thousands of sailors and airmen. In 1940, he started research on synthesizing estrogen, progesterone and testosterone from soybean oil by a technique he invented and patented. He also developed an improved process for synthesizing cortisone.

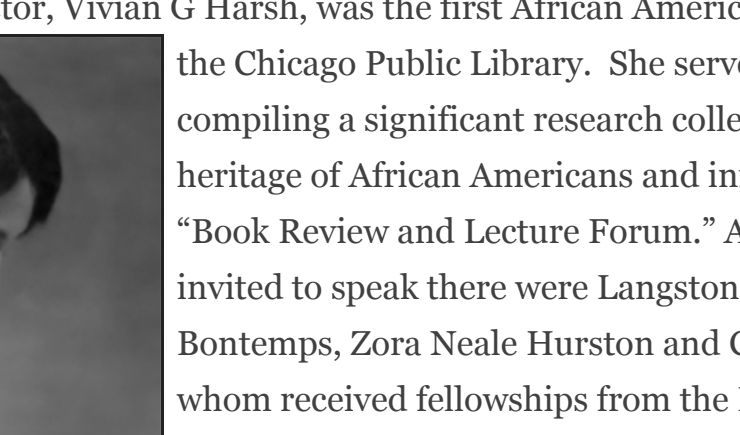
In 1953, Julian left Glidden to start his own company, Julian Laboratories, Inc. He sold the company in 1961 and became one of the first African American millionaires.

Julian received over 130 patents during his career. He was the second African American to be inducted into the National Academy of Sciences and was awarded the NAACP's Spingarn Medal in 1947.

Percy Julian, who briefly considered becoming a truck driver, made notable contributions in the field he had long desired to enter -- chemistry. He was among the nearly 600 highly talented African Americans who received Rosenwald Fund fellowships between 1928 and 1948. These fellowships enabled them to demonstrate their ability to perform top-notch work in a wide variety of professions. Their accomplishments contributed to refuting the then widespread belief of racial inferiority and to changing the attitudes of graduate and professional institutions toward the admission of African American, invested in people, and those investments are still paying dividends.

## Commemorating Dr. George C. Hall and Vivian Harsh During Black History Month

In January 1932, two weeks after the death of Julius Rosenwald, the George C. Hall branch of the Chicago Public library opened to the public, a dramatic and unusual structure with a significant history.



George C. Hall Library Branch photo from Chicago Public Library

George Cleveland Hall was a noted African American surgeon who, in 1915, joined Carter Woodson and three others to found the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History (now the Association for the Study of African American Life and History, ASALH). He met frequently with Carter Woodson and others at the Wabash Avenue YMCA in the Bronzeville section of Chicago, the first of the 24 YMCAs for African Americans that built as a result of the challenge grant offered by Julius Rosenwald in late 1910 -- that he would give \$25,000 to any city in America that raised \$75,000 for that purpose. Dr. Hall was extremely active in civic affairs -- he was chairman of the Wabash Avenue Y's management board, vice president of the Urban League and served on the board of trustees of Provident Hospital for African Americans. He became the first president of ASALH.

Hall was also a close friend of and medical advisor to Booker T. Washington, the founder of Tuskegee Institute (now Tuskegee University), who traveled frequently to Chicago. In May of 1911, when Washington was in Chicago to attend a YMCA anniversary dinner, Rosenwald, eager to meet the renowned Black leader, gave a luncheon in his honor and included Dr. Hall. The next day Hall accompanied Washington to tour the Sears, Roebuck merchandising plant with Rosenwald and have lunch in the executive dining room there. Rosenwald and Hall became well acquainted; in 1913 Hall was part of the group of friends and prominent Chicago figures that accompanied the Rosenwalds to Tuskegee.

Hall and Rosenwald maintained their friendship after Washington's death in 1915. They served together on the Chicago Commission on Race Relations, formed after riots in the summer of 1919. And when Hall asked Rosenwald to make a donation for a new branch of the public library in Bronzeville, Rosenwald agreed and donated land valued at \$30,000. Dr. Hall died in 1930. Two years later the library -- named in his honor -- opened.

The library's initial director, Vivian G Harsh, was the first African American to head a branch of the Chicago Public Library. She served with distinction, compiling a significant research collection on the cultural heritage of African Americans and initiating programs like the "Book Review and Lecture Forum." Among those who were invited to speak there were Langston Hughes, Arna Bontemps, Zora Neale Hurston and Claude McKay -- all of whom received fellowships from the Rosenwald Fund.

The George C. Hall branch of the Chicago Public Library and Vivian Harsh, Woodson, Harsh and all those who made such significant and lasting contributions to our country.

## And One Last Thing!

The latest addition to the Campaign's collection of memorabilia is a first edition copy of the novel *Drums at Dusk* by Arna Bontemps, a prolific poet and novelist who, in the view of some, has not received the critical acclaim or lasting prominence he merits. The book is signed by Bontemps and carries an inscription on the title page that says in part "For Horace, To celebrate 75 years of emancipation..." Presumably, Horace was folklorist and painter Horace Pippin, but we will never know for sure.



Like Pippin, Arna Bontemps was active in the Harlem Renaissance, the great flowering of Black arts and thought centered in New York during the 1920s and early 30s. His role model Langston Hughes and he became great friends, collaborating on a number of books. Bontemps received two Rosenwald Fund fellowships; the first in creative writing in 1938 gave him the needed support to write *Drums at Dusk*, which is based upon Toussaint L'Ouverture's successful slave rebellion in Saint-Domingue (later Haiti). The second, in 1942, enabled him to get a master's degree in library science from the University of Chicago and later become the head librarian at Fisk University in Nashville, TN. In that capacity Bontemps developed important collections and archives of African-American literature and culture, including the Langston Hughes Renaissance Collection.

The Campaign is particularly pleased to have a copy of this book among the many by Bontemps. The reason is that it was Bontemps's first Rosenwald Fund fellowship that made the book possible. It is a concrete example of the value of the Fellowship program.

And, of course, Langston Hughes too was a Rosenwald fellow, receiving two fellowships in creative writing. These were investments in people that definitely paid off!



Langston Hughes, Wikipedia Photo by Carl van Vliet

DONATE

We need your support to create the Julius Rosenwald & Rosenwald Schools National Historical Park.

For questions and suggestions, please write to [info@rosenwaldpark.org](mailto:info@rosenwaldpark.org).

Stephanie Deutsch, editor

February 2, 2023

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