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Figure 1. Students Assembled for a Class Portrait at Dunbar High School, 1910(circa). Principal R.H.L. Dabney is in the upper left corner. State Library and Archives of Florida, Tallahassee, FL. [1]

## PART I: The Pivotal Role Played by Booker T. Washington and Julius Rosenwald in Educating Black Youth in 15 Southern States of America

by James Lloyd Milton



Gadsden County, FL is a farming community located in the panhandle of Florida and includes the towns of Chattahoochee, Greensboro, Gretna, Havana, Midway and Quincy. Some early history of formal schooling for Black students in Gadsden County began after the turn of the 20th century. In 1914 [2], Black students living in Quincy went to school in the Old Mitchell Hall located on West Clark Street. Five years later, Odd Fellow's Hall located on South Duval Street became the school. Seemingly, it morphed into Dunbar High School. A one-story, L-shaped brick structure named Dunbar High School was the county's first physical schoolhouse for Blacks. It was partially funded by the Rosenwald Foundation (as was Stevens High School

which was constructed in 1929) and covered grades 1-12. In this article, the writer will share how turn-of-the-century education for Black students in Gadsden County is linked to Booker T. Washington and Julius Rosenwald and the development of primary and secondary education opportunities for Black students across 15 Southern states.

### Black Education Following the Civil War.

During slavery, it was illegal to teach Blacks to read or write [3]. It was the assumption of some White people that educated Blacks would not willingly remain slaves. Only 5% of slaves were thought to be literate; thus, there was pent-up demand for the education for Black people following Emancipation. Following the Civil War (12 April, 1861 to

09 April, 1865) some large farmers in the rural South provided a small building for a Black church and school. Black students were in school for only five months in the year until well into the 20th century. Such scheduling provided as a priority the needs of farmers and their crop production. The Southern states and counties did very little to provide for the education of Black children before there was the mass migration of Black families from the South. By 1910, Black families had begun to leave the South in large numbers, leaving sharecropping and boll weevil infestations. They were seeking a better life for themselves, as well as relief from the oppressive segregation laws. Education was poorly funded by Southern states; especially for blacks. In 1912 Booker T. Washington observed that in Alabama, about fifty percent of all children were Black. However, the education of White children was allocated \$2M per year, as opposed to that of Black children which received \$0.35M per year.

“Inadequacy and poverty are the outstanding characteristics of every type and grade of education for Negroes” was the conclusion in the 1917 Jones Report, a major study on Black education conducted by the federal government over a multi-year period [3]. The study was aided by a grant from the Phelps-Stokes Fund, a charitable foundation. There were numerous foundations at the turn of the 20th century. In this article, the writer will only focus on the Julius Rosenwald Foundation and its work with Black communities. The Julius Rosenwald Foundation formed a partnership with Booker T. Washington, the then president of Tuskegee Institute, that resulted in the construction of schools dedicated for Black students throughout rural Southern states. The Julius Rosenwald Foundation was quite broad in scope; the writer will however, limit coverage to its activities that improved conditions in Black communities.

The significant impact that the Rosenwald Foundation made is captured in the following statements. In 1912, Julius Rosenwald, as an individual, provided funds that allowed Booker T. Washington to facilitate the construction of several schoolhouses in one Alabama county with none. By 1917, the Rosenwald Foundation had in progress the construction of 300 school buildings in a single year, in response to increased demand from across the South.

That same year, the U.S. entered WWI. Northern Black educational progress was better: Cheney State U, 25 Feb 1837, Lincoln Univ, 29 Apr 1854, Wilberforce U, 30 Aug 1856.

**Booker Taliaferro Washington** (hereafter referred to as Washington). Washington was born in April, 1856 (many slaves typically did not know their birthdate) in Franklin County, VA. He was a self-made man, with humble beginnings, who became an American educator, author, orator, reformer, and advisor to several U. S. presidents. He was a dominant leader and spokesman in the Black community from 1895 to 1915.

The slave owners of Washington’s family, James and Elizabeth Burroughs, had 14 children as well as 8 to 10 slaves. Four months after Emancipation, Washington and the family said goodbye to the Burroughs. They moved to Malden, West Virginia. There, the young Washington worked as a salt packer, coal miner, and as a houseboy. In Malden, the Malden Mine owner’s wife, Mrs. Viola Ruffner (ex-VT teacher), assisted Washington with his education, taught him how to do housework, and recommended that he go to Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute to continue his training [3]. Hampton had been founded in April, 1868 by Brigadier General Samuel Chapman Armstrong for freedmen. After seven years in Malden, Washington headed to the Institute, some 400 miles across Virginia, to its east coast.

Washington arrived at Hampton in 1872, tattered, with 50 cents in his pocket. He later worked as a janitor to help pay for his keep. He graduated from Hampton in June 1875, at age 19. By then, his mom had died; no family members attended his graduation. After graduation, Washington attended Wayland Seminary, Washington, D. C. for eight months and explored law as well as ministry options, but did not like them. After several years, he was invited to return to Hampton as an instructor. In 1881, a letter came to General Armstrong seeking “a well-qualified White man” to become principal of a school being started by the state of Alabama to train Negro teachers. Armstrong recommended Washington as a capable mulatto, better than any White man for the job, and the Alabama commissioners accepted, saying “Send him at

once.” Washington headed to rural Tuskegee, population 2000, 40 miles east of the capital, Montgomery, and founded Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute on 04 July 1881 in a loaned one-room shack near the grounds of the Butler Chapel AME Zion Church with 30 students. Washington soon bought a 100-acre abandoned plantation for \$500, with a \$200 down payment that was borrowed from James Marshall of Hampton until \$2000/year state appropriation starts. All early campus construction was performed by students. At his death in 1915, Tuskegee Institute had grown to some 3500 acres with 100 well-equipped buildings, some 1500 students, 200 faculty members teaching 38 trades/professions, and an endowment of around \$1.5M.

Washington had many jobs during his life-time: farmer, salt packer, coal miner, janitor, teacher, higher-education administrator, fundraiser. His life experiences formulated his understanding of the role of the Black race in America. Washington was thought to believe that racism and discrimination would always exist in America, and that Black people would never be treated equally. He thought that education was important for Black people so they could prosper and become independent. He authored a best seller, *Up from Slavery*, and was often compared with Frederick Douglass and W. E. B. DuBois.

Washington was born into slavery and had struggled to attend Hampton Institute in eastern VA. W. E. B. DuBois was born in Massachusetts, after the Civil War, and graduated from Fisk, Humboldt in Berlin, and Harvard-Ph.D. Their perspectives were polar opposites. W. E. B. DuBois did not accept Washington’s philosophical stance: his acceptance of inferior social status and his acceptance of Blacks limited access to the ballot box, and much more. Frederick Douglass was born into slavery in 1818 in Talbot County, MD. He escaped slavery and became a major leader of the abolitionist movement in Massachusetts and New York. He was noted for his oratory skills and incisive anti-slavery writings. Julius Rosenwald supported the activities of both Washington and W.E.B DuBois.

**Julius Rosenwald** (hereafter JR, as he was called by his friends) was born in August, 1862 in Springfield, IL. He spent his adult life in Chicago. He was born while Abraham

Lincoln was president, in a house only a block from the Lincoln home. When JR was born in 1862, Springfield was a growing, lively place. One New World issue needing a resolution was the decision to choose Reform Judaism (for the New World) or the Orthodox faith (where many European Jews had been reared). The Rosenwald family chose Reform Judaism [4]. There were only a dozen or so Jewish kids in Springfield. They all attended a religious school together in a room above a grocery store; JR attended the 4th Ward public school. He had a normal middle-class childhood. In 1879, after attending high school for two years, JR headed to New York City to serve a six-year apprenticeship with his Hammersloughs uncles, who were major clothing manufacturers and retailers. He never finished high school.

JR’s internship in New York proved invaluable to his success later in life. He was to become a key figure on three fronts: American mail-order business, philanthropy, and Black youth education. He achieved significant wealth near the turn of the 20th century. By age 30, he had achieved moderate success, running his own clothier business in Chicago that manufactured men’s ready-to-wear suits, which were sold in-person and by mail-order. On the other hand, Richard Sears (who, with Alvah Roebuck, had renamed their watch company the Sears, Roebuck and Company in 1893) had difficulty filling orders for his thriving mail-order business (following the 1893 recession) and was disorganized. Sears was an advertising genius, but he immediately needed cash and management assistance. He offered to sell 50% of Sears, Roebuck and Company to JR’s brother-in-law, Aaron Nusbaum, for \$75,000. Aaron (a financial guru) discussed the opportunity with JR. In August, 1895 Richard Sears, Aaron Nusbaum, and Julius Rosenwald signed the contract making them partners. JR had bought 25% of Sears, Roebuck and Company. (Earlier in 1895, Sears had bought out Alvah Roebuck, who was a watch repairman, and the right to use his name.)

JR’s \$37,500 fledgling mail-order house investment may be considered as one of the most brilliant decisions in American business history [4]. JR started work at Sears, Roebuck, and Company in December, 1896 as the men’s clothing department head, ultimately rising to vice president and president. JR brought to the company a

rational management philosophy and diversified product lines: dry goods, consumer durables, drugs, hardware, furniture, and nearly anything else a farm household could desire (including mail-order houses!). When JR first joined Sears, Roebuck, and Company, he worked well with Richard Sears, who thought the mail-order business would be short-lived, volatile, and risky. JR had exemplary management skills and was well organized, with lots of drive and energy. His internship in New York paid dividends. He locked in the company pledge “satisfaction guaranteed or your money back,” and demanded quality (Sears didn’t). Congress gave mail orders a big boost with the passage of Rural Free Delivery. Thicker, glossier Sears catalogs would soon be on farmhouse kitchen tables across the country. Sears, Roebuck, and Company sales surpassed its older competitor Montgomery Ward in 1900. Telegraph wires were used to assist in ordering custom items. Six years later, Sears and JR bought Nusbaum’s shares in the company for \$1.25M. JR bought his stock. During the dozen years from 1895 to 1907, sales at Sears, Roebuck and company rocketed from \$0.75M to \$50M annually. Profits, too, skyrocketed. JR transformed Sears, Roebuck and Company from near-bankruptcy into the country’s most important retailer. Think of Sears then, as the Amazon.com we know today. Its main customers were farmers. Sears, Roebuck and Company became a juggernaut. JR’s organizational skills helped systematize the company. Even Henry Ford reportedly copied some of the assembly-line techniques for his Ford plant. When JR assumed the role of Chairman in 1924, he devoted most of his time and efforts to philanthropy

**Meeting of Washington and JR in Chicago on 18 May 1911.** Washington and JR met in Chicago to discuss the potential for collaboration. The meeting was set up by White minister L. Wilber Messer. Washington needed to recruit a wealthy White donor for his board. JR had read Washington’s best-selling book *Up from Slavery* in 1910 and was touched by his life story. Washington asked JR to join his Tuskegee board. JR declined [4] until he visited the campus. On the trip to Tuskegee, JR was impressed with the Institute and its programs. JR accepted a position on the Tuskegee Institute board and made measurable contributions to the institution.

Not only did he give money, he gave of himself. He remained on the board for the rest of his life. The two men had synergy and similar goals. Their meeting in 1911 set the stage for very significant future activities. Each of them knew that the other could be of long-term and significant value to the cause. Washington had spent a lifetime negotiating Black-White interactions; JR had not had any experiences in interacting with Black people. Over time they became very good friends.

**JR’s New Approach to Philanthropy** The Julius Rosenwald Foundation had a limited lifetime, existing for one generation from 1917 to 1948. It donated ~\$70M to a large number of causes including; University of Chicago, the Chicago Museum of Science & Industry, a variety of Jewish organizations and to programs in the Black community. Later in life, JR took a particular interest in the plight of African Americans. His many visits to Tuskegee made this concern real to him. The collaboration with Washington and other Black leaders had opened his eyes to the reality of their experiences. Due to his religious upbringing, he believed in fairness to all people. He considered a large mass of uneducated citizens as a threat [4] to the future stability of the country. In 1919 many of the major U.S. cities experienced race riots. As a Progressive JR felt that, upon his implementation of a successful program, the government would take it over. Washington is said to have stated that it was JR’s educational programs that led to the Southern states to appropriate funds for the education of Black children.

JR’s life was not guided by the activities of many of the leaders of industry at that time. Most founders of major corporation engaged in such activities as collecting European art, spending summers in Newport at their cottages, or selling their names into posterity with perpetual foundations. JR chose, instead, to give away much of his fortune during his lifetime to benefit American society while he was alive, which included providing opportunities for African Americans, with whom he identified.

**JR’s 50th Birthday.** In 1912, JR was worth \$23M (~\$648.0M today). He thought it was time to take stock, and initiate bold philanthropic steps. He planned a \$687,500

(~\$19.36M today) philanthropic gift and encouraged other wealthy business leaders to support their causes. One of JR's gifts was \$25,000 to Tuskegee. Washington shrewdly set \$2800 aside [4] to build schools in rural Alabama, where little/none existed. This launched a schoolhouse building revolution and paradigm shift, a watershed act!

*Part II of this article will focus primarily on the collaboration of JR and Washington in the construction of schools for Black children in 15 Southern states (including Gadsden County) and will appear in the next issue of the newsletter.*

#### References

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The research for and writing of this article was performed by J. Lloyd Milton. Milton was born and raised in Gadsden County, graduated from Carter-Parramore High in 1960, Howard University (Washington, D C) with a B.S.M.E., and the University of Massachusetts (Amherst) with a Ph. D. in Mechanical Engineering. He retired after a 27-year industrial career, mostly R&D at Bell Laboratories in Ohio and NJ. He and his wife, Martha, currently reside in the Tampa Bay Area. The author wishes to express his thanks to Jacklyn Attaway, Stephanie Deutsch and members of the board for their contributions to the value of this article.

### From the Desk of the President

The past twelve months have proven to be very busy for the members of the board of the Carter-Parramore High Alumni Scholarship Fund (The Fund). During that time-frame, we have filed an application with the Florida Department of State for corporation status, filed an application with the Internal Revenue Service for non-profit status, filed an application with the United States Postal Service for non-profit mailing status, developed a scholarship application package for distribution to seniors of Gadsden County High School (GCHS), collected names of members of some graduating classes of Carter-Parramore High School, searched for the addresses of the graduates so identified, and published two newsletters to forward to Carter-Parramore High graduates, relatives and friends as well as some businesses and churches in Gadsden County. We have had the assistance of several C-P graduates in our activities to collect names/addresses. This is an on-going effort as there are several classes of C-P graduates, from 1965, 66, 67, 69, and 70 whose names have not been obtained. We are very appreciative to those persons who have provided assistance in this effort and encourage you to reach out to your classmates and relatives and assist us in obtaining additional names/addresses. You may forward names/addresses to us at [cpscholarfund@gmail.com](mailto:cpscholarfund@gmail.com). To facilitate electronic communication, it would be helpful to have your email address.

We are pleased with the response of the community to our request for contributions to The Fund. Scholarship applications were distributed to GCHS seniors in February of this year. Board members will review the applications and we anticipate that several award recipients will be announced at the High School's Awards Night Ceremony on June 1. We encourage your continued support as we endeavor to positively impact the future of members of the younger generation. To quote the late Hank Aaron, "A man's ability is limited only by a lack of opportunity."

Franklin D. Hamilton

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**IN THIS ISSUE:**

# **The Pivotal Role Played by Booker T. Washington and Julius Rosenwald in Educating Black Youth in 15 Southern States of America**

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