

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES NOMINATION

NPS Form 10-900

USDI/NPS NRHP Registration Form (Rev. 8-86)

OMB No. 1024-0018

Washington, Booker T., High School and Auditorium, New Orleans, Orleans Parish, LA

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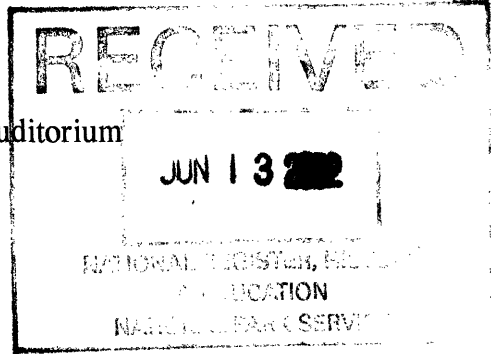
United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

1. NAME OF PROPERTY

Historic Name: Washington, Booker T., High School and Auditorium

Other Name/Site Number:



2. LOCATION

Street & Number 1201 South Roman

Not for publication: NA

City/Town New Orleans

Vicinity: NA

State: Louisiana Code: LA County: Orleans Code: 071 Zip Code: 70125

3. STATE/FEDERAL AGENCY CERTIFICATION

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this X nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property X meets does not meet the National Register Criteria.

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

Nationally: Statewide: Locally: X

Jonathan Fricker

Signature of Certifying Official/Title Jonathan Fricker,
LA Deputy SHPO, Dept. of Culture, Recreation and Tourism

June 11, 2002

Date

State or Federal Agency and Bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of Commenting or Other Official/Title

Date

State or Federal Agency and Bureau

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4. NATIONAL PARK SERVICE CERTIFICATION

I hereby certify that this property is:

- ☒ Entered in the National Register
☐ Determined eligible for the National Register
☐ Determined not eligible for the National Register
☐ Removed from the National Register

Other (explain):

Elson H. Beall

Signature of Keeper

7/17/02

Date of Action

5. CLASSIFICATION

Ownership of Property

Private: _____
Public-Local: X
Public-State: _____
Public-Federal: _____

Category of Property

Building(s): X
District: _____
Site: _____
Structure: _____
Object: _____

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing

5

5

Non contributing

1 buildings

_____ sites

_____ structures

_____ objects

1 Total

Number of Contributing Resources Previously Listed in the National Register: 0

Name of Related Multiple Property Listing: NA

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6. FUNCTION OR USE

Historic: education

Sub: school

Current: education

Sub: school

7. DESCRIPTION

Architectural Classification: Art Deco

Materials:

Foundation: concrete

Walls: brick

Roof: other: tar and gravel

Other: cast concrete

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Describe Present and Historic Physical Appearance.

Booker T. Washington's historical plant consists of a quite large three story school and an attached, also quite large, auditorium. Both buildings are veneered in dark brown brick. Relief is provided on the school with cast-concrete accents painted an off-white. Built in 1942 in a severe Art Deco style with funding by the Works Progress Administration, Booker T. (as it is known) is located in a lower income African-American neighborhood just north of a section of New Orleans known as Central City. Immediately to the rear of the campus is a large public housing project, separated from the school property by only a concrete block wall. As can be seen on the enclosed sketch map, the school/auditorium is located at one end of the school property with an open yard at the Erato Street side and historic dependencies located mainly in a tight space at the rear. Because the campus has been altered very little since its opening in September 1942, it easily conveys its local historical significance.

Booker T. is unusual for the Art Deco in that its articulation is asymmetrical. Instead of the typical central pavilion with flanking wings of equal length, Booker T. Washington's entrance pavilion is skewed to the west side. There are eight wide bays to the east but only three to the west. At the end of the long eastern wing, connected via a recessed hyphen, is the massive auditorium which towers about a story above the school building.

Booker T.'s asymmetrical composition arises from its unusual floorplan, which is anchored by a more-or-less central three-story atrium-like cafeteria (see plan). The location of the cafeteria forces the typical entrance pavilion and corresponding corridor and stair off to one side. The approximately 45 classrooms and other spaces are located off halls encircling the atrium on the second and third floor and on three sides at ground level. The fourth side at ground level is the location of a foyer running along the side of the auditorium.

The school's severe Art Deco styling is found on the projecting entrance pavilion, which is about a story taller than the flanking wings. Because of its height and ribbed vertical members, the pavilion provides verticality to an otherwise strongly horizontal composition. The three-door entrance, found in its own one story projecting pavilion, is framed by pronounced curved and ribbed piers done in an off-white cast concrete. Above is a shallow and thin metal canopy with rounded corners. Above the doors, and encompassing much of the entrance pavilion, is a two story window composition in cast concrete. It is devoid of ornament except for two tall, thin ribbed strips. Window panes here and elsewhere on the building are in multiples of two. Crowning both the main pavilion and the one story entrance pavilion are thin concrete bands with a stylized geometric motif. A simple concrete plaque bearing the words "Booker T. Washington Public High School" is found near the top of the main pavilion. Art Deco style piers accent the entrance steps. (The small lions, representing the school mascot, are presumably of a later vintage. They are certainly too small in scale.)

The remainder of the façade (i.e., the wings to each side of the main pavilion) is given over almost entirely to bands of windows separated by brick piers. Like the windows on the pavilion, the floors are marked by wide concrete bands in off-white cast concrete. These, along with a thin band at the very top of each window unit (almost at the parapet), contribute greatly to the school's horizontal thrust.

A recessed hyphen wing (containing a small foyer opening into a larger one) makes the transition from school to auditorium. The hyphen wing's three-part entrance, very similar to that of the main pavilion, leads to a side entrance to the auditorium. The latter, which seems to cascade from the door, has curving

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steps and rounded side piers of terrazzo. The main auditorium lobby, which spans the façade, features the original Art Deco chandeliers, decorative Art Deco grilles, and a cornice composed of advancing and receding planes and then several layers of molding on the ceiling.

Even more severely articulated than the school, the mammoth auditorium is entirely of brick, with no decorative detail. The façade is almost a solid brick mass, with the only visual relief being a very few windows. Pilaster-like elements extend the height of the building, in varying widths, advancing and receding from the main wall plane. The pilasters are more concentrated, more defined at the center to mark the three entrance doors located under a curving metal awning. Two-stage steps feature the same Art Deco style piers topped by small lions as the school. The façade sweeps around rounded corners to flow into the long side elevations. The bays of the side elevations are delineated by wide pilaster-like elements extending the height of the building. Windows are more plentiful than on the façade, and appear in a variety of sizes and groupings.

The cavernous auditorium seats approximately 2,000 in a fan-shape with a sweeping balcony. The squared-off proscenium is formed of boldly ribbed cast concrete. Near each corner a strip formed of wide bands sweeps up to connect the proscenium with a ribbed cornice. The ribbed treatment is then repeated at chair rail level in two bands. The auditorium seating is original, although the light fixtures have been replaced.

The auditorium and its lobby are easily the most notable interior spaces at Booker T. The school's modest entrance lobby features an opening with curved and boldly ribbed side members leading to a room containing simple twin staircases. The flooring of the various halls and other public spaces is black and white tile. Ceilings are covered in celotex, but they do not appear to have been lowered. Classroom doors feature upper sections with multiple panes of glass and a three-pane transom above.

Contributing Elements:

There are four small buildings at Booker T. that illustrate its historic role as a vocational school (see Part 8) and hence are listed as contributing elements. All four appear on a 1951 Sanborn map. They are as follows:

Standing at the front corner of the school is a small brick building labeled "auto repair" on the 1951 map. At the rear are three garage openings. All windows have been filled in with concrete blocks.

Tucked away in a very tight space at the rear of the school (see sketch map -- between the school and a wall separating the campus from the housing project) are a greenhouse, potting shed, and a farm shop. The one story brick farm shop is impossible to photograph because of the lush vegetation and tightness of its location. The long greenhouse has a concrete block base with glass walls. Along one side is a largely below ground concrete feature. Originally filled with dirt, it was a transition stage for plants. The potting shed is a long low brick building.

Non-contributing:

Adjacent to the potting shed is a small concrete block building that replaced a structure labeled "arbor" on the 1951 Sanborn map.

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COMMON PHOTO INFORMATION

Photographer: Donna Fricker
Location of negatives: LA SHPO
Date Taken: May 2002

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Applicable National

Register Criteria: A X B__ C__ D__

Criteria Considerations
(Exceptions):

NA
A__ B__ C__ D__ E__ F__ G__

Areas of Significance: education; entertainment/recreation; ethnic heritage: black

Period(s) of Significance: 1942, 1942-1952

Significant Dates: NA

Significant Person(s): NA

Cultural Affiliation: NA

Architect/Builder: Works Progress Administration (no architect given)

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State Significance of Property, and Justify Criteria, Criteria Considerations, and Areas and Periods of Significance Noted Above.

The Booker T. Washington School is of local significance as a milestone in the development of secondary public school education for blacks in New Orleans. The much lobbied for high school, with its state-of-the-art vocational educational facilities, was the first public high school in the city built specifically for blacks. The first public high school opened in 1918 in a recycled building that had previously been for whites. Although blacks were glad to have it, there was the psychological issue of a "hand me down" versus the specific commitment of public funds for black secondary education. Built through the WPA for about one-quarter of a million, Booker T. compared more than favorably with white schools of the time. Booker T.'s auditorium was of great significance in the life of the city's African-Americans because in a segregated world, it was the only large venue for black events. It was, in effect, the equivalent of a municipal auditorium for the black community.

Education:

Public education for even whites did not make appreciable progress in Louisiana until the first three decades of the twentieth century, and, of course, the situation was worst for blacks. With rigid segregation the law of the land, precious funds had to maintain a dual educational system – one that was "separate but unequal" for blacks. Statistics show far less money spent per black pupil, lower salaries for black teachers, poorer buildings, etc.

The opening of Booker T. in 1942 was an occasion for great rejoicing when one remembers that in 1900 the New Orleans school board had voted to limit black education to the first five grades. Booker T.'s opening and other milestones that paved the way would not have happened without decades of sustained activism from black leaders. Lacking political power, they worked through civic, religious and educational organizations. These activists drew up petitions, submitted reports on deficiencies and otherwise pressed their case before the school board. And to their credit, there were some white board members who sympathized and even supported the black petitioners (most notably Mrs. Adolph Baumgartner and Isaac Heller).

Early in the century the chief concerns were poor facilities and overcrowding (the latter resulting in half day classes), the lack of a high school, and the need for night schools and vocational training. Slowly but surely, many of these concerns were addressed, but only because of eternal vigilance, some help from sympathetic white school board members, and in the case of Booker T., federal funds. Commenting on the "separate but unequal" aspect of the dual system, *The Louisiana Weekly*, a black newspaper, asked: "Why is it that every time a Negro school is built, we are forced to economize – conserve, et cetera – and build a make-shift structure inadequate for present needs and impossible for future necessities?" Two elementary school buildings that in the 1920s were exceptions to this rule (but only because of prodding) were the Valena C. Jones and Craig schools, both modern brick schools that compared favorably with those for whites.

Perhaps the paramount problem facing black leaders was the total lack of education beyond the fifth grade, as mandated by school board policy in 1900. Their initial goal was to press for restoration of the sixth, seventh and eighth grades. The sixth was restored in 1909, the seventh in 1913, and the eighth in 1914. This accomplished, blacks between 1914 and 1917 "repeatedly petitioned" the school board for a black high school (Donald E. DeVore and Joseph Logsdon, *Crescent City Schools: Public Education in New Orleans*). The much sought after school opened in 1917 as McDonogh No. 35. But as DeVore and Logsdon

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write in *Crescent City Schools*, "school officials did not appropriate a large capital outlay as they had for the three recently built white high schools. Instead, they simply transferred white students from McDonogh 13 and converted the structure to black use." McDonogh 35 initially emphasized traditional college preparatory courses, but by 1927 vocational classes had become a regular part of the curriculum. (The latter, however, did not hinder an overall emphasis upon academic attainment.) The next milestone reached, again after appeals and petitions by black leaders, was a program of evening classes, established by the school board in November 1918.

The next item on the agenda was the cause of vocational training. And while some vocational training was available at McDonogh 35 and in various elementary schools, all agreed that a trade school was needed. But where to find the money? The Rosenwald Fund had expressed an interest but only if the school board shared the cost. When in 1930 the school board sold three million dollars in bonds for school construction and allocated \$275,000 towards construction of a black trade school, the Rosenwald Fund pledged \$125,000. In response to concerns that a black trade school might threaten white jobs, a public statement was issued, stating "that the trades to be taught at the school would be exclusively those which are largely occupied by colored labor at this time."

But it would still be another dozen years before Booker T. became a reality. After purchasing a parcel of land for the purpose, the school board announced that it did not have the money to match the Rosenwald offer. Instead, in 1934 they built on the site a frame elementary school for blacks for \$21,000. As DeVore and Logsdon concluded in *Crescent City Schools*, "the black community was left only promises," and its leaders "loosed a thunder of protest." Although disheartened, they did not lose sight of the goal. Throughout the 1930s, the Colored Educational Alliance, the New Orleans NAACP, and the Federation of Civic Leagues championed the cause. But it was federal, not local funds, via the Works Progress Administration, that made Booker T. Washington possible. Opening in the fall of 1942, the school by its very nature as a "first," was a benchmark in black public education. The psychological impact of having such a large and splendid plant purpose-built for black education (not hand-me-down) must have been considerable. *The Louisiana Weekly*, on the front page of its September 19, 1942 edition, ran three "action" photos of students in the classroom. The caption began, "Opportunities for training in numerous trades heretofore not included in Negro high schools became available to students when the newly-built Booker T. Washington High School opened for the first time. The most popular classes seemed to be those in shoe repairing, printing and motor mechanics."

Entertainment/Recreation:

With the erection of Booker T., New Orleans' blacks received not only a badly needed, much sought after trade school, but also a huge auditorium that became, in effect, a separate, but in this case equal, municipal auditorium. Until Booker T., the only venues for concerts, speeches and other entertainment and civic functions would have been small halls and clubs and a handful of neighborhood theaters scattered around town. (The city's first large state-of-the-art black theater, the Carver, did not open until 1950.) Large events for whites were held at the city's Municipal Auditorium or in the many large hotels in town. Booker T. filled this void in the black community. As Booker T.'s librarian Emily Braneon observed, "All of the black major events took place in that auditorium." All available evidence indicates that it was the place for all the city's black schools to hold graduation and other large events. Very importantly, the school board allowed the facility to be used by entertainment companies for concerts and the like and for various events such as labor rallies, choir recitals, etc. sponsored by local black organizations. Advertisements in *The Louisiana Weekly* for the 1940s show a yearly concert series presented by the Crescent Concerts

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Company, which billed itself as the "first concerts company owned and controlled by Negroes in America." Two big names Crescent Concerts brought to Booker T. soon after its opening were Paul Robeson (October 1942, the opening of the first year concerts series) and Marian Anderson (1943). Paul Robeson's visit, his first appearance in New Orleans, made a particularly big "splash" in the *Louisiana Weekly*. The October 17 issue ran Robeson's photo under the main headline and throughout the paper were various ads welcoming him to the city. In the next week's issue the paper reported that blacks turned out "en masse" to hear Robeson, along with a "fair sprinkling of whites." There were seven encores, and the audience was "almost shaking the roof with its thunderous applause." The year 1949 saw Louis Armstrong on Booker T's stage, as well as Dizzy Gillespie and Mahalia Jackson. Other references in the *Louisiana Weekly* document a labor rally held at Booker T. featuring union leader A. Philip Randolph and an insurance company convention. Without the vast auditorium, large events such as these would simply not have been possible.

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9. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

DeVore, Donald E., and Logsdon, Joseph. *Crescent City Schools: Public Education in New Orleans*. The Center for Louisiana Studies, University of Southwestern Louisiana, 1991.

The Louisiana Weekly. Various issues in 1940s. Copies in National Register file, Louisiana Division of Historic Preservation.

1951 Sanborn map showing Booker T. Washington campus.

Previous documentation on file (NPS): NA

- ☐ Preliminary Determination of Individual Listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
- ☐ Previously Listed in the National Register. (partially)
- ☐ Previously Determined Eligible by the National Register.
- ☐ Designated a National Historic Landmark.
- ☐ Recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey: #
- ☐ Recorded by Historic American Engineering Record: #

Primary Location of Additional Data:

- ☒ State Historic Preservation Office
- ☐ Other State Agency
- ☐ Federal Agency
- ☐ Local Government
- ☐ University
- ☐ Other (Specify Repository):

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10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

Acreage of Property: approx. 3 acres

UTM References: **Zone Easting Northing**
 15 780960 3316800

Verbal Boundary Description: See enclosed sketch map.

Boundary Justification:

Boundaries were chosen to encompass the main building and its historic related buildings (all of which demonstrate the school's vocational education thrust), while deleting less than 50 year old construction on the campus. The boundaries shown on the attached sketch map follow property lines except at one corner where they cut in to exclude a non-historic gymnasium.

11. FORM PREPARED BY

Name/Title: National Register staff

Address: Division of Historic Preservation, P. O. Box 44247, Baton Rouge, Louisiana 70804

Telephone: (225) 342-8160

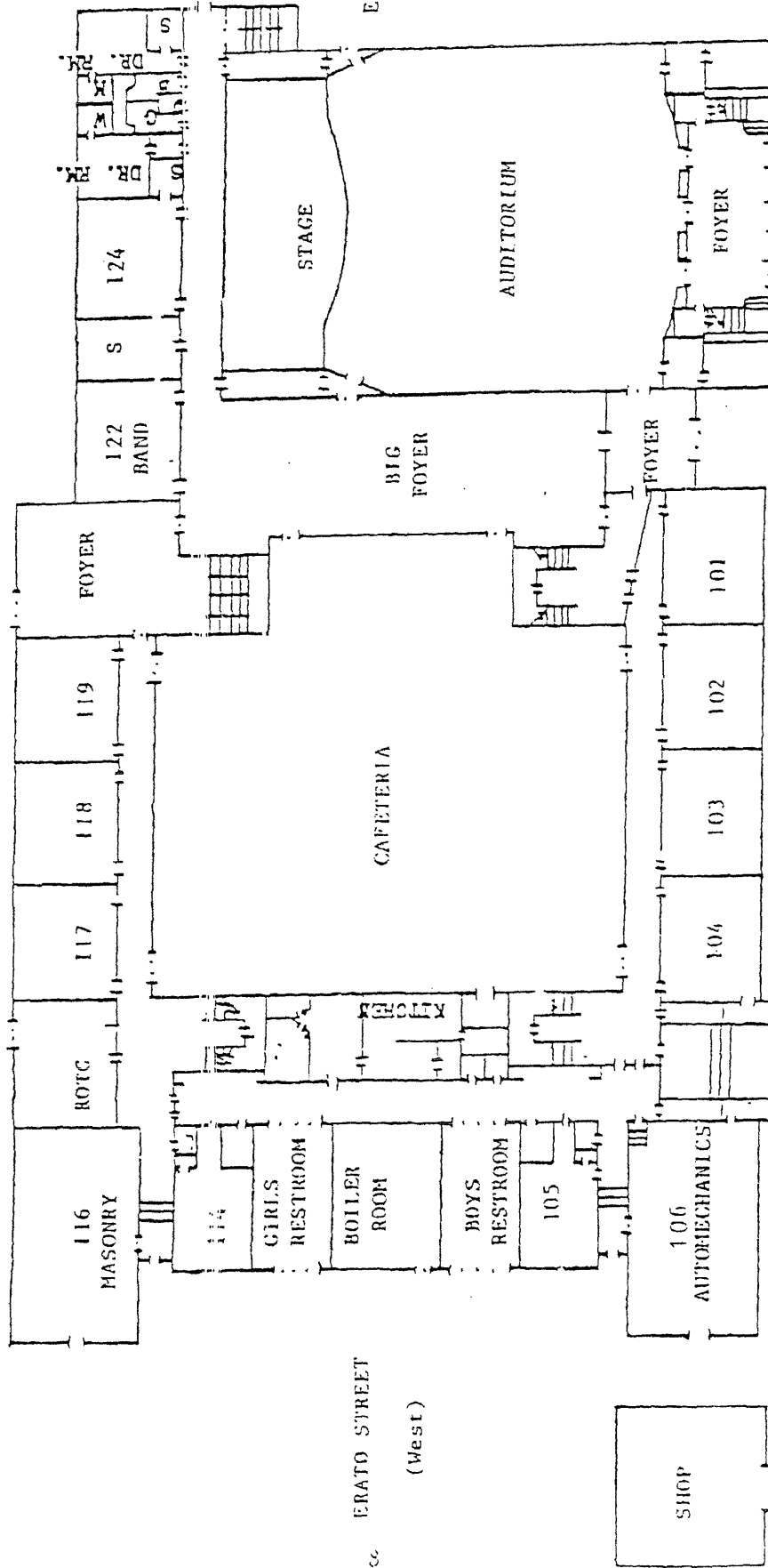
Date: May 2002

PROPERTY OWNERS

Orleans Parish School Board

BOOKER T. WASHINGTON SCHOOL AND AUDITORIUM Orleans Parish, LA

B. M. COOPER HOUSING COMPLEX
(North)



FIRST FLOOR
MAIN BUILDING

SOUTH ROMAN STREET
(South)

ERATO STREET
(West)

ERHART S
(East)

Booker T. Washington High School + Auditorium

New Orleans

Orleans Parish, LA

--- BOUNDARY



1" = 100'

