

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



Remembering Julius Rosenwald

(August 12, 1862 – January 6, 1932)

The death of Julius Rosenwald on January 6, 1932, was front page news for the New York Times, the Chicago Daily Tribune, and numerous other newspapers across the country.

Following his death, President Herbert Hoover issued a statement saying Rosenwald's passing "deprives the country of an outstanding citizen." Walter White, then-Secretary of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), said, "No name is more revered and deeply loved by American Negroes than that of Julius Rosenwald, and I know of no one whose passing is more deeply mourned." The sociologist, writer, and Civil Rights activist W.E.B. DuBois wrote that Rosenwald "was a great man. But he was no mere philanthropist. He was, rather, the subtle stinging critic of our racial democracy."

Rosenwald amassed great wealth as leader of Sears, Roebuck & Company. However, it was his fundamental philosophy that there is a point where the continued acquisition of money becomes a vice. He dedicated his life and fortune to helping others, with a special focus on the education of African Americans.

Rosenwald believed in "giving while you live" and was opposed to attaching his name to buildings. He did not believe in perpetual endowments and designed his foundation to close down within 25 years of his death. Consequently, Rosenwald and his innovative and enduring contributions were largely forgotten over time.

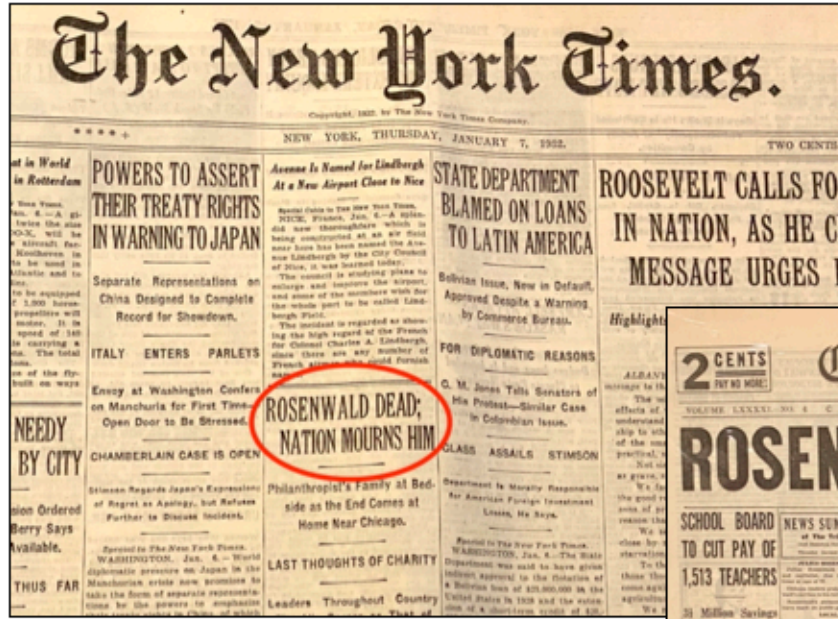
Key among those contributions were the 5,357 Rosenwald School facilities in 15 states that Rosenwald helped fund through "challenge grants" between 1912 and 1932. The schools educated nearly one-third of African Americans in the South, prior to the Brown v. Board of Education decision desegregating public schools. Maya Angelou, Congressman John Lewis, and Washington Post columnist Eugene Robinson attended Rosenwald Schools, which helped them and so many others "make a way out of no way."

In addition to Rosenwald Schools, Rosenwald created a fellowship program that assisted almost 900 people, most of them early in their careers and two-thirds of whom were Black, including diplomat Ralph Bunche, poet Langston Hughes, singer Marian Anderson, and historian and educator Dr. John Hope Franklin. He also employed challenge grants to help build YMCAs for Blacks in 24 cities. He contributed to the NAACP, the Association for the Study of African American Life and History, and a number of Historically Black Colleges and Universities, and helped fund Jane Addams' Hull House and numerous Jewish causes. He also made the entire founding donation for the Museum of Science and Industry in Chicago.

The Rosenwald Park Campaign is working to preserve Rosenwald's legacy through a Julius Rosenwald & Rosenwald Schools National Historical Park with a visitor center in Chicago and a small number of Rosenwald Schools. The Park will be the first of the more than 400 specially designated National Park units to commemorate the life and legacy of a Jewish American.

The early 1900s were a time of virulent racism and segregation. By commemorating the legacy of Julius Rosenwald, we also remind ourselves that Jews worked closely with Blacks at the forefront of the civil rights movement to effect real change. At this time of division, unrest, and increased awareness of past and ongoing racism, it is important to create a National Park honoring Rosenwald and the schools that provided the first quality education available to African Americans in the South.

Now, more than ever, the life of Julius Rosenwald demonstrates again how we, as a nation, can overcome the differences among us by helping those in need and, in the process, improve the lives of all Americans. Today, on the 89th anniversary of Rosenwald's death, it is especially important to his legacy that we rededicate ourselves to forming the "more perfect union."



Photos of vintage copies of the January 7, 1932, issues of the two newspapers purchased by the Campaign to add to its growing collection of memorabilia that will ultimately be donated to the Julius Rosenwald & Rosenwald Schools National Historical Park.