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Julius Rosenwald: A Review of the Literature on His Motivations and Impact in Redefining Library Service in the South.

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Introduction

On October 30, 1917, philanthropist Julius Rosenwald (1862-1932) incorporated the Julius Rosenwald Fund for “the well-being of mankind” (Embree & Waxman, 1949, p. 28). By 1938, the Rosenwald Fund would be able to show the untapped promise of library service in the rural South. In the 1949 publication *Investment in People*, Edwin Embree, the president of the Fund, more particularly described its work in the field of library services as comprising three parts: “(1) the assembling and distribution of small sets of books to rural schools; (2) efforts to improve the library facilities of negro colleges; [and] (3) co-operation in the establishment of county library systems” (p. 60). These county library systems took their primary embodiment in the form of so-called library demonstrations: “these would consist of central libraries in the county seats, branch library stations in schools, churches, stores, and individual homes, and book trucks touring the counties to keep a constant exchange of books among the branch stations and to serve individual readers” (Embree, 1949, p. 65). This review will argue that the Rosenwald Fund redefined library service in the South not so much by changing those libraries but rather by changing the perception of the public library as a force for the improvement of social and educational conditions in the South (Wilson & Wight, 1935).

This literature review also explores the influences in Julius Rosenwald’s life that inspired his philanthropic efforts. It could be said that Rosenwald’s generosity can be explained by his Jewish background; he was born a member of a group for whom discrimination and persecution had long tempered a sympathy for the oppressed. In his adult life, Rosenwald was imbued with the social justice teachings of famous Reform Rabbi Emil Hirsch (1851-1973), who ministered to him for many years at the Chicago Sinai Congregation (Ascoli, 2006). On the other hand, Rosenwald’s white, middle class background fails to explain how he was decades ahead of the vast majority of Americans in his thinking on racial advancement. In Rosenwald’s case, while his motivations for philanthropic giving can be traced to such sources as faith, family, and friends, his extraordinary vision for Black Americans seems almost inexplicable for a man of his time.

Overview

This literature review focuses on the educational component of the Fund’s efforts, and, in particular, its impact on library services, as well as the motivating factors which led Rosenwald to establish the Fund in the first place. Starting with an examination of the major biographical works on Rosenwald, this review explores the main forces in Rosenwald’s life leading to his philanthropy, as well as the reasons behind his African-American focus; this research also investigates the influence of anti-semitism on his thinking, and then takes a brief look at a somewhat novel source of motivation: the role that the legacy of Abraham Lincoln played in Rosenwald’s life. This paper then considers the ways in which the Rosenwald Fund redefined library service in the South, particularly focusing on its impact on schools and the public library movement. Finally, some criticism of the Rosenwald Fund’s work will be presented after reviewing various attempts in the literature to estimate the impact of the Fund’s efforts.

Part I: Influences on Rosenwald’s Philanthropy Two Biographies

M. R. Werner, Rosenwald’s first biographer, offered multiple explanations for Rosenwald’s philanthropy including: (1) the moral orientation of Rosenwald’s childhood home environment where a traditional sense of responsibility to the community was inculcated in him, (2) the influence of the generous nature of Rosenwald’s wife, Augusta or “Gussie” (1868-1929), and his mother, also named Augusta (1833-1921), (3) the social teaching of Reform Jewish Rabbi Emil Hirsch, (4) the influence of the many notable men and women Rosenwald encountered during his life such as Judge Julian Mack (1866-1943) and Jane Addams (1860-1925), (5) what might be described as Rosenwald’s almost impulsive, charitable nature, and (6) the numerous philanthropic examples provided to him by his coreligionists, such as Baron Maurice de Hirsch, Jacob H. Schiff, and Sir Moses Montefiore (Werner, 1939). Werner, a professional writer, who had the benefit of using many original source materials now lost, provided a rich, flattering depiction of Rosenwald’s life; however, Peter Ascoli, Rosenwald’s most recent biographer and his grandson, faults Werner’s book for inadequate scholarship, “hardly ... the last word on its subject” (2006, p. x).

Alternatively, Ascoli's biography has been criticized for lack of brevity, but is praised as a scholarly contribution to the literature on the subject (Felsenthal, 2006).

Peter Ascoli reports that although Rosenwald credited his wife and mother for his devotion to charity, Rabbi Emil Hirsch was the principal force encouraging him in this direction (2006). Both Werner (1939) and Ascoli (2006), emphasize the importance of Emil Hirsch's teachings on social justice. Hirsch believed that Judaism imposed a strict code of moral obligation to others, in that the rights of society took precedence over the rights of the individual (Ascoli, 2006). However, Ascoli (2006) claims that Hirsch was not alone in influencing Rosenwald's philanthropy; nearly as significant was Judge Julian Mack and Minnie Low (1867 – 1922). Mack was a federal judge and a social reformer, as well as a member of Hirsch's Chicago Sinai Congregation (Barnard, 1974). Little remembered today, Low was a celebrated social worker in her time, who was dubbed "the Jane Addams of the Jews" and was elected president of the National Conference of Jewish Charities in 1914 (Marcus, 1981, p. 127). Werner nicely sums up the impact of Rosenwald's social network on his philanthropic activity: "His ideas were stimulated by his wife and by Rabbi Hirsch; his social purposes were stimulated by Jane Addams and her associates; Judge Mack acted as a clearing house for the multitudinous causes and schemes which soon began to pour into his office at Sears, Roebuck and [Company]" (Werner, 1939, p. 94).

Emil Hirsch and Reform Judaism

In addition to Werner (1939) and Ascoli (2006), other authors point to the impact of Reform Judaism and Rabbi Hirsch, in particular, on Rosenwald's philanthropic efforts (Embree & Waxman, 1949; Sosland, 1995; Bachmann, 1976). Although the motivating forces behind Rosenwald's philanthropy are numerous, the primary source of inspiration appears to have been his Jewishness (Diner, 1977). Rosenwald felt "consecrated to the Jewish faith" (Ascoli, 2006, p. 4). Central to Hirsch's teachings on social justice was the idea that wealth entails duty, from which also flows rights, and that charity is not simply a concession of the well-to-do but a right to which the poor are justly entitled (Ascoli, 2006, p. 54).

The place Reform Judaism played in directing Rosenwald's thinking is incompletely analyzed in the literature on his life, however Beilke posits that "the benevolence of Julius Rosenwald and other Jews during the Progressive Era grew out of Judaism and its emphasis on charity" (2002, p. 32). A religious sensibility even seems to have played a role in the way Rosenwald set up the Rosenwald Fund to extinguish within a generation of his demise; believing perpetual endowments created selfish institutions which are more interested in their own survival than the charitable purposes of their founders, "Rosenwald stated that a person's charity 'should be like manna of the Bible, which melted at the close of each day'" (Grimm, 2002, p. 279).

Based on the literature, Rosenwald's philanthropy is best understood in the context of his religious community of

origin. As Embree and Waxman (1948) point out, there is nothing remarkable about the existence of a Jewish philanthropist. However, Rosenwald's compulsion to improve the world appears to be strongly tied to Jewish ethical tradition (Beilke, 2002). Citing Katz-Fishman and Scott, Beilke notes that Talmudic tradition supports the notion of using education to affect social change (2002, p. 33). Ascoli (2006) affirms this claim, emphasizing the importance of the Hebrew concept of *tsadakah* or justice and charity as the basis for the moral and ethical background of Julius Rosenwald. Werner (1937) also cites the Talmud as conditioning the Jewish people towards an almost reactive charitable orientation, which encouraged Rosenwald's philanthropy.

Baumgarten (2004) presents the Hebrew idea of *Tikkun Olam* (repair of the world) as part of the rich, ethical background of Rosenwald's thinking, which, according to Rosenwald, was instilled in him through the teaching of Hirsch. According to Beilke (2002), Rosenwald's inner circle was also comprised mainly of Reform Jews, who shared the imperatives of the Progressive Era to build a better society by uplifting the disenfranchised and disadvantaged. Jane Addams exerted a powerful liberalizing influence on Rosenwald (Werner, 1939). Through Addams, Rosenwald became close to non-Jews such as social reformers Dr. Graham Taylor and Mary McDowell and, ultimately, to members of the African-American community (Werner, 1939).

African American Focus

Writing years after the Rosenwald Fund had dissolved, Hasia Diner observed that there was something "peculiarly Jewish" in Julius Rosenwald's Black philanthropy, which inspired many of his coreligionists in the same direction (1977, p. 189). Rosenwald's concerns should be seen within the context of the history of Jewish suffering, which has been marked by oppression since ancient times (Van Der Horst, 2005); like Blacks, the Jewish people have endured "a history which is complete with unspeakable outrages ... they have drunk the bitter dregs of the cup of persecution" (Diner, 1977, p. 229). Even at the beginning of the twentieth century, "a new wave of European Jews who fled the pogroms of Eastern Europe" to America, found themselves facing anti-semitism in their newly adopted land (Salzman and West, 1997, p. 240). Ascoli (2006) notes that Rosenwald's interest in helping the African-American community can be traced to various factors including the experience of Jewish suffering from racial prejudice, which promoted his sense of sympathy or kinship with African-Americans, and, in particular, his reading of William H. Baldwin, Jr.'s biography, *An American Citizen: The Life of William H. Baldwin Jr.*, and Booker T. Washington's *Up from Slavery*. In contrast, in a 1937 review of Embree's *Julius Rosenwald Fund. Review of Two Decades 1917-1936* for the "Journal of Negro Education," D.O.W. Holmes described the transformative impression that the work of the YMCA made on Rosenwald, positing that the experience gave him the idea for the Rosenwald Fund (1936). Holmes further attributed the southern library focus of the fund to the realization by

its trustees of the “dearth of library facilities for Negroes in the South, where they were frequently excluded from the college and public libraries.” (1936, p. 207).

In an article from a 1948 edition of “Phylon,” a scholarly journal founded by W.E.B. Dubois, Embree and Waxman trace the African-American orientation of Rosenwald’s philanthropy to the following sources: (1) to his early discussions of the struggles of Black Americans with his friend, Professor Paul Sachs, (2) his reading of Baldwin’s biography and Washington’s Up from Slavery, (3) his meeting with Booker T. Washington, and (4) his frequent visits to the South. A review of the literature found that the sources generally agree that Rosenwald’s readings of Baldwin’s biography and Washington’s Up from Slavery in the summer of 1910 were the primary inspirations for his focus on African-Americans (Ascoli, 2006; Hoffschwelle, 2006; Sosland 1995; Beilke 1994).

Rosenwald’s sympathy with the plight of the African-American is remarkable in light of some of his own, personal comments at the time that Jews suffered even more than American Blacks (Ascoli, 2006). Rosenwald’s charity was expansive, and included poor whites as well as Blacks, and members of various creeds (Werner, 1939). However, in the Julius Rosenwald Fund: Review for the Two-Year Period 1931-1933, the Fund reported that it had focused its activity “in the general field of racial adjustments,” specifically to improving the condition of the Black American (p. 15). In the October, 1934, edition of the “Journal of Negro Education,” J. Scott McCormick wrote that Rosenwald believed that the progress of the black and white races was interdependent: “He believed that the time had gone when two races could live peacefully and prosperously together with one of them in poverty and without opportunity to elevate its standards of living” (p. 605). Thus, his philosophy on racial matters was unusually advanced for a man of his time, and would not become commonplace for generations. As noted by Ascoli (2006), the extent of Rosenwald’s vision is only truly appreciated when he is compared to some of the great social reformers of his day, such as Taylor and Addams, whose thinking, although also advanced for the time, revealed them to be more creatures of their age in so far as racial matters were concerned. Nonetheless, Beilke (2002) notes that Progressive Era principles promulgated by activists such as Addams specifically channeled Rosenwald towards assisting the Black community through his friendship with Booker T. Washington (1856 – 1915).

Anti-Semitism

The phenomenon of anti-semitism is one of the most complex and difficult forces to comprehend in determining its influence on motivating Rosenwald’s philanthropy, specifically with respect to his substantial efforts on behalf of African-Americans. Rosenwald’s motivations in this regard, are better understood in the context of his social, religious, and political worlds. In Inside American Philanthropy, Waldemar Nielson favorably compares Julius Rosenwald with the other two major philanthropists of his age, namely Andrew Carnegie and John D. Rockefeller,

noting that, of the three, Rosenwald was the most devoted to American democracy and the struggle against religious and racial intolerance (Ascoli 2006). Rosenwald’s life coincided with the growth of anti-semitism in the United States following the Civil War (Diner, 1977) but does not seem to have been a major factor in his youth (Ascoli, 2006).

During Rosenwald’s adulthood, both English and Yiddish Jewish newspapers were filled with editorials and reports of violence, lynchings and other outrages committed against Blacks by racist, white southerners (Diner, 1977). Persecution extended to other communities in the South, including Catholics, liberals, and, notably, Jews. Rosenwald was intensely conscious of his Jewishness, and deeply concerned with acts perpetrated against Jews such as the lynching of Leo Frank in Georgia in 1915, whose case he closely followed (Diner, 1977). Rosenwald was also very concerned that the Jewish people were frequently judged by the conduct of a few individuals and was not particularly enthusiastic about Jews participating in politics (Diner, 1977).

Ironically, it was Eugene Talmadge, Governor of the State of Georgia, who declared that the Rosenwald Fund was “a menace to the Southern way of life” (Evans & Morris, 2005, p. 271). Even Henry Ford’s “Dearborn Independent,” targeted Rosenwald for his philanthropic activities, resulting in a very rare personal defense from Rosenwald himself (Baldwin, 2002). Many Jewish persons saw charity towards African-Americans as a way of helping the entire community, including the Jewish people, in part, by confounding notions of Jewish “clannishness” (Diner, 2002, p. 190). Although some members of the Jewish community saw charity to African-Americans as advancing Jewish status, Diner (1977) reports that it was also a common feeling that the concern for African-Americans was unique when compared to any other ethnic or religious group, and a direct product of the Jewish historic and cultural experience. Diner notes that “when one examines Julius Rosenwald’s ideas about the position of Jews in America and the response of prominent Jews to Rosenwald’s black philanthropy, one can get some appreciation of the peculiarly Jewish motives in these activities” (Diner, 1977, p. 189).

Lincoln

An interesting but poorly developed theory behind Rosenwald’s philanthropy is the impact of the legacy of Abraham Lincoln, whom he considered “America’s greatest man” (Ascoli, 2006, p. 260); Beilke says that Rosenwald was imbued with “the spirit of the great emancipator” from childhood (2002, p. 28). Ascoli (2006) relates that Rosenwald frequently read to his children about Lincoln and on one occasion paraphrased the Gettysburg address in a speech. And Werner (1946) mentions that Rosenwald kept and treasured a quote from Lincoln he had seen framed on a visit to President Taft. As Beilke relates, “Privately, Rosenwald used to tell his family that his interest in [B]lack originated with his childhood in Illinois, where he was deeply affected by the spirit of ... Lincoln” (2002, p. 28). Neither of Rosenwald’s major biographers,

P. M. Ascoli (2006) or M. R. Werner (1946), develop this theme, though both mention that Rosenwald's childhood home was a block from Lincoln's home in Springfield, where Lincoln is buried. In exploring the roots of Rosenwald's philanthropy towards Blacks, Diner (1977) also briefly mentions Rosenwald's Springfield, Illinois, origins and admiration of Lincoln. Rosenwald's deep admiration and even emulation of Lincoln could very well have been a subtle influence motivating and guiding his philanthropy. It may be no coincidence, as Diner reports, that articles about Rosenwald from this time period, which Rosenwald would have seen, frequently referred to him as the best "friend the negro has had since Abraham Lincoln" (Diner, 1977, p. 190).

Part II: The Rosenwald Fund: Redefining Library Services in the South

Benjamin Edward Powell recounted that, in 1929 and 1930, the officers of the Rosenwald Fund began the county library demonstration in order to stimulate interest in library service to rural and urban populations in the South (1936). It should be mentioned that the library service project of the Rosenwald Fund was part of the much larger efforts of Rosenwald to improve education in the South during the difficult years from 1917 to 1932, when his efforts "lifted successive [B]lack generations out of a morass of illiteracy and into the mainstream of the country's economy" (Bachmann, 1976, p. 101). However, in the Julius Rosenwald Fund: A Review to June, 1929, Edwin Embree emphasized that the Fund supported the development of county library services for all people, "urban and rural, colored and white" (p. 31); Embree further stated that the work of the Fund in libraries was a "natural" extension of its work in schools, and that its intention was not to administer libraries but to help local authorities for a short period of time before turning the work over to the counties. Eleven demonstration libraries were selected overall from the following counties: Walker, Alabama; Webster Parish, Louisiana; Coahoma, Mississippi; Davidson, North Carolina; Mecklenburg, North Carolina; Charleston, South Carolina; Richland, South Carolina; Hamilton, Tennessee; Knox, Tennessee; Jefferson, Texas (Wilson & Wight, 1935).

In the premier study of the Rosenwald Fund's county demonstration project, County Library Service in the South, the authors, Louis Round Wilson and Edward Wight (1935), note that the Rosenwald Fund County Library Demonstration marked the recognition "that the public library is ... an important potential agency for the improvement of general educational and social conditions" (p. 204). Although Patterson Toby Graham found that Wilson and Wight were critical of the administration and planning of the library demonstrations, he agreed that the authors conceived the efforts of the Rosenwald Fund as indicative of the belief that the Southern library could be a positive force for change (2002, p. 165). Wilson and Wight further opined that "while it is very difficult to measure such an intangible thing as influence, the demonstration has made vivid and concrete the idea of county-wide service sustained at a high level of efficiency, and has contributed

greatly to the general thinking in the South about libraries" (Wilson, 1935, p. 220). Wilson and Wight's (1936) contribution represents the first comprehensive work on the libraries of the South, and so its observations are particularly significant in this regard.

In County Library Service in the South, Wilson and Wight include an exhaustive list of tables providing statistical information such as the tenure and numbers of officers on the demonstration library boards, various library and circulation statistics, and even organizational charts (1935). Overall, significant progress was reported in stimulating reading and the circulation of books among the African-American population (Porter, 1937). As an indirect result of the Fund's work, the extreme misdistribution of books between Blacks and whites, was documented, as particularly shown by the tables produced by Wilson and Wight (Porter, 1937). It should be noted that Wilson and Wight's study occurred during the height of the depression, which may be partly responsible for their finding that most counties in the South were not financially able to support libraries, but, based on their analysis, "the conclusion seems inescapable... that increasing state participation [was] necessary for the development of adequate library service to the majority of the population in the South" (1935, p. 205).

Libraries and Schools

In a similar vein, as early as 1934, when the library demonstrations were still ongoing, Dean Margaret Rufsvold, founder of the Graduate Library School at Indiana University, observed that the demonstrations showed that the people of the South were willing to support public libraries and that a well-organized library service could contribute much to the success of the schools. Tommie Dora Barker, the American Libraries Association Regional Field Agent for the South from 1930 to 1935, similarly found that the Rosenwald Fund was the "greatest stimulant" to the provisioning of Black elementary and secondary schools (Josey & Schockley, 1977, p. 62).

Louise Robbins noted that though the impact on literacy was difficult to estimate, the Rosenwald Fund remapped the availability of reading materials for African-American children, provided books with positive Black images, and stimulated the development of library collections (2005). The Rosenwald Fund also promoted the development of school libraries by using them as branch stations, nurturing the then relatively new movement to treat schools as centers of reading (Gleason, 1941). In fact, in many cases, the only books available to Black children were those supplied through the Rosenwald Fund (Embree & Waxman, 1938).

Public Library Movement in the South

Embree and Waxman (1948) point to the Rosenwald Demonstration Libraries as important catalysts of the free public library movement in the South, whose effect continued even after the dissolution of the fund. Donald G. Davis, Jr. is reported to have claimed that the South

probably would have never experienced the public library movement if it were not for the philanthropic efforts of men such as Julius Rosenwald, Enoch Pratt, and Andrew Carnegie (Graham, 2002). Lucy B. Campbell similarly argued that the development of the field of Black professional librarianship arose through the infusion of funds through grants and substantial endowments from several philanthropic sources, including the Julius Rosenwald Fund (Josey & Schockley, 1977). Important precedents set by the Rosenwald Fund were the integration of Black library services into the functions of the county library and the coordination of school and public libraries (Barker, 1936). In terms of what was then seen as the future of public libraries, Barker (1936) reported that the Rosenwald library experiment found that the development of public libraries depended on the consolidation of smaller geographic and population areas into larger units, joint financial support by local, state, and even the federal government, as well as cooperation between libraries.

Estimating the Influence of the Rosenwald Fund

Various researchers have attempted to describe the impact of the Rosenwald Fund, from vague generalizations to more quantitative evaluations. For example, according to Patterson Toby Graham, before the intervention of the Rosenwald Fund, there was "almost no rural service for African-Americans in the South" (Graham, 1977, p. 28). However, it should be noted that there was very limited library service for whites as well, the rural South still bearing many of the characteristics of the American frontier and even colonial period (Wilson & Wight, 1935). Tommie Dora Barker remarked that because of the Rosenwald Fund, library service was extended to 140,459 Black Americans for the first time and significantly increased the facilities for the remaining 111,403 who were previously receiving library service, establishing a precedent which influenced the entire region of the South (Gleason, 1941). Fortunately, the South was not devoid of other efforts, though certainly modest in number, to connect Black Americans with books, as evidenced by the Faith Cabin Library Movement (Lee, 1991). This initiative began in Saluda County, South Carolina, in the 1930's by Willie Lee Buffington (1908-1988), a white mill worker, who was inspired by a Black teacher Euriah Simpkins (1871-1944), to collect books for the local school. As the movement grew, numerous libraries were founded in Georgia and South Carolina.

In reviewing Wilson and Wight's County Library Service in the South, Dorothy B. Porter noted that although the Rosenwald Report covering the years 1933-35 showed that the circulation of books among whites was much higher than Blacks, book usage by African-Americans had grown substantially beyond all known previous experiences in the South (1937). And Embree and Waxman claimed a 200% increase in readership among African-Americans as a direct result of the public library demonstrations (1948).

Graham asserted that the Julius Rosenwald Fund was the most significant force behind the "extension of black library service" (2002, p. 164). And Patrice Sullivan (1996) found that, in a time when no county was supporting

biracial service models in the South, the Rosenwald Fund generously offered assistance in this regard. In 1935, when the library demonstrations were drawing to an end, in the Julius Rosenwald Fund: Review for the Two-Year Period, 1933-1935, Edwin Embree reported that "the total circulation of books in these demonstrations counties last year was 6,580,000, an average of 5.2 per capita" (p.35). In short, the Rosenwald Fund made significant strides in library services to Blacks in the South, both in a concrete way, as well as in terms of the conception of what library service could accomplish, particularly when compared to what had come before. However, as Thomas W. Hanchett noted, at least for a while, white racism ultimately impeded the struggle to further education, even with the best efforts of Black volunteerism and the Rosenwald grants (O'Donnell, 2000).

Despite various estimates of the impact of the Rosenwald Fund during and soon after the library demonstrations, a significant gap exists in the research in terms of quantifying or even assessing the Rosenwald Fund's long term impact. However, unlike similar library efforts by the WPA, the Rosenwald Fund demonstrated real success in promoting library services for Blacks because one of the requirements of the Fund was that African-Americans would be guaranteed service before monetary aid was received (Robbins, 2005). Southern counties that would not have provided library services to African-Americans were led to do so because of the strict requirements of equal provisioning to both the white and Black races which were part of the criteria for sponsorship under the Rosenwald Fund (Robbins, 2005).

Criticism

With respect to libraries, even among their most ardent supporters, there was criticism of the work of the Rosenwald Fund; for example, Tommie Dora Barker argued that none of the county demonstrations provided an adequate distribution of books to Black Americans (O'Donnell, 2000). It could be said that from its start that the Rosenwald Fund's "model" had certain flaws because its biracial model necessarily perpetuated segregation. It is arguable then that the Rosenwald "experiment" was a lost opportunity to make strides in the integration of the races, but Rosenwald was pragmatic, recognizing the limits of what he could do for Blacks at the time (Ascoli, 2006). Working within the prevailing racial order of the South, the Fund established a successful model of biracial library services; "The Rosenwald agents did not advocate integration, but they did demonstrate that leadership in the area of race relations could result in a much more fair arrangement within the parameters of segregation" (Graham, 2002, p. 47). It should also be remembered that Rosenwald was following the approach of Booker T. Washington, who believed that progress for Blacks was best achieved through accommodation with the white establishment, a philosophy in conflict with the more "militant" NAACP and W.E.B. DuBois, which would later predominate (Ascoli, 2006, P. 95).

Although the county library demonstrations lived up to their names by “demonstrating” the value of library service as a potential agent for social change, it would take decades of some of the most turbulent times in American life before that vision could fully become a reality. A possible avenue for future research would be exploring the extent to which the efforts of the Rosenwald Fund remained a part of the African-American library experience and whether Rosenwald’s personal efforts were remembered in the Black community, especially by individuals later associated with the civil rights era. An interesting book in this regard is A. Q. Jarrette’s (1975) Julius Rosenwald, Son of a Jewish Immigrant, a Builder of Sears, Roebuck and Company, Benefactor of Mankind, which contains copies of original letters of thanks to Rosenwald, personal reminiscences of African-Americans, and transcripts of speeches by him.

Conclusion

Motivated by a far-reaching vision to improve mankind, Julius Rosenwald established the Rosewald Fund in 1917. Various explanations for Rosenwald’s philanthropy have been posited, with the social teachings of Rabbi Emil Hirsch being most credited with stimulating his ethical response to help others; likewise, Rosenwald’s reading of William H. Baldwin, Jr.’s biography and Washington’s Up from Slavery are particularly credited with inspiring his charity towards African-Americans. On one level, Rosenwald’s Jewish faith, supportive family, and forward thinking friends provide a ready explanation for his philanthropic mindset. However, Rosenwald’s lack of a college education (he did not finish high school) and generally uneventful, conventional, white middle class background do not seem predictive of a man who, born in the nineteenth century, would give a large portion of his fortune to a people as far away from him in social, religious, and ethnic terms as can be imagined (Ascoli, 2006). It should be noted that the Jewish community was highly laudatory of Rosenwald’s charitable activity, and that numerous contemporary Jews also followed Rosenwald’s example by donating substantial amounts of money to African-American causes, “far out of proportion to the number of Jews in the population” (Diner, 1977, p. 188).

Perhaps the best explanation for Rosenwald’s charity comes from the words spoken by Rabbi Louis Mann at his

funeral: “his passionate interest in helping the [B]lack man was a practical application of Hillel’s golden rule and but an ethical paraphrasing of ‘remember the stranger for ye, too, were strangers’” (Diner, 1977, p. 191). Marc Lee Raphael (2006) suggested that Jewish philanthropy has evolved into the major form of the expression of Jewishness in the modern world. In a real sense, Rosenwald’s Jewishness appeared to be the central motivating factor in his philanthropic support of schools and libraries, which grew out of the concept of social change through education, emanating from the Talmud. In her thesis on Rosenwald, Karen E. Lindermuth (2002) stated that Rosenwald took to heart the tenet of Reform Judaism that it is the duty of Jews to solve the evils of society. At least for Rosenwald, charity was the intrinsic expression of being Jewish and “Rosenwald’s devotion to the cause of uplifting the Negro was, in the light of ...emotional motivation, one of the most intensely Jewish things that Rosenwald ever did” (Diner, 1977, p. 191).

Time has blotted out much of our collective memory of Julius Rosenwald’s monumental achievements in improving American life, but, in a strange way, that might have pleased the unpretentious Rosenwald, whose popular memory, like “manna in the desert” modestly disappeared at the end of the proverbial day. In terms of library services, Rosenwald’s greatest achievement will not be found in buildings or books or Sears Roebuck, but rather in the minds of the generations of people who came after him who conceive public institutions such as the library as powerful change agents which can be applied to the problems faced by society. The Rosenwald Fund helped to redefine library service in the South by showing that library services to African-Americans could be significantly improved through funding by outside agents and resources. When one considers the hostile environment in which African-Americans were forced to live, in which a misunderstood comment or a careless glance could result in a person being lynched, evidence that this downtrodden group of people could be transformed by the contents of books threatened the racist South to its very core and clearly demonstrated the responsibility of the American nation to the African-American community.

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