

Booker T. Washington & The Rosenwald Schools

A ray of hope during the Jim Crow era in the South

1912 - 1932

Visionary Design

Working Together

Community Investment

Built nearly 5,000 Schools



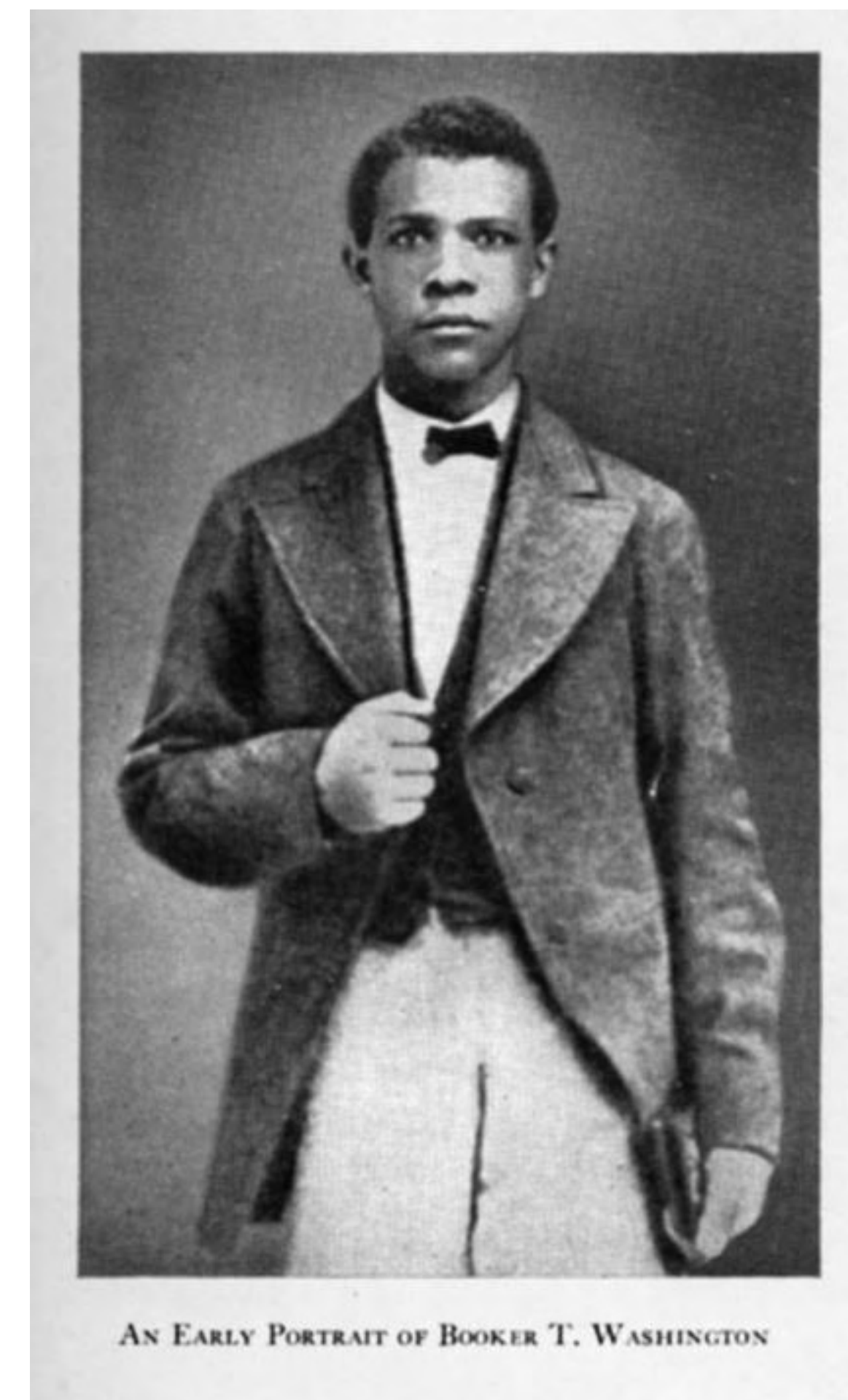
Booker T. Washington

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, Booker Taliaferro Washington (1856-1915) was likely the most famous Black public **intellectual** in America.

Born into slavery in Virginia, Washington grew up experiencing destitution and racial discrimination. Despite these obstacles, his perseverance eventually led to an education at what is now known as Hampton University.

His bestselling **autobiography** *Up From Slavery* describes his journey from uneducated slave to teacher and education reformer.

Have you heard of Booker T. Washington?
What do you know about him?



Vision of Booker T. Washington

Washington believed that the best way to improve the lives of Black Americans was through economic advancement.

While he supported changing the laws to secure equal rights for Black Americans, he also recommended **vocational** training, starting businesses, patience, and thrift as the best paths to progress.



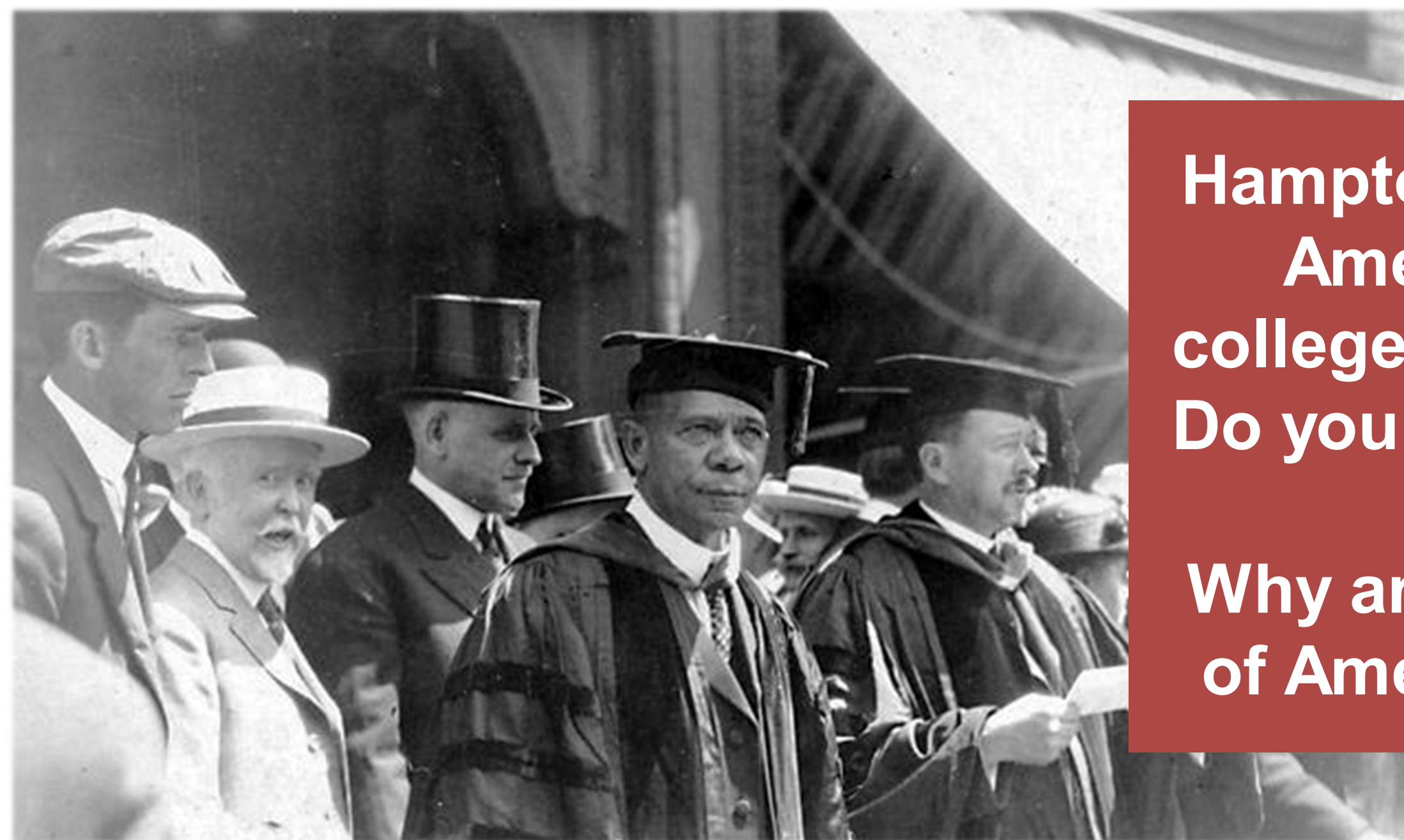
Why was education so important to improve the lives of Black Americans?

Why were new laws needed?

Vision of Booker T. Washington

As an educator, he had an important part in transforming Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute into Tuskegee University — perhaps the most famous, well-funded, and influential Black research facility of its era.

Washington focused on making sure Black Americans had the opportunity to get a good education.



Hampton and Tuskegee are two of America's historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs). Do you know of any other HBCUs?

Why are HBCUs an important part of American history and culture?

Vision of Booker T. Washington

In the segregated South of the early 1900s, Black children often received their education in churches and lodge halls because local White governments refused to spend money on schools for Blacks.

Having seen the differences in education and opportunity for blacks, Washington dreamed of a school-building project for Black communities that could help begin to lift them out of poverty.

Washington dreamed of building high-quality schoolhouses that the surrounding Black communities would support not only with their money, but with their time and energy.



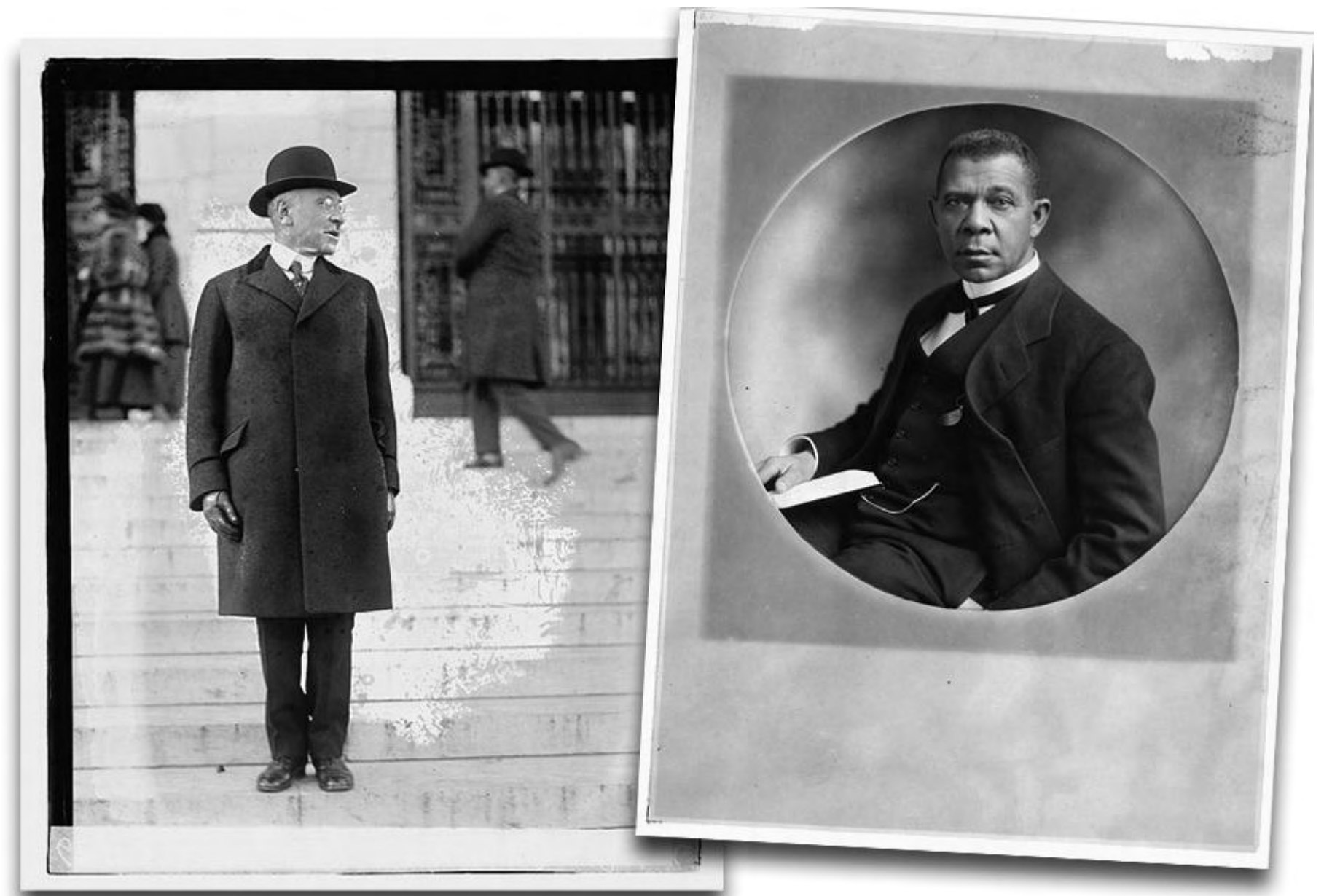
Working Together

In 1912, Washington presented his ideas to Julius Rosenwald, a wealthy American **philanthropist** who was already a member of Tuskegee's board of trustees and well-known for working on problems related to racial inequality.

Washington provided the vision for both what the schools would look like and what they would teach. With Rosenwald's financial contributions, Washington's hopeful dream soon became a reality.

A philanthropist is a person who donates money, property, or work to try to improve society.

What kinds of projects would you donate to if you were wealthy?



Thousands of Schools

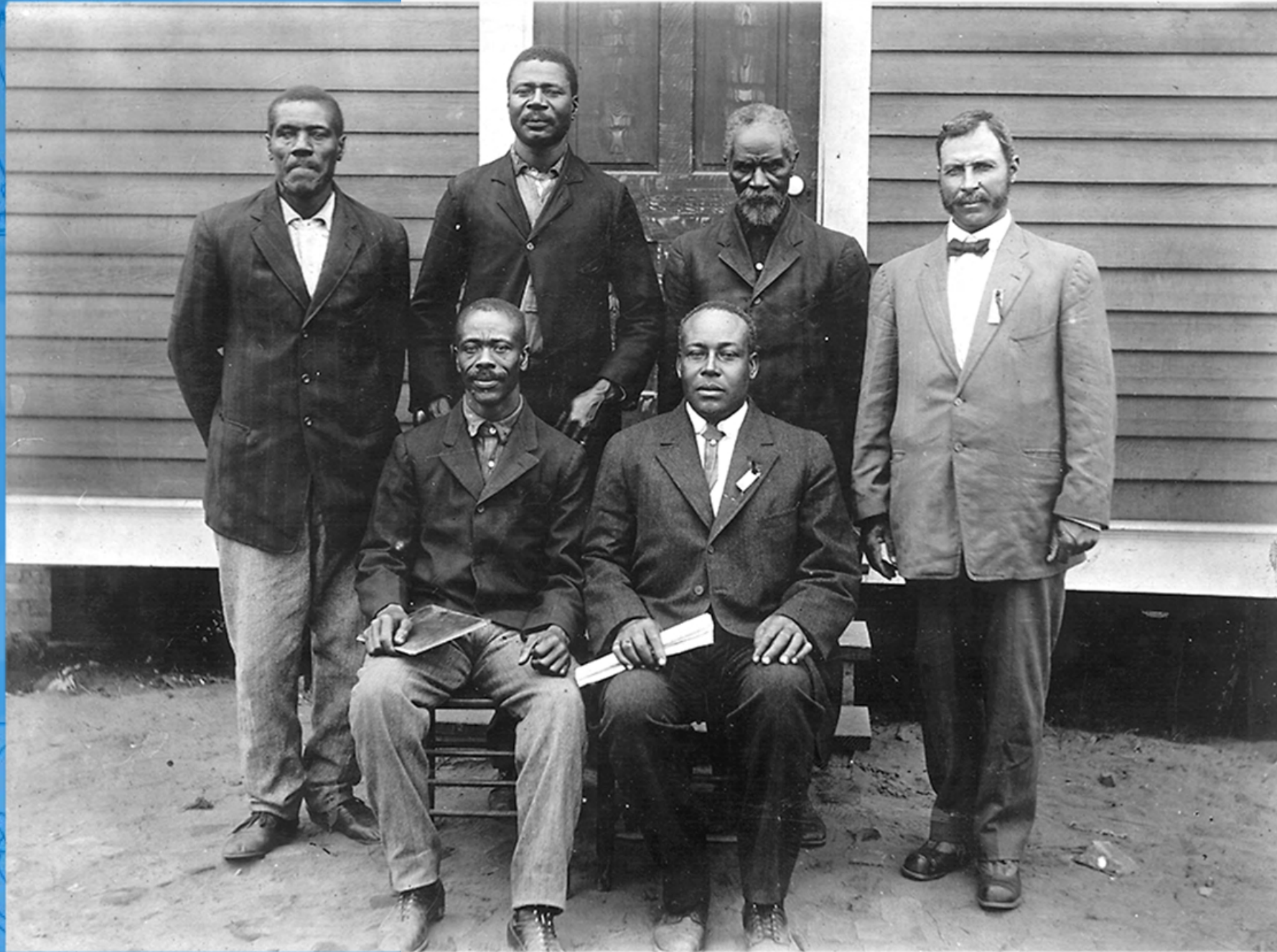
Rosenwald was the son of German Jewish **immigrants** who made his fortune as one of the owners of Sears, Roebuck, and Company. He founded the Rosenwald Fund as a effort to address the problems facing Black Americans in the age of **segregation**.

In total, Rosenwald donated \$4.3 million (\$75 million today) to build schools in 15 states. The schools became social centers and sources of pride for the communities they served.



The almost 5,000 schools built in the rural American South between 1912 and 1932 became known as “Rosenwald schools.”

Self-Empowerment



Washington and Rosenwald were both firm believers that true lasting progress happens when communities work together and have the power to help themselves. They wanted each community to be a **stakeholder** in the school project.

Rosenwald gave donations to equal the amount of contributions from community members. His funds helped start the building projects, but each community would eventually take over the schools themselves.

Have you ever been part of a community service project?

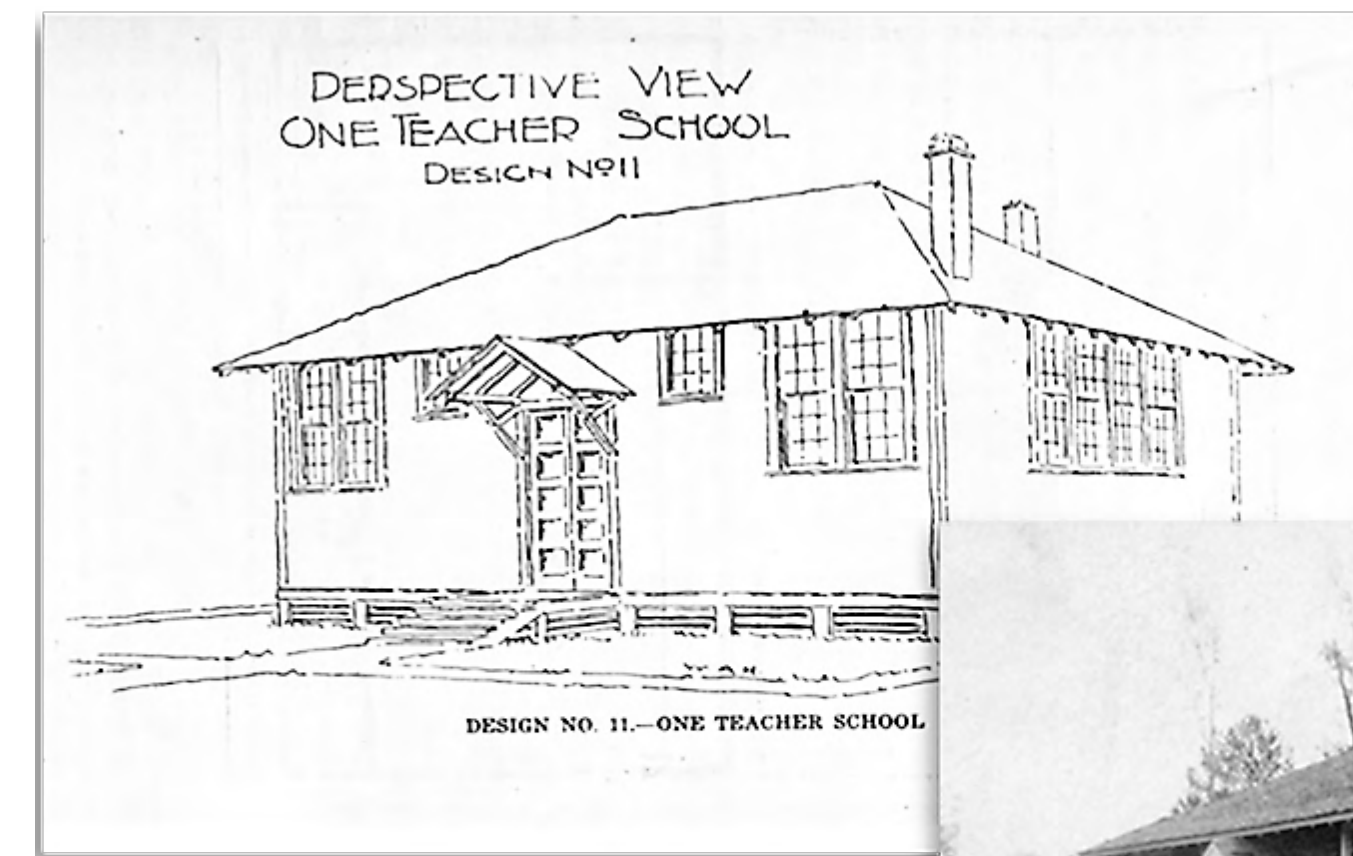
How do you feel when you help make something good happen in your family or neighborhood?

Plans for Schools

Washington insisted that the schools be designed by Black architects. Robert Robinson Taylor, a Tuskegee faculty member, designed the schools. Taylor was the first Black graduate of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and the first licensed Black architect in America when he graduated in 1892.

The schools were typically built and partially funded by the families and communities of the students, even though they didn't have much money.

The goal was for the whole community to take ownership of and have pride in the schools.



*Rosenwald School in
Macon, Alabama, c. 1915*

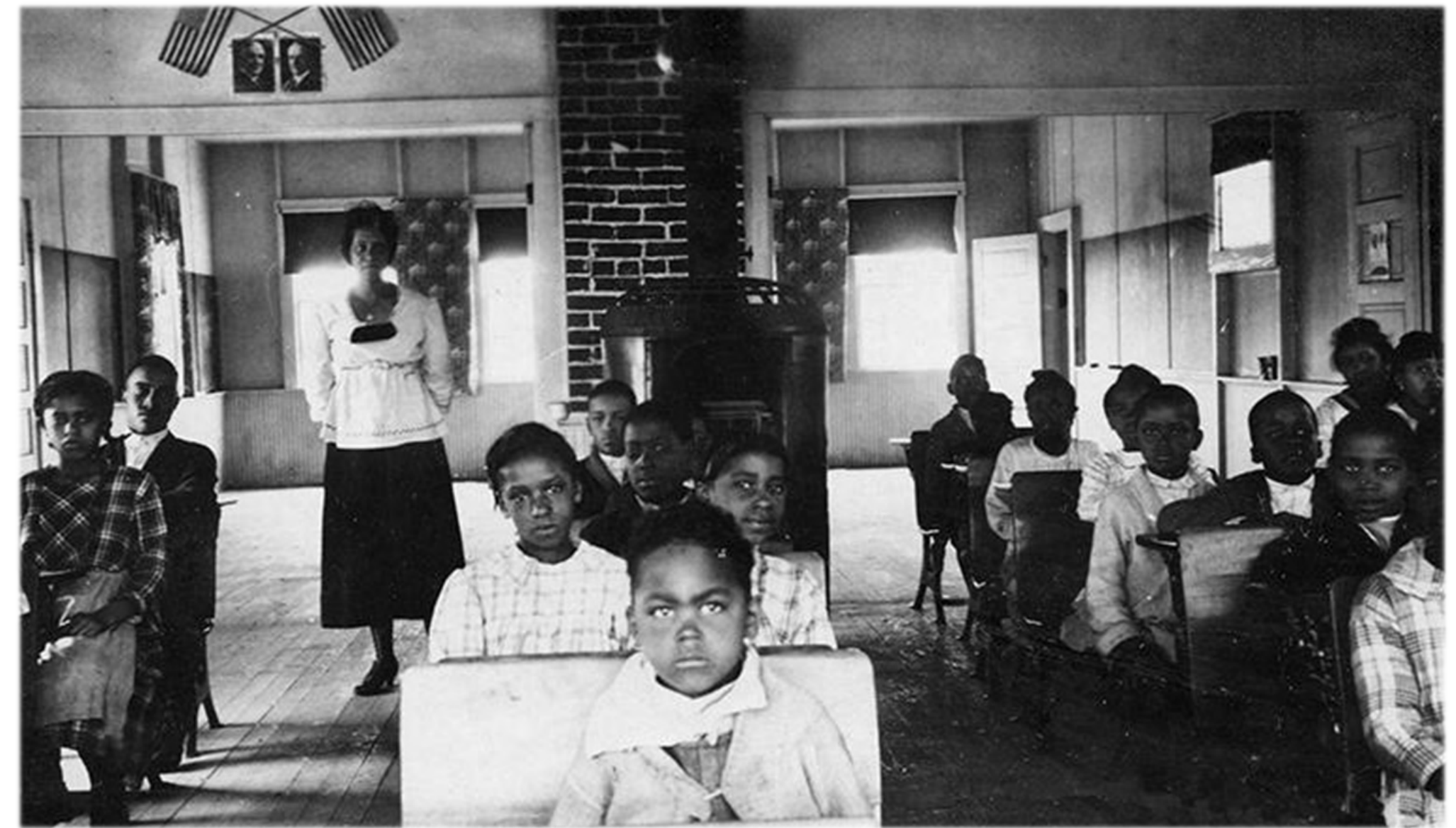


A Hopeful Future

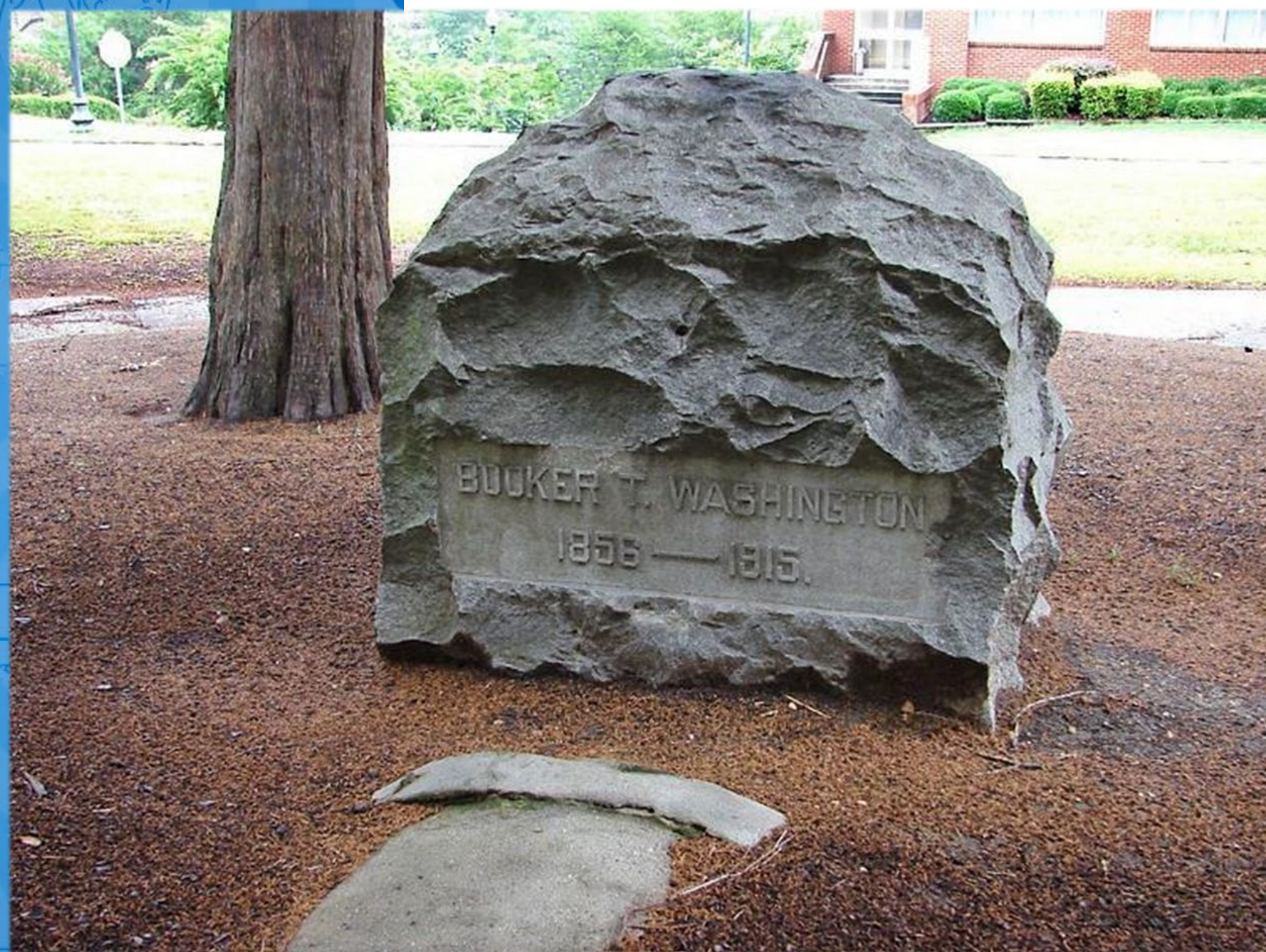
The Rosenwald schools were a product of its hopeful vision of the future.

According to historian Stephanie Deutsch, the schoolhouses “*were new and modern, with big tall windows, and lots of light streaming in. They felt special [to the students], because they were new and they were theirs.*”

The Rosenwald schools offered two generations of Black Americans a quality education in pleasant, new schoolhouses.



Booker T. Washington's Death



Sadly, Washington did not live to see his schoolhouse project completed.

In the fall of 1915, after a short time of illness, he died at the age of 59. He was buried in the Tuskegee University Campus Cemetery.

But Rosenwald and others from Tuskegee continued to design and build schoolhouses throughout the South.

After Desegregation

In 1954, the Supreme Court ruled unanimously in the landmark civil rights case, ***Brown v. Board of Education***, that separating schools by race and the idea of “separate but equal” was **unconstitutional**.

While this was a legal victory for racial justice and equality, it was also the beginning of the end for the thousands of Rosenwald schools throughout the American South.

Despite student protests over their closing and demolition, most of the schools were gone by the 1970s.



Preservation & Legacy

In the early 21st century, people began to celebrate the important role the Rosenwald schools played in American history.

Today, a few remaining school buildings are the subject of **preservation** efforts, and are now education centers and museums that keep the Rosenwald school spirit alive.



Restored Rosenwald School in Hiram, Georgia - circa 1930

Alumni of Rosenwald Schools

Graduates of Rosenwald schools include novelist and poet Maya Angelou and Congressman John Lewis, both of whom played key roles in the civil rights movement, along with tens of thousands of others whose lives were transformed for the better because of the schools.



Maya Angelou



Representative John Lewis

Vocabulary

intellectual
autobiography
vocational
segregation
philanthropist
immigrant
stakeholder
architect
desegregation
literacy
unconstitutional
preservation



Julius Rosenwald and Booker T. Washington, c. 1912



WOODSON
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BLACK *History* *and* EXCELLENCE