



**National Trust for
Historic Preservation**

Save the past. Enrich the future.

October 28, 2019

Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, Public Lands
Chairman Deb Haaland
1329 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, Public Lands
Ranking Member Don Young
1324 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Haaland and Ranking Member Young,

We appreciate the opportunity to share our support for H.R. 3250, the Julius Rosenwald and the Rosenwald Schools Act of 2019 and H.R. 139, the Springfield Race Riot National Historic Monument Act. The National Trust enthusiastically endorses these bills and looks forward to their enactment in this Congress.

Interests of the National Trust for Historic Preservation

The National Trust for Historic Preservation is a privately-funded charitable, educational, and nonprofit organization chartered by Congress in 1949 to “facilitate public participation in historic preservation” and to further the purposes of federal historic preservation laws. The intent of Congress was for the National Trust “to mobilize and coordinate public interest, participation, and resources in the preservation and interpretation of sites and buildings.” With headquarters in Washington, D.C., nine field offices, 27 historic sites, more than one million members and supporters, and a national network of partners in states, territories, and the District of Columbia, the National Trust works to save America’s historic places and advocates for historic preservation as a fundamental value in programs and policies at all levels of government.

H.R. 3250, Julius Rosenwald and the Rosenwald Schools Act of 2019

We appreciate the leadership of Representatives Danny Davis and Steve Cohen, along with Senator Dick Durbin (S. 1863), on this bipartisan and bicameral legislation. The bill would require the Secretary of the Interior to conduct a special resources study of sites associated with the life and legacy of philanthropist and businessman Julius Rosenwald, with a particular focus on Rosenwald Schools.

Julius Rosenwald was a nationally significant philanthropist who helped transformed educational opportunities for African American children during the years of segregation. The son of Jewish immigrants who fled persecution in Europe, he transformed Sears, Roebuck and Company into a retail powerhouse and acquired great wealth during his successful career that he subsequently used for his visionary philanthropy.

Rosenwald partnered with Booker T. Washington and African American communities across the South between 1913 and 1932 to provide partial funding for schoolhouses and related buildings—most often known as Rosenwald Schools—serving children who otherwise would have had extremely limited access to public education. His offer to contribute \$25,000 after communities provided a \$75,000 matching share facilitated the construction of YMCAs for African Americans in 24 cities, which were necessary due to Jim Crow segregation policies. Starting in 1928, the Rosenwald Fund supported early NAACP legal cases that eventually led to the Brown vs. Board of Education of Topeka case and funded fellowships awarded to promising African American artists, scholars, writers, and scientists—many of whom went on to play critical roles in the civil rights movement.

The more than 5,000 Rosenwald Schools, located in mostly rural areas in 15 states, were predominantly one or two-room structures and state-of-the-art for the period. They educated one-third of all African American children in the South during the years of segregation, producing markedly improved educational outcomes

for their students and bringing a sense of hope and civic engagement to their communities. In 2002, the National Trust for Historic Preservation named Rosenwald Schools to its 11 Most Endangered Historic Places list after research estimated that only 10-12 percent of the structures survive. The dwindling numbers of Rosenwald Schools make it all the more important that we act to preserve these historic places and their stories for future generations.

The National Trust is working in partnership with the Rosenwald Park Campaign and the National Parks Conservation Association to support this critical first step to establishing the first National Park Service site to honor a Jewish American, while also preserving a selection of iconic Rosenwald Schools. The National Trust has supported the preservation of Rosenwald Schools for many years, and our expertise and involvement includes providing workshops, conferences, and technical assistance – including our publication: the *Grassroots Guide to Preserving Rosenwald Schools*. Since 2002, the National Trust has provided over \$2.5 million in matching grants to advance Rosenwald School preservation, including planning, engineering studies, architectural plans, archaeology, research, and rehabilitation.

We hope you support this important initiative that would commemorate a vital piece of our nation's history. We urge Congressional support of this legislation and look forward to enactment of H.R. 3250 during this Congress.

H.R. 139, Springfield Race Riot National Historic Monument Act

We appreciate the leadership of Representative Rodney Davis, along with Senator Tammy Duckworth (S. 298), on this bicameral legislation to designate the site of the 1908 Springfield Race Riots as a National Historic Monument. The area near Madison Street and the 10th Street Rail Corridor in Springfield, Illinois includes structural remains of black-owned homes burned during the 1908 race riots. Over the course of two days during these riots, the community experienced the shooting deaths and lynching of African-Americans, as well as significant destruction of property. The riots were also a catalyst for civil rights activists to launch meetings that led to the formation of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP).

Last month, a National Park Service reconnaissance survey discussed the national significance of this location and noted the determination of the Federal Railroad Administration, in concurrence with the Illinois State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO), that the site is eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places. The report also found that the site “offers a unique opportunity to interpret the founding of the (NAACP) as well as expand the narrative about racial violence at the turn of the 20th century.” With the report referencing the rare survival of burned structural remains from race riots during this time period and few examples of sites associated with racial terror listed on the National Register, it is even more important to secure permanent protection for this historic place.

Including this site in the national park system will ensure this place is interpreted and preserved for future generations to learn a critical story in our nation's history. We urge Congressional support of this legislation and look forward to enactment of H.R. 139 during this Congress.

Sincerely,



Pam Bowman
Director of Public Lands Policy