

Rosenwald: movie review

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Several years ago I attended a conference about Booker T. Washington. In High School I had written a paper about Frederick Douglass (which is why I know how to spell his last name) but I had no idea who Booker T Washington was. The conference was put together by a man named Lee Walker. Lee was known for seemingly being the only Black Republican in Chicago. He would laugh because he was invited to all the VIP Republican events so the hosts could show everyone that there was such an animal as a Black Republican. Lee was a businessman who had gone through the system working at Sears in New York. While he was there, a group suddenly appeared on the streets in white jump suits cleaning the streets. They were members of the Unification Church and he followed their careers very closely while he still worked in New York—Madison Square Garden and Yankee Stadium and all. Eventually Lee chose early retirement and moved to Chicago.

Michael Jenkins and I met Lee somewhere along the line and eventually we became very close friends. He went to one of our conferences in Korea and wound up rooming with Archbishop Stallings who told him that being roommates was the main purpose of his attendance at the conference.

In his retirement Lee worked with a conservative think tank in Chicago called the Heartland Institute and eventually started his own think tank called The New Coalition for Social Change. In this capacity he introduced me to several new ideas by attending many conservative luncheons. Eventually Lee invited me to an incredible conference about the life of Booker T Washington. Lee fund-raised for the entire event which was held over several days at some of the most prestigious venues in Chicago. He invited academic speakers from all over America including Booker T Washington's grand-daughter from Atlanta. Through this conference I was introduced to the name of Julius Rosenwald.



Julius Rosenwald was a creative entrepreneur who began working with Richard Sears (of Sears Roebuck renown) near the turn of the century. Through his genius Sears became one of very first IPOs when it became public (and through its catalog it became of the Amazon of its time). Richard Sears would die soon and Rosenwald would become the CEO of Sears and one of the richest men and philanthropists in America.

At the conference I learned that Booker T Washington would build (literally construct the campus) and found Tuskegee Institute and become a friend and confidant of President Theodore Roosevelt. Eventually they would meet when Washington invited Rosenwald to be on the Board of Directors of the University. Rosenwald insisted on visiting Tuskegee before he would consent to join the Board. Once he was there Rosenwald fell in love with the University and especially the Gospel Music from their Sunday Services which was unknown in Chicago and the North.

I am sure that we are well aware of the disparity of the education system in the South before the Supreme Court's "Brown vs the Board of Education" decision in 1954. "Separate but Equal" was little more than a myth. Most African-American rural schools in the South were little more than one room shacks which were usually taught by un-educated teachers.

Rosenwald, first inspired by the Washington's vision for Tuskegee, then became inspired to help fund the building of over 5,000 new schools in the rural South. Rosenwald had a unique method of fundraising. He would donate \$25,000 to build a school but would then expect the Negro community to match that amount and then ask the white community to put up the remaining \$50,000 (which often came from the state boards of education).

This week I attended the showing of a brand new documentary entitled "Rosenwald." I sat in a theatre for a \$9.00 Sunday matinee in a rich Jewish neighborhood with about 25 older Jewish patrons (the film is only being released in 2 theatres in Chicago). Without going into a lot of the details, let me just say that I was enlightened by learning the reality of the life of Julius Rosenwald. The documentary features commentary from some of the most famous African-Americans in America, including Maya Angelou, Julian Bond, Congressman John Lewis, Ossie Davis, , the grand-children of Eleanor Roosevelt, our own Congressman Danny K Davis and so many others. It is a must- see for every member of the American Clergy Leadership Conference (ACLC) and anyone who considers themselves an American Patriot.

Julius Rosenwald lived from 1868 -1932 and effected the lives of millions of African-Americans prior to the Civil Rights movement. His schools educated seemingly nearly all of the children growing up in the rural South before 1954. The film is incredibly historic and a must see for all.

Rosenwald, by Aviva Kempner, is a documentary about how Chicago philanthropist Julius Rosenwald, the son of an immigrant peddler who rose to head Sears, partnered with Booker T. Washington to build 5,400 Southern schools in African American communities in the early 1900s during the Jim Crow era. Rosenwald also built YMCAs and housing for African Americans to address the pressing needs of the Great Migration. The Rosenwald Fund supported great artists like Marian Anderson, Woody Guthrie, Langston Hughes, Gordon Parks, and Jacob Lawrence. Among those interviewed are civil rights leaders Julian Bond, Ben Jealous and Congressman John Lewis, columnists Eugene Robinson and Clarence Page, Cokie Roberts, Rabbi David Saperstein, Rosenwald school alumni writer Maya Angelou and director George C. Wolfe and Rosenwald relatives.