New Organizations and Urban Issues

Social work institutions and civil rights organizations were established during and after World War I to deal with welfare concerns and civil rights issues that multiplied in Ohio cities during the wartime black migration. White hostility increased and acts of intolerance spread while the scale and complexity of the migrants’ needs grew in those years. No other issues concerning African Americans in Ohio at the time received more public attention than those involving instances of white prejudice and social problems plaguing black migrants. Black civic leaders in cities across Ohio acted with renewed energy and participated in organized efforts to address these issues in the period 1915–1920. In earlier times, there were few urban organizations designed to assist black migrants in Ohio and to oppose racial discrimination there. The number of these organizations rose slowly between 1890 and 1910, but rapidly thereafter as Ohio’s black urban population increased greatly.

Local people took the lead in struggles to overcome racial injustice and to resolve social problems in each major urban center in Ohio. Out-of-state reformers occasionally came to Ohio to assist these efforts, and statewide movements sometimes were launched; however, the orientation and leadership of these struggles were typically local, centered in a particular city, like Cleveland or Cincinnati. The character of these struggles, consequently, varied from city to city. These differences had antecedents in Ohio’s early years of statehood, like the color line itself.

Ohio possessed a race-relations legacy that included a protest tradition whose intensity varied from region to region, being strongest in northern Ohio. What shaped the origins of this protest tradition? Prior to the Civil War, blacks and some whites in each part of Ohio criticized slavery and favored equality under the law for African Americans. But
abolitionism and advocacy of equal rights were more prevalent in northern Ohio, especially in the Western Reserve, than in the other Ohio regions. This protest activity was an aspect of the regional pattern of black-white relations that developed early in the nineteenth century. The strength of white intolerance varied by region before the Civil War. Tolerance of dissent against the color line was greater in northern Ohio than in southern Ohio. As seen in Chapter 2, the dominant influence of relatively tolerant New Englanders in the settlement of northern Ohio shaped early black-white relations there. Also the northern region’s distance from the South placed it well outside of the South’s social-economic sphere of influence, which affected many Ohio counties located in the vicinity of the Ohio River Valley.

The antebellum form of black-white relations in Ohio, which embraced the protest tradition, was passed on as an inheritance to subsequent generations into the next century. Public support for treating blacks as equals in law fluctuated in Ohio during the period 1860–1915. Historian David A. Gerber’s research shows that public backing for this principle increased across the state in the aftermath of the Civil War and then started decreasing in the 1890s as war memories faded.¹

During the period 1860–1915, as in earlier times, the principle of equal rights for African Americans was asserted most insistently in northern Ohio. Regional differences in the effectiveness of protest were seen, for example, when there were issues about whether to establish separate public institutions for the welfare of African Americans. In northern Ohio, more than elsewhere in the state, such institutions were opposed as threats to equal rights for all. In Cleveland, prominent African Americans customarily insisted that publicly funded institutions be open to all regardless of color and objected to proposals for the establishment of separate institutions for blacks if their finances would depend on tax money or funds subscribed from the general public. Influential white civic leaders in Cleveland usually withheld their financial support and endorsements of such proposals when faced with this objection. When such propositions were made in southern and central Ohio cities, local African American spokespersons raised the same objection. The results were different there, for instance, in Cincinnati where certain prominent white philanthropists were inclined to disregard the objection and to financially back separate institutions for African Americans. Consequently, in 1915 separate institutions for blacks, such as homes for the elderly or children, were relatively common in Cincinnati but rare and poorly financed in Cleveland. At the same time blacks in Cincinnati were excluded from social institutions serving whites. Meanwhile blacks in Cleveland, at least on a token
basis, were admitted to such places, for instance, to one of the Young Men’s Christian Association facilities.\(^2\)

The struggle against the Ohio color line after 1915 must be understood as an ongoing phenomenon that originated and took its basic form in the previous century. This explains why the strength of protest varied across Ohio’s regions in the period 1915–1920. Equal rights advocacy then, as in the past, was most effective in northern Ohio, while separate welfare organizations for blacks were stronger in southern and central Ohio than in the northern region. This struggle was related to major themes in the nation’s history, particularly movements for equal rights and urban reform, as well as to Ohio’s past.

Black Ohioans participated in the establishment of welfare institutions and civil rights organizations during and after World War I. These bodies were organized to deal with social problems and civil rights issues that multiplied in Ohio cities during the wartime black migration. While the scale and complexity of the migrants’ needs grew in those years, white hostility increased and acts of intolerance spread. Earlier on, few urban organizations were in place to assist black migrants in Ohio and to fight racial discrimination. These organizations were not to increase rapidly in numbers and strength until after 1910, when Ohio’s black urban population began to increase greatly.\(^3\)

The development of African American welfare organizations in Ohio was related to national trends. Between 1865 and 1920, urbanization in the United States was accompanied by the growth of urban social problems that caused concern among reformers. While the nation’s cities grew rapidly and prospered, many urban residents experienced poverty, inadequate shelter, ill health, vice, and crime. Social reformers organized to combat urban ills, for example, by establishing an array of associations and private institutions to aid the needy and the troubled. These included settlement houses meant to facilitate the adjustment of immigrants to urban life in America. Prior to 1890, only a small fraction of blacks in the United States lived in cities, and urban welfare institutions were rarely devoted to African Americans. But the gradual urbanization of the nation’s black population eventually made reformers conscious that African Americans were increasingly affected by the problematical aspects of the urban environment. Especially after 1910, urban welfare organizations for blacks were founded in many states, including Ohio.\(^4\)

Early concerns about the welfare of black migrants in cities inspired the establishment of the National Urban League in 1911. Black and white reformers supported it. The league’s sponsors included Booker T. Washington, president of Tuskegee Institute, while its financial backers included Chicago philanthropist Julius Rosenwald. Branches, estab-
lished in large urban centers, were intended to ease the relocation difficulties facing largely rural migrants who were settling in cities and to improve employment opportunities for African Americans generally.5

Although there were exceptions, during this era of reform in the United States, African Americans in cities were debarred from existing private institutions intended to assist white newcomers or poor white people. Typically, shelters for single working women, homes for unwed mothers, orphanages, and similar refuges imposed color lines. Many social service institutions were sponsored by organizations involved in Christian activism. Among them were the Salvation Army, the Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA), and the Young Women’s Christian Association (YWCA). The Salvation Army in the twentieth century was essentially an urban social service organization, although it had been founded in the nineteenth century as an evangelical movement in Great Britain and in the United States. The YWCA and YMCA maintained facilities in cities across the United States offering lodging, food, and recreation to female or male transients. These Christian social service organizations maintained a minimal presence in African American urban life before 1910, but this changed significantly in the war decade. Racial exclusion, nevertheless, remained a motive for the establishment of separate institutions providing for the welfare of African Americans.6

The trend of founding separate welfare institutions for African Americans in Ohio was strongest in large cities. Needs were the greatest where African Americans were most concentrated, in Cincinnati, Cleveland, and Columbus. This trend in Ohio began earliest in Cincinnati. During the century before World War I, African American welfare needs were relatively large in Cincinnati because that city attracted more black migrants and accommodated more black residents than any other Ohio municipality. In Cincinnati three African American welfare institutions were opened in the nineteenth century, and two more were formed shortly before World War I.7 The New Orphan Asylum for Colored Children was incorporated in 1845.8 The Crawford Old Men’s Home (for African Americans, especially ex-slaves) was established in 1888, and the Home for Aged Colored Women was founded in 1891.9 The Walnut Hills Day Nursery for Colored Children was incorporated in 1910, and the Home for Colored Girls was established in 1911.10 All of these institutions for African Americans still existed in Cincinnati during and after World War I.

Welfare services for African Americans in Cincinnati expanded considerably from 1916 through 1919 as many more black migrants entered the city from the South. In 1916, the Young Men’s Christian Association
YMCA) dedicated a new building constructed to accommodate the Ninth Street Branch YMCA for black men. In 1917, the Salvation Army opened the Evangeline Home for the care of unmarried black mothers. In 1918 the Friendship Home for Colored Girls was founded as a shelter for working women over sixteen years of age. In 1919 the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) founded the West End Branch for black women in Cincinnati.

These separate welfare institutions for African Americans in Cincinnati were established through cooperative efforts of blacks and whites. Typically, a few African Americans took the initiative by proposing the creation of an institution for blacks, by promoting their plan within the black community, and by securing the support of influential whites. The Home for Colored Girls was established through the joint efforts of prominent Cincinnatians, black and white, who composed the membership of the Cincinnati Protective and Industrial Association for Colored Women and Children. Three white philanthropists each gave three thousand dollars toward the purchase of the building that was opened in 1914. Other funds for the Home for Colored Girls were raised by private subscription and, starting in 1915, the institution received funding assistance from the Cincinnati Council for Social Agencies. Likewise, in 1912 a small group of African Americans formed a definite plan for a black YMCA branch building in Cincinnati. Once a survey of community opinion revealed that there was support for the idea, the plan's backers started a building campaign. Local African Americans contributed $15,000 of the total investment in the new Ninth Street YMCA building that opened in 1916. Chicago philanthropist Julius Rosenwald donated $25,000 toward the cost of the YMCA edifice, and an additional $50,000 came from Cincinnati whites. Similarly, the Salvation Army of Cincinnati agreed to sponsor a home for unwed black mothers in response to a request from a small ad hoc committee composed of black and white female social workers and black weekly editor Wendell P. Dabney (see photo 1). A campaign to interest black churches and clubs in an unwed mothers’ home was conducted by an African American Salvation Army ensign, Elizabeth Symmes; white philanthropist Mary Emery donated a building; other contributors provided funds to remodel and equip the structure; and the Cincinnati Council of Social Agencies agreed to provide partial funding.

The character of Jacob G. Schmidlapp's interest in the welfare of the black community was unusual in Cincinnati, and he had no counterpart elsewhere in Ohio. Schmidlapp, a white Cincinnatian whose fortune was made in whiskey, led an effort to build relatively low rental apartment complexes for African Americans. Schmidlapp felt that it was his
duty to try to improve the condition of housing available to African Americans, but his housing project efforts were not entirely philanthropic.18 He and his white associates expected a 5 percent return on their investment in low-cost sanitary housing.19 In 1915, Schmidlapp’s Model Homes Company constructed the Washington Terrace apartments that eventually housed about 600 black tenants. Washington Terrace was founded on a community plan aiming to provide black tenants “social

Photo 1
Wendell P. Dabney.

With permission of Cincinnati Museum Center—Cincinnati Historical Society Library.
and civic opportunity and a stronger economic position.” Consequently, the apartment complex gave tenants access to a cooperative store, a large assembly room, a billiard room, and playgrounds for children. Schmidlapp took up the idea of building this African American community in the firm belief “that the Negro can best develop himself when surrounded by those of his own race.” Schmidlapp claimed success for this community plan, citing 1918 statistics indicating that the arrest rates and death rates of Washington Terrace residents were significantly lower than those for Cincinnati blacks generally.

Prior to 1910 welfare institutions serving African Americans were almost nonexistent in Columbus, but several existed there by 1920. In earlier times, whites generally were unsupportive of the plans for social work among blacks that were occasionally proposed by some African Americans in Columbus. In 1902, however, a white woman’s group opened a day nursery for black children. Subsequently, an African American women’s club managed that nursery. Interracial cooperation in social work improved as the wartime black migration to Columbus accelerated. The Young Men’s Christian Association of Columbus formed a branch for African Americans in 1912. Lacking sufficient funding, the black YMCA initially was housed in two old adjoining buildings on Spring Street in Columbus. In 1916 the Spring Street Branch was included in the building fund drive of the Columbus YMCA’s Central Association. A new building, costing approximately $131,000, was erected for this African American branch in 1917. Chicagoan Julius Rosenwald, president of the Sears & Roebuck Company, contributed $25,000 toward the construction costs. African Americans in Columbus pledged over $18,000 to the Spring Street YMCA building, while local white contributors covered the remainder. Also in 1917, a group of Christian women opened the Columbus Home for Colored Girls on 17th Street. In 1918 the Columbus Young Women’s Christian Association established the East Long Street Branch for black women. Institutions for African Americans’ dependents, the Ohio Avenue Day Nursery and the Old Folks Home, also existed in Columbus at the end of the decade.

Expansion of social welfare institutions for African Americans was slower in Cleveland than in Cincinnati and Columbus. Traditionally, there was less public approval of racially separate facilities in northern Ohio than in the state’s other regions. Established in 1896, the Cleveland Home for Aged Colored People struggled financially, but endured through the World War I period. A day nursery, a children’s home, and a settlement house for African Americans were opened in Cleveland before 1912, but all closed after short periods because of insuf-
cient support from blacks and whites. A movement advocating a Cleveland YMCA branch for African Americans collapsed in 1911 for similar reasons. Prior to the wartime migration, Cleveland's black population was not large enough to finance more than one shelter like the Home for Aged Colored People. Furthermore, certain influential African Americans in Cleveland did not support secular institutions created solely for blacks. Those advocating racial integration of public facilities contended that the establishment of secular institutions for blacks promoted racial segregation in public life. They argued that African Americans should insist on using existing public welfare institutions instead of pressing for the creation of separate ones for blacks. Given this criticism, whites in Cleveland were relatively disinclined to financially support separate facilities for African Americans. 28

In 1913 the Phillis Wheatley Home, a shelter for black working women, was opened in Cleveland and ultimately thrived there despite many objections. Upon entering the city as a young African American nurse, Jane Edna Hunter found that the only living quarters available to her in Cleveland were shabby and disreputable rooming houses. The Cleveland Young Women's Christian Association discouraged black women from membership. In these circumstances, Jane E. Hunter (see photo 2) concluded that Cleveland needed a home for African American working women. She founded the Phillis Wheatley Association with the assistance of Mrs. Levi T. Schofield, a wealthy white Clevelander who was president of the Cleveland YWCA. A local white philanthropist financed the rental of the house accommodating the association's activities. The Phillis Wheatley Association's white board of trustees, headed by Mrs. Schofield, hired Jane Hunter as a general secretary. Subsequently, the association offered employed black women room and board at a reasonable rate, while also providing employment assistance and vocational training.29

In June 1915 the Playhouse Settlement was formally opened in Cleveland's Central Avenue African American district. The Playhouse Settlement was established through the efforts of the Men's Club of the Second Presbyterian Church, a white congregation that was located near the Central Avenue African American area. Seeking advice about the settlement house plan, a committee of the Presbyterian men consulted Charles Chesnutt and several other outstanding Cleveland African Americans. Chesnutt fully supported the scheme, believing that blacks would be “the chief beneficiaries” of a settlement house in a black district. But he advised the group that the settlement house “not be conducted on race lines,” saying: “A great many colored people object and properly so, to the policy of segregation which seems to regard them as
unfit to associate with other human beings, . . . and it would be difficult to reach many of them, even with a good thing, coupled with such a suggestion.”

Russell and Rowena Jelliffe, white graduates of the University of Chicago’s Graduate School of Social Service, were placed in charge of the Playhouse Settlement. The integrated settlement house became one of the Cleveland Community Fund’s agencies in 1919.

African Americans were involved in the administration of institutions for black dependents and working women in Ohio during 1915–1920. Governing bodies of these institutions often included whites, but black men and women generally were members of their governing boards. These institutional homes usually were entirely staffed and managed by African Americans. Most often they were supervised and staffed by black women. The Cincinnati Home for Colored Girls was typical; its first board of trustees was biracial. Among the board’s African American members in 1914 were former state legislator George W. Hays, barbershop proprietor Fountain Lewis, newspaper editor Wendell P. Dabney, and social worker Mrs. J. P. Monroe, who was associated with the Cincinnati Better Housing League. The board’s white

Photo 2
Jane E. Hunter.

With permission of The Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, Ohio.
members included the Procter and Gamble Company’s James N. Gamble, businessman Jacob G. Schmidlapp, philanthropist Mary Emery, and other locally prominent women. Through the end of the decade, Mrs. Cora Oliver, a black social worker, was superintendent of this facility for “girls of school age from broken and improper homes.”

In Cleveland, the Phillis Wheatley Association board of trustees, chaired by Mrs. Levi T. Schofield, was entirely white, but Jane Hunter, an African American, was supervisor and general secretary of the Phillis Wheatley Home for employed women. An African American, Mrs. Isabella Ridgeway, was superintendent of the Old Folks Home in Columbus. All of the trustees of that home for elderly African Americans were black men, mostly clergymen.

Meanwhile in Ohio, African Americans participated in the administration and work of racially separate institutions affiliated with the Salvation Army, the YWCA, and the YMCA. Prominent white and black citizens of Cincinnati served on an advisory committee of the Salvation Army’s Evangeline Home for unwed African American mothers. The committee’s black members included Jennie D. Porter (see photo 3), a highly respected teacher, and Edmund H. Oxley, Rector of St. Andrew’s Episcopal Church. The Evangeline Home’s medical staff was composed of seven black physicians who served gratuitously. Typically, African Americans filled the executive secretary positions and management committee memberships of black YMCA and YWCA branches in Ohio. Anna Hope was the original executive secretary of Cincinnati’s West End Branch YWCA.

As these examples indicate, the black leadership of social work institutions in Ohio came from the business and professional classes. White backers of these institutions similarly came from backgrounds in business or industry. Scholars find this class dimension in other states where, as in Ohio, middle class values shaped social work goals and efforts in black neighborhoods.

During and after World War I, recently established African American institutions and associations addressed problems confronting black migrants in Ohio cities. In Cincinnati, Columbus, and Cleveland, African American institutions providing temporary shelter brought some relief to people facing the severe housing shortage of the period. Most of these facilities provided rooms for females. Homes for employed single black women offered their residents temporary shelter, board, and recre-
Also, young female residents, including many vulnerable newcomers, were shielded from the dangers of involvement in vice and crime that flourished in some overcrowded urban areas. This shielding is an Ohio instance involving what Hazel Carby’s insightful essay characterizes as “Policing the Black Woman’s Body” by enforcers of middle class standards. Cleveland’s Phillis Wheatley Home, which was accommodating 170 young women annually by 1916, enlarged its capacity by
acquiring buildings during the war. Attempting to further aid black women seeking rented rooms, the Phillis Wheatley Association cooperated with the United States Homes Registration Bureau, which canvassed and registered available living quarters in Cleveland and in other cities of the country. In 1919 the Cleveland agency of the bureau maintained a special office in the Phillis Wheatley building. Certainly, the Phillis Wheatley Home was the most outstanding shelter for black working women in Ohio during the wartime migration. Columbus’ Home for Colored Girls was a comparatively small facility. Located in a two-story frame house, it was supported by a group of Christian women, undoubtedly with relatively limited funds. Nevertheless, this Columbus Home offered shelter and policed conduct, as it tried “to promote the social, moral, intellectual, industrial, and religious advancement of women and girls.” Also, rooms at affordable rents were available to adult women at Cincinnati’s Friendship Home for Colored Girls. The African American YWCAs in Columbus and Cincinnati, established respectively in 1918 and 1919, were opened too late to accommodate newcomers at the peak of the wartime migration.

While providing inexpensive lodgings in dormitory rooms, black YWCAs and black YMCAs in Cincinnati and Columbus also served as social and recreational centers late in the decade. The Ys were intended to give black newcomers and young people alternatives to social life in saloons and on street corners. The facilities of Columbus’ Spring Street Branch YMCA and Cincinnati’s Ninth Street Branch YMCA included swimming pools, gymnasiums, billiard tables, bowling alleys, and cafeterias as well as banquet, meeting, and reading rooms. In Cincinnati, the West End Branch YWCA offered patrons use of its swimming pool, gymnasium, and tennis and basketball courts. The West End Branch YWCA’s Tea Room served inexpensive wholesome meals to nonresidents as well as residents, and its public meeting rooms often were used by other organizations in the black community.

New African American welfare associations appeared in Cincinnati, Columbus, and Cleveland in 1917 when the gathering momentum of the black wartime migration focused public attention on problems affecting African Americans in urban Ohio. Ultimately, these Ohio associations were affiliated with the National Urban League, but their origins were rooted in local initiatives. After local black and white investigators studied conditions of migrants, major civic organizations in each city proposed and financially backed the formation of a new African American welfare association. The association in each initially was seen as an agency mainly for the reorganization of welfare services already available to African Americans in the city.
As the presence of black migrants in Cincinnati became increasingly evident during May 1917, the Cincinnati Council of Social Agencies reported its intention to survey the “Negro Problem” in the city. Later in the year, the Negro Civic Welfare Association was established as a department of the Council of Social Agencies and the Cincinnati Community Chest, a leading public charity organization. In 1918 the Negro Civic Welfare Association formulated a citywide social service program based upon a broad survey of social conditions among all blacks in Cincinnati. The program was designed to coordinate the city’s existing African American welfare activities and promote further social work among blacks generally. The intention was to serve a broad African American clientele including migrants. The Welfare Association usually worked through other agencies, for example, by encouraging Cincinnati’s Better Housing League to help black migrants who were searching for better shelter and to otherwise assist African Americans. Starting in 1918, the Better Housing League provided landlords with a visiting housekeeper service through which black tenants received information about good housekeeping practices. Similar domestic agendas existed in other states. The Welfare Association’s program aimed to create linkages among social work agencies and to enhance the efficiency and financial resources of the city’s black welfare institutions.

Accordingly, in 1919 the New Orphan Asylum for Colored Children, the Crawford Old Men’s Home, and the Home for Aged Colored Women became affiliated with the Cincinnati Community Chest. Meantime, the Orphan Asylum for Colored Children was remodeled. During 1917–1919 the Negro Civic Welfare Association’s efforts were devoted mainly to social services planning and harmonizing the efforts of Cincinnati’s comparatively large number of black social work institutions. Employment assistance for black men and women seeking jobs in Cincinnati manufacturing plants began after the wartime migration. The Welfare Association initiated a program of industrial welfare work in 1920. At the same time recreational programs were started in the West End, Walnut Hills, and other black communities in the Cincinnati area.

The Columbus Urban League evolved from the Federated Social and Industrial Welfare Movement for the Negro, or the Negro Welfare League, as it was known informally. The Negro Welfare League grew out of an interracial meeting held in early 1917 to consider problems experienced by the large number of black migrants from the South who were just then entering Columbus. Those attending the meeting represented the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, the YMCA, church groups, and schools. Several municipal government offi-
cials attended. Subsequently, black migrants arriving by train at Columbus’ Union Station were met by a “travelers’ aid” worker of the Negro Welfare League who assisted them in seeking contacts with social agencies, relatives, or friends. In 1918 the Negro Welfare League was reorganized as the Columbus Urban League, affiliated with the National Urban League. At the end of the decade, the featured work of the Columbus Urban League included placing unemployed persons in jobs, improving the efficiency of employed workers, and making adult education classes available to unschooled persons. Still at a formative stage, the Columbus Urban League sought contributions in 1920 to pay the salaries of the executive secretary, traveler’s aid, and home visitor. Also, contributions were needed to purchase office equipment and to acquire a building to serve as a community center. The Columbus Urban League evidently was not as well funded as its counterparts in Cincinnati and Cleveland.

In December 1917 the Negro Welfare Association was founded in Cleveland in response to mounting social problems experienced by thousands of recently arrived black migrants from the South. The Cleveland Negro Welfare Association shortly became affiliated with the National Urban League, but its antecedents and funding were much tied to Cleveland. In the summer of 1917 one of the city’s major civic organizations, the Cleveland Welfare Federation, appointed a biracial committee to study welfare problems arising from the wartime migration. The original idea of the Negro Welfare Association and most of its funds came from the Cleveland Welfare Federation. The Negro Welfare Association was meant to assist the adjustment of migrants to new living and working conditions in Cleveland, while improving their housing conditions and providing employment services. The association was designed to develop cooperation among existing welfare agencies serving black clients and to create new ones when necessary. After opening offices in the Phillis Wheatley Association Building at East 40th Street and Central Avenue, the association began operations on a first year budget estimated at $5,000.

According to Emmett J. Scott’s contemporary study of the black wartime migration to the urban North, Cleveland led other cities in Ohio in dealing with welfare problems of the migrants. Black and white civic organizations took an active interest in their difficult situation. In 1917 both the Cleveland Chamber of Commerce and the Cleveland Welfare Federation sponsored investigations into the welfare needs of black migrants. Nevertheless, many black migrants received no assistance in finding satisfactory housing before the winter of 1917–1918, when the Cleveland’s Negro Welfare Association began to coordinate
the migrant aid efforts of local African American churches and other organizations. The Negro Welfare Association’s annual report for 1918 recorded a variety of services aiding migrants. The association was most active in providing employment assistance, placing almost all of its 1,500 job applicants during the year. The association also urged greater efficiency among black industrial workers, gave clients advice concerning housing conditions, organized several “Home Economics Clubs,” and conducted surveys and investigations revealing conditions, needs, and wishes of African Americans in Cleveland. In 1919 the Negro Welfare Association helped establish a Community House to serve unemployed war veterans in the East 40th Street and Central Avenue area.

African Americans with strong academic credentials and backgrounds in social work served as executive secretaries of black welfare associations in Ohio during and after World War I. James Hathaway Robinson, who was born at Sharpsburg, Kentucky, in 1888, became executive secretary of Cincinnati’s Negro Civic Welfare Association in 1917. Robinson graduated with a B.A. degree from Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee. At Yale University he earned the M.A. degree and completed the residence requirements for the Ph.D. degree with a major in sociology. Then with the benefit of an Urban League fellowship, Robinson studied sociology and social work in the Graduate School of Columbia University during 1914–1915. Robinson was a member of Cincinnati’s Douglass School faculty when he was appointed executive secretary of the local Welfare Association. Using his formal training in social services, Robinson constructed an elaborate and sophisticated survey of the social-economic conditions in Cincinnati’s black community. Robinson’s Cincinnati survey and the planned welfare program based on it received national recognition in the field of social work. William R. Conners was hired as executive secretary of Cleveland’s Negro Welfare Association, starting in January 1918. Conners received his undergraduate degree from Biddle College (later Johnson C. Smith University), Charlotte, North Carolina. He was a teacher at Livingston College in Salisbury, North Carolina and then became a school principal in the Philadelphia area. Meanwhile, Conners studied at the University of Pennsylvania where he earned a master’s and a doctorate. In 1917, Conners was secretary of the Housing and Industrial Bureau in the National Urban League’s New York Office. He was sent to Ohio to assist local organizers who were forming Cleveland’s Negro Welfare Association as an Urban League affiliate.

The black welfare associations in Ohio operated with biracial executive boards. In Cleveland, blacks and whites were members of the Negro Welfare Association’s Board of Trustees. James H. Robinson’s plan for a
black welfare association in Cincinnati called for an advisory group including black professionals and others who were well informed about Cincinnati's black community. Most members of the Cincinnati Negro Civic Welfare Association's biracial board of directors were whites. Through 1920, a biracial executive board provided the sole governance of the Urban League's affiliate in Columbus, evidently because it lacked the funds for an executive secretary's salary. The board president was the Reverend Irving Maurer, the white pastor of the elite First Congregational Church in Columbus. Dr. William J. Woodlin, a black physician, was first vice president. Its secretary was an African American, Ann Hughes, who was superintendent of the Ohio Avenue Day Nursery for black children. The regular members of the board included several African American physicians, clergymen, and social workers. One of the African American board members, Nimrod B. Allen, was a likely candidate for the vacant executive secretary post. Allen, born at Gerard, Alabama, in 1886, was the son of a minister and educator. As a youngster, Allen worked on the Southern Christian Recorder, edited by his father. He attended Wilberforce University in Xenia, Ohio, receiving the B.A. from that traditionally black institution in 1910. Allen acquired some training in social work while studying at Yale University, where he was awarded the S.T.B. in 1915. Returning to Ohio in the same year, Allen became executive secretary of Columbus' Spring Street YMCA, a position that he held through 1920. Meanwhile he helped organize the local Negro Welfare League and the Urban League's Columbus affiliate. Allen was appointed as the executive secretary of the Columbus Urban League in 1921.

Generally, social services for African Americans in Ohio cities were not coordinated at the state level. But early in the war period a statewide organization formed in response to widespread publicity and concern about the welfare implications of the black migration into Ohio. The Ohio Federation for Uplift Among Colored People arose from a statewide conference on migrant problems held in Columbus in 1917. Among the leading black citizens of the state who had called for this large interracial meeting were J. Walter Wills, president of the Cleveland Association of Colored Men, and Charles S. Johnson, superintendent of the Champion Chemical Company of Springfield. The Ohio Federation cooperated with or established welfare organizations in Ohio cities, including Cincinnati, Cleveland, Dayton, Sandusky, Akron, Springfield, Xenia, Urbana, Piqua, Troy, and Chillicothe. It also maintained a lecture bureau and supported the war effort, for instance, by promoting the sale of United States Thrift Stamps. The Ohio Federation for Uplift Among Colored People evidently disintegrated after 1918 as the African American migration into Ohio temporarily subsided.
During and after World War I, African Americans in Ohio organized to protest racial discrimination as well as to aid African Americans needing employment, housing, and medical assistance. Branches of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) were established throughout Ohio during the second decade of the twentieth century. The Ohio branches were affiliated with the parent organization's national offices in New York City. The original plan to form the NAACP was made in 1909 at an interracial conference attended by W. E. B. Du Bois and other young African American members of the Niagara Movement who adamantly demanded an end to all racial discrimination and segregation. Also present were Jane Addams, John Dewey, and other white notables who were troubled by the recent Springfield riots and the prospect of escalating racial violence. Formally organized in 1910, the NAACP set out to combat racial inequality and brutality, especially in the forms of lynching and southern state laws that caused racial segregation and the disfranchisement of black men.\(^6\)

NAACP affiliates were started in many of the nation's cities. The first Ohio NAACP branch was organized at Cleveland in 1912. NAACP branches were formed at Cincinnati, Columbus, Dayton, Springfield, and Toledo in 1915. During the period 1916–1919, NAACP branches were established at Akron, Lorain, Oberlin, Wellsville, and Youngstown in northern Ohio. Meanwhile, NAACP branches were started in central Ohio at Urbana and in southern Ohio at Middletown and in Greene County.\(^6\) Like their parent organization, Ohio's NAACP branches were racially integrated, but most NAACP members and leaders in Ohio were African Americans.\(^6\) Usually, African Americans held the local offices; for example, in 1917 the president of the Cleveland NAACP branch was the Reverend Horace C. Bailey, pastor of Antioch Baptist Church.\(^6\) Likewise, in 1919 the Columbus branch's president was the Reverend Edward L. Gilliam, an African Methodist Episcopal church pastor, and its secretary was attorney S. T. Kelly.\(^7\) More NAACP affiliates were formed in Ohio during the decade than in most states.\(^7\) However, interest in Ohio's NAACP branches tended to decline after the original efforts to organize them. For example, the Cincinnati NAACP branch "in its early days had a large and loyal membership," according to Wendell P. Dabney, but "interest in it gradually died."\(^7\)

The Cleveland affiliate was the most vital NAACP branch in the state, and its public meetings were generally well attended. Even so, the NAACP’s Cleveland membership was small, and its branch there lacked sufficient funding.\(^7\) In Cleveland the NAACP interested itself in employment and housing problems, occasionally asserted itself in cases of racial discrimination, and hosted lectures by national civil rights lead-
ers, including Joel Spingarn. The first district conference of the NAACP was held in Cleveland in May 1916. Delegates attending the conference came from branches in Ohio, Michigan, and Pennsylvania, which were the states comprising the Great Lakes District. In June 1919 Cleveland was the site of the Tenth Anniversary Annual Conference of the national organization. While active in these ways, the Cleveland branch was criticized for ineffectiveness, as were others in the state. Silas D. McElroy, a Cleveland member, held, “. . . the local branch ought to do something far more practical for the race than merely hold meetings, with white speakers as a rule, and take in new members at one dollar each a greater part of which is sent to the National Association headquarters in New York City.”

The existence of NAACP branches in many Ohio cities created the potential for formally organized campaigns against racial bias in the state. But that potential was little realized before 1920. The NAACP occasionally opposed racial discrimination and sometimes succeeded. The NAACP was one voice among others advocating civil rights in Ohio. As in the past, opposition to racial bias in most instances was led not by civil rights organizations, but by individual African Americans acting on their own initiative or as spokespersons of traditional black institutions and associations including churches and newspapers. Some black persons who took these initiatives were acquainted with or were known to influential whites. Their acquaintances and reputations among white notables often arose from their active participation in partisan politics, almost always as Republicans. Commonly, white civic leaders and public officials involved in a particular issue were contacted on a personal basis. Black leaders individually or in committees addressed white leaders through personal conferences or through correspondence. The African American spokespersons described the nature of the grievance and requested action remedying the problem. When matters were not resolved in this way the issues were sometimes taken to the courts. In other circumstances, black persons whose civil rights were infringed upon acted directly and without group support, starting private legal proceedings under Ohio equal rights legislation. In still other cases of racial discrimination, black individuals brought attention to injustices by writing letters to the editors of local African American weekly newspapers or major dailies. In extraordinary instances, ad hoc groups of local black citizens formed to petition for redress of grievances, for example, concerning racial segregation in a public school. African American state legislators were expected to take leading parts when the Ohio legislature was capable of affecting the outcome of equal rights issues.

During its first decade of existence in Ohio, the NAACP did not lead
the opposition to color line practices in public accommodations. Typically, African American individuals opposed racial bias in Ohio’s public places during the decade when restaurants, theaters, parks, and other commercial venues increasingly excluded blacks or required racial segregation. An interested observer made a comparison of differing reactions to racial discrimination in Cleveland and Columbus that could have been made in regard to Cleveland and other Ohio cities. He wrote, “In Cleveland, although discrimination is clandestinely practiced, there is a conviction on the part of prejudiced whites that our people will fight in the courts thereby keeping prejudice and discrimination to a minimum; while here in Columbus there has been but one civil rights case tried in ten years, the prejudiced whites have no awakened public conscience.”

African Americans in Cleveland were more inclined to act against racial discrimination in public places than black citizens of other Ohio cities. In May 1917 the black ushers of Cleveland’s Miles Theatre, evidently acting on their own initiative, quit in a body when a patron was refused a ticket on the main floor because of her race. Editor Harry C. Smith (see photo 4) regularly used the Cleveland Gazette to vehemently criticize racial exclusion and segregation. Over a period of many years, The Gazette excoriated Cleveland’s Luna Park and the African Americans who patronized it. Luna Park’s concessions were closed to African Americans except when the Cleveland Caterers’ Association held its annual summer picnic there. In 1919 the Cleveland Association of Colored Men used its influence to discourage the Caterers and other African American organizations from using Luna Park. The Caterers Association subsequently held its outing at another park.

In several Ohio cities, African American individuals started legal proceedings against public accommodations, alleging racial discrimination in violation of Ohio’s late nineteenth century civil rights statutes. More civil rights suits were filed in Cleveland than elsewhere in the state. The civil rights cases involved alleged racial discrimination in restaurants and theatres. African American plaintiffs won most of the suits involving restaurants but lost most of those against theatres. (See table A4.) Ohio statutes permitted courts to award at most $100 to victims of racial discrimination. Usually the black litigants were businessmen, lawyers, and other professionals. Few civil rights suits were filed because members of the African American community generally were unaware of the existence of laws prohibiting racial discrimination in public accommodations, lacked money to initiate litigation, desired to avoid the notoriety of a court case, or wished to avoid the degrading experience of being refused service.

African American resistance to racial discrimination most often
occurred in the state’s large urban centers but sometimes was mounted in small Ohio cities. During 1916 through 1918, Gallipolis was the scene of a campaign to end racial segregation in a public high school. In the war decade Gallipolis’ total population did not exceed 6,070, and its black population declined from 684 to 482.\(^\text{81}\) Located on the Ohio River border with West Virginia, the city’s racial practices reflected those of the South. Gallipolis was one of the few Ohio cities maintaining separate

\begin{center}
\textbf{Photo 4}
Harry C. Smith.
\end{center}

With permission of The Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, Ohio.
schools for African Americans in the twentieth century. Lincoln Elementary School for African Americans was opened in Gallipolis in the late nineteenth century. During the 1880s, black students were refused admission to Gallipolis’ Union High School and were discouraged from attempting to register at Gallia Academy, another secondary school in the Gallia County seat. African American parents persistently tried to enroll their children in the high school, and the board of education responded by adding two rooms to the Lincoln Elementary School. Thereafter, a “high school education” was purportedly available to African Americans in those rooms. The “high school” for African Americans employed one teacher until 1900, when a second one was hired. Commenting on the unsatisfactory character of the “high school” in the Lincoln Elementary facility, a black Gallipolis citizen wrote: “An obsolete, dilapidated building, inadequate in every respect for the needs of the scholars, has been given us for years, also, teachers, who are not always appointed without political consideration. Thus was lowered the intellectual and moral standard of the institution. . . .”

The issue of new school construction in Gallipolis was raised in 1916 when the Gallia Academy trustees offered to transfer that institution to the local school board if it would authorize the construction of a modern high school building. Accordingly, the property was transferred and Gallipolis High School was erected. African Americans were not permitted to attend the new high school. Responding to complaints about this, the Gallipolis school board repaired the dilapidated Lincoln School. Two years later, in May 1918, black residents petitioned the board of education to substantially improve Lincoln School or to admit African American students to the new high school. The board ignored the petition. The following September some eligible students from Lincoln School sought admission to Gallipolis High but were refused.

Several factors made it difficult for the advocates of high school integration to gain the active support of the whole African American community in Gallipolis. Some were affected by apathy resulting from the failure of previous attempts to influence the board of education. Some in the black community opposed “mixing the schools.” In this regard, a black resident of Gallipolis commented: “These conditions [at Lincoln School] were tolerated for years, the personal interest of the few being of more value than the future possibilities of the many!” Undoubtedly, his reference was to the few African American teachers and their students. Outside of Cleveland, Ohio school boards only employed black teachers to instruct black students. Unemployment of black teachers would likely follow high school integration. Nevertheless, local activists obtained the services of a Columbus attorney. An injunction suit against the
school board was filed in common pleas court. On November 18, 1918, the court found that the Gallipolis Board of Education had “willfully, arbitrarily and illegally” maintained a separate high school for African Americans and enjoined the board from maintaining such a high school. In a session at Ironton, a circuit court of appeals upheld the decision.85

During and after World War I, African Americans in Ohio criticized racial discrimination in employment, housing, and law enforcement; opposed color lines in public schools and in public accommodations; and addressed issues of racial violence.

Exhibition of racist motion picture films in the state was at the center of the most extensive and sustained opposition to color bias by black Ohioans at the time. African Americans everywhere were offended by the racial contents of “The Birth of a Nation” and other films exhibited nationwide during World War I. There were intense controversies in many states as NAACP representatives and other voices of black protest objected when these films were exhibited. Racially biased films were shown in Ohio cities during March 1915 through October 1918. Throughout that period and in every section of Ohio, African Americans urged theater owners and public authorities to edit the films or stop their exhibitions. While by no means alone in these campaigns, the NAACP actively opposed these motion pictures in several Ohio cities. Other expressions of protest came from individual African Americans, especially newspaper editors and clergymen. African American women’s associations and ministerial alliances joined the controversies. Eventually, an African American state representative sought a legislative remedy. African Americans approached and pressured whites in authority, including Ohio mayors, police chiefs, governors, and state film censorship board members.

In March 1915 a motion picture released in Cleveland by the Fox Film Corporation carried a title bound to offend African Americans. The black Ministers’ Alliance in Cleveland held a meeting to discuss the showing of “The Nigger” at the Standard Theatre and adopted a strong set of protest resolutions. The ministers visited Cleveland Mayor Newton D. Baker to protest the exhibition of the film. Also, Harry C. Smith, editor of a local African American weekly, called upon the mayor and the chief of police in connection with the film. Smith reported the mayor’s statement that the film “would be banished from the city if it was as represented by us.”86 The chief of police ordered an investigation, sending officers to see the film. The officers claimed that it did not warrant an order of suppression and reported that the state board of film censors had approved the film for showing.87 In reply to a letter from Editor Smith, Governor Frank Willis wrote, “I shall take immediate steps to bring this
[the film] to the attention of the State Moving Picture Censor Board in order that this film may not be exhibited at any point within the limits of this state. The governor was given a copy of a review of the film taken from a motion picture industry journal. The *Moving Picture World* stated:

> Repulsive, harmful and void of any moral lesson worth pointing out in a picture purporting to be founded on Edward Sheldon’s play, “The Nigger.” . . . . A drunken Negro, frothing at the mouth, is shown in a close up as he hides behind a tree, waiting to assault a little (white) girl wandering through the woods. The child dies from the effects of what a sub-title describes as “the usual crime,” and after that we have a manhunt with bloodhounds, a lynching and the spectacle of a Negro being burned at the stake. Nothing so nauseating as “The Nigger” has been shown on the screen as seen by a representative of the *Moving Picture World*, it is a brutal appeal to most dangerous human passions and prejudices.

Mayor Newton D. Baker, also replying to an inquiry by Editor Smith, said that he had contacted the state censor board. The board had informed him “that the film in question . . . contained none of the disgusting and inflammatory details in . . . the *Motion Picture World*.” Baker assumed “these objectionable things had been eliminated before the film was exhibited to our Censor Board.” Editor Smith replied that the chief of police had informed him that ten feet of film had been eliminated. Smith stated positively, however, that objectionable features remained. These features included scenes showing the Negro hiding “behind a tree waiting to assault the little white girl,” the dead child, the manhunt, “the flames indicating the lynching and burning at the stake,” and a “‘race war’ during which whites were killed by Negroes.

The controversy about the showing of “The Nigger” in Cleveland was resolved when the Censor Board withdrew its approval of the film. Governor Willis informed Editor Smith, “As soon as I heard from you I got in touch with the President of the [Censor] Board. Upon further consideration the Board adopted a resolution rescinding the certification that had been issued for the very objectionable film, ‘The Nigger,’ Notification was sent to the Fox Film Corporation at Cleveland, Cincinnati and New York. Also authorities at Cleveland were notified.” The showing of the film was then discontinued by action of the Cleveland police.

A new version of “The Nigger” with a different name did pass the state’s board of film censors. Chairman of the Board Charles G. Williams
explained that “a new picture” had been “submitted to the Board under the name of ‘The Mystery of Morrow’s Rest’ without the objectionable parts.” According to Williams, however, some film exhibitors advertised the revived film as “The Nigger” or showed the original version under the new title.  

The local NAACP branch discovered that the Majestic Theatre in Springfield was attempting to show the original film under the title “The Mystery of Morrow’s Rest.” The local NAACP branch then complained to the Springfield city manager, who informed the state censor board. Subsequently the board stopped the showing of the film.  

Municipal officials in several Ohio cities took action against “The Mystery of Morrow’s Rest” once African Americans made objections to it. In June 1915, Mayor Hartenstein of Youngstown reported:

> . . . I advised the management of the theater not to produce it because of its tendency to arouse race prejudice. The manager faithfully promised me he would obey my request. When several prominent Colored residents called and objected to the picture, I informed them it would not be produced. [Later] I found out that the picture called “The Mystery of Morrow’s Rest,” advertised to appear at the Dome . . . was really “The Nigger” under another name. I immediately instructed [Police] Captain Jenkins to stop the show, and he obeyed my orders.

The exhibition of the film also was stopped in Steubenville and Toledo under similar circumstances. “The Mystery of Morrow’s Rest” was shown in Lorain despite protest. Ruth Anna Fisher of Lorain’s Colored Women’s Association stated: “. . . the unpleasant . . . feature of this case was the apparent indifference of our city officials in the matter. The chief of police passed the case on to the mayor; and he in turn gave it over to the city solicitor who was glad to do nothing about it.”

“The Birth of a Nation,” epic film maker D. W. Griffith’s version of Thomas Dixon’s overtly anti-black fiction, was released nationwide in 1915 and shown through the war years. Griffith’s professional reputation and the extraordinary technical quality of his film in combination with its emotional content quickly made “The Birth of a Nation” a major commercial film. The motion picture seemed to inflame racial passions as the lynching of black men increased and race rioting spread in the United States. Meanwhile, the NAACP’s New York headquarters orchestrated a campaign designed to stop the screening of “The Birth of a Nation,” and African Americans throughout the land opposed it. Beginning in the summer of 1915 African American leaders from Cleveland and around Ohio urged state officials to prevent the showing
of “The Birth of a Nation.” At the end of September the promoters of the film applied to the State Board of Motion Picture Censors for permission to exhibit it in Ohio. In response, a biracial protest against “The Birth of a Nation” was filed with the state censors’ board by Columbus civic leaders including representatives of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, Mayor George J. Karb, Dr. Washington Gladden, pastor of the First Congregational Church, Rabbi Kornfield, and Editor James Carroll of the Catholic Columbian. The censors’ board subsequently denied the application of the film’s promoters.\textsuperscript{100}

Chairman of the Ohio Board of Motion Picture Censors Charles G. Williams, in giving his official opinion on “The Birth of a Nation,” commented upon the protests against the film. He said that the Ohio Board of Motion Picture Censors received information indicating that “the entire Colored race” seriously objected to the film. The Governor’s office received many protests against “The Birth of a Nation.” Governor Frank B. Willis repeatedly asked the board to carefully consider the motion picture and “urgently recommended” rejection of the film if the board found that it was “of such a character as to reflect upon the Colored race” and tended “to arouse racial hatred and prejudice.” According to Williams, the owners of the film submitted many statements praising “The Birth of a Nation.” These included recommendations by “reputable individual citizens” that the film be shown. Supporters asserted that it was of “dramatic and historical value” and that it was the “most gigantic production from the standpoint of cast and spectacular achievement” ever made by the film industry.\textsuperscript{101}

After viewing “The Birth of a Nation,” the Board of Motion Picture Censors admitted that it had “a great dramatic value” and that it was “stupendous from the standpoint of camera achievements.” But the board concluded that the film reflected “unfavorably on the colored race” and that it misrepresented history. Williams wrote:

The entire latter half of said film is devoted to scenes and subtitles portraying Colored men engaged in all sorts of vicious conduct toward whites of the South during the Civil War and Reconstruction Period following. There are many mob scenes where Negroes are in the most repelling way attacking white citizens, and scenes where Negro men are forcing their attention upon white women and are engaged in all sorts of ridiculous and knavish conduct, not only as individuals, but as a race. True, they were led in many instances by what the film terms “scalawag carpetbaggers”; but this only further reflects upon the government of that period. . . . [The] child unfamiliar with the real facts of history, would upon
viewing the film immediately conclude that the result of the Civil War was the greatest crime in the annals of history, rather than, the prevention of human beings being driven by the lash and being sold upon the auction block.\footnote{102}

Defenders of “The Birth of a Nation” held that the film was not objectionable because it concerned events of a time long ago. While the film was set in the past, the Ohio Board of Motion Picture Censors concluded that it affected current life. Chairman Williams said: “[I]t strongly tends to arouse hatred and prejudice among the coming generation against a race that is living in our midst.” Noting that “The Birth of a Nation” seemed to condone lawlessness by the Ku Klux Klan and racial violence against African Americans in the past, Williams stated:

The play also represents the Ku Klux Klan in such a manner that their conduct would be applauded. It tends to justify that organization in capturing the Negroes and, as masked vigilance committees, trying them at night, convicting them of supposed outrages, executing them and placing their bodies at the doors of state officials who sympathized with their cause. . . . [T]he same spirit that urged their activities at that time is the same that prompts such appalling conduct in recent times as to cause Negroes to be lynched, making lynching day a day of celebration. . . . Films which present scenes of this character in a manner which to the onlooker seems to be justified cannot fail to be harmful.\footnote{103}

The Ohio Board of Motion Picture Censors rejected “The Birth of a Nation” in its entirety instead of approving an edited version of it.\footnote{104}

In January 1916 the owners of “The Birth of a Nation,” through Attorney Joseph W. Heintzman of Cincinnati, threatened to file an injunction suit in the Supreme Court of Ohio or in a federal district court if the Ohio Board of Motion Picture Censors did not revise its ruling on their film.\footnote{105} In response Ohio Attorney General Edward C. Turner personally reviewed the motion picture and subsequently supported the board of film censors’ decision. Turner gave the opinion that the picture should have been entitled “An Insult to the Nation.”\footnote{106} On January 18 the Epoch Producing Company, the owners of the film, filed a suit to restrain the censors’ board from prohibiting the showing of “The Birth of a Nation” in Ohio.\footnote{107} A federal district court dismissed the case on the grounds “that an adequate legal remedy is afforded by Ohio statute in provision for appeal from the ruling of the state board of motion picture censors to the Ohio Supreme Court.”\footnote{108} The state
The supreme court subsequently upheld the board’s ruling on “The Birth of a Nation.”

The decision of the Ohio Supreme Court regarding “The Birth of a Nation” did not end the controversy over the film. Attempts to have it shown in Ohio were renewed in 1917 after a change in the administration of state government. Democratic Governor James M. Cox succeeded former Republican Governor Frank B. Willis. A revised version of the film passed the state censors’ board on February 1, 1917. Two days later George A. Myers, who was perhaps the most widely known black man in Cleveland, asked the chairman of the Democratic party organization in Cuyahoga County to use his influence with Governor Cox to have the film prohibited. The county Democratic leader informed the governor that he had seen “The Birth of a Nation” while in New York City and advised, “I doubt very much the wisdom of allowing it to be shown in Ohio.” Nevertheless, the film was exhibited in theaters around the state, beginning in March, but not without the continued opposition of African American activists and interested white citizens.

In March a committee of Dayton African American leaders actively campaigned against the showing of “The Birth of a Nation” in that city. The committee obtained the cooperation and aid of the Greater Dayton Association (a business organization), the Dayton Federation of Churches, and the Young Women’s Christian Association of Dayton. The film’s opponents appealed to local authorities in Dayton, which employed the city commission form of municipal government. The Dayton City Commission passed a resolution condemning the exhibition of “The Birth of a Nation.” The commission then considered the passage of a city ordinance that would have prevented the screening of the motion picture. Among the interested parties who gave pertinent testimony before the commission were conservative African American newspapermen George L. Knox and A. E. Manning, publishers of the Indianapolis Freemen and the Indianapolis World respectively. Knox and Manning spoke in favor of “The Birth of a Nation,” and their testimony evidently dissuaded the Dayton city commissioners from enacting an ordinance prohibiting the film’s appearance in Dayton, according to the Dayton Forum, an African American weekly.

Early in April 1917, when the opening of “The Birth of a Nation” at Cleveland theaters was advertised, local civic leaders began to protest against it. For example, the Cleveland Minister’s Union (white) sent letters opposing the film to Mayor Davis and Governor Cox. Mayor Davis repeatedly stated that he would do all in his power to prevent the showing of the picture in Cleveland. On March 29 the mayor issued an order to stop the exhibition of “The Birth of a Nation” on the grounds
that “it might tend to incite riots.”\textsuperscript{116} The Epoch Producing Company subsequently filed an injunction suit in the local federal district court to restrain the city officials from interfering with the presentation of the film.\textsuperscript{117} Meanwhile, the Cleveland City Council passed a resolution disapproving of “The Birth of a Nation” and then passed an ordinance prohibiting its exhibition and the use of advertising that tended to cause riots.\textsuperscript{118} The film company’s injunction suit was dismissed from the federal district court, whereupon it was carried to the local common pleas court. The common pleas court ruled that city officials had no right to interfere with the presentation of “The Birth of a Nation” because the state censors’ board had approved it. Meanwhile, the Cleveland Branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, the Cleveland Association of Colored Men, and the Cleveland Federation of Colored Women’s Clubs had joined in a united fund-raising campaign to hire lawyers to assist the city attorneys in the case.\textsuperscript{119}

In Cincinnati the local branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People appealed to the mayor to prohibit the showing of “The Birth of a Nation.” The request proved to be fruitless. Furthermore, NAACP Branch President William Stevenson’s effort to obtain a court injunction against the film was thwarted by a lack of funds.\textsuperscript{120}

Opposition to “The Birth of a Nation” was taken to the Ohio General Assembly in 1917. Hamilton County State Representative A. Lee Beaty was the only African American in the state legislature at the time. On January 30 Beaty introduced House Bill No. 227 that provided a fine of up to one thousand dollars against any person “who shall advertise, publish, present or exhibit in any public place in this state, any lithograph, drawing, picture, play, drama or sketch that tends to incite race riot or race hatred, or shall represent any hanging, lynching or burning of any human being. . . .”\textsuperscript{121} It was hoped that such a measure would have the effect of preventing the exhibition of “The Birth of a Nation” and similar films. Several African American leaders spoke in favor of House Bill No. 227 before a hearing of the House Judiciary Committee, to which the bill had been referred.\textsuperscript{122} On February 19, Beaty presented the House with a petition of two hundred forty-one Franklin County citizens favoring the bill.\textsuperscript{123} House Bill No. 227 received support from other parts of the state. The Baptist Ministers’ Alliance and several other African American church groups in Cincinnati passed resolutions in favor of the measure. William Stevenson, who was president of the Cincinnati NAACP branch, gave several speeches in support of the bill and circulated a petition that was sent to the state legislature.\textsuperscript{124}

Both Democratic and Republican members of the Ohio House of
Representatives offered Beaty support for House Bill No. 227. But an editorial in Dayton News made some of them anxious about siding with Beaty. Governor James M. Cox was the publisher of the Dayton News, and many assumed that its editorials reflected the governor’s opinions. The News editorial was favorable to “The Birth of a Nation.” The editor asserted, “[I]t is only the Negro politicians who are trying to stir up a tempest in a teapot” about the picture and “it is hoped that they will not succeed.” Beaty and the other proponents of House Bill No. 227 were fearful that it would die in committee unless it was forwarded to the whole house well before the end of the legislative session in March. Consequently, they took steps to bring it up for a vote. On March 2, Beaty succeeded in having the bill taken from the judiciary committee and placed upon the calendar. A few days later he failed in an effort to have it moved up on the calendar. Nevertheless, House Bill No. 227 passed the house with a unanimous vote on March 9. The next day it was received by the senate, given a second reading, and sent to the senate judiciary committee. On the last day of the legislature, March 21, Senator White of Columbiana County tried to bring the bill to a vote by moving to have it taken from the judiciary committee. The motion failed and House Bill No. 227 was thus killed.

State Representative Beaty concluded that former Republican Governor Frank Willis precluded the possibility of bipartisan support for the bill in the senate and thereby caused its death. Beaty stated: “I had hopes of bringing it [House Bill No. 227] to a vote until Willis wrote a letter to the Republican Senators urging that all vote for it. The letter became public, party lines were drawn and I now realize that Democrats in control of the senate will not let it come to a vote.” State Senator George D. Jones, who was a Democrat and Columbus NAACP branch president, had offered to promote the passage of the bill in the senate. But after Willis’ appeal, Jones had withdrawn his support and had abstained when the crucial senate vote on the bill was taken. However, Editor Harry C. Smith of the Cleveland Gazette, a black weekly, believed that the Ohio General Assembly’s Democratic majority was responsible for the death of House Bill No. 227.

“The Birth of a Nation” was free to run in Ohio from early 1917 until October 1918. During that period it was shown in many Ohio cities including Cleveland, Dayton, Columbus, Cincinnati, Toledo, and Lorain. African American leaders continued to express opposition to the showing of the film. After the motion picture was shown in Ohio for over a year Governor Cox took steps to prevent further release of it in the state. Harry C. Smith, editor of the Cleveland Gazette, was informed that the producers of “The Birth of a Nation” agreed voluntarily to stop
showing it in Ohio after October 1, 1918, “at the request of Governor Cox.”

Surely, “The Birth of a Nation” and other contemporary films depicting racial violence contributed to the trend of rising white hostility toward blacks that included the spread of race riots in urban America or at least reflected that social phenomenon of the time. Deadly violence occurred in many cities including East St. Louis, Chicago, Omaha, and the District of Columbia. The African American community of Ohio was concerned about the nationwide epidemic of race riots and racial incidents. In Ohio, meetings were held and resolutions protesting violence against African Americans were adopted. In Cleveland, for example, the Ministers’ Alliance, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, and the Cleveland Association of Colored Men passed a resolution strongly condemning “the appalling outrages committed upon citizens of the United States and residents of East St. Louis, Illinois” and sent it to Representative H. I. Emerson, of the 21st Ohio Congressional District. Similarly, a meeting to protest against the Omaha riot was held at Cleveland’s Metropolitan Church.

African American activists in some Ohio cities organized to prevent local riots. In August 1918 about fifteen representative citizens of Cleveland’s East End joined an ad hoc committee that was formed to report racial incidents and seek protection for members of the African American community. The committee was created in response to a series of incidents involving whites molesting blacks on East End avenues and streetcars in the summer of 1918. The committee, in cooperation with the local NAACP branch, sought and secured promises of protection from Cleveland’s director of public safety. In 1919 some one hundred African Americans in Franklin County organized the Columbus Citizens’ Law and Order League. The purpose of the league was to prevent African Americans from taking any action that might lead to rioting. The means of achieving the objective was to be “instruction on the advantages of being law abiding citizens.”

Prominent African Americans in Ohio publicly stated their views concerning the racial violence of the period. While some of these statements were directed toward whites, others were addressed to blacks. Harry C. Smith, using the editorial voice of the Cleveland Gazette, repeatedly warned his readers that they might be subjected to mob violence. Often in the race riots at that time, armed white mobs invaded black residential areas. Smith’s repeated advice was that the Gazette’s readers should arm themselves in order to protect their homes against such violence. In 1919, following the riots in Chicago and in the District of Columbia, Smith wrote an editorial entitled, “The Mob: A Warning.”
He warned, “Cleveland may be the next riot storm-center” and advised, “have a U.S. Amy Riot Gun in your homes.” Consequently, a Cleveland daily newspaper quoted the editorial and implied that Smith was inciting a riot. In response, Smith stated: “The Gazette is unalterably opposed to the mob and our readers well know this.” Advising citizens to have protection in their homes, Smith asserted, “whether it be against a thief, a would be murderer or a mobocrat is no crime, is not contributory to the same, is not without the law but clearly within the law and good sound advice.” In further rebuttal, Smith wrote:

The Gazette stands for law and order! No agency among our people of this community has more constantly and incessantly for years urged our people to be law abiding to the last degree but at the same time to be MEN and WOMEN who know their rights and privileges as citizens, and to insist upon them . . . in a proper way.

The race rioting in contemporary America also was the subject of public comments made in the postwar period by William S. Scarborough, president of traditionally black Wilberforce University near Xenia, Ohio. His audience was the largely white readership of a national magazine, The Independent. He offered a means to solve the problems of racial violence. After describing the injustices suffered by African Americans, especially black soldiers, Scarborough said: “There is but one remedy for the riots, and that is justice—a willingness to accord every man his rights—civil and political. . . .” On the one hand he appealed to the whites’ sense of fair play. On the other, he noted in very mild language that African Americans would defend themselves physically if necessary. Scarborough wrote:

The Negro is law-abiding and only occasionally shows a retaliatory spirit. Will not the American white people come halfway—put aside their prejudices and play fair with this people that has done so much to help win the war? Negroes are not rioters, but they can be made so.

Race riots in Chicago and other cities during 1919 occurred while the United States was experiencing the postwar Red Scare. Ohioans felt the anti-Bolshevik hysteria that exaggerated the potential for violence by political radicals. In Cleveland parading Socialists were attacked and Socialist headquarters were ransacked on May Day, 1919. One aspect of the Red Scare in Ohio and the nation was an anxiety that the Bolsheviks would successfully recruit African Americans, with violent
results. James W. Faulkner, a *Cincinnati Enquirer* columnist, reported that African American political leaders of Cleveland were discussing “overtures of the Socialist party for a union of forces.” Faulkner’s report named Harry C. Smith, who was a businessman, ardent capitalist, and lifelong Republican. Speaking as the proprietor of the Cleveland Gazette, Smith scoffed at Faulkner’s assertions and added: “Negro leaders of [Cleveland] . . . are impatiently waiting for the opportunity to vote a straight Republican ticket at the next national election. They want no union with other parties. . . .” Subsequently, reports were circulated that International Workers of the World agents were attempting to incite blacks to mob violence in Akron, Cleveland, and other Ohio cities. Early in October 1919, Akron police raided International Workers of the World headquarters in that city, arrested its organizers and confiscated pamphlets. The pamphlets were reportedly “violent in tone”; that is, they urged blacks to retaliate against whites for injustices they had suffered. Yet there were no reports of black Ohioans initiating retaliatory violence against whites. These fears about the loyalty of African Americans, Bolshevism, and violence are illuminated by current studies examining the federal government’s surveillance of alleged African American radicals during the war.

New research comments on issues of wartime patriotism among African Americans. In Ohio, the fulfillment of wartime citizenship responsibilities was used to buttress claims to citizenship rights. Many blacks backed the war, professed loyalty to the war’s democratic ideals, and then called for the realization of these war aims. Black men joined the armed services as volunteers and draftees. Some black Ohioans were inducted directly into the United States Army. Others entered the national service as volunteer members of Ohio’s state militia units. African Americans from Ohio served in combat and noncombat roles. Black Ohioans enrolled in the Officer Training School at Fort Des Moines, Iowa, and in Students’ Army Training Corps programs on college campuses. African Americans from Ohio were among the military officers, physicians, female nurses, and war correspondents of World War I. Some of the black combat units representing Ohio won war honors. Meanwhile, African Americans on the home front in Ohio did their bit for the war effort, for example, by backing the government’s war loan campaigns. The African American contributions to the defense of democracy during the war made black Ohioans feel even more entitled to racial equality under the law.

During the conflict, the United States War Department created two black combat organizations: the 92nd Division, draftees, and the 93rd Division (Provisional), largely National Guardsmen. These black divisions
were trained at a variety of camps in the United States, sent overseas at different times, and assigned to various divisions of the French army. A large proportion of the black Ohioans who served in World War I were draftees in the National Army. Under the Selective Service Act of May 1917, 7,861 blacks and 139,695 whites from Ohio were drafted for duty in the war. Many Ohio draftees, both black and white, were trained in Ohio at Camp Sherman near Chillicothe. Ohio's black draftees served in 92nd Division units including the 317th Engineers Regiment, the 317th Engineers Train, the 325th Field Signal Battalion, and the 365th Infantry Regiment.

Many black Ohioans were schooled as officers in various officers training camps. Some entered the Officers Training School at Fort Des Moines, Iowa. Eighteen Ohio men were among those who received commissions at Fort Des Moines in October 1917. Two were commissioned as captains, nine as first lieutenants, and seven as second lieutenants. Later, many other black Ohioans received commissions. Wilberforce University, a traditionally black college in southwest Ohio, alone sent two hundred African American students to the regular army's officers training camps. Wilberforce University also participated in the Students’ Army Training Corps Program involving about five hundred fifty educational institutions nationwide, including approximately twenty African American institutions. The program's purpose was to use educational facilities to complement the training programs of the regular army camps.

The Surgeon General's Office, United States Army, accepted few of the African American physicians and nurses who wanted to serve in the war. Charles Garvin, a Cleveland physician, was an exception. Garvin, a lieutenant, was a member of an otherwise white hospital contingent created in Cleveland in the summer of 1917 for immediate service in France. Eventually he was transferred to the medical section at Fort Des Moines because he was an African American. Garvin subsequently attained the rank of captain and commanded the African American 366th Ambulance Corps, which served in France. Until the war was nearly over, the Surgeon General's Office and the Red Cross refused black women who volunteered for the nursing service; then in July 1918, the authorities accepted about a half dozen African American nurses, four of whom were assigned to Camp Sherman in Ohio.

Many black Ohioans volunteered for military service in the Ohio National Guard's Ninth Separate Battalion, a black unit that was organized in 1881. The battalion was composed of Companies A–D, stationed in Springfield, Columbus, Dayton, and Cleveland respectively. As war loomed during 1916–1917 certain socially and politically prominent
African Americans across Ohio made an elaborate and persistent effort to obtain governmental approval of their proposal to enlarge the black battalion to a regiment. The proposed regiment’s advocates used their direct acquaintances with whites in authority positions, including the Ohio governor, the Ohio adjutant general, and most notably the Wilson administration’s secretary of war, who was Clevelander Newton D. Baker. Ultimately, their proposition was rejected but not before it reached the desk of President Woodrow Wilson. At first the black battalion was sent with the Ohio Guard to Alabama for training at Camp Sheridan. Later, it was transferred to Camp Stuart in Virginia, where it was designated as the Second Battalion of the 372nd Regiment in the 93rd Division that was composed of black national guard units of many states. At Camp Stuart, two black Clevelanders, Major John C. Fulton and Captain William R. Green, were reportedly retired by reason of physical disability. The black press suspected that the alleged ill health was being used as an excuse to remove black officers above the rank of captain. The Ohio battalion embarked for France with the 372nd Regiment on March 30, 1918.

The 372nd Regiment, with its contingent of Ohio National Guardsmen, was one of the two combat regiments in the African American 93rd Division that were brigaded with the famous 157th or “Red Hand” Division of the French Army. The 372nd Regiment’s most notable combat duty was done under heavy shelling in defense of “Hill 304” in the Verdun Sector during the summer 1918. A press report about black men defending “Hill 304” stated:

[A] company of the Old Ninth Ohio Battalion . . . laid in an open field all night, awaiting orders to go into action, while all the time the Germans were dumping 210 shells and 88 machine gun fire at them. But even in the face of such a murderous fire, the line stood firm. Anderson Lee and William Chenault, of Dayton, were killed.

The 372nd Regiment also participated in the Champaigne offensive in September 1918. General Goybet, Commander of the 157th Division, praised the “dash” and heroism of the men of the black regiments under his command. Prior to disembarkation from France, Vice Admiral Moreau decorated the colors of the 372nd Regiment with the Croix de Guerre.

African Americans aided the war effort on the home front in the United States as well as in Europe. President William S. Scarborough of Wilberforce University was a member of Governor James M. Cox's War
Blacks generously supported the five war loan campaigns. The Fourth Liberty loan, for instance, received contributions of fifteen thousand dollars from pupils at Stowe School in Cincinnati, five thousand dollars from Big Four Roundhouse employees in Columbus, and over four thousand dollars from coal miners at St. Clairsville. The African American press in the state played an active role in promoting the loan campaigns. Journalists Harry C. Smith of the Cleveland Gazette and Ralph W. Tyler of Columbus attended an extraordinary national conference of black newsmen in June 1918 that was held to discuss press coverage of African Americans in the war. In September 1918, the Wilson Administration’s Committee on Public Information designated Tyler “as a regularly commissioned war correspondent to specialize on the conditions surrounding the colored troops in France. . . .” Tyler had served in various departments of the Columbus Evening Dispatch and the Ohio State Journal. He had been a contributing editor for the African American Cleveland Advocate and secretary of the National Colored Soldiers Comfort Committee. Tyler reached France just prior to the Armistice and observed some of the final combat of the war. His dispatches included glowing accounts of the African Americans’ role in the war.

African Americans assisted private organizations, including the Red Cross and the YMCA, which sponsored separate social centers for black and white trainees. These facilities were intended to maintain the soldiers’ morale while they were in training in the United States. African Americans, for instance, staffed “Community Houses” for black soldiers that the War Camp Community Service sponsored in many Ohio cities. The establishment of “Community Houses” for soldiers foreshadowed the establishment of similar projects for the greater African American community during the war in many cities in Ohio and across the country.

What was the war’s significance in the history of Ohio’s black-white relations? African American participation in World War I raised a new spirit of resistance to the color line in Ohio. This spirit, which arose in Ohio and elsewhere, underlay what historians of black history in the United States have long since called “the New Negro” movement of the 1920s. African Americans who performed military service to defend democracy in Europe experienced a white society in France that was relatively free of racial discrimination. The wartime crusade for democracy abroad and at home inspired African Americans to greater insistence on equal rights promised in the democratic ideal. Like many African Americans who were in France during the war, Ohioan Ralph W. Tyler
appreciated the French people's comparative lack of racial prejudice. He wrote: "I am stuck on France. I feel free over here—absolutely . . . free. Were I a young man I would never return, and as it is, were it not for the fight I ABSOLUTELY KNOW we face on returning I would prefer to stay here where you have real democracy. But to stay, and fail to get into the fight back home would stamp me as a coward, which I am not."\(^{174}\)

The war effort in Europe and on the home front inspired other black Ohioans to contest the color line. Blacks objected to the color line in military and civilian life during the war. The black press in Ohio, for instance, called attention to the inequitable shelter and treatment accorded blacks in military encampments and to the exclusion of blacks from the officers' corps above certain ranks and from the nursing corps.\(^{175}\)

In 1918, black parents in the southern Ohio town of Gallipolis challenged the existence of an inferior segregated high school that they had tolerated for years. Explaining why the parents acted when they did, a local observer wrote: "But with hundreds of thousands of our boys fighting to make 'the world safe for democracy,' and the race at home being loyal to its government in every particular, it became our duty in this city, to see that this 'democracy' here did not degenerate into a mere catchphrase."\(^{176}\) The struggle to promote the nation's democratic principles at home increasingly required the use of organization.

In summary, persistence and change shaped the struggle to affirm equal rights and to sustain the needs of African Americans in Ohio during the period 1915–1920. Early nineteenth century regional differences in the nature of protest persisted through 1920; however, the style of African American leadership changed with the times. The enormous proliferation of sundry kinds of voluntary associations was a characteristic of modernization in the United States following the Civil War, especially in the Progressive Era after the turn of the century. Americans of practically every color, class, and gender became increasingly organized.\(^{177}\) Blacks in Ohio, for instance, joined affiliates of the NAACP and the National Urban League, founded in the decade after 1910. In Ohio, this was a decade of transition from African American leadership exercised through informal networks of prominent individuals to leadership conducted through organizations. The leadership changeover was incomplete in 1920. Ohio's NAACP branches and Urban League affiliates were still approaching maturity at decade's end. These new organizations had created bureaucratic forms, defined issues of concern, and set some precedents for action, establishing the basis for more effective work in the future. Meantime, old networks of influential individuals were intact and functioning, although weakened a bit by advancing age, competition from new organizations, and decreasing Republican party
support of African American interests in the partisan arena. The new-style organized leadership coexisted with the old-style individual networks in the period 1915–1920. Sometimes the two leadership sets addressed the same particular cause, each working independently of the other and each using its own methods and techniques. The rivalry’s future in the 1920s was predictable in the teens. The new organized leadership was young and gathering strength while the old one was showing some signs of decline.