An atypical collaboration: A succinct overview of the partnership between
Booker T. Washington and Julius Rosenwald

A video prepared by Rosenwald-schoolsfilm (2010) underscores that after Julius Rosenwald read the text “Up from Slavery” by Booker T. Washington in 1910, he (Julius Rosenwald) was distressed by the story. Furthermore, Rosenwald-schoolsfilm (2010) posits that Julius Rosenwald felt, as an affluent individual, it was incumbent on him to assist African Americans as they were suffering prejudice as Jewish people had. Deutch (2011) asserts Rosenwald was determined to assist African Americans despite not knowing exactly how to do so. For clarity purposes, J. Rosenwald was born in 1862, the president of Sears, Roebuck and Co., and consequently one of the wealthiest men in America (NPR, 2012). Contrarily, B. T. Washington was born in 1856 into slavery and, subsequently, I opine he had achieved public acclaim as an educator and principal of the Tuskegee Institute in Alabama. Furthermore, I suspect he was the most prominent black man in America at the time. According to Deutch (2011), B. T. Washington engaged in resource mobilization activities with affluent individuals often to raise capital for his Tuskegee Institute. Concisely, the aims of Rosenwald and Washington coincided well which brought about a pertinent partnership, resulting in the building of numerous schools in deprived areas throughout the South.

Pilgrim (2012) affirms between circa 1875 and the mid-1960s the term Jim Crow represented a series of anti-black laws which legitimized racism in the United States. During this period, African Americans, predominantly in the South, were ostracized by their Caucasian counterparts. Nonetheless, it was truly amazing Washington and Rosenwald forged a partnership that was so triumphant during this period. During the Jim Crow operative era it is apparent there was considerable discrepancy in education between black and white farm children of the South. Hanchett (2014), maintains public education seldom continued beyond elementary grades for white children although never for black children. Additionally, Hanchett (2014) contrasts that while funding was often identified for a new schoolhouse for white children, black children were typically educated in deserted schoolhouses, deteriorating cabins or even buildings constructed for storing maize. In terms of needs, Hanchett (2014) elaborates in North Carolina “one in five white children grew to adulthood without learning to read while among blacks the illiteracy rate was one in two” (p. 4). Against this backdrop, at the Tuskegee Institute in Alabama, B. T. Washington implemented a vocational pedagogy, aiming to teach freemen (i.e. former slaves) how to work proficiently in agriculture and become self-sufficient which, in turn, he (B. T. Washington) believed would lead to improved economic conditions. Overall, the educational needs of the former slaves in the South were enormous, while available resources to mitigate these needs were extremely limited. Furthermore, the animosity towards African Americans presented nearly unsurmountable challenges which were resolved, in part, through the partnership between B. T. Washington and Rosenwald.

1 Rosenwald-schoolsfilm refers to Julius Rosenwald’s grandson and biographer Peter Ascoli.
Literature Consulted


