African Americans and the Color Line in Ohio, 1915-1930

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Published by The Ohio State University Press

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African Americans and the Color Line in Ohio, 1915-1930.
The Ohio State University Press, 2005.
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The 1920s presented the greatest challenge to the African American
equal rights struggle in Ohio since the nineteenth century. Racial
discrimination and segregation reached new levels as the floodwaters of
white intolerance crested during the twenties, after rising for decades.
African Americans in Ohio, upon seeing color bars rise, elevated the
struggle in city after city. The decade’s African American rights efforts
were mainly local in nature, each being mounted by local residents and
aimed at the local color line. Equal rights advocates in Ohio occasional-
ly practiced statewide cooperation on wider issues. There were also
exceptional instances of intervention in Ohio by the leadership of the
national civil rights movement. Local differences in the strength and
characteristics of equal rights activities existed from city to city. Equal
rights work was decidedly most vigorous, extensive, and effective in the
cities of northern Ohio, especially Cleveland. These efforts in northern
Ohio were in accord with the relatively strong spirit of equal rights advoca-
cy which was part of the region’s heritage going back to the early nine-
teninth century when the Western Reserve area was a hotbed of abol-
tionism. This is the clearest evidence of the persistence through the
twenties of the nineteenth century regional race-relations pattern in
which the protest tradition was strongest in northern Ohio and weakest
in southern Ohio. During the twenties equal rights efforts were stepped
up in southern and central Ohio; however, in those regions the work of
addressing social welfare concerns received higher priority than attempts
to directly challenge color bias. In all Ohio regions the leadership of the
equal rights struggle changed during the twenties. The old guard leader-
ship was in decline and in its last decade. It was composed of aging
individuals trained in nineteenth century patronage politics. They figu-
atively passed the gavel to a younger set of organized leaders. Prior to
decade's end, a new leadership in the form of organizations pressing for
equal rights displaced the old leadership that depended upon the politi-
cal influence of individuals to obtain redress of grievance. This occurred
as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
(NAACP) reached maturity.

NAACP officials in Ohio were mainly employed in professions, while
few were in white-collar occupations and still fewer in business. 1 In
Cleveland lawyers generally served as NAACP president in the 1920s,
and most executive committee members were professionals. 2 In 1920 the
NAACP’s president in Columbus, Edward L Gilliam, was a clergyman,
and its secretary, S. T. Kelly, was an attorney. 3 The Springfield branch’s
officers in 1922 included two attorneys, a dentist, and a physician. 4
Nonprofessionals were more prominent in NAACP leadership in
Cincinnati than elsewhere in Ohio. Contractor and builder Charles R.
Davis was one of the Cincinnati branch’s dominant figures in its early
years. In the mid-twenties, Pullman porter instructor Charles E. A. Hunt
was a vice president of the Cincinnati NAACP, and federal post office
clerk Courtland Lewis served as the branch’s secretary. 5

Historian Joe William Trotter, Jr. argues that the black professionals’
assumption of community leadership roles was an aspect of a linkage
between their class and black working people at this time. Black profes-
sionals had a stake in the well-being of black workers because their pro-
fessional incomes essentially were drawn from clients coming from with-
in the African American community then. In exchange for this, the
black working people accepted and benefited from the leadership servic-
es of black professionals. Trotter finds this mutual reliance of the profes-
sional class and the working class existing among African Americans in
the coal mining areas of southern West Virginia in the period
1915–1930. A similar mutuality of interest existed in Ohio cities where
African American professionals, who relied on black clients, often sup-
plied the leadership for NAACP branches and many kinds of black com-
munity institutions. 6

The NAACP grew stronger in Ohio during the 1920s, but its gains
were not made steadily throughout the decade, nor were they evenly dis-
tributed geographically. The continuing black migration to Ohio was
important to the NAACP’s growth and success in the state. The ensu-
ing black population growth enlarged the NAACP’s pools of potential
black dues-paying members and contributors. Also, black newcomers to
the state invigorated the NAACP leadership in Ohio. The state’s
NAACP leaders often belonged to black families of long standing in
Ohio. Yet black migrants were well represented among Ohio branch officials by 1930. For example, Clayborne George and Charles W. White arrived in Cleveland during the 1920s, and they were Cleveland NAACP presidents successively in that decade. The Reverend Samuel A. Brown joined the Cincinnati NAACP leadership shortly after he came to that city in 1923 to take the pulpit of the Mt. Carmel Presbyterian Church. Also, Ohio branches were strengthened by the rising visibility of their parent body, NAACP National Headquarters in New York City. In addition, an NAACP branch's constitutional structure generally ensured the continuation of its formal organization from year to year. In contrast, the NAACP's counterparts in the past were comparatively weak and susceptible to disintegration because they conducted anti–color line protests as loose coalitions of individuals and not as organizations. NAACP causes in the twenties were emboldened by the spirit of the “New Negro” that had arisen during and after World War I. This spirit derived from black “Soldiers of democracy” who returned from Europe declaring, in W. E. B. Du Bois’ words, “Make way for Democracy! We saved it in France, and . . . we will save it in the United States of America, or know the reason why.”

NAACP branch strength varied considerably across Ohio during the twenties. The strongest NAACPs were located in northern Ohio. Protest against racial injustice was traditionally greatest in the state’s northern section and comparatively weak in central and southern Ohio where racial customs more closely approximated those of southern states. NAACP branches serving Ohio’s three major black urban populations were potentially the strongest in the state. The great numbers of African Americans in Cincinnati, Cleveland, and Columbus gave NAACP branches in those cities the best opportunities to build membership size, achieve financial strength, and mount protest activity.

Indeed, the most successful Ohio NAACP branch did represent Ohio’s largest black urban population. The Cleveland NAACP was decidedly the most active branch in Ohio. It acted on the widest range of racial discrimination issues. These included a real estate company’s unfair practices, harassment of new black residents in white neighborhoods, and color biases in public places such as restaurants, theaters, schools, and hospitals. Evidently, an Ohio branch’s vitality was influenced more by its regional location in the state than by local demographic factors. Some northern Ohio branches serving relatively small black populations were more vigorous than those in southern and central Ohio cities with larger numbers of African Americans. In Toledo, the local NAACP maintained a vigorous campaign to raise local public support for the Dyer anti-lynching bill, which was under consideration in the
United States Congress.\textsuperscript{12} This was part of a nationwide NAACP effort seeking federal action against the lynching of black men, an outrage which had reached grotesque proportions in the United States, especially in the South. The Toledo NAACP made numerous protests against the color line in local public accommodations.\textsuperscript{13} Also, it sustained a successful six-year campaign to end objectionable treatment of African Americans in Toledo daily newspapers.\textsuperscript{14} Working in another small black community in northern Ohio, the Akron NAACP was active through the decade; for example, it took a public stand against the Ku Klux Klan and opposed local restaurant color lines.\textsuperscript{15} The Cincinnati NAACP occasionally made its presence felt, but its protests were conducted on a relatively narrow front. The most notable work of this southern Ohio branch was its opposition to the Ku Klux Klan. The Cincinnati NAACP, for instance, was directly involved in efforts to kill a Klan-endorsed bill that was introduced in the Ohio legislature at mid-decade. In central Ohio, it was the Columbus Urban League not the Columbus NAACP that took an early initiative against this Klan-backed measure. This central Ohio NAACP generally was less vigorous than its Cincinnati counterpart.\textsuperscript{16}

Ohio’s NAACP branches generally became more vigilant against racial discrimination during the 1920s; nevertheless, vigorous action by local branches was the exception rather than the rule. Typically an Ohio NAACP branch experienced periods of activity when community interest and membership increased. These were preceded and succeeded by periods during which community interest declined and the branch showed little vitality.\textsuperscript{17} The Cincinnati branch, for instance, was dormant for a time in the twenties. In 1926 black weekly editor Wendell P. Dabney said that the Cincinnati NAACP “in its early days had a large and loyal membership” but added, “Interest in it gradually died . . . ”\textsuperscript{18}

The Cleveland NAACP was the most consistently active Ohio branch; however, even it was not uniformly vigorous throughout the 1920s. The Cleveland branch in the early twenties was described by one of its prominent members as being “in a very bad way.”\textsuperscript{19} Improvements started in 1922 and continued through the decade as the Cleveland branch regularly conducted successful campaigns to raise membership and dues income.\textsuperscript{20} Meanwhile, it occasionally launched special fund-raising drives. Early in 1926 the Cleveland NAACP collected a thousand dollars in a campaign to raise money for the national office’s Legal Defense Fund. Walter W. White and Robert W. Bagnall of the national headquarters visited Cleveland to build interest in the campaign.\textsuperscript{21} Later in 1926 the Cleveland branch carried on a determined two-week membership drive with an ambitious goal of three thousand members.
Volunteers canvassed the community seeking members. Director of Branches Bagnall hosted a dinner for campaign workers and met with various community organizations. As an incentive, organized groups that included two hundred fifty NAACP members were to be rewarded with one free trip to the NAACP Annual Convention. The local black clergymen's association cooperated by naming May 30 “NAACP Sunday.” The campaign resulted in over five hundred new members and more than one thousand dollars in dues. Local leaders were convinced that the Cleveland NAACP should raise its activity level still further. The following year, 1927, Branch President Charles W. White announced that the “adoption of a more aggressive attitude toward all forms of segregation and discrimination in Cleveland” was necessary. The Cleveland Branch did become more vigorous, most notably in its effort to end racial discrimination at City Hospital. By the end of the decade the Cleveland NAACP was the most active branch of the organization in Ohio.

The voluntary character of local NAACP offices was a factor causing branch activity levels to vary over time and place. Ohio branches were not administered by paid executive secretaries during the 1920s. Management of local NAACP affairs was entirely in the hands of volunteers willing to serve as branch officers. The availability of talented volunteers for branch leadership undoubtedly was very much subject to chance. In that respect fortune was not even handed through the years or across different branches in Ohio. In addition to other advantages, the Cleveland branch was especially fortunate to attract many black volunteers with outstanding abilities for NAACP leadership. Attorneys Clayborne George and Charles W. White were among the Cleveland branch's very able and effective African American leaders. George, a Virginia native, arrived in Cleveland at the opening of the decade with law degrees earned at Howard University and Boston University. A native of Tennessee, White came to Cleveland in the mid-twenties as an alumnus of Fisk University and Harvard Law School. Shortly the two attorneys opened a law office together. Upon settling in Cleveland, each had quickly become active in the local NAACP. George and White each served three-year terms successively as branch president during 1924–1929. The association's national officers recognized their abilities. For example, the NAACP's New York headquarters consulted these Cleveland attorneys about allegations of racial segregation in another northern Ohio city. A remarkable portion of the Cleveland NAACP's black officers, including executive committee members, possessed considerable aptitude and acuity in politics. This undoubtedly was beneficial to the branch in areas of government and politics. For instance, attorney
Harry E. Davis often acted for the Cleveland NAACP and gave it legal counsel, especially early in the decade. Davis, a native Clevelander and son of a locally prominent black family, was repeatedly elected to the state legislature during the twenties. Other successful political activists included Dr. E. J. Gregg and attorneys Clayborne George and Lawrence O. Payne, all Cleveland NAACP executive committee members in 1928. George and Gregg won Cleveland city council seats in 1927, and Payne was elected to the council in 1929.

Together Ohio’s NAACP branches made the association a force for civil rights unlike any seen in the state before 1920. Perhaps taken singly, every NAACP branch in Ohio experienced shortcomings in the twenties. In 1923 black weekly editor Harry C. Smith asserted that “drawbacks” of NAACP branches in Cleveland and other Ohio cities inhibited their membership growth. These negatives, according to the editor, were first, that a high percentage of the local branches’ income was used to pay the national officers’ salaries; second, “the abject failure of local branches . . . to be of real service” to their black constituencies; and third, poor management of their major activities. Undoubtedly, at times these were issues for many NAACP locals in Ohio, but as was his editorial custom, Smith used hyperbole in characterizing them. Collectively the Ohio branches and the NAACP’s New York headquarters addressed the Ohio color line along a wide front, especially in areas of education and public accommodations. Some branches resisted the Ku Klux Klan and attempts by whites to exclude blacks from all-white neighborhoods. Some Ohio NAACP’s stood up to objectionable press coverage of African Americans and questioned police racial policy. Ohio branches fought racial discrimination in public places of various kinds ranging from hospitals to the cemeteries. Such places included the schools, restaurants, hotels, theaters, and swimming pools. The NAACP employed a variety of political and public advocacy tactics against racial bias in Ohio. These included direct negotiations with the offending parties and press releases designed to influence public opinion. Also, court suits against racial bias were filed, and legislators were lobbied in the interest of equal rights. Likewise, specific equal rights views were advocated in the political arena and in general elections when racial justice was at stake. Each of these devices was used by at least a fraction of the Ohio branches; conversely, each Ohio NAACP usually employed only a few of these measures.

The NAACP’s national organization contributed to the effectiveness of its branches in Ohio. However, the NAACP’s national headquarters ordinarily was not involved in Ohio branch affairs during the 1920s. National officials usually came to Ohio to promote local branch mem-
bership campaigns or to raise money for projects of the national organization but rarely to assist local efforts to combat racial bias. The color line in northern and western states was not the NAACP's highest priority in the twenties. The national office was most concerned about the proliferation of lynching and about southern state laws requiring racial segregation and causing the disfranchisement of black voters. Ohio NAACP branches forwarded to the national office a portion of their dues receipts and money from special fund drives. In that way NAACP branches outside the South expressed their support for the national office's priorities and helped finance its activities including a much-publicized campaign for a federal anti-lynching law. In the twenties the NAACP developed a national reputation as a cogent voice for racial justice, and that strengthened local branches in Ohio and elsewhere. A branch's pronouncements and efforts against racial bias carried added weight because it was an agent of this nationally reputed organization that might itself enter the local dispute.

During the 1920s, the NAACP's newer organized approach displaced but did not entirely eliminate the older individualistic types of responses to color line issues. Old-style racial protest was occasionally practiced in Ohio through the twenties. Prior to World War I African American individuals usually led protests against racial bias. These leaders presumed to speak and act for black constituencies. Generally respected for their integrity and accomplishments in the professions or business, they were socially and politically well connected to influential persons, both blacks and whites. These leaders generally were experienced in the patronage system common to American political parties in the late nineteenth century. Notable party activists, blacks as well as whites, were rewarded at some point in time, for example, with appointments to public offices or political party positions. Such black leaders belonged to age groups that reached maturity in the 1880s or 1890s and that formed the older generations after 1900.

While few in number, these elder black leaders in Ohio employed the individualistic nineteenth century style of racial protest into the 1920s. Most influential among them was George A. Myers, affluent proprietor of the prestigious Hollenden Hotel barbershop in Cleveland. Myers' influence was built on a foundation laid in the 1890s, when he was closely associated with fellow Clevelander and Republican party boss Mark Hanna. Myers' role at the Republican national convention in 1896 was instrumental in leading black delegates to support William McKinley, who was nominated and elected President. At that time Myers developed a state and national network of personal ties with prominent blacks and whites that he maintained through the balance of his life. Black journalist Ralph W.
Tyler of Columbus also used the older black protest style into the twentieth century. Tyler was one of Myers' early political friends. Another elder black protest leader was William S. Scarborough, who distinguished himself first as a professor and then as president at Ohio's Wilberforce University. Among others, Wendell P. Dabney, editor of the Union in Cincinnati, and Harry C. Smith, editor of the Gazette in Cleveland, perpetuated through the twenties the traditional African American form of racial protest by prominent individuals. Tyler, Scarborough, Dabney, and Smith, as well as Myers, were associated with patronage politics in the Ohio Republican party. Each once accepted a Republican appointment to a federal or a state position, excepting Myers, whose private business was preferable to an insecure political job.

The 1920s witnessed the last hurrah for the generation of African American protest leaders in Ohio whose careers began in the previous century. Arguably, the volume of their activity against racial discrimination in the twenties was greater than that in earlier times. They were freer to speak against the color line because, no longer employed as political appointees, their careers were less at stake in these latter years. Undoubtedly, these few black elders also were inspired by the spirit of "the New Negro" that called for racial justice in recognition of the African American role in the World War. Nevertheless, their era ended in the 1920s because only few of these notable black elders lived long after 1930. Ralph W. Tyler of Columbus died in 1921, Wilberforce University President Emeritus Scarborough in 1926, and George A. Myers of Cleveland in 1930. In addition, most of the prominent African Americans in Myers' early network of Ohio political friends were gone by decade's end. Republican politico Charles Cottrill of Toledo, for example, died in 1924. Black author Charles W. Chesnutt's influence with the white authorities, which was sometimes brought to bear on color line issues in Cleveland, ended with his death in 1932. Chesnutt's personal ties and influences were much derived from his national reputation as a significant novelist.

Prominent African Americans like George A. Myers, who sometimes took individual action against the Ohio color line, were motivated by general principles requiring the enforcement of equal rights for the good of all African Americans. Specific personal grievances impelled some other African Americans in Ohio to confront the color line singly. For instance, African Americans who personally encountered racial discrimination in public accommodations sometimes filed suits in Ohio courts. Similarly, some African Americans took informal grassroots action when they were personally affected by a specific color line grievance. For example, black parents in Dayton objected when racial segregation was
practiced in their children's school. In the 1920s, while black persons of various backgrounds acted individually, the Ohio color line was most broadly challenged by organizations, usually affiliated with the NAACP.

Anti-Klan campaigns constituted the most widespread African American struggles against racial discrimination and intolerance in Ohio during the 1920s. In cities across the state African Americans opposed the Ku Klux Klan, which advocated white supremacy and gained white Protestant adherents early in the twenties. Ohio's NAACP branches often figured prominently in local efforts to counter Klan agendas. Shortly after the Ku Klux Klan was organized in Cincinnati, the local NAACP branch formed a committee to oppose it. In April 1921 representatives of the Cincinnati NAACP met with the city's mayor and personally requested him to "use all means in his power to suppress the Klan" in Cincinnati. In response the mayor "promised to use the full force of the police department in case of lawlessness on the part of members of the Klan" and issued a statement to the local press that strongly condemned that organization.

Since the Ku Klux Klan stood for the superiority of white Protestants, substantial anti-Klan sentiment existed in the northern Ohio cities with sizable Catholic, Jewish, and black populations. A storm of protest ensued in Cleveland when a Klan chapter was organized there in July 1921. In the subsequent month, Cleveland's mayor and city councilmen were "bombarded" with anti-Klan protests from Catholics, Jews, and African Americans. A resolution condemning the Klan was introduced in the Cleveland City Council by Jewish Councilman Jacob Stacel and seconded by African American Councilman Thomas Fleming. Cleveland Mayor William S. Fitzgerald spoke in favor of this anti-Klan resolution, which the Council unanimously passed. Although it continued to exist there, the Ku Klux Klan remained insignificant in Cleveland during the decade.

Similar anti-Klan sentiment was expressed in Akron, another multi-ethnic manufacturing center in northeastern Ohio. Klansmen objected to plans for an upcoming Klan meeting in Akron on May 24, 1922. The meeting, featuring "King Kleagle" Charles L. Harrod of Columbus, was to be part of the Klan's 1922 recruiting campaign in Akron. Critics objected to plans to hold this Klan meeting on public property, in the Akron Armory. Local Catholic, Jewish, and African American organizations, including the Akron NAACP, complained to public authorities. In response to letters of protest, Ohio Governor Harry L. Davis acted to prevent the Klan from using the armory. Afterwards the Klan secured a substitute meeting-place, a Baptist Church in Akron. The Klan's Akron meeting plans finally were blocked by a court injunction.
issued at the request of George W. Thompson, who was the secretary of
the African American YMCA branch in Akron.43

African Americans across Ohio opposed legislation promoted by the
Ku Klux Klan. At mid-decade, bills outlawing racial intermarriage were
introduced in the Ohio, Iowa, and Michigan state legislatures. State
Representative George H. Roberts of Youngstown introduced the Ohio
measure in February 1925. His House Bill No. 218 prohibited ministers
from marrying white persons to individuals of other races and required a
fine and imprisonment for violators.44 Shortly after its introduction,
black weekly editors Wendell P. Dabney of the Cincinnati Union
and Harry C. Smith of the Cleveland Gazette covered this Klan issue and
urged their readers to fight the proposed legislation against racial inter-
marrige.45 A Columbus correspondent of the Cleveland Gazette stated a
basic argument used against the bill. He wrote:

The thing that most concerns our people [about] the introduction
of the [inter-marriage] bill is the fact that as a law it would harm our
girls and women most! Those who would be so unfortunate as to be
taken advantage of by any white youth or man could not compel
him to give her child a name, which only marriage can do. More,
. . . down would go the moral status of the race because it is deter-
mined most largely . . . by our women. . . . 46

The racial intermarriage bill eventually was referred to the judiciary
committee in the Ohio House of Representatives, where it encountered
substantial opposition from equal rights groups and others.47 Cleveland’s
African American State Representative Harry E. Davis organized dele-
gations to speak against the bill at its hearing before the judiciary com-
mittee on March 4, 1925. Representatives of various NAACP branches
in Ohio appeared before the committee. They included the Reverend H.
C. Kingsley of Cleveland and a Cincinnati delegation headed by editor
Dabney. The Ohio State University Sociology Professor Herbert A.
Miller, a white liberal, made a committee appearance and spoke against
the intermarriage bill at the request of the Columbus Urban League.
Mahoning County State Representative Mrs. C. J. Ott (white) also
advised the committee to oppose the measure.48 Other opponents who
were unable to give testimony in Columbus used the postal and wire
services to convey their views to the committee. Samuel T. Kelly, who
was the Akron NAACP branch president, opposed the Roberts bill in a
telegram to the judiciary committee chairman.49 Klan opponents were
victorious. The Roberts bill was permitted to die in committee.50 Ku
Klux Klan power peaked in the Midwest before this bill was introduced
in the Ohio House. After national Klan leader D. C. Stephenson was convicted of second-degree murder in 1925, Klan support in the region faded away rapidly. The Ohio Klan was disintegrating in 1926, and by the end of the decade it was inconsequential in the state.51

Greater efforts were made to break color lines in Ohio’s public accommodations during the 1920s than in the past; however, racial bias of that kind still was not commonly challenged. Most often action was taken against racial discrimination practiced at restaurants and less frequently against that found at theaters, stores, and swimming pools. Occasionally protest was directed at racial practices on a streetcar, at a cemetery, or another sort of public accommodation. In many of these cases the local NAACP took action through negotiations with the managers of discriminatory facilities or through legal assistance to plaintiffs in antidiscrimination court suits. Sometimes such legal action was initiated without the NAACP’s involvement. In a few instances, a prominent black elder, who was not affected personally, attempted to achieve redress of the grievance through use of political influence.

As in the past, public accommodations color lines were more frequently protested in northern Ohio than downstate. In exceptional instances, African Americans in southern Ohio moved against racial discrimination existing in public places there. For example, in 1921 Mrs. Beulah Smith sued Cincinnati’s traction company and was awarded five hundred dollars in damages because a conductor addressed her with a racial epithet and ejected her from a streetcar.52 Likewise, on rare occasions, courts suits were filed against public accommodations in Columbus in central Ohio; the defendants were restaurants and other downtown commercial establishments that commonly refused service to African Americans.53 The Crisis, published by the NAACP, reported a central Ohio protest mounted by a small black community in Zanesville, located east of Columbus. Local African Americans complained to the Zanesville City Council after the Greenwood Cemetery’s white officials refused to sell lots in a new addition to blacks.54

The volume and the scope of activities against color proscriptions in public accommodations were greatest in northern Ohio cities, especially Cleveland, Toledo, and Akron. In Cleveland individual activists and the NAACP continued a long tradition of African American protest against color lines in that city. In 1921 Cleveland NAACP president William R. Green objected to a recently initiated municipal police policy of not issuing arrest warrants for persons who violated the Ohio law against racial discrimination in public accommodations. In response to Green’s protest, Cleveland Mayor William S. Fitzgerald ordered the appropriate officials to rescind the policy.55 Actions against commercial enterprises in
Cleveland usually targeted restaurants that treated blacks unequally. Civil rights suits were filed against Cleveland restaurant proprietors regularly through the twenties. Plaintiffs won some of these cases, some were lost, and some were settled out of court. The Cleveland NAACP, which assisted in five restaurant cases in 1924, was only sometimes involved in this litigation. Often the filers of suits against restaurants were black professionals, especially lawyers, who were especially interested in the enforcement of the state civil rights law. Attorney Chester K. Gillespie, for example, wrote: “. . . Isadore B. Cohen of the Delicafe Co., 45 Public Square, on September 2, refused to serve me a meal, stating that by doing so he would injure his trade. This was at 2:00 P.M. At 3:00 P.M. the flying squadron of the Cleveland police department was taking him to jail.” Subsequently, Cohen was fined fifty dollars in municipal court, and later in common pleas court his wife, the actual owner of the establishment, was fined five hundred dollars under the Ohio civil rights law. Gillespie explained: “I concern myself a great deal with these cases because I feel it my duty to make an example of some of these idiots who persist in deliberately violating your Ohio Civil Rights Law. If we people, who are supposed to know the procedure in such cases, do not take adequate action, we can hardly expect others of our people to make any effort to have their civil rights respected.”

African Americans sometimes protested color lines at places of public entertainment and recreation in Cleveland. In 1924 Cleveland NAACP negotiators persuaded the management of Loews’ Ohio Theater to admit African Americans. Despite organized protest, however, racially segregated seating still was required at many Cleveland theaters including the Stillman and the Allen. Also in 1924, the Cleveland NAACP obtained corrective action by Brookside Park officials following an instance of racial discrimination at the park’s swimming pool. Prominent African Americans took the lead when racial disturbances occurred at a Cleveland municipal park swimming pool in the summer of 1927. White patrons reacted violently when blacks tried to use the pool at Woodland Hills Park. Upon the request of George A. Myers and other leading black citizens of Cleveland, city officials promised to provide police supervision of the Woodland Hills pool to prevent further racial incidents there.

Local NAACP branches usually were at the forefront in public accommodations disputes in Toledo and Akron. In 1920 the Toledo Branch of the NAACP filed twenty-four civil rights suits involving racial discrimination in restaurants, stores and other public accommodations and “secured satisfaction” in eighteen of them. Late in the decade, the Akron Branch of the NAACP took action against blatant
racial discrimination in several South Main Street restaurants of that city. The Akron NAACP's objections induced proprietors of these restaurants to remove "whites only" signs from their windows in 1928.

In the 1920s African Americans in Ohio expressed concerns about offensive treatment of blacks in the state's daily newspapers. Press coverage of blacks naturally varied in character from one paper to another and from city to city, but blacks were disrespected in newspapers across Ohio in the twenties. Objectionable references to blacks in Ohio newspapers and complaints about them had nineteenth century antecedents. In 1926 black weekly editor Wendell P. Dabney noted: "Nearly fifty years ago the [Cincinnati] Enquirer had writers on its staff who were much addicted to using opprobrious terms and epithets concerning the Negro." A delegation of black citizens met with Enquirer owner John R. McClean to discuss the unfair reporting. According to Dabney, "He promised that it would not occur again and 'it didn't.'" In contrast, throughout the 1920s all four major Columbus dailies regularly associated blacks with disapproved behavior, especially vice and crime, and sometimes subjected African Americans to ridicule.

Complaints made by blacks affected how African American news was treated in some northern Ohio daily newspapers. The major Cleveland dailies became fairer toward blacks between 1915 and 1930. Undoubtedly, this trend reflected criticism of their racial reporting. Over decades, certain notable black citizens of Cleveland monitored the Cleveland dailies and called attention to their racial abuses. In the century's second decade, black weekly editor Harry C. Smith regularly publicized this issue in the Cleveland Gazette. Cleveland daily newspapers then commonly used such terms as "negress," "darker" and even "nigger" and the word "Negro" without capitalization. In addition, the daily press occasionally carried cartoons ridiculing African Americans. The Cleveland dailies also emphasized crime news involving African Americans and published "scare-headline" front-page articles about blacks. The Plain Dealer was less offensive to African Americans than its leading competitors. But even the Plain Dealer occasionally used objectionable terms. Letters protesting unfair news treatment of African Americans sometimes were sent to newspaper officials. The Plain Dealer reacted to these letters most sympathetically. In 1913, for example, upon receiving Harry C. Smith's complaint that his newspaper had used the term "darker," the Plain Dealer's managing editor explained that he had not known that the word was objectionable and said the Plain Dealer "would not willingly use a word or do a thing which even by innuendo might do injury or bring in any degree into disrepute so worthy a class of our population."
blacks nevertheless occasionally appeared in the Plain Dealer. Responding to another such complaint from Harry C. Smith in 1919, the managing editor found it necessary to explain: “in a paper with as many departments as the Plain Dealer and with the . . . shifting of the staff . . . , these things will occasionally happen. The best we can do is to keep everlastingly on the job. . . .”73 Influential black Clevelander George A. Myers also surveyed the Cleveland dailies and once received assurances from Plain Dealer General Manager Elbert H. Baker that his newspaper would not use insulting references to blacks, but even in the 1920s there were occasional abuses. In 1929, Myers wrote Paul Bellamy, the Plain Dealer’s chief editor, to complain that the words “negress” and “darky” appeared recently in his newspaper.74 In reply, Bellamy welcomed complaints from African American readers and said that newspapers ordinarily should not make racial distinctions, except in such matters as “race uplift.”75

Also in northern Ohio, the Toledo NAACP sustained a successful six-year campaign against objectionable treatment of blacks in Toledo daily newspapers. In 1920 representatives of the Toledo branch discussed the matter in meetings with local newspaper editors. Another Toledo NAACP committee, formed in 1923, obtained pledges from the editors of the three leading Toledo dailies that their newspapers would not make offensive references to African Americans.76 Then in 1926 each of these newspapers adopted common rules governing news items about African Americans. They agreed, for example, not to emphasize racial identities, not to report color in a headline, never to use “Negress” or “Black,” and always to capitalize “Negro.”77

Public school policies were the subjects of the most intensive civil rights protests conducted by African Americans in Ohio cities during the 1920s. These actions escalated in response to a racial trend in Ohio schools. As the number of black students grew during the wartime migration and afterwards, Ohio public schools increasingly placed black students in special classes in separate rooms, sometimes in ones located outside regular school buildings. In justification of these practices, public school administrators generally asserted that black students were classified according to scholastic achievement and not color. In comments on such policies, public school officials often mentioned that these special classes were initiated at the request of local black citizens. Indeed some African Americans held that freedom from racial antipathy and sincere commitment to the success of black pupils could exist only in classrooms of black students taught by black instructors. In addition, black teachers possessed a vested interest in classes composed of black students. Excepting some Cleveland schools with racially mixed staffs
and students, Ohio public schools only employed black faculty to teach black students. Strong proponents of equal rights for African Americans, nevertheless, insisted on the enforcement of the nineteenth century Ohio law prohibiting racial segregation in the state’s public schools.

Protests charging racial segregation in Ohio public schools proliferated in the twenties and touched every region of the state. Public school racial issues were raised at Cleveland, Shaker Heights, and Mansfield in the northern area, at Woodlawn and Dayton in the southern section, and at Springfield in central Ohio. In some instances an affected black parent acting singly took the initiative. Sometimes aggrieved black parents acted in association, and sometimes interested black citizens formed leagues opposing local school policies affecting black students. The NAACP often was involved in these Ohio school segregation issues, but the character of its participation was not uniform from city to city. Protest tactics and devices employed in the Ohio school segregation controversies varied from place to place, but they included petitions, court actions, public meetings, fund raising drives, and publicity in black weeklies. In a couple of these instances, protestors used direct action tactics in the form of school boycotts.

Active critics of racial discrimination expected and demanded that the Cleveland public schools maintain their traditionally high standard of fairness to African Americans. During the 1920s, as in the past, public school racial integration was greater in Cleveland than anywhere else in Ohio. Prominent black individuals, including journalist Harry C. Smith, and the local NAACP kept watch against the introduction of color line school policies in Cleveland. For example, a protest was mounted in 1925 when Cleveland schools initiated a new practice of requiring students to designate their race and religion on certain questionnaires. In reply to the complaints, the Cleveland Board of Education voted to discontinue that race labeling policy. In 1927 the Cleveland NAACP received reports that racial segregation had been introduced at Outhwaite and R. B. Hayes Schools. NAACP branch president Charles W. White raised the issue in a letter to Cleveland Superintendent of Schools Robert G. Jones. The superintendent immediately replied: “... the basis of selection of pupils in these schools [Outhwaite and Hayes] is that of age only. That is, they are designed for pupils who are at least three years behind that point in their school work where age would naturally place them.” Cleveland’s leading African Americans generally were convinced of the good intentions of the local public school officials charged with growing numbers of black students who previously attended inferior schools in southern states. Black weekly editor Smith, who was the most consistent and strident opponent of Jim Crow practices in
Ohio, expressed general satisfaction with school superintendent Jones' fairness on the race issue.81

Cleveland NAACP leaders, also, were concerned in a dispute about racial practices at a school in Mansfield, located about eighty miles southwest of Cleveland. In September 1925 attorney Harry E. Davis, a Cleveland NAACP activist, alerted the NAACP's national headquarters that a civil rights problem was developing there. He indicated that the Mansfield Board of Education, in reaction to "a large influx of Southern children," was preparing to provide "separate classrooms for colored children" which were unprecedented in that city's schools.82 Attorney Davis registered a protest with the Mansfield school board and advised the NAACP's national office to do the same.83 Although opposed to the new policy, the Mansfield NAACP branch was not at the forefront of protest against it. Instead the Good Citizenship League, a black local organization, actually took the lead. In August 1925 the Good Citizenship League sent to the Mansfield Board of Education a petition opposing plans for separate classes composed of black students.84 In reply, the school board said that after "carefully considering" the petition it reaffirmed its intention to place "retarded colored children" under the "instruction of two colored teachers," enabling the pupils to "make up their school credits" and rise to their proper grade levels.85 As these events foreshadowed, separate classes for black students were conducted at Mansfield's Bowman Street School during the 1925–1926 school year. The Good Citizenship League acquired the services of Toledo attorney B. Harrison Fisher (white), evidently anticipating continuation of this Bowman School policy in the following year. In August 1926 attorney Fisher protested the separate classes in a letter to Mansfield Superintendent of Schools Henry H. Helter. In response, the school superintendent denied that there was ever any intention to introduce "the principle of segregation of colored pupils" and asserted, "The organization of classes of colored children of the Bowman School was effected for the express purpose of helping and benefiting the colored children, a few of whom were slow and many of whom were far retarded behind the grades to which their ages and abilities would place them."86 Superintendent Helter promised: "... colored children in the Bowman School who are up to grade ... will be allowed to remain in the white classes and those in the colored classes who made rapid progress will be allowed to join the white pupils in their grade as speedily as they catch up to grade."87 Helter’s reply stated plans for the upcoming year to employ three black teachers and add domestic and manual training to the academic work already in the separate curricula for black pupils. Practical training of that sort was not available to white students in Mansfield.88
Bowman Street School maintained separate classes of black students through the 1930–1931 scholastic year, when Cleveland attorneys Clayborne George and Charles W. White visited Mansfield and made a thorough investigation of the school situation there. In an elaborate report of their findings sent to the NAACP’s national office, these former Cleveland NAACP presidents discussed the controversy’s larger social context and its nuances. Mansfield was a northern Ohio industrial city with a population of about 33,000 in 1930. Mansfield’s black population was then about 900, up from 249 in 1920 and from 105 in 1910.89 One entrepreneur, one physician, three clergymen, and three public school teachers largely constituted the business and professional group in this small black community. Most black employees in Mansfield worked for a steel company, and some were in domestic occupations. The city’s largest employers included the Empire Steel Company and a state reformatory. Most African Americans in Mansfield were migrants from the South who arrived during the last decade and a half. Persons interviewed by George and White all said that racial discrimination and segregation increased in the city during that migration period. Black newcomers to Mansfield tended to be residentially clustered, but the older black households were widely distributed over the city. In 1930 color lines existed at all Mansfield restaurants, theaters, and other public accommodations. The exclusively black classes at Bowman School were initiated in that setting.90

The investigation of the Mansfield public school system conducted by Charles W. White and Clayborne George found no evidence of racial discrimination in any of its eleven schools, excepting Bowman. Black students were enrolled in most of the system’s schools and participated in junior high and high school athletics and other extracurricular activities. Bowman School enrolled about 800 students including about 100 African American pupils. The investigators from Cleveland interviewed Bowman School’s three black female instructors, all college graduates.91 They concluded that all three were “capable, one of them being an unusually able teacher, and they would be assets to the school system without segregation.”92 Attorneys White and George learned from the Bowman School principal, through a personal interview, that many of his students were children belonging to white immigrant families and to native white migrant families from the Appalachian South who tended to achieve below their expected grade levels. They suffered language barrier and educational retardation problems, respectively, but the school did not give them special and separate remedial classes.93 Reporting other indications of racial bias, White and George noted that the Bowman School’s black pupils were confined to three rooms, were not permitted
to enter other rooms and were not allowed to leave the building until the white students were dismissed. However, no racial discrimination existed in the rest rooms or on the playgrounds.94 Black students who finished at Bowman School were enrolled in junior high school without difficulty.95

The Good Citizenship League's campaign against public school color lines in Mansfield was handicapped because the city's African Americans were not united behind it.96 Although a segment of the Mansfield black community joined the school protest, Charles W. White and Clayborne George concluded: "segregation has the open endorsement of a part of the colored population; and probably the lethargic acquiescence of a majority of it."97 One of their sources said that a black employee in a city hall patronage job was an early advocate of separate classes for black students at Bowman School. According to that source, he was motivated by the possibility that his daughter might be employed as a Bowman teacher, as she eventually was once black students were placed in separate rooms. Mansfield employed no black teachers until that time. White and George noted that the teachers themselves had a financial stake in the existence of Bowman's separate classes. Many local African Americans with no personal interest in the matter supported the segregated classes because they meant jobs for black teachers. The black investigators from Cleveland also learned that black parents, being much pleased by the black teachers' work, were uncooperative in protests against Bowman School policies. The black teachers' appeal was so great, George and White discovered, that some black parents wished to transfer their children from one racially integrated school to Bowman's segregated classes.98 In this context Mansfield NAACP officials were ineffectual; however, according to White and George, they were "most perturbed" about the segregated classes and wanted their elimination.99 The local NAACP lacked the benefits of leaders with professional training. Mansfield's few black professionals did not include a lawyer. In larger Ohio cities NAACP officials were largely black professionals, but the Mansfield branch president and vice president were black steel mill workers. Mansfield whites, nevertheless, were responsible for Bowman School's racial practices. An exclusively white Parent Teachers Association was opposed to racial mixing in Bowman School, and its white officials were intransigent in the face of protest.100

New public school policies affecting African Americans also were protested in southern Ohio during the 1920s. Woodlawn, a hamlet of less than one thousand population, was located in Hamilton County about ten miles north of downtown Cincinnati. In 1924–1925, a Woodlawn school placed black students in special classes under black
teachers, apparently on the grounds that the pupils were behind academically. Unaided by organizations, a lone family disputed the practice in court, making a determined but eventually fruitless effort. Meanwhile, the Cincinnati NAACP was aware of the Woodlawn situation and reported to its national office on the case’s progress. William Phillips, a parent of black students in the special classes, requested a local common pleas court to issue a writ of mandamus ordering Woodlawn officials to admit his children to regular classes. The common pleas court declined to issue the order after holding that the special classes were not racially discriminatory. Phillips then carried the issue to a court of appeals, which sustained the decision of the lower court. Finally in March 1925 the Ohio Supreme Court dismissed Phillips’ appeal to that body.101

Meanwhile, larger protests against public school color lines were made in Dayton, one of the major southern Ohio cities with sizable black populations. In 1924 black migrant children attending Dayton’s Willard Elementary School were placed in special classes on the grounds that their educational achievements did not correspond to their age or grade levels. The African American students were assigned to basement rooms in the Willard building and were required to use the rear exit. In response, offended fathers and mothers of the black children formed the Parents Protective Association, which drafted and sent a protest statement to the Dayton Board of Education. When the Dayton school board ignored its objections, the Parents Protective Association organized and implemented a student boycott of Willard School that was 95 percent effective for over two months. While parents initiated this action, the NAACP in Dayton kept abreast of the Willard School controversy and informed its national office. Consequently, NAACP Assistant Secretary Robert W. Bagnall was sent from the national office to Dayton with instructions to assist the parents’ efforts. Bagnall and various local black leaders conducted a series of meetings sympathetic to the parents’ action. The meetings raised several hundred dollars in contributions to their cause. It was publicized through articles in the NAACP’s Crisis and in the Cleveland Gazette, which was circulated across Ohio. Then an attempt was made to secure arbitration of the issue with the assistance of a local judicial official. In the end, however, the arbitration failed to resolve the differences between the parents and the Dayton Board of Education.102

Opponents of racial segregation in the Dayton public school system then focused their attention upon Garfield Elementary School. In 1925 the Garfield School was comprised of a main brick building used exclusively by white teachers and children and two frame annex buildings used exclusively by black teachers and children. Black students were
required to attend the annex school and were not permitted to receive instruction with white students in the main building. The Dayton Board of Education established the separate facility at Garfield School about ten years earlier when a segment of Dayton's black community requested it.

Early in 1925 a black parent initiated action against Dayton public school officials who required his child to attend Garfield School's annex facility for black students only. Earl Reese requested the school's principal to admit his son to classes in Garfield's main building. When the principal refused this request, Reese hired a lawyer and entered a mandamus suit in the local common pleas court. He requested the court to issue a mandamus writ that would compel the Dayton Board of Education to admit his son to the main building of the Garfield School. After several months of inaction on the suit by the common pleas court, Reese requested and received a dismissal of the case. He then filed a similar suit in the local court of appeals. Assistant Secretary Bagnall was in touch with the Reese case in its early stages and reported the matter to NAACP headquarters in New York City.

Prominent black citizens of Dayton were seriously divided on the Garfield School issue. Some professional men and women, especially doctors, dentists, and teachers, opposed Earl Reese's court suit and supported the Board of Education's policy at Garfield School. Those in accord with the Dayton school board were organized in a group called the Hand of Ethiopia. Local black opponents of Reese's legal efforts mainly based their stance upon the contention that the black teachers at Garfield School would lose their positions if the annex classes for black pupils were abolished by court order. The Dayton school board's action toward the black teachers made that argument credible. The board officials implied that they would not use black teachers in integrated classes. They held up the reappointment of the black teachers for the next academic year pending the outcome of the Reese case. The school board officials reasoned that if they were reappointed and the courts ruled in favor of Reese, the black teachers would have to be paid full salaries although their services would not be used in court-ordered integrated classes. Eventually the black faculty members were appointed as substitute teachers and thus were paid a substantially lower salary, although they taught full time during the school year 1925–1926. Reese's supporters argued that the Dayton Board of Education was using the African American teachers as a “club” to force them to drop their attempt to integrate Garfield School. Earl Reese's legal efforts received moral and financial support from the local NAACP branch, the black Alpha Phi Alpha fraternity, and a group representing black parents of
school children. The Dayton school board chose to regard Reese's opponents as being reflective of majority opinion on the issue in Dayton's African American population.107

The Dayton Board of Education filed a demurrer to Earl Reese's mandamus suit in the court of appeals. The board's demurrer claimed that separate classes for black students were formed because some black pupils at Garfield School exhibited “backwardness.” The appeals court overruled the demurrer, reasoning that the “discretion of the board of education . . . does not permit segregation purely on the basis of race or color.”108 Earl Reese died a few days before this decision in his favor. Carrie Reese, his wife, stayed in the legal fight. The board appealed the previous decision to the Ohio Supreme Court, which unanimously affirmed the ruling of the Montgomery County Court of Appeals.109 This legal victory for the equal rights cause did not reverse the trend toward greater de facto racial segregation in the local public schools. In 1926, only months after the Reese case ended, a school bond issue in Dayton provided funds for the construction of an elementary school in an almost all-black district of the city.110

Central Ohio was the locus of a civil rights campaign against an all-black public school established in the early 1920s contrary to Ohio civil rights legislation. Springfield, a city of about 60,000, was located on the National Road west of Columbus. About 7,000 black people comprised about 12 percent of that city's population. The proportion of African Americans was larger in Springfield than in most Ohio urban centers. African Americans inhabited every Springfield district, and black pupils attended each of the city's public schools. However, over half of Springfield's black population was concentrated in two of the city's seven census wards, and schools in those wards enrolled most of the city's black students. Springfield's black society included a variety of churches, an Odd Fellows chapter, a YMCA branch, a NAACP branch, and several other black community organizations. Members of the black business and professional classes in Springfield, who tended to be socially active, included entrepreneurs, lawyers, physicians, dentists, and clergymen, but in 1920 no public school teachers. In-migration and population increases in the previous decade enlarged the social and economic life of African Americans in Springfield. As in other Ohio cities, growing white intolerance accompanied black demographic changes in Springfield. Among manifestations of this trend in Springfield were a race riot in 1921, the rise of the local Ku Klux Klan, and increased white support for resegregation of public schools.111

What eventually came to be known as the Springfield Fulton School controversy arose in that setting. The dispute's origins owed much to the
white supremacy views held by Springfield Superintendent of Schools George E. McCord. He was opposed to racial mixing in schools and publicly admitted his membership in the Ku Klux Klan in the wake of this school controversy.\(^\text{112}\) Black teachers played a role in events ultimately leading to the dispute. They applied for teaching positions in the local school system and were denied employment. The Springfield Board of Education refused to hire the African American teachers on the grounds that there was no all-black school in the city. The board seemed to imply that it would employ an African American staff if such a school existed. In consequence, a group of Springfield's socially prominent black women secured two hundred signatures on petitions favoring the establishment of a black school with black teachers. After these petitions were presented to school officials, counter-petitions containing about twelve hundred signatures were submitted to the Board of Education. This seemed to stop the movement for an all-black school. But, in May 1922 Superintendent McCord announced that a black principal and twelve black teachers had been hired and assigned to Fulton School in order to implement an "experiment of an all-colored school" during the following academic year. School officials asserted that the local black citizens desired a separate school. When the 1921–1922 school years ended, all white students living in the Fulton School District were assigned to other schools.\(^\text{113}\)

Opposition to the new Fulton School policy quickly took shape. The Springfield Branch of the NAACP met, formed a special committee, and eventually petitioned the local school officials. The Springfield Board of Education was unmoved by the NAACP's objections. This led to the creation of the Civil Rights Protective League, a black organization formed solely to fight local school segregation. Its most visible activity was a sustained public demonstration at Fulton School. The league prompted a student boycott of the Fulton School. Approximately one hundred local black women formed a pool of demonstrators, some of whom regularly picketed the school from September to December 1922. Occasionally, black men joined the regular pickets. The boycott was so effective that no more than about fifty of the approximately three hundred black students enrolled in Fulton School ever attended classes during this period. Also, the Civil Rights Protective League sponsored regular weekly meetings that were sometimes addressed by notable out of town speakers, including editor Harry C. Smith of the Cleveland Gazette. In addition, the league raised funds and hired attorneys to challenge the school board's racial practices. League attorneys filed a common pleas court suit requesting that the Springfield Board of Education be enjoined from making Fulton School an all-black institution contrary
to state law. In autumn 1922 the common pleas court issued a temporary restraining order against the school board’s action, and in January 1923 the same court issued a permanent injunction against the operation of Fulton School as a racially segregated institution. The school board appealed the decision, and the legal issue was ended when a court of appeals dismissed the case early in 1924.\textsuperscript{114}

The campaign against racial segregation at Fulton School lacked the full and undivided backing of Springfield’s black citizenry. African Americans supporting the school board largely belonged to a faction led by pastors of two affluent black churches in the city. Leading opponents of the Fulton School policy like its backers were socially prominent African Americans; for example, Charles S. Johnson, the Civil Rights Protective League’s president, was the Champion Chemical Company plant supervisor.\textsuperscript{115} The league bore the brunt in the anti-segregation fight with the Springfield Board of Education. The local NAACP’s part in the dispute was practically invisible to the public. Protest meetings, boycott activities, fund raising, and judicial actions were conducted under the league’s banner. Nevertheless, the NAACP’s national headquarters and some of its local officers participated in the cause. Among the key league activists were several local NAACP officials including black attorneys George W. Daniels and Sully Jaymes, the branch president. Daniels and Jaymes were chosen to serve on the league’s legal staff. Their legal activity in the court dispute was done in the name of the league, not the NAACP.\textsuperscript{116}

NAACP correspondence reflected that organization’s restrained participation in the Fulton School controversy during 1922–1923. In September 1922 George W. Daniels telegraphed W. E. B. Du Bois in New York City requesting NAACP aid. The telegram identified Daniels as legal advisor to the league and did not record his NAACP title. In reply Director of Branches Robert W. Bagnall offered Daniels the assistance of NAACP field secretary Mrs. Addie Hunton. At the same time, Bagnall wrote local NAACP presidentJaymes inquiring about the Springfield branch’s efforts to date and advising it to organize and lead civic organizations in the cause. Bagnall further advised that the next step should proceed to a court injunction.\textsuperscript{117} In answer to Bagnall, the branch president claimed that the local NAACP and the league were “working jointly,” for instance, “pooling . . . [their] financial interests” and using “a joint committee” to choose speakers for the public protest meetings.\textsuperscript{118} Some league backers were critical of the Springfield NAACP, charging that it did not help enough in the protest.\textsuperscript{119} Branch president Jaymes took a different view. Early in 1923 he complained: “. . . we do not feel that the Home Office has been showing the proper regard for the work we have
been doing here." Addressing his complaints to the NAACP director of branches, Jaymes cited lack of publicity in the Crisis about the Fulton School issue. Jaymes was then reminded that Director Bagnall spoke to a mass meeting in Springfield and advised leaders there in May 1922 near the start of the school controversy. Also, Bagnall explained that unavoidable circumstances permitted the Crisis to give the dispute only a little attention.

Protests against school racial policies barely slowed the growth of racial separation in Ohio public schools, a statewide trend that was most pronounced in central and southern Ohio during the twenties. In Springfield, as in Dayton, a court decision against an all-black institution did not preclude the eventual development of a nearly all-black school. Springfield officials retained none of Fulton School’s black teachers for the 1923–1924 school year, when the city again employed only white teachers. Subsequently, white students attended Fulton School, but in time its enrollment was increasingly African American and eventually predominantly black. As the decade ended, however, all-black public schools existed in only two major Ohio cities, Columbus and Cincinnati. There was no sustained protest or legal action against racial practices at Columbus’ Champion Avenue School or at Cincinnati’s Douglass and Stowe Schools, although each enrolled black students only. There was a dispute of sorts involving the Champion Avenue School in Columbus. This institution was an elementary school with a “Junior High School Department.” Early in the decade, Columbus Urban League official Nimrod B. Allen noted, “An additional building to be used by this Junior High is being bitterly opposed by groups of Negroes.” Any objection to color lines at Douglass and Stowe Schools evidently was forestalled because their popularity was widespread among Africans Americans in Cincinnati. Their black principals and teachers were widely respected, and their facilities were valued as important black community centers.

Civil rights protest aimed at Ohio’s public universities was exceptional in the 1920s. The state universities freely admitted African Americans, but in varying degrees color lines existed in their social life and extracurricular activities. Late in the decade, African American students raised an equal rights issue concerning Ohio University at Athens in southern Ohio. They said that Ohio University had a rule that discriminated against the admission of black applicants from southern states whose universities barred African Americans. The alleged regulation excluded from admission to Ohio University all students who were not eligible for admission to a university in their own states. Black students at Ohio University, who wanted the rule eliminated, asked the
Columbus Urban League’s executive secretary and others to assist their cause. In March 1929 Cleveland’s African American state representative and leading black citizens of Columbus and Dayton appeared at a meeting of the Ohio General Assembly’s joint finance committee and protested against the regulation.

Public hospitals in Ohio, like state universities, were rarely the objects of civil rights protests in the twenties. Hospital racial practices in Ohio raised a color line paradox. Black patients were admitted to Ohio public hospital charity wards, but these rooms often were racially segregated. Generally black physicians, interns, and nurses were barred from public hospital staffs. Black doctors, consequently, could not treat paying black patients in these public medical centers. When private hospitals also were unavailable to black physicians, their black patients underwent childbirth, surgery, and other medical procedures in facilities not meeting hospital standards. Given racial exclusion at public institutions, black physicians often saw private hospitals as potential means to improve their black patients’ medical care and enhance their medical practices at the same time. Yet African American doctors and patients generally lacked the resources to make full-fledged private hospitals financially viable. Private black hospitals in financial need could survive only with outside assistance from white philanthropy or local government. But black hospitals accepting such funding then became publicly financed institutions for blacks only. These hospitals were possible targets for anti–racial segregation protests. This was the color line dilemma facing black doctors lacking proper hospital facilities. In Cincinnati and Columbus, African American physicians founded black hospitals that existed for a time in the twenties. These hospitals encountered no significant protests. But in Cleveland, attempts to establish a black hospital were blocked by opponents charging that it would be a Jim Crow institution. The Cleveland instance was unusual in the state and the nation. Increasingly since the late 1980s, scholarly studies of black hospitals and medicine in the United States have called attention to the history of black hospitals in many cities in states of the South and North.

The color line was pervasive in Cincinnati hospitals in the twenties. The tax-supported Cincinnati General Hospital’s charity wards admitted African Americans on a segregated basis. No black physicians, interns, or nurses were appointed to this city hospital’s staff. In 1925 Cincinnati Health Commissioner W. H. Peters reported: “Not many beds [for blacks] . . . are available in private hospitals.” At about the same time, Mary L. Hicks conducted a hospital survey in Cincinnati and found that about 85 percent of the city’s black patients were cared for in General Hospital. The Hicks hospital survey also noted: “In numerous instances, Negro
physicians, failing to obtain accommodations for their patients in the hospitals, have kept those patients in their homes to the definite disadvantage of the patients.”

In addition, Health Commissioner Peters observed: “We have no training school for colored nurses and the colored physicians have no opportunity for postgraduate medical work or bedside instruction in the wards of any hospitals.”

A group of black physicians in Cincinnati founded Mercy Hospital in order to compensate for the exclusive practices of the city’s hospitals. The facility was meant to provide care for paying black patients, professional advantages for black doctors, and training for black nurses. The physicians in the hospital group committed themselves to support the institution financially. In 1925 all of the black doctors associated with Mercy Hospital were young men in their thirties or twenties. Numbering about ten, they were largely newcomers to Cincinnati who came after the start of the wartime black migration. Half of them came to Cincinnati early in the decade with recently earned doctorates from black medical schools. Mercy Hospital’s physicians possessed M.D.s mainly from Meharry Medical College, Nashville, Tennessee, but a couple were graduates of the medical school at Howard University in Washington, D.C. These were the only black medical schools still existing in the country by 1923. Most black doctors practicing at Cincinnati’s Mercy Hospital had served postgraduate internships, for example at Kansas City General Hospital in Missouri and Freedman’s Hospital in Washington, D.C. These internships were at black hospitals financed with tax revenues or philanthropic funds.

Their earlier experiences with black colleges, medical schools, and hospitals, undoubtedly, inclined some young black physicians on the Mercy Hospital staff to participate in the development of black organizations and institutions in Cincinnati. In addition to founding Mercy Hospital, some of these black doctors established a black medical association in Cincinnati and formed a chain of pharmacies owned and operated by African Americans. Prominent among these physicians was Dr. E. B. Gray, who was Mercy Hospital’s chief of staff and president of the Model Drug Company, owner of local drug stores. At age thirty-five, Dr. R. P. McClain served as Mercy Hospital’s manager, as the Model Drug Company’s secretary, and as a member of the black Ninth Street YMCA’s management committee. At age twenty-eight, Dr. R. Eugene Clark was Mercy Hospital’s secretary of staff and president of the Cincinnati Medical Association.

Cincinnati’s Mercy Hospital was open for the greater part of the 1920s, but its existence was troubled all the while. Its bed capacity was limited, and it could not qualify as a hospital under the “accepted usage
of the term hospital." Mercy Hospital's thirty-three beds were too few to meet state requirements for nursing school accreditation, and that curtailed applications for its nurses' training program. Chronic income shortages were most damaging. Fund raising efforts were made, but they proved to be insufficient. For example, staff physicians sponsored an annual benefit that solicited donations for Mercy Hospital. By the end of the decade Mercy Hospital had succumbed to financial difficulties.

Civil rights protest was not a factor in the private black hospital's demise. Black weekly editor Wendell P. Dabney, Cincinnati's most outspoken critic of Jim Crow policies, opposed racial separation at public hospitals, but not at private ones. Objecting sarcastically to the lack of protest against color lines at Cincinnati's municipal hospital, Dabney said: "The patients, black and white, get about the same treatment, but the colored are segregated and the segregation is received by colored citizens here with the complacency usually accorded by them to such indignities." Apparently, he saw Mercy Hospital as an inoffensive black private business like a newspaper, bank, or insurance company. The issue changed late in the decade after private fund raising failed to keep Mercy Hospital open. In 1929 a group of black physicians sought the establishment of a tax-supported hospital to care for African Americans. Opponents of racial segregation complained bitterly about this hospital proposal. Editor Dabney maintained that "the establishment of a city Negro hospital would mean the final barring of all Negro patients" from Cincinnati General Hospital. He added: "... if the Negro doctors haven't the courage or wisdom to gain entrance into a place for which they are taxed [General Hospital] why should others condone their cowardice and bow to an undemocratic custom and perpetuate prejudice by submission to a racial wrong?" Dabney was vehement about this hospital effort, but there was no organized opposition to it. Nevertheless, the proposal of a tax-funded black hospital in Cincinnati went unrealized. Undoubtedly, this was not a high priority of Cincinnati officials responsible for appropriating municipal funds in 1929–1930.

In the early 1920s, the hospital situations of African Americans in Columbus and Cincinnati shared some common factors. Alpha Hospital in Columbus was the counterpart of Cincinnati’s Mercy Hospital. Black physicians were excluded from practice in other Columbus hospitals, which likewise denied African Americans opportunities for nurses' training. Racial segregation was not the rule in the charity wards of the city's hospitals; however, few white doctors with "respectable" patients, evidently paying ones, would treat African Americans, according to contemporary observers. In this context, Alpha Hospital was established as a private medical facility for the city's African Americans. Costing
$23,000 to construct, its building was located on East Long Street in Columbus’ black business district. The hospital’s black founders, Drs. W. A. Method and R. M. Tribbitt, were associated with a group of recent migrants from the South that Columbus Urban League official Nimrod B. Allen praised for invigorating black institutional and business life in Columbus. Respectively, Method and Tribbitt were chairman and vice chairman of the black Spring Street YMCA’s management committee, and Method also was a Columbus Urban League board member. Their private hospital venture was short lived. By 1922 their institution was reorganized as the Alpha Hospital Association, a social agency that evidently was eligible for financial aid from the city’s charitable funding agencies. The Hospital Association provided a nurses’ training program open to African Americans. This evolution of the Alpha Hospital occurred without any notable criticism from opponents of racially segregated institutions in Columbus. The city’s black protest heritage was not strong. Furthermore, this tradition in Columbus lost perhaps its loudest voice with the death of Ralph W. Tyler in the midst of the Alpha Hospital developments. Tyler, an old-style black leader with political patronage connections, was an active opponent of color line practices in Columbus during the years just prior to his death in 1921.

Anti–color line protests overshadowed and thwarted the efforts of black hospital promoters in Cleveland during the twenties. Effective counteraction against efforts to found publicly supported black institutions was a long-established custom in Cleveland. It was a force that black hospital advocates were unable to match. Again during 1926–1927, black physicians were prime movers of campaigns promoting a black hospital in Cleveland. Unlike the earlier movements, these were highly organized, sustained over time, and conducted in the midst of much public controversy. The Cleveland Hospital Association solicited money in 1926 to fund its black hospital proposition, and in 1927 it was reorganized as the Mercy Hospital Association (MHA). Association officers and advocates were prominent members of Cleveland’s black community, including Dr. Charles H. Garvin, a staff member at Cleveland’s Lakeside Hospital, and entrepreneur Herbert S. Chauncey. The MHA hired a publicity agent and disseminated a handbill advocating a “Negro Manned Hospital,” while its promoters solicited funds during “open forum meetings” at black churches. The campaign raised some funds; however, the MHA experienced financial problems and went defunct in July 1927.
Lack of broad-based support foreshadowed the collapse of the MHA from its inception. The hotly debated Mercy Hospital issue in black Cleveland was neatly summarized by local NAACP president Charles W. White, who wrote: “On the one hand it [Mercy Hospital] is being bitterly opposed as a self-inflicted bit of Jim Crowism. On the other hand it is being espoused as a very much needed institution for the training of Negro physicians and nurses who at the present time have no such facilities for training anywhere in Cleveland.” White added: “Its opponents fear that the effect would be to close the doors tighter in existing institutions against colored people; its proponents insist just as positively that it would not. . . .” Heading the opposition were elder black Clevelanders, notably George A. Myers, editor Harry C. Smith, and clergyman Horace C. Bailey. They addressed their prominent black and white contacts who were capable of influencing public opinion. These included the Cleveland city manager, Cleveland daily newspaper editors, and black ministers associations. The anti-MHA campaign also was conducted in the daily press and in black weeklies. This determined opposition to the MHA was the crucial factor in its demise. The opponents’ efforts prevented Mercy Hospital boosters from gaining endorsements from Cleveland’s black organizations and financial support from philanthropic white sources like the Cleveland Community Chest. The local NAACP, Urban League, and black ministers associations refrained from endorsing or opposing the Mercy Hospital proposal, evidently wishing to avoid internal divisiveness.

Later in the decade, the central hospital issue for African Americans in Cleveland concerned color lines in the city’s municipal hospital. There was another debate about an African American staffed hospital, but it was upstaged by protests against racially exclusive practices at Cleveland City Hospital. The Cleveland NAACP initiated a campaign against the municipal hospital late in 1927. A broad variety of African American organizations and individuals adopted this cause. Eventually the protesters included representatives of the Universal Negro Improvement Association and the Phillis Wheatley Association. Also represented in this movement were influential black elders like George A. Myers, recently elected black city council members, and black weekly newspapers. The City Hospital protest was conducted in various forums including editorials in the black press, correspondence with municipal officials, debates in city council chambers, and political campaigns in municipal elections.

The Mercy Hospital controversy in 1927 raised awareness in Cleveland that black interns and prospective nurses were not admitted to hospital training programs in the city. Mercy Hospital’s proponents
argued that their proposal would create these professional opportunities for blacks, while its opponents retorted that City Hospital should make them available to African Americans. This debate made others aware of these hospital issues. After discussing the matter, the interracial committee of the Cleveland Area Church Federation concluded that internships and nurse’s training for African Americans should exist in a Cleveland facility, but not necessarily at City Hospital. Responding to the Church Federation’s interest in positions for black interns and nurse trainees in October 1927, Cleveland City Manager William R. Hopkins promised to authorize a study of pertinent hospital practices in municipalities outside Ohio. He indicated that Cleveland City Hospital’s racial policies in future would reflect its findings. Director of Public Health and Welfare Dudley S. Blossom then selected members of a hospital investigating committee that toured several cities including Chicago, St. Louis, New York City, and Washington. They found that predominantly white hospitals with intern and nurses’ training programs open to blacks were very exceptional. Reporting in December 1927, Blossom’s investigating committee chose not to recommend the admission of black interns and nurses to the City Hospital staff. This recommendation was in accord with the preponderance of advice received by committee members from medical personnel at hospitals on their tour.153

Meanwhile, in fall 1927 the Cleveland NAACP and other parties were in the early stages of a campaign to open the City Hospital’s intern and nurses’ training programs to African Americans.154 Early in November the Cleveland NAACP initiated its own inquiries about the treatment of blacks in hospital training programs outside Ohio. The influential elder black politico George A. Myers shortly voiced his concerns about City Hospital color lines in a series of letters to City Manager William R. Hopkins with whom he was well acquainted. Starting in December 1927, this elaborate correspondence continued for over two months. In short, Myers reaffirmed his opposition to a separate hospital for blacks and advised the city official to end all racial discrimination at the municipal hospital.155 On January 31, 1928, the city manager indignantly denied the accusation of racial bias when he made his first and only reply to Myers letters on this subject. Also, Hopkins expressed incredulity as to how Myers could oppose additional hospital facilities for African Americans, which the city manager said were sorely needed.156

Echoing this view in June 1928, new councilman E. J. Gregg, a black physician, announced his intention of introducing in the Cleveland City Council a resolution providing for the formation of a City Hospital branch on the East Side “to take care of the poor of that district,” which housed the greater part of Cleveland’s black population.157 Several days
later Councilman Gregg introduced his hospital resolution with the endorsement of City Manager William R. Hopkins. Opponents of the defunct Mercy Hospital campaign immediately rejected the Gregg resolution, and the Gazette denounced it as “Jim Crow hospital scheme.”

The exclusion of blacks from the Cleveland City Hospital medical staff ended few weeks later. In July 1928 Dr. John H. McMorries became the first African American to receive a Cleveland municipal hospital appointment as a staff physician. An experienced doctor, McMorries had acquired undergraduate and medical degrees from Howard University in Washington, D.C., where he also interned at Freedman’s Hospital. Dr. McMorries possessed twelve years’ tenure on the staff of Cleveland’s Lakeside Hospital, a private facility in a local university hospital group. Other African Americans on the Lakeside Hospital staff were Dr. Charles H. Garvin, a distinguished urologist, and Dr. Stanley Brown, a graduate of Western Reserve University Medical School in Cleveland. Although he was a Cleveland resident, Dr. Brown served his internship at Freedman’s Hospital in Washington, D.C. because internships in Cleveland were unavailable to blacks. In 1928 two other black doctors were affiliated with the private University Hospital System in Cleveland.

Editorializing in the Gazette, Harry C. Smith characterized Dr. McMorries’ appointment to the City Hospital staff as an unsatisfactory attempt to placate those who were attempting to open the public hospital to black interns and nurse trainees.

Dr. McMorries’ appointment did not forestall the anti–color line campaign against Cleveland City Hospital. In fall 1928 Cleveland NAACP President Charles W. White requested the city’s director of public health and welfare to remove the barriers against black nurse trainees and interns at City Hospital. But, Director Dudley S. Blossom replied that he had no authority to act in this area. An investigation of Cleveland City Hospital in December 1928 was the next move to advance the cause of the municipal hospital’s critics. An investigating committee was composed of a diverse array of Cleveland’s black civic leaders. They included two new city councilmen, attorney Clayborne George and physician E. J. Gregg, and representatives of the local NAACP and UNIA. The investigating committee had previous knowledge that the municipal hospital was not open to black interns and nurse trainees. But upon visiting City Hospital, the committee learned that the hospital did not employ blacks in any capacity. This fact was particularly galling to local African Americans because blacks were employed, some in quite responsible positions, in other local medical facilities. These included St. Luke’s, St. Vincent’s (Charity), Lakeside, Huron Road, and Mt. Sinai Hospitals and Cleveland Clinic, all private institutions.
During their Cleveland City Hospital visitation, the investigating committee's members observed segregation of black patients. The investigators publicized their findings in a published letter of Clayborne George and E. J. Gregg to the editor of the Cleveland Plain Dealer. They announced that the committee “found bold and flagrant segregation” in three of the hospital’s thirty-five divisions. The senior nurses of these three divisions told the committee that as long as they had held their positions patients had been separated by race in their divisions, except when it was inconvenient to do so. Investigating committee representatives also called upon City Manager Hopkins to discuss the hospital segregation findings. In January 1929 Hopkins stated, “it was not the intention of the City to segregate patients on account of color.” The city manager then issued an order stating that patients were not to be segregated by race at City Hospital.

During 1929 black interns, nurse trainees, and nurses still were absent from Cleveland City Hospital and protests against these remaining color lines continued through the year. In March the Reverend Russell S. Brown took a stand on this issue. He was one of Cleveland's three black city councilmen at that time. Brown announced his intention to introduce in the city council a resolution designed to end racial discrimination in the municipal hospital unless city administrators took action toward this end. Administrative officials made no such moves, and Councilman Brown bided his time. In summer 1929 color bias at the municipal hospital became a personal concern to the Reverend Horace C. Bailey, former pastor of Antioch Baptist Church in Cleveland. In league with other local black elders, he had worked against the Mercy Hospital proposal as a matter of principle. But family interests impelled the Reverend Bailey when his granddaughter was twice refused admission to the nurses’ training school of City Hospital that summer. He contemplated court action in order to win admission for his granddaughter and gave the story to the local black press.

Meanwhile in 1929, Dr. E. J. Gregg, a black member of the Cleveland City Council, continued to advocate the establishment of an East Side branch of the City Hospital, staffed by African Americans. In April, for example, Councilman Gregg spoke of the need for this hospital branch in a statement addressed to a meeting of Cleveland’s black Baptist pastors. Many local black physicians favored the councilman’s proposal to place a municipal hospital branch in Cleveland’s East Side African American district. In Cleveland’s black community, criticism of Gregg’s hospital idea was more widespread than the opposition to the Mercy Hospital proposal made earlier. The latter did not include the Cleveland NAACP. Many local NAACP leaders had seen Mercy
Hospital as a private black facility. The difference between that kind of institution and a black municipal hospital branch was apparent to the Cleveland NAACP leadership, which formed a consensus and took an unequivocal stand against Councilman Gregg’s proposition. Explaining the local branch’s views, Cleveland NAACP President Charles W. White said that NAACP principles did not require opposition to a private black hospital or city hospital branch with a racially integrated staff and clientele. But the NAACP could not approve a racially segregated municipal institution. White declared: “We stand against a branch of City Hospital which, whether intended or not, will eventuate in a short while into what to all intents and purposes is a Negro branch of City Hospital.”

The hospital branch issue was not permitted to obscure the civil rights campaign against Cleveland City Hospital in 1929. The East Side branch hospital matter was on the Cleveland City Council’s agenda late in the year. Its opponents used the ensuing debate to focus public attention on the municipal hospital’s color lines. At this time, the campaign against racial discrimination at City Hospital possessed the backing of a diverse, large, and still growing body of black civic leaders in Cleveland. On November 11, 1929, the city administration recommended to city council that three hundred fifty thousand dollars of a proposed $1 million tax levy be appropriated for an East Side branch of City Hospital. The recommendation was introduced in council in ordinance form and referred to the finance committee. On November 19 this bond question was discussed at a finance committee hearing that became a forum for civil rights protest. African Americans who were present at this committee debate argued that the city should not finance an East Side hospital branch. Among them were Councilmen Russell S. Brown and Claybourne George, NAACP President Charles W. White, the Reverend Horace C. Bailey, and Phillis Wheatley Association Executive Secretary Jane E. Hunter. While admitting that hospital facilities were needed, they refused to support a city hospital branch on the East Side while the interns’ and nurses’ training programs at City Hospital were closed to African Americans. The protest campaign against hospital color lines won a victory when the question of financing the branch hospital with municipal bonds was permitted to die quietly in the finance committee.

During 1927 through 1929 African Americans persistently opposed Cleveland City Hospital color lines. In the wake of these sustained efforts, the Cleveland City Council decided to racially integrate the municipal hospital’s professional training programs. On November 25, 1929, Councilman F. W. Walz, an octogenarian white physician, introduced a
resolution in city council designed to end racial discrimination at the municipal hospital. Advising reliance on the Walz resolution, African American Councilman Russell S. Brown persuaded Harry C. Smith and others to postpone their planned court action against City Hospital for not admitting the Reverend Horace C. Bailey’s granddaughter to its nurses’ training program. In a unanimous vote on January 13, 1930, the Cleveland City Council did pass the Walz resolution requiring municipal officials to “give all citizens the right to receive training as internes [sic] and nurses at City Hospital in accord with the provisions of the U.S. Constitution and the law of the State of Ohio.”

The racial integration of Cleveland City Hospital occurred in a political context. Politics was involved in hospital issues concerning African Americans in Cleveland from 1927 through 1930. For example, the municipal hospital’s African American critics entered the political arena in 1927 when they tried to persuade city officials to eliminate City Hospital color lines. African Americans in groups, most notably the NAACP, raised political pressure on the city manager by urging him to remedy the hospital’s inequities. Meantime black individuals like George A. Myers, seeking the same end, employed old-style politics that relied on networks of acquaintances with influential civic leaders. During the Cleveland municipal elections in fall 1927, another political dimension was added to this sort of lobbying. The general election ballot carried a proposition to approve a bond issue to raise funds for Cleveland City Hospital. Its black critics urged African Americans to vote no on the hospital bond proposition in protest against the City Hospital’s racially exclusive practices. This was the public stance of the Cleveland NAACP and most of Cleveland’s prominent black ministers. Also, local black weeklies, The Call, The Post, and The Gazette, editorialized against the bond issue. The hospital bond proposition was defeated, and there was a heavy vote against it in the city’s black wards. Shortly afterwards, George A. Myers warned the city manager that African American support for his administration was being seriously undermined by the City Hospital’s racial practices.

As noted, starting in 1928 black council members used the Cleveland City Council as a platform to protest against municipal hospital color lines. African Americans obtained unprecedented influence on the Cleveland City Council following the November 1929 municipal elections. Three African Americans were elected to the council that year. They were attorneys Claybourne George and Lawrence O. Payne and dentist Leroy Bundy. Each one had made a campaign pledge to fight against racial exclusion at City Hospital. Also, after the 1929 election the white city council members were evenly split along party lines. In
January 1930 the African American councilmen joined the Republican caucus, giving it the majority in council. Councilmen George, Payne, and Bundy demanded that City Hospital color lines be eliminated and the African American share of Republican party patronage appointments be enlarged. Once given such assurances, the black councilmen agreed to vote with Republican council members on key issues. As promised, City Hospital admitted African Americans to its nursing school, beginning in September 1930. An African American intern was appointed to the City Hospital staff for the first time in summer 1931.\(^{184}\) Clearly, politics had its place in the remarkable African American campaign for equal rights in Cleveland’s municipal hospital. The next chapter considers partisan politics’ role in the larger equal rights struggle in Ohio during the twenties.

In summary, the struggle for equal rights in Ohio challenged inequities in most areas along the color line in the 1920s. Protests usually involved local efforts to overcome local instances of color bias found in restaurants, hotels, theaters, residential housing, daily newspapers, public schools, hospitals, cemeteries, and other public places. The most adamant and effective assertions of equal rights in the state came from African Americans in northern Ohio cities in the twenties, as in past generations. Occasionally, the struggle went statewide as African American equal rights advocates in many Ohio cities worked in a common cause, for example, opposition to the Ku Klux Klan in the state.

The equal rights struggle in the 1920s came at a pivotal time in the long African American protest tradition in Ohio. It borrowed tactics from the past, adapted them, and used them in ways that set precedents for the future. Ohio NAACP branches made public protests in the newspaper press, courtrooms, legislative halls, and election campaign forums. Protests had been made in these same arenas in the nineteenth century. The NAACP adaptation gave organizational backing to such protests, which were conducted in the previous century by black individuals possessing political influence. The NAACP, while leading the way in the twenties, was not alone in the equal rights struggle in Ohio. Clevelanders George A. Myers and a few other elder black leaders kept alive the traditional leadership style, which died with them early in the next decade. Also, in a few instances concerned black neighbors assembled ad hoc community associations and organized mass demonstrations, for example, the student boycott mounted by black parents objecting to racial segregation at Dayton’s Willard School in 1924. These were nontraditional tactics in Ohio’s equal rights struggle in the twenties, but they became antecedents of the direct action strategy commonly employed at the height of the Civil Rights Movement in the early 1960s.
The advocacy of equal rights for African Americans sometimes was successful in Ohio, but the color line in the state remained about as rigid as ever in 1930. The significance of protest then was not about winning or losing specific contests concerning rights; instead, its importance lay in how the contests were conducted. New leadership was established in the equal rights struggle. It practiced and developed tactics drawn from an old and less-organized African American protest tradition. This relatively new NAACP form of organized protest came of age in Ohio and elsewhere, making the twenties an important decade in the formation of the twentieth century Civil Rights Movement in the state and the nation.185