

The National Coalition ***on*** ***School Diversity***

December 5, 2024

President Joseph R. Biden, Jr.
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20005

President Biden:

The **National Coalition on School Diversity (NCSD)**¹ joins [the call](#) for you to establish the Julius Rosenwald & Rosenwald Schools National Monument under the authority granted to you by the Antiquities Act. It will be one more accomplishment to add to your Administration's important legacy.

As we wrap up a year of commemorating the 70th anniversary of the Supreme Court's landmark *Brown v. Board* decision, we believe that the establishment of the Rosenwald Schools National Monument will help build awareness about the harms of segregation and their enduring impact on our nation. It would also serve as a reminder that people of diverse backgrounds have worked together to make this nation more equitable throughout our history, persevering in the face of injustice and against great odds.

Philanthropist Julius Rosenwald partnered with Booker T. Washington during the Jim Crow era to build schools—in collaboration with nearly 5,000 Black communities across 15 Southern states—for children who previously had little or no access to public education due to racial discrimination. As Leslie T. Fenwick notes, "The Rosenwald schools proliferated as an alternative to state-financed public education"² for Black children, even as "tax dollars—collected by both Black and White citizens—were used to build schools for White children."³ A total of 5,357 Rosenwald school facilities were erected between 1912 and 1932, attended by over 600,000 Black children. The National Trust for Historic Preservation estimated that "[b]y 1928, one-third of the South's rural Black school children and teachers were served by Rosenwald Schools."⁴ The impact of these schools was profound.

The son of German-Jewish immigrants, Julius Rosenwald also contributed to numerous other social justice causes. Notably, between 1928 and 1948, the Julius Rosenwald Fund awarded nearly 900 fellowships to scholars, artists, and community leaders. Two-thirds of the Fund's recipients were Black. As we [recently affirmed](#) (see page 5), these fellowships provided critical support to several people who made significant contributions to the *Brown* litigation, including Pauli Murray (another unsung hero), Robert Lee Carter, and Kenneth and Mamie Phipps Clark. Additional hidden figures who contributed significantly to the Rosenwald efforts were Jeanes Supervisors.⁵

¹ Founded in 2009, the [National Coalition on School Diversity](#) is a cross-sector network of 50+ national civil rights organizations, university-based research centers, and state and local coalitions working to expand support for school integration. NCSD supports its members in designing, enacting, implementing, and uplifting PK-12 public school integration policies and practices.

² Jim Crow's Pink Slip: The Untold Story of Black Principal and Teacher Leadership 76 (2022).

³ *Id.* at 77.

⁴ See National Trust for Historic Preservation, [Rosenwald Schools](#) (last accessed Nov. 20, 2024).

⁵ Jeanes Teachers (also known as Jeanes Supervisors) were women of color who functioned as superintendents for Black schools. Often beginning with little more than a school building and a single educator, Jeanes Teachers worked tirelessly to benefit their communities through improving public health, living conditions, and teacher training. They were funded through the Negro Rural School Fund, established by the Anna T. Jeanes Foundation in 1907 with an endowment of \$1 million. Jeanes appointed an impressive list of educators and other leaders of the time to the Fund's board, including Booker T. Washington as chairman. See Dudley Flood Center, [The Jeanes Fellowship Program](#) (last accessed Dec. 4, 2024) for additional information.

A recent special resource study performed by the Department of the Interior (DOI) was mandated by the [Julius Rosenwald and Rosenwald Schools Act of 2020](#). The [resulting report](#) concluded that both Julius Rosenwald and the Rosenwald Schools are of national historical significance, determining that the San Domingo School in Sharptown, MD met all the criteria for inclusion in a National Park unit.⁶ The DOI report further recommended that Congress consider establishing a network of Rosenwald Schools.⁷ Accordingly, legislation to establish the Julius Rosenwald and Rosenwald Schools National Historical Park was introduced in the [House](#) and [Senate](#) in September 2024. We support actions taken to make the DOI's recommendations a reality.

Given the focus of NCSD's work, we support efforts to ensure that the complexity of this story and legacy are told. For example, we would hope to see an emphasis on the important role that Black educators played during this era and recognition of how Black educators were affected when Rosenwald Schools were phased out (in part as a result of desegregation). We believe the scholarship of Vanessa Siddle Walker and Leslie T. Fenwick, among others, can and should be instructive. We also hope that the Rosenwald Fund's fellowship program receives due attention. Last, we support opportunities for visitors to learn about and grapple with different schools of thought regarding Rosenwald's approach and the conditions that necessitated these efforts,⁸ considering them alongside present-day circumstances.

We request that you preserve this significant history by establishing the Rosenwald Schools National Monument. Taking action now will uplift this very important history, which provides a powerful example of individual and collective agency at its best, during what is undoubtedly a challenging time.

Thank you for considering our request. We are happy to provide further input should you deem it helpful.

Sincerely,

/s

Gina Chirichigno, Director
Jenna Roberson, Communications Manager
National Coalition on School Diversity

Sent to: Stephenne Harding, *Senior Director of Lands*, White House Council on Environmental Quality
Jessica Cardichon, *Special Ass't to the President for Education*, Domestic Policy Council
Andrea O'Neal, *Special Ass't to the President for Racial and Economic Justice*, Domestic Policy Council
Bernadine Futrell, *Deputy Ass't Secretary*, U.S. Department of Education (OESE)
Kayla Patrick, *Senior Policy Advisor*, U.S. Department of Education
Roberto Rodriguez, *Ass't Secretary*, U.S. Department of Education (OPEPD)

⁶ Per the Julius Rosenwald & Rosenwald Schools National Historical Park Campaign, the San Domingo School was built in 1919 during the Tuskegee phase of the Rosenwald Schools Building Program and served as a school until 1961. It has been restored and is now a community center. The owner of the school, the John Quinton Foundation, Inc., has officially expressed its willingness to donate the school to the federal government.

⁷ The DOI report explains that a Rosenwald School Network Program would entail the "establishment of a new network dedicated to the preservation and interpretation of Rosenwald Schools across the nation." At iv. Importantly, it would confer "grant-making authority pending congressional authorization," thus "supporting community-driven preservation efforts." *Id.*

⁸ See, e.g. Noliwe Rooks, *White Philanthropy, Black Education*, in *Cutting School: The Segrenomics of American Education* 49-78 (2020). Rooks acknowledges that, "Rosenwald schools did more to further the cause of Black education than did any other educational entity of the time." At 70. However, she also documents important context that warrants recognition. She notes, for example, "Because the [Rosenwald Schools] program used a system of matching grants, we know that, all told, between 1906 and 1960 Black communities raised more than \$4.7 million to aid in the construction and support of the schools built to educate their children. Across the rural South, the Black community members who contributed their money to such efforts 'came from people who represented a poor working class, men who worked at furnaces, women who washed and ironed for white people, and children who chopped cotton in the heat of the day.' The schools built with such matching funds had to focus on vocational education for Blacks, whereby they were taught to make bricks or become carpenters or nurses or teachers. Any other form of education was forbidden if Rosenwald funds were to be used." At 69-70. See also, Penn State, [Behrend professor writing book about Rosenwald Fund and 'politics of knowledge'](#) (Jan. 11, 2024) ("The Rosenwald Fund fellowship program changed the face of American social thought," said Emily Masghati, an assistant professor of history at Penn State Behrend....Masghati is writing a book about the Rosenwald fellowship program....'My goal is to shine a light on the power dynamics that the fellows navigated,' she said.").