

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

As we continue to deal with the Covid-19 pandemic and look forward to the establishment of a new normal, the Rosenwald Park Campaign will be maintaining contact with you, not only to update you on the progress of the Campaign but also to share personal stories from the life and legacy of Julius Rosenwald.



Dorothy Canter

UNLIKELY ALLIES

By Stephanie Deutsch

What was it about Julius Rosenwald, the son of German Jewish immigrants, and Booker T. Washington, born enslaved, that allowed these two men from such different backgrounds to work together so effectively? Why were they so compatible that within months of meeting each other they were visiting in each other's homes and listening deeply to what they each had to say?

The two men met in 1911 when Washington came to Chicago to give the keynote address at the Chicago YMCA's fifty-third anniversary dinner. Earlier that day, Rosenwald gave a luncheon in his honor and took him on a private tour of the enormous, state of the art Sears, Roebuck plant. Shortly after that visit, Washington invited Rosenwald to serve on the board of Tuskegee Institute. Rosenwald said that before deciding he would have to visit so, in the fall of 1911, he hired a private railroad car, filled it with invited family and friends, and traveled down to rural Alabama to visit the school.



The following year, in honor of his fiftieth birthday, Rosenwald made a number of significant donations and one of these – \$25,000 – went to Tuskegee.

It was a high point of the research that led to my book, *You Need a Schoolhouse*, when I interviewed Julius Rosenwald's youngest child, his son William. In the fall of 1996 Uncle Bill was in his early nineties. He was blind but animated and gracious, sharing memories of his family. He remembered his father bouncing him on his knee with a German song and walking him to school while the chauffeur followed behind in the car, ready to drive him to work. And Uncle Bill recalled that

in 1912, when he was nine years old, Booker T. Washington came to spend several days at the Rosenwald home.

And what, I asked Uncle Bill, was his impression of the man who was then world famous as the founder of Tuskegee Institute, a man who had been a dinner guest at the White House and had had tea with Queen Victoria? “I wondered why they spent such a long time talking in my father's office with the door shut.”

For me this was an “aha” moment. Julius Rosenwald and Booker T. Washington were similar kinds of men – pragmatic, action oriented, facts-driven. And each had something the other valued – the visionary Booker T. Washington was always in need of funds to support the work of Tuskegee educating African Americans to become teachers and craftsmen. Julius Rosenwald was deeply committed to sharing his vast wealth, to use it to benefit a “despised minority” with whom he, as a Jew, identified. The two men had a lot to talk about.



I like to think that in those long conversations Washington was describing for Rosenwald conditions in the South, sharing the hunger for education that was so widely felt in rural areas where there were very few schools for white children and almost none for black ones. I like to think these conversations were the background for the remarkable school building program created by Washington and Rosenwald – a program that, combining Rosenwald's financial generosity with donations of land, labor and money from impoverished African American communities longing for education, encouraged participation of local governments and, between 1913 and 1932, built 5,357 schoolhouses, teachers' homes and shop buildings in 15 states.

On November 13, 1915 Washington died somewhat unexpectedly. At the memorial service a month later at Tuskegee Rosenwald delivered an emotional eulogy. “I have tried,” he said, “to think of someone whose life means more to the welfare of this country than his life. I am unable to think of one.”

Rosenwald's admiration for and friendship with Booker T. Washington were at the very heart of what became an exceptional career in Philanthropy



Stephanie Deutsch lives in Washington, DC, where she is a writer, community volunteer and active grandmother. Her book, *You Need a Schoolhouse, Booker T. Washington, Julius Rosenwald and the Building of Schools for the Segregated South*, was published in 2011 by Northwestern University Press. She is married to David Deutsch, a great-grandson of Julius Rosenwald, and is a member of the Campaign Board.

DID YOU KNOW?

In 1918 Julius Rosenwald served as a goodwill ambassador to US troops in France. He gave motivational speeches and shared letters he solicited from Senators and Governors, sometimes speaking to five groups a day. Issued a uniform without insignias of rank, he introduced himself as “General Merchandise.”

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