UC Berkeley
UC Berkeley Electronic Theses and Dissertations

Title

“Definition from Above”: Industrial Philanthropy and the Shaping of Racialized and Gendered Education for Black Students in the Early Twentieth Century

Permalink

https://escholarship.org/uc/item/0cr8j9c2

ISBN

9798173786555

Author

Anspach, Rachel Bruck

Publication Date

2026-08-10

Peer reviewed|Thesis/dissertation

eScholarship.org Powered by the California Digital Library
University of California

“Definition from Above”:
Industrial Philanthropy and the Shaping of Racialized and Gendered Education for Black Students in the Early Twentieth Century

By

Rachel Bruck Anspach

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

African American Studies

and the Designated Emphasis
in
Women, Gender, and Sexuality

in the

Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

Professor Nikki Jones, Chair

Professor Ula Taylor

Professor Tianna Paschel

Professor Janelle Scott

Summer 2026

Copyright © 2026 Rachel Bruck Anspach
All Rights Reserved

Abstract

"Definition from Above":

Industrial Philanthropy and the Shaping of Racialized and Gendered Education for Black Students in the Early Twentieth Century

By

Rachel Bruck Anspach

Doctor of Philosophy in African American Studies

Designated Emphasis in Women, Gender, and Sexuality

University of California, Berkeley

Professor Nikki Jones, Chair

My dissertation uncovers the historical roots of the patriarchal gender norms and public-private partnerships that pervade education policy for Black youth in the United States today. I conducted an archival study of two Northern industrial philanthropies—the General Education Board (G.E.B.), funded by oil tycoon John D. Rockefeller, and the Rosenwald Fund, funded by Sears & Roebuck C.E.O. Julius Rosenwald—that centrally shaped Southern Black education in the early twentieth century. Both funds mandated that schools they supported have a vocational focus, training Black youth for labor roles following those that Black people had filled during slavery—agricultural or low-skilled industrial labor for boys and domestic service work for girls.

While many scholars have studied the racialized elements of U.S. education philanthropy, few have taken an intersectional, gendered perspective. To help fill this gap, I conducted archival research at both these foundations' archives, analyzing correspondence, meeting minutes, photographs, and reports to understand their funding structures and relationships with Black schools. I also consulted the Wilcox County School Board archive in Alabama to learn more about one school, Snow Hill Normal and Industrial Institute. Finally, I visited the site of the shuttered Snow Hill school and conducted oral history interviews with community members. My archival analysis is rooted in the epistemologies of intersectionality, Black feminist historiography, Black Studies, and racial capitalism, which contend that power pervades the historical record.

I found that funding decisions were overwhelmingly rooted in Black schools' willingness to adhere to gender-segregated vocational curricula. The G.E.B. also funded gender-segregated agricultural clubs called corn cobbing clubs for boys and canning clubs for girls. I argue that the G.E.B. and Rosenwald Fund intentionally rooted their education models in gender segregation and patriarchal norms as an essential strategy for ensuring their ideal economic conditions. This model became the lasting foundation for public education in the region. I also found that Black educators and communities resisted and subverted the foundations' efforts to constrain their autonomy.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to my dissertation chair, Professor Nikki Jones, for your mentorship and support over the last eight years. Thank you for seeing a home for me in our department before I did, and for investing in my growth, including all the hours spent shaping this dissertation. Professor Ula Taylor, thank you for your mentorship and kindness all these years. From working with you during my first experience as a Grad Student Instructor, to your support of my site visit to Snow Hill School, you always encouraged me to get it done by putting one foot in front of another. Professor Tianna Paschel, thank you for your generous feedback on my work, frank advice, and support, from your Black feminist research methods course in 2018 to this dissertation. Professor Janelle Scott, thank you for bringing me into your policy research community in the Education Department when I first came to Berkeley, and for continuing to encourage my work and vision. It is an honor to have this group of Black feminist women and expert scholars as my mentors.

Thank you to the University of California, Berkeley, for the funding that made this work possible, including the Regents Fellowship for Graduate Study, the UC Dissertation-Year Fellowship, and the Summer Dissertation Writing Grant. Thank you to the African American & African Diaspora Studies Department, in particular for research funding from Nikki Jones, Ula Taylor, and the Black Studies Collaboratory.

Thank you to the Snow Hill community, in particular Cornelius Gaines, who gave me an extensive tour of the school site; Cliff Lee, who welcomed me into his home in Brooklyn and shared his childhood memories; Annie May Collins, who welcomed me into her home and shared memories from nearly a century ago; Wendell Edwards for your help connecting me with the local community; and Sheryl Threadgill-Matthews, who met me for lunch and welcomed me to Camden. I hope I have done your perspectives justice. Thank you to the Hanna Holborn Gray Special Collections Research Center at the University of Chicago, and the Rockefeller Archive Center, in particular Archivist Monica Blank for all your help.

Thank you to the mentors from earlier in my life who taught me what it means to educate and research with an ethic of care: Professors Katherine Hite, Luke Harris, and Kimberlé Crenshaw. Each of you played an instrumental role in setting me on the path toward earning this doctorate.

Thank you to my dear friends, Kiara and Sukari, who held me down in the Bay as we navigated the ups and downs of grad school and life. I am grateful that grad school brought me friends whose perspectives align so closely with mine, and for all the memories we've shared. You're real ones.

Last but certainly not least, thank you to my family: Sable, Mom, Dad, Gabi, and my kitties Sophie and Lenny. Each of you provided me with unconditional love and support on this journey and well beyond. Mom, in addition to everything else in life, thank you for all the time you put into editing my work, culminating in reading and editing this entire manuscript. Sable, I cannot thank you enough for all your love and support – from nearly a decade ago in the thick of applying to grad school together and editing one another's materials, to multiple reads and insights to help strengthen my perspective in this dissertation. I feel blessed to have all of you in my life.

Table of Contents

ABSTRACT **1**

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ..... **I**

INTRODUCTION: "DEFINITION FROM ABOVE": INDUSTRIAL PHILANTHROPY AND THE SHAPING OF RACIALIZED AND GENDERED EDUCATION FOR BLACK STUDENTS IN THE EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY **1**

CHAPTER ONE: A "GOSPEL OF WORK & MONEY": THE GENERAL EDUCATION BOARD'S FORMATIVE ROLE IN SHAPING PUBLIC EDUCATION FOR BLACK STUDENTS **42**

CHAPTER TWO: THE ROSENWALD FUND: GENDERED VOCATIONAL EDUCATION FOR BLACK STUDENTS AND THE MAKING OF INDUSTRIAL RACIAL CAPITALISM **89**

CHAPTER THREE: THE RISE AND FALL OF SNOW HILL NORMAL & INDUSTRIAL INSTITUTE: A BLACK BELT COMMUNITY SCHOOL **137**

CONCLUSION: IMPLICATIONS FOR U.S. EDUCATION POLICY IN TODAY'S POLITICAL CLIMATE **182**

BIBLIOGRAPHY **190**

Introduction:

"Definition from Above": Industrial Philanthropy and the Shaping of Racialized and Gendered Education for Black Students in the Early Twentieth Century

Rachel Anspach

"One of the main reasons African American males are passed up for opportunities is because of our appearance. Before walking into this environment, CHECK YOUR APPEARANCES AT THE DOOR… ABSOLUTELY NO EXCEPTIONS!!!!"[1] This excerpt is from a "Manhood Development" syllabus from Oakland Technical High School in 2015. The Manhood Development Program consisted of courses taught in fourteen Oakland public high schools that were open solely to Black boys and taught by Black men, with the goal of "help[ing] Black males better manage peer and adult relationships."[2] Manhood Development was a central offering of Oakland Unified School District's (OUSD) African American Male Achievement office (AAMA). Founded in 2010 as a public-private partnership, AAMA created male-only spaces in the city's public schools for Black boys to learn about leadership, job training, and self-improvement.[3]

As of today, in 2026, the AAMA site reports that the initiative is now in the "next phase of the Manhood Development Program: King Care…" programs that "focus on student and family empowerment and student success."[4] The King Care and Manhood Development courses, specifically focused on teaching Black boys how to become better "men," or "kings," through the lens of professionalization and patriarchal family values, are funded principally by the East Bay Community Foundation. This means that these programs are paid for by some of the largest corporations in California, including Blue Shield of California, P.G.&E. Electric, and J.P. Morgan Chase.[5]

---

[1] Lamar Hancock, "Oakland Technical High School African American Male Achievement/Manhood Development," Oakland Unified School District, n.d., http://oaklandtech.com/staff/lhancock/files/2015/09/AAMA-Syllabus-2.docx.

[2] Oakland Unified School District, *African American Male Achievement - Programs and Services* (Oakland Unified School District, 2018), https://www.ousd.org/Page/17777.

[3] Oakland Unified School District, *African American Male Achievement* (Oakland Unified School District, 2026), https://www.ousd.org/african-american-male-achievement.

[4] Oakland Unified School District, *African American Male Achievement*.

[5] East Bay Community Foundation, *Partners* (East Bay Community Foundation, 2026), https://www.ebcf.org/donors/partners/.

In 2012, during Barack Obama's presidency, the AAMA initiative was central to an agreement between OUSD and the United States Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights (OCR) after the OCR investigated OUSD for disproportionate discipline against African American students.[6] While the allegation of disproportionate discipline was not gender specific, and Black boys *and* girls experienced drastically disproportionate discipline in Oakland schools, much of the solution was specifically geared toward boys, in the form of AAMA programs.[7] The agreement cited a number of statistics demonstrating the disproportionate suspension of Black boys in OUSD, including that they comprised 17% of students but 42% of suspensions, and that 44% of Black boys were suspended solely for "defying authority."[8] Comparable statistics were not included for Black girls or nonbinary students, and the document provided no explanation for its focus on boys. In fact, the words "girl" and "female" were not mentioned once in the agreement. Black boys were offered a program that hinged on changing their behavior as the solution to disproportionate suspension and school pushout rates, while Black girls and nonbinary Black children were erased.

Oakland was the first school district in the United States to create a department specifically geared toward Black male students, though initiatives of this type would sweep the country in the 2010s, sped along by significant support from the private sector.[9] As the home of the Campaign for Black Male Achievement (CBMA), George Soros' Open Society Foundations has been one of the most prominent funders of male-exclusive racial justice programs. A CBMA report stated that in 2014, philanthropic funding specifically for Black men and boys amounted to $61.4 million, while funding for boys and men of color totaled an additional $62.7 million.[10] The report also stated that from 2005 to 2014, $334 million in philanthropic funding was specifically geared toward Black men and boys.[11] By 2018, the CBMA had garnered widespread support across the country, including national partners such as My Brother's Keeper (President Obama's all-male

[6] Anthony Smith and Jacqueline Minor, *Agreement to Resolve United States Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights Compliance Review of the District's Discipline of African American Students Under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964*, Government (Oakland Unified School District, 2012), 1–32.

[7] Smith and Minor, *Agreement to Resolve United States Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights Compliance Review of the District's Discipline of African American Students Under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964*.

[8] Smith and Minor, *Agreement to Resolve United States Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights Compliance Review of the District's Discipline of African American Students Under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964*.

[9] Grace Sato, *Quantifying Hope 2017: Philanthropic Support for Black Men and Boys*, Philanthropy (Campaign for Black Male Achievement, 2017).

[10] For context, in 2015 the total philanthropic funding geared specifically toward Black people in the U.S. was $73.1 million, and total U.S. funding for racial justice or equity was $5.5 billion. Source: Malkia Devich Cyril et al, *Mismatched: Philanthropy's Response to the Call for Racial Justice* (Philanthropic Initiative for Racial Equity, Tides Center, 2020), https://racialequity.org/mismatched/.

[11] Sato, *Quantifying Hope 2017: Philanthropic Support for Black Men and Boys*.

racial justice initiative), the Executives' Alliance (prominent business leaders), and Cities United (a coalition of cities with Black male achievement programs).[12]

Support for these programs is more ideological than evidence based.[13] Scholars have demonstrated that reinforcing patriarchal gender roles and an exclusive focus on Black boys does not address the structural causes of educational inequality.[14] Additionally, there has been no similar level of philanthropic investment in programs specifically for Black girls, girls of color, or nonbinary youth.[15] Despite their lack of measured outcomes, Black male achievement programs continue to be supported year after year. This begs the question of why changing the behavior of Black boys is so appealing to corporate funders, political, and community leaders.[16]

Half a century prior, in 1965, the U.S. government commissioned a report titled *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action*, which was written by Assistant Labor Secretary Daniel Patrick Moynihan, a white man with a doctorate in history.[17] Commissioned to help government officials better understand the enduring causes of racial inequality, Moynihan's study principally argued that the root of Black communities' suffering stemmed from pathological gender roles. In short, he argued that racism had impacted Black men more than Black women due to its emasculation of the traditional patriarchal role; that Black women, who often worked and led their own households, were centrally to blame for Black men's suffering; that restoring Black masculinity represented the best path toward racial equality; and as a result, bolstering patriarchal masculinity in Black communities should be a matter of public policy.

"A community that allows a large number of men to grow up in broken families, dominated by women, never acquiring any stable relationship to male authority, never acquiring any set of rational expectations about the future—that community asks for and gets chaos... And it is richly deserved," Moynihan argued. As the solution, he proposed that, "we must not rest until every able-bodied Negro male is working. Even if we have to displace some females."[18] By the late twentieth

[12] "About CBMA," Campaign for Black Male Achievement, 2018, https://www.Blackmaleachievement.org/about/cbma.

[13] As I discuss further in the section below on "Theoretical Epistemology & Key Terms," an ideology is an organized set of ideas, and according to Gramsci, the hegemonic (dominant) ideology can become so ingrained in society as to appear like "common sense," serving to legitimize the social hierarchy. Gramsci's definition of ideology has been taken up and extended by many Black feminist and critical scholars. Source: Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (International Publishers, 1971).

[14] Kimberlé Crenshaw et al., *Black Girls Matter: Pushed Out, Overpoliced and Underprotected* (African American Policy Forum, 2015).

[15] Vanessa Daniel, "Philanthropists Bench Women of Color, the M.V.P.s of Social Change," *New York Times*, November 19, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/11/19/opinion/philanthropy-Black-women.html.

[16] Michael J. Dumas, "My Brother as 'Problem': Neoliberal Governmentality and Interventions for Black Young Men and Boys," *Educational Policy* 30, no. 1 (2016): 94–113.

[17] Daniel Patrick Moynihan, *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action*, Policy Report (Washington, DC, 1965), 1–76.

[18] Moynihan, *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action*.

century, the Moynihan Report had exerted a widespread influence in policymaking, from the stereotype of the Black mother as "welfare queen" being used to justify extensive cuts to welfare policy,[19] to the proliferation of "Afro-centric" charter schools for Black boys across the country.[20]

But Moynihan was far from the first white man to prescribe the adoption of patriarchal gender roles as the best path toward social and economic inclusion for Black people in the U.S. Half a century before Moynihan published his influential report, prominent philanthropies formed to create racially segregated schools for youth across the South following the Civil War and the emancipation of Black people from chattel slavery. One of the most prolific of these philanthropies was the General Education Board (G.E.B.), founded by John D. Rockefeller Jr. in 1902, utilizing the oil fortune of his father, John D. Rockefeller. In the early years of the twentieth century, one of the General Education Board's central programs consisted of race and gender segregated clubs, called "Corn Cobbing Clubs" for boys, and "Canning Clubs" for girls. These clubs were extracurricular activities that taught boys more efficient techniques to work on farms, while girls learned homemaking skills like food preservation to prepare them for lives in rural agricultural families.

While these programs were offered separately to both white and Black young people, they had very distinct implications by racial group. White boys often learned better techniques to run their own farms, while white girls were prepared to run their own households. Black youth, on the other hand, were largely being primed for either agricultural or service labor, usually under conditions of debt peonage, on white people's farms. The subsequent photo is drawn from the Rockefeller Archive, and it was recorded in their files from 1912 as part of the documentation of these agricultural education programs. It depicts a Black woman and Black children laboring in a cotton field, which the photo describes as infested with weevils, a major barrier to farming in the South at the time. Behind the Black workers rides a white man on a horse, who appears to be supervising their work, dressed much more formally than the others. This photo provides context for the distinct dynamics of these Black and white agricultural education initiatives. The system of slavery had formally ended in 1865, but nearly forty years later, this photo depicted markedly similar dynamics of racial domination and children's labor in service of capitalist production.

---

[19] Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (Routledge, 2000), Comparative Ethnic Studies HQ1426 .C633 2000, Chapter Four.

[20] Juliet Williams, *The Separation Solution?: Single-Sex Education and the New Politics of Gender Equality* (University of California Press, 2016).



G.E.B. archival photo from its agricultural education program, Louisiana, 1912[21]

These clubs, and the other agricultural training provided by the G.E.B., were specifically aimed at "seeking to familiarize [children] with the work of the farm and also tending to make rural life more attractive."[22] Another goal of this program was to enforce traditional patriarchal gender roles in Black communities. As I discuss further in Chapter One, it is likely that the G.E.B.'s program was designed specifically in response to growing concerns at the turn of the century about the "Negro Problem" in Northern cities. In *The Philadelphia Negro*, which W.E.B. Du Bois published in 1899, he discussed how the University of Pennsylvania commissioned him to study the Black communities of Philadelphia specifically because they viewed them as a problem to be solved. The predominant white scholars and policymakers of the time placed the blame for the "Negro Problem" (such as crime and unemployment) squarely on the backs of Black people, and central to this narrative were concerns over lack of proper gender roles in Black families. In the chapter titled "Conjugal Condition," Du Bois directly addressed white Northerners' concerns over the disproportionately high rates of women-headed households and single men amongst Black families in Philadelphia. While white leaders largely blamed this on their perceptions of Black people's moral failings, such as idleness and criminality, Du Bois argued that this predominance of women-led families was a direct result of slavery: "The lax moral habits of the slave regime still show themselves in a large amount of cohabitation without marriage. In the slum districts there are many such families, which remain together years and are in effect common law

[21] General Education Board, "General Education Board Archive," 4000 - Agricultural Demonstration Work, 1908-1913; Photographs, Series 1054; Rockefeller Archive Center, December 2022.

[22] General Education Board, "General Education Board Archive," Relations with Dept. of Agriculture 1914-1919, Box 15, Folder 148.

marriages. Some of these connections are broken by whim or desire, although in many cases they are permanent unions."[23]

Du Bois and many other Black scholars since have rightly highlighted that lower rates of the traditional nuclear family structure stem from slavery and subsequent economic conditions, and that the patriarchal nuclear family is not the key to being moral, productive members of society. Regardless, white leaders of the time, including the G.E.B., created policies and programs aimed at encouraging traditional marriages in Black communities, while also discouraging migration to Northern cities. For instance, a 1915 report on the clubs in Alabama that focused on women and girls' behavior noted that:

> There was a total of 2,703 homes visited where the agents came in personal contact with the mothers, gave lessons in housekeeping, sanitation and care of the children…. The clubs met as a rule at different homes in the community, and the kitchen and dining room of these homes were used in giving lessons. Some 5111 girls and 3408 mothers were enrolled as active members…. The lessons given have been very practical. Cooking, housekeeping and sanitation have been especially stressed and a spirit of pride in home life has been developed.[24]

This report was one of many references in the Rockefeller Foundation Archive that made clear that promoting patriarchal gender roles and family structures was a central goal for the G.E.B.'s education initiatives.

The subsequent photo, of a G.E.B. field agent leading a Black girls' canning club demonstration in Georgia around 1915, further exhibits this finding. The demonstration, with what appear to be burners for cooking, alongside several jars of preserved foods, was geared toward teaching food preservation skills to the Black girls in attendance. Black girls like those portrayed in the image of the cotton field were the intended audience for such a presentation. Not only is the domestic duty of cooking being emphasized, but so is the centrality of childrearing, as evidenced by the inclusion of a Black baby doll alongside canned goods as part of the display. Furthermore, this focus on domestic labor did not reflect the reality outside the classroom, in which women and girls routinely had to work alongside men and boys on the farm.

[23] W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Philadelphia Negro: A Social Study* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1899; repr., Oxford University Press, 2007), 45.

[24] General Education Board, "General Education Board Archive," Supervisor of Rural Schools (Negro) 1912-18, Box 17, Folder 142.



G.E.B. Field Agent in Pike County, Georgia, c. 1915[25]

In the U.S., the role of public education cannot be separated from the history that shaped it: the capture and enslavement of people from Africa, and the land theft and genocide of native peoples. Providing both stolen land and labor, these violent genocides served the ultimate purpose of enabling the multi-faceted project of racial capitalism, white supremacy, and Christian hetero-patriarchy. As education scholar Eve Ewing argues, "the schoolhouse, the most venerable and beloved image of American aspiration, hasn't rested angelically on the sidelines. Rather, it has played a central role in furthering the work begun by slavery and settler colonialism."[26] Education has always held great power and potential for liberation and critical thinking on the one hand and indoctrination and domination on the other.

My Dissertation Research

Public-private partnerships in public education have historically played an outsized role in the schooling of Black and native students, as compared to white students. In the case of education for Black students, this dates back to the seminal period in which Black people could first legally be educated following legal emancipation and the end of chattel slavery. Except for a brief period (around 1865-77) known as Reconstruction following the Civil War, in which the country invested

[25] General Education Board, "General Education Board Archive," GA 268 - Supervisor of Rural Schools - Negro, 1902-1964; General Education Board records; photographs, Series 1054.

[26] Eve Ewing, *Original Sins: The (Mis)Education of Black and Native Children and the Construction of American Racism* (One World, 2025), Introduction (eBook).

in incorporating Black people into American citizenship, extending the benefits of democracy to this population was largely abandoned by the federal government and violently resisted by the Confederate states.[27] This was not a passive abandonment, but was marked by the re-entrenchment of white supremacy through apartheid laws and practices and the widespread resurgence of legal and extra-legal terror against Black Americans in the name of white power.[28]

In these conditions, the wealthy industrialists of the time stepped in to fund—and fundamentally shape—public schools for Black students across the Southern states.[29] Since their creation in the early twentieth century, philanthropies have allowed unelected white men to shape the life trajectories of marginalized individuals. Philanthropic giving appealed to these men both because it allowed them to shape society as well as to shelter their fortunes from taxation. Given the central influence they have had over shaping the course and content of public education in this country, philanthropists should be seen as policymakers in their own right—albeit ones who have not been elected through any democratic process.[30]

My dissertation explores the racialized, gendered nature of K-12 education policies enacted by major philanthropies for Black students in the early twentieth century, and the economic vision that undergirded them. I analyze the activities of two of the most powerful Northern philanthropies in shaping Black public education in the South in this seminal period: the General Education Board, funded by oil tycoon John D. Rockefeller, and the Rosenwald Fund, funded by Sears Department Store C.E.O. Julius Rosenwald. The reach of these two privately run philanthropies in the early twentieth century was so prolific that together they funded the construction of schools that about one third of Black school-age children in the South attended by the 1930s.[31] Both of these funds mandated that any schools they supported be rooted in their vision of vocational education.

While many scholars have studied the racialized elements of education philanthropy in the U.S., a much smaller number have taken an intersectional, gendered perspective.[32] I aim to advance a more holistic analysis by exploring how philanthropies shaped race and gender together. To do this, I conducted archival research exploring the gendered dimensions of foundations' vocational

---

[27] W. E. B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860-1880* (Harcourt, Brace & Co, 1935).

[28] Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth Century America* (Oxford University Press, 1997).

[29] James D. Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935* (University of North Carolina Press, 1988).

[30] Megan E. Tompkins-Stange, *Policy Patrons: Philanthropy, Education Reform, and the Politics of Influence*, First Paperback Edition (Harvard Education Press, 2016).

[31] Noliwe M. Rooks, *Cutting School: Privatization, Segregation, and the End of Public Education* (The New Press, 2017), 50.

[32] These authors have excellent work relevant to Black education and philanthropy that focuses more on race/class than gender: William H. Watkins, *The White Architects of Black Education: Ideology and Power in America, 1865-1954* (Teachers College Press, 2001); Rooks, *Cutting School*; Tompkins-Stange, *Policy Patrons*; Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935*.

education models, as well as other ways they promoted a binary gender framework. The primary sources for my dissertation are the Julius Rosenwald Papers at the University of Chicago, the General Education Board Archive at the Rockefeller Archive Center, newspaper coverage from the period, and oral history interviews with individuals who attended Snow Hill Institute in Alabama, an independent Black school funded by both the G.E.B. and Rosenwald Fund.[33]

I argue that the G.E.B. and Rosenwald Fund intentionally rooted their education model for Black students in gender segregation and patriarchal gender norms not as a passive reflection of the times, but as an essential strategy for ensuring their ideal economic conditions. The philanthropists' central goal in spreading this model was, in their own words, to prime Black youth as a steady source of low-wage labor. In turn, this model was adopted so widely and quickly that a large number of Black youth in the South were subject to its curriculum. In conjunction with this analysis, I recognize and discuss Black educator and community resistance to these philanthropies' efforts to constrain their autonomy and social status. Rather than treating gender as an add-on to the theoretical framework in existing scholarship on race and capitalism in education for Black students,[34] I argue that the gendered dimension was central to the foundations' strategy for using K-12 education to bring Black people into the fold of racial capitalism as workers and consumers.

Chapter One focuses on the activities of the General Education Board, which was founded in 1902 by a group of elite white men who came together to shape education for Black students in the South, led by John D. Rockefeller Jr. and funded by his father. The group agreed that it was of the utmost importance to educate Black youths, but that this education should be vocational in nature—preparing students to be low-wage industrial, agricultural, and domestic workers. In 1903, one short year after the group came together, Congress bestowed it with sweeping powers similar to the federal Department of Education from the 1980s-2010s, including the "construction" of new schools and "improvement" of existing ones, making it an important example of a formative public-private partnership in U.S. public education.[35] This first chapter analyzes the structure of this public-private partnership alongside the ideology and on-the-ground practice of the gendered vocational model developed by the G.E.B., showing how this came together to shape education for Black students for the modern age.

Chapter Two focuses on the Rosenwald Fund's school building initiative, founded by another northern businessman who played a central role in the K-12 schooling options first made widely available to Black youth in the South. Despite having little input on the schools' physical designs and curricula, Black communities had to agree to contribute both their own labor and funds to get the schools built under the foundation's matching funds requirement. To qualify for Rosenwald funds, these schools were required to be vocational, training students to enter a laboring class as agricultural, factory, or domestic workers—favoring professions that were highly gender

[33] Julius Rosenwald and Rosenwald Fund, "Julius Rosenwald Papers," Rosenwald Fund Archive, Hanna Holborn Gray Special Collections Research Center, 1905-1963; General Education Board, "General Education Board Archive."

[34] Such as: Watkins, *The White Architects of Black Education: Ideology and Power in America, 1865-1954*; Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935*.

[35] General Education Board, "General Education Board Archive," GEB 1902-1911, Box 16, Folder 157.

segregated. In both of these chapters, I explore the structure of the Funds' activities and detail examples from their work with schools and Black education leaders that reveal their economic, gendered, and racialized visions. This chapter analyzes how the Funds modernized the project of racial capitalism through entrenching gendered ideology in education for Black students.

Chapter Three tells the story of Snow Hill Normal and Industrial Institute, a school in Alabama's rural Black Belt impacted by both the G.E.B. and Rosenwald Fund. This chapter shows how the gendered vocational regime and public-private governance model discussed in chapters one and two played out in a single, Black-founded school. This third chapter follows the trajectory of a school founded at the turn of the century by a local Black leader, William James Edwards; from the promise of working with the great Northern education funds to educate local, impoverished youths; to its persistent economic and political struggles to keep its doors open; ultimately to its closure under the false guise of racial desegregation in the 1970s. This chapter provides a closer look at how these foundations' relationships with Black-founded schools played out in reality.

How did I come to this topic for my doctoral research? When I first became interested in studying the role of philanthropy in education for Black students and, more broadly, in U.S. social policy, I did not have a historical project in mind. I became interested in the privatization of education over a decade ago, through working at a think tank that advocated for Black women and girls under the intellectual leadership of Black feminist legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw. I was struck by the dearth of support for Black women and girls in contemporary mainstream philanthropy, as well as the rising popularity of neoliberal, individualized education programs geared toward Black boys. In 2015, I began working at the African American Policy Forum (AAPF) to support the release of their *Black Girls Matter* report and campaign, which used data disaggregated by race and gender, in addition to focus group analysis, to show the ways that Black girls were harmed by criminalization and school pushout.[36] AAPF launched the campaign in order to call on policymakers and advocates to recognize that meaningful solutions to education inequity must take a holistic, structural approach that includes the specific needs of Black girls and LGBTQ youth.

During my time working at AAPF, my eyes were opened to the ways in which even institutions and organizations claiming to advocate for equity often erase or marginalize Black women, girls, and LGBTQ people. As we worked to generate funding for the organization, I saw how few funding opportunities there were for our work at that time. I also saw how the priorities and requirements of grant-giving institutions were often not aligned with the most impactful or ethical ways to carry out the work. Through our advocacy work on My Brother's Keeper, an all-male racial justice initiative led by then-President Obama, I saw how philanthropy actively contributed to a narrative and material reality where 1) Black girls are not equitably included in key resource investment initiatives and 2) powerful foundations and political actors embrace teaching patriarchal gender roles to Black boys as a solution to educational, racial, and economic inequalities.

My research and education in graduate school at UC Berkeley over the last several years convinced me of the importance of looking to the foundations of philanthropy's intervention in

[36] Crenshaw et al., *Black Girls Matter: Pushed Out, Overpoliced and Underprotected*.

public education initiatives geared toward Black youth. In my home department of African American & African Diaspora Studies, my training deeply emphasized the importance of studying history to understand the present, as well as the interdisciplinary ethos of using whatever research methods are best suited to the question at hand, rather than letting a set of methods dictate the direction of the research.[37] I also extensively read and learned from work by Black feminist scholars who utilize research methods of critically examining historical archives and contemporary narratives through the lens of power.[38]

For instance, Black feminist scholars who write about the turn of the twentieth century help elucidate the ways in which the state, white businessmen, and intellectual elites utilized gender to solidify white supremacy and justify violence against Black people. In *No Mercy Here*, Sarah Haley investigates records of Black women in convict labor camps in Georgia to demonstrate how gender regulation was central to the consolidation of white supremacist capitalism in this important period of modernization.[39] Through analyzing both the state and media's treatment of criminalized Black women, Haley provides empirically rooted analysis showing how American society was directly shaped by Black women's labor and racialized gender norms aimed at consolidating white men's power. Her analysis leads her to conclude that: "Jim Crow modernity premised upon Black subordination in the service of southern capitalist development required definitive ideas about gender difference. Whiteness was constituted through gender normativity and therefore Black antinormativity had to be continually reasserted for the maintenance of white supremacy."[40]

Through taking graduate courses in education under the mentorship of Dr. Janelle Scott, I learned more about the role of philanthropy in shaping education for Black and brown students throughout the history of the U.S., with a focus on the proliferation of neoliberal education programs such as charter schools and school choice policies in the last fifty years.[41] In my research

[37] Barbara Christian, "But What Do We Think We're Doing Anyway: The State of Black Feminist Criticism(s) or My Version of a Little Bit of History (1989)," in *New Black Feminist Criticism* (University of Illinois Press, 2007); Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Beacon Press, 1995); Saidiya Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," *Small Axe* 12, no. 2 (2008): 1–14; Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (Routledge, 2000).

[38] Saidiya Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Riotous Black Girls, Troublesome Women, and Queer Radicals* (Norton, 2019); Sarah Haley, *No Mercy Here: Gender, Punishment, and the Making of Jim Crow Modernity* (The University of North Carolina Press, 2016); bell hooks, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*, 2nd edition (South End Press, 2000).

[39] Haley, *No Mercy Here: Gender, Punishment, and the Making of Jim Crow Modernity*.

[40] Haley, *No Mercy Here: Gender, Punishment, and the Making of Jim Crow Modernity*, 67.

[41] Rooks, *Cutting School*; Janelle Scott, "Managers of Choice: Race, Gender, and the Philosophies of the New Urban School Leadership," in *School Choice Policies and Outcomes: Empirical and Philosophical Perspectives* (State University of New York Press, 2008), http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/berkeley-ebooks/detail.action?docID=3407332; Tompkins-Stange, *Policy Patrons*; Sonya Douglass Horsford et al., *The Politics of Education Policy in an Era of Inequality: Possibilities for Democratic Schooling* (Taylor & Francis Group, 2018), http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/berkeley-ebooks/detail.action?docID=5611520; Janelle Scott, "The Politics of Venture Philanthropy in Charter School Policy and Advocacy," *Educational Policy* 23, no. 1 (2009): 106–36, https://doi.org/10.1177/0895904808328531; Janelle Scott, "The Problem We All Still Live With: Neo-Plessyism and School Choice Policies in the Obama Era," in *Choosing Charters: Better Schools or More Segregation?* (Teachers College Press, 2018).

I noticed a strong correlation between cities and foundations that supported Black male achievement programs and those that supported highly privatized forms of public education, such as corporate-managed charter schools and voucher policies.[42] There is enough overlap between the supporters of these programs in the public and private sectors to suggest that they share a broader vision of market oriented public education that is both raced and gendered in specific ways. This finding led me to want to better understand the underlying ideology that brings together supporters of Black male achievement programs and supporters of the privatization of public education. This, in turn, led me to the history of the industrial philanthropies' first forays into education for Black students in the early twentieth century.

Altogether, my training and life experiences over the last decade, within and outside the academy, have helped me as a researcher to develop a working praxis of "feminism as a critical reading practice in which one 'reads through these layers' of gendered forms of domination," as feminist scholar Imani Perry put it.[43] Central to Perry's concept of liberation feminism as a critical praxis, as well as my own, is the lens of racial capitalism (which will be discussed further below). This is a lens guided by a Marxist critique of capitalism and labor, and a focus on interrogating social structures at the systemic level, while also insisting on a more nuanced vision of liberation that includes patriarchy and anti-Blackness in the ontology of modern capitalism.

As Perry argues, "reading through the layers is especially necessary now, because some of the ideas that we conventionally associate with feminism are increasingly colonized by our marketized public sphere; at the same time, politically powerful neo-conservative forces are rolling back the gains of feminist movements. This dynamic requires [mapping] both the 'old' and the 'new' orders, as it were, as well as the dizzying complex forces of today."[44] In other words, analysis through a feminist lens is increasingly complex, as capitalism has been extremely successful at coopting key feminist tropes to reproduce and consolidate power, while at the same time there has been an alarming and increasingly powerful backlash that seeks to roll back the gains of feminist and other social justice movements of the past century. Today, six years after Perry shared this analysis, both of these trends are more prevalent than ever, emphasizing the importance of this continued practice of using a critical feminist lens to read between the lines of dominant discourse.

---

[42] *2017-2018 BMA City Index* (Campaign for Black Male Achievement, 2018), https://www.Blackmaleachievement.org/community/city-index; Arianna Prothero, "Six Districts Where 40 Percent or More of Students Attend Charter Schools," *Education Week*, November 10, 2015, http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/charterschoice/2015/11/six_districts_where_40_percent_or_more_of_students_attend_charter_schools.html; Mikhail Zinshteyn, "Oakland Charters More Likely to Enroll Higher-Performing Students than District Schools," *EdSource*, June 20, 2017, https://edsource.org/2017/oakland-charters-more-likely-to-enroll-higher-performing-students-than-district-schools/583582; James Vaznis, "For Boston Charters, a Record Spike in Applicants," *Boston Globe* (Boston), March 6, 2017, https://www.bostonglobe.com/metro/2017/03/05/boston-charter-schools-see-record-breaking-spike-applications/0QBbfVxXYCQ0xsOXkLaRZJ/story.html.

[43] Imani Perry, *Vexy Thing: On Gender and Liberation* (Duke University Press, 2018), 9.

[44] Perry, *Vexy Thing: On Gender and Liberation,* 9.

History of White, Patriarchal Philanthropy in Shaping Black Public Education

After witnessing the profound shortcomings of Reconstruction and violent re-entrenchment of white supremacy in the late 1800s, W.E.B. Du Bois created the powerful concept of "abolition democracy"—arguing that for the U.S. to be a true democracy, the government needed to build robust institutions with the power to foster equitable life chances for Black people and for all Americans. His use of the term *abolition*, which was associated with the movement to end slavery, connoted a critique of Reconstruction as a failed opportunity to extend the rights and protections of democracy to Black citizens. As Black people continued to labor under conditions of debt peonage, without access to most civil rights and under constant threat of white violence, true abolition had yet to be achieved by the early twentieth century. Du Bois proposed a form of abolition which meant "not simply abolition of legal ownership of the slave," but rather "the uplift of slaves and their eventual incorporation into the body civil, politic, and social, of the United States."[45]

In 1935, with his remarkable prescience for analyzing the country's recent history, Du Bois argued that the largest threat to the realization of abolition democracy was not the overtly racist Southerners, but the Northern businessmen who successfully coopted the concept of abolition democracy as a means to incorporate Black people into their vision of expanding capitalist accumulation and exploitation. Du Bois argued that, following the Civil War, the South "sought to reestablish slavery by force, because it had no comprehension of the means by which modern industry could secure the advantages of slave labor without its responsibilities."[46] On the other hand, "Northern industry seemed at last free and untrammeled. It began in 1876 an exploitation which was built on much the same sort of slavery which it helped to overthrow in 1863. It murdered democracy in the United States so completely that the world does not recognize its corpse."[47]

In this analysis of the political outlook of the Northern business elite after the Civil War, Du Bois argued that:

> Industrialists after the war expected the South to seize upon the opportunity to make increased profit by a more intelligent exploitation of labor than was possible under the slave system. They looked upon free Negro labor as a source of profit, and considered freedom, that is, a legal doing away with individual physical control, all that the Negroes or their friends could ask. They did not want for Negro labor any special protection or political power or capital, any more than they wanted this for Irish, German or Scandinavian labor in the North. They expected some popular education and a gradual granting of the right to vote, which would be straitly curtailed in its power for mischief by the far larger power of capital.[48]

[45] Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860-1880,* 3.

[46] Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860-1880,* 2.

[47] Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860-1880,* 2.

[48] Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860-1880,* 2.

In other words, Du Bois argued that following the Civil War, Northern industrialists looked on the abolition of slavery as a positive opportunity for business. They expected Southern businessmen to recognize the opportunity to have a more docile labor population that would continue to operate under much the same conditions as before, but without the added moral burden and violent enforcement of outright enslavement. When the South instead sought to deny Black people any minimal rights or freedoms that would have been needed to instill a willing labor force, the northern industrialists were incentivized to intervene. They were dealing with labor movements amongst white and immigrant laborers in the North and saw Black people as potentially more docile and affordable workers; in addition, they did not want the country's industry as a whole—which depended on cooperation between the North and South—to be threatened. According to Du Bois, this was what prompted the Northern businessmen to proactively intervene in racial politics in the South, primarily through vocational education initiatives.

Providing education appeared to give Black communities one of their most sought-after civil rights, while controlling the shape of education provided an ideal strategy to instill capitalist values amongst Black youth. The activities of groups like the G.E.B. in the post-emancipation South were what led Du Bois to argue that, following the war, it was the Northern industrialists who "murdered democracy" in the country. [49] By extending some rights to Black people, such as education, but in racially segregated schools where their children learned to work in the field or the kitchen, Du Bois argued that Northern businessmen did equal or more lasting harm to Black people and American democracy than the overtly racist Southerners.[50]

Du Bois' study of Reconstruction, which was published in 1935, is invaluable as he was both a prolific social scientist and was present to draw firsthand observations of how politics unfolded during this period. As the first Black person to earn a doctorate from Harvard and the father of modern Sociology, central to Du Bois' vision for a society that supported the wellbeing of African Americans was state provision of robust liberal arts education.[51] He famously butted heads with Booker T. Washington, the longtime president of Tuskegee University, who was arguably the preeminent Black leader of the time in working with Northern (and some Southern) businessmen to shape education for Black students.[52] Washington's vision for education for Black students centered on racially segregated schools providing vocational training; Du Bois derided Washington's agenda as promoting a "gospel of work and money" and "industrial slavery and civic death" that "accept[ed] the alleged inferiority of the Negro races."[53] Because Washington successfully aligned his vision with that of northern white power brokers, it was backed with the resources to have an outsized impact not only on the educational offerings of the day, but

[49] Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860-1880*.

[50] Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860-1880,* 2-3.

[51] Aldon Morris, *The Scholar Denied: W.E.B. Du Bois and the Birth of Modern Sociology* (University of California Press, 2015); W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (A. C. McClurg and Co., 1903).

[52] W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk,* Chapter Three.

[53] W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk,* Chapter Three.

throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.[54] Washington will be a recurring presence in this dissertation, with more context provided in the chapters to follow, as a constant advocate for the funding and support of Black schools, albeit a certain type of school.

While recognizing that Washington was a powerful leader, my archival research also suggests that Washington's ability to convince white philanthropists of his agenda was mixed. White funders such as the G.E.B. seemed to follow his guidance, or arguably coopt it, when it furthered their agenda, while at other times acting against his advice.[55] Washington was passionate about spreading educational access to Black youth throughout the South, for which he was extraordinarily successful at lobbying white funders. Central to Washington's ability to gain white support was his framework of vocational education and promoting prescribed socio-economic roles for Black young people. In turn, this hinged on a conservative, gendered, respectability politics; this included strict formal dress codes and conduct rules following the gender binary at Tuskegee.[56]

However, when white philanthropists' funding priorities shifted, placing specific schools in jeopardy, Washington was not always able to protect those schools despite his efforts. In my third chapter, I focus on Snow Hill, an Alabama school founded by James Edwards, a Tuskegee graduate and direct mentee of Washington. While the G.E.B. provided Snow Hill with financial support in their initial years of operation, by the 1910s-20s they no longer found it attractive to support Black-led community schools. This caused the Fund to turn down multiple aid requests from Principal Edwards, even when accompanied by direct correspondence from Washington, who went so far as to offer to personally oversee the restructuring of the school to meet the Fund's standards. Like Edwards, Washington's direct advocacy for the school was repeatedly disregarded by the Fund's Board, leaving Snow Hill in a precarious position.[57]

While it is easy to write off Washington as an ally of white supremacy, recent scholarship has complicated this perspective, pointing out that Washington's focus on agriculture and other vocational skills was intended to provide Black people with the practical skills they would need to be more self-sufficient within the limited parameters of the period and region.[58] His advocacy was undeniably central to the proliferation of Black public schools in communities that otherwise may not have had a school. In his recent book *Afterlives of the Plantation*, Jarvis McInnis argues that, while Washington's vision was "undeniably conservative," the legacy he created at Tuskegee and throughout the South was one of "modern Black subjectivity and self determination that inspired a host of freedom dreams throughout the Black world."[59]

---

[54] Watkins, *The White Architects of Black Education: Ideology and Power in America, 1865-1954*.

[55] General Education Board, "General Education Board Archive."

[56] Jarvis C. McInnis, *Afterlives of the Plantation: Plotting Agrarian Futures in the Global Black South* (Columbia University Press, 2025).

[57] General Education Board, "General Education Board," Rockefeller Archives Center, Accessed 2022, Rockefeller Archives Center, Snow Hill, Box 2, Folders 16-18.

[58] McInnis, *Afterlives of the Plantation: Plotting Agrarian Futures in the Global Black South*.

[59] McInnis, *Afterlives of the Plantation: Plotting Agrarian Futures in the Global Black South,* 2.

While acquiescing to the limitations of racist structures at the time, McInnis makes a compelling case for looking at Black agricultural schools like Tuskegee, and Washington's legacy in particular, as a critical locus in the development of Black Studies and Black freedom dreams more broadly:

> "Afterlives of the plantation in the Global Black South" is a spatial- temporal paradigm that captures how Black people across the Western Hemisphere grappled with plantation geographies, logics, and epistemologies in slavery's aftermath. A distinct component of what the literary historian and cultural theorist Saidiya Hartman has called the 'afterlife of slavery,' my framework refers specifically to how the geographic, ecological, political-economic, and cultural logics of 'plantation modernity' continued to shape Black life after emancipation…. My conception is more attuned to how Black people exploited the plantation's 'affordances' to create alternative futures, particularly through farming and agriculture, that could sustain Black life rather than perpetuate Black subjection.[60]

This is an important intervention, as it creates more of a regional focus on the slave-plantation economy throughout the U.S. South as well as the Caribbean, and importantly emphasizes that there was room for Black people to find agency within this constrictive system just as they did in the North. This perspective, which acknowledges Black resistance within constrictive realities, provides an important layer in considering my research, which broadly supports the conclusion that Washington's education model was successfully coopted into the Northern industrialists' vision of gendered, racial capitalism. This analysis echoes Perry's and other Marxist scholars' findings that the political visions of marginalized groups are in constant danger of being coopted to serve the political project of racial capitalism, as well as Du Bois' scathing critique of how the Northern industrialists successfully coopted the freedom dreams of Black southerners following Reconstruction.

While Du Bois' and Washington's perspectives on education were at odds in many ways, they both centered on visions for the socio-economic positions of Black men.[61] McInnis draws attention to the fact that promoting traditional patriarchal gender roles was a central cornerstone of Washington's strategy for gaining respectability and increased social status for Tuskegee graduates. As a counter to the slavery system's denial of traditional gender roles to Black people, "Tuskegee established a strict gendered code of conduct, dress, and labor to contest the racial-sexual abuses of the plantation past."[62]

While Black women were at this time already at the forefront of the on-the-ground work to educate their communities, their perspectives were largely ignored by the decision makers of the day. For instance, Black education leader Anna Julia Cooper, the fourth Black American woman to earn a PhD, argued as early as 1892 for Black girls' and women's education to be a priority

---

[60] McInnis, *Afterlives of the Plantation: Plotting Agrarian Futures in the Global Black South,* 4.

[61] W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*.

[62] McInnis, *Afterlives of the Plantation: Plotting Agrarian Futures in the Global Black South,* 85.

because "the position of woman in society determines the vital elements of its regeneration and progress."[63] As the reproducers of the race, she noted, women held a central role in determining the wellbeing of their communities at large. In *A Voice From the South*, she argued that "a race is but a total of families. The nation is the aggregate of its homes. As the whole is sum of all its parts, so the character of the parts will determine the characteristics of the whole."[64] Urging both Black communities and white philanthropists to include women and girls in their visions for social equity, she advocated: "'I am my Sister's keeper' should be the hearty response of every man and woman of the race," and that there should be an "organized effort for the protection and elevation of our girls such as the White Cross League in England."[65]

This astute analysis was seemingly ignored by the white philanthropists of the early twentieth century in shaping education for Black students and continues to be overlooked today. Yet Cooper captured a critical truth: to create equitable educational opportunities for Black youth, policies must attend to the needs of Black girls. Those most marginalized by existing systems are often also those in community and familial caregiving roles, meaning that supporting their wellbeing would have an outsized impact on the rest of their communities and also on broader society.[66]

Since the time that African people were first enslaved and forced to live in this country, there have always been myriad visions for what Du Bois termed abolition democracy, many of which centered the importance of education.[67] While Du Bois, Washington, and Cooper were among the newly emerging Black educational elite, this tradition of placing education at the center of a vision for true democracy is also visible in slave narratives, which comprise some of the few written records we have that were authored by formerly enslaved individuals. As detailed by Frederick Douglass and Harriet Jacobs, enslaved individuals recognized that if white slave owners and legislators were hellbent on their remaining illiterate, literacy must be key to gaining freedom.[68] As Douglass discovered as a child, when his owner was furious that he was receiving reading lessons, knowledge would "forever unfit him to be a slave."[69]

Despite this powerful history, access to power and resources has continuously remained in the hands of elite white men, who have proven extremely effective at consolidating their status. How

---

[63] Anna Julia Cooper, *A Voice From the South* (The Aldine Printing House, 1892), 22.

[64] Cooper, *A Voice From the South,* 26.

[65] Cooper, *A Voice From the South,* 27.

[66] Combahee River Collective, "A Black Feminist Statement," *Monthly Review*, January 1, 2019, 29–36, https://doi.org/10.14452/MR-070-08-2019-01_3.

[67] Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860-1880*.

[68] Frederick Douglass, *My Bondage, My Freedom* (Penguin, 1855), https://www.amazon.com/My-Bondage-Freedom-Penguin-Classics/dp/0140439188; Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (Thayer & Eldridge, 1861).

[69] Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (The Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society, 1845), Chapter Four.

might a vision for freedom have looked different if Black women were centrally involved in its creation?[70] What set of demands would this vision elicit from the state and private actors? The work of Black women of the time, such as Cooper and Jacobs, suggests that a holistic vision of bodily integrity[71] and communal wellbeing would be central. At the same time, it is also the case that respectability politics, which supported Black people adopting the norms of dominant white society in order to gain status, was prominent amongst Black women's leadership of the time, including Cooper.[72] Without overdetermining what these possibilities may have been, it is safe to say that more holistic visions of Black education, which center the needs of Black girls, have consistently been constrained by the dominating power of the intertwined projects of hetero-patriarchy, white supremacy, and racial capitalism.

Industrial Philanthropy and Conflicting Visions for Black Education in the South

Much of the history I discuss in this project reflects a tension between the vision of education for Black students advanced by the industrial philanthropists and the visions for Black education from members of Black communities. In this section, I detail some of that historical context that informs this project as a whole.

In the late nineteenth century, the industrial revolution brought unprecedented breakthroughs in technology which allowed a handful of white men to accumulate unprecedented fortunes.[73]At the same time, the country grappled with how to engage with the newly emancipated population. In the decade following Emancipation, the federal government ran the Freedman's Bureau, which oversaw rebuilding after the Civil War and incorporating Black people into American society. After a few years, political support for the Bureau ended and in 1877 the federal government abandoned most of its work providing Black people with the resources and institutions needed to participate in society as full citizens.[74]

This period of government abdication and accompanying violent re-entrenchment of white supremacy in the late nineteenth century marked the end of a cohesive national approach to providing education to Black people of all ages for the next several decades.[75] By the turn of the twentieth century, the first industrial philanthropies were formed. Their founders had recognized an opportunity to cultivate their continued supply of underpaid labor through expanding the raced

[70] Sarah Haley, "Abolition," in *Keywords for African American Studies* (NYU Press, 2021).

[71] Child Rights International Network defines bodily integrity as: "The principle of bodily integrity sums up the right of each human being, including children, to autonomy and self-determination over their own body. It considers an unconsented physical intrusion as a human rights violation." Child Rights International Network, "Bodily Integrity," https://archive.crin.org/en/home/what-we-do/policy/bodily-integrity.html.

[72] Cooper, *A Voice From the South*.

[73] Eric Williams, *Capitalism & Slavery* (University of North Carolina Press, 1944).

[74] Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860-1880*.

[75] W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk,* Chapter Two.

and gendered workforce upon which their fortunes depended.[76] It is critical to highlight that individuals from the private sector were able to enact such an outsized influence over education for Black students precisely because the government abdicated responsibility for providing this basic social good to Black citizens.

While foundations have become a solidified institutional presence in American society, the government has never done much to legally regulate their massive levels of political influence. As a result, foundations operate with little public scrutiny or legal controls. The federal government passed four major laws between 1913 and 1969 to govern the activities of foundations, with limited effect and little to no enforcement.[77] In exchange for tax-exempt status, foundations are required to submit annual tax filings and to spend at least 5% of the past year's assets, which can include administrative costs. Any investment profits earned by foundations are subject to a 1-2% excise tax. And, finally, foundations are prohibited from partisanship or engaging in self-dealing.[78] However, this does little to constrain the policymaking efforts of foundations that choose to engage in those activities.[79]

The emergence of foundations and their efforts to control the education of African Americans created a battle over who controls education for Black students that continues to drastically constrain the agency of Black educators, students, and communities. As James Anderson asserts in his extensive 1988 book *The Education of Blacks in the South*, education has always been a major priority for Black people in the U.S. and was a top priority for many Black communities post-emancipation.[80] During the period in which the Freedman's Bureau was in operation (around 1866-77), Black communities in the South were in some cases able to use property taxes to found and run public schools. Anderson importantly demonstrates that "the postwar campaign for free schooling was rooted firmly in the beliefs and behavior of former slaves. W.E.B. Du Bois was on the mark when he said: 'Public education for all at public expense was, in the South, a Negro idea.'"[81] Anderson additionally details the Reconstruction-era widespread proliferation of Black private schools, many of them religious, that were created by and for Black communities in this period, but not included in the official records of the Freedman's Bureau.[82] Like in so many cases, the historical archive does not fully reflect the contributions of Black people.[83]

---

[76] Watkins, *The White Architects of Black Education: Ideology and Power in America, 1865-1954*.

[77] Horsford et al., *The Politics of Education Policy in an Era of Inequality*; Tompkins-Stange, *Policy Patrons*.

[78] Horsford et al., *The Politics of Education Policy in an Era of Inequality*.

[79] Tompkins-Stange, *Policy Patrons*.

[80] Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935*.

[81] Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935,* 6.

[82] Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935*.

[83] Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*.

Closely related to what happened following the demise of the Freeman's Bureau, throughout the last one hundred years, at key moments when redressive movements and policies have gained more leadership and control for Black people, other people of color, and women in the education system, white supremacist institutions found a way to reassert control.[84] In *The White Architects of Black Education*, Watkins details the history of white men who were central to establishing the conditions for early education for Black students. He explains that "by World War I the industrial philanthropies had supplanted missionary societies as the leading influence in Black education…. Evidence supports the argument that corporate philanthropies did not simply provide dollars but indeed offered a political and ideological platform. Their program was one of classic colonialism adapted to the Southern United States. This adaption, accommodationism, would dominate education, the curriculum, and social policy for decades."[85] While figures like Washington and Du Bois are often portrayed as the leading voices in Black education in this period, Watkins shows that, in fact, most of the material power and influence over education for Black students was shaped by a handful of elite white men.

Inspired by the history of Black people educating themselves illicitly during slavery, and the continued constraints under which they sought to educate their communities post-Reconstruction, education scholar Jarvis Givens created the concept of "fugitive pedagogy." According to Givens, amidst the constraints of white supremacist violence that very much continued into the twentieth century, Black educators developed a working praxis of *fugitive pedagogy*: a "narrative plot that transcended the limited world in which Black folks found themselves. It became more than a teaching method—more than utilitarian skills to be learned. Instead teaching and learning themselves continued to be 'a means of escape."[86] Relatedly, sociologist Karida Brown's research on a Black community in Appalachia shares an illustrative account of how Black teachers and schools served as the material and ideological center of their communities. In this account Black schools provided children not just with education, but with a vision of the difference that education and educators could make in their communities.[87] The findings of my study highlight some of the conditions of racial domination and cooptation that Black communities experienced. My research is in conversation with that of scholars like Givens and Brown who detail how Black communities dealt with and resisted efforts to constrain their lives.

While this project is focused on K-12 education, the foundations I study were highly influenced by the earlier forms of higher education established by white male philanthropists. Black colleges trained soon-to-be teachers for Black elementary and high schools, where they would impart their educational philosophies to their students. As Watkins details, Samuel Chapman Armstrong, who founded Hampton Institute in Virginia in 1868, was one of the earliest and most influential white male education leaders to chart a direction for education for Black

[84] Janelle Scott, "Managers of Choice: Race, Gender, and the Philosophies of the New Urban School Leadership."

[85] Watkins, *The White Architects of Black Education: Ideology and Power in America, 1865-1954,* 20.

[86] Jarvis Givens, *Fugitive Pedagogy: Carter G. Woodson and the Art of Black Teaching* (Harvard University Press, 2021), 30.

[87] Karida L. Brown, *Gone Home: Race and Roots through Appalachia* (University of North Carolina Press, 2018).

students for students of all ages.[88] The Hampton model consisted of a hard-labor-focused education in which students engaged in manual labor in the morning and studied in the afternoon and evenings. It was directly inspired by Armstrong's upbringing—his parents were Christian missionaries and colonists in Hawaii.

Central to Hampton's model was gender specific vocational training, in which young men learned agricultural work and young women learned domestic work. Within this framework teaching Black people normative gender roles, which scholars such as Angela Davis point out had been atypical for the enslaved population,[89] was an important part of what Watkins terms the "ideological construction of colonial education for Black students."[90] Watkins argues that: "The Hampton model of education and societal development dramatically influenced one hundred years of Black schooling… it was about forging a social order rooted in apartheid, economic exploitation, oppression, and inequality."[91] As I further detail in the following chapters, Booker T. Washington was a graduate of Hampton, and a personal mentee of Armstrong. They were so close that Armstrong tapped Washington to be the first president of Tuskegee Institute when it was founded in 1881. Washington in turn was extremely influential in spreading this vocational education philosophy, rooted in Christian colonialism, amongst the Northern white philanthropists.[92] Watkins details that Armstrong secured the original funding and teachers for Hampton from the American Missionary society, cementing the school's roots in Christian values including hard work, thrift, subservience and acceptance of hierarchical paternalism.[93] As Watkins put it, "Hampton was neither a school nor a church nor a factory nor a prison nor a barracks, yet it was simultaneously all those things. Hampton was an ideological and practical training ground for the Negro in the new industrial order. Hampton education came to exemplify colonial education for Blacks both in America and in the rest of the world."[94]

The Rosenwald Fund and General Education Board

The Rosenwald Fund and the General Education Board were the most prolific and influential philanthropies in shaping education for Black students in the South in the early twentieth century. Founded in 1917, the Rosenwald Fund was responsible for providing the resources to build nearly 5,000 Black schools spread across the South. Rosenwald, who contributed over $4 million of his Sears fortune to the effort (nearly $105 million in 2026), was heavily influenced by Chapman's

[88] Watkins, *The White Architects of Black Education: Ideology and Power in America, 1865-1954,* Chapter 3.

[89] Angela Davis, *Women, Race, & Class* (Random House, 1981), https://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/books/37354/women-race-and-class-by-angela-y-davis/.

[90] Watkins, *The White Architects of Black Education: Ideology and Power in America, 1865-1954,* 1-2.

[91] Watkins, *The White Architects of Black Education: Ideology and Power in America, 1865-1954,* 43.

[92] Peter M. Ascoli, *Julius Rosenwald: The Man Who Built Sears, Roebuck and Advanced the Cause of Black Education in the American South* (Indiana University Press, 2006).

[93] Watkins, *The White Architects of Black Education: Ideology and Power in America, 1865-1954,* Chapter 3.

[94] Watkins, *The White Architects of Black Education: Ideology and Power in America, 1865-1954,* 44.

Hampton Model for education for Black students. Eventually becoming known as the Hampton-Tuskegee School, Hampton's ideas were taken up and spread exponentially by his former student and mentee, Booker T. Washington. As I detail in Chapter Two, Rosenwald's school building fund was developed as part of a close partnership with Washington and Tuskegee. Rosenwald's funding structure allowed the foundation to control the structure of Black schools, from their physical school plans to their vocational curricula, while requiring Black communities to do the majority of the labor and fundraising. Through its matching funds requirement, each individual Black town or rural community that applied for funding had to raise half of the funds for the construction of their school building, in addition to securing the land for the school site, before the Fund would release the other half. This funding model led Black communities to contribute $4.7 million (around $80 million in today's dollars) toward building their own schools from 1906 to 1960—about two-thirds of the total funds spent.[95] The extent to which Black communities found and contributed the financial resources to build their own schools—just a few years out of slavery—is widely underrecognized in accounts of foundations like the Rosenwald Fund.



Rosenwald on a visit to Tuskegee with a group of girls whose dresses spell his name, 1922[96]

The John D. Rockefeller-funded General Education Board was a precursor and, in many ways, served as a model for the vocational education program developed by Rosenwald. However, the scope of the GEB's work was much broader than the Rosenwald Fund, which focused almost solely on building K-12 schools for Black students in the South. In 1902, John Rockefeller Jr. led a group of his friends (elite white businessmen) to found the General Education Board, which

[95] Rooks, *Cutting School,* 64-65.

[96] Rosenwald Fund, "Julius Rosenwald Fund Collection," Students and Julius Rosenwald at Tuskegee, Fisk University Franklin Library Archive, 2026, https://rosenwald.fisk.edu/s/rosenwald-fund-collection/item/63345.

endeavored to lead the effort to educate Black people in the South.[97] The group agreed that it was of the utmost importance to educate this population, but that this education should specifically be "industrial" in nature—meaning that it would prepare Black students to be low-wage industrial and agricultural workers. These men had already begun to see the impacts of labor organizing in the North and sought not only to prop up the Southern agricultural economy, but also to entice Black workers into new industrial jobs without posing the same "problems" as organized white labor.[98] One member of the G.E.B., Walter Hines Page, editor of *The Atlantic*, argued that industrial education for Black people was "good business especially for the South, but good business for the entire country."[99]

In 1903, just one year after its founding, the G.E.B. was incorporated by Congress. In referencing the communities they hoped to shape, an excerpt of the group's mission statement states:

> In our dreams, we have limitless resources and the people yield themselves with perfect docility to our molding hands. The present education conventions fade from their minds, and unhampered by tradition, we work our own good will upon a grateful and responsive rural folk. We shall not try to make these people or any of their children into philosophers or men of learning, or men of science. We have not to raise up from among them authors, editors, poets or men of letters. We shall not search for embryo great artists, painters, musicians nor lawyers, doctors, preachers, politicians, statesmen, of whom we have an ample supply. . .. The task we set before ourselves is very simple as well as a very beautiful one, to *train these people as we find them to a perfectly ideal life just where they are*.[100] (emphasis added)

The government gave the Board sweeping powers similar to those of the Department of Education today, including the "construction" of new schools and "improvement" of existing ones. There was no built-in accountability mechanism either to elected officials or local communities.[101]

Like Rosenwald, the G.E.B. required Black communities to raise matching funds to build a local schoolhouse. This allowed the Board to assure white Southern leaders that their tax dollars would not go to education for Black students; meanwhile, Black people contributed to white education through their tax dollars, in addition to contributing whatever they could afford to build their own schools. This meant that not only were Black communities paying doubly for their own education, not to mention that of white Southerners, but their schools were also heavily restricted

---

[97] Rooks, *Cutting School,* 55-61.

[98] Rooks, *Cutting School,* 55-61.

[99] Rooks, *Cutting School,* 58.

[100] General Education Board, "General Education Board Archive," GEB 1902-1911, Box 16, Folders 150-160; General Education Board - Organization, Charter, By-Laws, 1902-1950; Office of the Messrs. Rockefeller records; Rockefeller Boards, Series O; General Education Board; Rockefeller Archive Center; https://dimes.rockarch.org/objects/BzmU7w5YkB7KMWqkBifx7W.

[101] Rooks, *Cutting School*.

by these philanthropies' parameters. Black communities were also required to cede the land for the schoolhouses to the state in perpetuity and to pay extra taxes going forward to ensure the continued functioning of their schools. The bulk of the funding for the Board came from Rockefeller himself, founding the group with an initial amount of $1 million, to which he added a staggering $42 million by 1907 (nearly$1.5 billion in 2026).[102]

Through the efforts of early white philanthropists like Rosenwald and Rockefeller, we see the seeds of an ongoing pattern of *public-private partnership* in which the U.S. government 1) abdicated responsibility for providing a key civic duty to Black communities; 2) quickly turned over leadership and resources to a small group of unelected wealthy white men; and 3) ignored and undermined the educational vision and leadership already existing in Black communities across the country.

While the ethos of vocational education and public-private partnerships championed by these philanthropists remains at the forefront of education policies geared toward Black youth, most of the schools themselves are long shuttered. Because all of these schools were racially segregated, when the federal government began to enforce school desegregation in the 1960s and 70s, local governments widely shuttered Black schools under the guise of racial integration. Black students were often required to travel further to formerly all-white public schools, losing access to the critical support that Black teachers and local schools had provided.[103] Meanwhile, in many school districts, white parents pulled their children out of integrated public schools, resulting in the continuation of de facto segregation for Black students without the continuity and benefits that their local schools had provided.[104]

In *Gone Home*, sociologist Karida Brown interviewed former students at a rural Black school that was closed as part of the first wave of desegregation in the 1960s. Decades later, former students recalled the school closure as traumatic, representing a loss of community and cultural identity. The interviewees most frequently cited the loss of the Black teachers as the greatest loss to themselves personally and to their community. Black teachers played a critical role in the community, not only as educators in school, but also as caretakers and esteemed community members. In a time when slavery was not far removed, in rural communities, Black teachers also often represented the only examples of college graduates and white-collar professionals that their students knew personally.[105]

---

[102] General Education Board, "General Education Board Archive."

[103] Vanessa Siddle Walker, *The Lost Education of Horace Tate: Uncovering the Hidden Heroes Who Fought for Justice in Schools* (The New Press, 2018).

[104] It is important to note that in the 1960s-1980s, there was also meaningful progress toward racial integration in Southern schools that included white families integrating; this does not take away from the massive wave of Black school closures and white flight that took place in this period. Source: Danielle Cohen Jarvie and Gary Orfield, *Black Segregation Matters: School Resegregation and Black Educational Opportunity* (The Civil Rights Project, 2020), https://civilrightsproject.ucla.edu/reports/black-segregation-matters-school-resegregation-and-black-educational-opportunity/.

[105] Brown, *Gone Home: Race and Roots through Appalachia,* Chapters 5-6.

"For [these students], it was not integration but the fact that they were being called on to move their Black bodies from a place where they had constructed a social world to one where they had no familiarity, advocacy, or say in shaping the environment."[106] While supporting racial integration more broadly, these alumni still found it painful to recall their experiences of how it happened. Only Black schools were closed, and most Black teachers were fired, reinscribing the notion that Black people and spaces were inferior while removing the institutional support that the schools had provided to rural communities.

The story that Brown tells is revealing of the broader impact that the widespread closure of Black public schools had on their pupils and broader communities. The life and death of these philanthropy-funded schools reveals that the state and wealthy philanthropists' ultimate agenda was not about creating sustainable, equitable education access. Instead, the ultimate purpose was to extend the ethos and power of racial capitalism and white supremacy further into Black communities—inextricably linking Black citizenship with prescribed socio-economic roles.

Theoretical Epistemology & Key Terms

Central theoretical fields for my epistemology are the intersecting lineages of Intersectionality, Black Feminism, Black Studies, Critical Race Theory, and Racial Capitalism. These bodies of work have been instructive in my conceptualization of race and gender and their roles in society. In this section, I detail the key epistemologies and theoretical frameworks that guide my research.

My analysis is also influenced by the work of education scholars who turn a critical eye on the oft-elided role of race in education philanthropy, such as Janelle Scott, Noliwe Rooks, and William Henry Watkins.[107] These scholars advance a power-focused analysis of philanthropic education policymaking, which looks head-on at the tensions elicited by unelected capitalists determining—and profiting directly from—controlling the educational choices available to Black students.

I conceive of the norms, rules, and narratives surrounding race and gender in our society as a *hegemonic ideology*. An ideology is an organized set of ideas, and according to Gramsci, the hegemonic (dominant) ideology can become so ingrained in society as to appear like "common sense."[108] Since the founding of this country, the hegemonic ideology has dictated that those at the top of the hierarchy (straight white men) are there due to their own merit, and those at the bottom (Black and indigenous people) are there due to their personal and cultural deficits. The work of Black feminist sociologist Patricia Hill Collins is helpful in distilling both Black feminist research praxis as well as the role of identity construction in our society. As Hill Collins argues,

[106] Brown, *Gone Home: Race and Roots through Appalachia,* 147.

[107] Janelle Scott, "Managers of Choice: Race, Gender, and the Philosophies of the New Urban School Leadership"; Scott, "The Politics of Venture Philanthropy in Charter School Policy and Advocacy"; Rooks, *Cutting School*; Watkins, *The White Architects of Black Education: Ideology and Power in America, 1865-1954*.

[108] Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*.

"intersecting oppressions of race, class, gender, and sexuality could not continue without powerful ideological justifications for their existence."[109]

Central to the construction of the socio-economic hierarchy has been the promotion of binary thinking by those in power. Binary thinking defines difference in "oppositional terms," such that "one part is not simply different from its counterpart; it is inherently opposed to its 'other.'"[110] Binary ideology suggests that groups such as men and women, Black and white, straight and gay, are completely opposite with inherent diametric differences. This conservative ideology elides the much more diverse, heterogeneous biological, cultural, and social realities of human existence. Binary ideology's central purpose is to create a hierarchy in which one side of the binary is the subject and the other is the object—justifying and naturalizing the domination and violence of our society.

Throughout colonial history, those in power have used the government and the market to support the ideology of hetero-patriarchy, in which the nuclear heterosexual family is humanized, and other familial/romantic arrangements are dehumanized. Collins argues that "the definitions advanced by elite groups in the United States uniformly work to the detriment of African-American women…. If one assumes that real men work and real women take care of families, then African-Americans suffer from deficient ideas concerning gender."[111] Othering Black people through racialized gender stereotypes functions to legitimize the social order by clarifying the boundaries of society and moralizing the social hierarchy. In addition to castigating Black mothers as the cause of Black suffering, racialized gender tropes function to erase Black LGBTQ individuals and exclude them from social benefits that are tied to the nuclear family structure.[112] And, when a group like Black women are dehumanized, this creates a clear boundary for how white women must behave to stay in line and maintain their status as human subjects who deserve the protections of society. In conjunction with naturalizing white supremacy and patriarchy, the goal of these anti-Black narratives is to discourage resistance to the status quo and discourage inter-group solidarity. Together, I refer to this ideology as patriarchal whiteness.

When an ideology like patriarchal whiteness becomes so ingrained as to appear as a "common sense" baseline, its hallmarks can be difficult to pinpoint through traditional social science metrics, which are inherently steeped in racism and patriarchy. This is why, as sociologist Victor Ray argues, "organizational theorists should abandon the notion that organizational formations, hierarchies, and processes are race-neutral. In place of the question 'Does discrimination exist?'… we should begin with the assumption that discrimination, racial sorting, and an unequal distribution of resources are not anomalous but rather foundational organizational norms."[113] As I will demonstrate, this argument is useful in the analysis of philanthropy, where

[109] Collins, *Black Feminist Thought,* Chapter Four.

[110] Collins, *Black Feminist Thought,* Chapter Four.

[111] Collins, *Black Feminist Thought,* Chapter Three.

[112] Marlon M. Bailey, *Butch Queens Up In Pumps: Gender, Performance, and Ballroom Culture in Detroit*, Triangulations : Lesbian/Gay/Queer Theater/Drama/Performance (University of Michigan Press, 2013).

[113] Victor Ray, "A Theory of Racialized Organizations," *American Sociological Review* 84, no. 1 (2019): 28.

patriarchal whiteness continues to be the unspoken norm. Additionally, viewing race and gender as socially constructed ideologies means looking beyond a politics of representation toward how both whiteness and patriarchy operate as invisibilized, default norms that can be advanced by individuals holding any personal identity—not solely white men.[114] In other words, a philanthropic foundation or political institution can advance patriarchal whiteness as an ideology, regardless of the racial composition of individuals in leadership (which is not to say that organizational diversity doesn't matter).

Critical Race Theory & Intersectionality

My theoretical framework is shaped by the work of Critical Race Theorists, legal scholars who treat race as a social construct made real through policies, resource allocation, and narratives. In particular, Kimberlé Crenshaw's work, including *Demarginalizing the Intersections of Race and Sex*, and Cheryl Harris' *Whiteness as Property* provide helpful frameworks for my study.[115] These scholars provide a theoretical lexicon to critically examine the ways in which institutions purportedly aimed at doing good can in fact reify the deeply unequal social hierarchy by connecting their distribution of resources to narratives rooted in violent domination. Because their analysis is rooted in examining the law, their theoretical frameworks are helpful for examining other areas of policy, such as education. Working under the mentorship of Kimberlé Crenshaw at her organization, the African American Policy Forum, the stakes and applications of intersectionality as a methodological tool were vividly imprinted in my mind and played an instrumental role in my decision to pursue graduate-level research.

There are a number of useful ways in which Critical Race Theorists have been able to identify the hallmarks of white supremacy, patriarchy, and anti-Blackness and expose them to the tools of scholarly analysis. I argue that race and gender are part of one holistic system of social hierarchy underpinning capitalism rather than separate forms of discrimination to be studied in silos (as they often are). Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality makes visible the overlaps and linkages of race, gender, and other dimensions of the American social hierarchy. An intersectional epistemology necessitates a fundamental concern with how power permeates policymaking and the relationships between power structures and lived realities.[116]

While it is now used to refer to a wide range of Black feminist work, in political analysis I find it useful to look to the origins of the specific term "intersectionality" in Kimberlé Crenshaw's pathbreaking 1989 article, *Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex*.[117] In this text,

---

[114] Ray, "A Theory of Racialized Organizations."

[115] Ray, "A Theory of Racialized Organizations"; Cheryl I. Harris, "Whiteness as Property," *Harvard Law Review* 106, no. 8 (1993): 1707–91, JSTOR, https://doi.org/10.2307/1341787; Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics," *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, 1989, 139–68.

[116] Vivian May, *Pursuing Intersectionality, Unsettling Dominant Imaginaries* (Routledge, 2015).

[117] Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics."

Crenshaw critically examines the 1976 legal case *Degraffenreid v. General Motors*, in which the court rejected Black women employees' discrimination claim because it could not be clearly delineated into a solely race- or sex-based category.[118] In other words, because Black women couldn't show that either Black men or white women experienced the same form of workplace discrimination that they did, their discrimination claim was not included in the U.S. legal system's classifications of discrimination. Crenshaw argued that "with Black women as the starting point, it becomes more apparent how dominant conceptions of discrimination condition us to think about disadvantage as occurring along a single categorical axis."[119] Using intersectionality as an epistemology helps one see how the tools used to combat inequality can in fact reify and replicate the social hierarchy.[120] The root of the word "philanthropy" translates to "love for mankind;"[121] as philanthropy presents itself as a resource promoting social good, which faces little outside accountability, it is critical to bring an intersectional analysis to bear that questions whether, and how, power structures are being reified or altered by its policy interventions.

So, how can we conceive, more specifically, how whiteness and patriarchy operate in American society? In the context of analyzing law and policy, Cheryl Harris' *Whiteness as Property* is also deeply instructive. "Whiteness and property share a common premise—a conceptual nucleus—of a right to exclude," Harris argues.[122] Harris shows how throughout U.S. history, whiteness has held real material value, functioning as a form of property. Her analysis focuses on the legal system's production of whiteness as a form of property holding material value; but this concept is also illustrative in the analysis of whiteness in philanthropic policymaking. I find the following two sections of the text particularly relevant:

> The law holds to the basic premise that *definition from above can be fair to those below*, that beneficiaries of racially conferred privilege have the right to establish norms for those who have historically been oppressed pursuant to those norms, and that race is not historically contingent. Although the substance of race definitions has changed, *what persists is the expectation of white-controlled institutions in the continued right to determine meaning—the reified privilege of power—that reconstitutes the property interest in whiteness in contemporary form.*[123]
> (Emphasis added.)

---

[118] Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics."

[119] Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics," 140.

[120] Catharine A. MacKinnon, "Intersectionality as Method: A Note," *Signs*, no. 4 (2013): 1019, https://doi.org/10.1086/669570.

[121] Merriam-Webster, "Definition of PHILANTHROPY," Dictionary, Merriam Webster, April 2021, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/philanthropy.

[122] Harris, "Whiteness as Property," 1714.

[123] Harris, "Whiteness as Property," 1762.

> When handling the complex issue of group identity, we should look to the "purposes and effects, consequences and functions." The questions pertaining to the definition of race then are not principally biologic or genetic, but social and political: what must be addressed is *who is defining, how is the definition constructed, and why is the definition being propounded*. Because definition is so often a central part of domination, critical thinking about these issues must precede and adjoin any definition.[124]
> (Emphasis added.)

As Harris suggests here, "definition from above" is one of the central ways that whiteness functions as property, and property has always been central to building wealth and safety in American society.

It is also important to note that the construction of whiteness as property has always hinged on the regulation of gender. During the period of Europe's colonization of Africa, Asia, and the Americas, European legal systems formalized the Enlightenment philosophy's construction of white men as full persons who had the right to own property; white women as partial persons who were dependent on their formal relation to a white man; and everyone else as nonpersons who could be treated as property and had no rights.[125] This ideological construction, later backed by racist pseudo-science, provided the ideological framework to legally regulate the Triangle Trade, in which Europeans enslaved African people, transported them to labor for agricultural goods in the Americas, and used the goods and their sales to fuel the wealth and technological development of Europe (particularly England).[126] The system continued to develop along race and gender lines in the colonies, where those in power developed laws to ensure that the children of enslaved Black people would inherit their mother's status, rather than patrilineal inheritance, which was the European norm of the time.

Harris' assertion that "the expectation of white-controlled institutions in the continued right to determine meaning" is central to the maintenance of "the property interest in whiteness in contemporary form" calls for a critical interrogation of the ways in which philanthropies, funded by elite businessmen who benefit from the status quo, have been granted wide-sweeping power to shape Black lives and Black futures. Political Science scholar Megan Ming Francis compellingly demonstrates that, in the early twentieth century, "funders engaged in a process of movement capture whereby they used their financial leverage to redirect the NAACP's [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People] agenda away from the issue of racial violence to a focus on education at a critical juncture in the civil rights movement."[127] In other words, in the early 1900s, the NAACP was interested in focusing its political work on fighting against lynching and white terrorism against Black citizens; however, the organization's funders successfully pressured

[124] Harris, "Whiteness as Property," 1763.

[125] Perry, *Vexy Thing: On Gender and Liberation*.

[126] Williams, *Capitalism & Slavery*.

[127] Megan Ming Francis, "The Price of Civil Rights: Black Lives, White Funding, and Movement Capture," *Law & Society Review* 53, no. 1 (2019): 275–309, https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1111/lasr.12384, 275.

them to make education their primary focus instead. Funders viewed expanding education for Black students as a less radical agenda than combating lynching and racial terror.[128] Her research raises important questions about the power of foundations in setting priorities for Black communities in ways that fundamentally shape their lives, labor, and the future conditions their descendants will face. As Harris argues, "what must be addressed is who is defining, how is the definition constructed, and why is the definition being propounded," because "definition is so often a central part of domination."

Racial Capitalism

As follows from my discussion of whiteness as property, racial capitalism is another epistemological lens central to my research. This framework is of particular importance in studying philanthropies that are funded by the country's most successful capitalists. To briefly summarize its tenets, racial capitalism posits that the modern race and gender hierarchy and the development of modern capitalism were part of the same historical processes—that it is impossible to conceive of race in the U.S. without capitalism, and vice versa.[129] Both modern capitalism and the race and gender hierarchy were created through Britain's colonization of Africa and creation of the Triangle Trade, through which Britain, and slightly later the U.S., was able to industrialize, as well as develop the legal system to justify classifying some groups of people as fully human, and others as property.[130]

In order to analyze the specific role played by philanthropies in shaping race and gender for broader American society, I work with the framework laid out by Victor Ray, who defines racialized organizations as "meso-level social structures that limit the personal agency and collective efficacy of subordinate racial groups while magnifying the agency of the dominant racial group."[131] Ray compellingly establishes four central reasons why it is of critical importance to understand organizations as racialized. These are: "(1) racialized organizations enhance or diminish the agency of racial groups; (2) racialized organizations legitimate the unequal distribution of resources; (3) Whiteness is a credential; and (4) the decoupling of formal rules from organizational practice is often racialized."[132] Ray frames racialized organizations as a key factor at the meso-level (meaning the middle level between micro and macro) that continues to attach resources and power to processes of racialization. His framework fills a gap in much literature on race, which either focuses on racism at the institutional level of the state or at the interpersonal level. His argument that "incorporating organizations into a structural theory of racial inequality can help us better understand stability, change, and the institutionalization of racial inequality" is

[128] Ming Francis, "The Price of Civil Rights."

[129] Williams, *Capitalism & Slavery*; Cedric Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (University of North Carolina Press, 2000).

[130] For instance, the "Three-Fifths" clause in the U.S. Constitution counted enslaved Black people as 3/5 of a person in determining states' populations.

[131] Ray, "A Theory of Racialized Organizations," 36.

[132] Ray, "A Theory of Racialized Organizations," 26.

highly relevant to looking at philanthropies, organizations which exercise immense power in each of the four areas Ray outlines, not only within their organizations, but within the vast network of other organizations they exert influence over through their grantmaking.[133]

Ray conceives of race as a cultural schema (similar to the "common sense" ideology mentioned earlier) that is made into a "durable structure" when it is connected to resources. In other words, organizations play a central role in making race (as well as gender, which Ray doesn't focus on) "real" through leveraging resources that reify racist and patriarchal ideology.[134] Ray's emphasis on resources is helpful, as it is hard to think of a type of organization with more resources at its disposal than philanthropies. Although Ray's metrics only discuss race, I adapt them to look at patriarchy as well, as follows: *1) Agency:* Does the organization constrain the agency of Black people, women, and LGBTQ people? *2) Resources:* Does the organization legitimate the unequal distribution of resources toward or in service of heterosexual, white men and away from other groups? *3) Whiteness as a Credential:* Does the organization use whiteness and cis male gender and/or values as a stand-in for other credentials, such as expertise in a field? And *4) Decoupling of formal rules from organizational practice:* Do these organizations profess commitments to or policies on diversity, equity, and inclusion that are not reflected in organizational structures and practices? Together, these questions help determine whether a foundation functions to reproduce and extend patriarchal racial capitalism.

Black Studies and Black Feminism

The fields of Black Studies and Black Feminism point to the importance of looking to the histories and narratives erased by dominant ideology in order to more fully understand how our society operates and why. In a foundational text in Black Studies, *Silencing the Past*, Haitian anthropologist Michel-Rolph Trouillot argues that: "History is the fruit of power, but power itself is never so transparent that its analysis becomes superfluous. The ultimate mark of power may be its invisibility; the ultimate challenge, the exposition of its roots."[135] As Trouillot and other Black Studies scholars demonstrate, the historical record does not simply transmit objective facts but rather reflects the priorities of those with power to shape the historical narrative.[136]

Relatedly, Black feminists have consistently used an ethic of care to critically examine and uncover the experiences of Black women throughout U.S. history, as well as the mechanisms through which their lives have been violently regulated.[137] For instance, in *No Mercy Here*, Black feminist scholar Sarah Haley looks at the history of Black women in convict labor camps in

[133] Ray, "A Theory of Racialized Organizations," 26.

[134] Ray, "A Theory of Racialized Organizations."

[135] Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History,* Preface.

[136] Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth Century America*.

[137] Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (Routledge, 2000).

Georgia during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, crafting a compelling analysis of how modernity was shaped by strict race and gender norms and the captured labor of Black women. The historical records that Haley draws upon in the book—largely media coverage and legal documents from Black women's trials—portrayed Black women in dehumanizing and discriminatory ways. Yet Haley was able to use a Black feminist theoretical framework to create scholarship that is both compassionate and methodologically strong from these deeply imperfect historical records.

As Haley argues, "Jim Crow modernity premised upon Black subordination in the service of southern capitalist development required definitive ideas about gender difference. Whiteness was constituted through gender normativity and therefore Black antinormativity had to be continually reasserted for the maintenance of white supremacy."[138] Rooting my doctoral education in this type of scholarship deeply influenced my interest in developing a historical dissertation project. Black Studies and Black feminism provide a lens to read the historical archive, in my case, namely, the records of powerful foundations, in a way that considers how power and violence shaped the preserved narrative and the stories that are distorted or excluded. This training convinced me that looking to the history of philanthropic education policymaking is critical to understanding the context in which it operates today. While the specific policies championed by the most powerful philanthropies look much different than they did one hundred years ago, fundamental through-lines remain.[139]

Public-Private Partnerships

Public-private partnerships are a key focus of my research. They have their roots in European colonialism, and the implementation of these partnerships has been a key mechanism through which the state has transferred power, legitimacy, and resources to private sector individuals and groups.[140] In *Vexy Thing*, Imani Perry demonstrates the formative, ontological role that public-private partnerships played in the development of racial capitalism, wherein European governments created the laws and systems to empower private businessmen to own other human beings. As she puts it, "public-private partnerships were constitutive to the creation of nonpersonhood from the beginning of empire and conquest."[141] I find Perry's conceptualization of public-private partnerships as the basis for modern capitalism (in contrast to the way it's often currently framed as a recent byproduct of neoliberalism)[142] to be extremely important in conceptualizing the nature of the modern U.S. state and its relationship with private industry.

[138] Haley, *No Mercy Here: Gender, Punishment, and the Making of Jim Crow Modernity,* 67.

[139] Scott, "The Politics of Venture Philanthropy in Charter School Policy and Advocacy."

[140] Perry, *Vexy Thing: On Gender and Liberation*.

[141] Perry, *Vexy Thing: On Gender and Liberation,* 22-23.

[142] David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford University Press, 2005).

Through a racial capitalism lens, it is impossible to separate the continued centrality of public-private partnerships in the governing of Black people from this originating system—"one that made a human, who theoretically could be a citizen, legally a possession by means of private contracts, with the permission and protection of the state, and neither legal person nor citizen."[143] In other words, the public-private partnership provided the specific mechanism through which some private individuals were granted the power to fundamentally and violently shape the lives of others. As Perry also points out, gender regulation was central to these policies, in that it constructed white men as full persons with the ability to own property, white women as partial persons contingent on their legal relationships with white men (marriage), and Black people as sub-human property that could be legally owned and traded as capital. The continuation of chattel slavery inherently relied on the continued supply of enslaved individuals, which required the regulation and control of enslaved women's reproduction.

After emancipation and the end of formal chattel slavery, public-private partnerships continued to play a central role in the maintenance and transformation of the race and gender hierarchy. From the federal government's seminal partnership with the General Education Board in 1903 to the more recent history of corporate-run public charter schools, public-private partnerships have been central to giving power to private entities with capitalist roots in shaping education for Black students.

Research Methods

The broader thematic questions that motivate my research are: How are whiteness and patriarchy reproduced in U.S. society over time? What are the central forces that have undermined the possibility of a true democracy in this country? What fundamental lessons do our public schools teach children about their place and role in society, and why? What are the mechanisms and purposes through which race and gender are made "real" through resource allocation?

In order to explore these large and enduring themes, my study considers two central research questions: (1) How did powerful northern philanthropists of the early twentieth century conceive of racialized gender roles, and how did that show up in their Black K-12 public school initiatives? And (2) What are the connections between the gendered norms promoted in these philanthropic Black education initiatives and their funders' capitalist visions for the economy? I utilize interdisciplinary methods to conduct a historical study aimed at answering these questions. My primary methods are archival research and analysis. My sources include the official archives of the Rockefeller Foundation and Rosenwald Fund and historical newspaper coverage; in addition, I conducted several oral history interviews with former students at a school funded by these philanthropies to help paint a more holistic picture than the archives' narrative alone, which reflects only the views of those holding power. Along with the meeting notes, correspondence, reports, and newspaper coverage of the G.E.B. and Rosenwald Funds, I analyze archival photos that include funders' visits to the schools, school building plans, and photos of Black school students and teachers. This fundamentally interdisciplinary approach is rooted in the Black Studies tradition of asking which research methods are best suited to my research questions, rather than

[143] Perry, *Vexy Thing: On Gender and Liberation,* Chapter One.

starting with a set menu of methods as is often done in more traditional social science disciplines.[144]

I spent two weeks conducting research at the Rosenwald Archives at the University of Chicago and two more weeks at the General Education Board Archives at the Rockefeller Archives Center. I have additionally engaged with digitized records that I collected on these visits as well as those digitized by the archives. In my engagement and subsequent analysis of these archives, I was mindful of how power haunts what has been preserved in the archive.[145] Given that I am focused on the activities and ideologies of powerful philanthropies, I understand that their archived materials revealed the narratives they wished to present to the world. At the same time, I attempted to read between the lines and around the margins of the archive, in order to engage more deeply with the experiences of the students, educators and communities of these schools.[146] Key archival sources for my study were foundation meeting notes, correspondence, reports, mission statements, philanthropists' biographies, training booklets, financial records, school guidelines and curricula, photos, and drawings of the designs of the physical schools themselves. Key items to help me fill in the gaps in the archive were Black newspaper coverage, historical interviews, personal papers of Black actors, and cultural productions associated with the initiatives and schools. I also conducted a site visit to one school, Snow Hill, in rural Alabama, which helped provide more context for my third chapter as well as more broadly gave context to the perspectives and meanings that a local Black community attached to their school and its legacy.

Historical Context: Public Education Before the Northern Philanthropic Giants

Throughout this dissertation's chapters, some background information on the history of U.S. public education and the role of race is relevant. In this section, I give some of that background as context for the analysis in the chapters to follow.

Northern states began to develop taxpayer-funded public education as early as the 1600s, with the first American public school—the all-boys Boston Latin School—founded by a Puritan colonist in 1635.[147] Northern states continued to develop their own public schools in a piecemeal fashion until the federal government began to organize public education in the early nineteenth century. In the 1830s, Massachusetts educator Horace Mann's advocacy for publicly funded "common schools" that would educate youth from all social classes in the basics of reading, writing, and arithmetic (known as the Three Rs) began to take hold, leading in particular to greater public school concentration in the Northeast and Northern cities. Schools became sites where many

[144] Morris, *The Scholar Denied: W.E.B. Du Bois and the Birth of Modern Sociology*; W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2014).

[145] Ula Taylor, "Women in the Documents: Thoughts on Uncovering the Personal, Political, and Professional," *Journal of Women's History* 20, no. 1 (2008): 187–96, https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1353/jowh.2008.0010; Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts."

[146] Taylor, "Women in the Documents: Thoughts on Uncovering the Personal, Political, and Professional."

[147] Mary Crooks, "First Public School in America," *National Geographic*, October 2023, https://education.nationalgeographic.org/resource/first-public-school-america.

immigrant children learned English, as well as the common beliefs and values of society at the time (i.e., assimilation). The early twentieth century was a period in which it became beneficial for those in power to consolidate the cultural meaning of whiteness and include more immigrant groups within the racial group. This was how immigrant groups including Jewish, Irish, and Italian came to be largely accepted as white in American society.[148] One of the central spaces in which this consolidation and homogenization of whiteness was enforced was in the schoolhouse.

While Northern states were certainly far ahead of the South in offering free education to all children, there were varying degrees of inclusion of both girls of all races and Black students in these schools well into the twentieth century.[149] Yet the region far outpaced the South, which did not begin to develop public K-12 education systems until Reconstruction in the late nineteenth century. During the period when the government actively funded Reconstruction, around 1868-77, government funds were used to fund school construction and operation for Black *and* white students across the South. After this brief period, whites in the South successfully regained control of Congress and enacted a series of anti-Black apartheid policies, commonly known as Jim Crow laws, of which education was a primary focus.

At the state and local levels, racist Southern lawmakers passed bills that outlawed racially integrated schools and mandated that white tax dollars would only go toward white schools, while Black parents had their tax dollars funneled toward white schools and routinely had to pay a second set of fees to send their own children to school. Most Southern states at the beginning of the twentieth century gave very little if any funding to Black schools and often shortened the Black school term to as little as three months, even as nine-month school terms were becoming the norm for white students.[150] Many Black communities lacked schools altogether decades after official Emancipation. There was a pressing educational crisis at hand.

For many reasons that stemmed from the recent history of chattel slavery and the continuation of an apartheid system in the U.S., it was nearly impossible for Black communities to found and sustain local schools without any white dollars. At the turn of the twentieth century, Black communities lacked access to well-paying jobs, had already lost the opportunity to build generational wealth, and were largely denied voting rights. Black people who did manage to acquire the financial means to found schools were usually met with extreme violence from local white communities, including lynchings, burning school buildings and educational materials, and physically attacking local teachers and staff.[151] As a result of these conditions, while there were myriad visions for what education should look like from *within* Black communities, white dollars

[148] David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class*, Haymarket Series (Verso, 2007), Comparative Ethnic Studies HD4903.5.U6 R64 2007.

[149] Nancy Kober and Diane Stark Rentner, *History and Evolution of Public Education in the US* (George Washington University, 2020), https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED606970.pdf.

[150] Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935*.

[151] Rooks, *Cutting School*.

from the North had the power to determine which of these visions would have the resources to become a reality.[152]

It is also critical to note that while legal education for Black people was relatively new, the U.S already had a long and brutal history of using education to socially control a racially othered population and justify extreme violence, genocide, and poverty.[153] Beginning in 1819 and continuing through the 1960s, the government implemented a program of kidnapping Native children from their homes and forcing them into westernizing boarding schools far removed from their local communities. The purpose of these schools was explicitly to "Kill the Indian, Save the Man," and they required Native children to adopt European appearances, speak English, and convert to Christianity.[154] Educators in these schools routinely issued harsh physical punishments if students were caught speaking their native languages or engaging in their traditional cultural practices.[155] Many of these schools were run as a public-private partnership, in which the federal government provided funding, as well as the manpower to physically kidnap Native children, while many of the schools themselves were run by Christian sects. These Christian-nationalist groups, empowered by the state, routinely engaged in torture, sexual violence, and the murder of Native children, evidenced by the existence of mass graves that continue to be uncovered at many of these schools.[156] By 1926, over 80% of Native school-age children were placed in these militaristic boarding schools.

Children at native boarding schools were specifically forced to learn skills for domestic or manual labor, often spending half the school day doing hard labor.[157] Like corporate philanthropies, religious institutions were and continue to be exempt from taxation and subject to little or no government-mandated accountability mechanisms for doing "good" in society. This system, in which the U.S. government partnered with private, white groups to fund racially

[152] For more on this, see: Watkins, *The White Architects of Black Education: Ideology and Power in America, 1865-1954*.

[153] Ewing, *Original Sins: The (Mis)Education of Black and Native Children and the Construction of American Racism*.

[154] The National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition, *US Indian Boarding School History* (The National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition, 2025), https://boardingschoolhealing.org/education/us-indian-boarding-school-history/.

[155] In general, corporal punishment was routine in schools in Europe and the U.S. until gradually declining in popularity starting in the early nineteenth century. While once commonplace for all students including white students, it was applied disproportionately and continued to be more prevalent for Black and native students through the twentieth century. Sources: Livia Gershon, "When Teachers Stopped Beating Kids," *JSTOR Daily*, 2019, https://daily.jstor.org/when-teachers-stopped-beating-kids/; Ewing, *Original Sins: The (Mis)Education of Black and Native Children and the Construction of American Racism*.

[156] Olivia B. Waxman, "The History of Native American Boarding Schools Is Even More Complicated than a New Report Reveals," *Time Magazine* (New York), May 17, 2022, https://time.com/6177069/american-indian-boarding-schools-history/.

[157] The National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition, *US Indian Boarding School History*.

segregated education designed to support American capitalism, set a precedent for the existence of groups like the G.E.B.

The education for Black youth that the G.E.B. heralded in the early twentieth century was also racially segregated, gendered, and rooted in preparing a docile workforce for menial labor. As Rooks argues, "this period birthed both apartheid schools and apartheid education and began a pattern whereby groups that were not themselves poor or of color proposed educational curricula and forms offered only to Blacks and the poor; they were seldom seen in the schools frequented by children who were of means."[158] Given this history, it is arguably unsurprising that the education system spearheaded by these business magnates did not lead to a public education system with equitable outcomes. By the 1940s, across the southern states of Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, South Carolina, and Mississippi—which were home to a total of 4.7 million Black people—still less than half of this population had five years or more of formal education.[159]

Dissertation Overview

My dissertation consists of this introduction, three chapters, and a conclusion. In this section, I provide an overview of the focus and key findings of the sections to follow.

Chapter One, *A "Gospel of Work & Money": The General Education Board's Formative Role in Shaping Black Public Education,* focuses on the activities of the General Education Board (G.E.B.). The chapter discusses the founding of the G.E.B., created in 1902 after John Rockefeller Jr. and a group of his peers took a train trip through the South to view the conditions of Black education in the region. My primary source for this chapter is the General Education Board Archive, housed at the Rockefeller Archive Center.[160] This archive allowed me to analyze the broader goals and activities of the Fund, along with developing case studies of their work with individual schools and communities. Another primary source is newspaper coverage from the period, which provides additional context on how Black and white audiences perceived the Fund's activities. Alongside this, I analyze secondary literature from the fields highlighted in my Theoretical Framework (above) to provide additional historical context, as well as theoretical analysis on the Fund's broader activities.

I explore the Fund's initial structure and public-private partnership, which gave the foundation sweeping powers similar to today's Department of Education, with little to no federal accountability. I argue that the result of the G.E.B. and peer philanthropies' education policies was to ensure that the U.S. public education system for the age of modernity would be strongly rooted in the core norms of race, class, and gender hierarchy on which the country had been founded. The vocational education model which they mandated ensured that these race and gender norms would be adapted and entrenched in the twentieth century and beyond, through requiring Black students to be prepared to enter the economy as low-wage service, industrial, and agricultural workers.

[158] Rooks, *Cutting School,* Chapter Two.

[159] Rooks, *Cutting School,* Chapter Two.

[160] General Education Board, "General Education Board Archive."

Filling in gaps in much scholarship on this period, I utilize an intersectional epistemology to analyze the Fund's mandates and praxes, highlighting how its programs were rooted in the gender binary and structuring the modern economy hierarchically according to race and gender.

In order to uncover these often unspoken or indirectly implied norms, I focused my research and intersectional analysis on 1) the general funding structure and priorities of the Fund over time, especially in its early years 2) how the Fund worked with individual schools and curricula to enforce its vocational education mandate, and 3) the Fund's extracurricular club initiative, in which they encouraged gender-specific agricultural labor through Canning Clubs for girls, and Corn Cobbing Clubs for boys. This research demonstrates that a gendered division of labor was built into the core of the G.E.B.'s vocational education model. The G.E.B. archive contains numerous records of their efforts to encourage Black youth to get married and work in menial labor, exemplified by their funding of these clubs that taught food preservation and other forms of domestic management to girls, and modern, efficient agricultural skills to boys.[161] I found that the goal of encouraging young people to stay in the South and work in agriculture was specifically tied to a vision of promoting traditional patriarchal families in Black communities.

Chapter Two, *The Rosenwald Fund: Gendered Vocational Education for Black Youth and the Making of Industrial Racial Capitalism,* focuses on the activities of the Rosenwald Fund. This Fund was created and funded by Julius Rosenwald, who earned his fortune as president of Sears & Roebuck, the department store company that revolutionized the scale of consumer goods sales and delivery throughout the country. In the early twentieth century, Rosenwald dedicated a significant portion of his fortune to Black K-12 education, primarily in the U.S. South. Eventually formalized into the Rosenwald Fund, his foundation supported the establishment of about 5,000 segregated Black K-12 schools spread across the southern states. Like the GEB, whenever possible, Rosenwald schools coordinated with local government to be established as public schools. The central archive for this research is the Rosenwald Archive at the University of Chicago; in addition to this, primary sources include newspaper articles from the period and the Rockefeller Foundation Archives.[162]

The chapter looks at the origins of the Rosenwald Fund, and how its approach was shaped by the business ethos of its founder, whose fortune stemmed from increasing both the American consumer base and the labor power of industrial workers to mass produce goods. Rosenwald's growing interest in philanthropy, after earning his fortune, coalesced with a relationship with Booker T. Washington, who became a central partner in the Fund's founding. Washington's goal of extending vocational schools for Black students throughout the rural South aligned neatly with Rosenwald's expressed interest in mutually beneficial philanthropy that developed Black Southerners as workers and consumers. In 1912, Washington successfully lobbied Rosenwald to begin a trial project together that funded the construction of schoolhouses for rural Black youth in the South.[163] Washington's proposal further appealed to Rosenwald because he liked the idea of

[161] General Education Board, "General Education Board Archive."

[162] Rosenwald and Rosenwald Fund, "Julius Rosenwald Papers."

[163] Peter M. Ascoli, *Julius Rosenwald: The Man Who Built Sears, Roebuck and Advanced the Cause of Black Education in the American South*.

Black communities producing matching funds toward their schools, a practice already in use by foundations such as the G.E.B. By 1917, the Rosenwald Fund was incorporated in partnership with Tuskegee to support the construction of more rural Black schoolhouses.

I explore the Fund's structure and ideology, as well as its partnerships and activities. I look at its platform on vocational education, and the challenges the Fund documented in its archive around graduating pupils who were competitive in the marketplace—challenging the idea of vocational education's purported ability to increase the economic standing of Black communities. I again look at how the Fund's goals and activities were gendered, including largely gender-segregated vocational tracks and an emphasis on instilling patriarchal, Christian values. I analyze the archived correspondence and reports on individual schools that the Fund worked with, which help draw out the broader themes around the Fund's vision for race, gender, and labor for Black Americans. The latter portion of the chapter considers the legacy of Rosenwald schools in light of the fact that almost all of them closed down by the 1960s-70s, when Black public schools were widely shuttered in the name of racial desegregation.[164]

Chapter Three, *The Rise and Fall of Snow Hill Normal & Industrial Institute: A Black Belt Community School*, takes a close look at the story of one school that was funded by both the G.E.B. and Rosenwald Fund. Examining the trajectory of one school, located in the rural Alabama Black Belt, is aimed at providing more depth to the general experiences of Black schools and communities in working with these foundations and the state. Snow Hill Normal & Industrial Institute was a Black K-12 school, founded by Tuskegee graduate William James Edwards, open from 1894 to 1972. Once the center of a tight-knit Black town, today Snow Hill lies vacant, and most residents have left the area. This chapter allowed me to further expand my original research, as this school has barely been written about in scholarly texts. My primary archival sources for this chapter included the Rockefeller and Rosenwald Archives, the Wilcox County Board of Education records, a memoir written by James Edwards, as well as a biography of Edwards authored by one of his grandsons, Donald Stone.[165] I conducted a visit to the school site in 2023, where an alumnus gave me a tour of the property. I also conducted several oral history interviews with graduates and local residents, including another grandson of the school's founder, Cliff Lee.[166]

In the archives, Snow Hill drew my attention due to having large files, in particular, extensive correspondence with the G.E.B., and on closer inspection, had a story of working with foundations and the state in a way that helped tease out many of the themes I was interested in. Snow Hill was founded and led by a local Black leader, William James Edwards (who went by James), who was born in Wilcox County, Alabama—the heart of the Black Belt—on September 12, 1869. Like much of his community, Edwards grew up directly in the shadow of slavery, living in extreme poverty in a former slave cabin and working to help support his family as a sharecropper

[164] Brown, *Gone Home: Race and Roots through Appalachia*.

[165] William James Edwards, *Twenty-Five Years in the Black Belt* (The Cornhill Company, 1918); Donald P. Stone, *Fallen Prince: Black Education, and the Quest for Afro-American Nationality* (Snow Hill Press, 1990).

[166] Cornelius Gaines, "Interview & Campus Tour with Cornelius Gaines," May 24, 2023, Interview with Author in Snow Hill, AL; Cliff Lee, "Cliff Lee on Snow Hill," May 30, 2023, In-person Interview with Author, Brooklyn NY.

from childhood.[167] As a direct mentee of Booker Washington, Edwards' school very much grew out of Washington's vision of spreading access to vocational education to Black communities, especially those neighboring Tuskegee.

I follow the story of the school from its founding, before the two funding giants were established, to Edwards' excitement and belief in the promise of working with the education funds in the early 1900s. While the G.E.B. initially provided Snow Hill with substantial support, by the 1920s their support for independent Black schools was no longer a priority, and the foundations began to question the integrity of Edwards' leadership. The school also tried to court support from Rosenwald, who was interested but chose to hinge his sustained support on the continued involvement of the G.E.B. The lack of support from these Funds, alongside the lack of state support for Black education, caused the school to struggle to keep its doors open year after year, even after investors successfully pushed Edwards out of leadership in 1925. By the 1930s, Snow Hill was able to strike a deal to keep its doors open for the foreseeable future, finally again garnering the support of the G.E.B. and Rosenwald to convert into a public school and turn the central school grounds over to the state. While it provided a lifeline in the short term, ultimately, this deal with the state was what led to Snow Hill's closure as part of the so-called desegregation of Wilcox County in 1972. Like most other counties that were forced to desegregate by the courts, the Wilcox County School Board interpreted this court order as a basis to close all the Black public schools in the area that had been built up with so much love, sweat, and tears in the century since Emancipation.[168]

Local residents and graduates who I interviewed reflected sorrow over the closure of the school decades later, reflecting that Snow Hill went far beyond simply providing an education. It was an anchor for the community that provided a sense of safety and belonging that was rare for Black people in the region. Its role as a community anchor was reflected by the sad reality that the closure of the school directly led to the gradual death of the broader Snow Hill community. When the desegregation order came down, Snow Hill still had 287 Black students attending.[169] The following year, 1972, the county forced Snow Hill to close its doors, and students were told to attend Wilcox Central High School, located in the county seat of Camden. Camden is located about 18 miles from Snow Hill, and the move represented a significant barrier for many local families.

The story of Snow Hill represents a paradox faced by many Black schools during this era: the school received nearly all its funding from white northerners and could not have stayed open without their funding. At the same time, the control that these Northern philanthropists exerted over Snow Hill, and the abdication of support in key moments, was central to the school's downfall and the devastation of the local community. Snow Hill's experience over eighty years showcases the injustice and unreliability that Black-led schools experienced in trying to work with the state and philanthropic foundations.

---

[167] Edwards, *Twenty-Five Years in the Black Belt*.

[168] Wilcox County Board of Education, "Wilcox County Board of Education Minutes," Wilcox County Department of Education, 1973.

[169] Wilcox County Board of Education, "Wilcox County Board of Education Minutes."

The Conclusion provides a reflection on the key findings of my dissertation, and places them in conversation with the distressing political reality that the U.S. faces today. I discuss nine key takeaways from this research, and their implications for the current moment. These include: 1) Gender was not incidental to vocational education; it was central; 2) Analyzing anti-democratic practices in U.S. education holistically rather than in a silo; 3) The role of public-private partnerships in education for Black students; 4) Vocational education as a tool of racial capitalism; 5) "Predatory Inclusion" is the defining logic of philanthropic education policies; 6) The importance of expertise in education, race, and gender equity in crafting educational policy and programs; 7) The archives of the G.E.B. and Rosenwald Fund preserve power, not truth; 8) Independent, Black-led community schools like Snow Hill provide hope for a path toward liberatory Black education amidst the constraints of racial capitalism; and 9) This research demonstrates the incomplete project of abolition.

Chapter One:

A "Gospel of Work & Money": The General Education Board's Formative Role in Shaping Public Education for Black Students

Rachel Anspach

In 1901, John D. Rockefeller Jr.—the patronymic son of the oil magnate who during his lifetime was the wealthiest person in the United States—set out with several of his peers on a Pullman train trip through the American South.[170] In keeping with the times, the group would have traveled in luxurious first-class train cars that were only open to white customers.[171] As part of the cutting-edge technology of the Industrial Revolution, the Pullman company had recently innovated a new standard in luxury, high-speed travel for the modern age—including comfortable, upholstered furniture, spacious accommodations, and full-service dining. The Transcontinental Railroad, which for the first time allowed train trips across the entire country, was completed just three decades earlier in 1869, transforming the speed and accessibility of travel.[172] Along their journey down from New York, the group would have been well taken care of by Pullman Porters, who were likely among the thousands of Black men the company hired after they entered into the job market following emancipation from chattel slavery in 1865. Pullman purposely hired formerly enslaved men to work on his trains, reasoning that they would be best equipped to serve his wealthy white customers and anticipate their needs—while being willing to work long hours for low pay.[173] Over time, Pullman became the country's largest employer of Black men, many of whom were college graduates with no better employment opportunities.[174]

The purpose of the Rockefeller cohort's deep-South trip was to observe the conditions of Black education in the region. Black education was newly legal in the South, just thirty-six years after the formal end of America's enslavement of Black people. During the period in which the country classified Black people as slaves, the slave-holding states passed laws strictly prohibiting the population from accessing formal education.[175] Violently-enforced ignorance was central to

[170] Barry Goldberg and Barbara Shubinski, *Black Education and Rockefeller Philanthropy from the Jim Crow South to the Civil Rights Era* (Rockefeller Archive Center, 2020), https://resource.rockarch.org/story/Black-education-and-rockefeller-philanthropy-from-the-jim-crow-south-to-the-civil-rights-era/.

[171] Jennifer Hasso, "Pullman Porters," *Jim Crow Museum*, 2021, https://jimcrowmuseum.ferris.edu/question/2021/august.htm.

[172] Jason G. Gauthier, *History and the Census: The Transcontinental Railroad* (US Census Bureau, 2023), https://www.census.gov/about/history/stories/monthly/2023/may-2023.html.

[173] Hasso, "Pullman Porters."

[174] "Pullman Porters," *History*, 2025, https://www.history.com/articles/pullman-porters.

[175] Douglass, *My Bondage, My Freedom*; *Literacy as Freedom* (Smithsonian American Art Museum, 2026), https://americanexperience.si.edu/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/Literacy-as-Freedom.pdf.

the slavery system. As industrial magnates (or their heirs) who set out to determine the best life path for Black citizens who had just emerged from generations of the most brutal form of chattel slavery, the ornate ironies of the Pullman trains were a fitting setting for what was to come.

All members of the group were white men, most of whom were extremely wealthy and from the North, including the virulently antisemitic car magnate Henry Ford.[176] Visiting numerous Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), as well as Black K-12 schools, Rockefeller Jr. and his friends were deeply struck by the poverty and lack of educational options available throughout the region.[177] When he returned from his Southern tour to his mansion in New York's Hudson Valley, Rockefeller Jr. quickly requested the start-up funding from his father to create a grand new education fund for education of Black students in the South.[178] They were to be called the General Education Board (G.E.B. or the Fund).



Henry Ford, left, and John D. Rockefeller, Jr., right, c.1900.[179]

---

[176] "Ford's Anti-Semitism," *American Experience*, 2026, https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/henryford-antisemitism/.

[177] Goldberg and Shubinski, *Black Education and Rockefeller Philanthropy from the Jim Crow South to the Civil Rights Era*. Note: For more context on the state of public education in the U.S. at this time, see this dissertation's Introduction.

[178] Goldberg and Shubinski, *Black Education and Rockefeller Philanthropy from the Jim Crow South to the Civil Rights Era*.

[179] John D. Rockefeller family photographs, Series 1003 (FA447), box P7, RAC.

Argument and Methods

The G.E.B. would go on to be one of the central players in shaping the trajectory of public education for Black students—as well as public education more broadly—in the century to come and beyond. In this chapter, I argue that the G.E.B. deliberately installed gendered vocational training and patriarchal ideology as a core pillar of their vocational education program for Black youth. In turn, the widespread adoption of this vocational model in racially segregated public schools played an outsized role in shaping education for Black students to prime them as a steady source of low-wage, gendered labor. The mechanism that facilitated the entrenchment of the Fund's platform in our public education system was the public-private partnership, a policymaking practice in which the government authorizes unelected, private sector groups to control key elements of public policy.

This argument frames the G.E.B. as actively adapting and entrenching U.S. racial capitalism for the modern age, rather than passively replicating the existing social hierarchy. The racialized gender ideology they entrenched in their vocational education model continues to exert a widespread influence on public education policies geared toward Black youth and other youth of color in the twenty-first century.[180]

The history of philanthropy using education to cement the racial hierarchy has been deeply studied in the intersecting fields of Black Studies, Education, and History. Scholars have paid less attention to the ways in which this early development of public education for Black people utilized, adapted, and entrenched patriarchal gender norms. Rather than treating gender as an add-on to the theoretical framework in existing scholarship on race and capitalism in education for Black students,[181] I argue that the gendered dimension was central to the Fund's strategy for using K-12 education to bring Black people into the fold of racial capitalism as workers and consumers.

This chapter's findings are centrally drawn from my archival research at the Rockefeller Foundation Archive, in which I focused on exploring how the G.E.B. addressed intersectional themes[182] in their programs for Black youth, as well as in the structure of its public-private partnerships.[183] I spent two weeks looking through the G.E.B.'s archived files at the Rockefeller Archive Center in 2022, which provided me with the core body of primary research for this chapter.

---

[180] Dumas, "My Brother as 'Problem'"; Williams, *The Separation Solution?*; Nikki Jones, *Between Good and Ghetto: African American Girls and Inner-City Violence*, The Rutgers Series in Childhood Studies (Rutgers University Press, 2010), Main (Gardner) Stacks HN90.V5 J66 2010.

[181] Such as: Watkins, *The White Architects of Black Education: Ideology and Power in America, 1865-1954*; Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935*.

[182] Note: For more context on my use of intersectionality as an epistemology, see this dissertation's Introduction. See also: Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics."

[183] General Education Board, "General Education Board Archive."

While at the archive, I collected notes and research memos on documents and emergent themes. I scanned many of the files of interest for continued analysis, in addition to making further reference to the documents and photographs that the archive has digitized. While some of the broader strokes of what I analyze, such as the Fund's core mission and structure, have been written about by other scholars,[184] I am not aware of any other academic research on the race- and gender segregated agricultural clubs or individual school case studies I discuss.

As I detailed further in the Introduction, my research methods are centered in a Black feminist ethos of bringing a critical lens and an ethic of care to interpreting what has been preserved in the archive.[185] Recognizing that power fundamentally shaped the narrative preserved in historical archives, my training in Black Studies and the praxis of intersectional work more broadly has been central to this research. Recognition of the role of power in the archive, with its inherent violence and erasure, makes my interpretation and interpolation as the researcher critical to building this analysis.[186] In addition to this archive, this research utilizes newspaper coverage from the period and secondary literature across the intersecting fields of Black Studies, Education, Black Feminist History, and Critical Race Theory. This epistemology helped me put together a more holistic vision of the gender ideology behind the Fund's work, which was never explicitly stated, but was frequently indirectly referenced in program requirements, reports, and evaluations.

While my research led me to believe that the Fund was actively invested in advancing a specific gender ideology in Black schools, this is mostly expressed in the archive through more passive references to the curricula of their gender segregated vocational programs, or their evaluations of their efficacy. In order to evaluate these often implied norms, I focused my analysis on 1) the structure of the Fund's public-private partnership and funding priorities, especially in its early years; 2) how the Fund worked with individual schools and curricula to enforce its vocational education mandate; and 3) the Fund's extracurricular club initiatives, in which they encouraged gender-specific agricultural labor through Canning Clubs for girls and Corn Cobbing Clubs for boys.

For instance, in the archive I encountered numerous references to encouraging Black youth to get married and work on farms, led by their funding of "canning clubs" for girls which taught food preservation and other forms of domestic management, and "corncob clubs" for boys, which taught modern agricultural skills for more efficient farming.[187] The Fund's goal of encouraging young people to stay in the South and work in agriculture was specifically tied to promoting

[184] But generally not through a gendered lens, as mentioned. See: Rooks, *Cutting School*.

[185] Perry, *Vexy Thing: On Gender and Liberation*; Taylor, "Women in the Documents: Thoughts on Uncovering the Personal, Political, and Professional"; Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought* (Routledge, 2000); MacKinnon, "Intersectionality as Method."

[186] Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Riotous Black Girls, Troublesome Women, and Queer Radicals*; Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts."

[187] General Education Board, "General Education Board Archive," GEB Relations with Department of Agriculture 1914-1919, Box 15, Folder 148.

traditional patriarchal families in Black communities. In a 1915 report on the clubs in Alabama, the Fund noted that:

> There was a total of 2,703 homes visited where the agents came in personal contact with the mothers, gave lessons in housekeeping, sanitation and care of the children. One agent reports 38 kitchens cleaned. These homes were put in sanitary condition and many were whitewashed or improved. The clubs met as a rule at different homes in the community, and the kitchen and dining room of these homes were used in giving lessons. Some 5111 girls and 3408 mothers were enrolled as active members… The lessons given have been very practical. Cooking, housekeeping and sanitation have been especially stressed and a spirit of pride in home life has been developed.[188]

As part of the canning clubs' lessons, teachers would conduct home visits with Black families, geared toward teaching the girls better sanitation and food preservation techniques. The example above specifically mentions housekeeping and childcare as being central to the purview of the girls' clubs. This was completely distinct from the boys' clubs, which usually met in the field and involved working directly with crop management. Through programs like these, the G.E.B. specifically created a form of access to education—and citizenship more broadly—that hinged on Black people's fulfillment of narrowly prescribed socio-economic roles. In turn, these roles hinged on gender regulation.

Industrial Capital, Philanthropy, and Black Education

The U.S. Industrial Revolution, beginning in the late eighteenth century, and greatly accelerating through the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, was a period that transformed physical technology, the modern economy, and daily life throughout the country. Mass-produced goods made in factories, from automobiles to electric lights to clothing, first became available at the turn of the century. High-speed travel on planes, trains, and automobiles became increasingly accessible to Americans throughout the country. During this time, American businessmen who capitalized on these new technologies amassed unprecedented fortunes, perhaps most famously John D. Rockefeller, the man who founded Standard Oil Company and became the country's first billionaire in 1916.

Importantly, the fortunes that men like Rockefeller amassed were directly made possible by the labor and raw materials produced by enslaved Black labor, underpaid immigrant labor, and theft of native land.[189] By the early twentieth century, men like Rockefeller began to consider what to do with all their money and power. Rockefeller and his family paved the way in founding formal philanthropic foundations, which provided a convenient pathway to utilize his fortune to directly influence society, while simultaneously offering a tax shelter. Philanthropic foundations built on a longstanding tradition of the wealthy using charitable works to bolster their standing in elite

[188] General Education Board, "General Education Board Archive," Supervisor of Rural Schools (Negro) 1912-18, Box 17, Folder 142.

[189] Williams, *Capitalism & Slavery*.

circles. Rockefeller's son, John D. Rockefeller Jr., played a central role in developing and leading his father's philanthropic giving. In 1901, the year he toured the South, a Mississippi newspaper reported that, "if Rockefeller survives his father, he will be the richest man in the world, with his fortune estimated at $300,000,000" (about $11.5 billion in 2026).[190]

Within the Southern education crisis, Rockefeller Jr. and his ilk saw an ideal, meaningful opportunity to become leaders in this new era of corporate philanthropy. At the time of their Southern tour, racist Southern Democrats held power both federally and at the state level, which they utilized to prevent both the national and local state governments from meaningfully contributing to a public education system for the newly emancipated Black citizens.[191] In the absence of state-level policy to educate millions of Black children and young adults, the Rockefellers and their friends found themselves with the means and power to impose their own values onto this new education system.

The General Education Board: A Seminal Public-Private Partnership

A year after their Southern tour, the members of Rockefeller Jr.'s group joined together to form the General Education Board, which was to use an initial $1 million in seed funding from Rockefeller Sr. to generate educational initiatives across the South. While the group was particularly interested in developing education for Black students, they decided that they would be more successful in gaining the support of racist Southern state and local governments if they contributed to white education as well. As a result, the group made its central mission to advance segregated public education for Black and white students across the South.[192]

Such a powerful organization directly shaping public policy required the government's approval. The G.E.B. was officially founded in 1902 after successfully lobbying Congress to pass the General Education Bill, which provided the group with the legal standing to begin its operations.[193] Headquartered in New York City at 49 West 49th Street, control of the G.E.B. largely rested with its Board of Directors, which included some of the wealthiest and most powerful men of the era: John D. Rockefeller Jr., Andrew Carnegie, George Foster Peabody (treasurer), and Robert C. Ogden.[194] The Board's chairman, Frederick T. Gates, was a Baptist

[190] Greene County Herald, "Our Washington Letter," *Greene County Herald* (Leakesville, Mississippi), August 30, 1901.

[191] Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860-1880*.

[192] General Education Board, "General Education Board Archive," GEB Organization, Charter, By-Laws 1902-1950, Box 15, Folder 145.

[193] General Education Board, "General Education Board Archive," Correspondence re Charter 1902, Box 15, Folder 146.

[194] The full list of G.E.B.'s founding board members: Frederick T Gates, Chairman, Robert C Ogden, William H Page, Albert Shaw, Starr J Murphy, Hugh H Hanna, E Benjamin Andrews, Edwin A Alderman, Hollis B Frissell, Harry Pratt Judson, Charles W Eliot, Andrew Carnegie, Edgar Marston, John D Rockefeller Jr., George Foster Peabody, Treasurer, Wallace Buttrick, Secretary (Source: Rockefeller Center Archives)

clergyman and educator who had advised Rockefeller Sr. on philanthropic activities, and the group's secretary was Wallace Buttrick, another Baptist minister and educator. The group had not been given a direct public mandate to shape public education, as they were not elected by the people or appointed by the government. Yet Rockefeller and his accomplices saw themselves as the best qualified individuals to create an education system for recently emancipated Black communities, confidently drawing their credentials from their social status and business acumen.

The Fund quickly formalized a seminal public-private partnership, which allowed it to act directly as an arbiter of public education policy. In January 1903, the G.E.B. was given special and far-reaching authority by another Act of Congress, which gave the Fund powers similar to today's Department of Education.[195] The government officially backed the G.E.B.'s mission for the "promotion of education in the United States of America without distinction of race, sex or creed."[196] The powers granted included government authorization to "build, improve, enlarge, or equip, or to aid others to build, improve, enlarge, or equip, buildings for elementary or primary schools, industrial schools, technical schools, normal schools, training schools for teachers, or schools for any grade, or for higher institutions of learning."[197] While the government gave the G.E.B. all this power, it did not build in any specific requirements around accountability, success metrics, or reporting to the government on its activities. Congress also exempted all educational activities of the Fund from taxation. Shortly after its official incorporation, in 1903, the G.E.B. laid out its plan to partner with Southern apartheid governments by setting up meetings with the state and/or county education superintendents of Virginia, North Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Louisiana, and Florida.[198] In conjunction with its partnership with the federal government, the Fund preferred to carry out its work in partnership with these local apartheid governments that generally refused to fund Black schools.

As they drafted their mission statement in 1902, the group fantasized about unfettered control over shaping the lives of Black and poor white youth. In their founding charter, the group outlined its central values and vision:

> In our dreams, we have limitless resources and the people yield themselves with perfect docility to our molding hands. The present education conventions fade from their minds, and unhampered by tradition, we work our own good will upon a grateful and responsive rural folk. We shall not try to make these people or any of their children into philosophers or men of learning, or men of science. We have not to raise up from among them authors, editors, poets or men of letters. We shall not search for embryo great artists, painters,

[195] The federal Department of Education was in fact not created until 1979. See: U.S. Department of Education, *An Overview of the U.S. Department of Education: History and Purpose* (U.S. Government, 2026).

[196] General Education Board, "General Education Board Archive," GEB Organization, Charter, By-Laws 1902-1950, Box 15, Folders 134-149.

[197] General Education Board, "General Education Board Archive," GEB Organization, Charter, By-Laws 1902-1950, Box 15, Folders 134-149.

[198] Richmond Times-Dispatch, "To Promote Education General Education Board Organized in Washington," *Richmond Times-Dispatch* (Richmond, Virginia), January 30, 1903, https://www.newspapers.com/image/827325610/?match=1&terms=%22general%20education%20board%22.

> musicians nor lawyers, doctors, preachers, politicians, statesmen, of whom we have an ample supply. . .. The task we set before ourselves is very simple as well as a very beautiful one, to train these people as we find them to a perfectly ideal life just where they are.[199]

In plain language, the G.E.B. stated its desire to train rural people "to live a perfectly ideal life just where they are," without any lofty goals of becoming "authors, editors, poets or men of letters." While its application undoubtedly differed on the ground, it is worth noting that this mission statement—which sought to be "unhampered by tradition"—applied to both Black and white Southerners. It is also worth noting that they saw their work as intergenerational, seeking to keep both the current generation and "their children" working in menial labor "just where they are" in the South.

While they sought to impart the value of Southern, agricultural labor on both Black and white young people, the program's implications were significantly more restrictive for Black youth, who would not have the same options for socio-economic mobility open to them after graduation. The language of their mission statement is reminiscent of David Theo Goldberg's work in *The Racial State*, which argues that a prominent strain of liberal philosophy functioned to naturalize the racial stratification of colonialism as inherent differences between racial groups.[200] Under the naturalist framing:

> Racial rule was considered imperative, if not the product of a Divine hand then the logic of Nature. The racially dominant were seen to set laws, impose order, and maintain control because destined by their blood or genes to do so. Dilution of their blood or genes was considered at once transgression of nature, with dire consequences. It follows that colonial rule, (imperial or self-determining) expansion, governmental imposition, and state control might be motivated as manifest destiny or natural law…[201]

In this case, a private entity enacted racial apartheid policies as a central partner of the state. This functioned to present the leadership of wealthy white men, whether elected by the people or not, as the natural state of society. The privilege that these businessmen had built was inherently tied to the status held by Black people conducting the same labor they had under the system of chattel slavery. Through naturalizing the continuation of Black people in those same labor roles in the South post-Emancipation, funds like the G.E.B. bolstered the power of the racial state and their status within it for the modern age.

The central goal of this agenda was keeping Black people in roles where, as during slavery, they continued to reside in the rural South and produce the raw materials needed by the industrial capitalist system—such as cotton, indigo, produce, lumber, and coal.[202] At the same time, low

---

[199] General Education Board, "General Education Board Archive," GEB Organization, Charter, By-Laws 1902-1950, Box 15, Folders 134-149.

[200] David Theo Goldberg, *The Racial State* (Blackwell, 2002), 75.

[201] Goldberg, *The Racial State*.

[202] Williams, *Capitalism & Slavery*.

wages and unjust working conditions, largely through tenant farming, placed Black families in financial debt and reliance on their continued labor on white people's farms to make ends meet.[203]

The G.E.B. forced capitalist values and prescribed economic roles onto Black communities in two central ways. First, they required schools to adopt a curriculum that prioritized vocational training. Furthermore, this vocational training had to focus on professions that the Board viewed as suitable for Black people, generally leading to low-skilled, service or agricultural positions.[204] Second, they required Black communities that wanted a schoolhouse to raise matching funds in order to access G.E.B. support. They also required local communities to purchase the land for the school building, which they were then generally required to deed to the state. The goal of the matching funds structure was to encourage Black communities to step into American 'pull yourself up by your bootstraps,' individualistic values. As a result of this funding structure, Black communities that had recently emerged from generations of slavery, and often continued to labor under debt peonage conditions, actually contributed more funds toward their local schools than the G.E.B. or other peer philanthropies.[205]

Across the board, Rockefeller and his group were in agreement that vocational education with a focus on agriculture was the best path forward for Black students.[206] These men had already begun to see the impacts of labor organizing in the North and sought not only to prop up the Southern agricultural economy, but also to hire Black workers who would not pose the same "problems" as organized white labor.[207] One member of the G.E.B., Walter Hines Page (editor of *The Atlantic*), argued that vocational education for Black people was "good business, especially for the South, but good business for the entire country."[208]

Within five years of opening its doors, the G.E.B. had raised $54 million, worth nearly $2 billion in 2026, to fund its operations. This largely came from Rockefeller's 1907 donation of an additional $43 million (about $1.6 billion in 2025), which was the largest single philanthropic gift in the history of the U.S. up to that point.[209] Of that, $10 million was designated for higher education, $20 million to be kept as principal for income, and the rest used at the "discretion of the Board of Directors."[210] Subsuming two large education funds that had been active in the South,

---

[203] Pete Daniel, *The Shadow of Slavery: Peonage in the South, 1901-1969* (University of Illinois Press, 1990).

[204] As I discuss further in the Introduction, this was in contrast to the prevailing view of white male leaders in the South, who would have preferred to bar Black people from education and other basic rights altogether.

[205] Rooks, *Cutting School*.

[206] General Education Board, "General Education Board Archive."

[207] Rooks, *Cutting School*.

[208] Rooks, *Cutting School,* Chapter Two.

[209] Goldberg and Shubinski, *Black Education and Rockefeller Philanthropy from the Jim Crow South to the Civil Rights Era*.

[210] General Education Board, "General Education Board Archive," GEB 1902-1911, Box 16, Folder 157.

the Slater Fund,[211] which funded education for Black students, and the Peabody Fund,[212] which funded both Black and white education, the G.E.B. quickly became the central power broker of education for Black students in the South. Both the Slater and Peabody Funds had been founded by industrialists in the late 1800s to promote segregated, vocational education, making them ideal partners in the G.E.B.'s work. In 1905, Anna T. Jeanes, another major funder of Black Southern education, came on as a major contributor to the G.E.B. as well, specifying that her $200,000 was to be used for "assistance of negro rural schools in the South."[213] In 1907 Charles Eliot, President of Harvard University, joined the Fund's Board, providing it with even more credibility.

While they found much support among the Northeastern elite, the activities of the G.E.B. were hotly contested at the time, across racial and political lines. A white Atlanta newspaper in 1910, discussing the Rockefellers' philanthropic activities, questioned, "[W]hat right has the Senate or Congress to grant a charter to a private concern to carry on private enterprise? And by what process of reasoning do they suppose the states which have been prostituted by the Standard Oil will submit to seeing Standard Oil Magnates given leave, under whatever title, to do business in disregard of State authority?"[214] This excerpt specifically shows people of the period questioning the validity of the public-private partnership that grants the Fund with such sweeping authority over public life. They identified a conflict of interest between the Rockefellers' business interests as oil magnates and their desire to shape state policies.

The G.E.B. was well aware that public education in general, let alone for Black people, was highly controversial, particularly in the region where they sought to build schools. To gain the support of local governments and residents, the Fund provided state universities with funding to hire education chairs who traveled the South to lobby in support of public education.[215] Central to this lobbying was the argument that the G.E.B.'s agricultural education would in turn help stimulate the local economies of the South, many of which had not recovered from the Civil War and the termination of unpaid labor provided by slavery.

Additionally, the G.E.B. hired Black and white field agents, who they sent out to work with communities in founding schools, as well as to continue monitoring the status of their investments. One such agent who was prominent in the archive was the Black field agent William T.B.

---

[211] The Slater Fund was established by Rhode Island textile magnate John Slater in the late nineteenth century to confer the "blessings of Christian education" onto the newly emancipated community. Like the GEB, the Slater Fund specifically promoted industrial education, but with an explicitly Christian bent. See: Kofi Lomotey, "Slater Fund," in *Encyclopedia of African American Education* (Sage Publications, 2026).

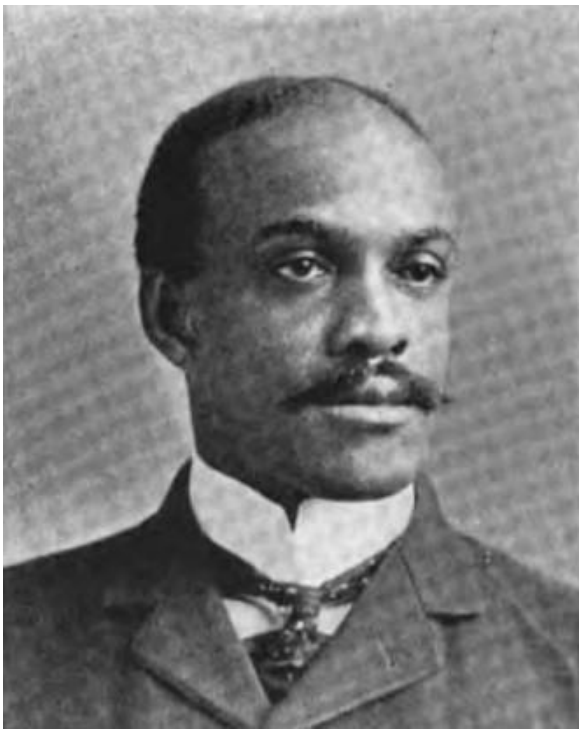
[212] George Peabody, a Baltimore banker, founded the first education philanthropy in the country following the Civil War, in 1867. The goal of the foundation was to help build schools for both white and Black students following the war. They employed an industrial education philosophy, as well. See: Philanthropy Roundtable, "Peabody's Reconstruction Schools," *Philanthropy Roundtable* (Washington D.C.), 2026.

[213] General Education Board, "General Education Board Archive," GEB 1902-1911, Box 16, Folder 157.

[214] Tom Dolan, "Summary of Events as They Happen," *The Jeffersonian* (Atlanta, Georgia), March 10, 1910, https://www.newspapers.com/image/887698874/?match=1&terms=%22general%20education%20board%22.

[215] General Education Board, "General Education Board Archive," GEB 1902-1911, Box 16, Folder 157.

Williams. As I will further discuss, agents like Williams played a central role in helping local communities to get and maintain a schoolhouse. Though he spoke the language of his employer, I found that Williams frequently seemed to advocate for the continued support of Black schools and their leaders, even if they were not in full compliance with the ideals and standards of the G.E.B.[216]



The G.E.B.'s Black field agent William T.B. Williams, source unknown.

In 1910, the G.E.B. further clarified the focus of its work, issuing a memorandum stating that over the first few years of its existence, it had "made a careful study of public education in the Southern States" in order to formalize its approach to educational policymaking. Its findings were that "the greatest present need of that part of our country is the increased productive efficiency of rural life," and because "eighty-five percent of the people in the Southern States live in the country and by farming," the Fund decided to strengthen its focus on rural education for both Black and white people in the South. The Fund's study was led by Dr. S.A. Knapp, who had previously led the Department of Agriculture's efforts to fight the boll weevil, a major threat to agriculture at the time. In response to Knapp's findings, in 1910 the G.E.B. clarified its "three main lines of work," which were: "1) The promotion of practical farming in the Southern States; 2) The development of a system of public high schools in the Southern States; and 3) The promotion of higher education throughout the United States."[217]

As part of this clarified mission, the G.E.B. partnered directly with the federal Department of Agriculture in its farm demonstration training endeavors. In a Memorandum from March 1910, the G.E.B. stated:

[216] General Education Board, "General Education Board Archive," GEB 1902-1911, Box 16, Folder 157.

[217] General Education Board, "General Education Board Archive," GEB 1902-1911, Box 16, Folder 157.

> It should be noted that the policy of the General Education Board is to work through existing institutions and agencies and not itself to undertake independent educational work. These contributions for agricultural demonstration work are expended under the supervision of the United States Department of Agriculture, which through its accredited representatives, has entire control of such expenditures. Payments are made by the General Education Board for this work on vouchers certified by representatives of the Department of Agriculture.[218]

In this way, the Fund strengthened both Southern agriculture and the American government. By 1914, the G.E.B. completely handed many of its agricultural demonstration initiatives over to the federal government.

In tandem with this agenda, the G.E.B. redoubled its focus on establishing racially segregated public high schools across the South, for both Black and white students. The 1910 memo noted that the Fund "seeks to promote public high schools not by sending its own agents into the several states to do this work, but by enabling State Universities and State Departments of Education to do the work. Here, again, the direction and supervision of the work is entirely in the hands of the accredited representatives of the states."[219]

The G.E.B. held onto its purse-strings and power bestowed by Congress, operating as a leader in education policy for several decades. The G.E.B.'s activities peaked throughout the 1910s, 20s, and 30s. In the 1940s, the Board decided to wind down its activities, stating that, "while in great ferment, the situation is full of hope and opportunity. It does not seem to us that we can wisely stop now."[220] Following this decision, the Fund proceeded to spend most of its funds by 1953, which totaled around $324.6 million by the time it fully closed shop in 1964 (about $12.5 billion in 2026).[221]

[218] General Education Board, "General Education Board Archive," GEB 1902-1911, Box 16, Folder 157.

[219] General Education Board, "General Education Board Archive," GEB 1902-1911, Box 16, Folder 157.

[220] Teresa Iacobelli and Barbara Shubinski, *"Without Distinction of Race, Sex, or Creed": The General Education Board, 1903-1964*, Re:Source (Rockefeller Archives Center, 2024), https://resource.rockarch.org/story/the-general-education-board-1903-1964/.

[221] Iacobelli and Shubinski, *Without Distinction of Race, Sex, or Creed*.



G.E.B. Officers in the 1920s. [222]

It is hard to overstate the power that the Fund held in shaping the trajectory of education for Black students. By the 1930s, nearly one third of all Black students in the South attended a school funded by the G.E.B. or the Rosenwald Fund (another major philanthropic organization, which I discuss in the next chapter).[223] Key features of the Fund's educational platform included the training of Black people for low-wage jobs; the continued racial segregation of public education; and the promotion of hetero-patriarchal gender norms amongst Black youth. The G.E.B. focused on founding schools in rural Black communities, where students were required to spend part of the school day learning vocational trades, often in the form of performing the hard labor central to running and funding the schools. For instance, in domestic science classes girls would do the school's laundry and cooking, while in shop class, boys would build or repair school buildings. Outside of the school day, the Fund encouraged students to join educational "clubs" that taught skills needed for running a farm. While this presumably prepared Black students to run their own farms, in reality it most often prepared them to work on white people's farms. [224] In this way, the Fund's educational platform extended the afterlife of slavery, by preparing Black youth to fill economic roles that their predecessors had filled during slavery.[225]

In conjunction with shaping education for Black students directly, the G.E.B. played a critical role in shaping the trajectory of corporate philanthropy, normalizing immense

[222] Rockefeller Foundation records photographs. FA003. Series 100-1000. Series 100 International Portraits. Portraits—Groups—General Education Board. Box 16. Folder 503. RF photo #25387. RAC.

[223] Rooks, *Cutting School,* Chapter Two.

[224] General Education Board, "General Education Board Archive."

[225] Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth Century America*.

policymaking power placed in the hands of unelected businessmen, and advancing public-private partnerships as a policymaking tool. As I mentioned, from 1906 to 1914 the G.E.B. had an official partnership with the Department of Agriculture, which supported its efforts in agricultural education for both Black and white people.[226] Their efforts to modernize agriculture, promoting scientific farming methods to maximize crop yields amongst Southern farmers, would in turn directly influence the work of the Rockefeller Foundation internationally in subsequent years.[227] While the Rockefeller Foundation was soon to become a behemoth in the philanthropic foundation sphere, the G.E.B. was actually a precursor to the family's broader foundation. The Rockefeller Foundation was incorporated in 1913 with a focus on global public health, whereas the General Education Board was incorporated in 1902, giving it an important role in setting the norms for the Rockefeller Foundation and other large-scale philanthropies that were founded in the coming decades. Moreover, Rockefeller Jr., who spearheaded the creation of the G.E.B. and served as its first chair, also served as the first board president of the Rockefeller Foundation a decade later.[228]

The government's decision to place the public education system in the hands of these philanthropists helped set in motion a cycle in which the U.S. government 1) abdicated responsibility for providing a key civil duty to Black communities; 2) quickly turned over leadership and resources to a small group of unelected wealthy white men; and 3) ignored and undermined the educational vision and leadership already existing in Black communities across the country. While the G.E.B. undertook wide-ranging activities in primary and higher education, this chapter primarily seeks to better understand this cycle through focusing on the Fund's K-12 education for Black students and children's agricultural initiatives.

The narrow vision for market-oriented education for Black students mandated by the G.E.B. points to an important conceptual and material distinction between what I'm framing here as *education for Black students,* versus what could be termed *Black education*. The term "Black education" refers to education conceptualized centrally by and for Black students, whereas "education for Black students" does not centrally or holistically include the needs and perspectives of the community, connoting outside, top-down definition and purposes. As I discussed in the Introduction, controlling norms and definitions is one of the central ways in which the tangible value of whiteness is adapted and maintained over time. In *Whiteness as Property*, legal scholar Cheryl Harris argues that even when the "substance of race definitions has changed, what persists is the expectation of white-controlled institutions in the continued right to determine meaning—the reified privilege of power—that reconstitutes the property interest in whiteness in contemporary form."[229] This suggests that education cannot be truly liberatory and equitable unless there is a meaningful seat at the table for Black people and other marginalized communities in shaping such policies and practices. However, as this history shows, equally critical to a seat at the

[226] Iacobelli and Shubinski, *Without Distinction of Race, Sex, or Creed*.

[227] Iacobelli and Shubinski, *Without Distinction of Race, Sex, or Creed*.

[228] The Rockefeller Foundation, "Our History," *The Rockefeller Foundation*, 2025, https://www.rockefellerfoundation.org/about-us/our-history/.

[229] Cheryl I. Harris, "Whiteness as Property," *Harvard Law Review* 106, no. 8 (1993): 1707–91, JSTOR, https://doi.org/10.2307/1341787, 1762.

table is that leaders bring an inclusive, critical perspective that centers the needs of groups including Black girls, LGBTQ youth, and those with disabilities.

The Hampton–Tuskegee Model and Vocational Ideology

When the G.E.B. set out to flesh out the details of what their vocational education program would look like, they found a model to build off of that had been established in Black vocational colleges, which came to be known as the Hampton-Tuskegee School. Central to promoting this education philosophy amongst white philanthropists was the Black educational leader Booker T. Washington. Born into slavery in Virginia in 1856, Washington went on to attend Hampton Institute, a college founded by Samuel Chapman Armstrong in 1868, to train freed Black men in his gospel of vocational education.[230]

Armstrong, who grew up the son of white Christian missionaries in Hawaii, strongly believed that there was a moral and religious value to hard labor. He believed that Black people's best path to becoming incorporated into society was through embracing both hard, menial labor and capitalistic, Christian values—a moral-religious fervor which propelled him to found Hampton. Washington attended Hampton from 1872-75, during which time he became an ardent supporter of Armstrong's educational philosophy.[231] Washington's hard-work ethic stood out to Armstrong, to the point that he personally mentored Washington while he was a student, helping prepare Washington to become an educational leader in his own right. In 1881, just six years after his graduation, Washington became the founding president of Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute, a new vocational college for Black students in Alabama.[232]

Tuskegee, in particular with Washington at its helm, would go on to centrally shape the trajectory of all levels of education for Black students in the U.S. While Washington was undoubtedly influential, my archival research also suggests that his ability to convince white philanthropists to follow his agenda was mixed. White funders such as the G.E.B. seemed to follow his guidance, or arguably coopt it, when it furthered their agenda, while at other times seemed to act against his advocacy in instances when it didn't match their priorities.[233]

Historian James Anderson, who authored *Education of Blacks in the South*, argues that "by the turn of the century, the 'Hampton-Tuskegee Idea' represented the ideological antithesis of the educational and social movement begun by ex-slaves."[234] In other words, while many formerly enslaved individuals had viewed education as a pathway to greater freedom and a more racially equitable society, the Hampton-Tuskegee model instead used education to maintain Black people's

[230] Watkins, *The White Architects of Black Education: Ideology and Power in America, 1865-1954*.

[231] Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935*.

[232] McInnis, *Afterlives of the Plantation: Plotting Agrarian Futures in the Global Black South*.

[233] General Education Board, "General Education Board Archive," Snow Hill, Box 2, Folders 16-18.

[234] Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935,* 33.

socio-economic position as menial agricultural laborers who had little political power or social mobility. As I discuss in the Introduction, recent literature has called for a more nuanced view of Washington's goals with Tuskegee, which included using hard work and respectability politics to as pathways to greater economic stability.[235] Washington believed that working in agriculture held the most realistic possibility for Black people, who had labored for generations while enslaved on plantations, to forge their own place in society. It is undeniable that he had widespread success in selling a vision of education for Black students to white funders, widely increasing Black educational access, while the nuances of whether those funders upheld his original vision or coopted it remain up for debate.

The archive confirms that many Black communities were strongly opposed to the idea of vocational education for their children.[236] Having recently emerged from decades of forced hard labor, Black communities largely hoped for schools to be liberatory spaces where they would access what had previously been illegal to them—namely to read, write, and acquire the knowledge they would need to take part as citizens in society and the economy.

Having emerged from slavery into a new apartheid era of the Jim Crow South, Black people largely lacked the resources and political power to exert widespread control over shaping their education system. This left Black communities with little option but to work with white funders who wished to lend their resources and support to Black education and the Black leaders who had their ears—even if they did not agree on the exact shape it took. In *The White Architects of Black Education*, William H. Watkins details the history of the white men who established the conditions for early African American education, including Rockefeller and Armstrong. He argues that by the 1910s, philanthropies promoting vocational education had become the "leading influence in Black education."[237]

Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. DuBois, with their oppositional agendas, are often framed as the leading voices in shaping Black education in this period. However, Watkins shows that most of the actual power and influence over education for Black students was shaped by a handful of elite white men. "Evidence supports the argument that corporate philanthropies did not simply provide dollars but indeed offered a political and ideological platform," he states. "Their program was one of classic colonialism adapted to the Southern United States. This adaption, accommodationism, would dominate education, the curriculum, and social policy for decades."[238] Given their early government backing and massive resources, and reach, the G.E.B. was arguably the most influential of these groups.[239]

---

[235] McInnis, *Afterlives of the Plantation: Plotting Agrarian Futures in the Global Black South*.

[236] General Education Board, "General Education Board Archive." For instance, GEB, Cottage Grove Academy, Box 1, Folders 1-11.

[237] Watkins, *The White Architects of Black Education: Ideology and Power in America, 1865-1954,* 20.

[238] Watkins, *The White Architects of Black Education: Ideology and Power in America, 1865-1954,* 20.

[239] Other early foundations that heavily influenced Black education included the Rosenwald Fund (discussed in Chapter 2), the Carnegie Corporation (founded 1911) and the Ford Foundation (founded 1936).

Black colleges like Tuskegee and Hampton were also extremely influential in the sphere of K-12 education because they trained soon-to-be teachers for Black elementary and high schools, where they would impart their educational philosophies to their students.[240] Anderson recounts that prominent philanthropists of the day, including Rockefeller and Rosenwald, were directly influenced by and embraced this educational model in their work, understanding intimately that "Washington propounded not merely an educational theory but a social philosophy."[241] As these Northern white men began pouring portions of their fortunes into Southern education for Black students, they consulted and collaborated to varying degrees directly with Washington and other leaders of the Hampton-Tuskegee school of education.

The Tuskegee-Hampton education model consisted of schooldays in which students conducted manual labor in the morning and studied academics in the afternoon and evenings. Students at these colleges who could not pay monetary tuition were permitted to attend on the condition that they perform additional labor to pay their way, on top of that conducted by all the students. After being adapted to the agendas of the northern white philanthropies, led by the G.E.B. as the vanguard, the sway and reach of this educational model was expanded exponentially. Watkins argues that "the Hampton model of education and societal development dramatically influenced 100 years of Black schooling… it was about forging a social order rooted in apartheid, economic exploitation, oppression, and inequality."[242]

The individualistic, classic liberal worldview that this education model was rooted in aligned neatly with the views of the white elites. For instance, in a 1902 speech before a group of young Christian men, Rockefeller Jr. opined that "ninety-nine times in a hundred fortune favors the persistent hunter and passes by the laggard. In business and in professional life opportunities must be sought… If you find yourself idle while willing to work and you think that opportunity passes you by, stop and consider more carefully. In all probability you will find that the fault is yours. Opportunity consists of one-tenth circumstances and nine-tenths effort."[243] Even as the inheritor of the largest fortune in the country, his belief in this individualist ideology was so strong that Rockefeller Jr. believed that his own status in life stemmed almost completely from his personal effort. This emphasis on individual hard work as the chief determinant of success was central to the funding model deployed by the G.E.B., which, as mentioned, required Black communities to raise the majority of funds to found and maintain their schools.

---

[240] Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935*.

[241] Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935,* 72.

[242] Watkins, *The White Architects of Black Education: Ideology and Power in America, 1865-1954,* 43.

[243] The Free Press, "Advises Young Men: John Rockefeller Jr. Tells of the Road to Success," *The Free Press* (Poplarville, Mississippi), March 6, 1902, https://www.newspapers.com/image/896342426/?match=1&clipping_id=170616255.

Gender Ideology and Racial Capitalism at the Turn of the Century

The early twentieth century was a key period in the adaptation and consolidation of the race and gender hierarchy in the U.S. As the examples I draw from the archive in the following two sections will detail, the G.E.B. took an active role in shaping a public education system that prescribed Black youth in socio-economic roles delineated by race, gender, and class. Before diving into the archival case studies that detail the contours of this ideology in action, I will provide some context on the importance of this period for shaping American society.

In *Women, Race and Class*, Angela Davis discusses how the Industrial Revolution was a key period for the solidification of racialized gender roles in the U.S., drawing attention to the ways that new technologies were framed as making women's labor obsolete.[244] Whereas white women had previously provided essential labor to keep the household running, through work such as weaving, sewing, candle and soap making, by the early twentieth century such products were widely replaced by goods mass-produced in factories. For instance, the electric washing machine was invented in 1907, but at first was only accessible to the wealthy, not widely proliferating in American homes until the 1950s.[245] The sewing machine was invented in the 1850s, creating mass-produced clothing for the first time. In fact, one of the initial implementations of mass-produced clothing was in northern plants which created cheap clothes to send south to be worn by enslaved Black people, likely using cotton grown by those same slaves. By the early twentieth century, mass-produced clothing was widespread, replacing most clothes that had been homemade a few decades prior.[246] This meant that wealthy white women were increasingly able to outsource household labor, whether to electric machines or domestic workers.

Post-emancipation, Black women continued to participate in the labor force at a significantly higher rate than white women due to economic necessity. Census data show that from 1870 to 1900, at least 40% of Black women aged 25 to 54 were in the workforce, compared to 15% of white women of the same ages. Additionally, the vast majority of white women workers were unmarried, showing that once they stepped into their "proper" roles as housewives, jobs were no longer appropriate.[247] Moreover, at the turn of the century, 90% of Black Americans still lived in the former Confederacy. Of these, 60% worked in agriculture, and 30% worked in domestic

[244] Davis, *Women, Race, & Class by Angela Y. Davis*.

[245] Smart Appliance Services, "When Did Washing Machines Become Common? A Historical Journey," *Smart Appliance Services*, January 17, 2025, https://smartappliancesservices.com/when-did-washing-machines-become-common/.

[246] Sofi Thanhauser, "A Brief History of Mass-Manufactured Clothing," *Lit Hub*, January 27, 2022, https://lithub.com/a-brief-history-of-mass-manufactured-clothing/.

[247] Leah Platt Boustan and William J. Collins, "The Origins and Persistence of Black-White Differences in Women's Labor Force Participation," *National Bureau of Economic Research* (Washington D.C.), Working Paper Series, May 2013.

service. Over half of white Southern families employed a Black woman to conduct domestic work, such as cooking and cleaning, showing that this was not just a norm amongst the wealthy elite but also the middle class.[248]

This restructuring of the labor market presented capitalists with new opportunities to create a narrative that solidified the social hierarchy. As Davis argues:

> During the first years of the twentieth century the influence of racist ideas was stronger than ever…. This escalated promotion of racist propaganda was accompanied by a similarly accelerated promotion of ideas implying female inferiority. If people of color—at home and abroad—were portrayed as incompetent barbarians, women—white women, that is—were more rigorously depicted as mother-figures, whose fundamental raison d'être was the nurturing of the male of the species. White women were learning that as mothers, they bore a very special responsibility in the struggle to safeguard white supremacy. After all, they were the 'mothers of the race'…. The cleavage between the home and the public economy, brought on by industrial capitalism, established female inferiority more firmly than ever before. 'Woman' became synonymous in the prevailing propaganda with 'mother' and 'housewife,' and both 'mother' and 'housewife' bore the fatal mark of inferiority.[249]

In other words, patriarchal capitalists utilized the advances of the industrial revolution to further relegate white women to their roles as wives and mothers. This in turn was upheld as the ideal model of womanhood, reinscribing white women's dependence on men and positioning Black women who continued to work outside the home as deviant.[250]

This consolidation of racialized gender roles built upon the development of white racial identity in the nineteenth century, which functioned to instill a more cohesive identity amongst workers who identified as white and male. As waves of immigrants from Europe entered the U.S. in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, it was not a given that these immigrants would be assimilated into whiteness. However, from the perspective of capitalists, the incorporation of groups like the Irish, Italian, and Jewish into whiteness became beneficial as a means to create a cohesive identity amongst their workers and maintain white supremacy.[251] Instilling a shared white identity amongst workers could make them feel more included in the American Dream of hard work leading to social advancement, discouraging labor organizing and solidarity with nonwhite workers. This consolidation of white identity took place at multiple levels, from the classroom to the factory to leisure spaces such as the theater.

---

[248] Peter Irons, *Jim Crow's Children: The Broken Promise of the Brown Decision* (Penguin Books, 2002).

[249] Davis, *Women, Race, & Class by Angela Y. Davis,* Chapter Seven (eBook).

[250] Davis, *Women, Race, & Class by Angela Y. Davis*. Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Riotous Black Girls, Troublesome Women, and Queer Radicals*.

[251] Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness*.

In *The Wages of Whiteness*, historian David Roediger discusses minstrel shows in the nineteenth century as one of the central spaces where working-class white identity was constructed in binary opposition to Blackness.[252] This identity construction was not only racialized, but also gendered, as the shows were specifically geared toward audiences of Northern white men, where they would be entertained by more white men who portrayed Black characters. In what became known as "blackface," minstrel shows played off of racist tropes about lazy, licentious, and/or criminally inclined Black men, cementing a more cohesive white working class identity rooted in racism. And all this was accomplished without any actual Black people in the room. As Roediger explains:

> In creating a new sense of whiteness by creating a new sense of blackness, minstrel entertainers fashioned a theater in which the rough, the respectable and the rebellious among craft workers could together find solace and, even joy. By so doing, the minstrel stage became a truly popular form of entertainment able to attract the immigrants, 'b'hoys'[253] and unskilled of the city while also making special appeals to those in the West and some in the respectable middle classes and above. Minstrelsy was featured at President John Tyler's inauguration, and in performances before Queen Victoria. Abraham Lincoln stole away from the pressures of duty during the Civil War to see Blackface shows. But the energy and complexity of the minstrel stage came largely from below, and specifically from the uses of racial disguise not only to mask tensions between classes but also to mask tensions within the working class.[254]

Roediger's work on the cultural production of whiteness provides a critical example of how racial hierarchy continued to develop for specifically capitalist reasons—in a way that was fundamentally gendered. This importantly centered on bolstering the symbolic value of whiteness for working-class white workers, including European immigrants, many of whom lived and labored under impoverished and inhumane conditions that arguably gave them more commonality with Black and brown workers than wealthy white capitalists. In turn, this development of white identity would not have been legible without gender ideology; patriarchy was key to the purported benefits of whiteness.

This gender-based ideology, which positioned Black people as fundamentally distinct from white people in the modern era, helped provide the justification for laws like the "separate but equal" doctrine that was enshrined through the 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson* Supreme Court case. In turn, such apartheid laws provided groups like the G.E.B. with the legal support to continue to promote racially segregated and deeply unequal education systems. Racialized gender ideology also justified the continued sexual regulation of race by the state post-slavery, which in turn served to maintain existing racial divisions and inequities. If white women's essential role was the reproduction and care of the white race, then white women having non-white children posed an existential threat to white supremacy. As a result, it was not until the 1967 Supreme Court ruling

[252] Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness,* 115-116.

[253] "B'hoys" was a slang term for working class white young men in the 1800s.

[254] Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness*.

in *Loving v. Virginia* that anti-miscegenation laws were struck down, meaning that for over one hundred years after Emancipation, the state continued to legally enforce the Black/white binary through regulating sexuality (not to mention that same-sex marriage was prohibited by federal law until 2015).

The state's continued regulation of marriage served to uphold the racial segregation that provided the condition of possibility for American capitalism. As Saidiya Hartman put it, "the prohibition of interracial marriage, mixed associations, and the commingling of the races was a prized element of a broader effort intent upon preserving racial order—that is, "hierarchies of mastery and subjection" upon which the state built prosperity and power.[255]

The work of scholars such as Davis, Hartman, and Roediger frames the construction of whiteness' value as legible specifically through the pathologization of Black women and men for having improper gender roles. Proper white women stayed home as mothers, while deviant Black women worked and had children out of wedlock. Proper white men were obedient workers who benefited from wives serving them at home, while Black men were lazy and licentious. The vocational education platform of the G.E.B. directly bolstered this narrative. The vocational program of the G.E.B. was able to do the double work of teaching heteronormative gender roles to Black youths while also reinforcing their economic positionalities in which they could never fully conform to those ideals. Black children in these vocational schools were also unpaid for their labor, such as cooking, construction, and laundry, which was often central to running and maintaining the schools themselves,. This in turn provided further normalization of Black people working for low wages, or no wages at all.

The G.E.B. did not explicitly document the gender ideology behind the design of their education initiatives, but the descriptions of their initiatives and reports make clear that certain vocations were strictly the purview of boys, while others were strictly for girls.[256] The schools fostered and enforced a strict binary of gender roles, often including gender-specific school uniforms, which superficially encouraged girls to be homemakers and boys to be workers who provided for their families. For boys, this gendered training included mainly agricultural or industrial-based manual labor, as well as at times more specialized labor such as construction or brick-making. For girls, encouraged vocations were primarily in the sphere of domestic labor, including sewing, cooking, laundering, cleaning, and food preservation techniques such as canning. Because economic necessity required most Black people to work outside their own homes, this education functionally prepared women to be domestic workers in white homes or laundries, and men to be sharecroppers or lower-skilled factory workers. A central exception to this is that both boys and girls could become teachers, as Black teachers were always sorely needed in segregated schools. Yet even in the sphere of education, gender dynamics predominated; Black men teachers were primarily the ones in leadership positions, while Black women did much of the essential day-to-day labor of educating children.[257]

---

[255] Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth Century America* (Oxford University Press, 1997), 189.

[256] General Education Board, "General Education Board Archive."

[257] Vanessa Siddle Walker, *Their Highest Potential: An African American School Community in the Segregated South* (University of North Carolina Press, 1996).

The Fund's purported agenda of teaching Black youth traditional gender roles was at odds with how the system of slavery had precluded Black people from traditional family structures. As scholars such as Dorothy Roberts point out, state control of Black reproduction was central to chattel slavery, ensuring that Black people did not have bodily autonomy or access to keeping their families together as they were traded as commodities—let alone having the right to marry.[258] By seemingly inviting Black people into the fold of patriarchal capitalism, while engineering a society in which most Black people could not financially afford to adhere to the nuclear-family model, the G.E.B. helped reinforce Black people's status as non-normative, naturalizing their systemic marginalization for the post-slavery era. In tandem with this focus on gender regulation, central to the G.E.B.'s vocational model was the overt stance that Black people should accept their lower-class status in American society, focusing on building economic stability in their communities, while actively entrenching racial segregation, limited job opportunities, lack of voting rights, and much more.[259] For the new industrial elite, this solidification of racism and patriarchy served numerous purposes, including controlling the Black labor population, providing a set of ideals to keep them as docile as possible, and continuing to position Black people who did not (or could not) follow traditional roles as deviants who were undeserving of the rights and protections of citizenship.

Prominent scholars on race and racism, such as Omi & Winant, note that key features of the social construction of race are that they are culturally and historically contingent and change over time.[260] While the fundamental system of racial capitalism has endured throughout U.S. history, studying moments like the Industrial Revolution's impact on the racialized gender hierarchy demonstrates that this system requires constant maintenance and transformation, denaturalizing it as the natural status quo. This framework of race being constantly shaped and reshaped positions groups like the G.E.B. as active social engineers, rather than passive replicators of existing inequities.

Case Studies: Kowaliga and Cottage Grove

With the context I have discussed so far on 1) public-private governance, 2) the Fund's vocational ideology, and 3) the way industrialists actively shaped racialized gender norms, I now delve into some closer examination of the Fund's ideology in practice. Because there was no existing public education system in the South, the early operations of the G.E.B. included some experimentation and support for independent Black schools that professed an interest in becoming public. Because independent Black schools were founded before receiving input from the Fund, looking at how the Fund assessed and treated such schools provides revealing context on their priorities and requirements for support.

---

[258] Dorothy Roberts, *Killing the Black Body: Race, Reproduction, and the Meaning of Liberty* (Vintage Books, 1997). Davis, *Women, Race, & Class by Angela Y. Davis*.

[259] W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*.

[260] Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States*, 3 edition (Routledge, 2014).

One such school that drew my attention in the archive was Kowaliga Academy. Located in Tallapoosa County, Alabama, the school was founded by a formerly enslaved man from the area, John Benson, who became a successful businessman and landowner. Benson founded the Kowaliga Academic and Industrial Institute in 1897 and the Dixie Improvement Company in 1900, which owned 3,000 acres of land surrounding the school. However, before long, Benson lost control of his company to its northern, white board, and lost the school along with it.[261] As a result, the archived correspondence shows that when the G.E.B. Black Field Agent W.T.B. Williams conducted a field visit in 1904, he reported that the Dixie Improvement Company was "composed entirely of northern white men." Williams reported that the white businessmen who ran the school had an ultimate goal "to sell off this land [consisting by then of 7,000 acres] in small parcels as farms for colored people."[262]

Based on these reports, a picture emerges of Kowaliga as a corporate school in a company town. This is noteworthy because a private school owned by a corporation is a very different arrangement than the public schools that the Fund sought to support on paper. By 1921, the G.E.B. would raise the question of whether they should continue to support Kowaliga, which then claimed to be a public school, but still hadn't received any support from the State of Alabama. However, the G.E.B. initially supported the school with thousands of dollars beginning shortly after it opened its doors in 1902, including a gift of $5,000 to support rebuilding following a major fire at the school.[263] At the time, the question of whether it was technically a public school did not appear central to the archived correspondence. Instead, they were primarily concerned with the quality of vocational education and business management at the school.

Archived correspondence between G.E.B. officers on Kowaliga from 1902-1904 showcases their gender ideology and its connection to the socio-economic roles for Black people that they sought to establish with their schools. They preferred not to support what they viewed as overly specialized trades such as carpentry or masonry, preferring more basic manual labor. A 1903 "President's Report on Kowaliga" submitted to the G.E.B. stated that: "The school looks toward educating boys who may become reliable workmen and good citizens…. It is absolutely essential in the development of an intelligent, well-balanced, community life, that the boy who is taught farming shall be given a chance to buy a farm of his own; that the girl who is trained in household affairs shall be given the chance to realize the practical value of her training in a well ordered home of her own making."[264] This quote makes a direct reference to instilling the value of

[261] Jack Echols, "The Forgotten History of Kowaliga, the Town beneath Lake Martin," *SoulGrown* (Alabama), June 23, 2024, https://soul-grown.com/the-forgotten-history-of-kowaliga-the-town-beneath-lake-martin/.

[262] General Education Board, "General Education Board Archive," Microfilm—GEB Early Southern Program, Alabama, Folder 78.

[263] General Education Board, "General Education Board Archive," Microfilm—GEB Early Southern Program, Alabama, Folder 78.

[264] General Education Board, "General Education Board Archive," Microfilm—GEB Early Southern Program, Alabama, Folder 78.

traditional nuclear families as a central goal of the school and one reason they should merit the Fund's support.

A 1904 report on the school written by the G.E.B.'s Agent Williams echoed this theme, noting that: "All the cooking for the school is done by the girls under the supervision of the matrons.... All the laundry work is also done by the girls. Few conveniences are provided, owing to lack of means. All the boiling of clothes, e.g., has to be done out of doors." For the boys, Williams reported, "there is manual training in wood and carpentry, and in agriculture. The conventional joints, etc., in manual training woodwork are made here, but the boys are soon pushed on to practical carpentry. Tables, bureaus and beds made by the boys were to be seen, as well as houses in the process of erection. The last they are building for the Dixie Improvement Co. under the direction of Mr. Kenney, the teacher of carpentry."[265]

In other words, girls were being trained in traditional homemaking and socialized into becoming housewives and mothers, while boys were taught manual labor. As part of this education, boys were constructing products (homes and furniture) that would generate profit for the Dixie Improvement Company, while the school saved costs through the girls' unpaid domestic labor. While the correspondence pays lip service to supporting the establishment of land-owning Black families, in reality it was likely known by most of the parties involved that financial realities would require both Black men and women to work outside the home. Black families were much more likely to work in extremely low-wage positions as share-cropping tenant farmers than they were to own their own farms. And there is no specific evidence of the G.E.B. materially supporting their graduates in obtaining land or the resources needed to acquire it.

Another school I located in the archive that provides a revealing case study is Cottage Grove Industrial Academy, located in the town of Nixburg, in Coosa County, Alabama. A 1902 internal memo on Cottage Grove written by the Fund's secretary, Wallace Buttrick, noted that the school was located in a Black, agricultural area with about 300 school-age children, where "it is said that there are no white residents within five miles of the school." Another independent Black school, Cottage Grove was founded in 1899 and incorporated in 1902, under the leadership of Principal J.R. Savage. The G.E.B. noted that Savage was a "good man, earnest and self-sacrificing," but they had some concerns that he was "somewhat lacking in self-reliance and power for larger leadership."[266] This statement was reflective of a broader trend in which the Fund fixated on individual Black leaders and what they perceived to be their personal failings, rather than evaluating the importance of the school in advancing the cause of Black public education in the region.

In 1902, the G.E.B. contributed $1,500 to Cottage Grove to complete the construction of its school building, as well as $216 to complete the school's purchase of the property for the school grounds (about $65,000 total in 2026). Alongside their financial support, the G.E.B. also required

[265] General Education Board, "General Education Board Archive," Microfilm—GEB Early Southern Program, Alabama, Folder 78.

[266] General Education Board, "General Education Board Archive," Cottage Grove Academy 1901-2, Box 1, Folder 7.

close oversight of the school's construction and the workers who built it. That same year, Cottage Grove also reported receiving $200 from the State of Alabama and $200 from the American Missionary Association. This lack of state or other outside funding made the contribution from the G.E.B. and its continued support vital to the stability of the school.[267]

As part of their continued evaluation of the school, W.T.B. Williams visited in 1906 and wrote up a report on its conditions and progress. Williams reported concern that there was still strong resistance in the local community to the idea that schools should be a place that teaches children to work:

> Mr. Savage [the principal] has not succeeded in interesting the people in industries sufficiently to get the children to work easily. *Work is not their notion of what a school stands for.* I fear too that Mr. Savage entertains something of the same idea. At any rate he gets but little manual training or industrial work done. Though his teachers have come mainly from Talladega and Tuskegee he has not succeeded in getting them to teach any sewing or cooking. He expects to have his sister who has spent a year or so at Spelman Seminary teach cooking this year; but judging from the looks of the kitchen where she and Mrs. Savage cook their own meals but little good will be accomplished. They are hardly equal to the work of teaching domestic science.[268]
> (Emphasis added.)

Linking the importance of instilling the moral value of hard work with gendered vocational training, another section of Williams' report argued that:

> The need of better home life is very imperative here. So domestic science training should be insisted upon. Better examples of farming should be set and the children be given real training in theoretical and practical agriculture along with good literary training. I think Mr. Savage could help greatly along all these lines by taking a more vital interest in the industries and by doing some of this manual work himself. Much of this I tried to tell him. I also tried to show him how to get the children interested in gardening, then farming, etc., as well as how to get his teachers to do the necessary work in domestic science.[269]

These sections from this report demonstrate clearly the ideological and material stance of the G.E.B. in relation to education for Black students. They believed strongly that these children should be taught hard labor and that this should be carried out in a strictly gendered manner. Because they were concerned about the "need of better home life," which meant traditional, married families living in their own homes, the G.E.B. strongly urged the school to focus on "domestic science training." They were gravely concerned about the girls' lack of training in cooking, sewing, and homemaking, while for the boys they strongly pushed greater agricultural education.

---

[267] General Education Board, "General Education Board Archive," Cottage Grove Academy 1901-2, Box 1, Folder 7.

[268] General Education Board, "General Education Board Archive," Cottage Grove 1906-1914, Box 1, Folder 11.

[269] General Education Board, "General Education Board Archive," Cottage Grove 1906-1914, Box 1, Folder 11.

Another point of concern was the lack of efficient cultivation and profit from the school grounds, which the Fund viewed as reflective of poor management practices. Of the 240 acres owned by the school, Williams reported that just five were being cultivated for farming.[270] They strongly believed that Black leaders should be "self-reliant" and versed in business norms just thirty years after the end of slavery, without acknowledging how little had been done to economically uplift Black communities in that period. The G.E.B.'s reports on Principal Savage also demonstrate the capitalist morality norms that they sought in working with Black educational leaders more broadly. Williams' report continued to criticize Savage, arguing that "he could work a little harder to no permanent disadvantage to himself and to the good of the school. He certainly ought to keep his books posted nearer than six months behind."[271] The Fund chose to push their vocational program onto Cottage Grove and Principal Savage, despite noting in their report that "work is not their notion of what school stands for." This was reflective of a broader lack of sensitivity to the recent history and ongoing reality of what it meant to be Black in the U.S

The photos of Cottage Grove included below demonstrate the gendered respectability norms at play. The first photo, showing girls in the "girls home making club," shows them dressed neatly in blouses, skirts, and aprons with their hair pulled back. The second photo shows girls and boys in a cotton plot, where the boys are also dressed formally in slacks, button-down shirts, and caps, with their hair cropped short, again modeling gendered respectability. The third photo shows the importance of vocational education, to the extent that it merited construction of its own building on the school grounds.



Vocational Training Workshop, Cottage Grove Academy, c. 1917[272]

[270] General Education Board, "General Education Board Archive," Cottage Grove 1906-1914, Box 1, Folder 11.

[271] General Education Board, "General Education Board Archive," Cottage Grove 1906-1914, Box 1, Folder 11.

[272] Alabama Department of Archives & History, "Alabama Photographs and Pictures Collection," Alabama Department of Archives & History, 1917, https://digital.archives.alabama.gov/digital/collection/photo/id/2905.



Girls Home Making Club, Cottage Grove Academy[273]



Students gathered in a demonstration plot in a cotton field at Cottage Grove Academy, c. 1917[274]

[273] General Education Board, "General Education Board Archive," ALA 160.2 - Alabama Homemakers Clubs, 1902-1964; General Education Board records; photographs, Series 1054.

[274] Alabama Department of Archives & History, "Alabama Photographs and Pictures Collection."

After Cottage Grove became more established in the region, mostly due to its own efforts as well as the support of philanthropies like the G.E.B., the State took a new interest in acquiring it. In 1913, James Sibley, the Alabama State Supervisor of Rural Schools, wrote to Buttrick about turning Cottage Grove into a county training school. County training schools were an educational trend of the time that promoted consolidating small rural schools into larger vocational education institutions serving the local region. In order to convert Cottage Grove, the State would require the school to cede sixty acres along with its main school buildings to the State. When the G.E.B. had helped Cottage Grove pay off the mortgage on its land, it took on ownership of forty acres of the school's land, which Sibley requested they deed over to the State as well. In September of that same year, Principal Savage also wrote to Buttrick voicing his support for making Cottage Grove into an official public school, stating that he would like to cede over the requested sixty acres they owned, in addition to the 40 acres which had already been purchased by the G.E.B., for a total of one hundred acres ceded to the State of Alabama.[275]

The G.E.B. readily agreed to the proposal. While the Fund's initial interest in Cottage Grove had centered on bringing its vocational program in line with its standards, the opportunity to make it a public school aligned well with their mission. By May of 1914, the deeds had been transferred, and Cottage Grove became a public school named Coosa County Training School.[276] This made the school the first County Training School in Alabama; by 1936, the State would have forty-four such schools.[277] A 1939 study of County Training Schools in Alabama found that they were primarily focused on "training for life needs," meaning a practical education to prepare children for life in the region. The school went on to operate for several decades after its transition to a public school, remaining open until official desegregation in the county. The G.E.B.'s focus on gender-segregated vocational training, as they openly discussed with schools like Cottage Grove and Kowaliga, worked in tandem with racial segregation to limit Black students' opportunities for social mobility and to reinforce their roles within the Southern economy.

Corn Cobbing Clubs for Boys and Canning Clubs for Girls

In my archival research, I found that another one of the central mechanisms that the G.E.B. used to entrench its ideology was gender- and race-segregated agricultural clubs. Following the clarification of its agenda in 1910 toward agriculture and rural communities, the Fund partnered with Southern State Universities to appoint several "special state agents" to lead agricultural education for youth.[278] These initiatives were engineered by white agricultural educator Seaman

---

[275] General Education Board, "General Education Board Archive," Cottage Grove 1906-1914, Box 1, Folder 11.

[276] General Education Board, "General Education Board Archive," Cottage Grove 1906-1914, Box 1, Folder 11.

[277] Reid E. Jackson, "County Training Schools in Alabama," *The School Review* 47, no. 9 (1939): 683–94.

[278] These investments in State Universities included: Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia. (Source: Rockefeller Archives Center, GEB 1902-1911, Box 16, Folder 157.)

Knapp, with the goal to "reform by simple means the economic life and the personality of the farmer on his farm."

This entailed working with "several thousands from twelve years of age and up," who "under the general designation of Boys' Corn Clubs, are 'learning by doing'; that is instead of studying text books on agriculture they are performing practical agricultural demonstration on their father's farms and are making these experiments the basis of agricultural study in schools."[279] By April of 1911, the G.E.B. reported that nearly 10,000 school-age boys of both races were a part of their Corn Clubs and participating in this vocational agriculture training. Boys learned modern farming techniques designed to maximize crop yield. In addition to the Corn Clubs for boys, the G.E.B. also established Canning Clubs for girls, where girls could learn canning and other domestic tasks that would be useful for a traditional wife on a farm—or a housekeeper working in domestic labor. Part of the girls' clubs included home visits, in which instructors would visit club members' homes and teach them how to make their homes cleaner, more orderly, and better equipped for domestic work.[280]

The above-noted reference to working on their "father's farms" is likely in reference to the white clubs that they funded. This points to an important distinction between their clubs for Black and white students, as in all of their efforts, this initiative was racially segregated. The clubs for white boys and young men were much more likely to provide them with knowledge to improve the function and profit on their own family farms, while for white girls they were specifically geared toward teaching them to manage their own households. The two photos below, which I drew from the Rockefeller Archive, show examples of the white boys' corn cob clubs. The first references a 1912 meeting of a corn cob club "on the acre of a Georgia member," directly referencing that the club aided a local white farmer in improving his methods. The club members are pictured standing next to a field full of corn, with what appear to be a substantial farmhouse and barn in the background.

[279] General Education Board, "General Education Board Archive," GEB 1902-1911, Box 16, Folder 157.

[280] General Education Board, "General Education Board Archive," GEB 1902-1911, Box 16, Folder 157; Relations with Department of Agriculture 1914-1919, Box 15, Folder 148.



Meeting of a white corn cob club on a member's farm, Georgia, 1912[281]

[281] General Education Board, "General Education Board Archive," 4000 - Agricultural Demonstration Work, 1908-1913; General Education Board records; photographs, Series 1054.



A boy sits atop 167 bushels of his corn grown as part of a corn club, Virginia, 1912[282]

This second photo (above) shows a teenage white boy (or young man) sitting atop a large pile of corn, which the caption from the G.E.B. files notes as "A Corn Club Boy… and his 167 bushels of corn produced on one acre in 1912." Again, the image and caption reference the white club member growing corn on his own land, which he could directly profit from.

Between 1911-1914 alone, the G.E.B. focused $133,000 (about $4.4 million today) of their funds on homemaking clubs for girls. In conjunction with the life of the farm, the G.E.B. sought to influence "the home itself—and its women and girls." The Fund noted that "no federal funds, or other public money, was available for girls clubs." Yet, G.E.B. correspondence shows that by the end of this period, such clubs had "spread all over the South."[283] This means that without public support or funding, the Fund independently spread its agenda of encouraging girls to be rural homemakers throughout the region.

[282] General Education Board, "General Education Board Archive," 4000 - Agricultural Demonstration Work, 1908-1913; General Education Board records; photographs, Series 1054.

[283] General Education Board, "General Education Board Archive," Supervisor of Rural Schools (Negro) 1912-18, Box 17, Folder 142.



G.E.B. Home Visit, Fayette County, Alabama, circa 1915[284]



White girls canning club, Virginia, 1911[285]

[284] General Education Board, "General Education Board Archive," ALA 160.2 - Alabama Homemakers Clubs, 1902-1964; General Education Board records; photographs, Series 1054.

[285] General Education Board, "General Education Board Archive," 4000 - Agricultural Demonstration Work, 1908-1913; General Education Board records; photographs, Series 1054.

The preceding two photos show documentation of the Black and white girls' agricultural clubs, respectively. They provide an interesting contrast as both appear to be on the home properties of club members. The first photo shows a Black mother with her four girls, standing outside their home as part of the club's home visit and inspection. There are noticeable differences between their property and the home properties of the white boys' clubs shown above. All the children are barefoot, suggesting that they may lack sufficient clothing and resources. They are otherwise dressed presentably, suggesting that they made an effort to look put together for the visit. Their front entrance is lifted off the ground, but doesn't have finished stairs; instead, it's propped up by a pile of rocks, and it's unclear whether the home has a door attached to the frame. This appears reminiscent of the one-room former slave quarters that many Black agricultural families resided in at the time. In the second photo, we see a meeting of a white girls' club where they worked on growing tomatoes in a garden plot. The girls appear completely at ease amongst the orderly rows of tomato plants. Captioned as "a club member's staked tomato plat," the photo again appears to be on the home property of one of the girls' families, showcasing the wealth differential between the racial groups.



Alabama Home Makers Club, 1915[286]

[286] General Education Board, "General Education Board Archive," ALA 160.2 - Alabama Homemakers Clubs, 1902-1964; General Education Board records; photographs, Series 1054.



Canning Club Exhibit, Macon, Georgia[287]

[287] General Education Board, "General Education Board Archive."



G.E.B. Field Agent in Mobile County, Alabama, 1914-16[288]



G.E.B. Field Agent in Pike County, Georgia[289]

[288] General Education Board, "General Education Board Archive," ALA 160.2 - Alabama Homemakers Clubs, 1902-1964; General Education Board records; photographs, Series 1054.

[289] General Education Board, "General Education Board Archive," 4000 - Agricultural Demonstration Work, 1908-1913; General Education Board records; photographs, Series 1054.

The preceding four archival photographs from the 1910s were likely taken by representatives of the G.E.B. as they conducted visits and progress reports on schools they supported. They were intended for white consumption and evaluation. Many of the photos preserved in the G.E.B. archive showed gender-segregated photos like those included here. Notably, in all the photos showing a group of Black women and girls, the girls look pristine in their white outfits, with their hair covered in white bonnets. The last photo included here shows a field agent, an employee of the G.E.B., conducting what appears to be a lesson on food preservation, canning, and domestic labor. Not only does she display canned foods and sauces, but a Black baby doll is seated prominently next to the display. This demonstrates how encouraging girls to have children, and lessons on childcare, were part and parcel of the lessons that the G.E.B. imparted to girls. Like the actual Black girls in the above photos, the baby doll is dressed neatly in a white gown and bonnet, implying modesty, hygiene, and propriety.

In the first photo of the four above, two Black girls can food under the supervision of two young Black women. They may be in the school's vocational instruction building or the school's kitchen. The composition of the photo shows the two girls very clearly echoing the actions of the two older women. They are all dressed alike, in white dresses with white aprons, and all but one wears a white cloth covering her hair. This photo provides more context on how the G.E.B. sought to educate Black girls into a specific vision of womanhood, which hinged on being a homemaker who kept a clean, orderly household and valued personal cleanliness. White outfits leave little room for mess, and their pristine condition implies their hard work in the laundry, as well. Photos like these, which were preserved in the G.E.B. archive, were important tools that philanthropies used to monitor progress as well as to support fundraising for their efforts. The photos the Fund chose to preserve reflect the idealized manifestations of the gendered roles for Black people that they sought to promote.

The Fund's Role in Regulating Social Change

The case studies I shared above, of 1) Kowaliga School, 2) Cottage Grove School, and 3) corn cobbing clubs for boys and canning clubs for girls, show the ethos and priorities of the Fund in action. The G.E.B. members developed the broader vision underlying these initiatives from the vantage point of the Northern cities in which they resided, where many white elites feared the rapid change that large influxes of Black migrants leaving the South could bring. This fear was a central reason that their mission hinged on encouraging Black young people to stay where they already resided in the rural South. The G.E.B. itself was headquartered in New York City, which, like cities across the country, was in a period of massive change and upheaval at the turn of the century. Black people were already beginning to seek better living and work conditions and exercise their increased freedom of movement to migrate to northern cities where industrialization held promise for better jobs. In turn, this spurred white Northerners' fears that their cities would be overrun and they would lose control of what they perceived as "their" spaces.

While the North lacked the blatant, state-sanctioned de jure racism of the South, the entire country has always been rooted in racial hierarchy and racist ideology. Many whites in the North

feared that Black migrants would take jobs and cause general immorality and social disorder.[290] With anti-Black racism as the norm of the day, prominent journalists and so-called social scientists[291] provided legitimacy to these fears, arguing that Black people, especially young Black men and women, were particularly likely to fall prey to the temptations of the city and live a lifestyle considered disreputable by white Christian patriarchal norms.

In spite of this racist climate, increasing numbers of young Black people were in fact taking their futures into their own hands and moving to the big city—with migration patterns first to Southern cities and then soon after toward Northern cities as well. While it came with its own set of challenges, the northern city represented a space where Black young adults had more agency to work however much or little they needed to stay afloat, along with offering a plethora of options to enjoy the urban culture, art, and nightlife. Moreover, the city offered a wider variety of illicit trades, such as sex work or organized crime, in which more financial payoff might be gained for less time and hard labor than the traditional positions offered to young Black people.[292] In *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments*, Saidiya Hartman details the importance of this time period for the trajectory of the country: "The decades between 1890 and 1935 were decisive in determining the course of Black futures. A revolution in minor key unfolded in the city and young Black women were the vehicle. The upheaval or transformation of Black intimate life was the consequence of economic exclusion, material deprivation, racial enclosure, and social dispossession; yet it, too, was fueled by the vision of a future world and what might be."[293] This agency presented a tangible threat to the industrial racial order, which hinged on Black people laboring to produce raw goods in the South, while underpaid "white" immigrant workers processed the goods in Northern factories. Intermingling of Black and immigrant low-wage workers threatened the racial divisions that capitalists exploited to undermine labor organizing.

In what would ultimately be a failed attempt to control the influx of Black migrants from the apartheid South to Northern cities, municipalities such as New York and Chicago took steps to criminalize Black residents, particularly Black women, in new ways. Expanding the carceral system, northern cities created a number of "status offenses," and also created separate women's and children's court systems, in which individuals could be convicted without due process of offenses such as vagrancy, being a wayward minor, sex acts, or simply being deemed too promiscuous.[294] A status offense meant that acts that would not otherwise be illegal, such as taking up space in public or behaving in ways deemed promiscuous, could be considered a crime due to the individual's "status" as a minor, a woman, or a vagrant. Combined with the lack of due process

---

[290] Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Riotous Black Girls, Troublesome Women, and Queer Radicals,* A Note on Method.

[291] Who Du Bois, a true social scientist, lambasted as "armchair sociologists" due to their lack of rigorous, empirical research methods.

[292] Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Riotous Black Girls, Troublesome Women, and Queer Radicals,* A Note on Method.

[293] Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Riotous Black Girls, Troublesome Women, and Queer Radicals*.

[294] LaShawn Harris, *Sex Workers, Psychics, and Numbers Runners* (University of Illinois Press, 2016).

in adjudicating such cases, this system created significant leeway for police to arrest Black women and children simply for being caught in the wrong place at the wrong time. Women and children found guilty of a status offense could find themselves incarcerated, placed in an asylum, or sentenced to hard labor reformatories.[295] These status offenses posed particular barriers to new Black migrants who risked being targeted by police without yet having found stable, legal employment or housing, or who simply had less knowledge about navigating the city.

Between 1880-1890, about 88,000 Black people migrated out of the South, mostly to the Northeast; between 1890-1900 that number rose to 185,000; and between 1900-1910 it rose markedly again to 555,000, almost all of whom went to the Northeast or Midwest. This was all prior to the massive wave of Black migrants from the South known as the Great Migration, which is often marked as beginning in the 1910s.[296] All in all, the phenomenon of large groups of Black people migrating to Northern cities, with significant numbers opting out of servitude-based labor and respectability norms, was not viewed as desirable or good for business by the wealthy white industrialists.[297] From the perspective of these philanthropists, even more effective than paying their tax dollars to imprison Black migrants up North was to prevail upon them to remain in the South in the first place. Moreover, the entire American economy was deeply interconnected with the agricultural plantation economy of the South, and industrialists' fortunes depended on the continued flow of goods from this region. In turn, this required a steady agricultural labor force previously supplied through slavery.

In addition to the early seeds of the Great Migration of Black southerners that was to come, the early twentieth century saw the rise of labor organizing that posed another concrete threat to the industrial philanthropists. Preventing Black workers from joining in solidarity with other organized labor became another central concern for these businessmen. In the period between 1897-1904 alone, union membership across the country more than quadrupled, from about 447,000 to over two million.[298] Workers using new mass production technologies banded together to demand better pay, hours, and working conditions. For instance, the International Ladies Garment Workers Union (ILGWU) was founded and headquartered in New York City in 1900. Most of its members were women immigrants from Europe, including many Jewish refugees, who worked in the inhumane garment production industry. By 1909, the Garment Workers Union held a strike of 60,000 workers across many of New York City's textile plants to demand better working conditions.[299] The Amalgamated Association of Iron and Steel Workers, founded in the 1870s,

---

[295] Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Riotous Black Girls, Troublesome Women, and Queer Radicals*.

[296] Trevon D. Logan, "Health, Human Capital, and African-American Migration before 1910," *Explorations in Economic History* 46, no. 2 (2009): 169–85, https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.eeh.2008.06.003.

[297] Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Riotous Black Girls, Troublesome Women, and Queer Radicals*.

[298] Philip Taft, *Workers of a New Century* (US Department of Labor, 2025), https://www.dol.gov/general/aboutdol/history/chapter4.

[299] Lisa M. Santoro, "Tracing the Origins of an Early Labor Union's NYC History," *Curbed New York* (New York), August 31, 2016, https://ny.curbed.com/2016/8/31/12733250/labor-day-history-international-ladies-garment-workers-union.

went on a major strike in 1901 in response to the formation of the powerful conglomerate United States Steel Corporation that same year. In both of these cases, corporate owners harshly quashed the union strikes. Yet the hard-won wins of organized labor suggest that businessmen of the time were deeply aware of the potential power of organized labor and their own at-times tenuous hold on control.[300]

From their perspectives as the CEOs of companies such as Standard Oil and Ford Motors, the more they could keep this labor organizing from reaching Black people in the South, the better. The socio-economic climate of that time was one in which white elites greatly feared the threats of organized labor, migration of Black people to Northern cities, and women rejecting traditional gender roles in the big city. These concerns were intimately tied to what can be seen as a preventative agenda crafted by the G.E.B., which in their own words sought to keep Black people "right where they [were]," in agricultural and service jobs in the South—rather than the factories and streets of the North. Their gendered vocational model offered what appeared on the surface to be a pathway for Black people to become so-called normative American families, while in fact training them for economic roles reminiscent of slavery.

"Work is Not Their Notion of What A School Stands For": Fugitive Pedagogy and Black Resistance

While white philanthropists and some Black leaders were focused on developing a productive workforce and customer base through the use of vocational education, many other Black leaders and individuals had very different ideas of the meaning of education, after having been brought to the country as chattel slaves. The notion that school should stand for something very different from child labor, vocational training, and ideological induction into the values of American capitalism reflects the counter-understanding that Black communities held around schooling at this time. This was why when speaking of the community he served, Cottage Grove's Black Principal J.R. Savage reported to the G.E.B. that, "work is not their notion of what a school stands for."[301] Contending with Black people's visions for their children's education provides a fuller picture of the violence of the outside, top-down model of education advanced by the G.E.B. and its peers.

The racist, neo-colonial nature of the segregated education system that these philanthropists developed was noted and critiqued by prominent Black intellectuals of the period, such as Carter Woodson and W.E.B. Du Bois. Du Bois famously lambasted the Tuskegee-Hampton philosophy for the race, calling it "industrial slavery" and "civic death" for Black men, arguing that "Mr. Washington's programme… takes an economic cast, becoming a *gospel of Work and Money* to such an extent as apparently almost completely to overshadow the higher aims of life."[302] Du Bois was critical of the vocational education model championed by philanthropies like the G.E.B. because it: "asks that Black people give up, at least for the present, three things—First,

[300] Taft, *Workers of a New Century*.

[301] General Education Board, "General Education Board Archive," Cottage Grove 1906-1914, Box 1, Folder 11.

[302] Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk,* Chapter Three. (Emphasis added.)

political power, Second insistence on civil rights, Third, higher education of Negro youth—and concentrate all their energies on industrial education, and accumulation of wealth, and the conciliation of the South."[303] Du Bois wrote this scathing critique as early as 1903, foreshadowing the immense power that the Tuskegee-Hampton model was to hold in the American educational system.

Education scholar Jarvis Givens' book *Fugitive Pedagogy* provides a critical lens into the perspectives of Black educational leaders of the time[304] who were working on the ground to educate their communities.[305] The book details the life and work of Carter G. Woodson, helping to shed light on the nuanced understandings of education held by Black educators of the time. Born in 1875 to former slaves in Virginia, Woodson overcame a difficult early life to become the second Black man (after Du Bois) to earn a doctorate from Harvard University. He went on to become a professor and dean at Howard University, a major civic leader, and the author of several historical books. After forty years as an educator, in 1933 Woodson published *The Mis-Education of the Negro*, in which he argued against both vocational education *and* westernized liberal arts education as the best path forward for Black students. Thirty years after Du Bois lambasted vocational education, Woodson took his critique a step further. He argued that both of these popular education movements failed to adequately prepare Black people for the conditions they faced in society, stating that the aim of classical education "was to transform the Negroes, not develop them," while "industrial education as these Negroes received, then, was merely to master a technique already discarded in progressive centers...."[306] In other words, both these educational paths failed at their purported mission of preparing Black young adults to successfully enter the workforce and take on the broader socio-political challenges of the day.[307]

Speaking about the white men who played central roles in shaping education for Black students, Woodson argued, "the Negro will never be able to show all of his originality as long as his efforts are directed from without by those who socially proscribe him. Such 'friends' will unconsciously keep him in the ghetto."[308] This argument harkens to Harris' theory of whiteness as property, in which a central way by which whiteness is maintained is through setting the terms and definitions that shape the lives of others. As she argues, when it comes to defining social categories, "what must be addressed is who is defining, how is the definition constructed, and why is the definition being propounded. Because definition is so often a central part of domination, critical thinking about these issues must precede and adjoin any definition."[309]

---

[303] Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk,* Chapter Three.

[304] It is also important to note that the majority of these frontline educators taking on the monumental task of educating their communities legally for the first time were Black women, even though they were generally not given a seat at the table by groups such as the G.E.B.

[305] Givens, *Fugitive Pedagogy: Carter G. Woodson and the Art of Black Teaching*.

[306] Carter G. Woodson, *The Mis-Education of the Negro* (The Associated Publishers, 1933), Chapter 2 (eBook).

[307] Woodson, *The Mis-Education of the Negro*.

[308] Woodson, *The Mis-Education of the Negro,* Chapter 4.

[309] Harris, "Whiteness as Property," 1763.

Education had been central to Black people's visions for their liberation since slavery. One of the key mechanisms that the U.S. and other colonial powers used to control enslaved people was keeping them illiterate and uneducated. Slave codes—the laws created by colonial governments to legitimize and regulate slavery—first made literacy illegal for slaves in South Carolina in 1740.[310] Laws like these, which spread across the colony—soon became national—encouraged the surveillance and punishment of slaves for learning to read and gaining an education. Lawmakers recognized the link between literacy and possible slave rebellion—controlling the minds of slaves and limiting their ability to connect with the outside world was central to keeping the system alive.

In his 1845 memoir sharing his journey from enslavement to freedom, Frederick Douglass famously shared the childhood memory of his owner being extremely angry when he found out that Douglass was learning how to read and write. When he caught Douglass in a lesson, his master angrily lamented that literacy would "forever unfit him to be a slave."[311] It was at that moment that Douglass realized the critical importance of literacy in his quest for freedom and autonomy. In *Fugitive Pedagogy*, Givens recounts how Douglass' owner framed reading as akin to his slave "running away with himself."[312] Givens highlights the aptness of this framing, arguing that "stealing oneself in this way meant that the literate slave was a fugitive slave: to secretly acquire literacy… was akin to Black flight from the sites of their enslavement."[313] Literacy provided the means for enslaved people to confirm for themselves the logical fallacies undergirding the slave system, as well as skills that posed material threats to slave owners (such as Douglass later forging his own papers in an attempt to free himself).[314]

Despite the incredible dangers, at least 10% of enslaved individuals learned to read.[315] After education was legalized for Black people, the first generation of Black students, including Carter Woodson, was taught by formerly enslaved individuals—many of whom had participated in what Givens terms the "fugitive pedagogy" of learning to read and write. This value and deep understanding of the power of the written word was central to the Black population's conception of the purpose and power of education. As a result, many Black families were not thrilled when the central thrust of the education they were provided by philanthropists in the early twentieth century centered on teaching their children the skills and value of hard physical labor. Working within and around these constraints, Black people continued to "steal themselves away,"

---

[310] Sally Hadden, *Slave Patrols: Law and Violence in Virginia and the Carolinas* (Harvard University Press, 2003).

[311] Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (The Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society, 1845), Chapter Four.

[312] Givens, *Fugitive Pedagogy: Carter G. Woodson and the Art of Black Teaching*.

[313] Givens, *Fugitive Pedagogy: Carter G. Woodson and the Art of Black Teaching*.

[314] Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*.

[315] Givens, *Fugitive Pedagogy: Carter G. Woodson and the Art of Black Teaching*.

developing their own fugitive pedagogies to educate their communities within and beyond the constraints of white supremacist, two-tiered education systems like that developed by the G.E.B.

Arguing that the realm of education was one of, if not the most, important political battleground for Black people at the time, Woodson pointed out that, "when you control a man's thinking you do not have to worry about his actions."[316] This was why Woodson believed that educational reform should be at the forefront of Black equity movements, because: "To handicap a student by teaching him that his Black face is a curse and that his struggle to change his condition is hopeless is the worst sort of lynching.... This crusade is much more important than the anti-lynching movement, because there would be no lynching if it did not start in the schoolroom. Why not exploit, enslave, or exterminate a class that everybody is taught to regard as inferior?"[317]

Instead, Woodson made an early argument for culturally specific education designed by Black educational leaders that would be uniquely useful to young Black people. Woodson argued that the true measure of educational quality was not whether students memorized information, but whether the student was "actually equipped to face the ordeal before them or unconsciously contribute to their own undoing by perpetuating the regime of the oppressor."[318] The educational vision promoted by Woodson, which placed the real material and psychological needs of Black youth at the center, was much more closely aligned with the perspectives of local communities, as gleaned from reading the subtext of correspondence from Black educators documented in the Rockefeller archives and secondary sources.

Across many communities, there was resistance to the idea of sending their children to school to work in the fields or the kitchen. Yet they accepted this when it was the only path for their children to gain an education. This supports Givens' argument that even as Black people gained more formal access to education, they continued to practice forms of fugitive pedagogy, because of the racism and limits enforced by groups like the G.E.B. and Jim Crow governments. Despite participating in the vocational education offered within this racist system, Black people continued to develop a "framework of learning" that "contested ideas of Black inferiority, while rejecting the superexploitation and ownership of Black people as fungible laborers." Within Givens' framework, Black education can be seen as:

> [A] narrative plot that transcended the limited world in which Black folks found themselves. It became more than a teaching method—more than utilitarian skills to be learned. Instead teaching and learning themselves continued to be 'a means of escape,' as Woodson wrote. Education would guide Blacks in pursuit of a new world and a new way of being; it was a total critique of the current order. Black Americans passed this narrative on as a panacea for social ills, and it heavily informed both politics and values after Emancipation.[319]

[316] Woodson, *The Mis-Education of the Negro,* Chapter One.

[317] Woodson, *The Mis-Education of the Negro,* Chapter One.

[318] Woodson, *The Mis-Education of the Negro,* Preface.

[319] Givens, *Fugitive Pedagogy: Carter G. Woodson and the Art of Black Teaching,* 30.

While many Black communities appreciated and actively supported the efforts of foundations like the G.E.B., this fugitive pedagogy, in which education formed a pathway to liberation, remained central to the visions of Black communities across the country. While the G.E.B. archive reflects the narrative they wished to craft about education for Black students, it contains shadowed references to the reality that Black educators and families continued to practice fugitive pedagogies within and around the educational institutions offered by white society.

The perspectives of figures like Woodson and Douglass are often rightly cited as being central to Black educational pedagogies in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, while the perspectives of Black women of the period are less recognized.[320] Yet the perspectives of education leaders such as Anna Julia Cooper, Mary McLeod Bethune, and Nannie Helen Burroughs were also developed through extensive work teaching Black students in this period, in addition to their own life experiences as Black women. While they, in many cases, embraced respectability politics like the male leaders of the time, these women's accounts more holistically considered what would be needed to truly uplift Black communities.

As I discussed in the Introduction, as early as 1892, Cooper argued that the education and support of Black girls should be central to the goals of Black civic leaders and society overall. In *A Voice From the South*, she argued that "a race is but a total of families. The nation is the aggregate of its homes. As the whole is sum of all its parts, so the character of the parts will determine the characteristics of the whole."[321] Urging both Black communities and white philanthropists to include women and girls in their visions for social equity, she advocated that, "'I am my Sister's keeper' should be the hearty response of every man and woman of the race," and that there should be an "organized effort for the protection and elevation of our girls such as the White Cross League in England."[322]

Relatedly, educator Nannie Helen Burroughs, who founded the National Training School for Women and Girls in 1909, argued that self-sufficiency and pride should be central to educating Black girls. While supporting their economic independence beyond the role of domestic worker, she believed that training women in the most modern and efficient ways to conduct housework, alongside taking pride in whatever type of work they did to support themselves and their families, should be central to Black education as a whole:

> The training of Negro women is absolutely necessary, not only for their own salvation and the salvation of the race, but because the hour in which we live demands it. If we lose sight of the demands of the hour we blight our hope of progress. The subject of domestic science has crowded itself upon us, and unless we receive it, master it and be wise, the next ten

[320] This is an issue even within this dissertation research, which draws on foundational Black Studies texts, and in future iterations of this research, I hope to bring in more women's perspectives from the period.

[321] Cooper, *A Voice From the South,* 26.

[322] Cooper, *A Voice From the South,* 27.

> years will so revolutionize things that we will find our women without the wherewithal to support themselves.[323]

Recognizing the constraints of domestic work that "crowded itself upon" Black women, Burroughs supported Black women using the tools at their disposal to gain as much economic independence as possible. In the coming years, Burroughs would develop a program for Black girls ages 8-12 where they could gain an education and have a safe place to spend time while their mothers had to be out of the home earning a living. "Writing essays and delivering high-sounding speeches about social conditions will not solve the problem," she wrote in a 1933 article introducing the new program at her academy. "We must provide a place that will take the place of the mother and the home."[324]

Separate and Unequal: The Enduring Legacy of the G.E.B.

While the G.E.B. spent an incredible sum of money, and undoubtedly was responsible for providing education to many students who would likely not have accessed it otherwise, the long-term efficaciousness of their initiatives is questionable at best. By the 1930s, about a third of Black children in the South had attended a school funded by one of two philanthropic foundations: the G.E.B. and the Rosenwald Fund (which is discussed in the next chapter).[325] Between 1903 and 1964, the G.E.B. spent a whopping $325 million, worth about $6.2 billion in 2026. Of this, about $60 million, or about 18.5 percent of the Fund's total spending, went specifically to funding African American education.[326] The sheer scope of the G.E.B.'s spending meant that this one group played a central role in expanding racially segregated, gendered vocational education in the U.S. This ideological and material focus for many counties' public school systems has had far-reaching impacts on the trajectory of public education in this country.

Ultimately, the story told in this chapter suggests that the work of the G.E.B. served to strengthen the white supremacist state and normalize the use of public-private partnerships to carry out key government functions. It was much more successful in this regard than in its stated purpose of providing a strong, enduring basis for Black K-12 education. For most of its years of operation, the G.E.B. had a strong preference for its primary partners to be other federal, state, and local-level government institutions. The Board required communities that wanted access to their funding not only to raise matching funds, but to obtain the land and buildings for their school and then deed them over to the state. This was central to their plan to develop public education systems across

---

[323] Nannie Helen Burroughs and Kelisha B. Graves, *Nannie Helen Burroughs: A Documentary Portrait of an Early Civil Rights Pioneer, 1900–1959* (University of Notre Dame, 2019), "The Colored Woman and Her Relation to the Domestic Problem," 1902.

[324] Burroughs and Graves, *Nannie Helen Burroughs: A Documentary Portrait of an Early Civil Rights Pioneer, 1900–1959, Miss Burroughs Plans a "New Deal" to Conserve Girlhood of the Race,* 1933.

[325] Rooks, *Cutting School,* 50.

[326] Goldberg and Shubinski, *Black Education and Rockefeller Philanthropy from the Jim Crow South to the Civil Rights Era*.

the South. As a result, the G.E.B. ultimately empowered racist Southern governments to exert nearly total control over education for Black students.

In order to partner with Southern state and county officials, the G.E.B. had to appease the local arbiters of Jim Crow policies. In turn, these apartheid policies inherently shaped their funding priorities. Racially integrated schools were never even considered. The Southern counties took for granted that most white funds should go to white schools, and the G.E.B. played ball.

While this approach was successful in garnering some support from state officials, most of the white public across the South were completely against any kind of public schools for Black people. A 1910 article from the white Atlanta paper *The Jeffersonian* accused the G.E.B. of "insidiously and industriously" promoting "educational and social propaganda." Criticizing the Fund's support of and work with Booker Washington, the article authored by one "Georgia Teacher" criticized the "scheme, originating with certain multi-millionaire negrophiles of the North, to break down the barriers, educational and social, between the white and black races."[327]

Facing such widespread criticism from many whites in the South, the G.E.B. tread carefully in garnering what support it could from apartheid state offices. For instance, in the early days of its operations, the G.E.B. began to support segregated white schools in Hancock County, Georgia.[328] Partnering with local officials included supporting the local school board's priorities that white schools receive significantly greater resources and tax dollars. There were thirty schools for white people in the county at this time, and the same number of schools for Black people. By 1902, there was one central white high school in Hancock County, called Sparta High School.

In correspondence from October 1902, M.L. Duggan, the Hancock County Superintendent of Schools, wrote to G.E.B. Secretary Buttrick to request that the G.E.B. provide two things. First, he requested funds to pay teachers' salaries for the remainder of the school year, specifically at the white schools in the county. Duggan argued that, on the other hand, G.E.B. funds would likely not be needed for the Black schools' teacher salaries, because salaries were low, and he believed that "nearly all the Negro schools [would] raise the amount."[329] Second, he requested funding from the G.E.B. to build a new, state of the art Manual Training Department at Sparta High School, with "first class" equipment and teachers, which would serve as an example to the rest of the county. The G.E.B. agreed to a plan in which it helped fund the white teacher salaries over three years, extending the white school year to ten months.[330] The Fund also agreed to provide funding for the manual training department and its teacher over a three year period. In a letter from November 27,

---

[327] Georgia Teacher, "That Ovation to Booker Washington," *The Jeffersonian* (Atlanta, Georgia), January 27, 1910, https://www.newspapers.com/image/887698646/?match=1&terms=%22general%20education%20board%22.

[328] General Education Board, "General Education Board Archive," Central High School GA 1902-1906, Box 46, Folder 411.

[329] General Education Board, "General Education Board Archive," Central High School GA 1902-1906, Box 46, Folder 411.

[330] General Education Board, "General Education Board Archive," Central High School GA 1902-1906, Box 46, Folder 411.

1902, Duggan again wrote to the G.E.B. to thank them for supporting the manual training program and confirming the local school board's agreement that the state would gradually take over funding the program and teachers' salaries.[331] I was not able to find any record of a similar state of the art school built by the County or the G.E.B. for Black students.

One of the G.E.B.'s central goals with their financial support of both Black and white schools in Hancock County was to extend the school term by a month. The G.E.B. viewed Hancock County as a whole, and in particular Sparta High School, favorably, because it already had a tax base to fund a nine-month school year for the white students. Additionally, the whole county had only one school that the G.E.B. considered to be a private school, which gelled well with their goal of supporting the expansion of public education in the South.

By 1914, the G.E.B.'s continued work with Hancock County, and the State of Georgia, continued to expand, including adding chapters of their canning clubs for girls and corn cob clubs for boys. A 1914 letter to Buttrick from Georgia's Special Rural School Supervisor, Geo Godard, noted, "It was my pleasure… to meet the canning and corn club workers of [Hancock] county, both white and Colored, and to speak to both meetings. The results seemed to be commensurate with the efforts put forth." This letter also argued that the Black people in Georgia "acted… in thorough accord with the white people," including purchasing lands and the "making of better homes for themselves." He further noted how, on his recent tour of the state, he tried to "show the [Negro] people that home-making, sanitation, home economy, industrial development and sane religious thinking were and are the pressing needs of the hour among their ~~race~~ people."[332] This was a telling list of priorities for the local Black people. In Godard's 1915 Annual Report on state education, he noted that in the 1913 Census there were 366,743 Black school-age children, and of those, 57,522 were illiterate. Yet spreading literacy was not their number one priority; it was developing their skills and interest in homemaking, religion, sanitation, and industry.[333]

The fact that the G.E.B. played a central role in giving control of so many Black schools to state governments is central to the history of what happened to most schools founded by and for Black people. Very few of them were to survive more than 50 years due to government-enforced closures in the 1960s and 70s. As a result, very few of the schools founded with the support of the G.E.B. remain open today—schools that Black communities poured the majority of funding and labor into creating. Ironically, the fact that they were racially segregated was what caused these schools to be shuttered. Because they technically owned their schools, the state was poised to comfortably shutter Black institutions when it became politically expedient during the brief period of school desegregation in the mid-twentieth century.

---

[331] General Education Board, "General Education Board Archive," Central High School GA 1902-1906, Box 46, Folder 411.

[332] General Education Board, "General Education Board Archive," GA Supervisor of Rural Schools (Negro), Box 67, Folder 591.

[333] General Education Board, "General Education Board Archive," GA Supervisor of Rural Schools (Negro), Box 67, Folder 591.

By the time desegregation policies reached the South in the 1960s and 70s, it was mostly Black schools that were shuttered to racially integrate the school system; meanwhile, many white families pulled their students out of desegregated public schools in what is known as white flight, placing them in segregated private schools.[334] While *Brown v. Board of Education* formally made public school segregation unconstitutional in 1954, it was not until the 1960s that lower court rulings began actually requiring many Southern school districts to actively desegregate.[335] However, the way state and local governments carried this out was usually to close down the Black schools that had been so hard-fought for and funded by groups like the G.E.B. just decades earlier.[336] At the same time, it is important to note that meaningful strides toward desegregation were made, including amongst white families, particularly in the South as compared to the North.[337] This does not take away from the devastating loss of so many Black schools, or the fact that racial integration does not exist in schools across the country today in 2026.

The legacy of the G.E.B. is not strong Black schools, but rather an underfunded, racially segregated education system in which Black communities often continue to be criminalized, under-resourced, and placed on a track for low-wage work or incarceration. Central to this was the G.E.B.'s use of vocational education to solidify binary gender roles amongst Black children and link these gender roles to specific economic roles. The G.E.B.'s role in shaping public education through privatization, vocational education, segregation, and the enforcement of racialized gender roles has left an enduring shape to the American education system—perpetuating inequities that continue to fundamentally shape the education of Black children to this day.

[334] Jennifer Berry Hawes, "Segregation Academies Still Operate Across the South. One Town Grapples With Its Divided Schools.," *Pro Publica* (Wilcox County, AL), May 18, 2024, https://www.propublica.org/article/camden-alabama-segregated-schools-brown-v-board.

[335] Charles J. Ogletree, "All Deliberate Speed," *Center for American Progress*, April 12, 2004, https://www.americanprogress.org/article/all-deliberate-speed/.

[336] General Education Board, "General Education Board Archive."

[337] Cohen Jarvie and Orfield, *Black Segregation Matters: School Resegregation and Black Educational Opportunity*.

Chapter Two:

The Rosenwald Fund: Gendered Vocational Education for Black Students and the Making of Industrial Racial Capitalism

Rachel Anspach

Julius Rosenwald (1862-1932), a first-generation Jewish American who made a massive fortune as President of Sears Department Store, played a central role in shaping the U.S. public education system. Based out of Sears headquarters in Chicago, Rosenwald became one of the wealthiest businessmen of the Industrial era through revolutionizing the scale of consumer goods sales across the country. Rosenwald's business model capitalized on the U.S. Postal Service's new delivery capabilities; with a Sears catalog, residents from the city to the farm could order and receive all the goods they needed or desired from the comfort of home.[338]



Pages from a Sears catalogue, 1898[339]

[338] Andrew Feiler, *A Better Life for Their Children: Julius Rosenwald, Booker T Washington, and the 4978 Schools That Changed America* (University of Georgia Press, 2021).

[339] Made in Chicago Museum, *Sears, Roebuck & Co., Est. 1893* (Made in Chicago Museum, 2026), https://www.madeinchicagomuseum.com/single-post/sears-roebuck/.

In the early twentieth century, Rosenwald dedicated a significant portion of his fortune to Black K-12 education, primarily in the U.S. South—about $4.3 million between 1912-32 (about $85.5 million in 2026).[340] Eventually formalized into the Rosenwald Fund, his foundation supported the establishment of about 5,000 racially segregated, Black K-12 schools across the southern states, mostly built between the 1910s-30s. Rosenwald took an interest in Black education during its seminal period, after it first became legal in the South following the end of the chattel slavery system in the late 1800s. At the turn of the century, there was no federal Department of Education to develop a public education system, and no coordinated federal effort to support newly emancipated Black citizens. While the Southern apartheid state governments largely repudiated founding schools for Black students, whenever possible, Rosenwald schools coordinated with local governments to use their funding to establish public schools in the region.

The sheer scale of the Rosenwald Fund's activities made the Fund, and Rosenwald as its founder, central figures in shaping the trajectory of education for Black students and public education in the United States. As such, the study of the activities and ideological approach of the Rosenwald Fund is critical to understanding the ways in which the U.S. public education system has developed and operated. In turn, because education plays such a large role in priming young people for their roles in society, the Rosenwald Fund's educational platform played an outsized role in shaping Black people's life trajectories for the twentieth century and beyond.

Rosenwald's self-professed perspective was as a businessman first and foremost, and he always sought to make his philanthropic activities mutually beneficial.[341] As such, his educational philosophy centered on developing rural, Southern Black communities as both a consumer base as well as workers who would continue producing key raw materials grown in the region. Race, gender, and class ideology were central organizing tools within the policies and practices of the Rosenwald Fund, although they were often only referenced implicitly. Closely related to the General Education Board, discussed in Chapter One, Rosenwald used patriarchal gender roles as the central basis of his vocational education platform, largely training boys to be agricultural or low-wage industrial workers, and girls to be domestic workers focused on cooking, cleaning, and laundry. To access Rosenwald's funding, schools were required to have a vocational focus, encouraging values of hard work, as well as traditional, Christian patriarchal gender roles and family structures. To encourage capitalistic practices of self-reliance, Black communities were also required to raise matching funds and purchase land for their community's school building, which they were then required to deed over to the apartheid state.[342]

---

[340] Note: This was less than the matching funds raised by Black communities in partnership with the Rosenwald Fund, which totaled about $4.7 million. Nick Tabor, "Rosenwald Schools," in *Britannica* (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2025), https://www.britannica.com/topic/Rosenwald-schools.

[341] Rosenwald and Rosenwald Fund, "Julius Rosenwald Papers."

[342] This followed a nearly identical funding model as the General Education Board, discussed in Chapter One.

Argument, Methods & Epistemology

While the vocational education model spread by Rosenwald and other peer philanthropies has been studied critically through the lens of racial capitalism,[343] it has been studied less through an intersectional epistemology. In this chapter, I argue that a gendered, intersectional lens is needed to see the central role that racialized gender ideology played in the foundation of public education for Black Americans. This in turn provides a fuller analysis of the development and mechanisms of patriarchal racial capitalism, a central theme driving my research.

As I detail further in this dissertation's Introduction, intersectionality is an epistemology which posits that facets of the social hierarchy—including race, gender, and class—are inherently intertwined and therefore cannot be separated into distinct silos of analysis for scholars seeking to understand how our society operates and why.[344] In this chapter, I directly analyze archival materials to better understand how the Rosenwald Fund utilized racialized gender norms in its vocational education platform, daily operations, and interactions with the schools it funded. The central archive I engaged for this research is the Rosenwald Archive at the University of Chicago, where I spent two weeks in the fall of 2022.[345] While in the archive, I took notes and wrote research memos on themes of interest. I also scanned relevant files for further analysis. In addition to this, primary sources include newspaper articles from the period and the Rockefeller Foundation Archives, which I also visited in 2022.[346] While the chapter focuses on the Rosenwald Fund and the ethos of its founder, Julius Rosenwald, the purpose of the chapter is more to gain insight into the role foundations played in this formative period in U.S. education rather than to provide an analysis of Rosenwald as an individual. As a businessman, his approach and prolific reach in national education policy is a revealing case study of the larger picture of the outsized role that private corporate interests have played in shaping education policy for Black students, beginning in its seminal period post-Emancipation.

In this chapter, I argue that the Rosenwald Fund installed gendered vocational training and patriarchal ideology as a core pillar of their vocational education program for Black youth. In turn, the widespread adoption of this vocational model in Black public schools played an outsized role in shaping education for Black students to prime them as a steady source of low-wage, gendered labor. This means that the Rosenwald Fund played a significant role in bolstering the system of racial capitalism to continue gaining strength in the twentieth century and beyond.

---

[343] Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935*; Rooks, *Cutting School*; Watkins, *The White Architects of Black Education: Ideology and Power in America, 1865-1954*.

[344] MacKinnon, "Intersectionality as Method"; Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics."

[345] Rosenwald and Rosenwald Fund, "Julius Rosenwald Papers."

[346] General Education Board, "General Education Board Archive."

This argument frames the Rosenwald Fund and peer philanthropies[347] as active leaders in entrenching and adapting U.S. racial capitalism for the modern age, rather than more passively replicating the existing social hierarchy.[348] The racialized gender ideology they entrenched in their vocational education model continues in the twenty-first century to exert a widespread influence on public education policies geared toward Black youth and other youth of color.[349] Relatedly, corporate philanthropies continue to play a central role in education policymaking geared toward Black students and other marginalized students. Rather than treating gender as an add-on to the theoretical framework in existing scholarship on race and capitalism in education for Black students,[350] I argue that the gendered dimension was central to the Fund's strategy for using K-12 education to bring Black people into the fold of racial capitalism as low-wage workers and consumers.

Central features of the Rosenwald schools were that they focused on rural, Black communities that lacked schools (and often other basic infrastructure); they were required to have a vocational focus; Black communities were required to raise matching funds and procure the land in order for their funding to be released; and the schools had to be (or on the path to being) public schools, regardless of whether they received any substantive support from the state.[351] Taken together, these fundamental features of the Rosenwald Fund's approach to philanthropy show how the values of American capitalism were baked into the U.S. public education system from the outset. The critical academic tradition of Black feminism provides an epistemological lens showing that American capitalism can only be fully studied and understood as a racialized, gendered system rooted in white supremacy and patriarchy.[352]

As I discuss further in the Introduction and Chapter One, bringing a critical feminist epistemology is central to my archival research, as it provides a critical, systemic lens to interpret

---

[347] Such as the General Education Board, Carnegie Corporation, and Phelps-Stokes Fund.

[348] Note: Since the American Revolution, when co-education of boys and girls was popularized by education leaders such as Emma Willard and Horace Mann, education was popularly viewed as teaching girls (namely white girls) how to prepare for their "traditional duties, now enlarged to include public instruction of children… justified by the analogy of the female teacher as mother." Source: Elizabeth Hansot and David Tyack, "Gender in American Public Schools: Thinking Institutionally," *Signs* (Chicago) 13, no. 4 (1988): 741–60. As I further discussed in the Introduction and Chapter 1, there were distinct implications for teaching traditional patriarchal gender norms to Black and white children due to the history of slavery and ongoing realities of racial capitalism built on anti-Black racism.

[349] Dumas, "My Brother as 'Problem'"; Williams, *The Separation Solution?*; Jones, *Between Good and Ghetto*.

[350] Such as: Watkins, *The White Architects of Black Education: Ideology and Power in America, 1865-1954*; Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935*.

[351] Rosenwald and Rosenwald Fund, "Julius Rosenwald Papers."

[352] Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Riotous Black Girls, Troublesome Women, and Queer Radicals*; Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth Century America*. Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (Routledge, 2000).

and analyze what those in power chose to preserve.[353] Working with this epistemology, studying the archive of the Rosenwald Foundations' activities reveals key features of the development and entrenchment of racial capitalism in this country. One of these key features is that unelected businessmen who do not necessarily specialize in the field in which they are working are viewed as key policy-making partners by the government and entrusted with sweeping powers.[354] This can be seen through Rosenwald, a white man from the North whose expertise lay in business—specifically sales of clothing and other commercial goods—who led one of the largest school-building initiatives for all Black youth in the South.

The curriculum requirements of the Rosenwald Schools further reveal the ideals of training Black students to occupy specific roles within capitalism in ways that are both raced and gendered. Boys and girls were largely trained in roles reminiscent of slavery, while adapting with more modern methods, with boys being trained in agricultural or industrial labor, and girls in homemaking and service work. The vocational courses that the Fund would require schools to offer were closely tailored to the needs of local industries whenever possible, such as refining sugar, growing cotton, or commercial laundering. The archived correspondence shows that it was highly encouraged for Black youth to get married, embody Christian values (which was widely promoted by the Fund even though Rosenwald himself was Jewish), and form traditional families within their home communities in the South.[355]

Industrial Retail Capital and Philanthropy

To understand what shaped the Rosenwald Fund's approach to rural, education for Black students, it is important to examine how Rosenwald made his fortune. Born in 1862, Julius Rosenwald was the child of German Jewish immigrants to the U.S. who worked in the clothing industry. By 1895, Rosenwald owned a successful clothing retail business, but he sought to expand his reach further. He took advantage of the opportunity to connect with mutual acquaintance Richard Sears and joined Sears Department Store in Chicago as a partner and vice president at the young age of thirty-three. By 1898, Sears retired, and Rosenwald took over as president of the company.[356]

[353] Taylor, "Women in the Documents: Thoughts on Uncovering the Personal, Political, and Professional"; MacKinnon, "Intersectionality as Method."

[354] Janelle T. Scott, "Market-Driven Education Reform and the Racial Politics of Advocacy," *Peabody Journal of Education* 86, no. 5 (2011): 580–99, https://doi.org/10.1080/0161956X.2011.616445.

[355] Rosenwald and Rosenwald Fund, "Julius Rosenwald Papers."

[356] Peter M. Ascoli, *Julius Rosenwald: The Man Who Built Sears, Roebuck and Advanced the Cause of Black Education in the American South* (Indiana University Press, 2006), Chapters 1-2.



Julius Rosenwald, Undated.[357]

Under his leadership, Sears would go on to revolutionize the scale of commercial goods sales in the U.S. through developing a massive mail order and delivery system. In 1896, the U.S. Postal Service (USPS) began rolling out its Rural Free Delivery Program, under which the government would deliver mail for free to rural addresses. Prior to this, people living in rural parts of the country, which was a high number at this time, routinely had to travel long distances to retrieve their mail. Similarly, they may have had to make quite a long trip to reach a well-stocked department store. Rosenwald recognized the potential of this USPS policy to transform mail order sales, and through a focus on logistics, customer service, and quality, he massively expanded the remote sale of goods across the country. By the early 1900s, Sears' sales had skyrocketed, and their catalog—selling everything from farm tools to appliances to clothing to prefabricated houses and the tools to build them—had become a routine household item.[358] In addition to rural residents, Sears saw Black people as an ideal customer base, as they faced widespread and extreme discrimination when shopping in person throughout the South, in particular, as well as throughout the entire country.[359]

[357] Rosenwald and Rosenwald Fund, "Julius Rosenwald Papers," Portraits, Series V, Subseries 2.

[358] Ascoli, *Julius Rosenwald: The Man Who Built Sears, Roebuck and Advanced the Cause of Black Education in the American South,* Chapters 1-2.

[359] Made in Chicago Museum, *Sears, Roebuck & Co., Est. 1893*.



Sears catalog production, 1908[360]



Sears catalog production, 1908[361]

[360] Made in Chicago Museum, *Sears, Roebuck & Co., Est. 1893*.

[361] Made in Chicago Museum, *Sears, Roebuck & Co., Est. 1893*.

The photos above show the massive scale of Sears' catalog production in 1908, as well as their use of modern, mechanized production techniques. As a result of this business model, led by Rosenwald, Sears sales grew from about $750,000 in 1895 to $50 million by 1907. Another major expansion of USPS came in 1913, after Congress approved a new program called parcel post, through which it became much cheaper to mail packages under 11 pounds. According to Rosenwald's records, in the first few weeks of this program alone, mail delivery orders increased by 15 percent. While net sales grossed around $51 million in 1909, by 1913 company sales surpassed $91 million (about $2.9 billion in today's dollars).[362] With his major fortune in hand and his company booming, Rosenwald went on to focus much of his attention on philanthropy for the remainder of his life. In addition to his well-funded Black school fund, Rosenwald's major philanthropic endeavors would go on to include the founding of Chicago's beloved Museum of Science and Industry, grants to individual Black artists, and serving on the Board of Trustees for the University of Chicago.[363]

In 1912, Rosenwald made his first major foray into philanthropy by providing a $1 million donation to pay for agricultural extension agents who would provide support to farmers across the country to modernize farms and increase yields. This program expanded on a Rockefeller-funded project initiated in 1902 for such farm experts, which had been limited to the South. Under the Rosenwald funding, which was coordinated by the National Council of Grain Exchanges, individual farmers in any part of the country could apply for an $1000 grant to work with an expert farm agent to improve their farm's production, provided that they could raise matching funds and local business leaders were also willing to provide matching funds. In his biography of Rosenwald, Peter Ascoli, a historian who is Rosenwald's grandson, notes that Rosenwald initiated this grant through Sears Roebuck before any company in the U.S. had set up a corporate foundation, which Sears would create six years later.[364]

The program was taken over in 1914 by the federal Department of Agriculture, after Rosenwald had disbursed just $220,000 of the million slated. While this was short-lived, Rosenwald's first major foray into philanthropy was successful and significant in setting the trajectory for his future work—namely a focus on expanding the economic power of rural, agricultural communities; matching funds requirements; and partnerships with the state. When asked about his investment in this program at the time, Rosenwald stated that it was "simply a business proposition," because improving farms "would add to their prosperity, and their

---

[362] U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, "CPI Inflation Calculator," U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, accessed January 29, 2025, https://www.bls.gov/data/inflation_calculator.htm.

[363] Ascoli, *Julius Rosenwald: The Man Who Built Sears, Roebuck and Advanced the Cause of Black Education in the American South*.

[364] Ascoli, *Julius Rosenwald: The Man Who Built Sears, Roebuck and Advanced the Cause of Black Education in the American South,* Chapter Three.

prosperity would redound to the prosperity of the city, and to ourselves."[365] This quote summed up much of Rosenwald's giving philosophy.

Racial Capitalism & Predatory Inclusion

Foundational critical scholarship on race and white supremacy, such as Omi & Winant's *Racial Formation in the United States* and Cedric Robinson's *Black Marxism*, emphasize that the racial hierarchy in this country was formed and enshrined in our laws and social systems specifically to support the socio-economic system of capitalism.[366] This relationship is explored in the theoretical field of racial capitalism, which contends that there is a symbiotic relationship between anti-Black racism and capitalism in which the ideology and material realities feed into one another and can never be fully disentangled. Omi & Winant define racial formation as the "sociohistorical process through which racial categories are created, lived out, transformed, and destroyed."[367] Central to this process of racial formation are racial projects, which are "simultaneously an interpretation, representation, or explanation of racial dynamics, and an effort to reorganize and redistribute resources along particular racial lines."[368]

This context is important because it reminds us that race and other intersecting social categories are socially constructed and change over time. As a racial project, the Rosenwald's Fund redistributed resources along racial lines both to Black communities and to white supremacist state education institutions. So was this a racist racial project? I argue that it was—because it was fundamentally a project about expanding and entrenching capitalism and consumerism in Black communities. It was not just about bringing Black people into the capitalist market to level the playing field but specifically intended to exploit the low-wage labor of Black workers and keep them at the bottom of the socio-economic hierarchy. This analysis is supported by Omi & Winant's definition of a racist racial project as one that "creates or reproduces structures of domination based on racial significations and identities."[369] Using this definition, it becomes evident that U.S. capitalism is an inherently racist system.[370]

Nearly a century ago, the prolific scholar W.E.B. Du Bois was already arguing that the largest threat to the realization of true American democracy was not the overtly racist Southerners, but the Northern businessmen. The largest threat to a robust democracy for Black Americans was the pattern of "liberal" Northern businessmen who sought to incorporate Black people into their vision

[365] Ascoli, *Julius Rosenwald: The Man Who Built Sears, Roebuck and Advanced the Cause of Black Education in the American South,* 76.

[366] Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States*, 3rd edition (Routledge, 2014). Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*.

[367] Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States,* 109.

[368] Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States,* 125.

[369] Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States,* 128.

[370] This is my own conclusion, which Omi & Winant would not necessarily agree with based on their work.

of growing capitalist accumulation and exploitation. (This was as opposed to conservative white Southerners, who simply wanted to exclude Black people from mainstream society.) Du Bois argued that, following the Civil War, the South "sought to reestablish slavery by force, because it had no comprehension of the means by which modern industry could secure the advantages of slave labor without its responsibilities."[371] On the other hand, "Northern industry seemed at last free and untrammeled. It began in 1876 an exploitation which was built on much the same sort of slavery which it helped to overthrow in 1863. It murdered democracy in the United States so completely that the world does not recognize its corpse."[372]

When Northern businessmen saw that those in power in the South were unwilling to provide the basic level of rights and protections that they thought Black people would need to cooperate willingly as workers post-Emancipation, they were concerned about their stable supply chain of raw goods from the South (such as cotton and coal) and decided to take matters into their own hands. As Du Bois outlines, education was one of the central mechanisms that Northern industrialists used to expand their reach into Black communities under the guise of extending democracy.[373]

Privatized education programs that built specifically vocational schools for Black students were one outgrowth of Northern industry superficially expanding democratic engagement through public education access, while in fact making education for Black students intrinsically tied to lower-class economic roles. The concept of *predatory inclusion* provides a helpful lens to conceptualize the role of vocational education funds like Rosenwald's.[374] This is a concept formulated by Keeanga Yamhatta-Taylor in *Race for Profit*, in which she looks at the period in the 1970s during which the federal government moved from its policy of redlining (preventing Black people from obtaining government-protected home mortgages) to policies insuring mortgages to encourage low-income African Americans to purchase homes.[375]

In this book, predatory inclusion describes how purported advances in fair housing in fact continued racial capitalism's longstanding pattern of turning a profit through exploiting and displacing Black people by encouraging the real estate industry to prey upon Black home buyers—particularly Black women—who they knew were at high risk for foreclosure. While Taylor studied housing policy, this concept is helpful for analyzing how, through law and policy, American elites have used the guise of civil rights and inclusivity to extend their power and profits into Black communities. In the case of the Rosenwald Fund, Black communities were given access to "public education," for which they had to raise matching funds, while the philanthropy dictated specific trades that students had to learn in to access their support. These trades were most often lower-

[371] W. E. B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860-1880* (Harcourt, Brace & Co, 1935), 2.

[372] Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860-1880,* 2.

[373] Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860-1880*.

[374] Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, *Race for Profit: How Banks and the Real Estate Industry Undermined Black Homeownership* (University of North Carolina Press, 2019), 5.

[375] Taylor, *Race for Profit: How Banks and the Real Estate Industry Undermined Black Homeownership*.

skill industrial work or agriculture for boys, and domestic service such as cooking, cleaning, and laundering for girls.

It is worth noting that this massive expansion of the racial hierarchy was spearheaded by a first-generation Jewish American with immigrant parents, a population that was widely discriminated against and not fully incorporated into whiteness in the early twentieth century.[376] My research suggests that Rosenwald may have consciously used philanthropy to raise his status in elite circles and build relationships with other industrial elites, who were overwhelmingly from Christian backgrounds. Use of philanthropy or charity to raise social status is a longstanding historical practice for people with "new money" who may be looked down upon by those with "old money." For instance, in Chapter Three on Snow Hill school, I discuss how the General Education Board's archived correspondence shows Rosenwald deferring to the older, more established foundation on whether to support the school. Rosenwald repeatedly made clear in his correspondence to both the G.E.B., led by the Rockefellers, and Snow Hill itself that the Rosenwald Fund's approval was contingent on the G.E.B. finding it worthy of support. This suggests that Rosenwald used philanthropy strategically to cement the broader racial order, as well as his own position at the top of the hierarchy, despite his Jewish immigrant background.[377]

While the period of chattel slavery and genocide of native peoples was the foundational period of racial capitalism in the U.S., the Industrial Revolution was another key period for the formation and consolidation of the racial order. The importance of this period is drawn out by Angela Davis in *Women, Race and Class*, in which she argues that the turn of the century was a key period for the solidification of racialized gender roles, importantly drawing attention to the ways that new technologies were framed as making women's labor obsolete.[378] Whereas white women had previously been essential to household labor, through work such as weaving, sewing clothes, candle and soap making, such products were increasingly replaced by goods mass-produced in factories.[379]

As one of the forces most influential in increasing sales of massed-produced consumer goods for the first time, newly available to order and receive from the comfort of home, Sears Roebuck played a central role in this process. This spread of commercial home goods and tools was one of the central mechanisms through which patriarchal capitalists relegated "proper" [aka married white] women to their roles as wives and mothers. In turn, this new ideal model of womanhood reinscribed women's dependence on men and positioned Black women who continued to work outside the home as deviant. Davis argues that, during the nineteenth century, "the cleavage between the home and the public economy, brought on by industrial capitalism, established female inferiority more firmly than ever before. 'Woman' became synonymous in the

[376] Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness*.

[377] Relatedly, I found several references in the GEB Archive criticizing the activities of the Rosenwald Fund and discussing how they could have greater influence on both Rosenwald and his Fund's activities. (Such as in GEB Archive, Julius Rosenwald Fund 1917-1919, Box 212, Folder 2038.)

[378] Angela Davis, *Women, Race, & Class* (Random House, 1981), Chapter Seven.

[379] See Chapter One for more discussion of this theme.

prevailing propaganda with 'mother' and 'housewife,' and both… bore the fatal mark of inferiority."[380]

For the new white male industrial elite, such as Rosenwald and Rockefeller, this solidification of racism and patriarchy under the guise of modern industrial advances served numerous purposes. Amongst these was the reality that, as Davis explains, these restrictive, idealized gender roles were never truly available to Black Americans. She argues that "among Black female slaves, this vocabulary [of mother and housewife] was nowhere to be found. The economic arrangements of slavery contradicted the hierarchical sexual roles incorporated in the new ideology. Male-female relations within the slave community could not, therefore, conform to the dominant ideological pattern."[381] Post-emancipation, Black women continued to work in low-wage jobs that again precluded them from being seen as real 'women' deserving of protection.[382]

This fissure also served to rupture the potential for the dominant women's movement to be race and class inclusive; instead, the wealthy white women leading the movement moved away from their prior commitment to abolition and toward racist arguments for giving white women the vote as a means of continued white political control.[383] White women's position as partial persons, contingent on their legal association with a white man, was solidified, as was the status of Black women as essentially nonpersons, which was used to justify a number of exclusionary economic and social policies toward both groups—particularly the latter—in the coming twentieth century.

This solidification of racialized gender roles during a key period in U.S. economic history—when the country formally abolished slavery and underwent the Industrial Revolution—demonstrates the extreme adaptability of racial capitalism to reinscribe white supremacist and patriarchal power relations under ostensibly new socio-political arrangements. When industrial capitalists utilized their fortunes to instill vocational education into the bedrock of public education across the South, they played an active role in cementing the new racialized, gendered order for the twentieth century and beyond.

Building the Rosenwald School Program

With this theoretical framework in mind, we return to Rosenwald. Following his initial foray into philanthropy, which as mentioned earlier resulted in a partnership with the federal government and its new agriculture department, Rosenwald sought to continue exploring how he could use his fortune to positively impact society. His next foray into philanthropy was in 1910, in support of local YMCAs [Young Men's Christian Associations], including donating land and financial

[380] Angela Davis, *Women, Race, & Class*, Chapter Seven.

[381] Angela Davis, *Women, Race, & Class*, Chapter One.

[382] Angela Davis, *Women, Race, & Class*.

[383] Angela Davis, *Women, Race, & Class,* Chapters 3 & 4.

support to have a new YMCA built near the Sears plant on Chicago's south side.[384] YMCAs in this era supported both the community uplift of low-income men, including immigrants, industrial workers, and Black migrants, and the advancement of Christian values of clean living and hard work. Importantly, the YMCAs built in 23 cities through Rosenwald's funding provided a relatively clean, safe, and affordable space for Black travelers seeking overnight accommodations, which were hard to come by due to the racism of the period.[385] Prior to his involvement with supporting the YMCA, there is little evidence that Rosenwald took an interest in racial issues or issues specifically impacting Black Americans.[386]

In 1910, as Rosenwald deepened his interest in philanthropy, his friend Paul J. Sachs (partner at the giant financial firm Goldman Sachs) lent him two books that greatly increased his interest in supporting Black educational philanthropy specifically. The first book was *Up From Slavery*, Booker T. Washington's autobiography, and the second was *An American Citizen: The Life of William H. Baldwin Jr.* by John Graham Brooks.[387] In particular, Rosenwald was struck by the philanthropic work of William H. Baldwin, a major railroad executive who had passed in 1905. During the latter years of his life, Baldwin had been active in fundraising amongst Northern businessmen to support Southern education for Black students, and had served on the board of Tuskegee Institute as well as the Rockefeller-funded General Education Board.[388] In a letter to his two daughters, Rosenwald conveyed his excitement about the book, calling it "glorious," and lauding "a man who really *led* a life which is to my liking and whom I shall endeavor to imitate or follow as nearly as I can."[389] This was exactly what Rosenwald proceeded to do—from the educational philosophy supported by Baldwin to partnering with Booker Washington at Tuskegee. From the time he read those books, Rosenwald's philanthropic fund rolled out relatively quickly considering the reach and power it would hold.

It is important to contextualize that while the Black population of Chicago would expand greatly in the coming years, in 1910 the Black population of Chicago was just about 2%. This meant that Rosenwald entered into this work with next to no proximity to Black people or communities. Baldwin and Washington's approach to education for Black students, which centered on vocational education that encouraged Black people to continue residing in rural agricultural areas, gelled neatly with the "welfare capitalism" approach that Rosenwald had taken

[384] Ascoli, *Julius Rosenwald: The Man Who Built Sears, Roebuck and Advanced the Cause of Black Education in the American South,* Chapter 3.

[385] The YMCA, *YMCA History: The 1900s* (The YMCA, 2026), https://www.ymca.org/who-we-are/our-history/1900s.

[386] Ascoli, *Julius Rosenwald: The Man Who Built Sears, Roebuck and Advanced the Cause of Black Education in the American South,* Chapter 3.

[387] Ascoli, *Julius Rosenwald: The Man Who Built Sears, Roebuck and Advanced the Cause of Black Education in the American South,* Chapter 3.

[388] The General Education Board is discussed in depth in Chapter One of this dissertation.

[389] Ascoli, *Julius Rosenwald: The Man Who Built Sears, Roebuck and Advanced the Cause of Black Education in the American South,* 79.

in both his philanthropic and business endeavors.[390] This vocational education philosophy, known as the Hampton-Tuskegee School, supported instilling conservative social values of patriarchal Christianity in conjunction with the values of hard physical labor.[391] Rosenwald viewed this as an ideal approach in that it provided substantive educational access to Black students, but in a way that specifically incentivized them to take on a lifelong status as compliant, low-wage workers and consumers. Rosenwald enthusiastically praised Baldwin for being a "good friend of Booker T. Washington and [who] made great study of the Negro problem along common sense, helpful lines…."[392] Moreover, encouraging Black people to stay in the rural South struck Rosenwald as beneficial for Sears' business model, which focused heavily on sales of agricultural equipment and home goods.

Rosenwald had his first in-person meeting with Tuskegee University President Booker Washington in May 1911, at a luncheon that Rosenwald hosted for local business leaders.[393] Recognizing the opportunity of Rosenwald's massive fortune and interest in his cause, Washington soon after expressed interest in having Rosenwald join Tuskegee's Board. In October 1911, Rosenwald journeyed down to Alabama to tour the college. Rosenwald was extremely impressed with the vocational education of the Black young adults he saw at Tuskegee, and in December, he agreed to become a trustee.[394] This was the beginning of a close personal and professional relationship between the two men, in which Rosenwald regularly supported Washington's endeavors at Tuskegee, and Washington advised and helped facilitate Rosenwald's philanthropic work.

In 1912, following Washington's recommendation, Rosenwald provided his first grant to a rural Black K-12 school, Utica Normal and Industrial Institute in Utica, Mississippi. Rosenwald continued these grants to struggling Black private schools in the next few years, including supporting Snow Hill Institute in Snow Hill, Alabama.[395] Ascoli argues that Washington had been working for years to build more rural schools throughout the Black Belt, stating that "building Black public schools in the farmland around Tuskegee was something Booker T. Washington longed to do." With Rosenwald, Washington recognized an opportunity to further align their interests, and he pitched Rosenwald on the idea of a broader rural Black school fund. As Ascoli

[390] Ascoli, *Julius Rosenwald: The Man Who Built Sears, Roebuck and Advanced the Cause of Black Education in the American South,* Chapter 3.

[391] The Hampton-Tuskegee school is further discussed in the Introduction and Chapter One of this dissertation.

[392] Ascoli, *Julius Rosenwald: The Man Who Built Sears, Roebuck and Advanced the Cause of Black Education in the American South,* 79.

[393] As I discuss in further detail in the other sections of this dissertation, Tuskegee was a leading Historically Black College/University (HBCU) founded in Alabama in 1881. It's president, Booker T. Washington, was a premiere Black education and conservative political leader in the period.

[394] Ascoli, *Julius Rosenwald: The Man Who Built Sears, Roebuck and Advanced the Cause of Black Education in the American South,* Chapter 3.

[395] Snow Hill Institute is the topic of Chapter Three of this dissertation.

put it, "he found his man in JR."[396] Washington's idea of extending vocation schools for Black students throughout the rural South aligned quite neatly with Rosenwald's expressed interest in mutually beneficial philanthropy that developed Black Southerners as workers and consumers. Washington's proposal further appealed to Rosenwald through the idea of Black communities producing matching funds toward their schools, a practice already in use by foundations such as the General Education Board.

In 1912, Rosenwald agreed to a trial program building six schoolhouses for Black children. By May 1913, Washington updated Rosenwald that three of the schools were nearly complete, informing him that, "you do not know what joy and encouragement the building of these schoolhouses has brought to the people of both races in the communities where they are being erected."[397] Ascoli argues that updates such as this were part of a smart strategic campaign on the part of Washington, since he knew that advancing interracial cooperation was one of Rosenwald's main interests. Interracial cooperation was a goal very distinct from racial equality—a perspective that Rosenwald made clear in a 1911 letter: "What interests me particularly is that we have a problem to deal with: namely, bringing about a condition whereby the Whites do what they can to make of the Colored people a decent, respectable element, if not from a sense of justice, at least in self-defense. Equality is furthest from my mind, but a nearer approach to justice toward these people must, in my opinion, be brought about through one method or another."[398] Washington himself was (in)famous for arguing that, "In all things that are purely social we can be as separate as the fingers, yet one as the hand in all things essential to mutual progress,"[399] or in other words that racial segregation should continue alongside economic cooperation for the good of society as a whole. He was well-versed and uniquely successful in appealing to the sentiments of wealthy white men.

Over the next couple of years, Washington continued to lobby Rosenwald to support Black school construction, regaling him with stories and photos of their new schools' success and grateful community reception. These photos had a major impact on Rosenwald's interest in expanding this funding, as well as appreciating their potential to bring in more wealthy funders to their cause. As he engaged in this work, Rosenwald became interested in having increased coordination between such schools, as well as shared educational and curricular standards.

---

[396] Ascoli, *Julius Rosenwald: The Man Who Built Sears, Roebuck and Advanced the Cause of Black Education in the American South,* 137.

[397] Ascoli, *Julius Rosenwald: The Man Who Built Sears, Roebuck and Advanced the Cause of Black Education in the American South,* 139.

[398] Ascoli, *Julius Rosenwald: The Man Who Built Sears, Roebuck and Advanced the Cause of Black Education in the American South,* 96.

[399] Booker T. Washington, *Atlanta Compromise* (Britannica, 1895), https://www.britannica.com/event/Atlanta-Compromise.

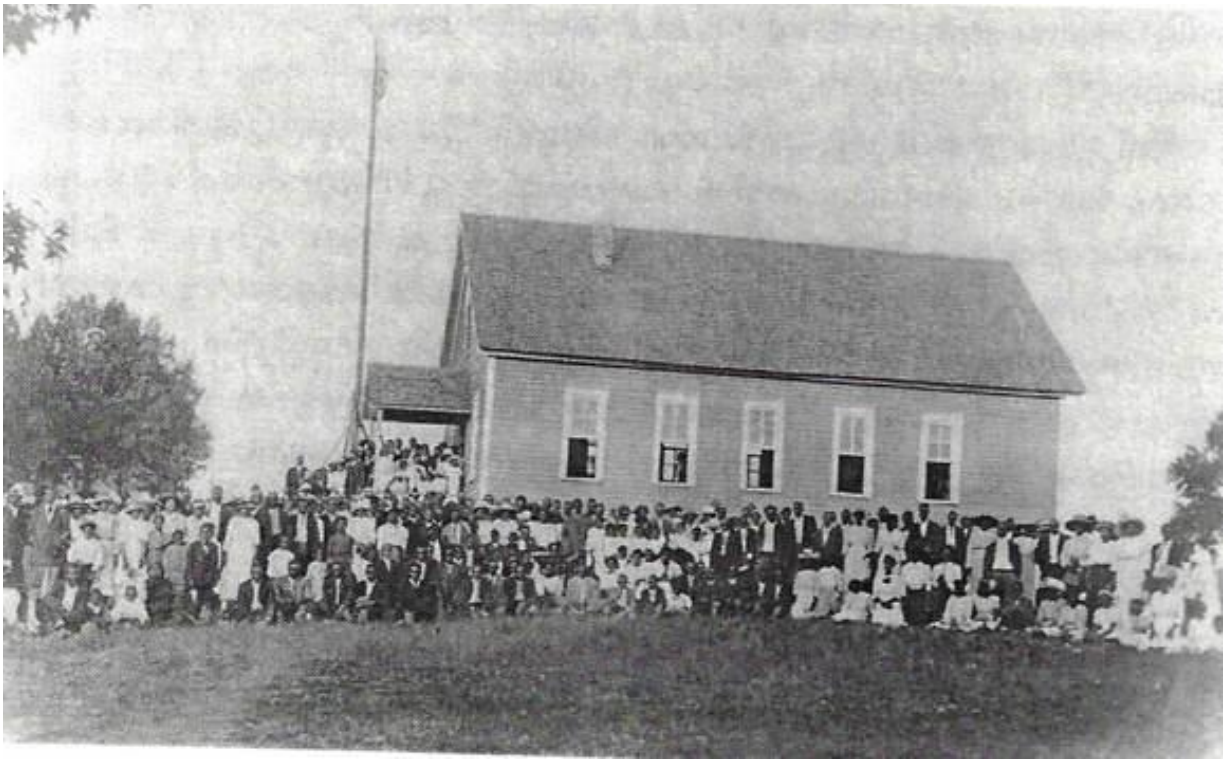


Photo sent by Washington to Rosenwald depicting Loachapoka School in Alabama, the first Rosenwald School, completed in May 1913.[400]



Rosenwald School in Chehaw, AL, one of the first six Rosenwald Schools to be built, completed in 1914.[401]

[400] Julius Rosenwald Legacy, "The First Six Schools," *Julius Rosenwald Legacy*, 2025, https://www.julius-rosenwald-legacy.com/the-first-six.html.

[401] Julius Rosenwald Legacy, "The First Six Schools."

As noted in the captions, the above photos show two of the first six Rosenwald schools completed in the trial partnership between Washington and Tuskegee. Both photos portray the "scientific," neat and uniform approach that Rosenwald saw as central to the success of their initiative. The children and teachers are lined up in front of the newly constructed schoolhouses in an orderly manner, neatly and formally dressed. In the second photo, we see that boys are lined up on the left, and girls are on the right. The boys are dressed in black suits, while the girls are in white dresses; this functions to distinguish the group by gender and shows how school dress codes were dictated according to the gender binary in the typical fashion of the time.

Their evident success and the widespread need led them to construct a more formal agreement in 1914, which centered on a commitment to build 100 schools in Alabama, where Tuskegee was located. Rosenwald agreed to provide up to $350 per school, with up to a $30,000 total spending limit (about $11,500 per school in 2026 dollars). In addition to requiring local Black communities to raise matching funds and encouraging local white support, when possible, central to this new initiative was an emphasis on supporting public schools. Because the Southern states and federal government had essentially abandoned Black public education during this time, there was not a strong network structure or way for resources to be distributed across Black primary and secondary schools.[402] As he developed his school funding program, Rosenwald saw fostering Black public schools as the clearest path toward their institutionalization and success in American society. Rosenwald felt strongly that the funds should be used in "supplementing what public school officers or the people themselves may do," and the matching funds from Rosenwald (about one third of the total funds) would only be released when the required funds had been provided by the local communities *and* the state.[403] Over the course of the Fund's activities, they would inspire local governments to spend around $18.1 million (about $358 million in 2026) on education for Black students, a major feat in support of Black public schooling in the apartheid South and one that was achieved through accepting racial and economic segregation.[404]

[402] For more context on the education policy circumstances of the time, see the other sections of this dissertation.

[403] Rosenwald and Rosenwald Fund, "Julius Rosenwald Papers."

[404] Tabor, "Rosenwald Schools."



Julius Rosenwald seated next to Booker Washington, Source Unknown

Rosenwald was, as his grandson put it, "totally opposed to charity as a mere handout," finding it critical that Black people contribute financially to philanthropic initiatives within their communities.[405] Rosenwald's funding structure[406] allowed the Foundation to control the structure of Black schools and gain recognition for their existence, while in fact requiring Black communities to do the majority of the labor and fundraising. The state and white communities also benefited financially from the arrangement.[407] The Fund's requirement for Black communities to come up with matching grants in order to qualify for funding resulted in Black communities contributing about $4.7 million (nearly $1 billion in 2025) toward building their own "public" schools from 1906-1960.[408] As mentioned, to qualify for Rosenwald funds, these schools were also required to be vocational in nature, thus furthering the economic reality of training students to be factory workers, sharecropping farmers, or domestic workers—favoring professions that were economically limiting and highly gender segregated. Before Rosenwald would release the

[405] Ascoli, *Julius Rosenwald: The Man Who Built Sears, Roebuck and Advanced the Cause of Black Education in the American South,* 82.

[406] Similar to Rockefeller's General Education Board, discussed in depth in Chapter One.

[407] Rooks, *Cutting School*.

[408] Rooks, *Cutting School,* 64.

matching funds, Black communities were also required to secure the land for the school building, which they were then required to deed to the state.[409] As a result, education scholar Noliwe Rooks found that in Southern states such as Alabama, "Black communities, not white philanthropists, contributed more than two-thirds of the total money spent" on schools built through the Rosenwald Fund.[410]

Four years after starting its school-building program in 1913, the program officially incorporated as a philanthropic organization named the Rosenwald Fund in 1917. When the Fund first got started, it based its administrative operations out of the Tuskegee Institute under Booker Washington's leadership. Tuskegee's Director of the Extension Department, along with a special committee, helped steer and administer the program. The biggest distinction from their initial school-building partnership was that, from its inception, the Rosenwald Fund sought to promote public education for Black K-12 students. This was part of a goal to create a cohesive public education system across the country. When working with communities to establish a school, the Fund aimed to connect first with the state's Department of Education, after receiving an application from the local county or parish superintendent. The "application blanks" were to be provided by the superintendent and could be filled out by community members.[411] This essentially required Black communities to get some level of cooperation and buy-in from state authorities, which could be an extremely difficult obstacle in the apartheid South.

At first, $400-$500 in funding was available per school (about $10,200-$12,800 in 2026). These funds would be released after 1) the application was forwarded by the state, 2) the community purchased and/or secured the land for the school grounds, and 3) raised matching funds to what the Fund would provide.[412] As with the Rockefeller-funded General Education Board, which was a direct inspiration to Rosenwald, the requirement that Black communities provide the majority of the capital to found their "public" school was viewed as preferable to simply providing Black communities with a charitable hand-out. This was seen as training Black communities to participate in the capitalist society and develop responsible financial practices. The fact that much of the funding came from Black communities, who also paid taxes that supported white schools but not their own, was a central way the initiative was able to garner support from the local governments.

This financial approach was evidenced in the following 1917 foundation report: "One hundred and forty-eight Rosenwald schools have been built in Alabama, costing $155,760 (about $4 million in 2026). Of this amount the negroes of Alabama gave $73,712 [nearly half of the funds]; Mr. Rosenwald $43,250; the State $32,126; and the white people donated $66.12. And besides this the negroes have continued to give what they could toward the improvement of their schools in most sections of the State."[413] The fact that Black communities in Alabama could raise nearly $2 million

[409] Rooks, *Cutting School*.

[410] Rooks, *Cutting School,* 65.

[411] Rosenwald and Rosenwald Fund, "Julius Rosenwald Papers," Julius Rosenwald Schools, Box 34, Folder 3.

[412] Rosenwald and Rosenwald Fund, "Julius Rosenwald Papers," Box 34, Folder 3.

[413] Rosenwald and Rosenwald Fund, "Julius Rosenwald Papers," Negroes, Rural Schools, Box 53, Folder 7.

from their own communities in 1917, just a generation or two after slavery, speaks to the tenacity and deep-seated commitment to education that these communities held. Additionally, the Rosenwald Fund would not offer indefinite support to these schools once they were built, though they did provide some with multi-year commitments provided they raised a certain level of matching funds. This left many Black schools public in name only, with little support from the state and mounting financial responsibility to keep their doors open.

Industrialized Education: Gendered School Plant and Curriculum Design

Much like how he ran Sears, in his school-building initiative, Rosenwald sought uniformity and the incorporation of modern, scientific techniques. In the early days of the Rosenwald Fund's operation, it laid out the following guidelines for communities to receive support: "1) That a community should provide for its children a modern schoolhouse, on a suitable site, furnished and equipped for work; 2) That the public school board should keep this school open for a term of at least five months; 3) That there should be provided an industrial room in which at least the home-making arts for girls should be taught, and in which agricultural home projects for boys and girls should be directed."[414] This statement of requirements encapsulated much of the Fund's central values. It is noteworthy that of central importance to their requirements was a specifically gendered set of rules: "an industrial room" in the schoolhouse, where "the home-making arts for girls should be taught," along with "agricultural home projects for boys *and* girls."[415]

The Rosenwald Fund's systematic, "scientific" approach to building and running schools reflected the values of the Industrial Revolution that made Rosenwald's fortune possible. For instance, developments in technology, factory production, and the creation of the assembly line in 1913 allowed a new scale for the efficient mass production of goods, from cars to clothing to home appliances. This ethos was reflected in the Fund's use of the term "school plant" to describe their school buildings, along with strict requirements around school building plans and space usage.[416] Rosenwald worked closely with Booker T. Washington and the Tuskegee Institute in crafting this vision. Tuskegee was where he commissioned the plans for the schoolhouses Rosenwald would fund across fifteen southern states. The uniform school plans helped ensure their vision of vocational education, along with efficient use of materials and space for the school plants.[417]

To help organize and evaluate this work on the ground, the Fund employed Black men as "Rosenwald Building Agents," who traveled to rural communities in the South to help assess whether communities should receive funding, and provided communities with aid in following the

---

[414] Rosenwald and Rosenwald Fund, "Julius Rosenwald Papers," Box 34, Folder 3.

[415] Rosenwald and Rosenwald Fund, "Julius Rosenwald Papers," Box 34, Folder 3.

[416] Rosenwald and Rosenwald Fund, "Julius Rosenwald Papers," Box 34, Folder 3.

[417] Rosenwald and Rosenwald Fund, "Julius Rosenwald Papers," Report for the Conference of the Trustees and Guests held on April 29, 1928, Box 57, Folder 1.

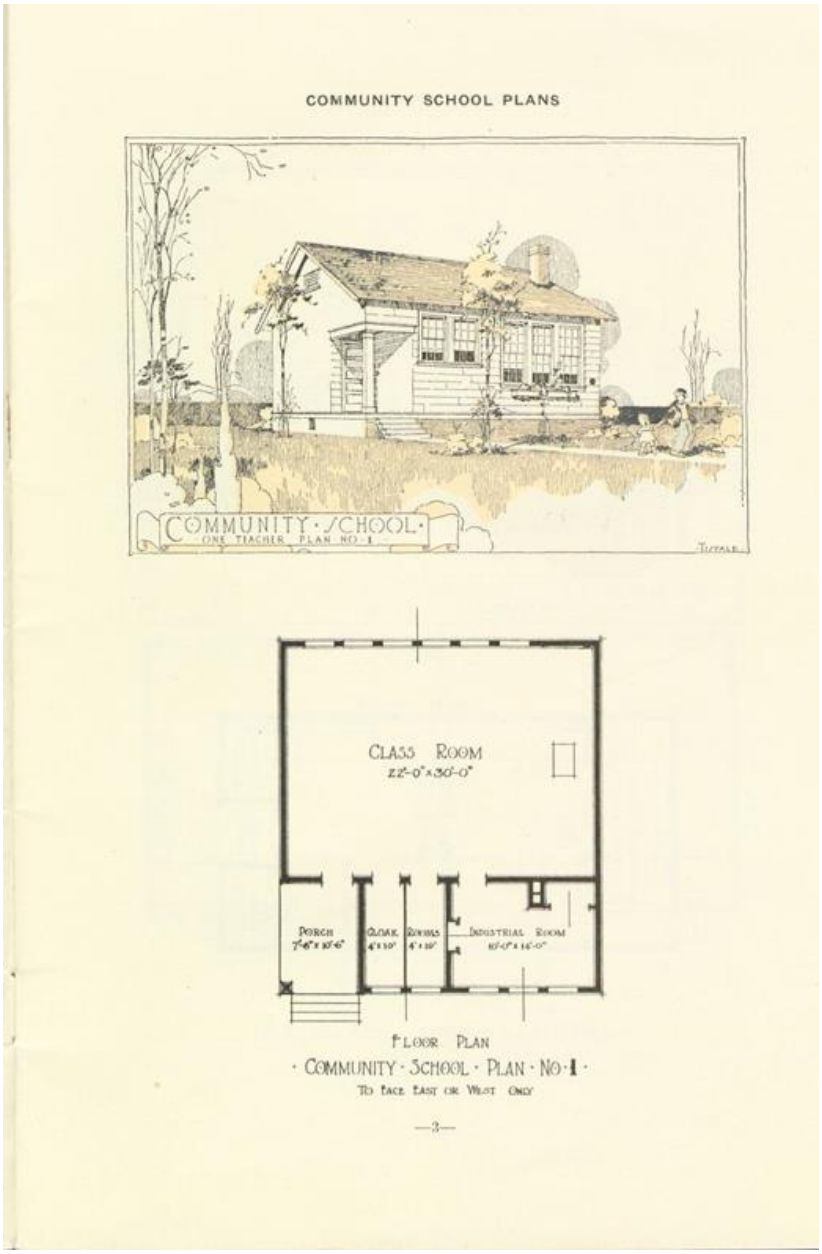
Fund's application process and requirements.[418] This approach was taken to advance the Fund's central goal of strengthening public education, expanding it to include Black students across the country, and promoting what they viewed as economic independence and accountability in Black communities.



Agents of Rosenwald Rural Schools, with Robert R. Moton seated in center, 1916[419]

[418] Rosenwald and Rosenwald Fund, "Julius Rosenwald Papers," Box 34, Folder 3.

[419] "Visual Materials from the Booker T. Washington Papers," Library of Congress, 1916, https://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2004670111/.



One Room School Plan, Rosenwald Fund[420]

The first of the two photos above shows a group of Black men who served as Rosenwald rural school agents. The photo shows them formally dressed in suits and ties, many holding their hats, connoting professionalism and politeness. Many of the men appear to have a lighter skin tone, which points to the colorism and respectability politics through which Black people gained relative influence in white society. The second photo shows an early plan for a one-room rural schoolhouse. The plan shows the school as having two main rooms—the classroom and the industrial room. The

[420] Julius Rosenwald Fund, "Rosenwald Schools, Community School Plan No. 1," Virginia Humanities, 1924, https://encyclopediavirginia.org/4619hpr-a02df22bf3548ed/.

provision of these school plans as part of the application process helped ensure that the Fund's vision of vocational education would be carried out according to its parameters.

"The aim of the Rosenwald school goes beyond the construction of modern schoolhouses and the establishment of school plants; it extends to the course of instruction, the work of the teacher and the life of the school," the Fund noted in a report on 1917-18 operations. In addition to the vocational school plan, the applying community was required to have sufficient space on the school grounds to provide an agricultural education to the boys, as well as a garden to train girls in growing and preserving produce.[421]

The specific structure and curriculum requirements of the schools were intended, as the 1918 report noted, to promote an overall lifestyle that the Fund viewed as productive, moral, and of course, profitable to capitalism. In the archived reports from the Fund's early years, I encountered a letter from a teacher in Mississippi, who stated that: "In my school room I have your [Julius Rosenwald's] picture and so often I point to it and tell my children you are the cause of them having this nice school and desks… I so often tell them when ordering to be sure and order from Sears, Roebuck and Co., because that man you see there has given millions to the negro in Christian education."[422] Although Rosenwald himself was Jewish, the archive contained many references to his fund's promotion of Christian education and values. This letter, one of many related letters and in-person exchanges with the Fund, reflected how Christian values have been central to the construction of the responsible worker and consumer in the U.S. Now that Black people were able to earn capital as workers, they were viewed as potential consumers who needed to be brought into the moralizing ethos of American capitalism.

Like Rockefeller a decade before, Rosenwald was directly influenced by the Hampton-Tuskegee school of vocation education for Black students. Even more than the Rockefellers' fund, Rosenwald partnered closely with Tuskegee and its Black leadership. In a 1929 pamphlet entitled *Eighteen Distinguished Men: Their Opinion of the Hampton Tuskegee Idea*, Rosenwald praised the education model for fostering an attitude of racial conciliation on the part of Black people: "Negroes trained in the Hampton-Tuskegee method strive to bring about cooperation between the white and colored races and to reduce inter-racial friction," he argued. "Leaders of this type are bound to have a salutary influence on Negro communities everywhere."[423] This harkens back to Washington's political philosophy of white and Black communities functioning as separate fingers socially and politically, while together they supported the functioning of one hand, which represented the U.S. economy. In other words, racial cooperation was the goal, not racial equality, and certainly not racial integration.

In his new book *Afterlives of the Plantation*, Jarvis McInnis importantly draws attention to how Booker Washington specifically incorporated traditional patriarchal gender roles into the Tuskegee education model. He saw this as a critical pathway to gaining respectability and status for Black

[421] Rosenwald and Rosenwald Fund, "Julius Rosenwald Papers," Box 34, Folder 3.

[422] Rosenwald and Rosenwald Fund, "Julius Rosenwald Papers," Box 34, Folder 3.

[423] Rosenwald and Rosenwald Fund, "Julius Rosenwald Papers," National Association for Advancement of Colored People, Box 26, Folder 13.

Americans.[424] This included strictly gendered, formal dress codes for students, and promoting patriarchal, Christian family structures, in conjunction with the development of a gender- and race-segregated labor force. This again meshed neatly with the goals of Northern industrialists like Rosenwald. As McInnis argues:

> Whereas slavery "ungendered" the Black body—forcing enslaved women to perform field labor alongside their male counterparts and enslaved men to perform domestic tasks usually assigned to enslaved women—Tuskegee established a strict gendered code of conduct, dress, and labor to contest the racial-sexual abuses of the plantation past. Before subsequent generations (rightly) challenged traditional gender norms and pursued cosmopolitan mobility, Tuskegeeans regarded the ability to 'stay put,' erect homes, and embrace the forms of femininity and masculinity denied them under slavery as constitutive of their eco- ontological regeneration and ability to plot agrarian futures rooted in autonomy and self- determination.[425]

In other words, Washington purposefully encouraged both educational-vocational tracks and aesthetic standards rooted in traditional, white patriarchal gender roles in order to gain societal standing for Black graduates of Tuskegee. This placed an emphasis on the male worker/husband's standing as the measure of the broader Black community's social standing. This framing, both explicitly and implicitly, became central to the educational model that Rosenwald and his contemporaries promoted.

As McInnis argues, there was potential for agricultural work to promote greater "autonomy and self-determination" in Black communities and families, but this would have required the realistic ability of Black people to purchase land and maintain farming homesteads.[426] Instead, the unfortunate reality was that in the Southern apartheid states, most Black people relied on economic arrangements of tenant farming, in which they "rented" a plot and grew produce on white people's farms under predatory conditions that pushed them into constant debt to their white landlords.[427] In most cases, no one in the region would sell land to Black families, and it was extremely difficult for them to amass enough funds without any reparations or substantive work to equalize opportunities—leading them to continue living in former slave cabins, doing the same labor their ancestors had conducted under the slavery system.[428]

[424] McInnis, *Afterlives of the Plantation: Plotting Agrarian Futures in the Global Black South*.

[425] McInnis, *Afterlives of the Plantation: Plotting Agrarian Futures in the Global Black South,* 85.

[426] McInnis, *Afterlives of the Plantation: Plotting Agrarian Futures in the Global Black South,* 47.

[427] For more discussion of tenant farming and Southern agriculture, see Chapter Three of this dissertation.

[428] Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth Century America*.



Julius Rosenwald (in center of group) traveling with his wife, daughter, and other prominent education leaders on his first visit to Rosenwald schools, 1915[429]



Rosenwald and Washington on Tuskegee's campus, 1915[430]

Labor Anxieties and Limited Efficacy of Vocational Education

Ultimately, Rosenwald and other industrial magnates saw interracial cooperation as better for business. The data I discuss in this section support the conclusion that the promotion of segregated vocational education was more ideological than evidence based. In terms of providing education accessible to the masses of Black children, it did not prove extremely effective. While there are numerous reasons behind this, one could be a lack of support for vocational education from Black

[430] University of Chicago, "University of Chicago Photographic Archive," Photographs, University of Chicago, 2026, https://photoarchive.lib.uchicago.edu/.

parents, something that was referenced numerous times in the archive.[431] Many Black families, recently emerged from enslavement, did not see schools as a place where hard labor should be central to the school day.[432]

Another barrier was the repressive economic conditions mentioned above, which routinely required child labor many months of the year for sharecropping farmers. In the active growing and harvest seasons, Black families often needed the labor of any children who were old enough to help out to meet their produce quotas, an issue that points to the lack of state support for Black people's rights, which could arguably not be solved by private philanthropy alone. This need for child labor was why the Fund initially required Black schools to be open for a term of only five months, when white schools were already closer to the standard nine-month term used today.[433]

As Rooks points out, "in Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, South Carolina, and Mississippi, states with a combined population of 4.7 million Black people, by the mid-1940s less than half could claim five years of formal education. In South Carolina and Louisiana, 60 percent of Black adults had no more than a fourth-or fifth-grade education."[434] In other words, 80 years after slavery formally ended and Black people were made citizens, the majority of the population across the South still had not completed grade school. The gap in educational attainment rates between Black and white students did shrink throughout each decade of the 20th century as more schools were established in the region; however, as of 1940, up to 15.1% of Black children over age 10 remained illiterate, compared to up to 5% of white children.[435] As mentioned previously, about one third of Black students from this period were educated at a school funded by either the Rosenwald Fund or the General Education Board, meaning that their practices arguably played a substantial role in the failure to graduate more Black students. At the same time, this also points to the fact that greater involvement from the state would have been needed to regulate the economy in such a way that would have facilitated more Black children staying in school instead of leaving to work in the fields.

On top of this, even for students who did graduate, the effectiveness of vocational education in preparing Black youth for the job market was questionable. As I discuss in Chapter One, lifelong Black educator and scholar Carter Woodson was vocally critical of vocational education for its lack of practical application for the economic uplift of Black communities. Based on decades of observation of Black education, Woodson concluded that, "such industrial education as… Negroes received, then, was merely to master a technique already discarded in progressive centers."[436]

---

[431] General Education Board, "General Education Board Archive"; Rosenwald and Rosenwald Fund, "Julius Rosenwald Papers."

[432] More discussion of Black educational ethos in Chapter One of this dissertation.

[433] Rosenwald and Rosenwald Fund, "Julius Rosenwald Papers," Box 34, Folder 3.

[434] Rooks, *Cutting School,* 65.

[435] Robert A. Margo, "Race and Schooling in the South: A Review of the Evidence," in *Race and Schooling in the South, 1880-1950: An Economic History* (University of Chicago Press, 1990).

[436] Carter G. Woodson, *The Mis-Education of the Negro* (The Associated Publishers, 1933), Chapter 2 (eBook).

Woodson's critique was supported by records I encountered in the Rosenwald Papers. The Fund repeatedly documented grappling with the difficulty their programs faced in keeping up with training Black students in the newest industrial technologies and practices of the times. At a meeting of trustees in 1928, the following was shared in a report on *Negroes in Industry*:

> During the past three years there has been a great deal of general unemployment in industry. The results have been not only to force the unskilled Negro laborer into idleness, but also to take from him many of the traditional skilled or semi-skilled jobs held by him since the World War. Scientific management and the installation of labor saving machines have made inroads on the number of both whites and Negroes employed, and the Negroes have not had an opportunity to learn how to operate the new machinery…. The hope is in the youth of the race and in the trade schools of the future. The whole question of trade training in both public and private schools must now be considered from the standpoint of mass production. The graduates of the present trade schools find shop practices very different from that which they were taught in classes, even a decade ago. As a result, many of these graduates find themselves unprepared to meet successfully these new conditions, which if the Negro is to secure an economic independence must be met.[437]

This report highlights the fact that during the 1920s, technological advances in mass production had made the "shop practices very different from that which they were taught in classes, even a decade ago." As mentioned previously, Ford had transformed the efficiency of assembly line production just a few years earlier, with the introduction of the conveyor belt system, and the techniques of mass production continued to rapidly transform in this period. The Rosenwald Fund expressed a seemingly earnest desire to help Black people secure greater "economic independence" through developing the "trade schools of the future." However, while they clearly expressed the difficulties of vocational classes and equipment becoming outdated within ten years or less, they did not have a clear solution to keep the technology up to date in Black schools. The lack of state support of Black schools created a strong barrier to the steady funding stream that would have facilitated contemporary, state-of-the-art equipment. One of the ways in which the Fund attempted to remedy this problem was to invest in education, including continuing education in summer programs, for Black vocational teachers. They regularly worked with Tuskegee to offer summer training programs to Black teachers who would go on to work, or already worked, in their schools.[438]

Woodson further argued that "the Negro will never be able to show all of his originality as long as his efforts are directed from without by those who socially proscribe him. Such 'friends' will unconsciously keep him in the ghetto."[439] In other words, the solutions to the educational crisis facing Black communities would never truly be solved by white philanthropists seeking to limit

[437] Rosenwald and Rosenwald Fund, "Julius Rosenwald Papers," Meeting of the Trustees, April 30, 1928, Box 57, Folder 3.

[438] Rosenwald and Rosenwald Fund, "Julius Rosenwald Papers," Meeting of the Trustees, November 16, 1929, Box 57, Folder 6.

[439] Woodson, *The Mis-Education of the Negro,* Chapter 4.

education for Black students to their vision of "socially proscribed," lower-class roles. This theme was reflected in another report that the Fund shared with its Board two years later, in 1930. "Millions of dollars are being spent on industrial education at both high school and college levels. The results are unsatisfactory," the report stated. "While there are huge expenditures and busy activity there is astonishingly little evidence of careful, realistic study and demonstration of feasible methods to achieve the desired ends." The report further concluded that "this is a problem for all groups of the population but it is accentuated in the case of the Negro, since the channels through which he can earn his livelihood are restricted."[440] Again, the Fund seemed genuinely concerned with the problem but did not visibly consider pivoting their fundamental strategy of training Black students for lower-skilled industrial labor.

Gender Ideology and Vocational Education

The known lack of efficacy of their vocational education program, at least for the men, raises the question of what the true aims of the initiative were. In this vein, it is worth noting that the primary focus of these reports was on the economic prospects of Black men. While most Black women of the time worked out of economic necessity, these statements clearly considered the workforce as comprised of men first and foremost. The prior two reports on the topic issued by the Rosenwald Fund used only male pronouns throughout. This also suggests that while men's work was more directly impacted by the economic and technological trends of the time, there was always an ongoing need for Black women's domestic and service work.

My research suggests, then, that vocational education was rooted in an ideological vision for Black people's socio-economic roles, more than a practical vision of what tools they would need to gain greater economic power. This ideological vision was strongly rooted in prescribed socio-economic roles that were fundamentally stratified and delineated by race, gender, and sexuality.

In conjunction with the vocational education requirements, a central way in which the Rosenwald Fund (and the General Education Board) promoted gender ideology was through promoting traditional marriages and family structures within Black communities. For instance, alongside its school building program, the Rosenwald Fund expressed its desire to fund "marital clinics," in 1930 noting that they had "placed [them]selves on record as prepared to support as an experiment a marital clinic in Chicago when proper personnel can be found and the organization worked out."[441] The regulation of sex and reproduction has always been one of the central mechanisms of white supremacy, and this emphasis on traditional Christian family structures continued to function as a tool of social control.

These Funds presented heterosexual, Christian marriage as the objectively desired path of the day; moreover, they implicitly promoted solely racially segregated relationships as part of their wholesale embrace of racially segregated schools and homes. This is worth noting because, as

[440] Rosenwald and Rosenwald Fund, "Julius Rosenwald Papers," Conspectus of Present and Future Activities of the Julius Rosenwald Fund, Box 58, Folder 5.

[441] Rosenwald and Rosenwald Fund, "Julius Rosenwald Papers," Conspectus of the Present and Future Activities of the Fund, July 23,1930, Box 58, Folder 4.

Black feminist scholars such as Saidiya Hartman demonstrate, this continued regulation of marriage served to uphold the racial segregation that provided the conditions needed for the possibility of American capitalism. As Hartman put it, "the prohibition of interracial marriage, mixed associations, and the commingling of the races was a prized element of a broader effort intent upon preserving racial order—that is, hierarchies of mastery and subjection" upon which the state built prosperity and power.[442] Through the framework of white supremacy, white women having nonwhite babies presents an ultimate threat to the stability of whiteness, as does solidarity and meaningful relationships between racial groups more broadly. Relatedly, queer relationships present an inherent threat to the narrative that underpins American racial capitalism because it helps denaturalize the hetero-patriarchal family structure.

While promoting traditional marriages for Black young people, the Fund also planned programs and fundraised based on the reality of Black graduates of their schools working in domestic service and/or tenant farming for white southerners. In this way, such schools held up heteronormative marriage ideals as the gold standard, while tacitly acknowledging that these idealized gender roles were not and never had been accessible to Black people in the U.S. For instance, in a 1923 fundraising request attempting to garner white Southern dollars, the Fund wrote the following:

> It will give me great pleasure to contribute $2,500 to the fund, which is being raised to rebuild and equip the Montgomery Industrial School, on condition that the white people of Montgomery raise $5000…. The reason why I make the condition is that for thirty-five years the city of Montgomery has been a beneficiary of this school. Training there has helped make the colored girls of Montgomery into better women. The white people have benefitted directly from this improvement because many of the girls have gone into the service of white families.[443]

This correspondence highlights how the Fund directly appealed to the socio-economic interests of white Southerners in an attempt to gain support for their cause. They directly referenced and built their fundraising case based on the fact that "white people have directly benefitted" from the Montgomery Industrial School, because it offered training that "helped make the colored girls of Montgomery into better women," who in turn had "gone into the service of white families." In this way, the Fund sought to garner white Southerners' financial support by framing the local industrial school as one that used the concept of proper womanhood to train Black girls into domestic service in white households.

The correspondence about the Montgomery school reflected a broader focus on instilling gendered rules within the Fund's archive. For instance, a 1928 "Report for the Conference of the Trustees and Guests" stated that, "Every school must provide not only formal and theoretical 'book larnin' but also practical industrial work. Every school has at least one industrial room and at least two acres of land available for farm gardens. The girls are taught sewing and cooking, and the boys

[442] Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth Century America,* 189.

[443] Rosenwald and Rosenwald Fund, "Julius Rosenwald Papers," Negro Schools Small, A-P, Box 53, Folder 8.

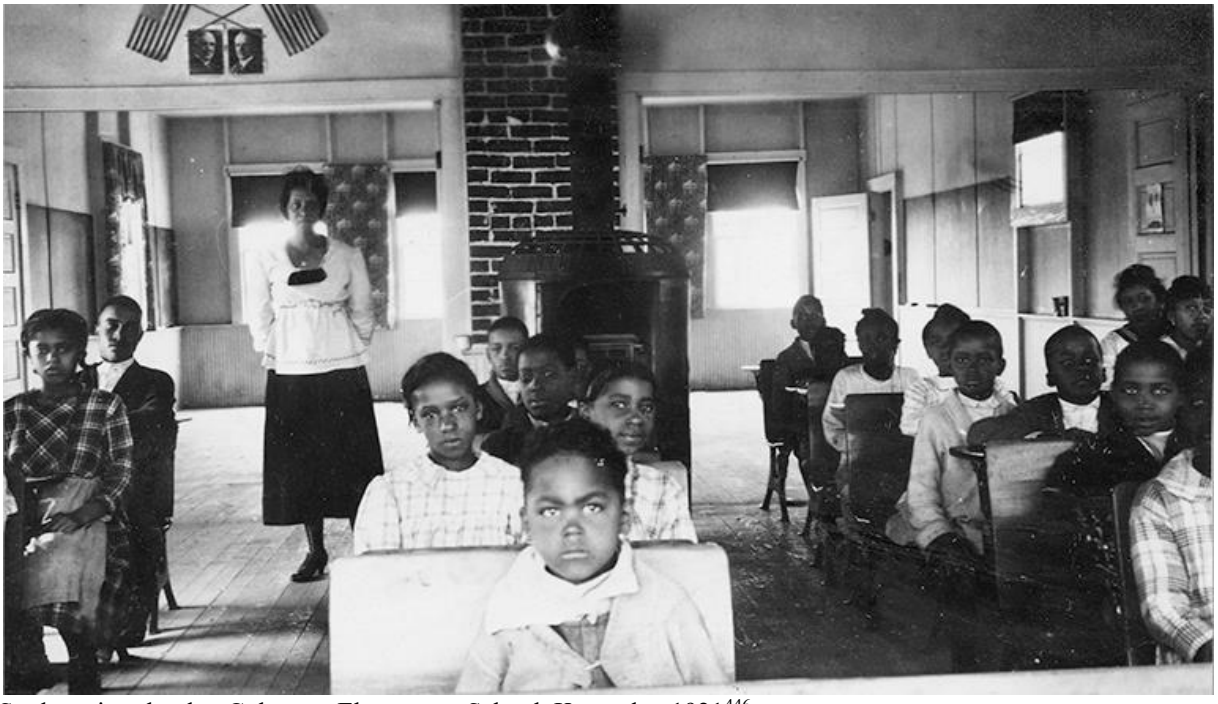
farming and simple shop work."[444] It is telling that the skills being taught to the boys were specifically referred to as "simple," arguably signaling that they were outdated or lacking efficacy in the economic market.



Girls in class, Rosenwald A&M School, Tallahassee, Florida, 1923[445]

[444] Rosenwald and Rosenwald Fund, "Julius Rosenwald Papers," Report for the Conference of the Trustees and Guests held on April 29, 1928, Box 57, Folder 1.

[445] Library of Congress, "Julius Rosenwald and Booker T. Washington in Fairfax," Library of Congress, 1900s-1920s, https://research.centerformasonslegacies.com/s/blnd/page/julius-rosenwald.



Students in school at Coletown Elementary School, Kentucky, 1921[446]



Students and teachers stand in the front of the classroom at Manassas School, Georgia[447]

[446] Rosenwald Fund, "Julius Rosenwald Fund Collection," Fisk University Franklin Library Archive, 2026, Coletown School, https://rosenwald.fisk.edu/s/rosenwald-fund-collection/item/58828.

[447] Rosenwald Fund, "Julius Rosenwald Fund Collection," Manassas Rosenwald School, https://rosenwald.fisk.edu/s/rosenwald-fund-collection/item/51032.



Domestic science students and teachers, Lecompte Rosenwald School, Alabama[448]



Rosenwald at Tuskegee with a group of girls whose dresses spell his name, 1922[449]

---

[448] Rosenwald Fund, "Julius Rosenwald Fund Collection," Lecompte Rosenwald School, https://rosenwald.fisk.edu/s/rosenwald-fund-collection/item/50883.

[449] Rosenwald Fund, "Julius Rosenwald Fund Collection," Students and Julius Rosenwald at Tuskegee, https://rosenwald.fisk.edu/s/rosenwald-fund-collection/item/63345. Note: During my research, the Fisk collection

The five photographs above show the students of Rosenwald Schools in action. These photos, preserved in the archive, are helpful in revealing how the Fund's vision for gender and vocational education played out on the ground. The first photo shows two Black women teachers in front of a classroom of girls. The classroom's is organized into orderly rows and the space is clean and tidy. Since the classroom is girls only, it's likely that this was some kind of domestic science class. The girls are all dressed neatly in white blouses and Black skirts, with their hair straightened and pulled back. This suggests that they wished to portray the norms of neatness and respectability that they knew their funders would be looking for when they were provided with this photo.

The second photo shows a mixed-gender classroom at a Rosenwald school in Kentucky in 1921. Again dressed neatly and seated in orderly rows, this image also reveals the reality of one-room schoolhouses in which one teacher was often tasked with teaching children of all ages at once. This highlights the lack of adequate resources for academic advancement that Black children continued to experience. The third and fourth photos again show Rosenwald school students lined up in an orderly manner and formally dressed. The image of domestic science students and teachers in Alabama again highlights the centrality of these courses and the gender segregation in the Rosenwald model.

The final photo shows an almost eerie image of Rosenwald meeting with a group of girl students on a visit to Tuskegee in 1922. The girls again are dressed neatly all in white, but this time their dresses have each been inscribed with a letter that together spell out "ROSENWALD." This photo implies the level of performance of gratitude and submissiveness that these schools would model to garner the Fund's continued support. The repeated choice for girls to be dressed in all white implies values of purity, cleanliness, and restraint—which directly point to the lessons they were being taught on conforming to Christian, patriarchal femininity.

The Fund's Second Chapter

By 1928, the Fund decided to part ways with Tuskegee Institute, moving to run the Fund independently. By the 1920s, Robert Moton, who Washington was training as his successor, played a central role in the leadership of Tuskegee and its political machine. Ascoli reports that Rosenwald did not have as favorable a relationship with Moton as he had with Washington, which began to put a strain on their activities together. After a joint Hampton-Tuskegee fundraising campaign in 1926 left Rosenwald even more doubtful of Moton's leadership, he greatly reduced his annual gifts to the university in the coming years.[450] Rosenwald became convinced that under Moton's leadership, Tuskegee's board was mismanaging and overspending its funds, including the University's continuous funding to "help small struggling private schools such as Snow Hill," even

was closed to the public for reorganization and digitization. Some material has recently become available online and some is still in progress.

[450] Ascoli, *Julius Rosenwald: The Man Who Built Sears, Roebuck and Advanced the Cause of Black Education in the American South,* Chapter 7.

while it remained in debt.[451] This was reflective of a broader concern that the Fund and peer philanthropies repeatedly expressed regarding Black education leaders' lack of regard for ideal business practices.

In addition, around this time, Rosenwald became convinced of the benefits of giving the Fund a more formalized, self-sufficient structure, including hiring a new director of the fund who was a leader in the field of corporate philanthropy. He identified Edwin Embree, a friend of his whom he knew through serving on the Board of the Rockefeller Foundation, as the ideal man to fill the role. Embree had previously served as a vice president at the Rockefeller Foundation. Embree and Rosenwald apparently shared the view that the Rockefeller Foundation had become too "formalistic," "bureaucratic," and reticent toward more experimental programs that "launch[ed] courageously upon imaginative enterprises," as Embree wrote in a letter at the time.[452] Rosenwald offered Embree a position with more freedom and funds to try such experiments, and on January 1, 1928, he began his new role as President of the Rosenwald Fund. One of the central tenets of Rosenwald's giving philosophy that differentiated him from funds like the Rockefellers' was that he supported his fund in giving away all its money over a set period of time, rather than constantly holding onto a large principal.[453] This allowed for a much more aggressive funding strategy than many of his peer philanthropists.

By this time, the Fund had been operating for seventeen years and had provided $4 million in funding to Black schools across the South. A report from this year noted that: "The results of [the Rosenwald Fund's] work are the building of more than five thousand schools, shops and teachers' homes at a total expense of about twenty-five million dollars, of which the Fund has given slightly less than four million dollars."[454] This meant that the Fund had given less than one-fifth of the total funding for its school building initiative, which in 2026 would be worth about $478 million and $76.4 million, respectively.

Alongside its new direction, the Fund noted discussion of a broader interest in impacting race relations in the South—a focus which clarified the Fund's broader perspective on race. They viewed increased civil relations on the part of Southern white people as necessary to increasing access and support for their Black vocational schools. A report from 1928 clarified the Fund's stance on race issues in the U.S. and what they saw as the root causes to be addressed:

> While certain of our contributions have been to general activities, it is understood that in this field we shall concentrate chiefly on the South. This is desirable (a) because the subject of our greatest interest, Negro welfare and interracial relations, is still largely a southern problem, (b)

[451] Ascoli, *Julius Rosenwald: The Man Who Built Sears, Roebuck and Advanced the Cause of Black Education in the American South,* 294.

[452] Ascoli, *Julius Rosenwald: The Man Who Built Sears, Roebuck and Advanced the Cause of Black Education in the American South,* 301.

[453] Julius Rosenwald, "Principles of Public Giving," *The Atlantic Magazine*, 1929, https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1929/05/principles-of-public-giving/649166/.

[454] Rosenwald and Rosenwald Fund, "Julius Rosenwald Papers," Box 58, Folder 4.

> because the state of the social sciences in the South is far below that of other sections of the country, (c) because white leadership and an intellectual attitude—rather than a purely emotional one—is necessary if the great social problems of the South (including that of inter-racial relations) are to be solved.[455]

These statements about the issue of race relations reveal many of the broader central understandings that underpinned the work of prominent Northern philanthropists of the time. The problem of "interracial relations" was viewed as solely a Southern issue, even as the Great Migration brought massive increases in Black populations in Northern cities. Next, they saw race relations as a problem that was exacerbated by a lack of social science studies on the issue, again implying that the more academically developed North did not deal with similar issues. And third, they recognized that there would need to be changes in white perspectives to create greater civility and cooperation between the races, which they framed as coming from overly "emotional" Southern leadership rather than being an "intellectual" issue. Together, this points to the Fund's broader stance: greater cooperation was needed between the races, termed "interracial relations," which was quite distinct from racial equity. This recalls my discussion in the Introduction of Du Bois' critique of Northern industrialists coopting the language of racial equity to advance more sinister, anti-democratic goals of using public education to develop the low-paid, reliable Black workforce.[456]

As part of their renewed goal of continuing to expand and improve their industrial education, under Embree's leadership the Fund expanded its support for training Black teachers in industrial education. In a Meeting of the Trustees in November 1929, the Board discussed a report on "Negroes in Industry." They noted that the Fund "is helping to increase the number of teachers for industrial schools by providing scholarships and other support to the vocational departments at Tuskegee and Hampton due to the demand for teachers outpacing supply."[457] In this agenda item, the Fund again noted its ongoing goal and the challenges associated with ensuring that their graduates could find work in either skilled or unskilled trades. The report continued:

> The need for vocational teachers in Negro schools is all the more important because of increasing and disquieting rumors to the effect that in the South Negroes are being replaced in skilled trades by white workers (many of them from the North) who are better trained and belong to trade unions. These workers are said to be going South in connection with northern capital invested in southern industrial plants.
>
> In the jobs below the skilled trade level such as porters, waiters, elevator men, taxi drivers, scavengers and street sweepers, the replacement comes through white men from country districts migrating to southern towns and cities who would otherwise be out of employment. With so many whites unemployed, it is easily understood why colored men and women are gradually losing out in many occupations formerly controlled by them.

[455] Rosenwald and Rosenwald Fund, "Julius Rosenwald Papers," Box 58, Folder 4.

[456] Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860-1880*.

[457] Rosenwald and Rosenwald Fund, "Julius Rosenwald Papers," Negroes in Industry, Box 57, Folder 6.

> This displacement is not only going on in the skilled trades, we are informed, but has extended to the jobs that traditionally have been held only by Negroes.[458]

This report notes two threats to jobs previously held by Black men, one from white unionized workers from the North who were taking skilled industrial jobs, and another from rural Southern white people taking jobs considered "below the skilled trade level" that "traditionally have been only held by Negroes." In addition to the challenges the Fund had previously noted around their industrial education's difficulty keeping up with new technologies, this report highlighted changes to economic conditions that threatened already marginalized Black workers disproportionately.

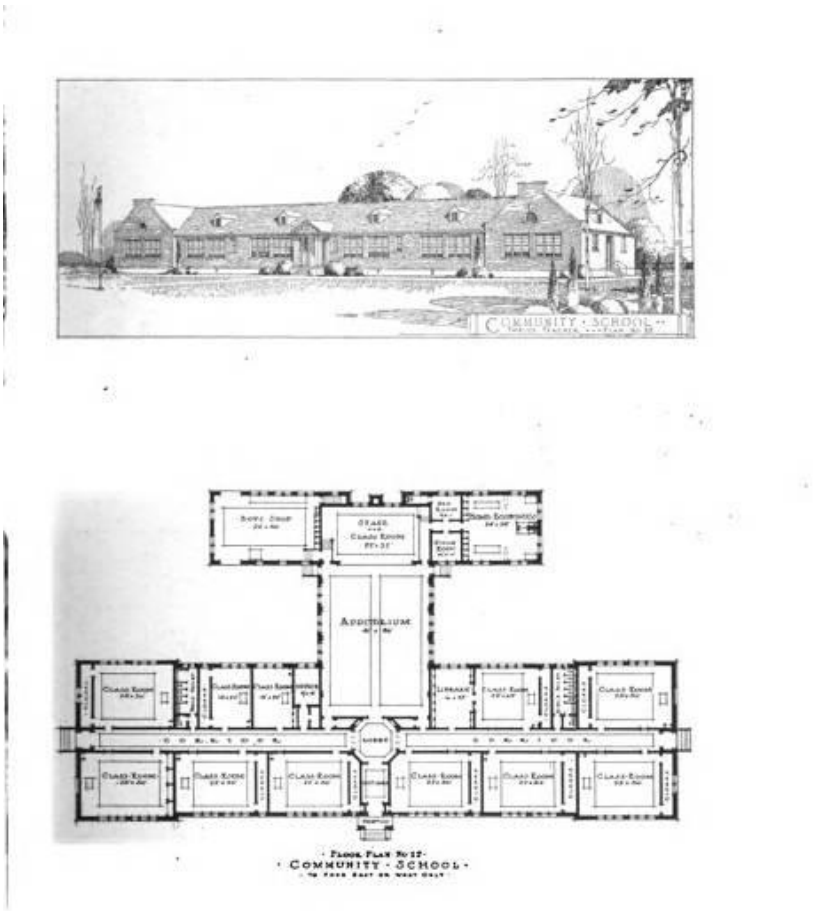
This report, finding newfound challenges threatening Black employment in the South, was written in 1929, right as the U.S. entered the major economic crisis known as the Great Depression. The 1929 stock market crash and subsequent financial crisis across the U.S. resulted in even harsher unemployment conditions for Black Southerners. The Depression created job scarcity such that menial jobs held by Black people—positions that previously no one else had wanted—were now desirable to white workers from the North and South alike. This created another layer in the challenges the Fund faced in advancing effective vocational education and convincing Southern states that their cause was worthy of support.

By 1930, the Fund also updated its policies to favor larger schools than it had originally funded. While its original focus had been on funding small, rural schoolhouses, now the Fund would no longer support one-teacher schools, with support for two-teacher schools ending July 1, 1931. Going forward, the Fund aimed to focus their support on three- to six-teacher schools.[459] The Fund continued to update its school plans regularly based on their observations of the needs of the time. The plan pictured below, from 1931, for a five-teacher school shows additions of several classrooms and an auditorium. It also includes separate rooms for "Boys Shop" and "Home Economics" for girls. As shown in the school building plan below, the schools' spaces were specified to the level of this specific six-teacher school building facing "east or west only" to gain the optimal sun exposure during the school day. Additionally, under the new leadership, the Fund moved toward supporting some urban industrial schools for Black students, a departure from its prior focus on rural schools. This again reflected their desire to keep up with changing economic circumstances, as industry and job opportunities increasingly moved to urban centers even in the agricultural South.[460]

[458] Rosenwald and Rosenwald Fund, "Julius Rosenwald Papers," Box 57, Folder 6.

[459] Rosenwald and Rosenwald Fund, "Julius Rosenwald Papers," Box 58, Folder 4.

[460] Rosenwald and Rosenwald Fund, "Julius Rosenwald Papers," Box 58, Folder 4.



Floor Plan No. 17, Five Room Community School, 1931[461]

Case Study: Utica Institute

Throughout its years of operation, the relationship the Rosenwald Fund had with some of the schools it funded reflected evolving priorities around industrial education and how the Fund saw that as facilitated through gender roles. Correspondence I analyzed from the archive shows that the foundation made funding decisions based on specifically gendered critiques of gender-segregated vocational education practices at individual schools.

One such school was Utica Normal and Industrial Institute—a K-12 school founded in 1903 in Black Belt Mississippi by William Holtzclaw, an Alabama native who was a mentee of Washington's at Tuskegee. In a foundation report on Utica, the Fund noted that the school was "affiliated with Tuskegee extension department," and "owned and controlled by a board of influential Northern and Southern men."[462] Although this was not a new school founded with

[461] Rosenwald Fund, "Community School Plans, Issued by the Julius Rosenwald Fund.," Community School Plans, 1900s.

[462] Rosenwald and Rosenwald Fund, "Julius Rosenwald Papers," Negro Schools, Small, U-Z, Box 53, Folder 10.

Rosenwald support, Utica was amongst a number of independent Black schools that the Fund supported in its early years if they met their educational criteria. In 1912, the Rosenwald Fund donated $2,000 to the school (about $67,400 in 2026), in addition to making an annual pledge of $1,000 for the next five years provided the school could raise an additional $4,000 per year.

Beyond providing financial support, the Fund aimed to influence Utica Institute to streamline their industrial education, in particular for boys, to make it more general and less specialized. They believed this would make the education more efficient and competitive on the job market. Their initial report on the school stated that: "Each pupil spends 1.5 days a week in the industries. Carpentry, blacksmithing, tailoring, shoemaking and printing for boys; sewing, millinery, housekeeping and printing for girls. Simple course in care of sick taken by a few girls. Commercial subjects may be substituted for the industries."[463] This latter sentence likely meant that commercial subjects of the time, which included professional skills such as typing, correspondence, or bookkeeping training, could be taken by these students as part of their vocational courses. However, the Fund did not agree with this approach. The report noted that "the effort to teach too many trades has weakened the industrial work. Equipment for manual training in wood and iron [is] inadequate, but much has been spent on large machinery for printing, saw-mill and electric light."[464] Instead of teaching specialized skills in printing, carpentry, or machinery, the Fund wanted Utica to cut down on its vocational course offerings and focus on industrial training. They also apparently saw electricity as an unnecessary luxury.

The Fund had less of a critique when it came to the gender segregated offerings for girls, which adhered more closely to their vision of a domestic worker and/or homemaker. This increased concern over the boys' vocational training was a prevalent pattern across records from both the Rosenwald Fund and the General Education Board. This suggests both a greater concern with the economic prospects and positionality of the boys, as well as perhaps a reality that there was less room for specialization and diversity in the girls' training at such schools. Across multiple records, these foundations expressed disapproval of boys' training being too broad or specialized, reflecting their broader vision for the economic prospects of young Black men.

The report also notes that they wanted the school to sell off some of its land and limit agricultural activities as a way to better manage their resources.[465] This reflected the Fund's broader concern with instilling proper business practices in Black communities. Over the next few years following this initial report, the Fund continued to monitor and evaluate Utica Institute. In April 1915, Mr. Graves, the Rosenwald Fund's secretary, received a report from Thomas Jesse Jones, who served in the Washington Bureau of Education, on the Utica and Snow Hill Institutes. Snow Hill Institute was another normal and industrial school founded by Tuskegee graduate, Alabama native, and Washington mentee, James Edwards, which is the subject of Chapter Three of this dissertation. "As to your request for information concerning the Utica Normal and Industrial

[463] Rosenwald and Rosenwald Fund, "Julius Rosenwald Papers," Box 53, Folder 10.

[464] Rosenwald and Rosenwald Fund, "Julius Rosenwald Papers," Box 53, Folder 10.

[465] Rosenwald and Rosenwald Fund, "Julius Rosenwald Papers," Box 53, Folder 10.

School and Snow Hill, I beg to give you the following confidential report," Jones' letter to the Fund read. He continued:

> Both of these schools are doing an important work. Their belief in industrial education is real and their efforts are genuine. I am quite convinced, however, that both of them are mistaken in their efforts to maintain the institution on a large scale. Their organization is entirely too complicated for the means at their disposal and for the needs of the community to which they are related. Both institutions have large tracts of land, far more than necessary for the agricultural education of the pupils or of the community. We shall probably recommend that all future donations to the institutions shall be conditioned upon the simplification both of their industrial and of their academic work.
>
> With modifications to suit the special needs of their communities, I am of the opinion that four industrial teachers would be ample for the smaller industrial schools, with such academic teachers as are necessary. There should be one man trained in agriculture with knowledge of practical operations on the farm. Next should be a carpenter who is also acquainted with the simpler operations in iron. For the girls' training there should be a teacher of cooking who would use the boarding department for practical work. There should be a woman in sewing who would have charge of the home life of the pupils. If these teachers are graduated from industrial schools like Hampton or Tuskegee they will probably have knowledge of such industrial operations as cobbling, chair caning, and other simpler activities.
>
> Our investigation shows that both Snow Hill and Utica are seriously in need of financial help. It is our opinion that financial help should be conditioned on the reorganization which I have indicated above.[466]

Reports such as this show how the Fund and its partners were invested not only in supporting schools with an industrial bent, but in shaping school agendas at the levels of curriculum, hiring, and finances. As this report notes, they supported a system in which boarding school students would conduct essential labor for the schools, such as cleaning, cooking, and construction, in exchange for their educations. This report again specifically cites gendered industrial training as the central focus on which to hinge their support, along with improved business practices.

Despite both of these schools expressing willingness to reorganize according to the Fund's recommendations and bring in more outside supervision, both Utica and Snow Hill continued to suffer from financial difficulties. In March 1915, Rosenwald's secretary Graves wrote to Booker Washington about the Fund's concern about "distressing reports from Mr. Holtzclaw and Mr. Edwards regarding conditions at [Utica Institute] and [Snow Hill Institute], two of the most promising and useful offshoots of Tuskegee."[467] The letter detailed that both schools were suffering from greatly reduced financial contributions, likely due to the onset of World War I, with Principal Holtzclaw reporting that "his collections thus far have been only about 25% of the normal

[466] Rosenwald and Rosenwald Fund, "Julius Rosenwald Papers," Box 53, Folder 10.

[467] Rosenwald and Rosenwald Fund, "Julius Rosenwald Papers," Box 53, Folder 10.

amount, and he is facing an imminent prospect of having to close the institution."[468] Similarly, Principal Edwards reported that contributions were down to the point that if he didn't find $5,000 within the subsequent twelve days, he faced the prospect of having to close the doors at Snow Hill.

Writing to Washington about the situation at Utica and Snow Hill, Graves stated that he was "not writing to urge you to increase your own liberal assistance to these schools, but rather to ask your judgement in regard to the situation, and what we should advise Mr. Edwards and Mr. Holtzclaw to do under these circumstances."[469] That same year, the Fund documented that Rosenwald had offered $500 in funding to Snow Hill on the condition it be anonymous and go through Tuskegee. They also expressed interest in contributing $1,000 to a fund to support the financial emergencies at both schools, provided it be anonymously administered through Tuskegee and that Tuskegee oversee the schools' reorganization. The Fund's desire for anonymous support suggested that they didn't wish to be publicly associated with supporting these schools at that point, though they hoped the schools would be able to remain up and running.

In April 1915, Washington wrote back to Graves, reporting that since receiving their correspondence, he had sent a committee to both schools, met with their respective trustees, and that he personally had "talked at length" with both of the schools' principals. "I now feel convinced that the heads of these two schools are now ready and willing to reorganize them and put them upon a more thorough and inexpensive basis," Washington reported. With his assurance of their "definitive promises" of reorganization, and Washington's personal continued oversight, he suggested that "both schools are in condition to be helped." Washington requested that the Fund consider offering funding to both schools to get out of their current debt, which was "proving demoralizing in several directions," and would allow them to start the next school year "on a new basis."[470]

In July 1916, the Rosenwald Fund received a letter from Emmett J. Scott, who served as Washington's personal secretary and oversaw many of his philanthropic and political dealings, known as the Tuskegee Machine.[471] Writing to Graves, Scott reported that, "Holtzclaw is doing a splendid work at Utica. He has the support of the best white and colored people in a way hardly true of any of the other of our graduates. He has cemented good relations in a way that leads the white people to regard the school as a genuine asset to the County." In the letter, Scott stated that he was not writing to request that the Fund offer Utica additional support, since they were already providing annual funding, but to update the Fund per their request with information on the school's progress and activities.

[468] Rosenwald and Rosenwald Fund, "Julius Rosenwald Papers," Box 53, Folder 10.

[469] Rosenwald and Rosenwald Fund, "Julius Rosenwald Papers," Box 53, Folder 10.

[470] Rosenwald and Rosenwald Fund, "Julius Rosenwald Papers," Box 53, Folder 10.

[471] Humanities Texas, "Emmett J. Scott," *Humanities Texas*, 2025, https://www.humanitiestexas.org/programs/tx-originals/list/emmett-j-scott#:~:text=February%2013%2C%201873%E2%80%93December%2012,Howard%20University%20in%20Washington%2C%20DC.

Following this and other favorable reports, in a letter dated January 1917, the Fund's Graves sent a letter to Principal Holtzclaw communicating that Rosenwald was pleased that "all reports that come from [Utica] Institute and remarks made about it to him by people acquainted with it are entirely favorable to the work you are doing." The letter continued to offer an additional five years of support, stating that, "in fact, I feel safe in writing you that, should you at the proper time be able to secure the renewal of the five-year pledges by the same individuals who are now subscribing to that plan, which began in 1913, and for the same amounts, Mr. Rosenwald would be willing to continue his contribution of $1,000 a year for five years beginning in May, 1918."[472] Translated from 1917 to 2026 dollars, $1,000 would be over $25,000, so this amount annually was a substantial level of support. In addition to the annual subscription, in December 1917, Rosenwald provided Utica with $1,000 in emergency funding as part of an $8,000 fund to rebuild the young men's dormitory following a fire at the school. In May 1918, the Fund also documented the payment of the first $1,000 of their new five-year subscription to the school, after receiving documentation confirming the other subscribers from Holtzclaw.[473]

However, this was the last round of support that Rosenwald would offer to Utica. After their five-year subscription ended in 1922, they declined to offer the school more funding. By this time, it had become less popular among the Northern education funds to support independent, Black-founded schools like Utica and Tuskegee. The Funds' archives suggest that Rosenwald opted to follow the lead of the General Education Board in regard to withholding support from these schools. In fact, in 1923 the GEB wrote to the Rosenwald Fund stating that they had "made no appropriations to Utica mainly because we have never felt clear in our own minds that the future of the school is assured."[474] Noting that it had no sustained backing from a religious or other type of institution, they concluded that "it is therefore one of those one-man schools doing doubtless useful work for the time being, but probably destined to shrink if not disappear when the moving spirit is lost. If the school were a small, modest enterprise, it might ultimately be absorbed into the public school system, but Mr. Holtzclaw could not content himself with any such program."[475]

Shortly after receiving this report from the GEB, the Rosenwald Fund chose not to renew its support of the school, reporting to Holtzclaw that Rosenwald "hopes you will be successful in raising the required funds without his aid." In 1924, the Fund documented another emergency aid request from Holtzclaw following an even more catastrophic fire at the school. The Fund declined to send aid. Again in 1926, the Fund reported a funding request from Utica, in response to which they noted that "the entire income of the Julius Rosenwald Fund is pledged toward the building of rural schools for Negroes. Request turned down."[476]

Utica's experience with the Rosenwald Fund demonstrates not only the racialized, gendered requirements for their vocational education agenda, but also the longevity challenges associated

[472] Rosenwald and Rosenwald Fund, "Julius Rosenwald Papers," Box 53, Folder 10.

[473] Rosenwald and Rosenwald Fund, "Julius Rosenwald Papers," Box 53, Folder 10.

[474] Rosenwald and Rosenwald Fund, "Julius Rosenwald Papers," Box 53, Folder 10.

[475] Rosenwald and Rosenwald Fund, "Julius Rosenwald Papers," Box 53, Folder 10.

[476] Rosenwald and Rosenwald Fund, "Julius Rosenwald Papers," Box 53, Folder 10.

with their funding structure. When the trends in philanthropy changed, and it was no longer popular for Northern education funds to support independent, Black-founded schools, they simply ended their support. Utica and Snow Hill were amongst many independent Black schools that lost funding from Rosenwald and other major education funds in the 1920s, despite having reorganized their educational offerings to align with the funds' priorities, as well as in some cases deeding control of their school properties over to the state to comply with the funding requirement that they be a public school. As I discuss further in the subsequent chapter on Snow Hill, even Washington's continued lobbying for the continued support of these schools did not prove enough of a factor to influence the GEB, or in turn, the Rosenwald Fund. This suggests that the ability of even the most powerful of Black leaders was not as central a factor in their funding decisions as was the judgment of other leading white philanthropies and political leaders. This left Black schools struggling to find funding, and often with less local community control than ever over the future and daily realities of their schools than they had before working with these foundations.

Case Study: Maysville Industrial School

Correspondence I encountered in the archive from 1929 about a prospective school building project highlights how the Fund considered economic implications—in an explicitly gendered way—as central to its school funding priorities. The Board of Education in Maysville, Kentucky had reached out to see if the Fund would help support a school for Black students in the area. The Fund noted that:

> The following considerations bear upon this request:
>
> 1) Industrial opportunities for Negroes in Maysville are favorable. The Carnation Milk Products has recently completed a million dollar plant there and will employ Negroes. Maysville is the third largest tobacco market in the world, and the second largest in Kentucky. The tobacco interest employs many Negroes. The automobile industry has increased considerably in Maysville during the past two years. All garages employ Negro mechanics. Practically all the town chauffeurs are colored. Colored women work as domestics, nurses, and in the commercial laundries. The reason why more Negro labor is not employed in Maysville is because it is not trained.
>
> 2) Maysville is the only high school for Negroes in the entire county, which includes an area within a radius of fifty miles….
>
> 3) In conference with the Superintendent of Schools at Maysville and the Department of Education at Frankfort, Kentucky, a representative of the Fund planned a course of studies which will give training in auto mechanics, dairying, various phases of the tobacco industry, brickmasonry (including plastering and cement work), and domestic science, which will include cooking, sewing, millinery and laundry work with special emphasis on commercial laundry machine operation.[477]

[477] Rosenwald and Rosenwald Fund, "Julius Rosenwald Papers," Meeting of the Executive Committee, December 10, 1929, Box 56, Folder 10.

Bearing these considerations in mind, along with the fact that the General Education Board had already pledged $10,000 to the school, the Rosenwald Fund decided to offer $25,000 to the Maysville Industrial School provided that they raised at least $65,000 from other sources (a substantial sum equivalent to about $478,000 in 2026).[478] As stated in the above excerpt, the local education authorities and the Northern education funds specifically designed the curriculum to be tailored to the local economy. For girls, there was to be a specific emphasis on "commercial laundry operation," and for boys, the offerings in dairy, tobacco, and the auto industry would directly support local companies as well. The fact that both the GEB and Rosenwald Funds offered such large sums to build out this school suggested that local economic factors were a primary consideration in their funding decisions.

A 1930 report for the Trustees' Meeting contained an update on Maysville. It noted that Maysville was part of a new broader focus that the Fund had on "the development of a program to aid city high schools with special emphasis on vocational training." The report noted that so far, $80,000 had been allocated to the building of Maysville Industrial High School, with the Rosenwald Fund having appropriated $25,000. The report noted the school's status as "almost completed."[479] Maysville was one of a number of larger urban industrial schools that the Fund supported constructing at this time, including schools in Winston-Salem, North Carolina; Atlanta, Georgia; and New Orleans, Louisiana.[480] Even as some of the Fund's broader strategies changed over time in an attempt to keep up with the needs of industry, such as supporting large urban high schools, the throughline of rooting their vocational education in racialized gender norms remained strong. The broader vision of the role of the Black person in society seemed to remain steadfast throughout the Fund's operation.

The Rosenwald Fund's Legacy

Julius Rosenwald did not believe in a philanthropic legacy that extended well beyond his lifetime, so he stipulated that the Rosenwald Fund should sunset its activities by twenty-five years after his passing. His commitment to giving away the entire contents of his Fund made him an outlier from other prominent philanthropists of the time and helped facilitate his Fund's giving on a massive scale. This strategy led to the Fund closing its doors on July 30, 1948. So, what is the legacy of the Rosenwald Schools? Today, only about 500 of the nearly 5,000 schools that Rosenwald funded are still standing. Of these, many of the schoolhouses are abandoned and in disrepair. Others continue with new life as educational or community centers. For instance, today one can visit the Noble Hill-Wheeler Memorial Center in Bartow County, Georgia, a former Rosenwald School that now serves as a cultural center and museum of local Black history. For twenty-one years after reopening in 1989, the Center was stewarded by curator Marian Coleman,

[478] Rosenwald and Rosenwald Fund, "Julius Rosenwald Papers," Box 56, Folder 10.

[479] Rosenwald and Rosenwald Fund, "Julius Rosenwald Papers," Meeting of the Trustees, April 26, 1930, Box 57, Folder 7.

[480] Rosenwald and Rosenwald Fund, "Julius Rosenwald Papers," Box 57, Folder 7.

a local resident who attended Noble Hill School from 1951 until 1955, when it was shuttered. After she retired, the Center's leadership was taken over by Marian's niece, Valerie Coleman.[481]



Marian and Valerie Coleman stand in the Noble Hill-Wheeler Memorial Center. Valerie holds a photo of their ancestor Webster Wheeler, who helped build the school. Photo by Andrew Feiler.[482]

[481] Feiler, *A Better Life for Their Children: Julius Rosenwald, Booker T Washington, and the 4978 Schools That Changed America*.

[482] Feiler, *A Better Life for Their Children: Julius Rosenwald, Booker T Washington, and the 4978 Schools That Changed America*.



Photographed by Andrew Feiler, The Emory School in Hale County, Alabama, open from 1915 to 1962, is believed to be the oldest surviving Rosenwald school building[483]

The above image was taken by photographer Andrew Feiler as part of his photographic project documenting the remaining Rosenwald school buildings. Many of the images in the book are as haunting as this image of the derelict building that was the Emory School in Alabama. Most of the Rosenwald Schools closed by the 1960s due to population changes in the rural Black Belt, as well as national desegregation policies which resulted in the closure of hundreds of Black schools, including almost all of the Rosenwald Schools.[484]

The Rosenwald Fund practiced a form of predatory inclusion in which it used Black education to further its economic goals rather than to further true democracy. The Fund knew the political stance of white leaders in the South, which was against Black education completely, and chose to sidestep this challenge rather than address it head on. This foundation in racial segregation proved, unsurprisingly, to be unstable over time. When the Black civil rights movement demanded access to true democracy in the mid-twentieth century, the state capitulated with racial integration in public schools, but in a way that placed a disproportionate burden of school closures, jobs lost,

[483] Feiler, *A Better Life for Their Children: Julius Rosenwald, Booker T Washington, and the 4978 Schools That Changed America*.

[484] Feiler, *A Better Life for Their Children: Julius Rosenwald, Booker T Washington, and the 4978 Schools That Changed America*.

and long school commutes on Black children and families.[485] Transience and instability are central to the legacy of the Rosenwald Schools. They failed to offer reliable, accessible K-12 education that would stand the test of time for the masses of Black youth across the South – and arguably this was never the Fund's central goal.

The Rosenwald Fund did not seek to promote racial equality or equity, but to promote interracial cooperation and the advancement of Black people's economic standing and buying power. They supported Black children learning literacy, math, and academic subjects to the extent that it would help them learn American morality and be productive yet still subjugated members of capitalist society. The goal of the vocational programs was to teach Black youth the practical skills they would need to be employed in local industry. Finally, their central goal of extending public education throughout the South and into Black communities was stymied by the history of racial segregation and the failure of de jure desegregation.

Taken as a whole, it's fair to say that the Rosenwald Fund was not able to meet most of its goals. Some of this was due to constantly changing economic and social conditions, such as World War I, the development of urban industry, the failure of unsustainable Southern agriculture post-slavery, and the Great Depression. Relatedly, as I discuss in the section on the limited efficacy of their vocational education programs, the Fund often seemed to see more success in their vocational training for girls than their programs for boys. This was likely because there was less technological or social change over time impacting white people's desire for domestic and other service labor traditionally provided by Black women.

Ultimately, much of what the short-lived Rosenwald Schools reveal is that major social programs like successful, inclusive public school systems require the sustained support of the state. This is a support system that our government has never been able to sustain for a meaningful period, even though real advances have been made in the last century. While there is a real question of whether the U.S. can ever achieve racial equity as long as patriarchal racial capitalism persists, I believe meaningful change would be possible if the State were to make earnest efforts to give Black people and other experts in social equity a seat at the table and meaningful public resources. Of course, having Black faces in high places alone does not guarantee equity, as shown by this history of figures like Booker T. Washington; equally important is that leaders bring an inclusive, equity-oriented mindset to the creation and evaluation of policies and programs.

The Rosenwald Fund's central goal of turning Black children into ideal American citizens and workers was arguably precluded on an ontological level by the very nature of race and gender ideology in the U.S. The idealized, gendered socio-economic roles in which Rosenwald rooted his educational vision were, as argued earlier, inherently closed off to Black Americans. That is, they could never achieve the ideal vision of the white Christian family, in which the woman is a stay-at-home wife and mother and the father is the breadwinner. In this way, the Rosenwald Fund and its contemporaries set an impossible standard for their students to strive for. Circling back to the concepts of intersectionality and predatory inclusion, programs for social uplift which root

[485] For more on the impacts of de jure school desegregation on Black schools and communities, see this dissertation's Chapter 3 on Snow Hill School.

themselves in the norms of white supremacy and patriarchy can never fully achieve their purported goals of advancing greater rights and access to opportunities for Black people.[486]

While the Rosenwald Fund failed to meet many of its goals, and most of the schools it supported are closed, I would not go so far as to frame the schools themselves as failures. These schools played central and critical roles in the Black communities in which they were located. As discussed throughout, communities undoubtedly found ways to work around and between the restrictive visions of their white funders and local white supremacist bureaucrats. The everyday experiences of the communities that attended and ran these schools are not equitably preserved in archives of institutions like the Rosenwald Fund. Without taking away from the monumental strides made by these communities and individual Black leaders, my research brings light to the level to which Black communities had to practice fugitive pedagogies to give their children the best education and childhoods possible under the restrictive circumstances of white supremacy.[487]

[486] Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics"; Taylor, *Race for Profit: How Banks and the Real Estate Industry Undermined Black Homeownership*.

[487] Givens, *Fugitive Pedagogy: Carter G. Woodson and the Art of Black Teaching*.

Chapter Three:

The Rise and Fall of Snow Hill Normal & Industrial Institute: A Black Belt Community School

Rachel Anspach

The Alabama Historical Commission placard informing visitors that they are on the site of Snow Hill Normal and Industrial Institute has been knocked over and is now held up in a makeshift fashion by a rope tied to two wooden poles. When I visited the school site in May 2023, the verdant property was nearly empty, dotted with broken-down buildings, grass fields, and wild copses of woods. The school's main brick building remains standing, though in disrepair, classrooms still filled with old desks and books. Snow Hill Normal & Industrial Institute was a Black K-12 school, founded by Tuskegee University graduate William James Edwards, open from 1894 to 1972. Once the center of a tight-knit Black town, today Snow Hill lies vacant, and most residents have left the area.

When Edwards opened Snow Hill, Wilcox County, Alabama was home to 35,631 people, including 11,623 Black school-age children; as of 2025, the county was home to just 10,059 people, 69% of whom are Black, including about 1,533 Black children.[488] The area surrounding Snow Hill has just a handful of people still living nearby. When I toured the school grounds with 80-year-old alumnus Cornelius Gaines, he pointed out vast areas that he remembered having been devoted to farming, community education, and businesses providing locals with housing, food, and clean water. In its prime during the 1910s-20s, the school farmed several crops, raised pigs and other livestock, built a water well, a community store, and ran a lumber mill and brick foundry.[489] Today, these fields have been dormant for so long that the forest has grown back in many places, and there is little visible evidence left of the grand dreams that Edwards once had for building up his community.

[488] General Education Board, "General Education Board," Rockefeller Archives Center, Accessed 2022, Rockefeller Archives Center, Snow Hill Normal & Industrial Institute, Series 1, Subseries 1, Box 2, Folder 16; U.S. Census Bureau, *U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts: Wilcox County, Alabama* (U.S. Government, 2024), https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/wilcoxcountyalabama/PST045223.

[489] Gaines, "Interview & Campus Tour with Cornelius Gaines."



Snow Hill graduate Cornelius Gaines giving a tour of the school. He stands in front of the main school building.[490]



The Alabama Historical Commission marker for Snow Hill Institute, 2023

[490] The original photos throughout, unless otherwise noted, were taken by S.A. Worthy during my May 2023 site visit. More of these photographs are included in the Appendix for reference. Photos used with permission.

Snow Hill's founder and longtime principal, William James Edwards (who went by James), was born in Wilcox County, Alabama—the heart of the Black Belt—on September 12, 1869. Like his community, he grew up squarely in the shadow of slavery, living in a dilapidated, one-room cabin that had formerly been slave quarters, starving much of the time, and struggling from childhood to eke out a living from tenant farming.[491] After barely surviving into young adulthood due to poverty, severe health issues, and family neglect, Edwards learned of Tuskegee Institute during a church service in 1887. Tuskegee, a Black vocational college that opened its doors in 1881 in nearby Macon County, taught a hard-work ethos that deeply resonated with Edwards.[492] After two years of extremely hard labor, mostly picking cotton, to raise funds to enroll and buy a school outfit, Edwards enrolled in 1889 and worked for Tuskegee's farm to put himself through school. Tuskegee founder and Black educational leader Booker T. Washington became a hero and inspiration of Edwards during his tenure there, and after graduation, he decided founding a school was the best way he could help his own community.[493]

I learned of Snow Hill Institute through my archival research on the General Education Board (G.E.B.) and Rosenwald Fund, two major philanthropic foundations of the early-to-mid twentieth century that played a formative role in the construction and maintenance of Black schools across the Southern United States.[494] These foundations became involved with shaping education for Black students when it first became legal in the South after Emancipation in the late 1800s; when the state refused to substantively support education for Black students, private funders stepped in.[495] In the course of my research, I spent several days at these foundations' archives, at the Rockefeller Archives Center and the University of Chicago, respectively.[496] As I explored those archives, I was interested in themes of 1) public-private partnerships—the specific mechanisms through which these private organizations gained such central power in shaping public education; and 2) the details of how these partnerships impacted Black schools and their curricula. My research brings an intersectional lens to studying these themes, utilizing an epistemology formed through my graduate study of the work of Black feminists, critical race theorists, theorists of racial capitalism, and my doctoral training in Black Studies, more broadly.[497] This epistemological lens led me to an interest in studying the contours of the early development of education philanthropy geared toward Black students in order to better understand the role of privatization and racialized gender norms in shaping our country's public education system.

---

[491] Edwards, *Twenty-Five Years in the Black Belt*.

[492] More context on Tuskegee and its founding president, Booker T. Washington, discussed in the Introduction and Chapters One and Two of this dissertation.

[493] Edwards, *Twenty-Five Years in the Black Belt*.

[494] See the prior sections of this dissertation for more on these organizations.

[495] For more context on Black education post-Emancipation, see the Introduction.

[496] General Education Board, "General Education Board Archive"; Rosenwald and Rosenwald Fund, "Julius Rosenwald Papers."

[497] See the Introduction for more on my theoretical framework.

In combing through these archives, I kept an eye out for schools that had worked extensively with both these foundations that could help me delve more deeply into how my central themes concretely played out and were preserved in correspondence, reports, and news coverage. Snow Hill drew my attention, in particular, because it had large files with extensive correspondence with the G.E.B., and on closer inspection, had a story of working with foundations and the state in a way that helped tease out many of the topics I was interested in. My interest in telling the school's story led me to conduct a site visit to the school in rural Alabama, interview living graduates, including descendants of James Edwards, and consult local archives, including the Wilcox County Board of Education.

Black feminist epistemology calls on scholars to read beyond and between the lines of official archives, with the understanding that power pervades the documentation and narratives preserved in official records.[498] My site visit, interviews with community members connected to the school, and secondary locally published materials formed another archive that I analyzed as a core source for this chapter. This archive, comprised of the perspectives of Black people who were closely connected to Snow Hill, formed an important counterpoint to the narratives presented in the official philanthropic archives. This counter-archive included community members' perspectives collected directly through my interviews, as well as secondary published materials such as the writings of Consuela Lee, a granddaughter of James Edwards who reopened the school as a music program for local youth in the 1980s, and Edwards' biography written by his grandson Donald Stone that was published locally utilizing extensive archival research.[499] James Edwards himself also published a short memoir in 1918, entitled *Twenty-Five Years in the Black Belt,* which told the story of his school and was intended to be used as a fundraising tool.[500] The importance of this community archive is highlighted by my finding that one of Snow Hill's central legacies was to bring a robust musical arts education to decades of Black students. This came up in every interview and local account I studied, but was completely missing from the philanthropic archives I consulted. This highlights how the official archives preserved a narrow story of what mattered to the funders—not the local community.

The story I tell in this chapter of Snow Hill's rise and fall showcases the precarity that Black schools faced in relying on public-private partnerships with no built-in accountability or reliability over time. Alongside this, we can see the power and promise of independent community schools founded by and for local residents. Snow Hill's story represents a paradox faced by many Black schools during this era: the school received nearly all its funding from white northerners and could not have stayed open without their funding. At the same time, the control that these Northern philanthropists exerted over Snow Hill, and their abdication of support in key moments, was

[498] Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts"; Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Riotous Black Girls, Troublesome Women, and Queer Radicals*; Taylor, "Women in the Documents: Thoughts on Uncovering the Personal, Political, and Professional."

[499] Donald P. Stone, *Fallen Prince: William James Edwards* (Snow Hill Press, 1990); Consuela Lee, "Alabama's Black Belt: Legacy of Slavery, Sharecropping and Segregation," *Consuela Lee*, n.d., https://consuelalee.com/doc/Blackbelt-legacy.html.

[500] Edwards, *Twenty-Five Years in the Black Belt*.

central to the school's downfall and the devastation of the local community. The white supremacist orientation of the state repeatedly stymied the school's potential for longevity and a more capacious vision of Black education. Rooted in my archival research, this chapter traces the injustice and unreliability that Snow Hill experienced in working with funders and the state over its eighty years of existence.

Snow Hill was a school founded by a local community member, who knew the needs of his own neighbors intimately, and rooted its curriculum in what he believed could fundamentally improve the living conditions and well-being of Black Belt residents. Following his college graduation, Edwards was a tenacious young man, inspired and ready to put in hard work to uplift his community. He started by undertaking an extensive survey of the schools and general living conditions of Black people in his county. He found that most children did not have access to remotely adequate schooling, if they were in school at all, and that most families continued to reside in slave quarters without the resources or knowledge to fundamentally improve their circumstances.[501] There was no dedicated schoolhouse in the area for Black children to attend more than a couple of months of the year, and even those were one-room cabins or churches that were dilapidated and ill-equipped for schooling. Most Black residents continued to work on white farms under extremely unjust conditions which relied on Black children working in the fields for much of the growing season.

Edwards' survey found 11,623 Black school-age children in the area, with no public schools and only one established private school to serve all of them. Black people outnumbered white people in the county seven to one, and he believed that less than half of Black children in the area were in school as of the 1890s.[502] From this emerged his vision of a normal and industrial school, with a full school term and an agricultural focus, that would allow children from neighboring communities to earn an education, learn trades to make a living, sell homesteading properties to local residents, and provide them with the tools and means to build their own homes.[503] Like his mentor Booker Washington from Tuskegee, Edwards believed that strengthening his community's roots in agriculture, through bringing in new, scientific techniques and pathways to owning and managing their own farms, was the key to building up Black people in the South.

Snow Hill opened its doors in 1894 with one wooden cabin on seven acres of land, donated by R.O. Simpson, a local white plantation owner who Edwards had known and impressed since childhood.[504] Edwards founded the school before most of the major Black school building foundations were formed, including the General Education Board and Rosenwald Fund, which together funded the construction of schools that about one-third of Black school-age children in

[501] Edwards, *Twenty-Five Years in the Black Belt*.

[502] Stone, *Fallen Prince: Black Education, and the Quest for Afro-American Nationality*; Edwards, *Twenty-Five Years in the Black Belt*.

[503] Edwards, *Twenty-Five Years in the Black Belt*.

[504] Stone, *Fallen Prince: Black Education, and the Quest for Afro-American Nationality*.

the South attended by the 1930s.[505] At this time, Southern apartheid states including Alabama largely refused to fund to Black schools, leaving communities to open their own schools without state support. Although Northern white funds were key to keeping Snow Hill open in the coming years, the initial investments in the school all came from Black community members, with the (large) exception of the land donated by Simpson. "The entire community assisted in raising the money and erecting the [school] building. Suppers, fairs and picnics were held to raise money for the school," reports Donald Stone, the grandson of James Edwards, who wrote a book about his grandfather. "The state furnished not one cent for this purpose nor rendered any financial support to the school… it was the Afro-American community of Snow Hill who initially provided for the welfare of the school."[506] Edwards taught the first year by himself in the one-room cabin they built, lengthening the local school term from three to six months. Edwards also took up working at a sawmill and taking pay in lumber to expand the school's buildings.

By the school's second year, Edwards was able to hire two of his Tuskegee classmates, Ophelia Clopton and Rosa Bradford, to join him as teachers. They started the school year with three teachers and 150 students. In 1895, they were joined by Henry A. Barnes, another Tuskegee graduate who went on to serve as the school's treasurer and helped start the school's music program, for which it became widely known.[507] Edwards himself was a talented musician, as were many of his children and descendants. "Music was the centerpiece of our home," recalled Edwards' grandson Cliff Lee, when I interviewed him in his Brooklyn brownstone in May of 2023. Lee grew up with his family, including his mother, who was Edwards' daughter, in a home next to the school and his grandparents. He proudly recalled his grandfather passing this musical legacy on to their family, with the children of his generation playing numerous instruments between the seven of them. Lee himself, now in his 80s, is a passionate jazz trumpeter. [508] This legacy of music, mentioned by every person I spoke to who was connected to the school, was not mentioned in any of the philanthropic archives I consulted.

Once the school was established with teachers beyond Edwards himself, he was able to turn toward the fundraising that would allow the school to keep its doors open. Given the poverty of the recently emancipated local Black community, and the continued reality of white supremacist apartheid in the South, it was clear that fundraising from white northerners would be key to Edwards' job as founding principal. He made his first fundraising trip up North for Snow Hill in 1897, and continued to do so every year at least, with varying success, until his health failed in 1923, and he could no longer travel.[509] In 1887, Booker T. Washington invited Edwards on a fundraising trip up the East Coast with the Tuskegee Quartet. In addition to performing in the concerts, this trip gave Edwards insight into Tuskegee's own fundraising campaigns and helped him establish connections with funders.

---

[505] Rooks, *Cutting School*.

[506] Stone, *Fallen Prince: Black Education, and the Quest for Afro-American Nationality,* 78-79.

[507] Stone, *Fallen Prince: Black Education, and the Quest for Afro-American Nationality*.

[508] Lee, "Cliff Lee on Snow Hill."

[509] Edwards, *Twenty-Five Years in the Black Belt*.

In Boston, Edwards connected with the siblings Susan and William Messinger, who helped connect him with other philanthropists in the area.[510] In the early days of his fundraising for Snow Hill, the Messingers became two of his most reliable supporters. Starting in the 1890s, Susan Messinger published a number of fundraising appeals for Snow Hill in Boston newspapers to help bring in more white people sympathetic to Black Southern education.[511] This relationship led Edwards to meet Anna T. Jeanes in Philadelphia on May 5, 1901—a wealthy white Quaker woman who would go on to found the Jeanes Fund for rural Black schools. That same year, she sent Snow Hill a check for $5,000, their largest donation thus far (worth about $194,200 in 2026), and she continued contributing annually for the next several years until her death.

The school also received a $10,000 donation from prominent businessman Andrew Carnegie after he heard Edwards speak for the twenty-fifth anniversary of Tuskegee in 1906—the school's largest single contribution at that time.[512] During its early days, the future of Snow Hill looked full of hope and promise, as did the possibilities for funding the school. It would not be long, however, before the school became plagued with continuous financial crises, which were exacerbated by northern funders' critical perspective of Snow Hill as a school, as well as of Edwards' operations and financial management as principal. Aside from the Simpson family, no other white Southern residents supported the school. Local Black families were initially skeptical of the value of a vocational school but were won over by Edwards' commitment to providing their children with a well-rounded, practical education. They were not able to provide much in the way of financial support, but they rallied with community events to pitch in what resources and labor they had to get the school running and help it expand.[513]

While the major players amongst Northern, white funders—such as the G.E.B. and Rosenwald Fund—had a narrow, specific vision for the type of education they would fund, Edwards' vision encompassed that and more. For instance, the G.E.B.'s mission statement read in part: "We shall not try to make these people or any of their children into philosophers or men of learning, or men of science. We have not to raise up from among them authors, editors, poets or men of letters. We shall not search for embryo great artists, painters, musicians nor lawyers, doctors, preachers, politicians, statesmen, of whom we have an ample supply. . . The task we set before ourselves is a very simple as well as a very beautiful one, to train these people as we find them to a perfectly ideal life just where they are."[514] This quote showcases the economically prescribed vision of vocational education that the great Northern philanthropies sought to advance for Black youth in the South. Whereas funders preferred a narrow focus on agricultural, industrial,

---

[510] Stone, *Fallen Prince: Black Education, and the Quest for Afro-American Nationality*.

[511] Susan D. Messinger, "Divers Good Causes," *Boston Evening Transcript* (Boston), November 24, 1897, https://www.newspapers.com/image/735169524/?match=1&terms=snow%20hill%20institute.

[512] Stone, *Fallen Prince: Black Education, and the Quest for Afro-American Nationality*.

[513] Lee, "Cliff Lee on Snow Hill"; Stone, *Fallen Prince: Black Education, and the Quest for Afro-American Nationality*.

[514] General Education Board, "General Education Board Archive," GEB Organization, Charter, By-Laws 1902-1950, Box 15, Folders 134-149.

or domestic labor, Snow Hill offered a wide range of trade courses including a strong focus on agriculture and domestic skills. Over time the school developed a strong music program, sports teams, and built a large auditorium for performances, games, and gatherings.[515] It became the only Black school in the area to have such an auditorium. Stone, Edwards' grandson, argued that Snow Hill diverged from vocational education in the Tuskegee model because Edwards placed an equal value on academics and industries; this differed from Tuskegee's vocational model, which placed less emphasis on academic subjects.

After five years in operation, Snow Hill's academic subject offerings were Mental and Moral Science, Mathematics, Bookkeeping, Music, Reading, Literature, Grammar & Rhetoric, History, Geography, Hygiene, Physics, and Civil Government.[516] The school's Industrial Department at that time included carpentry, blacksmithing, farming, and printing for boys, and laundering, cooking, and sewing for girls. Edwards was a forward thinker, ahead of his time in promoting a regenerative agricultural philosophy, which hinged on diversification and rotation of crops to keep the soil healthy.

This contrasted with the predominant model of constant cotton farming which prevailed in the South and quickly stripped the soil, constantly requiring new farmland to maintain the industry. Edwards' passion for the future of sustainable farming—and the possibilities he saw for Black southerners to lead those efforts—led him to make the acquaintance of George Washington Carver, who spoke at the school during their annual Farmers Conference.[517] Edwards was also passionate about home and land ownership as a path to economic uplift for his community. The school eventually operated both a brick foundry and lumber mill, which sold to local residents, and Edwards hoped to sell parcels of land that the school acquired over time to local residents for home building and farming.[518] By 1899, Snow Hill had seven buildings on forty acres, and eleven teachers who were paid $20 per month (about $800 in 2026), serving 300 students from the local area as well as boarders.[519] This salary was in line with the pay of other Black teachers in the state, while white teachers were paid on average over double Black teachers' salaries by 1910.[520]

While the vocational education model championed by white philanthropies was rooted in producing their ideal worker and consumer, Edwards' (and other Black leaders') vision for vocational education was premised upon study and intimate knowledge of what skills and resources Black communities would need to move from surviving to thriving in the South. Edwards determined that farming, land and home ownership, and self-sufficient communities with Black-owned businesses should be the central building blocks of building his community up. The

[515] Gaines, "Interview & Campus Tour with Cornelius Gaines."

[516] Stone, *Fallen Prince: Black Education, and the Quest for Afro-American Nationality,* 88-89.

[517] Stone, *Fallen Prince: Black Education, and the Quest for Afro-American Nationality,* 93-94.

[518] Edwards, *Twenty-Five Years in the Black Belt*.

[519] Stone, *Fallen Prince: Black Education, and the Quest for Afro-American Nationality,* 91-100.

[520] Robert A. Margo, "Teacher Salaries in Black and White: Pay Discrimination in the Southern Classroom," in *Race and Schooling in the South, 1880-1950: An Economic History* (University of Chicago Press, 1990).

local Black community was initially skeptical of a vocational focus for their school, questioning whether they wanted to have their children doing manual labor as part of their education. However, Edwards' efforts and the fruit of his work convinced the locals that his hard-work vision was the pathway through which they could uplift their community. To connote their respect for his leadership, the local community took to calling him 'Fessor Edwards, short for Professor.[521] Edwards' educational philosophy both converged and diverged from the vision of white funders, which became evident over the course of the school's life.

One central way in which Edwards' vision converged with northern foundations was in embracing Christian, patriarchal family structures and gender norms as the foundation of bringing Black people into American society and industry. However, he did not think that being a homemaker should be the sole goal of local girls. In one of his regular addresses to students in 1902, Edwards stated, "[I]t seems to me that the primary end of the education for our girls should be to make them independent, industrious and self-supporting citizens. The Negro girls should have that kind of education which will make them economic factors in the onward movement and development of the race."[522] Edwards strongly believed that girls should have access to a strong academic education alongside boys, but when it came to learning vocations, the classes were generally gender segregated.[523] This was the case across all the schools funded by the major foundations promoting vocational education. While it was important to Edwards that Snow Hill was nondenominational, it strongly promoted a Christian worldview and moral norms, which Edwards regularly communicated to his students and community in sermons and speeches.[524]

The General Education Board (G.E.B.) was founded in 1902, a few years after Edwards began fundraising for Snow Hill, and quickly became a preeminent funder of Black schools in the South.[525] The G.E.B. was founded by John D. Rockefeller Jr., who brought together some of the country's most elite Northern white men to shape segregated education policy with funding from John D. Rockefeller Sr.'s massive fortune. The Board agreed that it was of the utmost importance to educate Black people, but that this education should be "industrial" in nature—meaning that it would prepare Black students to be low-wage industrial, agricultural, or service workers. The group's mission statement (quoted in part above) emphasized its political orientation, stating: "In our dreams, we have limitless resources and the people yield themselves with perfect docility to our molding hands. The present education conventions fade from their minds, and unhampered by tradition, we work our own good will upon a grateful and responsive rural folk."[526] In 1903, just one year after the foundation came together, Congress created a partnership with the G.E.B., bestowing it with sweeping powers similar to the federal Department of Education of today,

[521] Stone, *Fallen Prince: Black Education, and the Quest for Afro-American Nationality,* 70.

[522] Stone, *Fallen Prince: Black Education, and the Quest for Afro-American Nationality,* 142.

[523] Gaines, "Interview & Campus Tour with Cornelius Gaines."

[524] Stone, *Fallen Prince: Black Education, and the Quest for Afro-American Nationality*, 85.

[525] For a more detailed analysis of the General Education Board, see Chapter One of my dissertation.

[526] General Education Board, "General Education Board Archive," GEB Organization, Charter, By-Laws 1902-1950, Box 15, Folders 134-149.

including the "construction" of new schools and "improvement" of existing ones.[527] The G.E.B. sought to train Black students in the specific vocational skills and mindset that would convince them to remain in the South and continue their central roles in supporting the American economy.

Edwards, by this time having made fundraising connections in the North, quickly became aware of the G.E.B. and submitted an application for $20,000, which he reported as the school's full budget for the 1902-03 academic year (about $768,000 in 2026).[528] Initially, it seemed like the G.E.B. was exactly what Edwards had been waiting for—a foundation with deep pockets created specifically to fund schools like his in the South. Given that Edwards was a close disciple of Booker Washington, and that the G.E.B. modeled their Fund on Washington's vocational education philosophy, it initially seemed like Snow Hill was an ideal candidate for its funding. Edwards was a staunch believer in the power of hard work and an advocate of Black people staying in the South and adopting farming and related trades as a means to uplift the race. He supported marriage and traditional gender roles for the local Black community. These ideals seemed to align neatly with the G.E.B.'s mission.

Edwards was clearly aware of the political bent of the Fund, evidenced in his appeal to the G.E.B. on March 25, 1902:

> The results of the first seven years of [Snow Hill] may be summed up under the following heads: (1st) It has established in the minds of the people in that section the fact that the South is the best place for the Negro. (2nd) It has created in them a love for country life, a desire to purchase and own a home, and an ambition to beautify and dignify the same. (3rd) It has shown them above all others, that intensive farming in the South is the Negroes opportunity of the age. (4th) The diminishing of crimes of all classes among them, the lessening of the desire to enter politics and the cordial relations between the two races. To my mind these are sufficiently strong proofs of the necessity and worth of such an Institution for my people in the South.[529]

The G.E.B. replied in June, informing Edwards that they would provide Snow Hill with $4,000 in funding (about $153,600 in 2026), provided he could raise a total of $20,500. The requirement of raising matching funds in order to access foundation dollars was a central practice of the G.E.B., which they viewed as a way to protect the longevity of their investments and instill their desired business principles among Black leaders and communities. In 1903, Edwards wrote an overjoyed letter to the G.E.B., informing them that, "because of this gift, we received double the amount from the patrons of that received during any previous year."[530] Based on this early donation from the G.E.B. and the tone of his correspondence, it is clear that Edwards believed that this $4,000 donation would be the start of a long and fruitful relationship with the G.E.B. that would greatly,

---

[527] General Education Board, "General Education Board Archive," GEB Organization, Charter, By-Laws 1902-1950, Box 15, Folders 134-149.

[528] General Education Board, "General Education Board: Snow Hill," Box 2, Folder 16.

[529] General Education Board, "General Education Board: Snow Hill," Box 15, Folders 134-149.

[530] General Education Board, "General Education Board: Snow Hill."

if not altogether, alleviate the school's financial struggles. This sadly could not have been further from the reality that was to come.

While Edwards was able to frame his school as falling neatly within the vision of the corporate philanthropists, in reality his dreams and visions for his people were much further reaching than those of the Northern industrial magnates. Edwards sought to train his local community in the values of hard work, including agriculture, construction, and homemaking because he believed that these were the skills his community would need to improve their lives. He sincerely hoped and believed in the possibility of uplift for his community and a materially better future if Black youths could learn the practical skills needed to farm, own their own land, and build self-sufficient communities in which Black residents owned the local shops and farms.

At the same time, Edwards recognized the importance of the spiritual and intellectual growth of his community. He began a legacy of music and love of the arts in his students that carried forward long after the school closed its doors.[531] Whether he sincerely believed that the Northern white funders shared his visions is unknown. But he repeatedly demonstrated his willingness to do whatever he could to gain support for his school and his community—evidenced by his many northern fundraising campaigns and unceasing correspondence with the northern education funds, which he continued until the strain of running the school took its toll and his health failed.

The story of Snow Hill's rise and fall showcases many of the themes that pervade the early years of the Northern education funds working with Black schools in the South. In the early years, when both the federal government and Southern states refused to invest in education for Black students, the lines between public and private schools were often blurred. While the G.E.B. sought to partner with states to construct public schools, in its early years, due to lack of state support for Black education, the Fund regularly supported private schools like Snow Hill. Often these schools were also on board with the mission of becoming public schools, but they were aware that the political reality in the South would not permit it.

Snow Hill's story showcases the competing visions for educating recently emancipated Black communities—those from Black people like Edwards, who had grown up and been educated squarely in the shadow of slavery, and those of the Northern white industrialists, who sought to use education for Black students as a means to incorporate Black people into a docile population of workers and consumers. Snow Hill's story shows Black leaders who were willing to achieve their visions by any means available, accepting the parameters set by institutions like the G.E.B., and working within and around them as best they could. Because there was no question that such schools needed white dollars to keep their doors open. Yet in working with the G.E.B., eventually partnering with the foundation and the State of Alabama to become public, Snow Hill eventually relinquished what power it did have to control the education of its community. When it became politically expedient, Snow Hill was shuttered by those same forces that they had looked to for help.

[531] Lee, "Cliff Lee on Snow Hill."

The Socio-Political Climate in Alabama at the Turn of the Twentieth Century

Before continuing to tell the story of Snow Hill that I've drawn from my primary archival and interview research, I will synthesize some history of the State of Alabama around the turn of the century to provide relevant context. Alabama had been admitted as a state in 1819 and had outlawed education for all Black people, free or enslaved, by 1832. As I discuss earlier in this dissertation, maintaining Black illiteracy was a key strategy that those in power used to uphold the chattel slavery system. Following the end of the Civil War and the emancipation of enslaved people in 1865, the country as a whole, particularly the South, grappled with how to handle the newly emancipated Black population. education for Black students was now suddenly legal in the region for the first time. In Alabama, there was a fierce battle between the more liberal Republicans, who favored dedicating state resources to incorporating the Black population, and the conservative Democrats, who supported instituting a new system of white racial apartheid to replace chattel slavery.[532]

As in the federal government, there was a brief period of about a decade, known as Reconstruction, when the more progressive Republicans held power in Alabama and began to implement a system of public schools for Black students to gain a legal education. In 1868, Alabama passed a new constitution, which contained an article that gave power to the state's board of education to "exercise full legislative powers in reference to the public educational institutions of the State" and to "establish throughout the State, in each township or other school district which it may have created, one or more schools, at which *all of the children of the State* between the ages of five and twenty-one may attend free of charge."[533] In other words, the state would now be empowered to build schools for both Black and white children.

In the years since Emancipation, private schools for Black students had been established across the South, many funded by missionary societies.[534] Significantly, the Republican members of the Board of Education during Reconstruction included both Black and white men (but no women, who still could not vote). The state constitution stipulated that these public schools were to be paid for by a corporate state tax. It did not mandate that the schools would be racially segregated, but instead included a compromise between Black and white representatives which stated that, "should it prove expedient to have separate schools for white and colored children, the Board of Education shall cause an equal division of the school fund in such district where such division is demanded."[535] While the political divisions in the state made the reality of how this played out on the ground more complex, this relatively progressive constitution was in effect until 1875. During this time, Alabama's Board of Education partnered with the Freedman's Bureau in the creation of new public schools. The Freedman's Bureau was the federal government agency

[532] Horace Mann Bond et al., *Negro Education in Alabama: A Study in Cotton and Steel* (University of Alabama Press, 2015).
[533] Emphasis added. Bond et al., *Negro Education in Alabama: A Study in Cotton and Steel* 90.

[534] Anderson, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935*.

[535] Bond et al., *Negro Education in Alabama: A Study in Cotton and Steel*.

that supported Reconstruction, and in this case partnered with the school board to help acquire lands for school grounds and their buildings.[536]

Because there was so much partisanship and uneven record keeping, historians of the period argue that it is difficult to find reliable statistics on education at this time. However, the state's Board of Education documented widespread white opposition to both the creation of the public school system writ large, and to the education of Black children, in particular. While the state constitution on paper provided ample funding for the Department of Education, the records are also unclear and not totally reliable about how much of this was ever actually distributed by the state legislature.[537] That said, a report from 1871 noted the employment at $43 per month of 2,497 white teachers and 773 Black teachers, meaning that at least on paper, they were paid the same salaries. The state also likely inflated its reports of how many children of both races were attending school in this period, but teachers' reports suggest the Black school attendance remained below 35% as of 1871.[538]

By 1875, Alabama passed a new constitution with the conservatives in power, which much more profoundly limited school funding, eliminating most of its tax base. This left white residents in the state looking even more heavily toward any resources spent on education for Black students as dollars that could go toward improving white schools instead. This was essentially the end of any substantive state support for education for Black students in Alabama until well into the twentieth century (and even then, funding remained meager).[539]

By the last years of the nineteenth century, the conservative Democrats had consolidated their power in local jurisdictions, in part through suppressing Black votes; favoring fiscal austerity, the party engineered scarcity around funding for public schools. This, combined with the re-entrenchment of white apartheid in the form of Jim Crow laws, meant that Black schools seeking to open their doors needed to look outside the state for financing. This inequity was further entrenched by Alabama's 1891 House Bill 504, which changed the apportionment of education funds from providing equal funding by the number of students per race, to leaving the disbursement of funding at the complete discretion of local education authorities. Following the adoption of this new provision, the state ceased publishing education funding breakdowns by race, and they did not resume again until 1908, by which time Black residents had been fully disenfranchised, and the State clearly felt there was no reason not to broadcast the reality of the racial funding disparities.[540]

In the 1870s, according to available data, Wilcox County spent roughly proportional amounts on Black and white teacher salaries proportionate to the number of students by race. For

[536] Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860-1880*.

[537] Bond et al., *Negro Education in Alabama: A Study in Cotton and Steel*.

[538] Bond et al., *Negro Education in Alabama: A Study in Cotton and Steel*, 99.

[539] Bond et al., *Negro Education in Alabama: A Study in Cotton and Steel,* Chapter 10.

[540] Bond et al., *Negro Education in Alabama: A Study in Cotton and Steel,* 157-163.

example, in 1876 the state spent $2,136 for 2,403 teachers of white students and $6,055 for teachers of 7,357 Black students. By 1908, however, Wilcox County reported spending $28,108 on teacher salaries for 2,285 white students, compared to $3,844 for teachers for 10,745 Black students. By the 1929-30 school year, the county spent $57,578 on teacher salaries for 1,856 white students, compared to just $8,176 on teachers for 8,483 Black students.[541] This is a staggering difference. It was during the entrenchment of this new period of heightened white supremacy that Snow Hill opened its doors and fought to keep them open.

While Black politicians and Black men, newly able to vote, held some real political power for a few years during Reconstruction, following conservative white residents' reconsolidation of power by 1885, Black men held onto very little of that power or their ability to vote for the next several decades. Women continued to live without any right to vote at all. As early as the 1870s, the system of debt peonage created through tenant farming had been developed in the South, replacing many Black people's status as unpaid laborers during slavery with a new status as constantly indebted laborers that scholars argue continued the direct legacy of slavery.[542] Historian Saidiya Hartman has termed this continuation of the legal, economic, and cultural forms of racial domination in the Jim Crow era as the "afterlife of slavery."[543]

The general way the share-cropping system worked was that white farmers would "lease" a portion of their land to be farmed by Black (or other poor) workers, with the agreement that they would be paid from the profits when the crops were harvested and sold at the end of the season. In reality, during the rest of the year, when the tenant farmers had no pay, they were forced to take out loans from their landlords to purchase supplies and daily necessities. In turn, the landowners would mark up the prices on these basic necessities, so tenant farmers were often left in debt even after the season ended. Their salaries often went to pay their so-called debts with nothing left over for the coming year. This created a vicious circle that was difficult to escape from, and in turn highlighted to leaders like Edwards the benefits that Black residents could gain from owning and working their own land.

Under this new economic system, which continued to rely on essentially unpaid Black labor, it became "obvious that an educated labor force, intelligent regarding rates of interest, cognizant of even the simplest methods of accounting, would be a distinct liability to the system rather than an asset."[544] The reconsolidation of Alabama's cotton-plantation-based economy at the turn of the century led directly to a "conflict between the status assigned to the Negro in the economic and social system and the threat that education might unfit the Negro for that status."[545] In combination with the end of formal slavery, the farming industry in Alabama was widely

[541] Bond et al., *Negro Education in Alabama: A Study in Cotton and Steel,* 162.

[542] Bond et al., *Negro Education in Alabama: A Study in Cotton and Steel*.

[543] Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America*, Race and American Culture (Oxford University Press, 1997).

[544] Bond et al., *Negro Education in Alabama: A Study in Cotton and Steel,* 141.

[545] Bond et al., *Negro Education in Alabama: A Study in Cotton and Steel,* 142.

impacted by soil depletion by the end of the Civil War. Cotton farming the same acreage year after year stripped the soil of nutrients; and because most plantation owners didn't rotate their crops, they continuously needed to obtain and farm new land rather than cyclically planting crops that would replenish the soil. In 1860, industry in Alabama was almost completely agricultural, reflected by the fact that just 4.2% of Black enslaved residents and 5.7% of white residents lived in towns with a population over 2,500. By 1900, the state was still extremely rural, with nearly 12% of Black residents now living in urban centers.

By the turn of the century, however, Alabama's economy was increasingly supported by mining, namely coal and iron. Coal mines were founded in the northern counties of the state as early as the 1840s. Once mined, the minerals would be processed in steel mills and transported up North to contribute to industrial production; this became another way in which Southern and Northern industry were inextricably linked.[546] What made this industry possible was, of course, the new railways—showcasing how intertwined the fortunes of Northern industrial philanthropists were with Southern industry. Snow Hill itself was located near two railroads by the end of the twentieth century, the Selma and Pensacola lines, which transported 3,500-4,000 bales of local cotton annually to be processed in factories across the country.[547]

After the war, mining companies increasingly preferred to hire Black workers, who they perceived as breaking up labor organizing while accepting low wages. By 1900, Black people comprised the vast majority of workers in the State's mining fields. A 1900 conference of industrial promoters described the labor force of Alabama as comprised of one-third Black people, "who [were] well adapted for common labor, and in some instances [could] be satisfactorily used for semi-skilled capacities."[548] While during slavery, Black people had conducted much of the more skilled manual labor on plantations, this new formation of the Black male laborer attempted to confine Black workers to low-skilled labor to justify low wages and poor working conditions. This served to further reinscribe the divisions between the Black and white races without the formal structure of slavery. This context was highly relevant to the Northern white businessmen who sought to materially support education for Black students; many corporate and political white interests converged in supporting an education system that prepared Black boys for low-skill agricultural and industrial jobs and Black girls for domestic service work.[549]

The political conflict of this period was also what led to the founding of Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute, which, led by its first president, Booker T. Washington, was to become a leader in the local and national movement for Black vocational education. This Black university was founded in 1880, after a white Democratic candidate for the General Assembly pledged to introduce a bill setting up Tuskegee in exchange for the support of Lewis Adams, a Black

[546] Bond et al., *Negro Education in Alabama: A Study in Cotton and Steel,* Chapter 15.

[547] S. B. D., "Rambles in Old Wilcox," *Wilcox Progressive Era* (Camden, AL), October 28, 1896, https://www.newspapers.com/image/308677242/?match=1&terms=%22ro%20simpson%22.

[548] Bond et al., *Negro Education in Alabama: A Study in Cotton and Steel,* 146.

[549] Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860-1880*.

Republican politician. Adams went on to become one of the first board members at Tuskegee.[550] At the time of Tuskegee's founding, Washington was working as an instructor of Native and working students at Hampton Institute, the Black vocational college that was his alma mater. Hampton's founder, Samuel Chapman Armstrong, was asked to recommend a leader for the new school, and he tapped his mentee, Washington. Armstrong, the son of white missionary colonists in Hawaii, brought a strong Christian, colonialist ethos to education for Black students.[551] The State provided the school with just $2000 in initial annual funding, appropriated from the state's Black school fund, almost all of which was required to go toward teacher salaries.

It was in this climate, where the South abdicated responsibility for providing education for Black students, that the Northern white philanthropists stepped in. When these wealthy white businessmen set out to fund Black schools, they had the power to choose which strands of Black educational leadership they would provide with the resources to be implemented on a wide scale. They could have chosen to support W.E.B. DuBois' vision of robust liberal arts education,[552] or Anna Julia Cooper's vision of Black education rooted in the needs of Black girls,[553] or myriad other visions from Black educators and political leaders. For example, in her 1892 work, Cooper strongly advocated for Black education to center the needs and well-being of girls, arguing that as the future centers of Black homes and communities, they played a central role in its progress.[554] Education scholars such as Vanessa Siddle Walker and Jarvis Givens have demonstrated that different strands of Black education leadership have existed since Black people could legally attend school; yet much of this leadership has consistently been undermined by public and private forces such as education laws and institutions.[555] In the case of Snow Hill, the local Black leadership of Edwards and his community was derailed through Northern white funders' lack of support for his educational vision. And the reason these funders had so much power in the first place was because of the lack of state provision or funding for Black public education throughout the South.

Back to Snow Hill and the Northern Industrial Giants

With this broader socio-political context in mind, we return to Snow Hill, which as of 1902 had successfully applied for the G.E.B.'s first round of funding. Following this initial successful funding application, Edwards sought to continue garnering support from the G.E.B. After reviewing Edwards' application for the following school year, the G.E.B. decided to take a more active role in determining the extent of their partnership. In May 1904, the G.E.B. sent their Black

[550] Bond et al., *Negro Education in Alabama: A Study in Cotton and Steel,* 196-198.

[551] See the earlier sections of this dissertation for more on Hampton and Tuskegee.

[552] W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*.

[553] Cooper, *A Voice From the South*.

[554] Cooper, *A Voice From the South,* 22.

[555] Walker, *The Lost Education of Horace Tate: Uncovering the Hidden Heroes Who Fought for Justice in Schools*; Givens, *Fugitive Pedagogy: Carter G. Woodson and the Art of Black Teaching*.

rural school agent, William T.B. Williams, to visit Snow Hill and create a report on the school's conditions. By this time, the school owned one hundred acres of land, seventy-five of which were being cultivated for agriculture, and had built about a dozen wood buildings that formed the heart of the campus, including the main school building, dormitories for boarding students, a laundry, and a blacksmith shop. The school had twenty teachers, ten men and ten women, most of whom were Tuskegee graduates. Williams' report, while noting numerous challenges and shortcomings, presented a fairly favorable perspective on the school and the G.E.B.'s continued financial support.[556]

While the school provided K-12 education, Williams argued that "the academic work in the end is about equivalent to the first year's work in a good high school, if the classics are omitted from the latter… there were few instances where the work was above commonplace."[557] While this sounds somewhat harsh, in reality this level of education was a major accomplishment considering where the school started just a decade earlier, with few local children having any formal education. Some of Williams' larger concerns about the school related to its industrial courses—a central requirement for the Fund's support. "They aim to prepare students for the trades at Tuskegee, but instead of their work being general manual training it is specialized and weak," Williams reported. He was particularly critical of the school's offerings in printing, blacksmithing and carpentry as too specialized and old-fashioned.

On the other hand, Williams found little to criticize regarding the girls' homemaking training, stating that the sewing, laundry, and cooking lessons met the G.E.B.'s standard for approval and allowed the girls to work to earn their keep as students. While finding much room for improvement, Williams concluded his report arguing that, "money spent here does a great deal of good. It will be through such schools that any marked educational advance, literary or industrial, will be made for a long time to come in Alabama."[558] While Williams seemed to provide a strong endorsement for continuing to fund Snow Hill, with some key areas for improvement, the G.E.B.'s decision makers apparently found enough of concern in his report to give them pause.

After their initial donation in 1902, Edwards wrote to the G.E.B.'s successive secretaries, Wallace Buttrick and E.C. Sage, every year, often several times per year, with updates, requests and applications for funding. These requests were repeatedly denied by the Board with little explanation. In 1907, the G.E.B. began to document concerns about financial mismanagement at Snow Hill. A confidential letter from a Mr. Davis (noted as a prominent Philadelphia businessman) to the Fund raised concerns about internal corruption, including concerns that R.O. Simpson, the white plantation owner who sold several parcels of land to the school and sat on its board, was overcharging for acreage, as well as that the school's secretary was unjustly profiting off of selling his lumber to the school. G.E.B. Secretary E.C. Sage noted in the letter that, "Mr. Davis questions the propriety of thus advancing personal interests. He is unwilling to remain on the Board of Trustees unless there is more careful supervision of its affairs."[559] The G.E.B.'s concerns showed

[556] General Education Board, "General Education Board: Snow Hill," Box 2, Folder 16.

[557] General Education Board, "General Education Board: Snow Hill," Box 2, Folder 16.

[558] General Education Board, "General Education Board: Snow Hill," Box 2, Folder 16.

[559] General Education Board, "General Education Board: Snow Hill," Box 2, Folder 17.

ignorance, whether purposeful or not, of the reality of Blacks seeking to own land in the South at this time. That the school had found a white landowner willing to sell them large parcels of agricultural land was unusual in and of itself, and the question of his overcharging would have likely been out of the control of the Black buyers. Yet as with other perceived financial mismanagement rooted in white business norms, this served as a reason for the G.E.B. to withhold support.

1907 was a momentous year for the G.E.B., with Rockefeller making a new donation that provided the Fund with a total of $43 million—the largest gift to a philanthropy thus far in the history of the U.S (about $1.5 billion in 2026).[560] Edwards wrote to Buttrick shortly after the news of the new donation to congratulate them and request access to some of the funding. His request was denied, as were increasingly desperate—though unfailingly polite—requests from Edwards for the next several years. Although they noted some real concerns with Snow Hill's vocational work and business management, the G.E.B.'s refusal to work with the school seemed quite punitive, particularly considering the vital role it played in the local community. "We have not been able to secure one dollar from the State in the way of encouragement in this work," Edwards reminded the G.E.B. in a letter from April 1909. "Aside from the $300 which we receive yearly from the Slater Fund, which is a very great help to us, all the other money for the expenses for this work, is raised practically by my individual efforts."[561] There is no response to this letter in the G.E.B.'s archived correspondence.

In 1914, Edwards wrote another long plea to the G.E.B., informing them that he'd seen a $6,000 decrease in donations from the previous year, which he believed was due to the onset of World War I. The school had also been victim of a large fire in 1911, which had required them to build a new main school building, this time in brick instead of wood, and stretched their finances to the breaking point. In late 1914, Edwards sent a flurry of requests to the G.E.B. in an effort to keep his school open, including a letter of support from Booker Washington himself, enclosed with his correspondence from December 4. In considering this request, the G.E.B. sought the input of Williams, their Black field agent; in a letter dated December 24, Williams sent his support of Snow Hill, arguing that it was critically important to keep open such an established Black school in this area. Williams believed that while the school had "spread out too far in the past," the "plant is in too good condition for it not to be kept in a high state of efficiency… and there is probably no place in the South where a thoroughly good school of the industrial type is more needed than at Snow Hill, Alabama."[562]

---

[560] Iacobelli and Shubinski, *Without Distinction of Race, Sex, or Creed*.

[561] General Education Board, "General Education Board: Snow Hill," Box 2, Folder 17.

[562] General Education Board, "General Education Board: Snow Hill," Box 2, Folder 17.



Newly constructed dorm at Snow Hill, 1914[563]

With these endorsements from leaders in Black vocational education in mind, in January 1915, the G.E.B. sent its secretary, E.C. Sage, to conduct a new report on the state of Snow Hill. Sage, a white man from the North, took a much harsher tone in his field report compared to Williams' assessment a decade earlier.[564] The school's financial management and sustainability were of particular concern. Sage reported a severe drop in donations since the war's start: donations from Northern white people totaled $12,882 in 1914, compared to $19,727 in 1913. Aside from an annual contribution of a few hundred dollars from the Slater Fund, all of these donations came from individual contributions from Northern white people—many for $5 or $10—rather than grants from philanthropic foundations. The fact that the school garnered so many individual contributions points to the unceasing and profound fundraising efforts of Edwards, yet this was framed as a negative in the eyes of the G.E.B.

The report emphasized the school's dire financial outlook, with just $100 on hand for operating expenses, zero funds to complete construction that was already underway, much of the labor for which was already being conducted by students, and significant debt. The report further noted that the control of the school's board was "limited," leaving the "actual management… very largely in the hands of one man, namely, the Principal."[565] Sage's report harshly concluded:

[563] General Education Board, "General Education Board Archive," ALA 160, Supervisor of Rural Schools, Negro, 1914-1916; General Education Board records; photographs, Series 1054.

[564] General Education Board, "General Education Board: Snow Hill," Box 2, Folder 18.

[565] General Education Board, "General Education Board: Snow Hill.," Box 2, Folder 18.

> In view of these facts I submit the following recommendation: That the application now before us be declined. If advice should be sought of us, I should recommend the following: 1) That the educational work of the school be discontinued temporarily. 2) That the school sell one half of its land, or so much as may be needed to pay all indebtedness and to finish the building now nearing completion. 3) That the school authorities seek at once the advice and cooperation of our State Supervisor of Negro Rural Schools, Mr. Sibley, with a view to obtaining the cooperation of the public school authorities in the establishment at Snow Hill of a county training school. 4) With respect to the attitude of the General Education Board, I would advise that we maintain the attitude of "watchful waiting"… [section crossed out]. That when educational work is again embarked upon that the school begin in a small way and in business affairs seek outside counsel."[566]

This report would prove extremely important to the future of Snow Hill, as it laid out the central guidelines that the foundation would use to interact with the school going forward. The idea that the Fund "maintain an attitude of *'watchful waiting'*" was particularly telling of their approach going forward. With that, the G.E.B. left Snow Hill to weather its crisis on its own and see if the school could keep its doors open. I identified this policy of "watchful waiting" as emblematic of the systemic precarity that was engendered by a political arrangement in which Black schools relied on the private sector to maintain their existence.

Arguably going beyond simply watchful waiting, the G.E.B. would also go on to actively bad-mouth the school and discourage other major philanthropies from supporting it. The recommendation that Snow Hill seek the advice of and work with the state would also prove important. Specifically, the recommendation that Snow Hill become a county training school would have required Snow Hill to give control of its land, buildings, and curriculum to the State, in a way that would have decreased the strength of academics, arts, and specialized trades at the school. While it never became a county training school formally, this foreshadowed what was to come. In whole, these recommendations became central to the G.E.B. and other Northern white male philanthropists' vision for Snow Hill.

Seeking to help the school weather the storm, Booker Washington became more active at this time in garnering aid for Snow Hill.[567] Washington's interest in keeping Snow Hill open made sense, given its status as one of the first and largest schools in the region opened by a Tuskegee alumnus. Snow Hill sits fairly nearby, about ninety-five miles away from Tuskegee University, so Washington intimately knew the challenges that a school like Snow Hill faced. Additionally, Washington had taken an interest in mentoring Edwards personally, which had begun many years prior when Washington took Edwards on his Northern fundraising tour for Tuskegee.

At the same time, Washington's decision to continue advocating for Snow Hill in the North provides an example of his active support for Black education leaders and Black independent schools, even if it meant pushing back against powerful white leaders. In May 1915, Washington visited with Sage at the G.E.B. headquarters in New York with a central goal of advocating for

[566] General Education Board, "General Education Board: Snow Hill," Box 2, Folder 18.

[567] General Education Board, "General Education Board: Snow Hill," Box 2, Folder 18.

Snow Hill. Sage's memorandum from the meeting stated that Washington had visited Snow Hill again and issued a series of recommendations, including lowering annual expenses, selling off all land except one hundred acres, and "getting rid of superfluous kinds of educational work, that is, limiting the industries being taught and directing all toward preparation for farm life."[568] Washington and Edwards hoped that this would help convince the G.E.B. and other funders to change their position of "watchful waiting" and provide substantive financial support to the school. Later, in May, Edwards once more wrote to Sage, again asking for $20,000 to keep the school afloat. He enclosed a letter from Washington attesting that they were reorganizing the school according to his recommendations and further guaranteeing that Washington personally would oversee this reorganization and the spending of incoming funds. Four days later, Sage wrote to Edwards that the Board had considered and declined his request for aid.[569]

For whatever reason, not addressed in the archive, Washington's own oversight and strong support were not enough to sway the G.E.B. to their cause. This suggests that while they took direct inspiration from Washington and his education philosophy, they did not view him as a leader whose perspective was on par with their own. When the Fund's priorities shifted away from independent community schools like Snow Hill, Washington did not always have the leverage to protect those schools despite his efforts.[570] This suggests that white funders such as the G.E.B. followed his guidance, or arguably coopted it, only when it furthered their agenda. At other times, such as this, they seemed to treat Washington as an expendable Black leader whose perspective was not of the same consequence as that of their white peers. Without the support of the leading \ fund for Black schools, and no other major funders in sight, Snow Hill's future looked very uncertain by the close of the 1915 school year. But Edwards refused to give up.

In April 1916, Edwards wrote to the G.E.B. informing them that he had a plan to save Snow Hill that he hoped would garner their support. With the help of James H. Post (a businessman who made a fortune from sugar refining) and William G. Wilcox (treasurer for Tuskegee), they had devised a plan for the school to be issued $25,000 in bonds (about $757,400 in 2026) that would provide the funding the school needed to open its doors for the next year. Edwards requested that the G.E.B. provide one of the bonds for $5,000, provided he could raise an additional $20,000.[571] Bonds differed from direct philanthropic aid in that they were loans that would have to be repaid on a set timeline, with interest; so Edwards likely hoped this would appeal to the business ethos of the Fund. There is, however, no note in the file suggesting that the G.E.B. responded or signed on to provide a bond. Luckily, Edwards was able to move the plan forward with other investors.

To help garner support from funders, Washington and the Tuskegee machine provided the financial analysis to devise this plan and offered to undertake continued oversight and guidance of the school. Prominent philanthropists who signed on to issue a bond to Snow Hill included Julius Rosenwald, Henry Goldman, C.H. Kelsey, Arthur B. Emmons, Howell Reed, C.H. Houghton, and

[568] General Education Board, "General Education Board: Snow Hill," Box 2, Folder 18.

[569] General Education Board, "General Education Board: Snow Hill," Box 2, Folder 18.

[570] General Education Board, "General Education Board Archive."

[571] General Education Board, "General Education Board: Snow Hill," Box 2, Folder 18.

Henry Wilder Foote. According to the deed from Title Guarantee and Trust Company, the $25,000 in bonds had to be paid off by April 1, 1926, with an interest rate of 6% annually. This gave Snow Hill ten years to get on stable financial footing and repay the loan. The school's unleveraged land and buildings were listed as collateral for the bonds, stating that if Snow Hill failed to pay the interest semi-annually, or to repay the bonds on time, the bondholders would have the right to sell off all or part of the school's property to repay the debt. The agreement also stated that Snow Hill should sell off portions of their lands not included in this mortgage to pay off the bonds over time. In other words, this arrangement required Snow Hill to mortgage the central portion of their property and its contents in order to acquire the funding to stay open.[572]

The $25,000 in bonds provided critical short-term resources allowing the school to stay open for another year. But this was nowhere near enough to alleviate Snow Hill's overall financial challenges. This ongoing need for Snow Hill to appeal to Northern funders reflects its difficult position in which the community's support and the school's local impacts were not the primary deciding factors in its funding. The following year, Edwards continued with his series of applications and letters to the G.E.B., sending over a list of funding priorities that included the installation of modern plumbing (toilets and baths) which the school didn't have, as well as heating, electric lighting, and more cabins for married teachers.[573] The G.E.B. denied this and several subsequent requests.[574] By 1919, Edwards reported to the G.E.B. that Snow Hill was again on the brink of collapse. Contributions from Northern white people had fallen to $1,087.50, with zero contributions from Southern white people or Black people. Meanwhile, the school had been $30,000 or more in debt for several years and saw no prospects for paying it off. [575]

During this period Edwards had also applied to the Rosenwald Fund, the other major Black school-building foundation of the period. In partnership with Washington at Tuskegee, Sears Department Store President Julius Rosenwald began funding construction of Black schools in the South in 1912. After receiving its application, Rosenwald made small donations to Snow Hill over the next few years: $500 in 1912, $1000 in 1915, and $1,000 worth of bonds in the 1916 crisis. After the Rosenwald Fund was officially incorporated as a philanthropic foundation in 1917, they decided to get in touch with the G.E.B. to seek their opinion on Snow Hill, given that the G.E.B. had been operating and working with schools including Snow Hill for fifteen years at that point. The Rosenwald Fund followed a similar vocational school building and matching funds model, so they sought to follow the guidance of their more established peer in the field. The Rosenwald Fund then informed Edwards that their funding for Snow Hill going forward would be contingent on approval and financial support from the G.E.B. as well. This news was highly disappointing to Edwards, who had hoped that Rosenwald would become a more reliable supporter.[576]

---

[572] General Education Board, "General Education Board: Snow Hill," Box 2, Folder 18.

[573] Note: Snow Hill was not outside the norm in not yet having electricity or indoor plumbing. While urban schools largely had these amenities by the 1920s, many rural schools did not until the 1930s-40s.

[574] General Education Board, "General Education Board: Snow Hill," Box 2, Folder 18.

[575] General Education Board, "General Education Board: Snow Hill," Box 2, Folder 19.

[576] Rosenwald and Rosenwald Fund, "Julius Rosenwald Papers," Box 37, Folder 9.

While the G.E.B. denied their financial support, they didn't ignore Snow Hill completely; the Board continued its policy of *watchful waiting*. In April of 1919, Sage again visited Snow Hill to make a new report on the conditions for the Board to consider.[577] Sage's 1919 report focused on examining Snow Hill's finances, which he found to be suspect and disorganized. Sage was concerned by what he viewed as the lack of proper accounting, including: that the school sold off parcels of land to local residents and then put those funds into current operating expenses without the proper documentation; that they had overpaid for the school's land to the former plantation owner R.O. Simpson who sat on the school's Board; and that the school had mortgaged its property as collateral for the $25,000 loan in 1916, which in his estimation they had little prospect of repaying. Here, as they routinely did, the officers of the G.E.B. showed little to no regard for the ongoing political and economic realities facing Black people in the South. As mentioned earlier, their assertion that Snow Hill overpaid Simpson for the land placed blame on Edwards and the school's staff, ignoring the reality that Black people at this time had no bargaining power and would be lucky to find white landowners willing to sell them large parcels, period. Similarly, their concerns with proper accounting seemed to ignore the reality that the school was operating with as few staff as possible, given its highly limited budget. These criticisms were framed as reasons to withhold support, rather than areas for improvement. Had the G.E.B. offered to provide an accountant of their choosing to bring the records to their standards, it seems clear that Snow Hill would have gratefully accepted this as a condition of the Fund's support.

On May 5, 1919, Edwards sent a handwritten letter to Sage, expressing his belief that "the actions of the Board will depend wholly upon your input and recommendation," and begging him to "defend" rather than "destroy" Snow Hill in his report. On May 8, Sage sent Edwards a dismissive response, arguing that the Board's decision on Snow Hill would be made "upon the basis of facts and of those alone."[578] On May 22, Edwards wrote back to Sage, stating:

> I did not mean that you should report anything other than the facts in the case. But it does seem to me that being located in the center of the Black Belt of a population of 200,000 and a school population of 70,000 and this being the only undenominational school… in this section where more than 25,000 children are without any education, I repeat, it does seem to me that if these facts were made clear to the Board they would be more encouraged to help us. And too, *I am not unmindful of the fact that sometimes a person is more interested in how one does his work than in what one is doing, and I would like for the board to know what we have done and are doing.*[579] [Emphasis added.]

This was amongst the most strongly worded statements that the unfailingly polite Edwards sent to the G.E.B., essentially suggesting that they might be losing sight of the forest for the trees. The same day that Edwards wrote this letter, the Board considered his application alongside Sage's

[577] General Education Board, "General Education Board: Snow Hill," Box 2, Folder 19.

[578] General Education Board, "General Education Board: Snow Hill," Box 2, Folder 19.

[579] General Education Board, "General Education Board: Snow Hill," Box 2, Folder 19.

new report. On May 24, Sage wrote to Edwards informing him that his funding request was denied. He assured Edwards that "all the facts relating to the Institute were given careful consideration."[580]

On June 3, Edwards wrote back to Sage to convey his "deep sorrow" at the Board's decision. He inquired "if you will please let me have a copy of your report to the Board in order that we may clearly see our defects so as to remedy them in the future. I have been much depressed since reading your letter as we all had hoped for something in the way of a donation or an endorsement in order that we may obtain some help from Mr. Rosenwald."[581] Edwards also wrote to Buttrick in August of that year to see if he could help him obtain an endorsement from the G.E.B. so that Rosenwald would more substantially support the school. The G.E.B. archive does not suggest that Edwards was provided with the contents of the report he requested in order to understand why his application was being denied.

In September 1919, Edwards wrote again to the G.E.B., now requesting their support in turning Snow Hill into a county training school. Edwards reported that for the first time Wilcox County had expressed interest in this transition, if the G.E.B. would also support the process.[582] County training schools were a popular investment among philanthropists at the time, rooted in their agenda of providing vocational education and teacher training to Black high school students in rural areas.[583] Later that month, the G.E.B.'s Black field agent Jackson Davis visited Snow Hill to help make a determination. He concluded that, "the only future I can see for Snow Hill is for the State to take it for a County Agricultural High School or small Normal School. It is too big for a County Training School."[584] The Board decided not to move forward with the plan, which stalled it altogether.

In 1920, Edwards wrote to the G.E.B. again, expressing his confusion and dismay at their lack of support. He reminded the Board that both the County and Rosenwald had expressed interest in supporting Snow Hill if they could partner with the G.E.B. "Just what are my sins, that we cannot get any help from the great funds for Negro education?" Edwards asked in a letter to Buttrick from July 1920. "Dr. Buttrick, I beg you to read carefully this letter and let me hear from you at your own good time. You can help us and I know it," he closed the letter.[585] Given the Board's professed goal to support Black public education, the new offer from the County, and the fact that Edwards ran one of the only schools for Black students in the area, it seemed logical that the G.E.B. would support this plan. In Edwards' letters, he seem truly baffled as to why they would

[580] General Education Board, "General Education Board: Snow Hill," Box 2, Folder 19.

[581] General Education Board, "General Education Board: Snow Hill," Box 2, Folder 19.

[582] General Education Board, "General Education Board: Snow Hill," Box 2, Folder 19.

[583] William A. Link, *Jackson Davis and the Lost World of Jim Crow Education* (Albert and Shirley Small Special Collections Library, n.d.), accessed March 11, 2024, https://small.library.virginia.edu/collections/featured/jackson-davis-collection-of-african-american-educational-photographs/related-resources/jackson-davis-and-the-lost-world-of-jim-crow-education/.

[584] General Education Board, "General Education Board: Snow Hill," Box 2, Folder 19.

[585] General Education Board, "General Education Board: Snow Hill," Box 2, Folder 20.

not, and based on his correspondence, he was beginning to suspect the aid refusal was more personal than factually based. In Buttrick's response, he told Edwards that in their next in-person meeting he could tell Edwards plainly why the G.E.B. could not support him. But he politely refused to put it in writing. Edwards continued to visit the G.E.B. offices in person, submit applications, and write letters to the G.E.B. asking for help over the next few years, all of which were either denied or went without a response. It is not clear from the record whether Buttrick ever had that promised meeting with Edwards where he gave him the real scoop on why the G.E.B. would not support his school.

The school caught another break in 1921, with the receipt of $21,341 in a legacy endowment from wealthy widower Chastity P. Drew (about $394,000 in 2026). However, the following year the school still carried a deficit of $41,611 according to a 1922 report undertaken by the G.E.B.[586] Around this time, the school's correspondence with the G.E.B. was taken over by Henry Barnes, the school's treasurer and secretary, as Edwards' health was in steep decline and he was unable to undertake his usual fundraising campaigns up North. Barnes beseeched the G.E.B. to conduct another visit to Snow Hill and see if they could provide support under closer supervision from the Board.

The G.E.B. sent two white agents to visit in October 1922, E.C. Sage and H.J. Thorkelson, who wrote a very similar report to those Sage had authored in previous years. They heavily criticized the financial management of the school, along with the construction quality of buildings, and the industries being taught to boys; homemaking courses for girls were one of the only favorable references in the report once again. "In view of the existing status of Snow Institute, we do not recommend that any financial assistance be given at this time," the report concluded.[587] In November 1922, the Board wrote back to Barnes to inform him that they declined the school's application for funding once again. Edwards' assessment that they were more concerned with "*how* one does his work than in *what* one is doing*"* seemed spot on.

There is no further correspondence in the G.E.B. file until 1925, by which time Snow Hill had a new principal, Harry Simms.[588] Simms was educated at Tuskegee and worked as a Farm Demonstration Agent; he didn't have experience as a teacher or administrator. While a 1926 report found that Snow Hill had focused "five to one" on academic compared to industrial subjects, Simms had been appointed by the Tuskegee administration—with the approval of Northern philanthropists—to bring a more agricultural focus to the school and to bring its finances in line.[589]

On top of the school's continuous financial difficulties, Edwards faced a series of personal trials as the school's principal. Edwards grew up with severe health issues and malnourishment to the point that he barely survived childhood, and this might be why he struggled constantly with

[586] General Education Board, "General Education Board: Snow Hill," Box 2, Folder 20.

[587] General Education Board, "General Education Board: Snow Hill," Box 2, Folder 20.

[588] General Education Board, "General Education Board: Snow Hill," Box 2, Folder 20.

[589] Stone, *Fallen Prince: Black Education, and the Quest for Afro-American Nationality,* 222-242.

his health.[590] The extreme stress and personal responsibility he took on for Snow Hill also could not have been easy on his well-being. By 1924, Edwards was in poor physical health, and his mental health was deeply impacted by the mounting criticism and lack of support from Northern funders.[591] The situation at Snow Hill began to come to a head in 1925, as Edwards and invested parties faced the reality that the remainder of their $25,000 in bonds, $19,500, would be due the following year.[592]

As a holder of $1,000 of these bonds, in 1925 Rosenwald gave his approval to Snow Hill's trustees to sell some of the school's timber to raise funds to pay off the bonds.[593] In February 1925, Snow Hill board member William H. Baldwin wrote to Rosenwald, informing him of the "frightful mess down there" at Snow Hill, assuring him that the Northern, white trustees would oversee the sales of timber to make sure it was done in such a way as to "protect the interests of the bondholders"—naming this as the priority over the best interests of the school itself.[594] Baldwin, whose father made his fortune as head of the Long Island Railroad, had become a Trustee of Snow Hill in 1916, from which point he represented the interests of Northern philanthropists at the school.[595] In this letter, Baldwin also informed Rosenwald that he was convinced to stay on and continue helping the school by Robert R. Moton, who became President of Tuskegee Institute following Washington's death in 1915.[596] "The present trouble is that the local trustees have so far proved incapable of eliminating Edwards, the essential first step in any honest reorganization of the school," Baldwin concluded. "When you see Dr. Moton next I wish you would talk Snow Hill a bit with him; I would dearly love your good advice."[597]

Two months later, in April 1925, Rosenwald received a "Confidential Memorandum" addressed to his secretary, W.C. Graves, regarding Snow Hill Institute. The memo was prepared by Albon L. Holsey, who served as secretary to President Moton at Tuskegee. In the letter, the Tuskegee machine's new leadership under Moton seemed less supportive of Snow Hill than it had been under Washington. "About two years ago a serious situation developed on account of repeated rumors of moral turpitude on the part of Mr. Edwards," the memo opens. "Some of the Northern Trustees felt that Mr. Edwards' usefulness to the school had been exhausted and that the only way for the school to prosper would be for him to resign…. Finally, Edwards did resign and

---

[590] Edwards, *Twenty-Five Years in the Black Belt*.

[591] Stone, *Fallen Prince: Black Education, and the Quest for Afro-American Nationality,* Chapter 16.

[592] Rosenwald and Rosenwald Fund, "Julius Rosenwald Papers," Box 37, Folder 9.

[593] Rosenwald and Rosenwald Fund, "Julius Rosenwald Papers," Box 37, Folder 9.

[594] Rosenwald and Rosenwald Fund, "Julius Rosenwald Papers," Box 37, Folder 9.

[595] Stone, *Fallen Prince: Black Education, and the Quest for Afro-American Nationality,* 198.

[596] Moton was a conservative educational leader who is known for heading Tuskegee at the start of the infamous Tuskegee Syphilis Study, in which the University partnered with the U.S. government to study 399 men with syphilis who were deceptively denied lifesaving medical treatment between 1932-1972.

[597] Rosenwald and Rosenwald Fund, "Julius Rosenwald Papers," Box 37, Folder 9.

Mr. Harry Simms, another Tuskegee graduate who is engaged in Agricultural extension work in the state of Alabama, was elected to succeed him."[598]

According to this memo, the leaders at Tuskegee and Snow Hill's northern trustees were successful in ousting Edwards from his leadership of Snow Hill by April 1925. However, they wished to completely oust Edwards to the point of evicting him from his home, which he owned, next to the school grounds. This proved a bridge too far, and they were unable to pressure him to give up his family home in the midst of a health and personal crisis. Regarding the accusations of "moral turpitude" on the part of Edwards, the memo only states that "some contributions made to the school have been converted by Edwards to his own use."[599] However, the school's treasurer, Henry Barnes, claimed that funds were only used to reimburse Edwards for funds he had previously loaned the school out of his personal savings. The memo concludes: "As the matter stands today the school is seriously handicapped for the reasons set forth above. The enrollment has dropped down to about one third of its former proportions. Practically no money is coming in from the North. Mr. Edwards remains at Snow Hill and Mr. Simms, newly elected Principal has not taken charge."[600] While years prior, Tuskegee had tried to convince funders to support the school under the continued leadership of Edwards, the new Tuskegee administration seemed to take a different approach—saving the school through distancing it from its founder.

The Tuskegee memo was followed by a letter to Rosenwald's Secretary Graves from Baldwin dated April 20, 1925, which stated that he and other northern trustees had "withdrawn from the board of trustees pending the elimination of Edwards, which only the local trustees can effect. I believe they will now see the light; if not, we may have to take the matter to the State authorities or to the courts."[601] It is not clear why the removal of Edwards from the vicinity of the school was of such central concern to the funders.

In April 1926, Principal Simms notified Rosenwald that Snow Hill had successfully raised the funds through timber sales to repay their outstanding bonds. Also in April 1926, H.J. Thorkelson, now General Education Board Secretary, wrote to Graves, offering an updated response to Rosenwald's interest in Snow Hill. "The officers of the [G.E.B.] have not felt justified in making recommendations for aid to any institution whose permanency was in doubt, and because of this no aid has been given to Snow Hill for some years," Thorkelson wrote. "I have no information leading me to believe that the Trustees have made any definite plans to ensure the permanency of the organization."[602]

---

[598] Rosenwald and Rosenwald Fund, "Julius Rosenwald Papers," Box 37, Folder 9.

[599] Rosenwald and Rosenwald Fund, "Julius Rosenwald Papers," Box 37, Folder 9.

[600] Rosenwald and Rosenwald Fund, "Julius Rosenwald Papers," Box 37, Folder 9.

[601] Rosenwald and Rosenwald Fund, "Julius Rosenwald Papers," Box 37, Folder 9.

[602] Rosenwald and Rosenwald Fund, "Julius Rosenwald Papers," Box 37, Folder 9. Note: This was reflective of an overall move away from supporting independent Black schools like Snow Hill toward newer public schools that the Board had helped construct and found easier to control and maintain.

This was a very interesting rationale, given that as the leading education fund, active support and endorsement from the G.E.B. could easily have been the very thing that would have provided Snow Hill with more reliable permanency. In June 1926, Principal Simms called on Rosenwald in Chicago after sending him a new appeal for funding. In November 1926, Simms wrote again to Rosenwald appealing again for funds. Simms reminded Rosenwald that he had been selected for the position by President Moton of Tuskegee, who promised him help in keeping the school open, but whose poor health had since prevented him from following through as planned. Although Rosenwald actively partnered with Tuskegee in the creation of his school fund, in this case he maintained his position of not wanting to support the school unless the G.E.B. deemed it worthy.[603] Rosenwald had also distanced himself from direct partnerships with Tuskegee in this period, in part because he had preferred Washington's leadership to Moton's.[604]

While Simms had sold enough timber to pay off the school's bonded debt and raised additional funds that had kept the school open that year, this was again not nearly enough to dig Snow Hill out of its dire financial straits. In 1927, Simms shared with the G.E.B. and other interested parties a plan for the "rehabilitation" of Snow Hill, which would require $150,000 over the next three years. This funding would be used to modernize school buildings with electricity, plumbing, and heat, as well as revamp the school's curriculum and structures.[605] In strong opposition to this expensive plan, the school's Northern board members began circulating letters informing interested parties that the school should be closed at the end of the school year and the assets turned over to its creditors. One such strongly worded letter from Baldwin and Post to W.J. Schieffelin (Chairman of the Tuskegee Board) read in part: "The decision to close Snow Hill Institute is necessarily a regression in one of the most backward sections of the country… but our efforts to find an alternative plan have been unsuccessful. This Snow Hill situation has been an open sore for all of us. It might have been treated successfully some twenty years ago, if Edwards had been publicly disavowed instead of tacitly endorsed."[606] In spite of the lack of white leaders' support for this plan, Simms was able to rally aid from Tuskegee and keep the school open for the 1927-28 school year.[607] The G.E.B. continued its policy of *watchful waiting* throughout all this to see what would happen at Snow Hill.

The following year, 1929, marked the start of a new chapter for Snow Hill. On February 9, 1929, J.S. Lambert, the State of Alabama's Director of Negro Education, wrote to Jackson Davis at the G.E.B.'s proposed plan to make Snow Hill into a public school, which would ostensibly allow it to stay open without persistent financial troubles. Lambert proposed that Snow Hill should deed a ten-acre school site over to the State, which should include both a well-constructed vocational building and an academic school building. Lambert stated that Snow Hill had agreed to this plan and already constructed a suitable vocational building; he requested that the G.E.B.

[603] Rosenwald and Rosenwald Fund, "Julius Rosenwald Papers," Box 37, Folder 9.

[604] Peter M. Ascoli, *Julius Rosenwald: The Man Who Built Sears, Roebuck and Advanced the Cause of Black Education in the American South* (Indiana University Press, 2006), Chapter 7.

[605] General Education Board, "General Education Board: Snow Hill," Box 2, Folder 21.

[606] Rosenwald and Rosenwald Fund, "Julius Rosenwald Papers," Box 37, Folder 9.

[607] Rosenwald and Rosenwald Fund, "Julius Rosenwald Papers," Box 37, Folder 9.

contribute $25,000 toward the construction of the academic building, which would cover most of the costs. Lambert also reported that Rosenwald planned to contribute a few thousand dollars toward this plan if the G.E.B. responded favorably.

After decades of turning down Snow Hill, the State's newfound interest in making the school public finally swayed them to respond favorably to this request. At a meeting on June 3, 1929, the Board ruled that it would "commit the Board to an appropriation to the State Department of Education of Alabama of a sum not to exceed $25,000 for the purpose mentioned [the construction of Snow Hill's academic building to be deeded to the State]."[608] Now that the money could be funneled through the State for a state-sanctioned project, the Board was ready to stand behind it. The Alabama Department of Education oversaw the construction contracts and the new building was erected by 1931, providing the campus for the first time with electricity, plumbing, and hot water. Rosenwald also agreed to pledge $5,000 toward the $20,000 indebtedness of Snow Hill, "provided that the General Education Board agrees to make the necessary repairs."[609] With the completion its new academic building, Snow Hill would meet the State's requirements and officially become a public school.

In 1929, Snow Hill also appointed another new principal, Ligon A. Wilson, who hailed from Hampton Institute. He took over shortly after Simms had struck this deal with the state, which included handing control of its curriculum over to the government. The state required much more emphasis on vocational education, and less emphasis on academics. Prior to this point, both courses of study had been more equally prioritized. Local community members invested in the legacy of Snow Hill were dismayed by the new direction of the school. Several alumni of the school wrote an open letter calling for Simms' dismissal because they weren't happy with his leadership, in particular, his laying off all the academic teaching staff but two teachers and his refusal to meet with them. According to Stone, Principal Simms was ousted shortly into his tenure after he "squandered the endowment; practically gave away the school's timber; dismantled the various industries; shipped away the school's forces of production to Tuskegee; tore down buildings; sold 500 acres of the school's land; deeded the central campus to the county and state and turned the school's educational mission over to the county."[610] In the eyes of the local community, Simms' leadership, which stemmed from the Tuskegee administration, was highly problematic. In the eyes of the white power brokers, Simms' efforts to downsize the school's offerings and pay off debts were successful, but too little too late.[611] This new direction was, apparently, what finally brought the G.E.B. back into direct support of Snow Hill. In May 1931, the G.E.B. authorized an additional $2,860 appropriation through the State of Alabama to finish purchasing equipment needed for the new academic building, which was named Wallace Buttrick Hall after the G.E.B.'s longtime secretary.

---

[608] General Education Board, "General Education Board: Snow Hill," Box 2, Folder 21.

[609] Rosenwald and Rosenwald Fund, "Julius Rosenwald Papers," Box 37, Folder 9.

[610] Stone, *Fallen Prince: Black Education, and the Quest for Afro-American Nationality,* 234.

[611] Rosenwald and Rosenwald Fund, "Julius Rosenwald Papers," Box 37, Folder 9.

Despite its new status as a public school and all the improvements just made to the campus, by September 1931, Principal Wilson reported that he was unsure whether the school could stay open beyond three more months due to lack of funds. In addition to the State's racist school funding policies, much of the latest financial crisis stemmed from the economic repercussions of the Great Depression, which hit the U.S. after the stock market crashed in October 1929, impacting both individual funders and state budgets. In February 1932, the G.E.B. authorized emergency funding of $1,500 to Snow Hill for current operating expenses and payment of past-due teachers' salaries.[612]

In July 1932, Alabama's Superintendent of Education, A.F. Harmon, wrote to the G.E.B. after conducting a site visit to Snow Hill, with a favorable report and endorsement for continued funding. However, the Board declined to make another appropriation for that year.[613] On November 26, 1932, Principal Wilson wrote a grim report to G.E.B. field agent Jackson Davis:

> You have doubtless learned that because of a lack of funds the public schools of Wilcox County closed Friday, November 18 for an indefinite period, however, with the exception of Snow Hill Institute and three mission schools of the Presbyterian Church, the Negro schools had not opened. There is not a Negro school within a radius of twenty three miles of Snow Hill Institute open, and we are facing the immediate prospect of having to close unless we can get relief. Losing the county support took about $2,800 out of our hands for the term, and it is going to be impossible for us to maintain our school although we have literally gone off of the salary basis and are paying our teachers whatever we can get. The loss of county help carries with it the loss of our two vocational workers and in my judgment, particularly for the Snow Hill community, this is an important and I sometimes think the most important phase of the work we are doing here.[614]

This was a telling report. Due to the Great Depression, Wilcox County ended up pausing funding for all schools in 1932. However, the white schools were more highly prioritized, as the County had aimed for them to stay open that school year, but ran out of funds by November. In contrast, the County never even opened the Black schools that academic year, reflecting the State's continued racial apartheid practices. Although Snow Hill had given the power over its curriculum and property to the State, they continued to operate without substantive or reliable State support. There is no further record in the G.E.B. archive to indicate that they offered emergency funding at this time or at any point in the future. After aiding in its official transition to becoming a public school, it seems that the G.E.B. ended even its policy of watchful waiting, leaving Snow Hill to figure out its path forward.[615]

Over the next forty years, Snow Hill managed to keep its doors open as the only Black public school in the vicinity and the center of the local community. However, its status as a public

[612] General Education Board, "General Education Board: Snow Hill," Box 2, Folder 21.

[613] General Education Board, "General Education Board: Snow Hill," Box 2, Folder 21.

[614] General Education Board, "General Education Board: Snow Hill," Box 2, Folder 21.

[615] General Education Board, "General Education Board: Snow Hill," Box 2, Folder 21.

school, which had been pushed by the Northern philanthropies, ultimately led to Snow Hill's forced closure. Here again, a key decision about the school was made by white leadership based on priorities that had little to do with the local community's support or the school's impacts. On September 1, 1971, the Wilcox County Department of Education received an order from the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of Alabama to desegregate the county's schools.[616] While school segregation had been outlawed across the country by the 1954 Supreme Court case *Brown v. Board of Education*, Southern districts, including Wilcox County, evaded this legal mandate for as long as they could. The federal ruling did not have a clear timeline for implementation, instead requiring states to desegregate their education systems with "all deliberate speed." After sixteen years, the timeline for *all deliberate speed* had run out for Wilcox County.

When the desegregation order came down, Snow Hill still had 287 Black students attending.[617] The following year, 1972, the county forced Snow Hill to close its doors, and students were told to attend Wilcox Central High School, located in the county seat of Camden. Camden is located about 18 miles from Snow Hill, and the move represented a significant barrier for many local families. At this time, local Black communities continued to face extreme racism and poverty, which presented multiple barriers to attending a school outside their community. About 15,000 Black people and 3,000 white people resided in the County by the 1970s, already a significant reduction from the early twentieth century.

When I visited Snow Hill, I met Sheryl Threadgill-Matthews—a community leader who has devoted decades to advocating for Black families—for lunch at a local café in Camden.[618] Sheryl had graduated in 1970 from Camden Academy, another local Black school located in the county seat of Camden. In our conversation, she reflected on the legacy of slavery she had witnessed throughout her life in the area. After going away to college and returning to the area as a welfare agent in 1974, Sheryl recalled that many of the local Black families still worked as sharecroppers, living in former slave cabins in the fields of white-owned plantations. She was deeply saddened by how little had changed in the area during the generations her family had resided there. "They were getting paid with tokens they could only spend in the Henderson plantation store," she recalled.[619] In other words, as late as the 1970s many local sharecroppers were not even paid real wages, directly harkening to what Hartman terms the *afterlives of slavery.*[620]

Sheryl's memories from this time were echoed in a 1970 article by a Harvard student who spent a summer teaching in a Black school in Wilcox County. Darrell Prescott related that despite Black people being in the majority, "the whites still own and run everything. The economy is

[616] Wilcox County Board of Education, "Wilcox County Board of Education Minutes," Wilcox County Department of Education, 1971.

[617] Wilcox County Board of Education, "Wilcox County Board of Education Minutes," 1971-72

[618] Sheryl Threadgill-Matthews, "Interview with Sheryl Threadgill-Matthews," May 23, 2023, In-person Interview with Author.

[619] Threadgill-Matthews, "Interview with Sheryl Threadgill-Matthews."

[620] Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth Century America*.

almost totally agricultural; cotton, soybeans, corn, greens, and cucumbers are grown. Many Blacks are sharecroppers living on $300 to $400 a year."[621] The year Snow Hill closed, Wilcox was reported as the second poorest county in the country, and the KKK and white racial violence continued to terrorize the local Black population. According to Prescott, "the whites in Wilcox—and seemingly in most of Alabama—seem to thrive on a heavy diet of hatred and racism." Prescott was struck by the fact that many of the local children suffered from long-term malnutrition and preventable health conditions such as worms.[622] In these harsh conditions, local schools like Snow Hill provided one of the only supportive institutions and community centers in rural Black Belt communities. Yet even this was about to be taken away by the local white officials.

Wilcox County in the early 1970s was openly run by white supremacists. When I visited Snow Hill, I visited the local school board office, where I was able to look through several decades' worth of its archived meeting minutes. I found that the minutes from this period prominently feature the resentment that the all-white, all-male school board felt about being legally required to desegregate. "The Board feels that the actions they are now being forced to take are 'fundamentally and constitutionally unsound'… the actions in the order above in the opinion of the Board will create an all Black school system," the Board opined on September 21, 1971.[623] The school board members knew that the local white opposition to desegregated schools would mean that white parents would rather take their children out of public schools than send them to a racially integrated one.

Instead of doing what they could to prevent white flight, the local board carried out "desegregation" in such a way as to further devastate the county's Black communities—and thus their entire public school system—as much as possible. Like many other counties that were forced to desegregate by the courts, the Wilcox County School Board interpreted this court order as a reason to close the Black public schools in the area—schools that had been built up with so much love, sweat, and tears in the century since Emancipation.[624] My research in the archive found that the Board received requests from local Black leaders and activists to convene a "bi-racial committee" on school desegregation, but the white men who made up the school board saw no reason to accommodate any input from Black community members.[625]

The closure of Snow Hill echoed themes that pervaded Black communities across the region when they lost their local schools. In her research on school desegregation in a town in rural Appalachia in the 1960s, sociologist Karida Brown conducted oral history interviews with Black people who had been part of the first wave of so-called desegregation, highlighting some of the

[621] Darrell Prescott, *Benign Neglect in Wilcox County, Alabama*, The Harvard Crimson edition, (Cambridge, MA), December 14, 1970, The Harvard Crimson Edition, https://www.thecrimson.com/article/1970/12/14/benign-neglect-in-wilcox-county-alabama/.

[622] Prescott, *Benign Neglect in Wilcox County, Alabama*.

[623] Wilcox County Board of Education, "Wilcox County Board of Education Minutes," 1971.

[624] Walker, *The Lost Education of Horace Tate: Uncovering the Hidden Heroes Who Fought for Justice in Schools*.

[625] Wilcox County Board of Education, "Wilcox County Board of Education Minutes," 1971.

harms it caused to Black students who had to transfer from their local Black school to the previously all-white school. Decades later, the former students she interviewed remembered the loss of their school as traumatic, representing a loss of community and cultural identity. The loss of the Black faculty was most frequently cited by interviewees as the greatest loss to themselves personally and to their community. Black teachers played a critical role in the community, not only as educators in school, but also as caretakers and esteemed community members. In a time when slavery was not far removed, in rural communities, Black teachers also often represented the only examples of college graduates and white-collar professionals that their students knew personally.[626]

The former students she interviewed supported school integration as a whole but still felt pain about their experiences of how it happened. "These participants' statements shed light on the hidden injury: it was not the actual act of integration that generated negative feelings but the procedure in which the process was carried out," Brown found. "For [these students], it was not integration but the fact that they were being called on to move their Black bodies from a place where they had constructed a social world to one where they had no familiarity, advocacy, or say in shaping the environment."[627] The fact that mostly Black schools were closed, and most of the Black teachers fired, served to reinscribe the notion that Black people and spaces were inferior while removing the institutional support that the schools had provided to rural communities.[628]

These observations are highly relevant to the closure of Snow Hill in very similar circumstances. As mentioned, I interviewed Cliff Lee, a grandson of James Edwards who became a music teacher and jazz musician in Brooklyn. When we met in his well-appointed brownstone, Cliff opened our interview by reading a passage from an unpublished memoir written by his deceased brother Leonard Lee. He said that his brother had a way of "saying things better than I could say it." The passage read as follows:

> [At Snow Hill] we were so positioned geographically, culturally and psychologically that we escaped the daily attacks of personhood which so characterized the time. This was possible because there was very little contact with white people. Thus, while oppressive segregation was rampant and in effect a way of life, I had the advantage of a tremendous mitigating shield. A loving and caring environment that fostered the expectations of high achievement, positive role models around at home, in school and in the community. This positive nurturing diminished the misnomer of white supremacy. White supremacy did not have the abusive psychotic scarring on my siblings and me that it could have had.[629]

Growing up, the Lee brothers both lived on their familial property "a stone's throw" from Snow Hill's campus. Cliff was born in 1936 and his brother Leonard in 1938, meaning they grew up

[626] Karida L. Brown, *Gone Home: Race and Roots through Appalachia* (University of North Carolina Press, 2018), Chapters 5-6.

[627] Brown, *Gone Home: Race and Roots through Appalachia,* 147.

[628] Walker, *The Lost Education of Horace Tate: Uncovering the Hidden Heroes Who Fought for Justice in Schools*.

[629] Lee, "Cliff Lee on Snow Hill."

during the height of Jim Crow apartheid in Alabama and across the South. Cliff graduated from Snow Hill High School in 1955 and went on to attend college at Xavier University, an HBCU[630] in New Orleans.[631] As Lee and his brother describe it, the school at Snow Hill went far beyond simply providing an education. It was an anchor for the community, providing a sense of safety and belonging that was rare for Black people in the region. Its role as a community anchor was reflected by the sad reality that the closure of the school directly led to the gradual demise of the broader Snow Hill community.

During its operation, Snow Hill was a lively Black town with a general store and clean water well, providing all the basic needs of the local community. When the school closed, "it caused a dying in the area," recalled alumnus Cornelius Gaines. "You don't see nothing here now. No people."[632] When Cornelius gave me a tour of the school, it was visible everywhere on the property how it had returned to nature, with most evidence of the local community's activities long erased. In the photo below, Cornelius spoke proudly about the clean water well that Snow Hill had provided, which as of 2023 stood long out of use, though still operable, in the middle of a thicket of woods.



Cornelius proudly leads me to the old water well that used to serve the entire Snow Hill community.

[630] HBCU: Historically Black Colleges and Universities

[631] Lee, "Cliff Lee on Snow Hill."

[632] Gaines, "Interview & Campus Tour with Cornelius Gaines."

On top of the trauma and loss that the closures of Black schools like Snow Hill caused is the fact that desegregation never actually happened in Wilcox County. Once *Brown v. Board of Education* was decided, whites in the county, as in many others, began to fundraise and build what are known as segregation academies—whites-only private schools that were not bound by legal integration mandates like public schools. After the 1971 court order came down, local whites widely pulled their children out of local public schools and placed them in these all-white private schools. This was a move openly supported by Governor George Wallace as well as local officials such as the county school board.[633]

The year that Wilcox County desegregated the formerly white public high school, it had half the enrollment as the year before due to white flight. Two years later, Wilcox County public schools had 3,733 Black students enrolled, and just 109 white students.[634] This legacy of the failed project of desegregation continues on to this day. Today, Wilcox Central High School has about 400 students, 99% of whom are Black—compared to 70% of the county's overall population.[635] At the same time, segregation academies continue operating in the county. For example, Wilcox Academy, located up the road from the underpopulated public school, still has 200 students, almost all of whom are white.[636] Like other segregation academies still in operation, Wilcox Academy has actively opted out of state education policies that make private schools like theirs more accessible to the county's majority Black population.

Consuela Lee & the Multifaceted Legacy of Snow Hill

The story of Snow Hill represents a paradox faced by many Black schools during this era: the school received nearly all its funding from white northerners and could not have stayed open without their funding. At the same time, the control that these Northern philanthropists exerted over Snow Hill, and the abdication of support in key moments, were central to the school's downfall and the devastation of the local community. Had Snow Hill retained its status as an independent school, perhaps it could have kept its doors open when the State forced Black public schools to close. However, this would have required access to significant funds that did not come with the narrow parameters set by foundations like the G.E.B. Snow Hill's experience over eighty years showcases the injustice and unreliability that Black-led schools experienced in trying to work with the state and philanthropic foundations. Even with the presence of extremely committed leaders like James Edwards, institutions upholding white supremacy and racial capitalism proved incapable of truly supporting education by and for Black communities.

At the same time, Snow Hill has multiple legacies. Despite the injustice of its closure and the constant uphill battles it faced to educate local students, the positive, uplifting impacts of Snow

[633] Hawes, "Segregation Academies Still Operate Across the South. One Town Grapples With Its Divided Schools."

[634] Hawes, "Segregation Academies Still Operate Across the South. One Town Grapples With Its Divided Schools."

[635] School Digger, *Wilcox Central High School* (School Digger, 2024), https://www.schooldigger.com/go/AL/schools/0351001780/school.aspx.

[636] Hawes, "Segregation Academies Still Operate Across the South. One Town Grapples With Its Divided Schools."

Hill live on in its graduates and their descendants. One of the central legacies of Snow Hill, which was evident in the alternative Black archive I constructed, was that of music and arts education for Black children. In 1992, Consuela Lee, granddaughter of James Edwards and a professional jazz musician, wrote about the struggles and legacy of Snow Hill in an article in *The Montgomery Advertiser*.[637] Herself a 1944 graduate of Snow Hill, Lee highlighted the school's artistic legacy, noting that Edwards and Barnes had created a strong music department, where students learned the music of Black composers alongside classical European composers. Clearly this had a large impact on Lee, as she went on to become a professional musician and music teacher. Lee expressed a commitment to revitalizing the school, while grappling with its complicated past and present conditions.

In an essay published on her personal website, Lee reflected on the school's complex legacy. She believed that the quality of education at Snow Hill began to decline in 1925 after her grandfather was removed as principal. In addition to the loss of Edwards' leadership, she attributed this decline in quality to the state taking control of the school's academic programs when it transitioned to a public school a few years later. "By 1973, it had lost its great purpose and academic excellence," she lamented.[638] One of Lee's deepest hopes was to revitalize the school's legacy for a new generation of local youth.

In 1980, after a successful musical career, Lee returned to her family's property and reopened her grandfather's school as a music academy, which she called The Spring Tree-Snow Hill Institute for the Performing Arts. For the next several years, she taught music and performing arts to thirty to forty-five Black students from the local community, meeting after school and during the summer.[639] Reflecting on her initial year returning to her hometown and teaching the local youth, Lee was struck by the lack of basic education the children had access to, contending that, "there still exists today serious neglect in the state of Alabama's obligation to educate and protect our children!"[640] She placed responsibility for the local poverty and poor education quality squarely on the State and corporations, arguing that "the state government cares more about the economic interests of the corporations that are exporting timber out of Wilcox County and elsewhere at record numbers without paying restitution to the Black residents who live on the land."[641]

Lee's larger goal was to reopen the school fully for the local Black children, and gain recognition for the site and its legacy as an important part of the region's history. In 1981, she was successful in leading efforts to have Snow Hill named as a historic site by the Alabama Historical Commission.[642] However, her broader efforts were stymied by funding issues and internal conflicts

---

[637] Consuela Lee, "Institute Continues Tradition," *The Montgomery Advertiser* (Montgomery, AL), May 4, 1992, https://www.newspapers.com/image/258641547/?terms=snow%20hill&match=1.
[638] Lee, "Alabama's Black Belt: Legacy of Slavery, Sharecropping and Segregation."

[639] Victor Inge, "Founder's Descendant Keeps Snow Hill Alive," *The Selma Times-Journal* (Selma, AL), February 28, 1993, https://www.newspapers.com/image/571484455/?match=1&terms=snow%20hill%20institute.

[640] Lee, "Alabama's Black Belt: Legacy of Slavery, Sharecropping and Segregation."

[641] Lee, "Alabama's Black Belt: Legacy of Slavery, Sharecropping and Segregation."

[642] Alabama Historical Commission, *The Alabama Register Of Landmarks & Heritage As Of April 2, 2019* (Alabama Historical Commission, 2019),

with the Snow Hill Board.[643] By this time, the Edwards family and descendants had lost control of the Board to corporate interests. This included Lee suing the Snow Hill Board of Trustees, who she accused of taking advantage of Snow Hill's property to earn timber profits while abandoning the school's core mission to educate and uplift the local Black Belt community.[644] While the school had deeded ten acres to the state when the school officially became public, Snow Hill's Board had retained over one thousand acres of the school's surrounding land. In her 1992 article, Lee passionately opined that "at present there is a desperate need for excellent educational opportunities for African American children throughout the Black Belt. Snow Hill Institute, as a private school, can and rightfully should fill this need."[645]



The school's auditorium/gymnasium, with remnants of the cultural productions from Lee-Morehead's work at the school, 2023

efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://ahc.alabama.gov/AlabamaRegisterPDFs/Alabama%20Register%20of%20Landmarks%20&%20Heritage%20Property%20Listing%20(for%20web)%20April%202019.pdf.

[643] I was not able to find information about the current Board members online, and it was a difficult topic for those I interviewed. In the next phase of this research I hope to find more on this.

[644] Alvin Benn, "Ruby Dee ASF Show to Benefit Institute," *The Montgomery Advertiser* (Montgomery, AL), October 29, 1995, https://www.newspapers.com/image/260539470/?match=1&terms=snow%20hill%20institute.

[645] Lee, "Institute Continues Tradition."

Sadly, the efforts to revitalize and reopen Snow Hill have largely languished since Consuela Lee passed on in 2009. “She did a good job there, but she got ill and it just faded away,” Cliff Lee reflected sadly in our interview. “It hurts, you know, to know that we should have done more than we did in terms of trying to be involved.” [646] Cliff shared that he hoped his family would be able to regain more control over the direction of the site, but they had not yet been successful in gaining control of the Board, which as of 2023 continued to prioritize timber sales over revitalizing the property.

In reflecting on the legacy of Snow Hill and what had happened since its closure, Lee concluded that the State of Alabama and corporate industry should provide reparations to Black Belt residents for generations of “genocidal policies” of abuse and neglect. “The state of Alabama, and the corporate timber interests it is subservient to, have kept the Black community in semi-slavery conditions,” she argued. As Lee pointed out, the State and corporate powers robbed the local residents of a school that was by them, for them. Policies of neglect and abuse by those in power took away the space, resources, and leaders that served as the center of the community. Now, there is hardly any local community left. As a beginning step toward accountability, Lee argued that “reparations must be paid for the crimes committed against the multi-generations of Black people in Alabama's Black Belt.”[647]

[646] Lee, “Cliff Lee on Snow Hill.”

[647] Lee, “Alabama’s Black Belt: Legacy of Slavery, Sharecropping and Segregation.”

Appendix: Snow Hill Photos

These photos, taken by S.A. Worthy during my tour of Snow Hill in May 2023, show the recent state of the school building and grounds. They also show remaining evidence of the education and extracurricular activities that took place when the school was open and the period since.



The entrance to the main school building, featuring a more recent sign welcoming alumni and friends to a reunion



The school's vocational building, taken from the steps of the main schoolhouse



An old classroom



Another classroom with vines growing in from outside



The auditorium/gymnasium



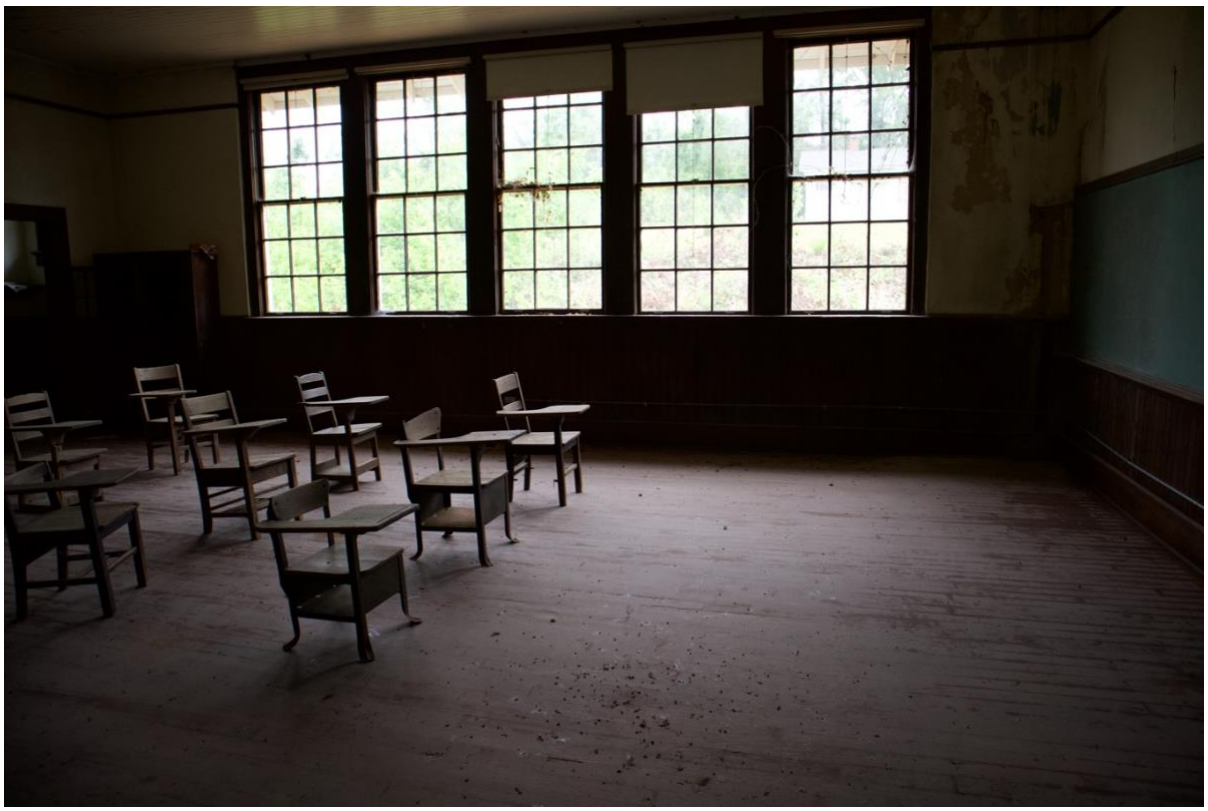
The main office, still containing some of the school's old files

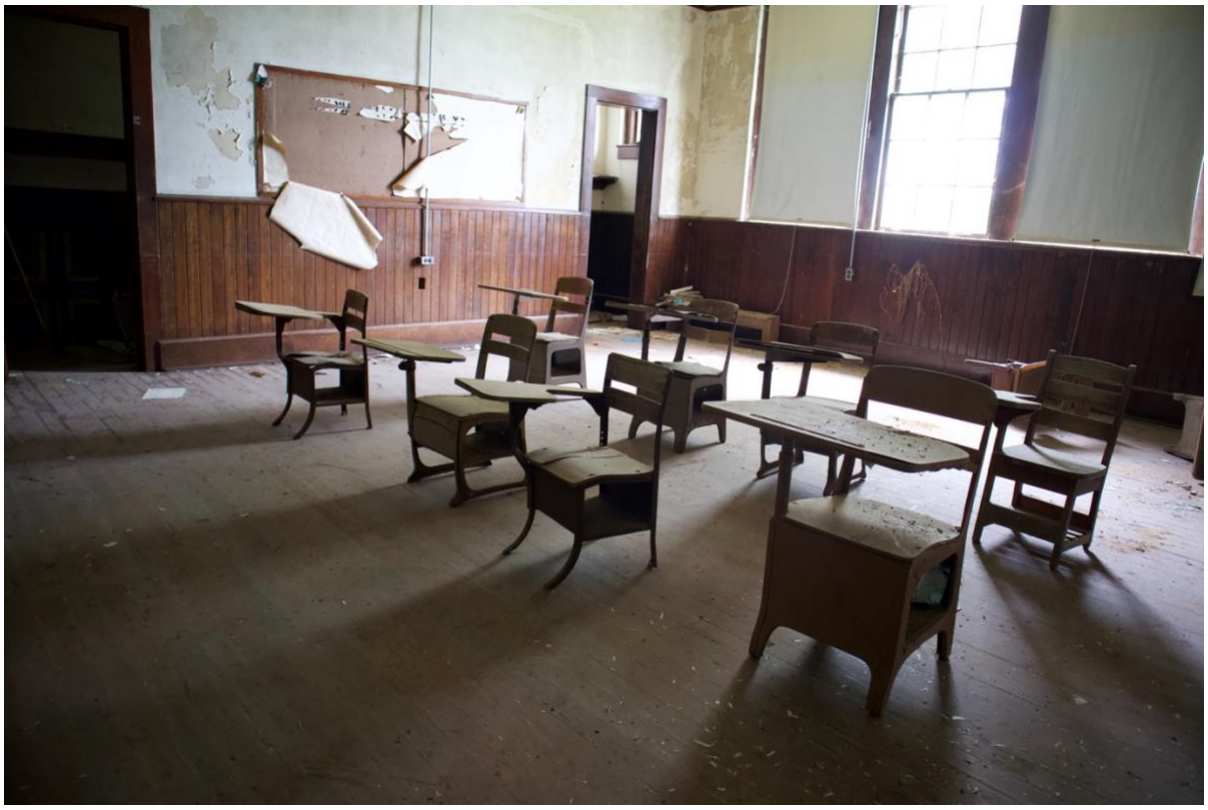


Another classroom containing old schoolbooks



Old educational books


Classroom with old desks still lined up neatly



Another view of the desks



The school grounds, much of which was cultivated for agricultural training



More of the vast school grounds



Cornelius proudly shows me the school's old well, which provided the community with clean water

Conclusion:

Implications for U.S. Education Policy in Today's Political Climate

Rachel Anspach

In an executive order on education signed days after taking office in January 2025, the Trump Administration laid out its central values and goals concerning public education:

> Parents trust America's schools to provide their children with a rigorous education and to instill a patriotic admiration for our incredible Nation and the values for which we stand. In recent years, however, parents have witnessed schools indoctrinate their children in radical, anti-American ideologies while deliberately blocking parental oversight. Such an environment operates as an echo chamber, in which students are forced to accept these ideologies without question or critical examination. In many cases, innocent children are compelled to adopt identities as either victims or oppressors solely based on their skin color and other immutable characteristics. In other instances, young men and women are made to question whether they were born in the wrong body and whether to view their parents and their reality as enemies to be blamed. These practices not only erode critical thinking but also sow division, confusion, and distrust, which undermine the very foundations of personal identity and family unity.[648]

The administration describes the key goals of the U.S. public education system as instilling a "patriotic admiration for our incredible Nation" and upholding "family unity." Conversely, it frames teaching on subjects relating to racial inequality, Black history, and gender diversity as direct attacks on these ideals. Under the administration's framework, learning about the history of race in America forces children to "adopt identities as either victims or oppressors solely based on their skin color;" meanwhile, learning about the existence of transgender people forces children to "question whether they were born in the wrong body," and as a result, to "view their parents and their reality as enemies to be blamed" for their newfound, yet misguided transgender identities. The administration's ability to mobilize rapidly around these ultra-conservative ideals points to how easily historical narratives seemingly left in the past can be given new life.

The current administration has linked its ideological agenda to an education policy agenda that hinges on greatly reducing, perhaps completely eliminating, the federal government's oversight of public education. On the U.S. Department of Education's website today, the administration notes "one of its most ambitious campaign promises: returning education to the states."[649] Guided by the ultra-conservative plan outlined by the Heritage Foundation in Project

[648] The White House, *Ending Radical Indoctrination in K-12 Schooling* (US Government, 2025), https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/01/ending-radical-indoctrination-in-k-12-schooling/.
[649] U.S. Department of Education, "President Trump's First Year: Education in America," Government, *U.S. Department of Education*, March 2026, https://www.ed.gov/about/initiatives/president-trumps-first-year-education-america.

2025, the administration has moved rapidly toward its goal of essentially shuttering the Department of Education, reducing it to nothing more than a "statistics gathering agency."[650]

Since opening its doors in 1980, the Department of Education has had a Congressionally mandated mission to regulate public education nationally and protect educational equity. While public education has consistently grappled with equity issues, oversight from the federal government has facilitated movement toward greater educational equity for Black students, girls, LGBTQ students, and those with disabilities. This expansion of the federal government to support educational equity was hard-won by the Civil Rights Movement, which advocated for educational equity for students of color, as well as girls and students with disabilities.[651] Some of the office's key functions include oversight and providing funding for schools in marginalized communities, ensuring students with disabilities have access to adequate schooling, and collecting data metrics that record the status of education across the country. In March 2025, in an attempt to circumvent these Congressionally mandated duties, Trump issued an executive order instructing Education Secretary Linda McMahon to begin dismantling the Department of Education as quickly as possible.[652] In the year since this executive order, McMahon has fired nearly half of the Education Department's staff, made massive funding cuts, and moved the management of key programs to other federal agencies (many of which the administration is also gutting).

This effort has included eliminating over 90% of the Department's Office for Civil Rights, which conducts key activities relating to enforcing civil rights in schools across the country. The administration is working toward eliminating all funding for educational equity, including Title I funding, which has provided critical support to high poverty schools since 1965, as well as critical funding provided through the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.[653] Project 2025 also calls to end the Head Start program, which, for context, fed 833,000 students in 2022. The elimination of Head Start would result in decreased food security and learning support for children across the country. In place of the national oversight of school equity that had been built, in particular, since the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s, states will receive less funding from the federal government and will have much fewer strings attached to how they utilize that funding. The administration aims to end data collection on marginalized groups, such as Black students, increasing the difficulty of tracking the status of education policy implementation and outcomes across the country.

Another key goal of this administration is to drastically increase the privatization of public education. Just one year after Trump's inauguration, his administration has made unprecedented

---

[650] Tim Walker, *How Project 2025 Would Devastate Public Education* (National Education Association, 2024), https://www.nea.org/nea-today/all-news-articles/how-project-2025-would-devastate-public-education.

[651] Elizabeth H. DeBray et al., "Re-Centering Civil Rights in the Reauthorization of ESEA: An Equitable, Ecological, Evidence-Based Framework," *Education Policy Analysis Archives* 31 (2023), https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.14507/epaa.31.7993.

[652] Ali Schalop, "The Plan to Abolish the Education Department—One Year Later," *NEA Today* (Washington, DC), March 20, 2026, https://www.nea.org/nea-today/all-news-articles/plan-abolish-education-department-one-year-later.

[653] Ricardo Mimbela and Deirdre Schifeling, *Trump's Department of Education Attack Explained* (ACLU, 2025), https://www.aclu.org/news/racial-justice/trumps-attack-on-the-department-of-education-explained.

increases in funding for charter schools and school choice vouchers. School choice vouchers allow families to take funds out of the public education system and place them into private schools of their choosing, including religious institutions.[654] The administration aims to make this voucher policy available in every state. Similarly, the administration supports further deregulation of charter schools, which use public school funding but are run by private corporations, often for-profit. The Trump administration's drive to privatize education is explicitly used as a tool to reduce children's exposure to teaching about race and gender from an inclusive perspective. School choice presents one obvious solution for parents seeking to shield their children from such "attacks" in their local public schools. Charter schools allow for less government oversight of curricula and school policies despite utilizing public funding, which opens the door for public funds to be used to serve private agendas.

Today's reality, in which the Department of Education will either cease to exist or have no teeth to enforce educational equity, echoes the circumstances in which the industrial philanthropies operated in the early twentieth century. Even if a more progressive administration takes office in the coming years, the fallout from the conditions created by this administration will last well into the future. The industrial philanthropies of the early twentieth century operated without federal oversight, and without a stated commitment to fostering or tracking racial equity in education. Relatedly, the Trump administration's education policies significantly increase opportunities for business leaders to shape public education to meet their own economic needs. We are now in a new phase of education policy that eliminates even the limited commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion that marked the prior era since the Civil Rights Movement.

An interest in understanding the current conditions driving educational inequity and the broader socio-economic hierarchy in the U.S. inspired me to conduct this historical study. Since I started graduate school in 2018, the circumstances surrounding education privatization and race and gender inequity have entered a new phase that makes looking toward historical foundations even more pressing. In light of this new political reality, I have reflected on key thematic takeaways that emerge from considering this research project as a whole. I aim for these reflections to be helpful for stakeholders who are committed to equalizing education and society for Black youth and all people. These stakeholders include but are not limited to scholars, policymakers, foundations, and advocates. Here, I list nine key themes that I see as important for stakeholders to consider in crafting educational policy geared toward Black youth and other marginalized groups. I then embark on bringing them together into a set of cohesive recommendations for advancing equitable public education.

Key Thematic Takeaways

Gender was not incidental to vocational education; it was central: The findings from my archival research showed that the gendered dimension was central to the foundations' strategy for using K-12 education to bring Black people into the fold of racial capitalism as workers and consumers. The G.E.B. and Rosenwald Funds consciously created gender- and race-segregated programs which primed men and women for distinct socio-economic roles. One central example of this was the canning clubs for girls, priming them for domestic work, and corn cobbing clubs

[654] Walker, *How Project 2025 Would Devastate Public Education*.

for boys, priming them for agricultural labor. Another example was the repeated references in both Funds' archives demonstrating that girls' domestic science training was explicitly used to promote the values of traditional homemaking and child rearing. The emphasis on the nuclear family also set a standard that was impossible for most Black families, especially women, since they could not afford to stay at home as solely homemakers and mothers.

Another noteworthy narrative that emerged relating to gender was the funds' preoccupation with effectively preparing Black men for formal employment in low-wage agricultural or industrial work. Increasing the employment of Black men was commonly seen at the time as a solution to the "Negro problem." Scholars often look to the Moynihan Report as a key originator of this idea that getting Black men to work would solve the country's race issue, which is not wrong. However, my research locates some of the roots of this belief over half a century earlier. The Rosenwald Fund reports I discussed in Chapter Two expressed a repeated concern about the difficulty in finding jobs for their Black male graduates, referencing challenges in keeping up with new workplace technologies and increased competition in economically difficult periods such as the Great Depression. On the other hand, there seemed to be less concern around ensuring that the women graduates found work, suggesting that this was less of an issue or priority.

This idea of putting Black men to work, thereby placing them in the traditional patriarchal provider role as a solution to racial inequality, draws parallels to the more recent history of Black male achievement programs, which focus on professionalizing Black boys in order to solve racial and educational inequity.[655] These findings suggest that the reproduction of the social hierarchy through time specifically depends on the weaponization of both race and gender. Through this lens, any new education policies or philanthropic programs that are segregated by race and/or gender, or specifically rooted in gendered ideology, should be subject to scrutiny by experts on the topic. Such programs should be examined through an intersectional lens to ensure that they are not further entrenching the violent norms that undergird the socio-economic hierarchy, and should be subject to specific accountability mechanisms. This is not to say that there are no instances when using race and gender in educational equity programs can lead to positive outcomes. For instance, affirmative action is an example of a race- and gender-specific program that functions to increase equitable access to education for marginalized communities. In this case, the solution is specifically formulated to address observable barriers that specific groups of people historically face in seeking equal opportunities.

Analyze anti-democratic practices in U.S. education holistically rather than in a silo: A second key takeaway that emerges from considering U.S. public education policy holistically is that privatization and lack of democratic accountability have persisted along a spectrum since European colonization. This contrasts with the way privatization is often framed in current education research and policy spaces as a more recent byproduct of neoliberalism. Neoliberalism—which champions the supremacy of the market, government austerity, and individual responsibility—is often framed as the driving force behind education privatization that has proliferated across the political spectrum since the 1980s. My research suggests that while neoliberal ideology has done much to promote the proliferation of market-oriented policies, the roots of this pattern extend much further back, to this land's earliest colonization. Looking at neoliberalism in a silo could run the risk of missing out on important lessons and parallels from

[655] I discuss Black male achievement programs a bit more in the Introduction.

other historical moments, such as the seminal period of education for Black students in the South that I cover in this study.

Why does this framing matter? I believe that the repressive ideology, paired with extreme levels of privatization and austerity, being implemented at the federal level today represents a new phase beyond neoliberalism. While neoliberalism could be seen as white supremacy with the "mask on," the current approach can be seen as white supremacy with the "mask off." Neoliberalism claims that any individual can achieve success if they pull themselves up by their bootstraps.[656] Under the framework of neoliberalism, there is a purported commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion guiding education policymaking from both within the government and prominent philanthropies, even while this commitment remained at a surface level. While limited, this left room for more marginalized people to find agency within the system.

Today's administration much more openly promotes marginalization and violence toward oppressed groups, seen in particular through their attempts to demonize trans people, immigrants, women, and Black people. Leadership and rights are being much more openly consolidated as belonging to wealthy white men. In this mask-off framework, the mere acknowledgment of the experiences of the marginalized is taboo, let alone their inclusion. This mask-off approach arguably harkens more closely to the original liberal philosophy that undergirded colonialism and slavery.[657] As I discussed throughout this dissertation, public-private partnerships have in fact been central to justifying and upholding white supremacy since slavery. In order to understand today's realities, it is arguably more important than ever to shed light on their anti-democratic, racist roots.

The role of public-private partnerships in education for Black students: A third key takeaway regarding education policy under public-private partnerships is that they are rooted in the interests of the market rather than the holistic needs of Black students. The sweeping powers granted to the G.E.B. and Rosenwald Fund set a precedent in education for Black students that legitimized key policymaking activities being controlled by powerful corporate philanthropies and their funders. My analysis of these two foundations demonstrates how these seminal public-private partnerships were rooted in a racially segregated education system that trained Black youth for socio-economic roles reminiscent of slavery and strengthened the racialized gender hierarchy. While public-private partnerships are often framed as a neutral or positive policymaking configuration, considering this history suggests that this arrangement is rooted in violent domination. While public-private partnerships are unlikely to be eliminated in the foreseeable future, this reality suggests that they should face much greater scrutiny and public accountability.

Vocational education as a tool of racial capitalism: The fourth key theme that emerges from this research is that the primary purpose of the vocational education platform that the industrial philanthropies advanced was to bolster racial capitalism and their desired role for Black people within it. That goal is in sharp contrast to the goal of offering Black students the best possible education and providing them with the skills they needed to be successful and powerful in the society they graduated into.

---

[656] Lisa Duggan, *The Twilight of Equality? Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics, and the Attack on Democracy* (Beacon Press, 2003), Main (Gardner) Stacks JC574.2.U6 D84 2003.

[657] Perry, *Vexy Thing: On Gender and Liberation*.

In looking at today's educational landscape, this finding implies that policymakers, foundations and stakeholders should apply extra scrutiny to any vocational programs geared toward Black youth and other marginalized groups. Chapter Two on Rosenwald discusses how their vocational education program continuously struggled to prepare Black workers for the industrial settings of the day. They were not able to keep up with the pace at which technology was moving and were unwilling or unable to maintain the resource investment to do so. Today, programs that claim to teach modern technological skills to Black youth should be subject to scrutiny over time, including ascertaining their graduates' ability to maintain employment in their respective fields. This is particularly relevant in today's rapidly changing technological landscape, in which functions that were previously conducted by human workers are being rapidly replaced or supplemented with artificial intelligence.

"Predatory Inclusion" is the defining logic of philanthropic education policy: A fifth consistent pattern is that the education access offered by the industrial funds was rooted in a logic of what Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor termed predatory inclusion—meaning a policy that on its surface seems to increase access to key services for marginalized people, but in fact is rooted in predatory logics that capitalize on the population it claims to support.[658] These programs visibly offered educational access to Black communities that otherwise might have had little to no access. While the story of schools like Snow Hill complicates the narrative by showing that this funding cannot be painted as all bad, the lasting impacts of these programs was to place true educational equity further out of reach. They entrenched a version of education for Black students in the public education system that hinged on their prescribed labor roles at the bottom of the socio-economic hierarchy. They did this by engineering and entrenching ideology and training rooted in the violent ideology of patriarchy. And sadly, they funneled not only astronomical sums of money from their funders, but also massive sums of money and labor directly from Black communities, into schools that the state would later shutter. The resources, time, and energy that Black communities poured into these schools, and the roles these schools played as the center of Black communities, have arguably never been recovered. A strong example of this is my third chapter on Snow Hill, an independent Black school whose partnership with foundations and the state ultimately resulted in the school's loss of the power to keep its doors open.

The importance of expertise in education, race and gender equity: Most corporate philanthropists are not experts on education or on race and gender equity. Individuals who are experts with experience and/or credentials in these fields should be consulted in the crafting of educational programs. Given the current climate, this would likely be more relevant to philanthropies and local governments in the coming years. To craft an education system that holistically considers the needs of Black communities, it is critical that individuals directly from these communities have a seat at the table. Unless this occurs, what is produced will be "education for Black people" rather than "Black education." As I discussed throughout, Cheryl Harris' work on whiteness as property demonstrates that the definition of groups through policymaking is a central tool of domination.[659] Black people and experts in social equity playing a central role in crafting education policy and accountability tracking is key to countering this pattern.

[658] Taylor, *Race for Profit: How Banks and the Real Estate Industry Undermined Black Homeownership*.

[659] Harris, "Whiteness as Property."

The archive preserves power, not truth: This seventh finding echoes much Black feminist work. In looking at these Funds' archives through an intersectional lens, it is clear that they preserved the historical narrative according to what the Funds valued and wished to preserve. One result of this narrow focus is that many of the records of Black schools, actors, and cultural productions are not preserved in the archive. Some are scattered amongst the descendants of educators and alumni of these schools, and some are lost to time. This further points to the importance of bringing an intersectional feminist epistemology to archival research and academic work more broadly, as without it we will never know all that transpired or the stories of all the key actors involved.

Community schools like Snow Hill provide hope: The eighth key finding from this research is that in the face of tremendous obstacles, Black-founded and led schools like Snow Hill were able to serve as rich community centers. As long as they could keep most of their leadership in their own hands, such schools had real potential to make a difference for their students. In spite of their prescribed vocational bent, schools like Snow Hill often found ways to provide a much richer education to their students than the Funds cared to document; or if they did, it was often viewed in a critical manner. In addition to providing students with the practical vocational skills for farming, domestic management, and academic education, Snow Hill offered students access to sports, art, and music. It also served as a community hub, providing local residents with fresh water, produce, and a small store. The loss of Snow Hill represented much more than just the closure of one school. It directly led to the death of the entire community.

While the story of Snow Hill is sad in many ways, it also provides the seeds of hope in showing the power that one community school can hold. In the coming years, it seems likely that the American state will continue to move further from providing equitable education access to Black students. If they can gain more equitable and reliable support from foundations, or even from their own communities, independent Black schools may present a practical path toward liberatory education. I would not advocate for these schools to be racially segregated, but rather if they are rooted in Black communities, local Black residents and educators should play a central role in determining their structure and curricula.

Abolition is a work in progress: This ninth takeaway recalls W.E.B. Du Bois' vision of abolition democracy, which I introduced in the Introduction. My research provides more context on the incomplete project of abolition, which Du Bois framed as not just de jure emancipation, but "the uplift of [Black people] and their eventual incorporation into the body civil, politic, and social, of the United States."[660] In other words, abolition and a true American democracy would not exist until Black people experienced true substantive equality in U.S. society. In direct contradiction to Du Bois' vision, the Northern industrial philanthropies structured public education for Black students in a way that extended the roles Black people had filled under slavery into the modern age.

---

[660] Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860-1880*.

The incomplete nature of abolition has been studied by many Black feminist scholars. In *Scenes of Subjection*, Saidiya Hartman draws on extensive historical research to argue that racial slavery did not simply end at Emancipation but persisted in new legal and socio-economic tools of domination.[661] Arguably, unelected businessmen centrally shaping public education for Black students with no accountability metrics is inherently undemocratic. There remains a broader question of whether abolition is truly possible under this system of patriarchal racial capitalism. However, many abolitionists support a vision of moving Black communities closer to liberation while recognizing the significant constraints of the system we live under. In that spirit of moving closer to liberation, foundations engaged in education policymaking should build in meaningful and measurable accountability measures to the Black communities they serve throughout the entire process of designing and implementing their programs.

Concluding Thoughts

Considered as a whole, these nine takeaways have several repeated themes. One concerns my proposal for experts and directly impacted community members to be involved in developing and evaluating programs geared toward Black youth and other marginalized groups. This begs the question of 1) who these experts are and 2) what forms this scrutiny should take. Whether the policies are being crafted by government or philanthropies, these questions are relevant.

I recommend that three areas of expertise be included in education policymaking geared toward Black youth and other marginalized communities: 1) Community experts, 2) Educational experts, and 3) Intersectional experts. Community experts include Black teachers, parents, and students who have firsthand experience with the needs of their communities. These community leaders should also be viewed as experts with real credentials regarding the circumstances of their communities. Another example of an expert in educational equity is someone who holds an advanced degree in Education, or a related field, in which their research focuses specifically on questions of racial and gender equity. An expert in intersectionality could be defined as an individual with an advanced degree in an interdisciplinary field, such as Black Studies, Gender Studies, or Legal Studies, who has developed research expertise in education and other forms of policy evaluation. There would undoubtedly be some overlap between these experts, such as a Black woman who attended public school and then earned a doctorate in Black Studies. I argue that in programs aimed at advancing educational equity, these experts should be centrally involved in every stage from program design to funding decisions to evaluation.

As I continue to move this research forward, I hope to continue reflecting on and further developing the conclusions that can be drawn from it.

[661] Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth Century America*.

Bibliography

2017-2018 BMA City Index. Campaign for Black Male Achievement, 2018. https://www.blackmaleachievement.org/community/city-index.

"About CBMA." Campaign for Black Male Achievement, 2018. https://www.blackmaleachievement.org/about/cbma.

Alabama Department of Archives & History. "Alabama Photographs and Pictures Collection." Alabama Department of Archives & History, 1917. https://digital.archives.alabama.gov/digital/collection/photo/id/2905.

Alabama Historical Commission. *The Alabama Register Of Landmarks & Heritage As Of April 2, 2019*. Alabama Historical Commission, 2019. efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://ahc.alabama.gov/AlabamaRegisterPDFs/Alabama%20Register%20of%20Landmarks%20&%20Heritage%20Property%20Listing%20(for%20web)%20April%202019.pdf.

American Experience. "Ford's Anti-Semitism." 2026. https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/henryford-antisemitism/.

Anderson, James D. *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935*. University of North Carolina Press, 1988.

Ascoli, Peter M. *Julius Rosenwald: The Man Who Built Sears, Roebuck and Advanced the Cause of Black Education in the American South*. Indiana University Press, 2006.

Bailey, Marlon M. *Butch Queens Up In Pumps: Gender, Performance, and Ballroom Culture in Detroit*. Triangulations : Lesbian/Gay/Queer Theater/Drama/Performance. University of Michigan Press, 2013.

Benn, Alvin. "Ruby Dee ASF Show to Benefit Institute." *The Montgomery Advertiser* (Montgomery, AL), October 29, 1995. https://www.newspapers.com/image/260539470/?match=1&terms=snow%20hill%20institute.

Bond, Horace Mann, Wayne J. Urban, and Martin Kilson. *Negro Education in Alabama: A Study in Cotton and Steel*. University of Alabama Press, 2015.

Boustan, Leah Platt, and William J. Collins. "The Origins and Persistence of Black-White Differences in Women's Labor Force Participation." *National Bureau of Economic Research* (Washington D.C.), Working Paper Series, May 2013.

Brown, Karida L. *Gone Home: Race and Roots through Appalachia*. University of North Carolina Press, 2018.

Burroughs, Nannie Helen, and Kelisha B. Graves. *Nannie Helen Burroughs: A Documentary Portrait of an Early Civil Rights Pioneer, 1900–1959*. University of Notre Dame, 2019.

Child Rights International Network. "Bodily Integrity." https://archive.crin.org/en/home/what-we-do/policy/bodily-integrity.html.

Christian, Barbara. "But What Do We Think We're Doing Anyway: The State of Black Feminist Criticism(s) or My Version of a Little Bit of History (1989)." In *New Black Feminist Criticism*. University of Illinois Press, 2007.

Cohen Jarvie, Danielle, and Gary Orfield. *Black Segregation Matters: School Resegregation and Black Educational Opportunity*. The Civil Rights Project, 2020. https://civilrightsproject.ucla.edu/reports/black-segregation-matters-school-resegregation-and-black-educational-opportunity/.

Collins, Patricia Hill. *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. Routledge, 2000.

Combahee River Collective. "A Black Feminist Statement." *Monthly Review*, January 1, 2019, 29–36. https://doi.org/10.14452/MR-070-08-2019-01_3.

Cooper, Anna Julia. *A Voice From the South*. The Aldine Printing House, 1892.

Crenshaw, Kimberlé. "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics." *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, 1989, 139–68.

Crenshaw, Kimberlé, Priscilla Ocen, and Jyoti Nanda. *Black Girls Matter: Pushed Out, Overpoliced and Underprotected*. African American Policy Forum, 2015.

Crooks, Mary. "First Public School in America." *National Geographic*, October 2023. https://education.nationalgeographic.org/resource/first-public-school-america.

D., S. B. "Rambles in Old Wilcox." *Wilcox Progressive Era* (Camden, AL), October 28, 1896. https://www.newspapers.com/image/308677242/?match=1&terms=%22ro%20simpson%22.

Daniel, Pete. *The Shadow of Slavery: Peonage in the South, 1901-1969*. University of Illinois Press, 1990.

Daniel, Vanessa. "Philanthropists Bench Women of Color, the M.V.P.s of Social Change." *New York Times*, November 19, 2019. https://www.nytimes.com/2019/11/19/opinion/philanthropy-black-women.html.

Davis, Angela. *Women, Race, & Class*. Random House, 1981. https://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/books/37354/women-race-and-class-by-angela-y-davis/.

DeBray, Elizabeth H., Kara S. Finnigan, Janel George, and Janelle Scott. "Re-Centering Civil Rights in the Reauthorization of ESEA: An Equitable, Ecological, Evidence-Based Framework." *Education Policy Analysis Archives* 31 (2023). https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.14507/epaa.31.7993.

Devich Cyril, Malkia, Matthew Kan, Ben Francisco Maulbeck, and Lori Villarosa. *Mismatched: Philanthropy's Response to the Call for Racial Justice*. Philanthropic Initiative for Racial Equity, Tides Center, 2020. https://racialequity.org/mismatched/.

Dolan, Tom. "Summary of Events as They Happen." *The Jeffersonian* (Atlanta, Georgia), March 10, 1910. https://www.newspapers.com/image/887698874/?match=1&terms=%22general%20education%20board%22.

Douglass, Frederick. *My Bondage, My Freedom*. Penguin, 1855. https://www.amazon.com/My-Bondage-Freedom-Penguin-Classics/dp/0140439188.

Douglass, Frederick. *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*. The Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society, 1845.

Du Bois, W. E. B. *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860-1880*. Harcourt, Brace & Co, 1935.

Du Bois, W. E. B. *The Philadelphia Negro: A Social Study*. University of Pennsylvania Press, 1899. Reprint, Oxford University Press, 2007.

Du Bois, W.E.B. *The Souls of Black Folk*. A. C. McClurg and Co., 1903.

Duggan, Lisa. *The Twilight of Equality? Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics, and the Attack on Democracy*. Beacon Press, 2003. Main (Gardner) Stacks JC574.2.U6 D84 2003.

Dumas, Michael J. "My Brother as 'Problem': Neoliberal Governmentality and Interventions for Black Young Men and Boys." *Educational Policy* 30, no. 1 (2016): 94–113.

East Bay Community Foundation. *Partners*. East Bay Community Foundation, 2026. https://www.ebcf.org/donors/partners/.

Echols, Jack. "The Forgotten History of Kowaliga, the Town beneath Lake Martin." *SoulGrown* (Alabama), June 23, 2024. https://soul-grown.com/the-forgotten-history-of-kowaliga-the-town-beneath-lake-martin/.

Edwards, William James. *Twenty-Five Years in the Black Belt*. The Cornhill Company, 1918.

Ewing, Eve. *Original Sins: The (Mis)Education of Black and Native Children and the Construction of American Racism*. One World, 2025.

Feiler, Andrew. *A Better Life for Their Children: Julius Rosenwald, Booker T Washington, and the 4978 Schools That Changed America*. University of Georgia Press, 2021.

Ferguson, Ann Arnett. *Bad Boys: Public Schools in the Making of Black Masculinity*. University of Michigan Press, 2000.

Gauthier, Jason G. *History and the Census: The Transcontinental Railroad*. US Census Bureau, 2023. https://www.census.gov/about/history/stories/monthly/2023/may-2023.html.

General Education Board. "General Education Board Archive." Rockefeller Archive Center, December 2022.

Georgia Teacher. "That Ovation to Booker Washington." *The Jeffersonian* (Atlanta, Georgia), January 27, 1910. https://www.newspapers.com/image/887698646/?match=1&terms=%22general%20education%20board%22.

Gershon, Livia. "When Teachers Stopped Beating Kids." *JSTOR Daily*, 2019. https://daily.jstor.org/when-teachers-stopped-beating-kids/.

Givens, Jarvis. *Fugitive Pedagogy: Carter G. Woodson and the Art of Black Teaching*. Harvard University Press, 2021.

Goldberg, Barry, and Barbara Shubinski. *Black Education and Rockefeller Philanthropy from the Jim Crow South to the Civil Rights Era*. Rockefeller Archive Center, 2020. https://resource.rockarch.org/story/black-education-and-rockefeller-philanthropy-from-the-jim-crow-south-to-the-civil-rights-era/.

Goldberg, David Theo. *The Racial State*. Blackwell, 2002.

Gramsci, Antonio. *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*. International Publishers, 1971.

Greene County Herald. "Our Washington Letter." *Greene County Herald* (Leakesville, Mississippi), August 30, 1901.

Hadden, Sally. *Slave Patrols: Law and Violence in Virginia and the Carolinas*. Harvard University Press, 2003.

Haley, Sarah. "Abolition." In *Keywords for African American Studies*. NYU Press, 2021.

Haley, Sarah. *No Mercy Here: Gender, Punishment, and the Making of Jim Crow Modernity*. The University of North Carolina Press, 2016.

Hancock, Lamar. "Oakland Technical High School African American Male Achievement/Manhood Development." Oakland Unified School District, n.d. http://oaklandtech.com/staff/lhancock/files/2015/09/AAMA-Syllabus-2.docx.

Hansot, Elizabeth, and David Tyack. "Gender in American Public Schools: Thinking Institutionally." *Signs* (Chicago) 13, no. 4 (1988): 741–60.

Harris, Cheryl I. “Whiteness as Property.” *Harvard Law Review* 106, no. 8 (1993): 1707–91. JSTOR. https://doi.org/10.2307/1341787.

Harris, LaShawn. *Sex Workers, Psychics, and Numbers Runners*. University of Illinois Press, 2016.

Hartman, Saidiya. *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America*. Race and American Culture. Oxford University Press, 1997.

Hartman, Saidiya. “Venus in Two Acts.” *Small Axe* 12, no. 2 (2008): 1–14.

Hartman, Saidiya. *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Riotous Black Girls, Troublesome Women, and Queer Radicals*. Norton, 2019.

Harvey, David. *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*. Oxford University Press, 2005.

Hasso, Jennifer. “Pullman Porters.” *Jim Crow Museum*, 2021. https://jimcrowmuseum.ferris.edu/question/2021/august.htm.

Hawes, Jennifer Berry. “Segregation Academies Still Operate Across the South. One Town Grapples With Its Divided Schools.” *Pro Publica* (Wilcox County, AL), May 18, 2024. https://www.propublica.org/article/camden-alabama-segregated-schools-brown-v-board.

History. “Pullman Porters.” 2025. https://www.history.com/articles/pullman-porters.

hooks, bell. *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*. 2nd edition. South End Press, 2000.

Horsford, Sonya Douglass, Janelle T. Scott, and Gary L. Anderson. *The Politics of Education Policy in an Era of Inequality: Possibilities for Democratic Schooling*. Taylor & Francis Group, 2018. http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/berkeley-ebooks/detail.action?docID=5611520.

Humanities Texas. “Emmett J. Scott.” *Humanities Texas*, 2025. https://www.humanitiestexas.org/programs/tx-originals/list/emmett-j-scott#:~:text=February%2013%2C%201873%E2%80%93December%2012,Howard%20University%20in%20Washington%2C%20DC.

Iacobelli, Teresa, and Barbara Shubinski. *“Without Distinction of Race, Sex, or Creed”: The General Education Board, 1903-1964*. Re:Source. Rockefeller Archives Center, 2024. https://resource.rockarch.org/story/the-general-education-board-1903-1964/.

Inge, Victor. “Founder’s Descendant Keeps Snow Hill Alive.” *The Selma Times-Journal* (Selma, AL), February 28, 1993. https://www.newspapers.com/image/571484455/?match=1&terms=snow%20hill%20institute.

Irons, Peter. *Jim Crow’s Children: The Broken Promise of the Brown Decision*. Penguin Books, 2002.

Jackson, Reid E. “County Training Schools in Alabama.” *The School Review* 47, no. 9 (1939): 683–94.

Jacobs, Harriet. *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*. Thayer & Eldridge, 1861.

Jones, Nikki. *Between Good and Ghetto: African American Girls and Inner-City Violence*. The Rutgers Series in Childhood Studies. Rutgers University Press, 2010. Main (Gardner) Stacks HN90.V5 J66 2010.

Julius Rosenwald Fund. “Rosenwald Schools, Community School Plan No. 1.” Virginia Humanities, 1924. https://encyclopediavirginia.org/4619hpr-a02df22bf3548ed/.

Julius Rosenwald Legacy. “The First Six Schools.” *Julius Rosenwald Legacy*, 2025. https://www.julius-rosenwald-legacy.com/the-first-six.html.

Kober, Nancy, and Diane Stark Rentner. *History and Evolution of Public Education in the US*. George Washington University, 2020. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED606970.pdf.

Lee, Consuela. “Alabama’s Black Belt: Legacy of Slavery, Sharecropping and Segregation.” *Consuela Lee*, n.d. https://consuelalee.com/doc/blackbelt-legacy.html.

Lee, Consuela. “Institute Continues Tradition.” *The Montgomery Advertiser* (Montgomery, AL), May 4, 1992. https://www.newspapers.com/image/258641547/?terms=snow%20hill&match=1.

Library of Congress. “Julius Rosenwald and Booker T. Washington in Fairfax.” Library of Congress, 1900s-1920s. https://research.centerformasonslegacies.com/s/blnd/page/julius-rosenwald.

Link, William A. *Jackson Davis and the Lost World of Jim Crow Education*. Albert and Shirley Small Special Collections Library, n.d. Accessed March 11, 2024. https://small.library.virginia.edu/collections/featured/jackson-davis-collection-of-african-american-educational-photographs/related-resources/jackson-davis-and-the-lost-world-of-jim-crow-education/.

Literacy as Freedom. Smithsonian American Art Museum, 2026. https://americanexperience.si.edu/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/Literacy-as-Freedom.pdf.

Logan, Trevon D. “Health, Human Capital, and African-American Migration before 1910.” *Explorations in Economic History* 46, no. 2 (2009): 169–85. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.eeh.2008.06.003.

Lomotey, Kofi. “Slater Fund.” In *Encyclopedia of African American Education*. Sage Publications, 2026.

MacKinnon, Catharine A. “Intersectionality as Method: A Note.” *Signs*, no. 4 (2013): 1019. https://doi.org/10.1086/669570.

Made in Chicago Museum. *Sears, Roebuck & Co., Est. 1893*. Made in Chicago Museum, 2026. https://www.madeinchicagomuseum.com/single-post/sears-roebuck/.

Margo, Robert A. “Race and Schooling in the South: A Review of the Evidence.” In *Race and Schooling in the South, 1880-1950: An Economic History*. University of Chicago Press, 1990.

Margo, Robert A. “Teacher Salaries in Black and White: Pay Discrimination in the Southern Classroom.” In *Race and Schooling in the South, 1880-1950: An Economic History*. University of Chicago Press, 1990.

May, Vivian. *Pursuing Intersectionality, Unsettling Dominant Imaginaries*. Routledge, 2015.

McInnis, Jarvis C. *Afterlives of the Plantation: Plotting Agrarian Futures in the Global Black South*. Columbia University Press, 2025.

Merriam-Webster. “Definition of PHILANTHROPY.” Dictionary. Merriam Webster, April 2021. https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/philanthropy.

Messinger, Susan D. “Divers Good Causes.” *Boston Evening Transcript* (Boston), November 24, 1897. https://www.newspapers.com/image/735169524/?match=1&terms=snow%20hill%20institute.

Mimbela, Ricardo, and Deirdre Schifeling. *Trump’s Department of Education Attack Explained*. ACLU, 2025. https://www.aclu.org/news/racial-justice/trumps-attack-on-the-department-of-education-explained.

Ming Francis, Megan. “The Price of Civil Rights: Black Lives, White Funding, and Movement Capture.” *Law & Society Review* 53, no. 1 (2019): 275–309. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1111/lasr.12384.

Morris, Aldon. *The Scholar Denied: W.E.B. Du Bois and the Birth of Modern Sociology*. University of California Press, 2015.

Morris, Monique W. *Pushout: The Criminalization of Black Girls in Schools*. The New Press, 2016. Social Research LC2731 .M59 2015.

Moynihan, Daniel Patrick. *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action*. Policy Report. Washington, DC, 1965.

Oakland Unified School District. *African American Male Achievement*. Oakland Unified School District, 2026. https://www.ousd.org/african-american-male-achievement.

Oakland Unified School District. *African American Male Achievement - Programs and Services*. Oakland Unified School District, 2018. https://www.ousd.org/Page/17777.

Ogletree, Charles J. “All Deliberate Speed.” *Center for American Progress*, April 12, 2004. https://www.americanprogress.org/article/all-deliberate-speed/.

Omi, Michael and Howard Winant. *Racial Formation in the United States*. 3 edition. Routledge, 2014.

Perry, Imani. *Vexy Thing: On Gender and Liberation*. Duke University Press, 2018.

Philanthropy Roundtable. “Peabody’s Reconstruction Schools.” *Philanthropy Roundtable* (Washington D.C.), 2026.

Prescott, Darrell. *Benign Neglect in Wilcox County, Alabama*. The Harvard Crimson Edition. (Cambridge, MA), December 14, 1970. The Harvard Crimson Edition. https://www.thecrimson.com/article/1970/12/14/benign-neglect-in-wilcox-county-alabama/.

Prothero, Arianna. “Six Districts Where 40 Percent or More of Students Attend Charter Schools.” *Education Week*, November 10, 2015. http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/charterschoice/2015/11/six_districts_where_40_percent_or_more_of_students_attend_charter_schools.html.

Ray, Victor. “A Theory of Racialized Organizations.” *American Sociological Review* 84, no. 1 (2019): 28.

Richmond Times-Dispatch. “To Promote Education General Education Board Organized in Washington.” *Richmond Times-Dispatch* (Richmond, Virginia), January 30, 1903. https://www.newspapers.com/image/827325610/?match=1&terms=%22general%20education%20board%22.

Roberts, Dorothy. *Killing the Black Body: Race, Reproduction, and the Meaning of Liberty*. Vintage Books, 1997.

Robinson, Cedric. *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*. University of North Carolina Press, 2000.

Roediger, David R. *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class*. Haymarket Series. Verso, 2007. Comparative Ethnic Studies HD4903.5.U6 R64 2007.

Rooks, Noliwe M. *Cutting School: Privatization, Segregation, and the End of Public Education*. The New Press, 2017.

Rosenwald Fund. “Community School Plans, Issued by the Julius Rosenwald Fund.” Community School Plans, 1900s.

Rosenwald Fund. “Julius Rosenwald Fund Collection.” Fisk University Franklin Library Archive, 2026.

Rosenwald, Julius. “Principles of Public Giving.” The Atlantic, The Atlantic Magazine, 1929. https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1929/05/principles-of-public-giving/649166/.

Rosenwald, Julius and Rosenwald Fund. “Julius Rosenwald Papers.” Rosenwald Fund Archive. Hanna Holborn Gray Special Collections Research Center, 1905-1963.

Santoro, Lisa M. “Tracing the Origins of an Early Labor Union’s NYC History.” *Curbed New York* (New York), August 31, 2016. https://ny.curbed.com/2016/8/31/12733250/labor-day-history-international-ladies-garment-workers-union.

Sato, Grace. *Quantifying Hope 2017: Philanthropic Support for Black Men and Boys*. Philanthropy. Campaign for Black Male Achievement, 2017.

Schalop, Ali. “The Plan to Abolish the Education Department—One Year Later.” *NEA Today* (Washington, DC), March 20, 2026. https://www.nea.org/nea-today/all-news-articles/plan-abolish-education-department-one-year-later.

School Digger. *Wilcox Central High School*. School Digger, 2024. https://www.schooldigger.com/go/AL/schools/0351001780/school.aspx.

Scott, Janelle. “The Problem We All Still Live With: Neo-Plessyism and School Choice Policies in the Obama Era.” In *Choosing Charters: Better Schools or More Segregation?* Teachers College Press, 2018.

Scott, Janelle T. “Market-Driven Education Reform and the Racial Politics of Advocacy.” *Peabody Journal of Education* 86, no. 5 (2011): 580–99. https://doi.org/10.1080/0161956X.2011.616445.

Scott, Janelle. “The Politics of Venture Philanthropy in Charter School Policy and Advocacy.” *Educational Policy* 23, no. 1 (2009): 106–36. https://doi.org/10.1177/0895904808328531.

Scott, Janelle. “Managers of Choice: Race, Gender, and the Philosophies of the New Urban School Leadership.” In *School Choice Policies and Outcomes: Empirical and Philosophical Perspectives*. State University of New York Press, 2008. http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/berkeley-ebooks/detail.action?docID=3407332.

Siddle Walker, Vanessa. *Their Highest Potential: An African American School Community in the Segregated South*. University of North Carolina Press, 1996.

Smart Appliance Services. “When Did Washing Machines Become Common? A Historical Journey.” *Smart Appliance Services*, January 17, 2025. https://smartapplianceservices.com/when-did-washing-machines-become-common/.

Smith, Anthony, and Jacqueline Minor. *Agreement to Resolve United States Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights Compliance Review of the District’s Discipline of*

African American Students Under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Government. Oakland Unified School District, 2012.

Stone, Donald P. *Fallen Prince: Black Education, and the Quest for Afro-American Nationality*. Snow Hill Press, 1990.

Tabor, Nick. "Rosenwald Schools." In *Britannica*. Encyclopedia Britannica, 2025. https://www.britannica.com/topic/Rosenwald-schools.

Taft, Philip. *Workers of a New Century*. US Department of Labor, 2025. https://www.dol.gov/general/aboutdol/history/chapter4.

Taylor, Keeanga-Yamahtta. *Race for Profit: How Banks and the Real Estate Industry Undermined Black Homeownership*. University of North Carolina Press, 2019.

Taylor, Ula. "Women in the Documents: Thoughts on Uncovering the Personal, Political, and Professional." *Journal of Women's History* 20, no. 1 (2008): 187–96. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1353/jowh.2008.0010.

Thanhauser, Sofi. "A Brief History of Mass-Manufactured Clothing." *Lit Hub*, January 27, 2022. https://lithub.com/a-brief-history-of-mass-manufactured-clothing/.

The Free Press. "Advises Young Men: John Rockefeller Jr. Tells of the Road to Success." *The Free Press* (Poplarville, Mississippi), March 6, 1902. https://www.newspapers.com/image/896342426/?match=1&clipping_id=170616255.

The National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition. *US Indian Boarding School History*. The National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition, 2025. https://boardingschoolhealing.org/education/us-indian-boarding-school-history/.

The Rockefeller Foundation. "Our History." *The Rockefeller Foundation*, 2025. https://www.rockefellerfoundation.org/about-us/our-history/.

The White House. *Ending Radical Indoctrination in K-12 Schooling*. US Government, 2025. https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/01/ending-radical-indoctrination-in-k-12-schooling/.

The YMCA. *YMCA History: The 1900s*. The YMCA, 2026. https://www.ymca.org/who-we-are/our-history/1900s.

Tompkins-Stange, Megan E. *Policy Patrons: Philanthropy, Education Reform, and the Politics of Influence*. First Paperback Edition. Harvard Education Press, 2016.

Trouillot, Michel-Rolph. *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*. Beacon Press, 1995.

University of Chicago. "University of Chicago Photographic Archive." Photographs. University of Chicago, 2026. https://photoarchive.lib.uchicago.edu/.

U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. “CPI Inflation Calculator.” U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. Accessed January 29, 2025. https://www.bls.gov/data/inflation_calculator.htm.

U.S. Census Bureau. *U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts: Wilcox County, Alabama*. U.S. Government, 2024. https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/wilcoxcountyalabama/PST045223.

U.S. Department of Education. *An Overview of the U.S. Department of Education: History and Purpose*. U.S. Government, 2026.

U.S. Department of Education. “President Trump’s First Year: Education in America.” Government. *U.S. Department of Education*, March 2026. https://www.ed.gov/about/initiatives/president-trumps-first-year-education-america.

Vaznis, James. “For Boston Charters, a Record Spike in Applicants.” *Boston Globe* (Boston), March 6, 2017. https://www.bostonglobe.com/metro/2017/03/05/boston-charter-schools-see-record-breaking-spike-applications/0QBbfVxXYCQ0xsOXkLaRZJ/story.html.

“Visual Materials from the Booker T. Washington Papers.” Library of Congress, 1916. https://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2004670111/.

Walker, Tim. *How Project 2025 Would Devastate Public Education*. National Education Association, 2024. https://www.nea.org/nea-today/all-news-articles/how-project-2025-would-devastate-public-education.

Walker, Vanessa Siddle. *The Lost Education of Horace Tate: Uncovering the Hidden Heroes Who Fought for Justice in Schools*. The New Press, 2018.

Washington, Booker T. *Atlanta Compromise*. Britannica, 1895. https://www.britannica.com/event/Atlanta-Compromise.

Watkins, William H. *The White Architects of Black Education: Ideology and Power in America, 1865-1954*. Teachers College Press, 2001.

Waxman, Olivia B. “The History of Native American Boarding Schools Is Even More Complicated than a New Report Reveals.” *Time Magazine* (New York), May 17, 2022. https://time.com/6177069/american-indian-boarding-schools-history/.

Wilcox County Board of Education. “Wilcox County Board of Education Minutes.” Wilcox County Department of Education, 1973 1965.

Williams, Eric. *Capitalism & Slavery*. University of North Carolina Press, 1944.

Williams, Juliet. *The Separation Solution?: Single-Sex Education and the New Politics of Gender Equality*. University of California Press, 2016.

Woodson, Carter G. *The Mis-Education of the Negro*. The Associated Publishers, 1933.

Zinshteyn, Mikhail. “Oakland Charters More Likely to Enroll Higher-Performing Students than District Schools.” *EdSource*, June 20, 2017. https://edsource.org/2017/oakland-charters-more-likely-to-enroll-higher-performing-students-than-district-schools/583582.