# “SAVE THE YOUNG PEOPLE”: THE GENERATIONAL POLITICS OF RACIAL SOLIDARITY IN BLACK CLEVELAND, 1906-1911

by

MICHAEL METSNER

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Thesis Adviser: Dr. Rhonda Y. Williams

Department of History

CASE WESTERN RESERVE UNIVERSITY

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**SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES**

We hereby approve the thesis/dissertation of

Michael Metsner

candidate for the Master's degree *.

(signed) Dr. Rhonda Y. Williams
(chair of the committee)

Dr. Renee Sentilles

Dr. John Grabowski

(date) 03/22/2010

*We also certify that written approval has been obtained for any proprietary material contained therein.

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# “Save the Young People”: The Generational Politics of Racial Solidarity in Black Cleveland, 1906-1911

Abstract

by

MICHAEL METSNER

This thesis analyzes the contentious public debate over the proposal for the establishment of a “colored” branch of the Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA) that took place within the ranks of Cleveland’s African-American leadership during the early twentieth century. It is my contention that the generational conflict over the proposal hinged on divergent interpretations of racial solidarity among Cleveland’s black leaders. Both the older and younger black men pled the cause of racial solidarity, yet their ideological limits differed markedly: the older generation opposed any program of racial solidarity that violated the enduring ethos of racial integration, while the younger generation was more than willing to advocate race-based institution building in the name of racial solidarity. Not only does the public controversy chart ideological fault lines within black Cleveland at the turn of the century, but it also begets a critical examination of the intricate racial philosophies underlying the debate.

**Introduction**

As the specter of racial proscription enveloped the United States at the turn of the twentieth century, the African-American population on both sides of the Mason-Dixon Line found itself once more on the defensive against the entrenched forces of prejudice and discrimination. The nadir in race relations did not spare the Western Reserve, the northeastern corner of Ohio renowned for racial tolerance and integration. Faced with increased racial discrimination in all aspects of their lives, African Americans in Cleveland responded to the racial animosity of their white neighbors by closing ranks and looking inward for support, comfort, and security. Indeed, it was the golden age of racial solidarity across black America.[1] The ideological limits of racial solidarity, however, were far from settled in turn-of-the-century Cleveland, at least among the city's black elite.

A case in point was the controversial proposal for the establishment of a "colored" branch of the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) on Central Avenue—a proposal which divided the city's African-American leadership along generational lines. The older generation preached integration and staunchly opposed the creation of a "Jim Crow" YMCA, whereas the younger generation championed with equal ardor the establishment of a separate branch which would address the social needs of a growing black community. This conflict played itself out in the pages of Cleveland's rival black newspapers, the *Gazette*, which opposed the proposal for a separate Y branch and the *Journal*, which promoted it. The ideological positions taken by the opposing sides do not mean that the generational conflict fit neatly into the traditional paradigm of

[1] August Meier, *Negro Thought in America, 1880-1915: Racial Ideologies in the Age of Booker T. Washington.* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1963): p. 121.

African-American political thought at the turn of the twentieth century—the accommodation of Booker T. Washington versus the militancy of W.E.B. Du Bois. As a matter of fact, the story of generational conflict in black Cleveland reveals some of the fundamental flaws of the national paradigm of "race leadership" when it is applied in the local context. Wary of agitation, the older men did not align en masse behind the militant rhetoric of Du Bois, even though they shared fully in his commitment to racial integration. Conversely, the younger men, almost to a man, embraced the leadership of Washington, but carefully adapted his political and social proscriptions for racial advancement to their particular circumstances. The local snapshot therefore complicates the national story.

At its ideological core, the generational schism hinged on divergent interpretations of racial solidarity among the city's black elite. Both the older and younger men pled the cause of racial solidarity in the black community, yet their ideological limits differed markedly: the older generation opposed any program of racial solidarity that violated the enduring ethos of racial integration, while the younger generation was more than willing to adorn racial separatism in the alluring garb of racial solidarity. There is an unfortunate tendency among historians to conflate racial solidarity with racial separatism, as if one naturally implies the other. In his seminal work, *Negro Thought in America*, historian August Meier contends that "[i]ndependence and self-help were commonplace virtues in American culture, and no one could deny that in union there is strength. Yet the appeal for racial solidarity smacked of self-segregation, of a sort of nationalism, of furthering the system of 'color caste.'"[2] Perhaps this historical conflation explains the fact that the existing historiography on racial solidarity largely

[2] *Ibid.*, pp. 7-8.

consists of works on racial separatism and Black Nationalism, such as *Black Self-Determination* by V.P. Franklin, *Black Separatism in the United States* by Raymond L. Hall, and *The Golden Age of Black Nationalism* by Wilson Jeremiah Moses, rather than works on racial integration and/or multiculturalism.

This approach, however, obscures the inclusive appeal and ideological malleability of the concept of racial solidarity in the African-American community, as the case of the turn-of-the-century black leadership in Cleveland illustrates. Both the older and younger men pled the cause of racial solidarity: championing black-owned businesses, imploring fellow African Americans to patronize these "race enterprises," and appealing for financial support of the Cleveland Home for Aged Colored People, a race-based social institution founded in 1896. However, when it came to the proposal for the establishment of a "colored" Y on Central Avenue, there was a marked and increasingly strident disagreement between the generations: the older men opposed the proposal as a direct assault on racial integration, while the younger men embraced it in the spirit of racial self-help. It is the purpose of this work to elucidate the ideological terms in which both the older and younger black leaders articulated racial solidarity, without glossing over the all-too-obvious inconsistencies and limitations of their views.

Not only does the YMCA public controversy chart ideological fault lines within Cleveland's black leadership at the turn of the twentieth century, it also begets a critical examination of the intricate racial ideologies undergirding the debate—racial separatism and racial integration. In his work, *The Golden Age of Black Nationalism*, historian Wilson Jeremiah Moses reminds us that black separatism should not be seen as an ideological monolith but rather a continuum ranging from "a simple institutional

separatism" to "the perpetual physical separation of the races."[3] Without question, the younger black men stood at the soft end of this continuum, desiring to "see black people mak[e] independent efforts to sustain themselves in a provenly hostile environment."[4] Historian Raymond L. Hall adds that black separatism is "an elusive and subtle phenomenon" since "at times blacks embrace some form of it because they are denied access to what most other Americans take for granted, at other times they aggressively pursue separatism as an end in itself; and at still others they endorse separatist ideology as a mechanism for fostering integration."[5] Historian David A. Gerber raises a crucial question concerning racial separatism in *Black Ohio and the Color Line*: were racially-based institutions "transitory?"[6] Were they mere way stations on the tortuous path to racial integration? This was certainly the case in turn-of-the-century black Cleveland since the younger men "aimed at achieving assimilationist ends through separatist means."[7] In other words, they viewed separatism as a means to an end, not an end in itself. Following in the ideological footsteps of their recognized leader, Booker T. Washington, they "synthesized integrationist and nationalist strains" to devise a practical plan for racial advancement in turn-of-the-century Cleveland.[8]

As is the case with racial separatism, there are important questions that complicate understanding of the opposing philosophy of racial integration. Since integration "must rely on coercion in form of civil rights laws to bring about equality for

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[3] Moses, Wilson Jeremiah. *The Golden Age of Black Nationalism, 1850-1925*. (Hamden, CT: Archon Press, 1978), p. 23.
[4] *Ibid.*
[5] Hall, Raymond L. *Black Separatism in the United States*. (Hanover: The University Press of New England, 1978), p. 85.
[6] Gerber, David A. *Black Ohio and the Color Line, 1860-1915* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1976) p. 186.
[7] Moses, *The Golden Age of Black Nationalism,* p. 30.
[8] Toll, William. *The Resurgence of Race: Black Social Theory from Reconstruction to the Pan-African Conference.* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1979), p. 47.

African Americans," legal scholar Roy L. Brooks contends in *Integration or Separation?*, it "begets a low-grade or second-class equality…because the ensuing racial mixing is nonconsensual on the part of whites."[9] If laws are required to coerce whites to respect the basic civil rights of their black fellow citizens, then this coercion naturally diminishes "the quality of equality."[10] Put in these words, the practice of racial integration, enforced by law, loses some of its moral luster. In *Black Self-Determination*, historian V.P. Franklin perceptively adds that "in the day-to-day experiences of the masses of Afro-Americans throughout the nineteenth century there were just too few examples of interracial cooperation to sustain 'integration' as a viable strategy for realizing Afro-American cultural goals and objectives."[11] This is a relevant point that shifts the historical focus onto the black masses and challenges the historian to examine the everyday reality of racial integration in turn-of-the-century Cleveland for ordinary black people. When the older generation spoke of the integrationist traditions of the Western Reserve, what exactly did they mean?

Nonetheless, what lacks in the secondary literature is the same discriminating analysis of racial integration that has been applied to racial separation. It is imperative to think of racial integration as an ideological continuum that extends from assimilation at one end to egalitarian multiculturalism at the other. Moses correctly identifies the assimilationist end of the continuum, noting that "the [black] masses were to be prepared for the responsibilities of citizenship; they were to be Anglo-Americanized, it was hoped;

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[9] Brooks, Roy L. *Integration or Separation?: A Strategy for Racial Equality*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), p. 105

[10] *Ibid.*

[11] Franklin, V. P. *Black Self-Determination: A Cultural History of African-American Resistance*. (Brooklyn, NY: Lawrence Hill Books, 1992):, pp. 195-196

they would be assimilated into mainstream American life."[12] The philosophy of racial uplift of the black masses to the normative standards of white middle-class respectability fits neatly with the assimilationist construction of integration. Interestingly enough, it was Roy Jenkins, the British Home Secretary, who best articulated the other end of the continuum—egalitarian multiculturalism—in a brief but powerful speech, "Racial Equality in Britain," that he delivered in 1966. It was, he argued, both undesirable and disadvantageous to require immigrants, irrespective of their point of origin, to shed their own "national characteristics and culture" once they set foot on British soil.[13] He rejected the careless conflation of genuine integration with the mythology of the melting pot. "I do not think that we need in this country a 'melting-pot', which will turn everybody out in a common mould, as one of a series of carbon copies of someone's misplaced vision of the stereotyped Englishman."[14] Jenkins defined genuine integration as "equal opportunity, accompanied by cultural diversity, in an atmosphere of mutual tolerance" as opposed to "a flattening process of assimilation."[15]

The secondary literature on black Cleveland at the turn of the twentieth century chronicles the public controversy over the proposed "colored" Y, but its analytic focus and reach are limited and somewhat dated. The two foremost works, *Black Ohio and the Color Line* by David A. Gerber and *A Ghetto Takes Shape* by Kenneth L. Kusmer, do not incorporate the concept of racial solidarity in their rather perfunctory examination of the generational conflict over the proposal, but limit their discussion to the overarching centrality of personal experience in shaping and informing the opposing viewpoints of the

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[12] Moses, *Golden Age of Black Nationalism*, p. 131
[13] Jenkins, Roy. *Essays and Speeches.* (New York: Chilmark Press, 1968), p. 267.
[14] *Ibid.*
[15] *Ibid.*

younger and older men.[16] It is a notable oversight on their part because the dissimilar appropriation and interpretation of racial solidarity by older and younger men illustrates the inconsistencies and incoherences inherent to human belief that must not be obscured. While Gerber and Kusmer recognize the cross-generational cooperation under the auspices of the Cleveland Association of Colored Men (CACM), an elite African-American social organization, both historians largely overlook the salience and significance of the philosophy of racial uplift in the work of this organization.[17] An important question must be addressed: what was it about racial uplift that appealed in equal measure to both generations?

There is an established consensus in the secondary literature that Cleveland's African-American leadership, both young and old, was by and large "conservative."[18] Even as Gerber and Kusmer implicitly recognize the disparate interpretations of "conservatism" among the black leaders, which made the proposal for a "colored" Y such a contentious issue, they neglect to critically analyze the meaning of this ideological label. For instance, neither historian properly explores the "conservative" politics of George A. Myers, a wealthy black barber and Republican operative, who corresponded regularly with Booker T. Washington (but refused to join Washington's National Negro Business League) while quietly working to undermine the proposal for a "colored" Y. There is also good reason to question the prevailing consensus in the secondary literature concerning the "militancy" of Harry C. Smith, editor of the *Gazette*, once he is placed in

[16] Gerber, *Black Ohio*, pp. 322-323; Kusmer, Kenneth L. *A Ghetto Takes Shape: Black Cleveland, 1870-1930*. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1976), p. 99.
[17] Gerber, *Black Ohio*, pp. 387-388; Kusmer, *A Ghetto Takes Shape*, pp. 151-152.
[18] Gerber, *Black Ohio*, p. 337; p. 463; Kusmer, *A Ghetto Takes Shape*, p. 140.

the proper historical and geographic context.[19] How "militant" was Smith compared with other voices of protest, if at all? Unlike his socialist contemporary, Peter Humphries Clark of Cincinnati, Smith did not challenge the capitalist system of production nor did he advocate direct action in the pursuit of racial equality. The secondary literature, therefore, neglects to properly contextualize and scrutinize the ideological demarcation of the political landscape of black Cleveland at the turn of the century, presenting a simplistic interpretation of an exceedingly intricate web of human beliefs.

The ideological foundations of the generational conflict over the proposal for the creation of a "colored" Y were informed by the dissimilar life experiences of the men involved. And since this contentious debate drew upon their very life experiences—their intimate beliefs, aspirations, incomes, and struggles—compromise proved unfeasible. In speaking of generational conflict, I draw on the work of historian Mario T. García, *Mexican Americans*, to define a generation politically rather than biologically. A political generation, according to political scientist, Marvin Rintala, is "a group of human beings who have undergone the same basic historical experiences during their formative years" and therefore "it is not age but politics that determines its character."[20] What distinguishes one political generation from another is not age per se, but "the shared experiences of a particular age cohort" that break with the past.[21] Every political generation "emerges not just in reaction to history but in order to make history—that is, to produce and consolidate significant social changes in an environment conducive to

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[19] Larry Cuban, "A Strategy for Racial Peace: Negro Leadership in Cleveland, 1900-1919," *Phylon* 28 (1967), p. 305; Kusmer, *A Ghetto Takes Shape*, p. 130.
[20] García, Mario T. *Mexican Americans: Leadership, Ideology, and Identity, 1930-1960*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989, p. 3.
[21] *Ibid.* p. 4.

such changes."[22] Since the older and younger black men came of political age at very dissimilar moments in American history, their collective experiences as African Americans *and* their proposed remedies for racial discrimination diverged considerably.

Lest one presume the historical exceptionalism of Cleveland, the same contentious public debates—structured along similar social and ideological lines—between an integrationist older generation and a separatist younger generation took place among the black leadership of Chicago and Milwaukee at the turn of the twentieth century, if with different outcomes. Unlike Cleveland, both cities witnessed the establishment of "colored" YMCAs, the Wabash Avenue Y in Chicago in 1913 and the short-lived Frederick Douglass Y in Milwaukee in 1917.[23] The valuable works by Allan Spear, *Black Chicago,* James R. Grossman, *Land of Hope,* and Joe William Trotter, *Black Milwaukee,* on the two Midwestern cities chronicle the same generational conflicts, once more emphasizing the centrality of personal experience, but these historians do not discuss instances of cross-generational cooperation, or the lack thereof, or address the views of the younger and older black leaders on the core issue of racial solidarity. These are important omissions that limit our understanding of and appreciation for the intricate intraracial politics in the urban Midwest at the turn of the twentieth century. It is the purpose of this work to open the door to other urban studies in turn-of-the-century African-American history that critically examine the generational tensions that surfaced in the wake of increased urban migration with a particular attention to cross-generational links, rather than simply disparities, and the inclusive appeal of racial solidarity.

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[22] *Ibid.*

[23] For Chicago, see Allan Spear, *Black Chicago: Making of a Negro Ghetto, 1890-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), pp. 100-101. For Milwaukee, see Thomas R. Buchanan, *Black Milwaukee, 1890-1915* (M.A. Thesis, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 1974), p. 135.

**"Truly a representative American City"** Cleveland at the Turn of the Twentieth Century

"Perhaps in no one city in the United States is its Negro population so free from the environments of prejudice as in the city of Cleveland," declared the Indianapolis *Freeman*, one of the nation's leading African American newspapers, in 1899.[24] There was nothing tongue-in-cheek about the statement made by Charles H. Stewart, the *Freeman* correspondent. The social reality on the ground was racial integration: "Mixed schools, mixed churches, partly and in fact everything 'mixed' and the influence of such a condition is easily seen and appreciated, when once a stranger is within the gates of the city."[25] By 1908, however, the local *Plain Dealer* would publicly acknowledge that Cleveland had a "race problem," going so far as to allege that "the barriers against the negro [*sic*] are nearly as high in Cleveland as in any city in the south."[26] Racial inequality was a daunting reality for African Americans of all classes and shades, compelling "the majority of the colored people to stay away from the places where they know they are not wanted."[27] The disparate social realities related in the pages of the two newspapers illustrate that the national deterioration in race relations at the turn of the twentieth century, termed the "Nadir" by historian Rayford W. Logan, did not bypass Cleveland despite the city's reputation for racial tolerance and social integration.

Settled mainly by New Englanders during the early nineteenth century, the Western Reserve, the northeastern corner of Ohio, including Cleveland, "remained in stark contrast to much of the central and southern parts of the state…where blacks

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[24] Indianapolis *Freeman*, August 26, 1899. This article includes a long list of who's who of black Cleveland, showcasing the black participation in the business and the public realms.
[25] *Ibid.*
[26] Cleveland *Plain Dealer*, May 3, 1908.
[27] *Ibid.*

suffered harsh prejudice and comprehensive discrimination."[28] Not only were the transplanted Yankees enthusiastic participants in the struggle against the institution of chattel slavery, but many also championed racial tolerance for its inherent sacred and secular good.[29] While the relatively small number of African American residents during much of the nineteenth century had undoubtedly contributed to the liberal cast of race relations in Cleveland, we should not summarily dismiss the personal commitment of many whites to inclusion and, just as important, the popular reputation of the Western Reserve for racial liberalism. "The Cleveland people believe in the "square deal" theory from head to foot and join in every effort put forth to vouchsafe this privilege to all people," Nahum Daniel Brascher, the editor of a local black weekly, the *Journal*, would claim in 1905.[30]

There were obvious (and convincing) reasons for the liberal reputation garnered by the Western Reserve with regard to race relations. Cleveland boasted integrated public schools since the late 1840s, both for black students and black teachers, which most of the city's residents accepted as "a fact of life."[31] Following in the footsteps of John P. Green, a Cleveland lawyer who became the state's first black legislator in 1881, prominent local blacks, such as Harry C. Smith and William Clifford, won statewide elective office in the late nineteenth century with the blessing and support of the Republican Party.[32] Black Clevelanders, too, enjoyed "a significant degree of racial equality" in the nineteenth century since integration was "the rule rather than the

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[28] Gerber, David A. *Black Ohio and the Color Line,* pp. 13-14.
[29] *Ibid.* p. 12
[30] Brascher, Nahum Daniel, "Cleveland—A Representative American City," *Voice of the Negro* 8 (1905), p. 533.
[31] Kusmer, Kenneth L. *A Ghetto Takes Shape*, p. 17.
[32] Jones, Adrienne Lash. *Jane Edna Hunter: A Case Study of Black Leadership, 1910-1950.* (Brooklyn: Carlson Publishing, 1990), p. 4.

exception" in most of the city's public accommodations.[33] Finally, "the overall economic standing of Cleveland's black population was higher than that of most black communities in the nineteenth century," denoting that the opportunities for skilled employment, social mobility, and acquisition of property available to the black minority in Cleveland were unattainable (if not unimaginable) in most other communities.[34] Nineteenth-century Cleveland was far from a racial paradise for most blacks who made the city their home, as prejudice and discrimination endured, yet their life prospects were much brighter in the Western Reserve than elsewhere in Ohio.

At the turn of the twentieth century, however, black residents of the Forest City, as Cleveland had been affectionately dubbed, experienced a blatant increase in racial discrimination as they sought admission to movie theaters, amusement parks, and hotels; service at restaurants, and stores; and employment at local businesses.[35] As the nineteenth-century heritage of racial egalitarianism faltered on the rocks of twentieth-century racism, Kenneth L. Kusmer observes, "a pattern of discrimination was becoming established in many areas of public life" with "increasing momentum."[36] And David A. Gerber adds, "Nowhere was the trend toward a more rigid color line more dramatic than in the Western Reserve."[37] Fully cognizant of the shifting racial attitudes in Cleveland, Nahum D. Brascher urged his fellow African Americans, both young and old, to face the obvious—that "the Cleveland of June 1, 1907 is no more like the Cleveland of June 1,

[33] Kusmer, *A Ghetto Takes Shape*, p. 31; pp. 14-15.
[34] *Ibid.* pp. 17-23.
[35] Kusmer, *A Ghetto Takes Shape*, p. 54.
[36] *Ibid.* p. 57
[37] Gerber, *Black Ohio*, p. 259.

1880, than granite is like saw dust"—and adjust to the present circumstances rather than dwell on a lost past.[38]

Protesting that "we have the color-line drawn on us often enough by the whites," the *Gazette*, a local black weekly, repeatedly reported on racial discrimination in public spaces in Cleveland.[39] The most blatant offenders were the local theaters and restaurants. In March 1903, Thomas B. Ackridge, an employee at a local hotel, ordered over the phone four sofa seats at the Cleveland Theater for the next evening's show and sent for the tickets the following day.[40] Once Ackridge and his friends reached the theater with their tickets, however, "they were refused their seats and offered cheaper ones."[41] They refused the offer.[42] In October of the same year, Reverend Horace C. Bailey of Antioch Baptist Church returned to Cole's Restaurant for a meal after patronizing the establishment the day before.[43] This time, however, Bailey was ordered to sit at the rear before a white waitress, who had waited on him the day before, refused to serve him at the direction of her boss, Mr. Cole.[44] Bailey did not miss a beat and followed Ackridge to the law office of W. T. Clark, filing a criminal lawsuit against the proprietor.[45] These are just two handy, if revealing, examples of racial discrimination in public accommodations that suffused the pages of the *Gazette* during the first decade of the twentieth century. It is interesting to note that white (and occasionally black) proprietors most often justified

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[38] Cleveland *Journal*, June 1, 1907.
[39] Cleveland *Gazette*, January 10, 1903. The articles on racial discrimination appear regularly in the *Gazette* during the period covered by this study.
[40] *Ibid.* March 21, 1903.
[41] *Ibid.*
[42] *Ibid.*
[43] *Ibid.* October 17, 1903.
[44] *Ibid.*
[45] *Ibid.* March 21, 1903; October 17, 1903.

their decision to draw the color line by alluding to the racist predilections of their white patrons.[46]

The deterioration in race relations did not occur in a social vacuum but corresponded with a significant in-migration of African Americans to Cleveland from the rural regions of Ohio as well as the Upper and Border South.[47] The city's black population grew from 2,989 in 1890 to 8,448 in 1910, representing a marked increase in the proportion of blacks in the total population from 1.1 percent of 261,353 in 1880 to 1.5 percent of 560,663 in 1910.[48] The available statistical data permits us to trace the geographic origins and the age profile of the migrants. The federal census conducted in 1900 put the black population of Cleveland at 5,863, of which 2,296, or 38.4 percent, were Ohio-born.[49] Black interstate migrants numbered 3,567, of which 2,137, or nearly 60 percent, came from the Upper and Border South.[50] While black Virginians, Marylanders, and North Carolinians predominated in the ranks of the migrants to Cleveland at the turn of the twentieth century, sizable groups of black Kentuckians and Tennesseans also made the city their home.[51] The 1910 federal census indicates that the migratory patterns of the previous decade endured. Nearly 60 percent of Cleveland's black population was born outside the state of Ohio and "the new southern migrants came largely from Kentucky, Virginia, North Carolina, and Tennessee."[52] The age distribution of the black population in Cleveland strongly suggests that the new migrants were disproportionately young and single, "members of a new free-born generation who could

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[46] Cleveland *Plain Dealer*, May 3, 1908.
[47] Kusmer, *A Ghetto Takes Shape*, pp. 39-41.
[48] Gerber, *Black Ohio*, p. 274; Kusmer, *A Ghetto Takes Shape*, p. 10.
[49] Kusmer, *A Ghetto Takes Shape*, p. 40
[50] *Ibid.*
[51] *Ibid.*
[52] Gerber, *Black Ohio*, p. 277

not feel, as their slave-born elders might, a sense of growing opportunity in the South."[53] According to the 1910 federal census, about 66 percent of the city's black population ranged in age from 15 to 44 years, while children under five years of age comprised only about 6 percent of the total.[54]

"To the young and valiant we say, come—if you have a job before you get here," the *Journal* forewarned the black migrants making their way northward.[55] The warning was well founded, for promise and reality collided with bitter if predictable results in turn-of-the-century Cleveland. The booming industrial economy of Cleveland certainly seemed to portend a bright future for the new migrants in search of a better life, yet their lively hopes were soon dispelled by the painful fact of racial discrimination in employment that was as real in Cleveland as it was in Chicago or Atlanta. "[A]t present, prejudice exists here as in other places, and the trades are not wide open," the *Journal* noted.[56] Black workers faced insurmountable obstacles, both direct and indirect, that restricted their opportunities for economic advancement while tightening the bonds of racial oppression. The ready availability of "cheap immigrant and second-generation ethnic laborers who had little choice but to do heavy, dirty work" rendered black workers dispensable, especially in the social context of deteriorating race relations.[57] In addition, many employers were reluctant to hire blacks due to the popular belief that they were "inherently unfitted for industrial work" by virtue of their agrarian extraction, whether real or imagined.[58] Finally, many trade unions affiliated with the American Federation of

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[53] *Ibid.* p. 278
[54] Kusmer, *A Ghetto Takes Shape*, p. 39
[55] Cleveland *Journal*, February 3, 1906.
[56] *Ibid.*
[57] Gerber, *Black Ohio*, p. 298
[58] Kusmer, *A Ghetto Takes Shape*, p. 67

Labor (AFL) excluded black workers from membership through official and unofficial means, "preventing most blacks from moving into the better paying, skilled jobs."[59] The fact that Cleveland only had five licensed black plumbers in 1910 attests to the exclusionary policies of the local plumbers' union that issued licenses.[60]

Rampant racial discrimination in hiring and promotion in the expanding iron and steel industries barred most African Americans from well-paid skilled employment—the golden path into the American middle class—and compelled them to accept the most demanding and the least remunerative positions available in the industrial sector.[61] In 1910, there were only 49 black metalworkers in the city of Cleveland, scant improvement from three in 1890.[62] "New job opportunities during the decade were confined to the unskilled level in the growing steel and manufacturing industries," remarks historian Adrienne Lash Jones.[63] The available statistical data illustrates the economic marginalization of black workers in Cleveland. Only 388, or 11.1 percent, of black males and 36, or 2.3 percent, of black females were employed in skilled occupations in 1910.[64] Conversely, 1,938, or 55.5 percent, of black males and 1,149, or 72.6 percent, of black females were employed in unskilled and service occupations.[65] Competing with immigrant and second-generation ethnic labor for the same low-paying, low-status service jobs, black workers were at a comparative disadvantage owing to their darker hue and were steadily supplanted in traditionally black occupations, such as barbering and

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[59] *Ibid.*
[60] Gerber, *Black Ohio*, p. 303
[61] *Ibid.* p. 280; p. 298.
[62] *Ibid.* pp. 298-299.
[63] Jones, *Jane Edna Hunter*, p. 11
[64] Kusmer, *A Ghetto Takes Shape*, p. 74
[65] *Ibid.*

waitering.[66] Although the number of black barbers and waiters in Cleveland increased from 80 to 109 and from 392 to 514, respectively, during 1890-1910, the percentage of blacks engaged in these professions declined.[67] The prevalence of racial discrimination in employment even left Harry C. Smith, the vocal editor of the *Gazette*, feeling dejected: "Although 75 to 95 per cent of the trade of the places of business on Central Ave., conducted by whites is given them by our people, the butcher…is about the only one who gives an Afro-American any steady employment and we cannot say how long that will last."[68]

The sting of racial discrimination not only affected the employment opportunities of black Clevelanders, but limited their residential choices as well. While nothing resembling a distinct black ghetto would emerge before the Great Migration, the residential conditions for most African Americans deteriorated appreciably during the first decade of the twentieth century as patterns of *de facto* segregation in housing began to solidify in the central neighborhoods of Cleveland.[69] "By common consent," noted Brascher, "most of the colored people live within a district bounded by East Ninth and East Fifty-fifth streets, and Woodland avenue S. E. and Cedar avenue S. E."[70] In "the age of the segregated city"—as the half-century before 1920 has been described—it was hardly surprising to find the growing black population concentrated in older inner-city neighborhoods with aging housing stock and congested living conditions alongside a sundry selection of immigrants from Eastern and Southern Europe.[71] This was not a

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[66] *Ibid.* p. 76.
[67] Gerber, *Black Ohio*, p. 305.
[68] Cleveland *Gazette*, June 3, 1911.
[69] Kusmer, *A Ghetto Takes Shape*, p. 42.
[70] Cleveland *Journal*, June 9, 1906.
[71] Kusmer, *A Ghetto Takes Shape*, pp. 42-44.

racially-based urban ghetto, however. "There is no iron clad district in which [black] people live. They are scattered all over Cleveland," observed Nahum D. Brascher perceptively in 1906.[72] Blacks did not constitute more than 25 percent of the population in any one of the city's 158 census tracts in 1910 and even the Twelfth Ward, the demographic center of black Cleveland, was only 16 percent black.[73] As important, white homeowners outside the Central Avenue district were more than willing to use violence, intimidation, and restrictive covenants to prevent upwardly mobile African Americans from moving—either as buyers or renters—into their white middle class neighborhoods.[74] Finally, the economic confinement of black Clevelanders to low-paying unskilled and service employment produced a sharp decline in property ownership among blacks. Only some 11 percent of blacks owned their homes in 1910, compared to nearly 15 percent in 1890 and 33 percent in 1860.[75]

**"Let the good work go on"** Black Cleveland at the Turn of the Twentieth Century

Black Clevelanders did not submit passively to the racial antagonism of their white neighbors, but responded to the shifting racial circumstances with financial ingenuity and moral fortitude. "While it is true that in some ways we are denied privileges that are enjoyed by some who are among the basest of the white race, it is also true that we have large, very large opportunities and we may use them as our own if we are prepared to do so," the *Journal* noted optimistically.[76] Cleveland's growing African-American population was more than prepared to take full advantage of the existing

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[72] Cleveland *Journal*, June 9, 1906.
[73] Kusmer, *A Ghetto Takes Shape*, p. 161; Gerber, *Black Ohio*, pp. 289-290.
[74] Kusmer, *A Ghetto Takes Shape*, p. 46; Gerber, *Black Ohio*, pp. 293-294.
[75] Kusmer, *A Ghetto Takes Shape*, pp. 89-90.
[76] Cleveland *Journal*, December 10, 1904.

opportunities for racial advancement by embracing the potent principles of racial solidarity and self-help.

The influx of migrants forged an urban black community that was both "large enough and concentrated enough to allow aspiring black entrepreneurs to dream of tapping a Negro market for goods and services."[77] During the first decade of the twentieth century, the commercial heart of black Cleveland pulsated with excitement and vigor along Central Avenue—between East 25th and East 35th streets—the main thoroughfare bisecting the sprawling black community.[78] Walking down Central Avenue in 1905, an observant visitor to Cleveland would easily locate a wide range of "race enterprises," including "a dentist, physicians, club houses, grocery stores, millinery stores, coal offices, jewelry store, drug store, hotel, restaurants, laundry, shoeshop, undertakers, bakery, ice cream parlors, and the usual number of barber shops, shining parlors and not to be endorsed, saloons."[79]

One of the most successful and versatile black businessmen reaping the financial whirlwind in Cleveland during this period was S. Clayton Green, a native of Virginia who made the journey northward at the turn of the twentieth century.[80] Green's first venture was the Leonard Sofa Bed Company, located on Cedar Avenue, that manufactured a combination sofa and bed, arguably "the best of its kind on the market," he had devised and patented in 1902.[81] Green also joined forces with Welcome T. Blue, a prominent black realtor, to form the Mohawk Realty Company in 1904.[82] Their real

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[77] Gerber, *Black Ohio*, p. 297.
[78] *Ibid.* p. 289.
[79] Brascher, "Cleveland—A Representative American City," *Voice of the Negro* 8 (1905), p. 534.
[80] Gerber, *Black Ohio*, p. 313.
[81] Davis, Russell H. *Black Americans in Cleveland from George Peake to Carl B. Stokes, 1796-1969.* (Washington, D.C.: Associated Publishers, 1972), p. 165.
[82] *Ibid.* p. 167

estate firm not only acquired several houses and two apartment buildings but also erected homes along Blaine and Cedar Avenues and the Clayton Building on Central Avenue.[83] Green next ventured into the world of entertainment. He first opened a skating rink and dance hall on Cedar Avenue in 1907 and then the Alpha Theater, the first black-owned theater in the city, on Central Avenue in 1911.[84] Alongside these major "race enterprises," Green also had a financial stake in a laundry, restaurant, and grocery store.[85] While his premature death at the age of 42 in 1915 cut short a remarkable career, Green's record of financial achievement attests to the opportunities made available to black entrepreneurs owing to the marginalization of the black customer by local white businessmen. In other words, racial discrimination in public accommodations bolstered the creation of parallel, black-owned enterprises in the Central Avenue district catering to black customers turned away by whites.

The growth of black enterprise should not be taken lightly since it cultivated a sense of racial pride and solidarity among an African-American populace under siege from the ascendant forces of racism. Brandishing the potent banner of racial self-help for all of black Cleveland to see, the *Gazette* challenged its readers, "Why not patronize an energetic, competent and obliging member of the race when he is in business? 'Help one another,' should be our slogan."[86] The psychological impact of coming into daily contact with tangible symbols of black progress in Cleveland—"race enterprises" that were owned by the black entrepreneur, provided employment for the black worker, and solicited the patronage of the black customer—cannot be overstated in a hostile

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[83] *Ibid.*
[84] Kusmer, *A Ghetto Takes Shape*, pp. 82-83.
[85] Davis, *Black Americans in Cleveland*, p. 167.
[86] Cleveland *Gazette*, January 14, 1911.

environment insistent upon black inferiority. A profound sense of racial destiny imbued the discussion of black-owned businesses in the *Journal*: "Let us support our business men. Our support means their success, their success is our salvation. Every business man of the race who runs a creditable establishment is a light in the darkness that surrounds us."[87]

Lest the commercial picture of black Cleveland at the turn of the twentieth century appear too rosy, it merits mention that black entrepreneurs and professionals could not depend on the emotional sway of "race pride" to secure black patronage at their establishments and had to vie for customers with established white businesses in Cleveland.[88] Although the *Journal* implored black Clevelanders to patronize the city's "race enterprises," it lamented the "lack of business tact" among black entrepreneurs and forewarned that "a well stocked store by no means makes a businessman. Economy, thoughtfulness and knowledge of practical business methods are necessary requisites."[89] Moreover, black merchants and professionals in Cleveland relied on an integrated clientele to make a living because the city's black population was not yet large enough to sustain their establishments. "[I]n every line of business, from manufacturing to undertaking, from ministry to journalism, including, of course, the law and medicine," the success of black entrepreneurs up North "comes from patronage of white people."[90] In 1915, for example, all of Cleveland's black lawyers, numbering a dozen, had integrated practices and most of their clients were actually white.[91] If black entrepreneurs, such as S. Clayton Green, grasped at the existing economic opportunities

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[87] Cleveland *Journal*, June 4, 1904.
[88] Gerber, *Black Ohio*, pp. 317-318.
[89] Cleveland *Journal*, April 11, 1903, June 11, 1904.
[90] *Ibid.* September 25, 1909.
[91] Kusmer, *A Ghetto Takes Shape*, p. 81.

for all their worth at turn-of-the-century Cleveland, there were clearly defined limits to their capacity to compete successfully with white enterprises.

Beyond the economic benefits of urban migration, the dramatic growth of membership in African-American churches merits mention if only because these institutions eased the social transition for Southern rural migrants, making their way precariously in the city. As black migrants poured into Cleveland at the turn of the twentieth century, they sought to resume their religious life by joining existing congregations as well as forming new ones. The mass-based Baptist and African Methodist Episcopal (AME) denominations attracted the largest number of newcomers to their various congregations.[92] By 1890, black Cleveland boasted five churches: St. John's AME, Shiloh Baptist, Cory Methodist Episcopal, Mt. Zion Congregational, and St. Andrew's Episcopal.[93] Between 1890 and 1915, the Baptists erected seven new churches (Antioch, Emmanuel, Gethsemane, Sterling, Avery, Mt. Haven, and Triedstone) and the African Methodist Episcopalians erected two (St. James and Harris).[94] In addition to their affiliation with the established denominations, black migrants of the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Zion and Colored Methodist Episcopal (CME) faiths formed their own congregations in Cleveland, St. Paul's AME Zion and Lane Memorial CME.[95] "Our churches are in a better condition spiritually and financially than they have been for many days," the *Journal* noted, "a systematic effort is being carried on to advance the work, and it is proving effective."[96]

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[92] *Ibid.* p. 94.
[93] Davis, *Black Americans in Cleveland*, p. 181.
[94] Kusmer, *A Ghetto Takes Shape*, p. 94.
[95] Gerber, *Black Ohio*, p. 435.
[96] Cleveland *Journal*, April 4, 1903.

Confronting the unsettling reality of racial exclusion and marginalization during the first decade of the twentieth century, members of Cleveland's growing African-American community turned inward to cope with an increasingly hostile world. The expansion of "race enterprises" and the proliferation of black churches exemplified the powerful sway that the ideals of racial solidarity and self-help held over all members of the community, both young and old. There was little disagreement among the city's black leadership concerning the tangible and intangible benefits of racial cooperation in building and nurturing racially-based commercial and religious institutions. There did, however, develop an unbridgeable gulf between the younger and older leaders over the advisability and the necessity of creating racially-based *social* institutions in Cleveland, especially a "colored" branch of the Young Men's Christian Association.

**"A gigantic farce"** Race and the Cleveland Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA)

The increasing numbers of young African Americans making the arduous trek northward at the turn of the twentieth century strained the limited social resources of Cleveland's African-American community, prompting some of the city's black leaders to voice their support for the creation of separate social institutions in areas with high concentrations of black residents. "Some place must be found along Central Avenue…where the young people can congregate for social enjoyment, physical exercise, and instruction in the right ways of living," asserted Nahum D. Brascher in 1905.[97] Prominent among the proposals was a plan to establish a separate (i.e. "colored") branch of the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) to meet the social,

[97] Cleveland *Journal*, June 17, 1905.

recreational, educational, and spiritual needs of black youth, especially the rural migrants who were seen as particularly vulnerable to the many unsavory temptations of the city, such as crime, vice, and alcohol. Without "higher encouragement held out to them," young migrants "not accustomed to city life" readily succumbed to "the temptations" and "one, three, a half dozen are bright minds are lost to the world!"[98] It is unclear what empirical research Brascher relied on to print such statements, but he adroitly manipulated the objective social conditions to make a social point and attract public support.

Needless to say, an unmistakable class bias suffused the preachments of the *Journal*. The increased migration of blacks into Cleveland did certainly place new demands on the city's African-American community in terms of social recreation, lodging, employment, education, and worship. Brascher, however, painted the newcomers as impressionable country bumpkins who desperately needed moral guidance in "the right ways of living" from middle-class residents of the city in a proper institutional setting. Unsurprisingly, "the right ways of living" conformed to "the dominant society's norms of manners and morals."[99] In a true paternalist fashion, he too readily imposed his middle-class standards of right and wrong on the perceived (and actual) misconduct of lower-class migrants, and too easily censured public behaviors that deviated from those standards. In an article revealingly titled, "The Vicious Element," Brascher disparaged the social demeanor of "indolent Negroes coming from the south" as "disgraceful," "discourteous," "obnoxious", and "loud."[100] His displeasure with the

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[98] Cleveland *Journal*, January 23, 1904.
[99] Higginbotham, Evelyn Brooks. *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), p. 187.
[100] Cleveland *Journal*, May 2, 1903.

alleged social transgressions of the black migrants had more to do with white opinion than black degeneration, however. "A large element of the whites, either from ignorance or indifference, being unable to separate the bad from the good, are forming unkind opinions, without reserve of the Afro-American citizen."[101] Upholding the popular view that individual behavior "determined the collective fate of African Americans," Cleveland's black middle class believed wholeheartedly that it alone shouldered the responsibility for inculcating the dominant culture of respectability in the hearts and minds of the lower-class black migrants.[102]

The proponents of a separate Y branch were largely drawn from the ranks of younger, middle- to upper-class black residents who had migrated to Cleveland from other parts of Ohio, neighboring Midwestern states, and the Upper South at the turn of the twentieth century. Planting their financial and professional roots in the fertile soil of black Cleveland, the younger men accumulated political or economic clout (or indeed both) within the black community, if not necessarily without.[103] The objective conditions of black life in turn-of-the-century Cleveland in conjunction with the ideological sway of racial solidarity induced the younger leaders of black Cleveland to advocate the creation of a "colored" Y on Central Avenue. As noted, the urgent need to socialize black youth to middle-class standards in a proper institutional setting informed the younger men's advocacy on behalf of a "colored" Y. But the tacit discrimination against African-American men and boys in admission to the Central YMCA played an equally important role in inspiring the younger men. Since it was "an open secret that the present Central Y.M.C.A. does not care to admit colored young men, no matter how worthy they may

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[101] *Ibid.*
[102] Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent*, p. 196.
[103] Kusmer, *A Ghetto Takes Shape*, pp. 114-115.

be," the younger men urged fellow African Americans to face "the condition as it is and not as it should be" and collaborate in the spirit of racial solidarity to "open a door in a place where, by reason of the very location, hundreds will be lifted up."[104]

Given their appeals to racial solidarity, it is ironic that the younger men tactfully avoided publicizing the racialized character of the proposed Y facility, carefully describing it as a branch YMCA rather than a "colored" YMCA. They obviously recognized that promoting a "colored" Y in Cleveland might engender an adverse response from the larger black public, particularly older African-American residents, and therefore obfuscated their intentions. Their hermeneutic maneuvers notwithstanding, social reality and the printed word confirmed the racially-based character of the enterprise. The prevailing winds of racial enmity and the proposed location on Central Avenue—the social, economic, and demographic epicenter of Cleveland's black community—strongly suggested the potential racial aims and repercussions of their plan.[105] As important, the younger men advocated a branch of the Central YMCA rather than an independent YMCA.[106] It was a meaningful distinction to make since an independent Y on Central Avenue would have been an autonomous institution, completely separate from the Cleveland YMCA, and open to all Clevelanders, regardless of race, national origin, or religion.

The proposal did not go unchallenged. Opposition to the proposed branch coalesced among older, upper-class black residents of Cleveland, most of whom migrated to the Forest City in the mid- to late-nineteenth century from the Upper South. As their personal and professional pursuits brought them into personal contact with the city's

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[104] Cleveland *Journal*, February 26, 1910.
[105] Gerber, *Black Ohio*, p. 389.
[106] Cleveland *Journal*, March 5, 1910.

leading white families, the older men adamantly rejected racial separatism and harshly censured any sign of capitulation to racial discrimination in their beloved integrated city.[107] "Cleveland has enough 'Jim Crow' affairs without Afro-Americans asking for or establishing more especially when it is not absolutely necessary and could never hope in our life time to have anything near like the accommodations now afforded at the central Y.M.C.A.," declared Harry C. Smith in no equivocal terms.[108] After all, the elders insisted, there was an integrated Central YMCA facility on Prospect Avenue that was perfectly prepared to meet the many needs of young black men in Cleveland, making voluntary racial segregation in an inferior facility both unnecessary and disadvantageous. Smith outlined the generational fault lines bisecting the city's black leadership in unmistakable terms when he chastised the "new comers in the city" who "ought to be the last to take the initiative in any progressive movement, to say nothing of such a retrogressive one."[109]

What made the question of a separate YMCA facility so contentious was the crucial fact that it touched the very life experiences of the contending leaders.[110] Leaving the South in search of opportunity in the aftermath of the Civil War, the members of the older generation had achieved personal and professional success in a racially integrated Cleveland where each man was judged by his merits rather than the color of his skin, or so they liked to believe. Theirs was an integrated upper-class lifestyle: they intermingled freely with the most prominent white citizens; most lived in integrated stylish neighborhoods; their children attended integrated schools and colleges; some were

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[107] Gerber, *Black Ohio*, p. 455.
[108] Cleveland *Gazette*, August 18, 1906.
[109] *Ibid.* April 20, 1907.
[110] Gerber, *Black Ohio*, p. 407; Kusmer, *A Ghetto Takes Shape*, p. 136; p. 140.

leading members in integrated congregations; and most depended on white patronage for their livelihood. For these elders, then, racial integration was much more than an abstract concept, it was "a living commitment acted upon daily."[111]

Conversely, the younger men made their way to Cleveland in the late nineteenth century from neighboring Midwestern states, such as Pennsylvania and Indiana, and the Upper South. As they reached their professional and personal peaks in Cleveland at a time of increased racial antagonism from whites, the city they came to call home was hardly the integrationist exemplar cherished by their elders. Most of the younger men relied largely, but not exclusively, on black patronage in their professional and commercial enterprises, which clustered in the vicinity of Central Avenue, and their social ties with the white community were tenuous at best.[112] It is true that their children attended integrated schools, but they consciously maintained their distance from the white community in their social interactions and religious affiliations. All in all, the younger men envisioned integration as a worthy goal for African Americans, but they deemed it unattainable in the oppressive racial climate of the time and, hence, preached race-based institution building as an antidote to white racism.

With the battle lines drawn and the trenches manned, the battle itself intensified in early 1911 after the announcement of a proposal to provide funding for the construction of "colored" YMCAs across the nation made by a prominent Chicago businessman and philanthropist. "A gift of $25,000 to Chicago and to as many other cities in the country where the negro [*sic*] citizens will raise an additional $75,000 for the erection and equipment of negro [*sic*] Y.M.C.A. homes was announced yesterday by Julius

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[111] Gerber, *Black Ohio*, p. 322.
[112] *Ibid.* p. 372.

Rosenwald, president of Sears, Roebuck & Co.," reported the *Inter Ocean* on January 2, 1911.[113] Seeking "the best method of assisting the colored people," Rosenwald embraced the work of the YMCA and advocated the establishment of "a building primarily for men and boys" devoted to "education and recreation," in "every community in which there are large numbers of colored people."[114] Given that there were not enough African Americans with the means to "establish and adequately equip such institutions," Rosenwald argued, it was "the duty of the white people of this country, irrespective of their religious beliefs," to assist their black neighbors.[115] The Jewish magnate had two aims in mind when he made his offer: to help worthy black citizens in need and to encourage wealthy white men to assist blacks in bettering their lives and, by extension, improve the condition of American cities.[116] Encouraged by the news from Chicago, the younger men redoubled their efforts in support of a "colored" YMCA in Cleveland, using the Rosenwald proposal to garner public support for their vision.[117]

The proposed $25,000 grant pertained only to race-based YMCA facilities, known in the contemporary parlance as "colored YMCAs," leading J. R. Clifford, the African-American publisher of the *Pioneer Press* in Martinsburg, West Virginia, to inquire "why not offer $25,000 to every city in the U.S. which will open its Y.M.C.A. door to their brother in black?"[118] It was a good and timely question. Obviously, the funds could have been used to facilitate the integration of African-American boys and men into mainstream YMCAs across the nation rather than bolster the "devilish prejudice" practiced by the Y

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[113] Chicago *Inter Ocean*, January 2, 1911.
[114] Julius Rosenwald to The Young Men's Christian Association of Chicago, December 30, 1910, Rosenwald Papers.
[115] *Ibid.*
[116] Julius Rosenwald to Mr. Graves, undated, Rosenwald Papers.
[117] Nahum D. Brascher to Booker T. Washington, January 20, 1911, Booker T. Washington Papers.
[118] Martinsburg *Pioneer Press*, January 21, 1911.

"under the guise of a Christian morality," as Clifford opined.[119] Rosenwald's words, however, reveal a racialized perception of social space in turn-of-the-century United States. "It has seemed to me that both in the interest of the colored race and in the interest of the country," Rosenwald wrote to the Chicago Y, "it is essential that there should be in every community in which there are large numbers of colored people, a building primarily for men and boys, devoted to such purposes for their use."[120] Of course, there was "a building primarily for men and boys" in most northern cities; it was called the Young Men's Christian Association. Rosenwald, therefore, tacitly endorsed the practice of racial segregation in the work of the YMCA and proposed a benevolent, yet passive adjustment to a racialized social reality with white money. In an ironic twist, too, white philanthropy funded black racial solidarity. Dangling a reward of $25,000 in front of African Americans, Rosenwald essentially challenged black communities across the nation to work together and raise the prerequisite $75,000 by their own efforts.

There was a kernel of truth to the contention that Cleveland had an officially integrated Central YMCA facility, yet G. K. Shurtleff, the secretary of the Cleveland YMCA from 1893 to 1909, contested the equal participation of African Americans in the associational life.[121] A native of New York, Shurtleff dedicated his life to the socio-religious work of the YMCA, serving as secretary of the associations in Utica, New York, and Denver, Colorado, before taking charge of the Cleveland YMCA in 1893.[122] As early as 1895, Shurtleff faced allegations of racial exclusion when the membership

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[119] *Ibid.*
[120] Julius Rosenwald to The Young Men's Christian Association of Chicago, December 30, 1910, Rosenwald Papers.
[121] "Shurtleff, Glen Kassimer," *The Encyclopedia of Cleveland History*, http://ech.case.edu/ech-cgi/article.pl?id=SGK.
[122] *Ibid.*

committee of the Central Y rejected the application of Walter H. Lawson, a bell boy at the historic Weddell House hotel on Superior Avenue.[123] Lawson's pastor, Reverend Daniel W. Shaw of the Mt. Zion Congregational Church, claimed that the secretary had privately informed him that "a great many complaints had been received against allowing colored young men the privileges of the gymnasium and the baths and their presence there would probably cause trouble" once he broached the case with him.[124] Shurtleff publicly denied allegations of racial discrimination, pleading ignorance over the rejection of Lawson's application and pointing out that the Central Y had black members who enjoyed all the privileges.[125] Allegations of racial discrimination resurfaced two years later. The membership committee rejected the application of Frederick D. Thompson without an explanation, even though he had received several invitations to join the Y and made his first payment for membership.[126] Maintaining that both Lawson and Thompson "have no superiors in point of character, appearance, etc., among our people," Harry C. Smith concluded solemnly that the Central Y "has decided not to increase its Afro-American membership."[127]

The *Gazette* doggedly publicized the persistence of the color line at the Central YMCA during the first decade of the twentieth century, chronicling an unmistakable pattern of racial discrimination, even though Shurtleff publicly maintained his innocence. A small number of African Americans retained their membership in the Central Y well into 1911, preserving the mirage of integration, but cases of blatant discrimination

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[123] Cleveland *World*, November 12, 1895.
[124] *Ibid.*
[125] Cleveland *Gazette*, November 16, 1895.
[126] *Ibid.* October 30, 1897.
[127] Cleveland *Gazette*, October 30, 1897.

emerged repeatedly in 1903 and once more in 1907.[128] Even the usually docile *Journal* agreed that "it is an open secret that the present Central Y.M.C.A. does not care to admit colored young men, no matter how worthy they may be."[129] In keeping with his prejudiced views, Shurtleff was "actively interested" in the creation of a "colored" Y in Cleveland and participated in a number of official meetings at the Central Y building with the younger black men.[130] Harry C. Smith had no doubt where the blame lay. Not only did Shurtleff institute "a color-line" in the Central Y, but he also "used" the younger black men "in an effort to establish a 'jim crow' Y.M.C.A."[131] Smith employed the language of racial manipulation to indict Shurtleff as well as those younger men of the black community who supported a "colored" Y, depicting them as spineless proxies of white racism run amok.

Secretary Shurtleff's sudden death in early 1909 did not alter the discriminatory practices at the Central Y. At a meeting of the board of trustees of the Cleveland YMCA on February 11, 1911, the Board registered its approval of "the attitude of the Central Department particularly in regard to receiving colored members."[132] That is to say, the Board officially embraced the racially exclusionary policies of the deceased secretary and pledged its commitment to their unofficial perpetuation. Robert E. Lewis, the new secretary of the Cleveland YMCA, seemed intent on pursuing the course set by his predecessor. A native of Vermont, Lewis dedicated his life to the YMCA movement,

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[128] In January 1903, the Central Y asked Bailey Co., a local department store, to recommend five of its employees for membership. After the company submitted the names, the only application rejected was the one submitted by a black employee. See Cleveland *Gazette*, January 17, 1903. In March 1907, the Central Y rejected the application of Edward Daw, a local African American, without proper explanation. See Cleveland *Gazette*, March 9, 1907.

[129] Cleveland *Journal*, February 26, 1910.

[130] *Ibid.*

[131] Cleveland *Gazette*, April 20, 1907; March 9, 1910.

[132] Young Men's Christian Association of Cleveland, *Young Men's Christian Association Records, 1859-1962*, Container 2, Volume I. (Cleveland: Western Reserve Historical Society): p. 258.

serving as a traveling secretary for students and as an international representative in Shanghai, China, before coming to Cleveland.[133] According to Brascher, Lewis was "very much interested" in the creation of a "colored" YMCA, upholding and sanctioning the tacit support of the association for a separate facility for blacks in Cleveland.[134] In considering the public controversy over the proposal for a "colored" branch, therefore, it is important to keep in mind the rather unwelcoming disposition of the Cleveland YMCA toward African Americans.

We should not dismiss the unofficial exclusion of African-American boys and men from the Central Y in Cleveland as simply another expression of the personal and societal prejudices deeply ingrained in the collective consciousness of the American nation. The act of physical exclusion also exemplified the racialist construction of masculinity by white men at the turn of the twentieth century. It is important to recall that (white) American men confronted a profound gender crisis at the turn of the century as they sought to reconcile their economic dependence in an increasingly impersonal world with the long cherished ideals of American manhood, autonomy and self-control.[135] "Rapid industrialization, technological transformation, capital concentration, urbanization, and immigration," notes Michael Kimmel, "created a new sense of an oppressively crowded, depersonalized and often emasculated life."[136] All was not lost, however. Fortunately for white men, informed the popular media, they inherited the genetic capacity to achieve "perfect manliness" in their lifetimes from their racial forebears, unlike the ostensibly inferior black men whose ancestors had never evolved

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[133] "Lewis, Robert Ellsworth," *Encyclopedia of Cleveland History*, http://ech.case.edu/ech-cgi/article.pl?id=LRE.
[134] Nahum D. Brascher to Booker T. Washington, February 1, 1911. Booker T. Washington Papers.
[135] Kimmel, Michael. *Manhood in America: A Cultural History*. (New York: Free Press, 1996), p. 83.
[136] *Ibid.*

that capacity.[137] And the Young Men's Christian Association was just the place for boys to become men by developing "manly physiques" and "masculine hardiness" during "a massive, nationwide health and athletics craze" at the turn of the century.[138] Given the purported incapacity of black boys and men to attain manliness, white men reinforced the historic link between manhood and whiteness by excluding blacks from private social organizations, like the YMCA.

As important, the conspicuous presence and visibility of racialized "others," especially African Americans and Southern and Eastern European immigrants, in the urban North at the turn of the twentieth century "threatened to wash over American manhood and dash [white men's] hopes for self-making."[139] Racial exclusion, therefore, proffered white men with a handy yet effective means of affirming and preserving their racially-defined masculinity in an increasingly cosmopolitan environment at the expense of "the emasculated others." White men also drew on the intellectual currents of turn-of-the-century United States to fashion "the perfect ideological justification" for exclusion using the pervasive ideas of Social Darwinism.[140] Formulating a pseudoscientific hierarchy of manhood among the different peoples of the world—with white men unsurprisingly embodying the ideal of masculinity—they held that their fabrication provided irrefutable proof that "some groups were more manly than others" and therefore had to be separated, lest they become feminized.[141] Following in the intellectual footsteps of Michael Kimmel, we might conceive of masculinity as "largely a homosocial

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[137] Bederman, Gail. *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917*. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), p. 29.
[138] Kimmel, *Manhood in America,* p. 120; p. 126.
[139] *Ibid.* p. 90.
[140] *Ibid.*
[141] *Ibid.* p. 91.

enactment," according to which "American men define their masculinity, not so much in relation to women, but in relation to each other."[142] It is worthwhile to place the many sports activities offered by local Y branches, such as basketball and football, within this hermeneutic framework since those activities naturally fostered a competitive social environment for and among the male members. White men sought to exclude black men from YMCAs for the fear of domination and humiliation at their hands in exacting physical competition. The act of exclusion was nothing less than a desperate attempt by white men to safeguard and nurture their fragile racialized masculinity. After all, "manhood is less about the drive for domination and more about the fear of others dominating us, having power or control over us," especially if those others are socially constructed as inherently inferior and feminine.[143]

The racialized social reality conflicted with the law in turn-of-the-century Cleveland since racial discrimination in publicly regulated businesses, such as restaurants, hotels, movie theaters, and amusement parks was illegal under the Ohio Civil Rights Act of 1884, which was amended in 1894 by none other than Harry C. Smith.[144] The Smith Amendment guaranteed "the full and equal enjoyment of the accommodations, advantages, facilities, and privileges of inns, restaurants, eating houses, barber shops, public conveyances on land and water, theaters and all other places of public accommodation and amusement" to all Ohio residents regardless of color or race.[145] Violators were liable for fines of up to $500 and jail terms of 30 to 90 days, on top of

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[142] *Ibid.* p. 7.
[143] *Ibid.* p. 6.
[144] Kusmer, *A Ghetto Takes Shape*, p. 59.
[145] Johnson, Franklin. *The Development of State Legislation Concerning the Free Negro*. (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1979), p. 164.

damages awarded by the court.[146] While an important legal measure in the struggle for racial equality in Ohio, it did not stem the rising tide of racism at the turn of the twentieth century. The Cleveland YMCA was, after all, a private, if nominally Christian, organization and therefore not covered by the legislation. Also, the legislative approach of the older men failed to recognize the underlying social and economic inequalities in American society. As James H. Meriwether argues concerning apartheid in South Africa, the prevailing misconception that "if laws could be changed and enforced, then equality and full citizenship surely would follow…divorced apartheid from the context of South Africa's history, removing the situation from the political and economic realities of African life."[147] Racism is "rooted in oppressive economic and political systems, not simply aberrant behavior."[148]

All the same, the older generation regarded the Ohio Civil Rights Law as the end point in the struggle for equality rather than the beginning; *the* panacea that provided the black minority with the necessary legal means to check the scourge of racial discrimination. "Fight in the courts for your rights!" Harry C. Smith enjoined his fellow blacks facing an increasingly hostile world.[149] "That's the only and proper way."[150] His voice captured perfectly the collective mindset of the old elite of black Cleveland. An important question lingers unanswered, however. How could black Clevelanders combat discrimination in a private institution? The lack of an answer to this crucial question illustrates the inadequacy of an exclusively legalist approach in contesting racial

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[146] *Ibid.* p. 166.
[147] Meriwether, James H. *Proudly We Can Be Africans: Black Americans and Africa, 1935-1961*. (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002), p. 95.
[148] *Ibid.*
[149] Cleveland *Gazette*, January 10, 1903.
[150] *Ibid.*

discrimination, an inadequacy largely overlooked by the older men. Moreover, the legal approach failed to take into account the socioeconomic realities of many African Americans who could not afford the cost entailed in bringing a lawsuit.

**Smity's "old relie-able" vs. Nahoomdy's "Toilet-paper"** The politics of black journalism

The public controversy over the proposed establishment of a "colored" YMCA branch found ample expression in the pages of the two "race newspapers" published in Cleveland at the turn of the twentieth century, the *Gazette* and the *Journal*. The coverage afforded the proposal in the two newspapers reflected both the differing interpretations of racial solidarity and the generational divide in the city's African-American leadership. As one would expect, the older *Gazette* opposed the proposal in no uncertain terms and the newer *Journal* championed it with abiding faith and conviction. When they were not busy exchanging petty insults, both newspapers provided cogent arguments in support of their respective positions.

The *Gazette,* published by Harry C. Smith since 1883, unapologetically disparaged "local impecunious jimcrow Negroes" who had barely arrived in Cleveland and yet had the audacity to contest the city's traditions of racial integration by openly advocating self-segregation.[151] Warning that recent migrants to Cleveland "ought to be very careful and move slowly" on sensitive racial questions, Smith disputed the race leadership credentials of "newer Negroes," making sure that his readers knew exactly whom he had in mind by singling out the publishers of the *Journal*—Brascher, Welcome

[151] Cleveland *Gazette*, March 9, 1910.

T. Blue, and Thomas W. Fleming—for special mention.[152] As the controversy over the proposal for a "colored" Y unfolded and intensified, the biting rhetoric of Smith reached new highs—or lows, depending on one's perspective. The "poor, misguided individuals of color," as the *Gazette* portrayed the proponents of a separate Y in 1903, became the "greedy, impecunious jimcrow Negroes" in 1910.[153] The sharp semantic transition exemplified the ascription of intentional malevolence to the younger black men. They no longer advocated a "colored" Y out of a mistaken appraisal of social reality but purposely worked to undermine the true interests of Cleveland's black community out of pure greed. Smith, therefore, castigated the younger men for selling their birthright for a mess of pottage—advocating segregation on behalf of their white masters for financial profit.[154]

With the alleged malicious and treacherous intentions of the younger men exposed to public view, Smith felt justified in attacking them by evoking the most repulsive stereotypes of African Americans suffusing American culture with complete abandon. "His head, like his lips, as a rule, is too thick," the *Gazette* jeered.[155] "That he 'gets the money' is all-sufficient for him; 'never mind the race,' is his favorite expression."[156] The remedy was self-evident. The older men must rid the Forest City of "traitors" who, in Smith's judgment, were "even more dangerous and harmful than many enemies among the other classes of people."[157] Qualitative judgments aside, Smith clearly exaggerated the threat posed to the city's African-American community by the

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[152] *Ibid.* October 13, 1906; February 4, 1911.
[153] *Ibid.* January 10, 1903; March 9, 1910.
[154] *Ibid.* March 9, 1910.
[155] *Ibid.*
[156] *Ibid.*
[157] *Ibid.* January 18, 1908.

public advocacy of the younger generation for a "colored" Y, especially when we consider the racliaized (and hence unequal) distribution of power in turn-of-the-century United States. When white Americans could arbitrarily exclude black Americans from public institutions, let alone private ones, or, even worse, lynch them with impunity on both sides of the Mason-Dixon Line, there were obviously "more dangerous and harmful" enemies to worry about. Nonetheless, Smith's journalistic malice encapsulated perfectly the persistent anxiety among the older leaders of black Cleveland that they were slowly but surely losing ground, both politically and socially, to the younger men. Gerber makes this point abundantly clear: "The sudden appearance after 1900 of a new generation of racial spokesmen created a sharp challenge to older leaders. That challenge existed on different levels, manifesting itself sometimes as a practical struggle for racial leadership, and other times as a conflict of values, world views, and racial programs."[158]

Smith's bombastic caricaturing of the younger generation reflected his real disgust with what he believed to be their willingness to throw their equal rights away—rights that the older generation fought long and hard to enshrine in the state's legal code. Sounding the clarion call to "the older Afro-Americans of Cleveland," Smith demanded to know if they were going to "sit supinely by and let a few selfish, cowardly 'jimcrow' Negroes" who were scared of integration to "wipe out all of the remaining advance our parents and their true white friends fought so long and so hard to secure?"[159] There is little reason to believe that the younger men were scared of racial integration, and even less evidence to support such an absurd overstatement. The younger men proposed a "colored" Y in Cleveland to provide a proper institutional setting for the inculcation of

[158] Gerber, *Black Ohio*, p. 398.
[159] Cleveland *Gazette*, February 4, 1911.

middle-class values and habits among black youth, especially rural migrants. Their plans, too, had little to do with the legislative history of racial advancement in Ohio. The YMCA, as a private institution, was not covered by the state's civil rights laws in any shape or form and, therefore, the proposal for a "colored" Y in Cleveland hardly conflicted with or violated any existing legal statutes.

Not only were the younger men relinquishing the hard-earned legislative gains secured by the older generation, Smith objected, they were consciously undercutting the historic tradition of racial integration in Cleveland as well. He insisted that once the precedent for voluntary racial separation was set in the public mind, all doors would close to blacks and the city would inevitably tread down the path of *de facto* racial segregation. "Where is this thing to end? In a complete return to the miserable color lines of the South? Ask yourself this question," he pleaded with his readers.[160] The establishment of a "jim crow" YMCA in Cleveland, Smith argued, would encourage "our prejudiced enemies" to segregate the city's public schools, transportation, and accommodations by claiming that blacks *desire* racial separation.[161] Citing Chicago and Dayton as cautionary tales of good intentions gone awry, the *Gazette* contended (erroneously) that the establishment of separate YMCAs in these cities "quickly resulted in 'jim crow' or separate schools and many other color lines" nonexistent before.[162] For Smith, and other long-time Cleveland residents, therefore, the creation of a separate YMCA threatened to set the city sliding down the proverbial and inevitable slippery slope toward segregation.

Unsurprisingly, Smith's slippery slope argument, like all arguments of the kind, was fallacious. Resorting to scare tactics in a desperate effort to hold on to his leadership

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[160] *Ibid.* March 16, 1907.
[161] *Ibid.* February 4, 1911.
[162] *Ibid.* December 21, 1912.

prerogatives, Smith readily obfuscated legal reality by indiscriminately lumping private and public institutions together. The 1887 school desegregation law enshrined integrated public education in Ohio's legal code, making all and any attempts at public school segregation both illegal and subject to state intervention.[163] And, as we have seen, Cleveland boasted integrated public schools since the late 1840s. For a committed legalist, who encouraged African Americans to defend their civil rights in the courts, Smith seemed to have little faith in the law when it came to public education. I do not mean to imply that the desegregation law equalized public education for African Americans in the state of Ohio, especially in central and southern Ohio, but it did proffer a legal recourse for enforcing integration in public schools. Needless to say, there was no legal mechanism for enforcing integration in the YMCA, or any other private institution for that matter. Smith's slippery slope argument came up short, but that certainly did not preclude him from lecturing black Clevelanders on what must be done.

The proper course of action, Smith informed his readers, was not to voluntarily segregate in an "inferior" facility in the name of racial solidarity but "to beat down the color-line of the local Y.M.C.A." in the name of racial integration.[164] Smith urged fellow blacks to appeal directly to the "charitably disposed and philanthropic persons of this community" whose donations subsidized the Cleveland YMCA.[165] Once enlightened about racial discrimination at the Central Y, Smith believed that the wealthy whites would use their financial leverage and compel the association to scrap its exclusionary policies.[166] He augmented his call for action with compelling objections to the proposal.

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[163] Gerber, *Black Ohio*, p. 263. The state of Illinois desegregated its public schools in 1874.
[164] Cleveland *Gazette*. March 9, 1907.
[165] *Ibid.*
[166] *Ibid.*

Considering the pressing financial needs of the city's black charitable institutions, especially churches, Smith considered it imprudent to further burden the city's black community with yet another institution when it was "hardly able to support" those already in existence.[167] He also questioned the need for a separate facility given the construction of a new central building by the Cleveland YMCA on the corner of Prospect Avenue and East 22nd Street, right in the heart of "the section of Cleveland most thickly populated by our people."[168] Furthermore, he argued that a "colored" Y would not reach most young black men in Cleveland since they would not be able to meet the association's strict membership criteria. "Only young men of good moral character, and vouched for by reliable and well known persons also of good moral standing in the community, can join the Y.M.C.A.," underscored the *Gazette*.[169] There was, however, a blatant discrepancy in Smith's promotion of a new central YMCA and his contention that most black men and boys in Cleveland would not benefit from the proposed creation of a "colored" Y. If most black men and boys could not meet the association's membership criteria to begin with, then why did it matter that the Cleveland YMCA was constructing a new building?

As Smith publicly disparaged the proposal for the establishment of a separate Y, he did not turn a blind eye to the needs of the city's black young men. However, his proposed remedies conformed strictly to the integrationist creed and exhibited a pronounced class bias. While Smith envisioned the settlement houses, such as Alta, Hiram, and Goodrich, providing the local black youth with temporary lodging, recreational activities, job placement, and wholesome social interaction, he primarily

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[167] *Ibid.* October 13, 1906.
[168] *Ibid.* February 4, 1911.
[169] *Ibid.* March 11, 1911.

looked to the city's black ministers to exert a moral influence upon the black youth and lead them along the straight and narrow.[170] Smith publicly castigated those young African-American men who failed to measure up to his standards of social propriety by rehashing the old-fashioned racist stereotypes of "the loud-mouthed, drunken Negro" and "the 'rag-time' singing and whistling young monkey Negro."[171] In a true reflection of his middle-class bias, he deployed the discursive tropes of racial semiotics to draw an unmistakable boundary separating the "respectable" members of the race from those who refused to abide by the traditional middle-class norms. In conjunction with the ministers' obligation to morally correct and direct the black youth, Smith urged the "respectable" black citizens to "put forth greater efforts to reduce the number of causes for discrimination arising from our own side" by policing the public conduct of the young men.[172] Therefore, Smith envisioned the sacred and the secular arms of the city's black community exercising a much needed restraining influences on the supposedly negative and immoral impulses of the young black men, and ensuring that they follow the righteous path of propriety in the public sphere.

The hostile treatment accorded to both the younger generation and the lower class in the pages of the *Gazette* clearly shatters the mythological construction of racial solidarity as an all-inclusive, all-encompassing ideology bringing African Americans together in the name of racial advancement. As far as Harry C. Smith was concerned, the younger men had publicly betrayed the race by promoting a "colored" Y in Cleveland and had to be permanently banished from the city as soon as possible. Obviously, racial solidarity did not extend automatically to all members of the race simply because they

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[170] *Ibid.* October 20, 1906.
[171] *Ibid.*
[172] *Ibid.* July 27, 1907.

shared a common history of oppression and distinct somatic traits. Smith fashioned a clear-cut us versus them framework of racial solidarity, rejecting outright those members of the race who did not abide by his middle-class, integrationist norms. The simple truth was (and still is) that racial solidarity, irrespective of its ideological appeal, could not efface the fundamental diversity of opinion and endeavor in the black community.

Two decades after the *Gazette* made its first appearance in Cleveland's newsstands, three enterprising and ambitious young black men—Nahum D. Brascher, Thomas W. Fleming, and Welcome T. Blue—founded the *Journal*, a weekly newspaper "devoted to the best interests of the Afro-American."[173] Brascher and Fleming were born and reared in eastern Indiana and western Pennsylvania respectively and had made their ways to Cleveland at the turn of the twentieth century.[174] Blue was a native Ohioan.[175] The unofficial motto of the *Journal*, "look on the bright side," encapsulated perfectly the newspaper's unwavering commitment to optimism and progress. Preaching "the gospel of optimism," the *Journal* strove "to give only that kind of news that will lead us on to a higher and better life" and "to inspire, not to discourage and distress."[176] Brascher chastised his fellow African Americans for dwelling on the many wrongs heaped upon the race instead of taking hold of the many opportunities available to them. "And so, if we are willing to look on the bright side, it is true that we can go through this life, this American life if you please, finding roses, sunshine, sweetness, and joy equally as plentiful as others find thorns, shadows, bitterness, and sadness," he advised his

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[173] Davis, *Black Americans in Cleveland*, p. 203.
[174] Brascher, Nahum Daniel. "Address before the Ministerial Alliance, Y.M.C.A. Cleveland." February 23, 1916. WRHS; Fleming, Thomas W. "My Life and Persecution." Unpublished manuscript. (Cleveland: c. 1932). WRHS.
[175] U.S. *Fourteenth Census*, 1920.
[176] Cleveland *Journal*, May 11, 1907.

readers.[177] In short, getting through "this American life" required an optimistic outlook. And as Brascher regularly underscored, the progress made by "a race that in forty years can show so much accomplished, remembering the depths from which we came," warranted an optimistic disposition in life.[178] He mocked, with his usual penchant for literary flourishes, those gloomy souls who would "turn a blind eye to the homes, churches, schools and industries, where progress is in the making, where sunshine enters the soul and where the dove of peace always hovers."[179]

Seizing the mantle of race leadership on behalf of the city's young black men, most of whom had migrated to Cleveland at the turn of the twentieth century, the *Journal* championed "the day of the young man." Brascher made the young man's claim to power by portraying the city's older leadership as "the blind leading the blind."[180] The uncomfortable truth, according to the *Journal*, was that the city's established black leaders had oppressed, retarded, and betrayed the best interests of their community with their bickering. In these trying times, Brascher noted, African Americans in Cleveland desperately needed race leaders who possessed "the skill, ability, and courage of men of superior build."[181] Unfortunately, all they had were "self-centered leaders" who were "great as pygmies, strong as gnats, and wise as fools."[182] It was character assassination at its finest, implicitly imputing the social prestige, civic authority, and intellectual abilities of the older men without providing any proof. The solution was self-evident: black Clevelanders must rid themselves of "this incubus of unwise and unworthy leadership" at

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[177] *Ibid.* December 1, 1906.
[178] *Ibid.* March 28, 1903.
[179] *Ibid.* December 1, 1906.
[180] *Ibid.* February 11, 1905.
[181] *Ibid.* April 16, 1904.
[182] *Ibid.*

once.[183] And who should step in and assume the duties of race leadership if not the young men. Brascher advised the older men, whose usefulness had come to an end, to step aside quietly but gracefully and let the younger generation of black Clevelanders take the reins of race leadership.[184] Appropriately, then, the *Journal* contested the aspersions cast by the *Gazette* upon the leadership credentials of the younger men as "newcomers" to the city. What actually mattered was a man's contribution to the community, not the duration of his residence in Cleveland. "If he is useful he is worthy; if he is useless he is worthless."[185]

Rejecting the segregationist omen foretold by Harry C. Smith, Brascher urged his fellow African Americans to adjust to reality rather than try to adjust reality. There simply was no way to reconcile the needs of the city's young black men with the unofficial exclusion of blacks from the Central Y without the establishment of a separate branch on Central Avenue. Brascher hoped to tap the social, economic, and spiritual resources of the nascent black community in developing a social institution that would address the needs of a growing population in a racially supportive manner. "The object is not to make big returns on money invested," he declared, "but to provide a place for the moral development of Cleveland young people and others who are constantly coming to make this city their home."[186] He urged his readers to "save the young people" from the corrupting temptations of the city, such as gambling, alcohol, crime, and sexual promiscuity, by establishing a conveniently located social institution "where the young people can congregate for social enjoyment, physical exercise, and instruction in the right

[183] *Ibid.*
[184] *Ibid.* July 13, 1907.
[185] *Ibid.* February 13, 1909.
[186] *Ibid.* October 6, 1906.

ways of living."[187] Young black men needed "a place where they can get together for mutual encouragement" since it is only when a youth "is in the company of those who can tell him the true ways of life, that he grows better and useful."[188] While the *Journal* did not intend to disturb the integrationist traditions of the Western Reserve, "[c]ertain social ideals, early established and long fought for, meet at every turn conflicts with real conditions and practical needs."[189] Blacks must let the historic traditions of the city "rest peacefully" and act in accordance with the existing social conditions.[190]

Nahum D. Brascher did not take kindly to the scathing abuse heaped upon his newspaper and his friends by Harry C. Smith and returned the favor with equal malice by assailing Smith's character and standing in the community. The crux of the matter, as far as Brascher was concerned, was Smith's lack of common sense. Smith "whined, sputtered, spouted and stewed in every conceivable fashion," regularly transgressing "the bounds of editorial decency" with unwarranted personal attacks.[191] His critique would have held water had not the *Journal* succumbed to the same excesses, hurling unfounded accusations at Smith and his newspaper. Brascher questioned the race loyalty of Smith, who was light-skinned, accusing him of "being partly of the race but very little with it, in secret and civic organizations, religious endeavor and private companionship."[192] This serious accusation obfuscated reality. Smith engaged the black community on a personal level as a public speaker, honored guest, and prominent socialite too a greater degree than

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[187] *Ibid.* June 17, 1905.
[188] *Ibid.* June 1, 1907.
[189] *Ibid.* June 1, 1907.
[190] *Ibid.* February 26, 1910.
[191] *Ibid.*
[192] *Ibid.* January 15, 1910.

he did on an organizational level, but he also formed political clubs, such as the Onward Foraker Club, and civic improvement associations, such as the Law and Order League.[193]

Not only did Brascher question the journalistic integrity and the racial credentials of Smith, he also challenged the Republican politics of the *Gazette*'s editor. Charging Smith with abandoning the Republican Party candidates, both white and black, in recent elections, Brascher argued that the "long eared, blatant and disloyal editor" was more of a Democrat than a Republican.[194] Of course, Brascher only told that part of the story that suited his agenda. Smith certainly refused to endorse Republican candidates in municipal, state, and federal elections who, in his judgment, did not have the best interests of African Americans at heart. He did not, however, direct the city's black electorate to support the Democratic Party.[195] Ironically, personal attacks on Smith did not preclude Brascher from claiming the higher moral ground in the bitter contest with the *Gazette*. Brascher complained that Smith "ignored, ridiculed, 'poked fun,' threatened or cursed" his newspaper, even though the *Journal* "maintained a respectful attitude" toward Smith "and on more than one occasion has blessed the hand that would smite us."[196] The reality, however, was that Brascher dished insults out as well as he received them, regardless of who started the acrimonious feud and why.

The two newspapers not only served as vehicles for the increasingly personal and ideological feud between Brascher and Smith, but allowed other public figures to publicly express their views on the proposal for a "colored" Y branch on Central Avenue. The pages of the *Gazette* afforded Walter L. Brown, Cleveland's leading black Democrat

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[193] Gerber, *Black Ohio*, p. 346; p. 424.
[194] Cleveland *Journal*. October 19, 1907.
[195] The lone exception was Walter L. Brown, an African-American candidate for the justice of the peace on the Democratic Party ticket in 1909. See Cleveland *Gazette*, September 11, 1909.
[196] Cleveland *Journal*. February 14, 1907.

in the early twentieth century, with a public forum to articulate his uncompromising opposition to the proposal.[197] Censuring the separatist stance of the *Journal*, Brown condemned any agitation for separate social institutions in Cleveland as "hurtful to the race and harmful to the community" because "such agitation is an entering wedge for the establishment of separate schools, 'Jim Crow' cars and other hurtful race discriminations."[198] As racial separatism was "out of place" in the Forest City, Brown urged the city's African-American residents to rebuff those among them who "would have us as a race build more separations than the whites have yet thought of."[199] He minced no words in censuring the editor of the *Journal*. "Brascher has missed his location," Brown stated, "Lower Mississippi is the place for him."[200] It is rather doubtful, if not outright impossible, that racial solidarity could have bridged the fundamental ideological chasm separating Brown from Brascher, especially since the former viewed the latter as a social menace to, rather than a contributing member of, the black community.

Lest he be outdone by the trenchant Smith, Brascher opened the pages of the *Journal* to the supporters of the proposal. A letter of support from John P. Green, an elder statesman with an extensive record of public service, provided the younger proponents of a separate YMCA branch with a forceful counterpoint to the printed assaults of the older generation. Impressed with the valuable work of the "colored" Y in Washington, D.C., Green asserted that the criticism of the separate branch for "drawing the color line" had been "drowned in the acclamations of joy and gratitude of the hundreds of intelligent,

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[197] Kusmer, *A Ghetto Takes Shape*, p. 134.
[198] Cleveland *Gazette*, May 16, 1906.
[199] *Ibid.* August 11, 1906.
[200] *Ibid.*

ambitious colored men who are the beneficiaries of this splendid help in race progress."[201] "I am, perhaps, as much averse to segregating our people by themselves as any resident of Cleveland," Green acknowledged, "but my heart yearns for the welfare of the thousands of poor colored youth who roam the streets, stand on corners and, for the lack of a proper place, go into devious paths."[202] This cautious endorsement of the proposal by an established political leader with impeccable credentials provided the younger generation with an important boost in their public tussle with the older leadership.

The strategic alignment of John P. Green with the younger men underscores the fact that there were notable desertions, so to speak, across the generational battle lines within the ranks of the city's African-American leadership. If the elder Green allied with the younger generation owing to his sense of community needs, his son, Theodore, an up-and-coming lawyer with a prestigious downtown practice, aligned with the older generation in opposition to the proposed branch because of his militant stance for racial integration.[203] Few, however, traversed the generational chasm when it came to the proposed branch and the two camps held solidly for the most part.

**"Between two minds"** The missing angles in the debate

Perusing the pages of the *Journal* and the *Gazette*, it becomes painfully obvious that the public debate over the proposed establishment of a separate YMCA branch rarely if ever addressed the intricacies inherent in creating a separate social institution at a time of racial proscription. In other words, a complex issue was depicted as a simple binary of

[201] Cleveland *Journal*, January 30, 1909.
[202] *Ibid.*
[203] Gerber, *Black Ohio*, pp. 455-456.

"for" and "against." With typical stubbornness, the *Gazette* failed to acknowledge the potential benefits that a separate YMCA branch would offer the city's African-American community—benefits obvious in light of the encouraging work performed by "colored" YMCAs in other cities, such as Atlanta and New York. The Carlton Avenue Branch of the Brooklyn YMCA, for example, was "a great social center for young men, where they can spend their evenings and spare moments pleasantly and profitably, thus escaping the many of the evil attractions common to a great city."[204] It boasted "Educational classes, Bible class, religious meetings, literary society, glee club and orchestra, employment bureau, baseball club, and other features to attract and help young men."[205] These were valuable programs for any city with a large population of young black men to have, but the *Gazette* glossed over this positive work to raise the scare of segregation in public schools. Indeed, Harry C. Smith proudly declared that "if we cannot have Y.M.C.A. privileges free from the color-line we had better not have any."[206] This was an easy statement for an idealistic middle-class proprietor to make, but its implications for young black men with few recreational and social alternatives available were much more serious.

On the other hand, the *Journal* touted the short-term benefits of a social institution which would address the needs of African-American youth, but avoided any discussion of the long-term implications of race-based institutional building for the black community in Cleveland. Brascher recognized that blacks had to contend for the social

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[204] Dodson, N. Barnett. "Carlton Avenue Branch of the Brooklyn, N.Y., Young Men's Christian Association," *Colored American Magazine* III (February 1904), p. 117.
[205] *Ibid.*
[206] Cleveland *Gazette*, February 4, 1911.

principle of racial integration since it was "just and right."[207] While contending for integration, however, blacks could not turn a blind eye to real conditions and had to address the obvious need of their young men for a social institution where they could "congregate for social enjoyment, physical exercise, and instruction in the right ways of living."[208] Brascher, therefore, refused to make a choice between integration and adjustment, and advised African Americans to pursue both courses simultaneously. This may appear to be a reasonable course of action for blacks to follow in an uncertain racial climate, but it discounts the long-term consequences of compromising racial equality to meet practical needs. As W.E.B. Du Bois would later argue, sacrificing the principle of racial integration on the altar of social expediency could prove to be disastrous in the long run.[209]

As important, Brascher failed to take into account the racialist implications that would naturally ensue from the creation of a racially-defined institution with white philanthropy. Alas, these implications surfaced explicitly in the press coverage of the fundraising campaign for a "colored" YMCA in Chicago in early 1911. Praising the large contributions made by Julius Rosenwald and N. W. Harris toward the construction of a "colored" Y on the South Side, the local *Record Herald* noted that these white philanthropists "have, in a simple yet stirring way, shown to the world a practical method of taking up 'the white man's burden.'"[210] According to the newspaper, therefore, white Americans bore "the white man's burden" at home as well as abroad: aiding African Americans in their seemingly haphazard progress upward on the evolutionary scale went

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[207] Cleveland *Journal*, October 13, 1906.
[208] *Ibid.* June 17, 1905.
[209] Du Bois, W.E.B. "Y.M.C.A." *Crisis* (December 1914), p. 80.
[210] Chicago *Record Herald*, January 2, 1911.

hand in hand with aiding the "primitive" Filipinos, Puerto Ricans, and Cubans do the same. Informing his black audience that "your race is in its early development among the races of the world," N. W. Harris elaborated upon the theme of white paternalism.[211] "The father who despises one of his children because it is weaker than the others, physically or mentally, is branded as a savage. The boy who lords it over another under his size is promptly called a bully and a coward; no less so will the race that deals unfairly with the weaker and more infantile people be judged unworthy of its heritage."[212] These disconcerting words, uttered by a prominent American banker, define the ideological pitfalls of racial separatism, even if the younger men "endorse[d] separatist ideology as a mechanism for fostering integration."[213]

Missing completely from the debate were the black masses—the urban working classes for whom the black elites presumed to speak. A pivotal question remained unaddressed in the *Journal*: who would actually benefit from a "colored" Y facility, if one was to be created? The all-encompassing concept of "young people" may have sounded appealing, but would African-American youngsters from the lower economic rungs be able to meet the strict membership criteria of the Y, including regular church attendance, a character recommendation, and a monthly association fee?[214] "If you are a decent man—that is all we ask—you get a membership ticket; if not—why, you know it beforehand, and probably don't apply," stated a YMCA brochure.[215] It seems plausible that many youngsters would be able to meet the church membership provision since a

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[211] *Ibid.*
[212] *Ibid.*
[213] Hall, *Black Separatism*, p. 85.
[214] Young Men's Christian Association of Cleveland, Ohio, *Young Men's Christian Association Records, 1859-1962*, Container 51, Folder 3. (Cleveland: Western Reserve Historical Society), pp. 52-53.
[215] *Ibid.* p. 52

very high 61 percent of African Americans aged 15 and over were formally affiliated with a church in Cleveland by 1916.[216] And the YMCA wanted "no one kept out by poverty," offering installment plans for membership to those unable to pay the annual dues, ranging from $5 without to $10 with gymnasium, at once.[217] The matter of membership at the Y, therefore, depended on the ability of young black men to secure character references. Considering the high rates of church affiliation, black ministers were one possible source of such references. Employers were another. Based on the available evidence, therefore, it seems that many young black men, if not necessarily most, would benefit from a "colored" Y on Central Avenue, just as the younger men contended. At the same time, however, it is important to underscore the fact that the YMCA was not an idyllic organization accessible to all that the *Journal* portrayed in its pages.

When the *Gazette* took notice of the black masses in Cleveland, it was only for the most negative of reasons and in the most demeaning of ways. "Especially do we call attention to the very bad habit of congregating on the street corners. They block the sidewalks, impede traffic, and by their unseemly and comedian-like conduct cause much needless trouble and attract much unfavorable attention and comment."[218] Adding, "The more thoughtless of the group will indulge in loud and vulgar conversation, while others will engage in 'skylarking,' making 'monkies' of themselves, and other amateur athletics."[219] This is simply a representative sample of the usual coverage accorded to black working classes in the newspaper. The low regard in which Harry C. Smith held the

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[216] Gerber, *Black Ohio*, p. 435.
[217] YMCA of Cleveland, *YMCA Records*, pp. 52-53.
[218] Cleveland *Gazette*, June 5, 1909.
[219] *Ibid.*

less well-off members of his race, especially migrants, reflected the middle-class elitism of his cohorts and, as important, revealed his Sisyphean efforts to hold on to the ephemeral reality of an integrated Cleveland that he cherished so dearly. He eagerly scapegoated the younger black men and women from the working classes for the deterioration in race relations in turn-of-the-century Cleveland. "They are the ones (not always the ignorant) that are causing the decent, self-respecting members of the race to be 'Jim Crowed' in railroad cars in the south, and in hotels, restaurants, theaters, and other places here in the north."[220] Moreover, Smith admonished his readers to "beat down the color-line" at the Central Y, yet he never got around to providing a coherent and thorough plan of action for black Clevelanders of all classes to follow. As we have seen, he urged older men to inform their wealthy white friends of the racial exclusion practiced in the Central Y and convince them to pressure that institution economically. But what were the rest of black Clevelanders to do? And what were young black men to do in the meantime? In censuring the younger men, the *Gazette* was consistently high on idealism, but low on pragmatism.

**"Men of honor"** George A. Myers and Thomas W. Fleming

Alongside the critical voice of Harry C. Smith, the racial interests of the older generation were most successfully represented by George A. Myers. A prosperous owner of an elite barbershop at the Hollenden Hotel, Myers used his extensive personal rapport with the city's leading white residents to lobby them in opposition to the YMCA proposition and performed the same service with Booker T. Washington, the

[220] *Ibid.* May 16, 1908.

distinguished principal of the Tuskegee Institute.[221] When Nahum D. Brascher publicized Washington's endorsement of the proposed "colored" Y in Cleveland, Myers promptly interceded with the principal for an explanation.[222] Myers informed Washington of "the vigorous opposition" to the agitation for "a Jim Crow Y.M.C.A." in Cleveland since the creation of a separate institution would inflict an "irreparable injury" on the black community by "causing discrimination in many avenues where it did not exist."[223] He also let Brascher have it. "About every selfish negro [*sic*], who has an ax to grind or his own interest to further, seeks to couple his name with yours."[224] Washington tendered his response to Myers in less than a week. Since "the Negro people of Cleveland…are best able to decide as to their wants and needs," he explained, "I have not the slightest disposition to say or do anything that would even seem to outline a program."[225] It was more an apology for intruding tactlessly into the internal affairs of Cleveland's African-American community than a clarification of his stance. Washington's contrite response speaks volumes for Myers, whose judgment and acumen the Tuskegeean evidently held in high esteem. Washington, too, distanced himself from the proposed YMCA by emphasizing subtly yet distinctly that his letter to Brascher was nothing more than "a courteous reply."[226]

The younger men had the political acumen of Thomas W. Fleming, a successful barber turned lawyer, at their disposal to contest the leadership prerogatives of the older generation. After operating a prestigious barbershop in Public Square for eight years,

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[221] *Ibid.* p. 456.
[222] Booker T. Washington to Nahum D. Brascher. January 24, 1911. Booker T. Washington Papers. "I hope that you may succeed in securing the Y.M.C.A. building," Washington wrote to Brascher.
[223] George A. Myers to Booker T. Washington. February 11, 1911. George A. Myers Papers.
[224] *Ibid.*
[225] Booker T. Washington to George A. Myers. February 17, 1911. George A. Myers Papers.
[226] *Ibid.*

Fleming decided to put his law degree to good use and opened a law office in the Clayton Building on Central Avenue.[227] He alluded to racial solidarity in his explanation for relocating: "I fully realized if I was to get clients in my practice of law I must live and have my office among my race group."[228] It is ironic (and indicative of cross-generational contact) that Fleming began his political career in Cleveland as a follower of Harry C. Smith, their paths diverging in 1893 when Smith refused to endorse a black candidate in a city council election.[229] Fleming cultivated his political credentials among the city's Republican bosses, especially Maurice Maschke, by faithfully championing the Republican cause among African-American voters in Cleveland and in Ohio through his organizations, the Twelfth Ward Republican League and the Attucks Republican Club. Years of hard work in the political trenches bore fruit in 1909 when Fleming won the councilman-at-large seat on the Cleveland City Council. "The prediction I had made in 1903 when I attended City Council meetings as a spectator 'That I would study law, become a lawyer, prepare myself, then be the first Colored man to occupy a seat in the Law-making body of the city of Cleveland' had come true," he wrote retrospectively.[230] With access to political patronage at city hall, Fleming wielded considerable influence in black Cleveland, much to the chagrin of the older men, dispersing jobs and favors among his black supporters in the middle and working classes.[231] Once more he alluded to racial solidarity in expressing his satisfaction to be "in a position to do something for my race group in Cleveland."[232] Fleming's political success, however, depended as much on his

[227] Fleming, "My Life and Persecution," p. 15; p. 33.
[228] *Ibid.* p. 33.
[229] *Ibid.* p. 19.
[230] *Ibid.* p. 39.
[231] Cuban, "A Strategy for Racial Peace," p. 290.
[232] Fleming, "My Life and Persecution." p. 41.

close relationship with Maurice Maschke as on his personal friendship with A. D. "Starlight" Boyd, a black crime lord.[233]

Speaking of politics in turn-of-the-century black Cleveland, it bears mention that both the older and younger men were by and large loyal Republicans and both the *Gazette* and the *Journal* billed themselves as partisan Republican newspapers. Perhaps in keeping with his militant leanings, Harry C. Smith tended to be much more critical of the Republican Party and its national leaders and policies than most other blacks leaders, both young and old.[234] Yet, even at his most disillusioned moments, Smith remained in the Republican fold; it was simply unconscionable for him to cast his political lot with the Southern-based Democratic Party of outspoken racists, such as Governor James Vardaman of Mississippi and Senator Benjamin Tillman of South Carolina. Other older black men, especially George A. Myers and Jere Brown, were deeply embedded in the local and state political apparatus of the Republican Party, largely due to the political patronage of the late Marcus A. Hanna, the white U.S. Senator from Ohio, and avoided rocking the Republican boat.[235] The older men shared a political devotion to the party of Abraham Lincoln that emphasized the Republicans' historic commitment to black rights. For their part, the younger men approached politics from a purely pragmatic standpoint in the early twentieth century. Their loyalty to the Republican Party stemmed from a practical realization that "the party at least recognizes the race in relative terms."[236] They followed a rather simple and practical strategy in pursuit of political patronage: "they stayed close to the established, unquestioned white Republican power centers, kept a low

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[233] Davis, *Black Americans in Cleveland*, p. 144.
[234] For example, Smith's attack on the Republican Senator Marcus A. Hanna of Ohio. See Cleveland *Gazette*, October 14, 1903.
[235] Kusmer, *A Ghetto Takes Shape*, pp. 138-139.
[236] Cleveland *Journal*, August 29, 1903.

profile in intra-party conflicts regardless of the principles at stake, and always backed the probable winner."[237] The Democratic Party made minor inroads among Cleveland's black voters, but could not break the Republican hegemony over the black electorate in Cleveland.[238] Walter L. Brown, a local streetcar conductor, was the most active black Democrat of his day. The Democrats rewarded his loyalty to the party standard with appointments to various positions in city and county government and a nomination for justice of the peace in 1909.[239]

**"Crystallized fellowship"** The political foundations of cross-generational cooperation

The generational conflict within the ranks of Cleveland's African-American leadership over a single issue—the proposal for the establishment of a separate YMCA branch—did not preclude cross-generational cooperation on other issues, where the older and younger men shared the same perspective. The best example of such cooperation was the Cleveland Association of Colored Men (CACM). Established in June 1908, the CACM was primarily a social organization that brought together "the best colored" men, irrespective of their ages, "to advance the varied interests of the Colored People of Cleveland."[240] The work of the CACM combined economic boosterism with social policy to promote "the progress and welfare of the colored people," attracting prominent members from both generations, including George A. Myers and Nahum D. Brascher.[241] Not only did the organization function unofficially as the black Chamber of Commerce,

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[237] Gerber, *Black Ohio*, p. 399.
[238] Davis, *Black Americans*, pp. 152-153.
[239] *Ibid.*
[240] The Cleveland Association of Colored Men. The Pamphlet Committee. *Summary of the work done by the Cleveland Association of Colored Men.* 1914. WRHS.
[241] *Ibid.* Harry C. Smith did not join the CACM owing largely to his personal animosity toward and rivalry with most members of the organization.

boosting race enterprise and promoting commercial development, it also launched an impressive array of social welfare programs to aid the city's black community, especially the working poor.[242] It hosted "the Sunday Afternoon Lyceum" to educate the general public through lectures and musicals, sponsored the "Merry Christmas Inn" to provide food and clothing to the needy, supported a public campaign to eradicate vice and immorality on Central Avenue, and worked behind the scenes to combat racial discrimination in local businesses.[243] The combination of business and welfare appealed to the conservative tastes of the middle- and upper-class African American men of both generations who wished to see black businesses prosper while helping the deserving poor.

Not all of the "despoiled" black masses were fit for uplift, however. The emphasis on "the worthy poor of the race" in the rhetoric of the CACM draws an obvious distinction between those poor blacks who deserved the organization's attention and resources, and those who did not.[244] While there was no elaboration of criteria to determine the inherent worth of a person for these moral reformers, the distinction corresponds perfectly with "a tradition of indigenous policing," to use the terminology of political scientist, Cathy J. Cohen. Such policing in the African-American community relies on "moralistic and character evaluations" to both "appraise membership" and "manage the public image of blacks."[245] These subjective evaluations, in turn, reflect white middle-class (or "dominant") norms of work, love, and social interaction, and, as

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[242] Gerber, *Black Ohio*, pp. 387-388.
[243] Cleveland *Journal*, January 16, 1909.
[244] *Ibid.* November 14, 1908.
[245] Cohen, Cathy J. *Boundaries of Blackness: AIDS and the Breakdown of Black Politics.* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), pp. 72-74.

far as moral reformers are concerned, only those who conform to them merit attention.[246] Not only is it unclear whether any CACM members seriously questioned the implied superiority of (white) middle-class values that were thrust so eagerly upon the "uncultured" black masses, but it seems that their public remonstrations focused on a program of racial uplift that placed much of the blame for white racism with the black victim. Both generations, therefore, agreed on their desired end, racial uplift of the masses to the plane of middle-class respectability, but disagreed on the means to attain that goal, through existing integrated institutions or emerging independent ones.

It is through the CACM that one discerns the ideological confluence of both the younger and older men around the paternalistic notion of racial uplift—that is, inculcating middle-class values and proper moral conduct in the black urban working class through social and religious institutions. Members of the CACM deemed racial uplift of the black masses through moral and behavioral proscriptions the panacea for racial hostility—that is, transforming the ostensibly uncouth, superstitious, and self-indulgent hordes into the living and breathing exemplars of white Protestant middle class values (only in black skin) who could not be denied their equal share of the American pie. George A. Myers made this point abundantly clear to Booker T. Washington. Since the "unfortunate discrimination" in Cleveland resulted from "the ill conduct and bad behavior of the scum of Southern negroes…and a few bad ones to the manor born," he noted, it was incumbent upon the city's black elite to form an organization, such as the CACM, devoted to "making better citizens of these negroes [*sic*]."[247] Racial uplift, therefore, provided the men of the CACM with the comfortable illusion that they were

[246] *Ibid.* p. 63.
[247] George A. Myers to Booker T. Washington. February 4, 1911. George A. Myers Papers.

fighting what they believed to be the root cause of racial discrimination in Cleveland: the social misconduct of black migrants. Combining his pronounced class bias with a malicious dose of duplicity, Myers placed the responsibility for discrimination squarely on the shoulders of lower-class black migrants, as if white prejudice necessarily required a black stimulus. It was an easy response for an intricate problem.

The distinguished members of the CACM were all avowed conservatives who eschewed any form of direct action and considered themselves to be the living embodiment of the reigning values of white, middle-class Protestant America, in particular, temperance, hard work, piety, cleanliness, and sexual purity.[248] It is important to note that class functioned simultaneously as a unifier and a divider within the organizational framework of the CACM. On the one hand, social class cultivated a pronounced sense of racial solidarity among a select economic class of black men (note the telling racial signifier in the organization's name) who shared in the commitment to uplift the less well-off members of their race. On the other hand, it explicitly excluded the disadvantaged black men of Cleveland from membership in the CACM because they did not meet the traditional mores of middle-class respectability in their speech, conduct, deportment, and attire. The men of the CACM also shared an aversion for protest and litigation, focusing instead on "quiet committee work."[249] They worked behind the scenes to combat racial discrimination in Cleveland by negotiating with local white public and business leaders through established lines of communications. The conservative label, however, oversimplifies an exceedingly intricate web of human beliefs. The fact that the

[248] *Ibid.* p. 195.
[249] Cleveland *Journal*, January 16, 1909.

older and younger men conceptualized their conservatism in different ways is evident in their ideological clash over the proposal for the establishment of a "colored" Y.

We have seen the areas of ideological congruence that brought the generations together, what then accounted for their bitter incongruity over the proposed branch? The crucial factor that elucidates their divergent perspectives on racially independent institutions was lived experience.[250] It is perhaps self-evident, but important to note, that personal experience informs ideological outlook in life. Since the older and younger men had experienced and engaged Cleveland at dissimilar historical moments and, as important, for varying periods of time, their lived experiences as middle- and upper-class black men in a majority-white city were bound to shape their ideological views in quite dissimilar ways. This was especially true when it came to something as sensitive, yet fundamental, as racial integration. George A. Myers best exemplifies the inherent complexity of human beliefs. Making his way to Cleveland from Baltimore in 1879, Myers acquired fame, power, and wealth in his adopted home by cultivating personal ties with the leading (white) men of Cleveland in his downtown barbershop.[251] His experience of racial integration in the city he loved shaped his conservative disposition. While maintaining a personal correspondence with Booker T. Washington, the leading African-American educator of his day, who advocated racially independent institutions, Myers worked diligently and quietly at home to undermine the proposal for a "colored" Y. Thus, the conservative label is useful in anchoring the historical narrative ideologically, but it is crucial that we acknowledge the complexity of human beliefs and the external and internal stimuli that shape them.

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[250] Gerber, *Black Ohio*, pp. 322-323; Kusmer, *A Ghetto Takes Shape*, p. 99.
[251] Gerber, *Black Ohio*, pp. 82-83.

**"Militancy is a state of mind"** Harry C. Smith and racial militancy

The concerns raised with regard to the conservative credentials of the CACM members apply in equal measure in the case of the "militancy" of Harry C. Smith, editor of the *Gazette*. The militant credentials of Smith essentially rest on his uncompromising commitment to the cause of racial equality for African Americans, including integration, and his frontal assault on all forms of racial discrimination in his newspaper. As was the case with George A. Myers, Smith's lived experience shaped his ideological zeal for integration. Born in Clarksburg, West Virginia in 1863, Smith migrated to Cleveland with his parents at the age of two.[252] He came of age in an integrated city where he mingled freely with white children in integrated public schools.[253] He also worked closely with white Republican politicians to secure an appointment as a deputy state oil inspector in 1885 and win a seat in the state House of Representatives (1894-96, 1896-1898, and 1900-1902).[254] His life, therefore, bore the sweet fruits of racial integration and he fought tooth and nail to ensure that other black boys (and girls) enjoyed the same opportunities in life as he did.

In many ways, Smith exemplifies a long-standing tradition of militant black editors that dates back to the publication of the nation's first black newspaper, *Freedom's Journal*, by Samuel Cornish in 1827.[255] Smith, however, tempered his militant streak by imploring local African Americans to combat racial discrimination through legal action—lawsuits—rather than direct action—protest. Litigation, not agitation, was the way forward. Smith insisted that blacks use the existing legal framework, enshrined in the

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[252] Davis, *Black Americans in Cleveland*, p. 133.
[253] *Ibid.*
[254] Kusmer, *A Ghetto Takes Shape*, p. 132.
[255] Bay, Mia. *The White Image in the Black Mind: African-American Ideas about White People, 1830-1925*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 25.

state anti-discrimination law, and make the offenders pay through the nose for their misdeeds, setting an important example for others in the process.[256] To some extent, his reluctance to consider more confrontational remedies to racial discrimination positioned Smith alongside the conservative members of the CACM and their "quiet committee work" against discrimination. This is not to say that Smith was necessarily a conservative, but to complicate the standard caricature of his "militant" ideology that fails to properly account for any discrepancies.

The militant credentials of Smith also lose some of their luster in a comparison with his socialist contemporary, Peter Humphries Clark of Cincinnati. In 1877, Clark publicly renounced his allegiance to the Republican Party and committed himself heart and soul to the Workingmen's Party of the United States (WPUS), earning the distinction of being "the first Afro-American to answer the call of modern American socialism."[257] Clark denounced the capitalist system of production as inherently oppressive and exploitative, amassing ever larger fortunes in the hands of the greedy few while the workers were forced to labor even harder and longer to eke out barely enough to survive on. He demanded government regulation of capital to supplant competition for cooperation and ensure the fair distribution of the fruits of labor. "The government must control capital with a strong arm," Clark declared.[258] "It is merely the accumulated results of industry, and there would be no justice should a few scores of bees in the hive take possession of the store of honey and dole it out to the workers in return for services

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[256] Cleveland *Gazette*, October 14, 1911.
[257] James, Winston. "Being Red and Black in Jim Crow America: On the Ideology and Travails of Afro-America's Socialist Pioneers, 1877-1930," in *Time Longer Than Rope: A Century of African American Activism, 1850-1950*, ed. Charles M. Payne and Adam Green (New York: New York University Press, 2003), p. 342; p. 338.
[258] *Ibid.* p. 345.

which added to their superabundant store."[259] Smith did not follow Clark's lead. There is nothing in the *Gazette* even remotely critical of the capitalist system of production, or the existing political order, for that matter.

How should we appraise the militancy of Harry C. Smith, then? First of all, it is important to discard the simplistic notion that we can comfortably place the complex web of human beliefs under a single heading, be it "conservative" or "militant." Labels are useful for making sense of an increasingly intricate world, but we must deploy them with clear-cut qualifications. "Political actors and ordinary citizens seldom hold consistent views," notes historian Thomas J. Sugrue, "their motivations vary; their ideologies shift; their sense of what is possible and impossible, pragmatic and impracticable changes with the times."[260] Smith's forceful editorials against racial discrimination and resolute advocacy for racial equality certainly place him in the militant tradition of early twentieth century African-American activism. The fact that he was one of the charter members of the all-black Niagara Movement, organized by W.E.B. Du Bois and William Monroe Trotter in 1905 to "propagandize for the conservation of black rights and oppose the accommodationist leadership of Booker T. Washington," bolsters his militant credentials.[261]

On the other hand, Smith's reluctance to consider direct action tactics to combat the rising tide of racial proscription in Cleveland demonstrates his conservative adherence to the existing legal framework, which he in part helped to put in place, to remedy discrimination. Secondly, it is important to contextualize our discussion of

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[259] *Ibid.*
[260] Sugrue, Thomas J. *Sweet Land of Liberty: The Forgotten Struggle for Civil Rights in the North.* (New York: Random House, 2008), p. xxv
[261] Gerber, *Black Ohio*, p. 462.

Smith's militancy. In the local context of Cleveland, where most black leaders shunned the spotlight and worked behind the scenes with prominent whites, Smith's sharp tongue certainly reinforced his militant credentials. In the regional context of Ohio, however, the socialist critique of American capitalism articulated so eloquently by Peter H. Clark diminished the militant credentials of Smith, who had little if anything to say about economic inequality. Therefore, the picture of Smith that emerges is as complex as were his beliefs.

**"For the sake of the cause"** The curious case of Jane Edna Hunter

On May 10, 1905, a young African-American woman by the name of Jane Edna Hunter arrived in Cleveland from Richmond, Virginia, with baggage in her hand and "faith in God and hope for the future" in her heart.[262] A native of South Carolina, she successfully completed her professional training in nursing in Charleston.[263] Bright and ambitious, she expected to transition comfortably to a new life in Cleveland, using her professional training to "secure patients and build up a practice in hydrotherapy and massage."[264] She found herself very disappointed very soon. Since the local Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) did not admit young single black women into its dorms, Hunter was obliged to lodge at shady boardinghouses on Central Avenue that often served as recruiting grounds for prostitution.[265] Her inability to secure employment at her chosen profession only compounded her residence difficulties. Much to her astonishment, a local white doctor told her to "go back South" since "white doctors did

[262] Hunter, Jane Edna. *A Nickel and a Prayer*. (Cleveland: Elli Kani, 1940), p. 66.
[263] *Ibid.* p. 53.
[264] *Ibid.* p. 67.
[265] Jones, *Jane Edna Hunter*, p. 40.

not employ 'nigger' nurses" in Cleveland.[266] However, her fortunes changed with the help of sympathetic physicians, both black and white, who recommended her to patients in need of a nurse. Earning the respect of prominent doctors and the trust of influential patients by her hard work and dedication, Hunter slowly but surely built up "a clientele of wealthy white families" and became self-supporting.[267]

Her early experiences with racial discrimination in housing and employment, as well as the lack of proper recreation, fueled her determination to help single young black women who were precariously negotiating the promises and the dangers of urban living, as she had done before. "The young Negro girl pushed from the nest by economic pressure, alone and friendless in a northern city; reduced to squalor, starvation; helpless against temptation and degradation," Hunter noted compassionately.[268] On a September afternoon in 1911, Hunter met with a small group of her closest friends to discuss "the rooming-house problem and find ways and means of ameliorating the hard lot of homeless girls" coming to Cleveland.[269] With few funds but plenty grit, they resolved to establish a social institution that would provide single young black women recently arrived in Cleveland with proper lodging, job placement, wholesome recreation, and moral guidance.[270]

Hunter drew inspiration from the words and deeds of Booker T. Washington, especially his emphasis on the importance of "self-help through mutual support" in these trying times for African Americans nationwide. Guided by the principle of self-help, Hunter at first focused her fundraising efforts within Cleveland's black community—"the

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[266] *Ibid.*
[267] *Ibid.*
[268] Hunter, *A Nickel and a Prayer*, p. 83.
[269] *Ibid.* p. 84.
[270] Jones, *Jane Edna Hunter*, p. 43.

poor and lowly of my own people"—hosting small concerts and meetings at local churches.[271] Her appeals for community support emphasized "the morality and protection of poor black women" and "the necessity of providing a good Christian atmosphere" for them.[272] Before long, however, Hunter realized that the pockets of the community were simply not deep enough to underwrite the construction and operation of a major social institution and turned to wealthy whites for help. Through her personal contacts with white patients, she appealed for support to wealthy white women, underlining the inherent value of her enterprise to them and their needs. The proposed institution would get at the root of "the domestic problem" in Cleveland, Hunter assured prospective white donors, by transforming young black women lacking in "interest, ambition, training, and association" into competent and obedient maids through lessons in "the art of housekeeping, the technics of hygiene, the beauty in personal neatness, [and] the importance of loyalty."[273] In an impressive tactical maneuver, Hunter successfully integrated the interests of both the black and white communities in Cleveland to garner public and financial support for her project.

Her plans hit a snag, however, when white members of the proposed institution's board of trustees threatened to resign unless they were given a carte blanche to select the black trustees.[274] Given that financial (and public) support for the institution depended on white membership on the board of trustees, including the philanthropy of Henry A. Sherwin of the Sherwin-Williams Company, Hunter insisted that she was literally in a bind. "I was faced with a choice between offending members of my race who had given

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[271] Hunter, *A Nickel and a Prayer*, p. 84.
[272] Jones, *Jane Edna Hunter*, p. 51.
[273] Hunter, *A Nickel and a Prayer*, p. 97.
[274] *Ibid.* p. 99.

far more than they could actually afford, and yielding to influences which could give our organization a sound financial basis," Hunter wrote of her dilemma.[275] Even though the ultimatum threatened to undermine Hunter's emphasis on racial self-help, she maintained that she was unwilling to abandon her lifework and acquiesced to the demand of the white trustees. Of her decision, she explained: "I was called upon to make a decision which gave to us the support we needed. It seemed necessary to sacrifice personal feelings for the sake of the cause."[276] Regardless of whether she made the right decision or not, her concession to the white trustees transformed her dream into a reality. On July 24, 1913, the Phillis Wheatley Association opened its doors on Central Avenue. It was, as Adrienne Lash Jones notes, "a black institution, financed mainly by whites and controlled by the donors."[277]

As one might expect, Hunter faced the same hostile opposition to her work from the older generation of black Cleveland as did the younger men advocating a "colored" YMCA. "Worst of all, those who did not understand would lay snares for us, and severe criticism would rain upon us," Hunter wrote of the imminent opposition to her proposal.[278] It did not take long for the criticism to rain upon her. "We have never had segregation. Our girls must go to the Y.W.C.A., along with the white girls. Why should you come up from the South and tell us what to do?" club women, representing the established black families of Cleveland, confronted Hunter at a local meeting.[279] In a similar vein, the *Gazette* castigated Hunter bitterly for preaching self-segregation that was

[275] *Ibid.* p. 100.
[276] *Ibid.*
[277] Jones, *Jane Edna Hunter*, p. 55.
[278] Hunter, *A Nickel and a Prayer*, p. 90.
[279] *Ibid.* pp. 90-91.

wholly out of place in Cleveland.[280] For his part, George A. Myers privately informed Booker T. Washington, whose help Hunter had solicited, that she had "no standing among our better class of women" and promoted a home for young black women "to further her own aggrandizement."[281] Washington followed Myers's advice and declined to meet with Hunter. As Jones explains, "Hunter, a Southerner, proposing a race facility, was viewed by [Harry C.] Smith and the traditional leaders as a typical outsider, forcing 'Southern' solutions on to her newly adopted Northern community."[282] In spite of the many obstacles thrown in her way by the older generation, Hunter persisted in her mission and succeeded.

The glaring difference in the outcomes of the generational clashes was Hunter's success in bringing her vision of a social institution for single young black women in Cleveland to fruition. She seems to have triumphed where her male cohorts failed because of several important factors. First of all, her professional relationships with wealthy whites positioned Hunter in close proximity to the leading white men and women of Cleveland who controlled the funds to make or break her dream. Their established rapport allowed Hunter to approach wealthy whites for financial aid and then use their connections to approach others. The fact that the younger black men lacked this type of personal access to the leading men and women of Cleveland hindered their campaign, making them much more reliant on the black community for public and financial support. Secondly, unlike the unofficial policy of racial exclusion practiced by the Central YMCA, the white trustees of the YWCA candidly informed a committee of black ministers that they did not encourage black participation at their facility since

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[280] Cleveland *Gazette*, March 22, 1913.
[281] George A. Myers to Booker T. Washington. July 20, 1914. George A. Myers Papers.
[282] Jones, *Jane Edna Hunter*, p. 47.

"when Negro girls came to the 'Y' building in large numbers and were the majority in any activity, the white girls would withdraw."[283] And besides, the trustees argued, "Negro girls should be cared for by the Negro race."[284] This straightforward declaration of exclusion swayed the city's black ministers to rally behind Hunter's proposal. If the distinction between unofficial and official exclusion seems trivial, it is important to think of its implications on white attitudes. White donors could not argue with the fact that black girls were not welcome in the YWCA since the organization had explicitly stated so, but they could rebuff requests for aid to erect a "colored" YMCA because the Central YMCA was officially integrated. What was common knowledge among African Americans in Cleveland—namely, the unofficial color-line at the Central Y—was not necessarily common knowledge among whites. Finally, Hunter's campaign was helped immeasurably by the modesty of her requests for financial help. "The first annual budget of the Phillis Wheatley Home was only $1,500; in contrast to the $100,000 YMCA branches going up around Ohio," David A. Gerber notes.[285]

The success of Jane Edna Hunter in creating a social institution for young black women was by no means accidental, but resulted from hard work, sacrifice, and compromise with the wishes of her white benefactors. The question of why Hunter succeeded, where her male cohorts failed, elucidates the salience and significance of access to networks of white philanthropy and influence in Cleveland.

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[283] Hunter, *A Nickel and a Prayer*, p. 93.
[284] *Ibid.*
[285] Gerber, *Black Ohio*, p. 458.

**"In union there is strength"** The many shades of racial solidarity

The generational dispute over the proposal for the establishment of a "colored" YMCA on Central Avenue hinged, above all, on divergent interpretations of racial solidarity among the city's African-American leaders. While both sides championed the principle of racial solidarity in theory—who could disagree that blacks should help one another?—there was a profound and bitter disagreement over the proper limits of racial solidarity when applied to concrete social questions, such as racial discrimination at the Central Y. The reality of discrimination revealed the generational fissures over the meaning of racial solidarity.

As has been shown, the disagreement over the proper limits of racial solidarity did not preclude cross-generational cooperation on issues where the ideological viewpoints of the older and younger men coincided—the proverbial middle ground. Both the *Journal* and the *Gazette* fervently encouraged black patronage of black-owned enterprises, publicized the city's black businesses, and advocated black entrepreneurship. "Let us patronize our own people in business," admonished the *Gazette*.[286] And the *Journal* encouraged its readers, "Prepare for business, get into business; produce something, be somebody."[287] Who could argue with the need for black economic empowerment at a time when African Americans were widely seen as innately inferior beings predestined for extinction? Both black weeklies also urged their readers to support the Home for Aged Colored People, a race-based social institution dependant upon the community for its operation. Publicizing "an auction social" for the benefit of "the Old Folks' Home,"

[286] Cleveland *Gazette*, October 17, 1903.
[287] Cleveland *Journal*, February 4, 1905.

the *Gazette* instructed that "it ought to be largely attended and doubtless will be."[288] Since the Home "is a Cleveland institution belonging to the colored people of Cleveland," noted the *Journal*, "every person should have a personal interest" in its welfare.[289] The fact that Harry C. Smith supported the work of the Home for Aged Colored People is quite fascinating since it was a separate institution of the very kind he should have opposed, if we are to judge him by his tirades against the proposed "colored" Y. How exactly he reconciled his paradoxical views cannot be answered from primary (or, for that matter, secondary) sources.

The story of the proposed YMCA would not be complete without a thorough analysis of the ideological foundations of racial solidarity, a powerful yet intricate concept that illustrates the conflicting black responses to the national deterioration in race relations at the turn of the twentieth century. It is best to think of racial solidarity as an ideological continuum extending all the way to the pole of racial separatism, yet offering the integrationist the option of stopping short that separatist extreme. That is to say, racial separatists, seeking solace away from the mainstream society, interpreted racial solidarity to mean the construction of separate institutions—be they economic, religious, educational, or social—based on their distinctive racial identity. Conversely, racial integrationists, seeking equal participation in the mainstream society, interpreted racial solidarity to mean intraracial cooperation—be it economic, religious, educational, or social—within the framework of interracial institutions. A telling case of the divergent interpretations of racial solidarity pertains to black-owned businesses which were, as noted above, supported by both the integrationist older men and the separatist younger

[288] Cleveland *Gazette*, September 23, 1905.
[289] Cleveland *Journal*, February 11, 1905.

men. While encouraging blacks to patronize "race enterprises," the integrationist thought it unwise for any black entrepreneur to base his (or her) business exclusively on black patronage and decried overreliance on racial solidarity to the detriment of sound business practices. Conversely, the separatist tended to overestimate the purchasing power of the urban black masses to the ruin of many "race enterprises" and asserted unequivocally that it was the racial duty of every self-respecting African American to patronize black-owned businesses.

It is worthwhile to consider the exceedingly intricate and often contradictory world of racial philosophies that occupy such a prominent place in this work—racial separatism and racial integration. An important caveat is in order, however, before proceeding. The older and younger black leaders both strove toward the same end—the full inclusion of African Americans in American society—but proposed dissimilar means to attain it. The older men believed that African Americans must insist on participation in existing societal institutions, such as the YMCA, whereas the younger men argued for the creation of independent, racially-defined ones. As Booker T. Washington once told his strident detractors, "We are all trying to reach the same end. We may travel, for a time at least, on different lines, but the goal is the same."[290] Brascher reinforced Washington's point by asserting unequivocally that integration, as a social principle, was "just and right" and blacks had every right to contend for it.[291] The generational disagreement was, therefore, over tactics rather than objectives.

In his work, *Negro Thought in America,* August Meier raises an interesting and relevant question concerning the "paradoxical compromises between cultural

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[290] Washington, Booker T. "An Extract from the Proceedings of the Washington Conference of the National Sociological Society." November 10, 1903. Booker T. Washington Papers.
[291] Cleveland *Journal*, October 13, 1906.

assimilationism and political nationalism," as Wilson Jeremiah Moses defines the path to assimilation through separatism.[292] If "eventual integration remained the avowed goal of most separatists," then how did they reconcile their integrationist strivings with what Meier perceived to be the innate tendency of racially-based institutions to stimulate and perpetuate ethnocentrism and group separatism?[293] The examples cited by Meier in support of his claim include the black church and the black fraternal orders. It is at best a questionable contention that racially-based institutions, such as the black church, are ethnocentric since most do (and did) not restrict their membership by race, but simply foster a safe and empowering social space for black Americans away from the hostile white world, while encouraging black cultural expression. There are certainly historical examples of ethnocentric and separatist organizations, such as the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) and the Nation of Islam, but these groups emphasized racial ethnocentrism and separatism from their very foundation rather than embraced these distinct ideological stances over time. Once again, it is important to position racially-defined institutions in a continuum proposed by Moses. An African Methodist Episcopal church is, by definition, a separate religious institution, but its membership is open to all and its sacred and secular objectives are universal rather than ethnocentric.

**"A Midwestern tale"** Comparative analysis

Far from being exceptional, the same ideological conflict between an older generation committed heart and soul to racial integration and a younger generation willing to embrace racial separatism manifested itself at the turn of the twentieth century

[292] Moses, *Golden Age of Black Nationalism*, p. 30.
[293] Meier, *Negro Thought in America*, p. 55; p. 13.

in Milwaukee and Chicago. The three Midwestern cities represent a useful demographic comparison because of the variation in their African-American populations. It bears mention that the black population of Cleveland stood at 8,448 in 1910, making up 1.5 percent of the total population. The same census year, the black population of Milwaukee was 890, making up 0.2 percent of the total population, and the black population of Chicago was 44,103, making up 2 percent of the total population.[294] This demographic variation lends itself to a critical comparison of the prevailing trends in intraracial and interracial relations in the Midwest at the turn of the twentieth century.

Both cities boasted a well-heeled black professional and business elite with close economic and personal ties to the established white Protestant community—among whose affluent members liberal racial sentiments persisted well into the twentieth century—and were avowed enemies of all vestiges of racial discrimination and segregation.[295] As was the case in Cleveland, the authority of the old black aristocracy was challenged by an emerging class of younger business and professional black men who were dependent upon the African-American community for the fulfillment of their social, political, and economic ambitions, and who were determined to "build a separate black institutional life" in their respective communities.[296] Facing the same racial pressures at the turn of the twentieth century as most blacks throughout the nation, the older and younger men in Milwaukee and Chicago responded to the nascent racism of their white neighbors in accordance with their personal experiences, or, as Allan Spear

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[294] Joe William Trotter Jr., *Black Milwaukee: The Making of an Industrial Proletariat, 1915-1945* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1985), p. 5; Allan H. Spear, *Black Chicago: The Making of a Negro Ghetto* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), p. 12.
[295] Trotter Jr., *Black Milwaukee*, p. 25; Spear, *Black Chicago*, pp. 51-54.
[296] Trotter, Jr. *Black Milwaukee*, pp. 27-29; Spear, *Black Chicago*, pp. 71-72.

puts it, "their positions on racial matters were conditioned by their circumstances."[297] When it came to separate institutions, the divergent viewpoints of the two camps were unmistakable and paralleled the generational schism within the ranks of the black leadership in Cleveland: the older men refused to support any attempts at "self-segregation," as they called it, whereas the younger men regarded the creation of separate social spaces as a much needed response to racial proscription.

The fate of separate YMCAs followed parallel paths in both communities: the outright rejection of a "colored" Y at the turn of the twentieth century prefigured the creation of such a facility in the second decade of the century. The small size of the African-American community in Milwaukee did not preclude public controversy over the advisability and necessity of establishing a separate YMCA branch in the city. As early as 1902, *Wisconsin Weekly Advocate*, a local black weekly, alerted black Milwaukeeans to be on the lookout for "the Negro mountebanks and fakes" from elsewhere who advocated a separate Y.[298] "There is no earthly excuse for the establishment of separate institutions such as a proposed C.Y.M.C.A. in this city since Negroes are eligible to membership in the white organization," insisted Richard B. Montgomery in a refrain reminiscent of Harry C. Smith..[299] As important, he accused "intermeddling outsiders," who they were and where they came from was left unsaid, of attempting to "draw the line of proscription" in Milwaukee, thus abetting rather than contesting racial discrimination.[300] The racial atmosphere and community sentiment certainly shifted by

[297] Spear, *Black Chicago*, p. 83.
[298] *Wisconsin Weekly Advocate*, August 21, 1902.
[299] *Ibid.* August 14, 1902.
[300] *Ibid.*

1917 when local young black men organized the Frederick Douglass YMCA, a "colored" branch that included none other than Richard B. Montgomery on its board of trustees.[301]

Farther south along the shore of Lake Michigan, the much larger African-American community of Chicago trod a similar path toward racial separatism, but with much more enduring results. In late 1889, Chicago's black community was up in arms over the proposal for the creation of a "colored" Y advanced at a public meeting, chaired by a white man.[302] "No pretended movement for the upbuilding of the race has in it more disastrous elements of retrogression than has this late attempt on the part of a few selfish, boodle seeking knaves to establish in this great free city of Chicago a separate and distinct organization known as the Colored Young Men's Christian Association," declared the *Western Appeal*, a leading black weekly, in full sympathy with black Chicagoans.[303] Furious over the suppression of their vocal opposition to the proposal by the meeting's chairman, blacks promptly organized a mass protest meeting at a local church and the proposition vanished from public view for more than twenty years.[304] The rising tide of racism, the growing black population, and the declining prestige of the old elite all combined to engender an ideological readjustment on the part of the city's elder statesmen during the early twentieth century. As a result, the Wabash Avenue YMCA, "the largest and finest Association building for colored men in the United States," was erected in 1913 with much fanfare and with broad community support from both the older and younger men.[305]

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[301] Chicago *Defender*, November 10, 1917; Buchanan, *Black Milwaukee*, p. 135.
[302] *Western Appeal*, November 30, 1889.
[303] *Ibid.*
[304] Spear, *Black Chicago*, p. 100.
[305] Tobias, C. H. "The Colored Y.M.C.A." *Crisis* 9 (November 1914), p. 33.

If it seems peculiar that the integrationist old elite should embrace a separate institution, it is imperative to bear in mind the large size of the black community in the Windy City. With tens of thousands of black people packed together in an unsanitary and impoverished environment of decrepit tenements on the south side, the social, recreational, educational, and religious needs of the black youth were much more pronounced and pressing for the city's black leaders than was the case in Cleveland (or Milwaukee). Also, white philanthropy and black wealth made the proposed $150,000 facility a reality. The large contributions of $25,000 each made by Julius Rosenwald of Sears, Roebuck & Co., N. W. Harris of Harris Trust and Savings Bank, and Cyrus H. McCormick of International Harvester toward the construction of a "colored" Y stimulated the fundraising efforts.[306] Collectively, their contributions defrayed half of the estimated cost.[307] Then, the city's black community flexed its financial muscles by raising more than $65,000 in a matter of ten days.[308] Clearly, the financial resources of the large black population in Chicago far surpassed those available to blacks in Cleveland and Milwaukee. Finally, only Julius F. Taylor, editor of the *Broad Ax*, and Edward E. Wilson, a local attorney, publicly questioned the fundraising campaign for a "colored" Y. Since "the separating or segregating along educational and religious lines, simply means the further and more permanent advancement of 'Jim Crowism' in this country," Taylor lamented "a tendency, on the part of the Colored people in all parts of this country, to get away from whites, along educational and religious lines."[309] For his part, Wilson equated the erection of a "colored" Y with "travelling to heaven by a back alley" since "[o]ne

[306] Chicago *Record-Herald*, January 17, 1911.
[307] Chicago *Inter Ocean*, January 2, 1911.
[308] Chicago *Defender*, January 21, 1911.
[309] Chicago *Broad Ax*, January 21, 1911.

could not be sure that after a long and weary journey along a jim-crow route to glory, that he would not find a jim-crow Paradise awaiting him beyond."[310]

**The wizard and the professor** National trends in a local context

The public controversy over the establishment of a "colored" YMCA branch in Cleveland played itself out at a time of great intellectual upheaval in the African-American community, a period often designated, "the Age of Booker T. Washington." Assigned the lucrative mantle of race leadership by the white elites, North and South, in the aftermath of his conciliatory ode to the segregationist South at the Atlanta Exposition in 1895, Washington maintained his grip on power in the African-American community by distributing political patronage, dispensing endowments to industrial colleges, and subsidizing the black press from his base at the Tuskegee Institute in Alabama. Washington implored his fellow southern blacks to abandon the futile agitation for political and social rights, and accommodate to the violent regime of disenfranchisement and segregation in their region. The time was ripe for them to focus their latent energies on the acquisition of a practical trade, the accumulation of wealth, and the cultivation of a strong moral character. In other words, Washington urged black people to abandon the presumably aimless chase for political and social rights, and devote themselves body and soul to the gospel of wealth. Once they have proven themselves to be valuable members of their respective communities, African Americans would be accorded their political and social rights by their white neighbors. In return for political and social accommodation,

[310] *Ibid.* December 31, 1910.

Washington asked southern whites to refrain from impeding black economic uplift and to collaborate with black men and women in "all things essential to mutual progress."[311]

The race leadership of Washington, however, was vocally contested by militant editors, academics, and professionals who refused to accommodate to racism and sacrifice their social and political rights on the altar of wealth. Prominent among the militants was W.E.B. Du Bois, an eminent black intellectual. Du Bois rejected any sign of compromise with racial segregation and disenfranchisement and called upon African Americans to agitate and protest at all times and in all places for the rights, not privileges, guaranteed to them by the United States Constitution as full-fledged American citizens. As there was nothing that blacks needed to prove to America, their social and political rights should not be contingent on the approval of racists. Denouncing the Washingtonian gospel of wealth, Du Bois insisted that blacks could not accumulate wealth in a racist society without retaining the requisite rights to protect it. For Du Bois, black economic advancement was hardly the panacea to white racism and he envisioned the uplift of the black masses achieved through the enlightened leadership of a college-educated, morally upstanding, and patriarchal Talented Tenth. Finally, as a product of liberal education at Harvard, Du Bois refused to accept the Washingtonian mantra of industrial education and asserted that black girls and boys needed access to both liberal and industrial education.[312]

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[311] Louis R. Harlan, "Booker T. Washington and the Politics of Accommodation," in *Black Leaders of the Twentieth Century*, ed. John Hope Franklin and August Meier (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982), pp. 1-17.

[312] Elliott Rudwick, "W. E. B. Du Bois: Protagonist of the Afro-American Protest," in *Black Leaders of the Twentieth Century*, ed. John Hope Franklin and August Meier (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982), pp. 63-83.

The story of generational conflict in turn-of-the-century Cleveland, however, is not as simple as identifying the younger men with accommodation and the older men with militancy in the best Washington-Du Bois tradition. Indeed, the local story illuminates some of the flaws that characterize the standard Washington-Du Bois paradigm. For one thing, the ideological affinities of the older men were divided. Aligning with Du Bois, Harry C. Smith disparaged Washington in the pages of the *Gazette* and was a founding member of two militant organizations opposed to racial accommodation, the Niagara Movement in 1905 and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in 1909.[313] Reiterating the militant stance of Du Bois, Smith contended that African Americans should not throw their constitutional rights away to recklessly pursue mammon and implored blacks who were slighted by racial discrimination to seek recourse in the courts.[314] Then, there was the prominent barber, George A. Myers, who corresponded with Washington on a regular basis, providing him with advice on political appointments and keeping him abreast of the latest developments in Ohio.[315] Myers eschewed the militancy of Du Bois, believing that African Americans should not agitate or protest but work discreetly with sympathetic whites to combat racial discrimination.[316] As his uncompromising stance for racial integration would readily attest, however, Myers was not an accommodationist. Also, as a self-made businessman who had lifted himself up in the world by his bootstraps, Myers found much truth in the Washingtonian gospel of wealth.[317] Therefore, while they differed in their views of Washington and their approaches to combating racial

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[313] Kusmer, *A Ghetto Takes Shape*, pp. 131-132.
[314] *Ibid.*
[315] Gerber, *Black Ohio*, p. 403.
[316] Kusmer, *A Ghetto Takes Shape*, p. 126.
[317] *Ibid.*

discrimination, Smith and Myers shared the same fundamental commitment to racial integration in Cleveland.

The younger men, on the other hand, exhibited a remarkable ideological cohesiveness in their unswerving endorsement of the race leadership of Booker T. Washington, if with a uniquely Midwestern flavor. If the younger men revered Washington as "the spiritual and practical leader of black America," they were conscious of the fact that they resided in Ohio rather than Alabama and freely appropriated those elements of Washington's ideology which they found amenable to their particular circumstances.[318] After all, racial discrimination in public accommodations was illegal in Ohio and African American men were free to exercise their franchise. What the younger men found most appealing in Washington's philosophy was his emphasis on black economic uplift and intraracial self-help.[319] Coming of age in a racially volatile environment, the younger generation embraced the standard Washingtonian view that success in the supposedly colorblind world of business would not only uplift the black community but also undermine the tenets of white supremacy.[320] The gospel of wealth provided the younger men with the ideological means to challenge racism without resorting to the militant tactics of protest and agitation, which they deemed to be counterproductive.[321] The accommodationist label should not, however, be applied haphazardly to the younger men. The political activism of the younger men, culminating in the election of Thomas Fleming to the city council in 1909, indicates that they turned a blind eye to Washington's denigration of political activity and envisioned politics and

[318] Gerber, *Black Ohio*, pp. 382-383.
[319] *Ibid.* p. 384.
[320] *Ibid.* p. 379.
[321] *Ibid.* p. 409.

economics as mutually reinforcing components of the racial uplift program. And yet the controversy over the proposal for a separate YMCA branch underscores the willingness of the younger men to accommodate to racial discrimination in pursuit of intraracial self-help and cooperation. It is, therefore, prudent to consider the younger men as pragmatic northern Bookerites who adapted the racial philosophy of Booker T. Washington to the conditions that they encountered in Cleveland.

**Epilogue**

In the end, Cleveland's older black leadership would reign supreme and the proposal for a separate branch would crumble in defeat in 1911 along with its most vocal advocate, the *Journal*.[322] The financial collapse of the *Journal*, the official organ of the younger men, effectively silenced the public agitation for a separate YMCA branch and allowed the older men to assert their victory. In hindsight, the great influence wielded by the older generation among the prominent white residents, on whose moral and financial support any successful campaign for a separate facility would have ultimately depended, made it an uphill battle for the younger men from the outset.[323] The long-established bonds of interracialism extending between the older black men and the white Protestant elite were showing signs of strain in the racially charged atmosphere of turn-of-the-century Cleveland, but they were strong enough to secure the whites' opposition to the YMCA proposal at the behest of their close black friends. The younger generation could not surmount the influence of George A. Myers among the white elite of Cleveland and it

[322] Kusmer, *A Ghetto Takes Shape*, p. 149.
[323] Gerber, *Black Ohio*, p. 456.

was largely due to his efforts that the older generation carried the day. Yet, an important question lingers: who were the real losers in this elite contest?

By the early 1920s, however, the rapid expansion of Cleveland's African-American population in the aftermath of the Great Migration and the increasing racial segregation of blacks would force the hand of the aging black leadership. In many ways, the fate of black Cleveland paralleled that of black Chicago, if only with a slight delay. As the city's black population soared from 8,448 in 1910 to 34,451 in 1920, the social, recreational, educational, and religious needs of young black men overwhelmed the poorly prepared black community and the old integrationist arguments collapsed under the weight of an alarming social reality that demanded urgent action.[324] The establishment of a Y facility to cater to African Americans in Cleveland was accomplished in 1921 with little fanfare and only muted opposition.[325] In 1923, the branch moved to its larger, permanent location on Cedar Avenue.[326] What had been unthinkable in 1911 had become a reality in 1921. However, as the Board of Trustees of the Cleveland YMCA informed Julius Rosenwald in 1926, it was not a "colored" branch after all.[327] "There is so much prejudice on the part of the race leaders against segregation that of course we did not call this a 'colored' branch, nor did we exclude white members."[328] The facility that the younger men fought for came into existence, but on the older men's terms.

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[324] Kusmer, *A Ghetto Takes Shape*, p. 10.
[325] *Ibid.* pp. 265-266.
[326] *Ibid.*
[327] The Young Men's Christian Association of Cleveland to Julius Rosenwald, February 2, 1926, Rosenwald Papers.
[328] *Ibid.*

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