MAYORAL POLITICS AND NEW DEAL POLITICAL CULTURE: JAMES RHODES AND THE AFRICAN-AMERICAN VOTING BLOC IN COLUMBUS, OHIO, 1943-1951

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ABSTRACT

This thesis discusses the impact of New Deal political culture on Columbus, Ohio in the 1940s. The case study involves the political relationship of James Rhodes, Republican mayor of Columbus from 1944 - 1952, and the African-American voting bloc. This study finds that Rhodes' political style and policy agenda converged with the interests and methods of the black community, facilitating a mutually beneficial alliance. Both Rhodes and blacks advocated policies that centered on themes of strengthening the home and the community and embraced New Deal political culture, a style based on pluralism and organizational activity. This story is useful to tell because it suggests that the shift in black voter's loyalty from the party of Lincoln to the party of Franklin Roosevelt occurred neither uniformly nor monolithically, foreshadows changes that occur in the Republican party because of the New Deal, describes a convergence of long term structural patterns with distinct personalities and ideologies that created a fleeting moment of middle ground between blacks and whites, and, finally, illustrates the limits of local public power to address systemic racial problems.
Dedicated to my parents, who understand
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This thesis discusses the impact of New Deal political culture on Columbus, Ohio in the 1940s. The case study involves the political relationship of James Rhodes, Republican mayor of Columbus from 1944 - 1952, and the African-American voting bloc. Unlike many narratives of black-white struggles, this story contains no soaring, inspirational dialogue from the main characters and provides no moving images of an oppressed but dignified people attempting to exercise basic civil rights while under attack from police dogs; nor is it a story that ends with any trenchant answers to questions regarding race matters in America. But it is a useful story to tell because it foreshadows changes that occur in the Republican Party because of the New Deal, describes a convergence of long term structural patterns with distinct personalities and ideologies that created a fleeting moment of middle ground
between blacks and whites, and, finally, illustrates the limits of local public power to address systemic racial problems.

The contradiction framing this analysis is how the Republican Rhodes, with roots in poverty-filled, rural, coal-mining Ohio used an interest-group approach to delay urban black abandonment of the Republican Party.\(^1\) Rhodes employed this strategy, similar to the one created by Franklin Roosevelt who formed the Democratic New Deal coalition, despite the absence of traditional New Deal groups, policies, and personalities that shaped the national New Deal coalition. Given the beginning of this major political realignment and his own background, how did Rhodes easily win a majority of the urban black vote in three straight mayoral elections? The answer includes three elements. First, Rhodes' political style, which evolved

from his childhood experiences, often matched the style of a machine boss even though no machine existed in Columbus. Historian Richard Hofstadter argued that bosses took "for granted that the political life of the individual would arise out of family needs."2 Rhodes' father, a coal miner who worked his way into lower management, died when Rhodes was a young boy. Growing up in a single-parent household and in relative poverty, Rhodes, never a good student, turned to athletic activities as an outlet for his energies. Later, as an adult, Rhodes believed these youthful diversions kept him out of trouble and thus always advocated various forms of athletic organizations to instill values and discipline in youths. As I will develop fully in a later chapter, Rhodes defined "family needs" as providing city services to financially strapped households, especially city services regarding recreational opportunities. In turn, Rhodes counted on "the political life of the individual" to mean votes from parents who were of any race or economic position.

So, if the first element that helps us solve this political contradiction is Rhodes' political style, then

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the second element must address how African-Americans acted toward and even shaped a political approach that took "for granted that the political life of the individual would arise out of family needs." Even though the African-American community was far from monolithic, its dominant voice was the Columbus Urban League. Founded in the late teens by Nimrod Allen, the Columbus Urban League (CUL) was a moderately conservative entity which shunned any fundamental critique or radical challenge to society and, instead, emphasized private social work and social uplift to help urban blacks. Often in conjunction with Ohio State University researchers, the CUL studied the status of African-Americans in Columbus, focusing on housing conditions, the cost of slums to the city, juvenile delinquency, and the lack of adequate recreational facilities for black youth. In line with the National Urban League, the Columbus branch believed that serious investigation and reports compiled by credible members of the community must inform public opinion about racial and social issues. The key to Urban League methods was its belief that the problems of African-Americans were fundamentally social and economic. Any solution based on other factors would, according to the organization's
philosophy, fail. Rhodes' political style and philosophy, then, matched the immediate desires and concerns of the Urban League, the mediating organization that for better or worse voiced the black community's concerns to the white power structure.

While the first and second elements, Rhodes' machine boss approach and the CUL's philosophy, help us describe the seemingly odd political relationship between Rhodes and the Columbus African-American voting bloc, they still fail to explain fully Rhodes' success. The third, and final, element concerns changes in the national political culture. In tandem, homefront exigencies created or exacerbated by World War Two and systemic political realignment wrought by Franklin Roosevelt and the New Deal contributed to Rhodes' success in the forties and shaped the rest of his political career.

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In cities across America, people in the 1940s pointed to a rise in juvenile delinquency and blamed the violent psychology of war and lack of parental supervision. In addition, race riots in other cities generated concern about racial issues in Columbus. Often, poor housing conditions and the competition that resulted from housing shortages fueled these riots. Thus, national issues related to the war found expression in Rhodes' approach and the CUL's philosophy. The broader Columbus electorate, in turn, connected to the idea that politics and family needs went hand in hand.

More importantly, however, FDR and New Deal policies changed American political culture. Historians have suggested that in the 1930s, organizational activity and commitment to groups replaced individualism as the backbone of political culture. Indeed, the bureaucratic and consolidating forces that altered business and the economy at the turn of the century shaped the techniques of political organizations and people who sought to influence policy decisions. Despite the nationalizing trends inherent in political and economic centralization, however, Americans clung to a "segmented society" in which local characteristics and values thrived. The parallel cultures,
therefore, facilitated the rise of a new breed of politician, one who recognized the legitimacy of state-brokered interest group politics and adopted the culture of centralizing organizations, yet retained an ability to address discrete, segmented groups. 4

Rhodes was uniquely positioned to learn this new political style. His brief entrepreneurial career in the 30s as a promoter of entertainment acts and part owner of a hamburger stand provided an environment in which Rhodes

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learned to organize, hustle, and cajole. Above all, business success relied on finding and satisfying an audience. The Depression, however, was not a good time for an independent rookie businessman to try to strike it rich. As a result, Rhodes chose to climb the political ladder instead of the corporate ladder. Synthesizing his machine boss approach with New Deal political culture, Rhodes, a Republican, used the Democratic New Deal coalition as a means to achieve his ends.⁵

I will develop the argument just outlined in subsequent chapters after I first explain why Columbus provides a useful case study. Two reasons form the foundation of my study. One, Columbus' particular mixture of economic development and demographic trends created a different base for city politics in comparison to other northern,

midwestern cities like Chicago or Detroit. Two, based on that mixture, black-white relations in Columbus in the past differed from larger northern cities and often resembled, to a certain extent, southern models of racial politics.

In the main, authors who chose to study the New Deal and black politics through city history pick urban, northern, and industrial cities. Historian Lizabeth Cohen, for example, analyzes the changes in working-class culture in the 1920s and 1930s in Chicago. Cohen's book is important because she challenges studies asserting the primacy of institutions, politicians, and union leaders in the formulation of the New Deal and because she attributes

the formation of class consciousness to the rise in mass consumer culture. Yet the specifics of her argument are not central to my study. Indeed, Cohen describes working-class culture and its relationship to the New Deal while I focus on the political relationship of a politician to one particular group, African-Americans. Her method, however, informs my approach.

The methodological premise of *Making a New Deal* is clear. First, a city's economic and demographic base influences its political practices. Second, by studying these factors historians can shed new light on the distinct quality of New Deal political culture. A study of a different kind of city than Chicago, consequently, will provide modified conclusions. Columbus affords that opportunity.

Compared to other northern cities, Columbus failed to develop a fully industrialized economy and, consequently, experienced only mild migration of ethnic immigrants and southern blacks in the twentieth century. Historically, city leaders relied on the business of running the state capital and emphasized retail, finance, commercial agriculture, and trade as the main path of economic development. In addition, Columbus' central geographical
location and convenient connections with many major railroad lines facilitated the growth of a transportation, clearing house, and commercial transfer center. The available capital flowed into these areas and other well-established business ventures. This settled business climate, and the fact that no city close to Columbus challenged its economic dominance, eliminated competition and stunted the growth of a industrial economy.\(^7\)

In terms of its demographic base, Columbus provides another experience for the scholar to study. Many northern cities experienced the black migration in shocking bursts from World War One through World War Two. The black population of Chicago, for example, grew from 44,000 in 1910 to 109,000 in 1920, and to 234,000 in 1930. The percentage of increase from 1910 to 1920 alone was 148.2 percent, a figure easily outdistancing a twenty-one percent increase in the white population. In another city, Cleveland, the black population grew by 307.8 percent during that same time period. Finally, in Detroit the black

population jumped by 611.3 percent whereas the white population inflated a relatively paltry 107 percent.\(^8\)

The black population in Columbus, on the other hand, constituted an historically stable percentage of the city's entire demographic base. In 1840, for example, 573 African-Americans comprised 9.5 percent of Columbus' citizens. In 1920, 22,181 African-Americans accounted for 9.4 percent of the total. These facts led one sociologist to conclude that blacks made up a higher proportion of Columbus' population before the migration than any other northern city, except Indianapolis, Indiana. As a result, Columbus resembled southern cities because it had a large proportion of native whites, few immigrants, and a relatively high proportion of African-Americans.\(^9\)

Census data indicate, however, that between 1910 and 1940, Columbus residents witnessed a direct impact of the migration on their city. In 1910, 12,379 African-Americans

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\(^9\)Mary Mark, *Negroes in Columbus*, (The Ohio State University: Columbus, OH, 1928), p. 7.
constituted seven percent of the population. By 1940, the numbers were 35,765, or 11.7 percent. Furthermore, in 1910 52.6 percent of Columbus' black population were born in Ohio while 46.8 percent originated from other states. By 1920, in contrast, 60.8 percent were from out of state and only 38 percent were from Ohio. This influx of southern blacks affected not only black-white relations but also created some divisions between established Columbus blacks and the newer migrants.¹⁰

The point is not just that Columbus differs from other northern cities in its economic and demographic base. Rather, these numbers are significant because, first, they influence the way in which New Deal political culture worked at the local level. James Rhodes, a Republican, was the first Columbus politician to utilize successfully New Deal political culture, a system that previously existed in Columbus for Roosevelt but no one else. And second, since

¹⁰The statistics are from John Alston, "A Statistical And Ecological Analysis of Selected Housing Conditions in Columbus, Ohio, 1940," (The Ohio State University, unpublished dissertation, 1947), p. 103; and Mary Mark, Negroes in Columbus, p. 8; Edward Lentz, "Rationalization and Reform," argues that black southern migration into Columbus prompted a rise in Ku Klux Klan activity and spurred the foundation of the Columbus Urban League to combat the social problems created by entrance of rural, southern blacks into the city.
northern cities cannot quite explain black-white political and social behavior in Columbus, the historian is forced to look elsewhere for similar patterns. It is ironic that historians can find approximate social and political environments for Columbus, the heart of the midwest and north, in two southern cities.¹¹

Greensboro, North Carolina and Norfolk, Virginia are important to this study of Columbus because, as historians have suggested, race relations were dominated by a veneer of civility and progressivism that actually stunted effective reform. In addition, the black community, when faced with diminished political power and economic dislocation, advocated policies that addressed their community and home life, thus renewing and strengthening its political voice.

Both trends characterized race relations and political culture in Columbus, contributed to the connections between Rhodes, the Columbus Urban League and the city's African-American masses, and, finally, shaped a period of political agreement from 1943 to 1951, a unique moment that in the 1950s failed to withstand changes in local leadership and an increasingly important national civil rights agenda.\(^\text{12}\)

The following chapters will develop the themes and arguments presented to this point. Chapter Two will briefly survey the political history of the African-American community in Columbus from the 1890s through the 1930s. Relying mostly on unpublished master's theses and doctoral dissertations, I will trace how the African-American community reached a point where, as a whole, they actively sought a political culture that "took for granted that the political life of the individual would arise out of family needs." In addition, this chapter will employ archival and secondary material to explain Rhodes' style and trace how Rhodes arrived at that moment in time when his agenda and

style converged with that of the black community in Columbus. Chapter Three describes and analyzes the specific interactions between Rhodes and African-Americans between 1943-1951. The conclusion suggests that the convergence of black Columbus' and Rhodes' style created a new kind of Republican politician in Ohio, new opportunities for successful policy outcomes for black Columbus, and a renewed local civil rights agenda.
CHAPTER 2

CONVERGING ON CONSENSUS

This chapter will survey the major political and economic events from the 1880s through the 1930s that shaped black-white political relationships in Columbus, Ohio. While the narrative primarily employs secondary literature concerning black Columbus and the rise of James Rhodes, the analysis offers an interpretive synthesis. This synthesis traces the rise of a political philosophy that emphasized public solutions of family-oriented issues and set the stage for the intersection of the Columbus Urban League's agenda and Rhodes' style. Part One argues that because of changes in the city's political climate and the economic conditions within the African-American community, black-white political relationships between the 1880s and the 1930s shifted among three styles: from the 1880s to the 1910s, reliance on elite connections and exploitation of vices; a drifting interlude during the 1920s that encouraged a nascent political independence within the black community; and, finally, beginning in the 1930s interest group activity
that, however moderate in its approach, linked African-American elites and masses to the white power structure in a lasting way. Part Two shows that Rhodes blended the agenda of the machine politician, the attitude of the hustling small businessman, and the techniques of modern organizational politics in order to adapt the New Deal coalition to local conditions.

PART ONE

BLACK POLITICS IN COLUMBUS, 1880s-1930s:
POINDEXTER TO HOBBS TO ALLEN

Preston Poindexter, Alexander "Smokey" Hobbs, and Nimrod Allen constitute the gamut of black leadership styles in this fifty-year span. The "Golden Era" of Columbus black politics lasted from the late nineteenth century to around 1915. In this era, two leaders -- Poindexter and Hobbs -- and their styles dominated black-white political associations. First, Poindexter and other black elites forged personalized ties to white community leaders. Generally a method exploited by middle-class blacks, this style ostensibly created benefits for all blacks, but in reality it benefited the elites more than the masses.
Second, the city politicians picked an African-American like Smokey Hobbs, who was tied to criminal organizations and who delivered black votes for the preferred candidate in return for political jobs, protection, or patronage control. Sometimes this class of leader discouraged black voting to minimize black political power.\(^{13}\)

Preston Poindexter, a black barber and minister, led the black community by fashioning personal ties to Columbus' city leaders. Operating from his barbershop, located across the street from the State House, Poindexter met with white political leaders. With a small circle of friends in the black community, Poindexter controlled or influenced allocation of welfare, housing, and political posts. In essence, as a result of these benefits, the black masses viewed the black leaders as legitimate. For this legitimation, black leaders structured their demands within the presumed boundaries of the white elites' parameters.\(^{14}\)


\(^{14}\)The information on Preston Poindexter comes from Curtina Moreland, "The Black Community of Columbus: A Study of the Structure and Pattern of Power in a Midwestern City," (University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, unpublished
The underworld figure Alexander "Smokey" Hobbs led by controlling criminal organizations and a mass of black votes. Hobbs ruled an area of Columbus once known as the "Badlands," a neighborhood where prostitution, saloons, gambling, and other criminal activities flourished. Hobbs himself ran a "combination gymnasium, gambling hall, and opium den" that often catered to whites. In addition, Hobbs provided a variety of services to the black community, including protection from police, funds for bail, and on a more positive note, help finding housing. White leaders gave Hobbs leeway because he controlled and delivered a black votes. Of this relationship one writer concluded, ". . . it was no secret that many politicians stood between Smokey Hobbs and punishment."\(^{15}\)

During this "Golden Era," blacks in Columbus mustered enough political power to elect black city councilmen and

school board members. In addition, many blacks held appointive political posts within government or the party structure. The foundation of this power, however, was weak, for it relied on individual personalities and the exploitation of vices. When Poindexter died in 1907, for example, the black and white communities lost a key mediator. Yet this loss was not a powerful enough force to change the structure of black-white political interactions. Instead, the reform spirit of the Progressive Era altered the foundation of this political relationship and continued to shape it well into the 1940s, along the way propelling African-American social worker Nimrod Allen into a leadership role and creating the basis for links between black organizations and James Rhodes.

Columbus' reformers in the Progressive Era modified black power in two ways. First, in 1912, city leaders revised the city charter, discarding the ward system in favor of at-large, city-wide elections for city council and school board. This amendment checked any black candidate's ability to win elective office and diluted the power of black voters. Second, progressives attacked vices such as gambling, prostitution, and alcohol consumption. The
increased emphasis on urban crime decreased the power of Smokey Hobbs, who was eventually sent to prison.\textsuperscript{16}

After the 1910s, African-Americans blazed a complex, contradictory political path. On one level, in the 1920s, traditional ties to the Republican Party and the lack of a ward system relegated African-Americans to political insignificance. In fact, black committeemen, faced with the threat of lost patronage power, often campaigned against independent black candidates. On a second level, however, during the 1920s and 1930s, economic shifts within the black community and the rise of a nascent political independence contributed to the development of interest group activity. This style of politics, favored by the Columbus Urban League

\begin{quote}
\textsuperscript{16}Himes, "Forty Years of Negro Life in Columbus, Ohio," p. 140. Kilson argues that the kind of political leadership exhibited by people like Smokey Hobbs "reinforced the structural pathologies of lower class urban life" and in the short run stunted political modernization. In the long run, however, this pattern ironically "established, after a fashion, the principle of institutionalized interaction between" urban blacks and the white power structure, a principle white immigrants took for granted. Kilson, "Political Change in the Negro Ghetto," pp. 183-185. On this point Kilson is persuasive concerning the events in Chicago, but the process could not occur in Columbus because these Progressive Era reforms destroyed the organizational foundation on which Kilson's model of modernization takes place.
\end{quote}
and its leader Nimrod Allen, created the lasting organizational structure that linked Rhodes with the black community.

In the 1920s, for the first time in the city's history, clear divisions between the black professional, business, and laboring classes developed. Furthermore, black doctors, lawyers, insurance agents, pharmacists, mortgage companies, and real estate agents served -- almost exclusively -- the burgeoning black population. In addition, black haberdasheries, photographers, beauty parlors, and tailors constituted a growing small business class. In a sense, these developments led to a segregated economy fed by the trickle of southern black migrants, a group of people accustomed to a dual economy. 17

Politically, African-Americans showed signs of independence underneath their traditional attachment to the Republican Party. Columbus blacks, for example, played a significant role in the 1930 Ohio Senate race. They galvanized support to oppose the reelection of Republican Senator Roscoe McCulloch because he voted to confirm President Hoover's United States Supreme Court nominee, John

17Himes, "Forty Years of Negro Life in Columbus, Ohio," pp. 142-144.
J. Parker of North Carolina. The NAACP alleged that Parker held racist views. To spark interest in the issue, the Ohio NAACP organized conferences, rallies, and other meetings. Membership in the Columbus branch of the NAACP rose to over one thousand. The agitation ultimately paid off. Democrat Robert Bulkey defeated McCulloch. Though the Depression and the Prohibition issue contributed to the Republican downfall, the black vote was important. Many of the black wards in Ohio's major cities, Columbus included, voted Democrat by margins of fifty to eighty-six percent or refrained from voting at all, thus denying McCulloch votes he previously took for granted.\(^{18}\)

Though the anti-McCulloch campaign exerted no direct influence on traditional black voting trends in the 1932 Presidential election, voting patterns suggest a growing willingness by African-Americans to desert the Republican Party. In 1932, election results from Columbus' 7th ward, the predominantly black ward, indicate that blacks voted 78.7 percent for Hoover. In 1935, that same ward produced

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60.7 percent for the Republican gubernatorial candidate. In 1936, 54.5 percent of the ward voted for Alf Landon, the Republican candidate for President.\textsuperscript{19}

Columbus' local parties seemed to recognize the potential shift in party allegiance. Tough competition characterized the elections to local offices. A Democrat, for example, held the mayor's office from 1931 to 1935 when a Republican defeated him. In 1939, the Democrats recaptured the office. These political struggles heightened interest in the black vote. Politicians often attended black political rallies and either spoke or made certain organizers introduced them. Usually attending with their wives, they mingled with the crowds and passed out campaign literature.\textsuperscript{20}

The parties also played politics with welfare relief. In the 1935 mayoral campaign, Republican challenger Myron Gessamen charged that the Democrats intimidated voters who were on relief roles, "particularly Negroes in the 6th, 7th, and 8th wards." Specifically, Gessamen claimed that "Negroes on relief have been told by persons representing

\textsuperscript{19}Franklin County Board of Elections, Abstract of Votes, 1935 and 1936, Ohio Historical Society.

\textsuperscript{20}Minor, "The Negro in Columbus," p. 194.
themselves as Democratic workers [that] everything they did in a political way would be watched." Gessamen concluded that the Democrats were playing "politics with misery." On a more positive note, the parties handed out patronage jobs. During the 30s, a greater number of blacks than before held positions ranging from clerk to chairman of the municipal civil service commission, assistant city attorney, assistant clerk of the courts, and positions within both parties' local bureaucratic structure.

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21 Ohio State Journal (Columbus), September 10, 1935, p. 3. Newspaper accounts of the mayoral elections in the 1930s suggest that the candidates thought that welfare relief was the only issue on the black community's collective mind. Given the context of the Depression, this fact is understandable to a certain extent. Yet it suggests something about the limits of these politicians, for Columbus blacks engaged in vocal, public demonstrations concerning segregated public buildings and boycotted local stores that served the black community yet failed to hire many black workers. For information and analysis regarding these actions, see Ralf Koch, "Purchasing Power as a Political Weapon: Black Consumer Boycotts in the USA, 1923-1941," (The Ohio State University: unpublished master's thesis, 1992), esp. pp 29-49 and 77-90. Political scientist James Q. Wilson suggests that when white politicians appeal publicly to blacks, the goal is to attract and hold a segment of the white electorate that will judge the politician on his record on race issues. See Wilson, "Negro Politics in the North," in Harry A Bailey, ed., Negro Politics in America (Charles E. Merrill Books, Inc.: Columbus, OH, 1967) p. 324.

From the late nineteenth century through the 1930s, then, the African-American community created political patterns that linked them to the white power structure, though never in any lasting way. Often these links required the presence of specific individuals or countenanced criminal behavior. Progressive Era political and social reforms, however, cast these existing political structures aside, leading to a period in the 1920s of slowly realized black political independence. This situation contributed to new patterns of voting, so that by the 1930s black allegiance to the Republican Party faltered. During the Depression, unfortunately, this newly acquired flexibility actually fostered a local political culture in which white leaders superficially addressed the black community's concerns and rewarded individual loyalty at the expense of organizations that institutionalized black-white political interaction.

The lack of organizational connections meant that on the eve of the 1940s neither local African-Americans nor white politicians used New Deal political culture to shape Columbus' policies. Yet, the basic element to construct this relationship existed. For ironically the Progressive Era reforms that killed the previous structures, Hobbs'
"machine" and ward-based elections, also provided the spirit that encouraged the rise of this principal component, organized interest group activity. Because of the local racial and political climate, the Columbus Urban League, though far from the only important institution, developed into the key group.

In cities across America, black interest group activity emerged after the failure of "clientage politics," that style of leadership practiced in Columbus by Preston Poindexter. This pattern, dominant in most cities between 1915 and 1930, gained strength from the growth of a black middle class, a process that occurred in Columbus during the 1920s. Furthermore, interest group activity relied on white collar, professional individuals, including social workers, doctors, lawyers, and businessmen, to advance their own needs and by extension the needs of the black community through specialized organization. Two examples are the National Urban League, social workers and sociologists, and the NAACP, lawyers, intellectuals, writers. Though interest group activity served a wider segment of the community than
"clientage politics," it still required influential white patrons for political benefits and, therefore, legitimation.  

In Columbus, the local racial and political climate fostered the Urban League's rise to prominence. Historically, moderation rather than confrontation has characterized black-white relations in Columbus. In part, the stable demographic growth of the black community contributes to this situation, for the black population grew at a steady pace, remained relatively segregated, organized social agencies to combat difficulties connected to southern, rural black migration, and provided no fundamental challenge to the economic and social status quo. As a result, city leaders could afford to appear racially

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23 Kilson, "Political Change in the Negro Ghetto," p. 177. Kilson concludes that this form of politics "depended excessively or uncreatively upon white allies or patrons, thereby short circuiting the process of political modernization within the Negro subsystem." Yet, in Columbus, this style connects African-Americans to the power structure and brings them into the New Deal political order, the modern political culture.
progressive. In the long run, however, this facade served as a peaceful, pragmatic technique to stifle conflict and deflect criticism of the social order.²⁴

In this context, and because of the Progressive Era reforms that limited black political power, Columbus blacks -- despite the variety of responses within the black community -- often --but not always -- veered away from problems concerning public issues, including access to better jobs or political gains. Instead, they emphasized improved city services like better housing, sanitation, and schools to enhance their community. This trend helps to explain the rise to prominence of the Columbus Urban League in the 1920s and 30s. As a social work agency dedicated to uplifting the black community and as a non-confrontational

²⁴This situation is directly opposite of that in many large, industrialized, northern cities. See, for example, Kenneth Kusmer, A Ghetto Takes Shape: Black Cleveland, 1870-1930, in which Kusmer argues that the rapid black migration into that city strained political, economic, and social resources and, thus, caused a sharp rise in institutional racism. In contrast, Greensboro, North Carolina, as explained by William Chaffe, more closely approximates the racial climate in Columbus. Civility, Chaffe argues, "provides a veneer for more oppression" by leaders who "guard power under the guise of sharing it." Chaffe, Civilities and Civil Rights, p. 249.
mediating organization, the CUL addressed both the black community's desires and the city leaders' moderate agenda.  

Thus, the Columbus Urban League was poised to offer organizational links that were, at once, within the bounds of Columbus' political and racial climate and critical to the foundation of New Deal political culture. Yet most Columbus politicians in the 1930s gave only token attention to this social work agency, ignoring its political potential. In fact, the changes in electoral strategies that F.D.R. fostered had little visible impact on Columbus

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25 The process of African-Americans choosing one strategy over another is based on Earl Lewis' account of Norfolk, Virginia. See Lewis, In Their Own Interests. Studies of northern black politics stress the importance of massive migration, heavy industrialization, and rapid urbanization. See, for example, Kilson, "Political Change in the Negro Ghetto;" or Ira Katznelson, Black Men, White Cities: Race, Politics, and Migration in the United States 1900-1930 and Great Britain 1948-68, (Oxford University Press: New York, 1973). Columbus' vastly different experience with those three factors forces the historian to choose a different model than the one cities like Chicago or Detroit provide. One exception to the rule of northern cities is Harold W. Pfautz, "The Power Structure of the Negro Sub-Community: A Case Study and a Comparative View," in Harry Bailey, ed., Negro Politics in America, pp. 101-112. Pfautz, a political scientist, describes the black community in Providence, Rhode Island, a state capitol with light industrialization and a relatively stable demographic pattern. Pfautz concludes that the local Urban League evolved into the key organization acting as a conduit for discussion about race matters. Yet the League failed to press demands not within the established parameters fearing it might lose white support.
in the 1930s. A politician capable of exploiting New Deal political culture was missing. James Rhodes, young and ideologically flexible, filled the vacuum.
PART TWO
RHODES ON THE RISE:
1909-1943

Dean Jauchius, long a Rhodes staff member and confidant, once said of his boss' biographical facts that "[s]ifting legend from fact is some job." Indeed, unverifiable stories and misreporting often characterize published accounts of Rhodes' early years as a boy growing up in Coalton and Springfield, Ohio or as a young man in Columbus. Sometimes, Rhodes' own imprecision contributed to the cloudy view. One can, however, gather these sources and weigh the provable facts so that a clear picture of Rhodes' life up to his mayoral election in 1943 emerges. What we see is that three contradictions shaped his political life. First, Rhodes is a machine politician without the resources or structures normally associated with machine politics. Second, he is at once a creature of organizations and a striving individualist. Third, and finally, he is a new
breed of politician who values political and economic centralization, yet is able to win the loyalty of distinct, localized segments of the electorate. 26

Born September 13th, 1909, Rhodes lived with his parents in Coalton, Ohio, the heart of rural Jackson county's industrial coal mines. His father, James, Sr. had worked in the mines but managed to rise from the shafts into lower level management. Thus, until Rhodes was nine years old, when his father died, the Rhodes family lived in a secure if modest economic environment. As one might expect with the death of the main provider, the one parent, female-led family struggled to make ends meet and, in order to pursue job opportunity elsewhere, moved to Springfield, Ohio. 27


27 Some confusion exists about the timing and nature of Rhodes' father's death. Current Biography (1976) suggests that a mine shaft accident killed the father when Rhodes was seven (p. 336). Tom Dudgeon, in Ohio Governor of the Century: James A Rhodes, Ohio Governor, 1963-1971 and 1975-1983 (Ohio Editorial Enterprise: Columbus, OH, 1991) writes that the flu claimed the father's life when Rhodes was nine (p. ). Concerning the family's move to Springfield, Gary Zimmerman, a journalist, claims that the Rhodes' moved "when it appeared
For the historian, two observations regarding the early part of Rhodes' life are important. First, Rhodes credits his Coalton days for forming his party affiliation. Not only was Rhodes' father a Republican precinct committeemen, but also the family hero, as Rhodes remembers, was John L. Lewis. Like Rhodes' father, Lewis had risen from the depths of the coal mines into management, though of a union and not into the business side of coalmining. As Rhodes told his associate Dean Jauchius, "... Lewis was a Republican. So my parents followed him."\(^{28}\)

The second observation concerns the role Rhodes' early family life played in shaping his political ideology and authorities were prepared to place the Rhodes' children in a county home." Zimmerman, however, offers no documentation to back this assertion. See Zimmerman, "Rhodes' First Eight Years, 1963-1971," p. 60.

style. In Springfield, Rhodes took a series of odd jobs to help his family financially. From the age of ten, Rhodes worked variously as a janitor, newspaper boy, caddy, and clerk in a men's clothing store. Rhodes' high school principal once recalled that James, or "Dusty" as his friends called him, was a "very popular, active school citizen . . . he was a real promoter" who often "booked bands" and was "always hustling to make a buck." Also, Rhodes excelled at various athletic activities. Combined with the fact that Rhodes was never a good student, these jobs and athletic interests conspired against Rhodes, keeping him from graduating high school in a timely fashion.29

29 Rhodes graduated, at his mother's insistence, from high school at age twenty. In 1932, the family moved to Columbus so that Rhodes could attend Ohio State University. Some sources report that Rhodes sold some family jewelry and his set of golf clubs to pay for tuition while another source claims he earned a basketball scholarship. In any case, Rhodes performed poorly, receiving "Ds" in English and geography while failing hygiene, physical education, and military science. While the record shows Rhodes dropped for financial reasons, his version was that his mother had been diagnosed with cancer, so he withdrew to tend to her needs. On Rhodes' early jobs, see Current Biography (1976) p. 336. The principal's recollections and Rhodes' reasons for quitting college are from Zimmerman, "Rhodes' First Eight Years," p. 60. On Rhodes' academic performance, see Gary Zimmerman, "File Bares OSU Career of Rhodes," Cleveland Plain Dealer, October 26, 1969.
These events are important because his experiences growing up taught him to scrap for what he wanted, to take any job while he searched for something bigger. More importantly, his struggle, and his family's, encouraged in him a blending of political and private life. As he matured politically, he understood -- instinctively, not intellectually -- that a politician should service the needs of the family first. This element, the core of his personalized political style, makes him comparable to the bosses who ran the big city machines. Yet Rhodes perfected this boss-like approach in Columbus, a city without the traditional parts of the machine. Columbus possessed neither a strong ward system, nor the teeming masses of immigrants that animated the machine.\textsuperscript{30}

Thus, the jobs he held, the political posts he sought, and the organizations he formed not only cultivated this style, but also reflect Rhodes as a striving individualist who nevertheless built organizations that facilitated consensus and diminished the possibility of conflict. Rhodes could centralize decision making while still servicing distinct segments of his constituency, that, in the end, helped him win elections. His political posts, for example, show a young man quickly rising from ward committeeman in 1933 to mayor by 1943. Along the way, Rhodes in 1935 served as Director of the League of Young Republicans Clubs of Ohio. By 1937 the Franklin County Republican Central Committee appointed him public relations director. In 1938, Columbus voters elected Rhodes to the school board, from which he moved to the city auditor's office in 1939. In 1943, Rhodes successfully ran for mayor at age thirty four.31

Just as important as these political posts are the organizations and business he started. In 1934, for example, Rhodes founded for boys and girls the "Knot Hole Gang," which sponsored trips to local athletic events and formed competitive athletic leagues. The importance of this particular organization is not that Rhodes was simply a good citizen for starting it, or, on the other hand, that Rhodes cynically built a civic organization so that grateful parents would vote for him, though an undeniable benefit. Instead, Rhodes' youth-oriented activity is significant because it represents one aspect of his machine boss approach and because it connected him to the broader city electorate, including, especially, blacks. Rhodes believed recreational opportunities afforded him as a boy had helped instill values and a sense of achievement, concepts normally considered private, but certainly well within the bounds of a politician who took "for granted that the political life of the individual" arose "out of family needs."  

32 In fact, nationally, the 1930s represented a time when the concern for children became increasingly political. With governmental and business leaders concerned about chronic unemployment and fascism rising in Europe, governmental programs, the NYA in particular, attempted to teach citizenship and provide job training, in hopes of delaying young people's entry into the job market. See Richard Reiman, The New Deal and American Youth: Ideas and Ideals in a Depression Decade (University of Georgia Press: Athens, GA)
Another important organization Rhodes started was the University City, organized in 1938. One newspaper article in the Ohio State Journal described this group as a "community trading association" and a "progressive organization formed by businessmen." The group assembled to ensure "better cooperation, understanding each other's problems, [and to] eliminate clannishness and concentrate on major issues." A Columbus Dispatch article suggested that the purpose of the group was to "consolidate the efforts of various civic organizations in Columbus and to map a program of civic betterment." Rhodes was clearly the driving force behind this action. The members, in fact, chose Rhodes as "mayor." Rhodes accepted, explaining that he was "perhaps inexperienced, but a young man with lots of energy and willing to work."

Original members of the group included men who owned small businesses or headed small business associations around Columbus. A list of members indicates that two dentists, one jeweler, one tailor, two publishers of neighborhood newspapers, at least one grocer, and the president of an African-American businessman's organization...
attended the initial meeting. This list is important for two reasons. First, it demonstrates Rhodes acting within the context of an organization, centralizing agendas, building consensus; yet it also shows Rhodes as a striving individual, as someone willing to exploit an organization, to shape it so that it will act as his vehicle to success. Second, the membership list shows the foundation for Rhodes' successful coalition. He began by cultivating organizational support from small businessmen scattered throughout the city, businessmen who were not in the same social, economic, and political circles as the bank owners, corporate managers, and large communication concerns like the Dispatch. This situation required that Rhodes organize a racially, religiously, and geographically segmented group of people. 33

33 The facts concerning the founding of University City come from two newspaper articles. See "New Community Group Organized," Ohio State Journal, August 5, 1938, section 3, p. 4 and The Columbus Dispatch, August 5, 1938, p. 10B. Current Biography (1948) described University City as a "welfare organization," yet at this point it is unclear in what way this group provided welfare. For example, University City's first function was a testimonial dinner for the groundskeeper at OSU's Ohio Stadium. Governor Bricker attended this function, in which the groundskeeper, Tony Aquilla, was presented with a gold watch. The O.S.J. generously pointed out that "The bewildered Aquilla smiled happily and in his best Italian accent claimed that, "dats just what I been lookin' for" and then "stammered out a 'tanks' to all present." "Tony Showered with Gifts," Ohio State Journal,
Rhodes fit into this group of small businessmen because he owned his own restaurant, "Jim's Place," located across from the Ohio State University campus. In addition, Rhodes continued to book bands and other entertainment acts. Thus Rhodes continued the pattern of hustling, cajoling, scraping, promoting that started in Springfield. More importantly, these activities forced Rhodes to hone his organizational skills and his ability to attract and satisfy an audience, an excellent crucible in which to forge political skills. 34

In conclusion, three contradictions frame Rhodes' political life in Columbus. He was a boss, yet he lived in a city without a machine. He was a small businessman and entrepreneur who sought organizational support and political power from associations, at once a creature of organizations and a striving individualist. He was a politician who centralized power while he melded an array of distinct groups. The death of his father, growing up in relative

January 25, 1939. section 1, p. 11.

34Richard Zimmerman reports that some of Rhodes' contemporaries alleged that one could also rent pornographic films and place bets at Rhodes' restaurant, "Jim's Place," though he concedes that no concrete evidence exists. Zimmerman, "Rhodes' First Eight Years," p. 61 and 353, n5.

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poverty, and the way Rhodes responded to these situations contributed to the development of his political philosophy and practice. Thus, Rhodes' particular political philosophy and practices converged with the political demands of the black community in the 1940s. This moment in time, in turn, created a climate where a young, pragmatic, shrewd politician from rural Ohio attracted the black urban vote in three straight mayoral elections.
In 1953, Nimrod Allen, director of the Columbus Urban League from 1921 to 1954, corresponded with two acquaintances, George Anderson, an African-American newspaper publisher who lived in Anchorage, Alaska and Robert Tucker, a caucasian minister who lived in New Haven, Connecticut. In one letter, Tucker, a Democrat, teased Allen, saying "I'll bet you voted for Eisenhower!" In a second letter, Anderson, a Republican, noted to his Columbus friend that "You may be a Democrat." Oddly, Allen's friends were both right. For the political behavior of Allen and the black community in Columbus in general suggests that the shift in black voters' loyalty from the party of Lincoln to the party of F.D.R. occurred neither uniformly nor monolithically. In fact, political and economic differences across the country contributed to variations in this critical electoral watershed. In Columbus between 1943 and 1951, for example, the emergence of a New Deal Republican,
James Rhodes, and the political inclinations of local African-Americans challenged the timing and nature of the transition. Rhodes' political style and policy agenda converged with the interests and methods of the black community, facilitating a mutually beneficial alliance. Both Rhodes and blacks advocated policies that centered on themes of strengthening the home and the community and embraced a new political style based on pluralism and organizational activity.\(^{35}\)

\(^{35}\) Letter from Robert Tucker to Nimrod Allen, dated January 3, 1953 and George Anderson to Allen, dated June 16th, 1953, The Nimrod Allen Papers, MSS 594, box 1, folder 5, Ohio Historical Society. Interestingly, both Tucker and Anderson assumed Allen voted for the opposite party and felt compelled to defend their votes to the respected if circumspect Allen. Tucker argued that Adlai Stevenson was one of the greatest statesmen in our history while Anderson observed that he could not vote Democratic because "all of the white Democrats in this section are Texans and Louisianans and other Southerners." In 1954, Allen campaigned for Ohio politicians Democrat Frank Lausche and Republican John Vorys. See Nimrod Allen papers, letter from Allen to Lausche, dated November 3, 1954, and Allen to Vorys, dated November 4, 1954, box 1, folder six. William Grimshaw, Bitter Fruit, argues that two black voting patterns in Chicago developed in the 1940s: "black voting in presidential elections followed one course" and "black voting in mayoral and aldermanic elections followed another" with blacks making clear distinctions between the national and local Democratic Party (pgs. 40-41). See chapters 3-5 for his details on these patterns. This thesis finds that Columbus' blacks began making distinction between the national and local parties as early as the late 1920s. By the 1940s, they voted Republican locally while they lamented the condition of the national Republican Party. In essence, local blacks wished they could vote for the party of Lincoln but voted for F.D.R. So in each city, Columbus and
Rhodes used the New Deal culture to win mayoral elections in 1943, 1947, and 1951. In the 1943 contest, Rhodes and other Republican candidates fought a tough campaign to reclaim the mayor's office and city council for the Republican Party. They charged in speech after speech that Rhodes' opponent, county Sheriff Jacob Sandusky, engaged in shady business dealings with gamblers, ran a corrupt office, and owed debts that might compromise his performance as mayor. Sandusky never managed to squash rumors of financial impropriety and corruption. In return, Sandusky offered his best shot, asserting that Rhodes was a "reckless young demagogue who owns no property."  

In fact, Rhodes, only thirty-four, was young. One local newspaper, the *Ohio State Journal*, even ran an editorial cartoon depicting a boy sitting behind the mayor's desk in city hall. All of the telephone wires connected to the *Columbus Dispatch* telephones across the street, implying the youthful Rhodes served only the *Dispatch*’s interests. And Rhodes' aggressively genial, energetic, working man's  

Chicago, ticket splitting in the 1940s was the norm, yet with important variations in timing and causes.  

*Ohio State Journal* (Columbus), October 29, 1943, pp. 1 and 8; and October 28, 1943, pp. 1 and 9.
personality, though a breath of fresh air to some voters, must have reminded some Columbusites of another demagogue, Huey Long. But Rhodes owned property, the restaurant he started with the help of Grant Ward, a state legislator from Jackson County.³

More importantly, however, many citizens ignored the claim that Rhodes was reckless, for in the 1943 election, Rhodes received 59.3 percent of the total vote. Combined with his quick rise in local politics, from ward committeeman in 1933 to mayor in 1943, this victory established Rhodes as an emerging political force. His success in this election resulted not solely from his association with the Dispatch owners. Rather, Rhodes' initial power base was small businessmen scattered throughout the city, businessmen of both races and both political parties whose friendship and political support Rhodes cultivated beginning with the establishment of University City in 1938. In 1947, Rhodes won again, gaining 58.6 percent of the total vote, sweeping fourteen of nineteen wards, and becoming the first reelected mayor since 1927. Clearly, this election cemented his reputation as a

³For the editorial cartoon, see the Ohio State Journal (Columbus), October 1943.
politician not to be dismissed as young and reckless because in 1951, during Rhodes' third and final campaign for mayor, the Democrats failed to field a candidate. Instead, a renegade Republican ran against Rhodes in the non-partisan election. The "boy mayor," as people called him, won sixty-four percent of all votes cast. 4

Throughout these three campaigns, Rhodes won the four black wards with a significant black population ten out of twelve times. 5 These wards, six, seven, eight, and thirteen, provided a solid percentage of the black vote. What accounts for this support? One possible explanation is the lack of a viable Democratic opponent. Rhodes' hardest campaign came against Sheriff Sandusky in 1943, a sheriff who failed to squelch rumors of personal corruption. In addition, in the month before the election, the Democratic mayor and city council ran out of money and could not pay for garbage collection. Not surprisingly, Rhodes promised


5 The election results are from the Franklin County Board of Elections, Abstract of Votes, 1943, 1947, and 1951, Ohio Historical Society. The identification of the black wards is from Richard Minor, "The Negro in Columbus," (The Ohio State University, unpublished dissertation, 1936) and from the black newspaper in Columbus, The Ohio State News.
to make sound the city's finances and provide regular garbage collection. In 1947, the Democrats offered only token opposition. In 1951, they gave up early, failing to nominate anyone to take on the popular mayor.

But the inability of the Democrats to find a capable challenger is a testament less to Democratic incompetence and more to Rhodes' political skills. This fact is especially apparent when considering the trends in black Columbus' voting. In the 1944 Presidential election, for example, all four black wards registered more Republicans than Democrats in the primary, but voted overwhelmingly for Roosevelt and the Democratic candidate for governor. This pattern of registering as Republicans but voting Democratic for statewide and national offices continued in 1948. In 1950 and 1952, furthermore, African-Americans in Columbus voted for Democratic candidates for Governor, United States Senator, and President. Yet in each of Rhodes' mayoral campaigns, blacks heavily supported the young Republican. Local Democrats should have captured the black vote, but failed.

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So what did Rhodes offer? What encouraged African-Americans to split their tickets? The agenda of social uplift and urban renewal formulated by the Columbus Urban League found its most articulate expression by any candidate in Rhodes. Thus, African-American support of Rhodes represented the convergence of black interest group organization with Rhodes' own political style and ideology. During the 1943 campaign, for example, Rhodes called for the creation of a civic welfare group, which included "representatives of the Ministerial Association, the Catholic diocese, the Jewish welfare group, the PTA, the Council of Social Agencies, organized labor, the Chamber of Commerce," and other relevant agencies. The purpose of the committee was to help solve social problems by clearing slums and creating better housing. Significantly, this proposed group represented a vast array of specialized interests from the entire community. In other speeches, Rhodes outlined his platform for his first four years, addressing, in particular, curbing juvenile delinquency, providing adequate recreational facilities, and "planning for a post war program that includes essential things as slum clearance and better housing . . ." The Urban League
had advocated all of these issues since its inception, but, for the most part, no previous mayor or candidate fully adopted the Leagues' themes.\textsuperscript{7}

In 1947, Rhodes appealed directly to the African-American community through the local black newspaper, \textit{The Ohio State News}. Liberal in its political slant and outspoken on racial issues, the \textit{News} strongly endorsed Rhodes. In one full page editorial, the editor, Llwellen Coles, stressed the positive steps the Rhodes administration had taken, especially in social areas like increasing and improving recreational facilities. One week later, a Rhodes political advertisement stressed similar themes and used language comparable to the earlier editorial. "Columbus," Rhodes claimed, "is a group of neighborhoods each with its own individual character and special needs. Your neighborhood is one of them... These [needs] include housing, good schools, transportation, slum clearance, better garbage collection, improved street lighting, and other important services." None of Rhodes' opponents placed ads in this newspaper. Clearly, though, Rhodes spoke to a distinct segment of Columbus yet drew in the entire

\textsuperscript{7}Ohio State Journal (Columbus), October 30, 1943, p. 1; Columbus Dispatch (Columbus), October 31, 1943, p. 1.
community by calling for the creation of a centralized organization to address these concerns. Most importantly, however, Rhodes' agenda included classic urban political boss concerns with the improvement of infrastructure and the delivery of city services that centered on the needs of the family.\(^8\)

The political and social climate of the 1940s helped Rhodes connect his philosophy to the wider Columbus constituency. Though Rhodes had long favored youth programs and recreational opportunities as a way to combat juvenile delinquency, homefront exigencies created by World War Two brought this particular concern to the fore. During the forties, many people across the nation blamed the war as the cause of an increase in juvenile delinquency. In Columbus, one city council candidate in 1943, for example, pointed to the war and asserted something - what he did not say - should be done about stopping increasing crime. In

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\(^8\)Ohio State News (Columbus), October 11, 1947, p. 4; Ohio State News (Columbus), October 18, 1947, p. 5. The News began publishing in 1935 and ran until 1952, though the Ohio Historical Society collection begins in March 1944.
addition, a *Columbus Dispatch* editorial argued that the violent psychology of the war environment coupled with a lack of parental supervision caused delinquency.⁹

The black community forcefully expressed ideas on this issue as well. In one letter to the editor in the *Ohio State News*, for example, a reader pleaded to blacks not to allow youth to wander aimlessly. He claimed that one group formed an organization to create recreation opportunities, but that it met with indifference. The letter writer blamed the lack of interest on the falling "axe of an uninterested, penny snatching, war inflated community." The struggling group represented, to the writer, "an all out effort to combat delinquency of our youth." An editorial in that same issue lauded the "cracking of the notorious 'Bottom Gang.'" The editorialist was relieved, but contended that this "simply proves again that juvenile misconduct and delinquency is a number one problem" and suggested that "activities must be developed which can successfully compete with the bottom gangs, but which lead into desirable results." A *News* columnist claimed that these problems began with Pearl Harbor. He was contradicted, however, by a

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⁹*The Columbus Dispatch* (Columbus), October 26, 1943, p. 3; *The Columbus Dispatch*, October 9, 1943, p. 4.
later article that asserted that crime among black youth had not increased since the war, but was nonetheless still a problem. The writer of the article blamed delinquency on black southern migrants who had trouble adjusting socially and could not find appropriate housing. The journalist, furthermore, cited recreational opportunities, social gathering places, and the work of the Columbus Urban League's Youth Department as effective methods to attack these problems.\(^{10}\)

The social and political climate of 1940s Columbus, therefore, allowed Rhodes to express his longstanding interest in youth and recreation. He easily and genuinely embraced this issue; thus, his philosophy converged with the Columbus Urban League's agenda, an agenda that had developed since the 1930s. In 1933, for example, League board member Reverend Siegenthaler mentioned in an executive meeting a "carefully conducted study" by the Boy Scout movement and the Ohio State Sociology Department. According

to Siegenthaler, this study demonstrated that juvenile
delinquency was highest in "sections where there are no
playgrounds or social centers, and where public amusements
are most to be found." Siegenthaler then advised that the
scouting program could "build confidence, friendliness, and
strength of character among our Negro boys and girls" and
that the League should "investigate the public amusement
places and study the effect upon the character and life of
the youth, investigating public dance halls, picture shows,
pool rooms, and the like." 11

11Columbus Urban League papers, MSS 146, box 12, folder
1, Ohio Historical Society. Siegenthaler referred to only one
of several studies written between the 1920s and 1940s on
recreation in Columbus. See, for example, Richard C. Minor,
"Negro Recreation in Columbus, Ohio," (unpublished master's
thesis: The Ohio State University, 1926); Wilbur Batchelor,
et al., A Report on a Study of Public Recreation in Columbus,
Ohio, 1938, (Council of Social Agencies of Columbus and
Franklin County, Ohio: Columbus, OH, 1939[?]); Lewis
Lumbard, "Negro Recreation," (unpublished master's thesis:
The Ohio State University, 1948); Clifford C. King,
"Facilities for Municipal Recreation in Columbus, Ohio,"
(unpublished master's thesis: The Ohio State University,
1938); William N. Thomas, "Various Social Aspects of
Municipal Recreation in Columbus," (unpublished master's
thesis: The Ohio State University, 1937); Community Chest
of Columbus and Franklin County, Research Department, Some
Went to Camp: From Columbus and Franklin County, 1948,
(Council of Social Agencies: Columbus, OH, 1948) Hibbard
Lamkin, "An Analysis of Municipal Recreation Centers and the
Community Use of Schools in Columbus, Ohio," (unpublished
master's thesis: The Ohio State University, 1939); Council
Of Social Agencies, Columbus, Ohio; Recreation and Youth
Services Council, A Survey of the Private Recreation and youth
Services Agencies of Columbus and Franklin County, (n.p.:
To the League, organizing the youth of Columbus meant reaching the adults of Columbus. Eva Warfield, the secretary of the League's Neighborhood Committee, pointed out this fact in her summaries of meetings with local settlement house directors. For example, in one meeting, with Miss Lawton of the Southside Settlement House, Lawton proposed that "by reaching the children the parents are later reached." In another meeting, with a Mr. Wheeler of the Godman Guild, Wheeler asserted "that the best way to reach adults is through the juvenile group. This seemed a very concrete way to interest adults: the organization of several juvenile groups; later reaching the parents through children." Warfield then noted without comment Wheeler's suggestion that one should "not let church and political interests enter the clubs . . ." According to Warfield, "it had been [Wheeler's] observation that the Negro is too religious and political conscious." Though he certainly
would have scoffed at Wheeler's priggish commentary, Rhodes, no doubt, agreed that by organizing youth he could reach the voting parents.  

In fact, in later years, advisors who surrounded Rhodes also recognized the potential political benefits of an organized and well functioning recreational system. Ray Dietz, Superintendent of Columbus' Division of Parks and Forestry, for example, wrote to Rhodes that "Good Parks and Recreation areas are an advertisement and create good feelings toward" the mayor. Dietz also attached an editorial written by the President of the National Recreation Association which Dietz claimed emphasized further "the need for a revision of the present set up for parks" in Columbus. The editorial celebrated the positive role of parks in the development of the American city but also suggested in a key paragraph that men in the past donated their land to the public for the creation of public parks. The writer then claimed that "for a thousand years others will sit in the same park and in his name enjoy the same kind of scenes that gave him pleasure." Furthermore, and most significantly, "the park has given him immortality.

12 Summaries of meetings, October 20 and 22, 1930, Columbus Urban League papers, MSS 146, box 12, folder 2, OHS.
He has a memorial not in the cemetery but among the living men and women and boys and girls. Twice blessed, yes, many times blessed, is the man who gives a public park." Dietz clearly framed his appeal to Rhodes in terms Rhodes understood: the political value of well run city services to an ambitious politician who would soon seek statewide office.¹³

In the meantime, in the 1940s, the League's youth work continued. In May 1944, the Recreation Committee reported about its meeting with the city's head of the Department of Recreation. The Committee attempted to determine the city's attitude toward building new playgrounds for children. Mr. Barack, the head of the city's department, said that the need was there, that gangs flourished where recreational opportunities lacked, and that "if given an opportunity to play and physically express themselves according to good moral behavior standards, the boys and girls would prove to be fine specimens of boyhood and girlhood." Later, in October of 1945, the League's Community and Neighborhood Department offered a description of its goals and methods.

¹³Letter from Ray S. Dietz to Rhodes, dated July 7, 1951, The Ohio State University Archives, Charles Sutton Collection (Spec. Reg. 40.125), box 1, "Columbus Committee on Parks, 1934-1951."
This department attempted "to direct leisure time activity into constructive channels and to provide a counter attraction to demoralizing forms of recreation." Furthermore, they believed that "desirable modes of thought and behavior are adopted more readily by individuals in his group" and that they could lay "a foundation for responsible citizenship by encouraged participation in self-regulated groups." Both Barack and the League believed that planned recreation and organized groups contributed to a civil society. Because Rhodes supported the CUL's policy on recreation and embraced a pluralist view of society, he plugged, temporarily, the exit in the Republican Party through which African-Americans streamed toward the Democratic Party.¹⁴

If Rhodes' commitment to organized youth activity and urban renewal attracted the black community's support, then once in office Rhodes continued to attend to those political demands that stemmed from the needs of the family. In March of 1944, for example, Rhodes and his Safety Director Charles C. Cole fired a city police officer for stealing money from a black inmate. Russell Jackson, a columnist for the News,

¹⁴CUL papers, MSS 146, box 13, folder 27, OHS.
lauded Rhodes for combatting "the thugs and other dishonest characters who have been riding rough shod over Negro citizens of Columbus in the past, and with a near absolute immunity." Jackson believed that "up to the time that James Rhodes became mayor of Columbus the town was becoming more corrupt with each passing second" and he commended Rhodes for opposing "a crooked copper." 15

While Rhodes won praise for trying to protect African-Americans citizens from "crooked coppers," the mayor also garnered applause for attacking vice on the eastside of Columbus, the section of town with the highest concentration of the black population. Throughout the first five months of his initial mayoral term, Rhodes' police force raided several gambling establishments and prostitution houses. The News praised the Rhodes administration for "enforcing laws against vice, delinquency, gambling, and the like," as opposed to previous years when "the officials downtown thought it did not matter

very much what went on in the East End. It had got to the
place where nobody was safe in that section, even in his own
home."  

In other areas of city services, Rhodes' first
administration cleared garbage from sections of the eastside
where no trash pick-up had occurred for twelve years. An
article in the News claimed that the clearing of just two
streets took two days. Moreover, Rhodes chose Dr. W.C.
Anderson, an African-American, as Superintendent of
Sanitation. Thus, the issues most salient to the News and
the black community concerned the safety and health
conditions of their neighborhoods, issues that reflect
themes of strengthening the home and community. Rhodes not
only executed policy decisions to address these concerns,
but also made symbolic appointments, Dr. Anderson, with
substance behind the political opportunism.  

Anderson proved to be a useful link between the black
community and the Rhodes administration, for Anderson was
also a member of the Frontiers Club, a service organization

16 ibid, May 20, 1944, p. 7 (microfilm edition, OHS, roll
00164, frame 164).

17 ibid, May 13, 1944, p. 21 (microfilm edition, OHS, roll
00164, frame 156); ibid, May 20, 1944, p. 4 (microfilm
edition, OHS, roll 00164, frame 162).
consisting solely of black businessmen and professionals. This club, a national group founded in Columbus by Nimrod Allen, acted not only to provide leadership within the black community, but also to lobby city leaders and advocate certain public policies beneficial to blacks. In April of 1945, for example, a committee of Frontiersmen headed by Anderson met with Rhodes regarding his film project, a movie meant to advertise the city to prospective businesses. ¹⁸

The Club wanted to know to what extent African-Americans would be represented in the picture. Anderson reported that the committee told Rhodes that "we as Frontiersmen wanted to be a part of anything civically going on in the city" and that "we did not come for protest." The committee emphasized that they wanted some aspects of the African-American community depicted "so when we see the picture we will know" it, but do not "designate it as Negro." From the reports of this meeting, it is clear Rhodes felt some pressure from other organizations, for the

¹⁸In debating what kind of community service the club would offer, one member suggested giving a scholarship to a young woman studying medicine at Ohio State, but another member asserted that "it would be perhaps far more reaching, since the club wants to do something civic, to do something for youngsters about playgrounds." Meeting Minutes, Frontiers Club, dated April 3, 1945, Nimrod Allen Papers, MSS 594, Ohio Historical Society, box 4, folder 12.
Frontiersmen reiterated several times that they "were a constructive group" who wanted to contribute, not complain. At one point, Anderson related that the Mayor said, "There is one group always in [here] on [my] neck about the picture and that is the Junior Chamber of Commerce." In the end, though, Rhodes proposed that he would show the film to the Frontiers. Afterward, the members evaluated the meeting. One committeeman, Mr. Nix, left with "mingled feelings," but believed "we did some good by the fact that they know we are on our toes as a group in the city." Nix further recommended that somebody should find the man writing the script to the movie and "guide [him]. I'm wondering whether this man knows where to go or not." Anderson took responsibility to find the man "and get acquainted with him" and then reassured his fellow Frontiersmen that this film was the mayor's project "and nothing will go in the picture to hurt Columbus." These interactions show that Nix felt compelled to prove that blacks constituted an articulate and organized group who actively sought to influence policy,

that Rhodes was willing to cooperate with blacks, and that Anderson provided a mediating link between Rhodes and blacks, someone with an insider's perspective on the agenda of both blacks and politicians.

On two other occasions, the Frontiers Club played a role in developing public policy. In one instance, in May of 1945, the Frontiers considered a request from Lester Merica, Police Chief of Columbus. Merica asked that the club donate money to help finance the Columbus Junior Police, an association established to combat "the growing problem of delinquency among teenage boys." The Chief explained that "Your organization has been recommended as one which is interested in helping worthy youth movements" and that the Junior Police "is all inclusive numbering in its personnel boys of all races, creeds, and nationality." The Frontiersmen approved the request, indicating each member could give whatever he wished in the name of the Club. In a second instance, they lobbied for the rebuilding of an eastside market. "Because of the apparent hesitancy of the city" on this issue, the Club decided "it would be necessary to organize and bring pressure to bear on city authorities. The Frontiers then instructed their Committee on Public Affairs, "with the addition of Dr. Anderson for
this particular project," to represent the club at City Hall, and also that the club enlist the cooperation of other civic minded organizations in an effort" to replace the market.²⁰ The Frontiers added Anderson less for his expertise on economic matters and more for his personal connection to Rhodes. More importantly, Rhodes' agenda of urban renewal and youth activity intersected with the black community's interests.

For the most part, Rhodes successfully dealt with the black community's concerns throughout his tenure as Mayor even though a few disappointments marred the record. The Lexington Avenue Neighborhood Group, for example, met with Rhodes on several occasions to discuss the poor condition of the Lexington Avenue park. The Group, affiliated with the Columbus Urban League, wanted the city to mow the grass and post a sign forbidding kids from playing football there. In October of 1945 the committee reported to the Urban League that they encountered unfriendly attitudes at City Hall. Even Rhodes, a normally gregarious person, greeted the group

in a "rather blustery" fashion. At first Rhodes insisted that the only thing the group could do was file a police report, but in the end he conceded that the "park is a beauty spot, that the boys using it as a playground make it unsightly," and that it "does depreciate the value of the property owners" who live in that area. Rhodes further offered to place a sign and instruct the police to watch the park. The members of the group related that they were "not too optimistic as to the carrying out of the mayor's plan."

In November of 1945, the Lexington Avenue residents believed that since the war was over, "there would be more manpower released and our difficulty of the past two years would be over." They hoped to get public officials interested now so that the park would be ready by spring. In October of 1946, however, the group told the League that "every effort had been put forth" with the Park Superintendent and Mayor Rhodes to get them to uphold their "promise in keeping the park up, but every effort failed." In a fit of frustration, Rhodes finally snapped that if "they listen to every request
that was made to him by neighborhood groups, they would not have time to do the big things the city was supposed to do."

A second area of disappointment concerned the lack of black police detectives. Publicly, the News chastised fellow African-Americans who blamed Rhodes for this situation. In June of 1944, one columnist, for example, proposed that the dearth of black officers was not because of racism. Instead, blacks, the writer thought, came up short on the fairly graded exams. "Backbiting the current administration for one's own shortcomings," he argued, "serves only to waste other people's valuable time."

Privately, however, the Frontiers Club wanted Rhodes to explain why no blacks had reached the rank of detective. Again, Dr. W.C. Anderson introduced Rhodes to the group. The mayor brought Police Chief Lester Merica and Service Director Cole to answer questions, but the only remaining comments from this meeting belong to Rhodes. He concluded, saying "the good people of the city want the government placed on a firm and sound financial basis, the streets and

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21 Meeting Minutes, Neighborhood Department, dated October 9, 1945, November 13, 1945, and October 8, 1946, Columbus Urban League Papers, MSS 146, OHS, box 13, folder 28.
alleys kept in a healthful condition and the community cleared of all vice and gambling." Clearly, promotion of African-Americans at this time was not a high priority to Rhodes. In September of 1952, though, Rhodes appointed Harvey C. Alston to the position of Captain, the first African-American in Columbus to attain that rank.22

A third area of disappointment concerned the inability of blacks to win a seat on the city council. On June third, 1944, two vacancies on the council opened. The News advocated that W.S. Lyman, a black attorney from the east end, fill one of the spots. This side of town, the News claimed, needed representation and, then, to apply pressure to the Mayor, suggested that the Franklin County Republican Party chairman and Rhodes were "expected to wield great influence in the filling of the vacancies." Two weeks later, after a local druggist filled one of the positions, a News columnist reviewed the history of black service on the council, noting at least twenty-five years had passed since the last black councilman. The writer blamed the dry spell

22 *Ohio State News*, June 17, 1944, p. 7 (microfilm edition, OHS, roll 00164, frame 228); *ibid*, August 5, 1944, p. 3 (microfilm edition, OHS, roll 00164, frame 338); Rhodes spoke at the Frontiers' ceremony honoring Alston. See Ceremony Program, dated September 27, 1952, Nimrod Allen Papers, MSS 594, box 4, folder 19, OHS.
on the advent of city wide elections and proposed that nominating an African-American "would represent a master political stroke" that would cement the Republican majority "for a longer period than some politicians might dream." Through the News, the black community let Rhodes know that African-Americans believed he should appoint a black, that he possessed the power to accomplish that task, and that he would serve his own political ambitions by doing so.

But within one week, something changed, for the paper stopped mentioning Rhodes in their articles on the council vacancy. One editorial, on June 24, reasserted the opinion that appointing an African-American "would be a brilliant stroke of political strategy," but submitted that only the city council played a role in this process. Then on July first, the News reported that a black man was not chosen for the one remaining position. Whom did the paper blame? Rhodes' name had not appeared in conjunction with this issue since the original article at the beginning of June. Instead, the News held the Republican county chairman and the Republican members of city council accountable. In less

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23 Ohio State News, June 3, 1944, p. 2 (microfilm edition, OHS, roll 00164, frame 194); ibid, June 17, 1944, p. 7 (microfilm edition, OHS, roll 00164, frame 228).
than a month and with the help of the News, the young but shrewd Rhodes moved from wielding great influence to invisibility.  

If Rhodes brought to this political relationship with black Columbus a friendly if forceful personality and an ideology forged in experience and tempered by instincts, what did local African-Americans supply? What accounts for this excellent editorial and electoral relationship? In the aftermath of the abortive attempt to gain a city council seat for the eastside, a News reporter proposed that "Negro citizens will never see one of their own serving in the Columbus city council until" they "make their voting so fluid and unpredictable," that they cause "a constant headache for candidates and bosses in both our major parties." The writer was only partly right. Blacks did vote solidly for Rhodes in three straight elections, although the News journalist could not have known this when he wrote the article in 1944. But African-Americans in Columbus had, in fact, over the last fifteen years broken the traditional bond with the Republican Party at the local,

\[\text{\textsuperscript{24}ibid, July 1, 1944, p. 8 (microfilm edition, OHS, roll 00164, frame 260).}\]
state, and national level. To complicate matters, many blacks registered Republican in primaries, but voted Democratic in general elections.\textsuperscript{25}

So the solution for political efficacy was not merely in splitting their ticket. Rather, blacks in Columbus modernized politically when they shifted their focus from individual action to organizational strength. The Progressive Era provided the wellsprings for the organizational impetus, for the Columbus Urban League, the quintessential progressive group, helped shape the policy agenda and political methodology of black Columbus. Dependent on the ascendancy of Rhodes, however, this revolution in black political culture failed to mature until the 1940s.

Observers of black Columbus in that key decade noticed this transition. Hardly a smooth shift, it contributed to a brief but intense flirtation in 1944 with nominal Republican Wendell Willkie. When it became apparent that Willkie would not vie for the Republican nomination for President in 1944, the News and its writers expressed their disappointment. Columnist Russell Jackson was "alarmed because with Willkie

\textsuperscript{25}ibid.
out of the race the Republican party hasn't one outright liberal aspirant with his hat in the ring." Jackson then reflected on the remaining candidates. "Wrong John Bricker" of Ohio was an "old guarder from way back whose reactionary tendencies are even more profound than those of some poll cat representatives from down Dixie way" while Thomas Dewey of New York was merely "suave, deceitful." In Willkie, Jackson claimed, "the sons and daughters of Ham did have a chance in the event Roosevelt's liberal attitude is voted out of the White House this year." The columnist concluded by speculating, "Wouldn't a ticket including Roosevelt and Willkie (in the event Vice President Wallace is dropped out of the picture) come under the heading of just what the doctor ordered?" Another writer, from the Associated Negro Press, wrote that a "fusion ticket" of Roosevelt and Willkie was a "fertile idea" that "would get ample support from progressive Republicans and Democrats."²⁶

In a later article, Jackson bemoaned the reactionary Republican Party, the absence of Willkie, and the lack of a compelling political choice for president. "Our alternative [to Bricker and Dewey] is apparently to go down the line for Roosevelt for the fourth time or accept the consequences." At best, this was a weak endorsement of the President. Moreover, Jackson also complained that "old guard Republicans" have failed to keep "pace with what is going on in the minds of a new breed of Negroes who long since have thanked Lincoln for his efforts in our behalf and who prefer to do their own thinking and allow Lincoln to rest in peace." 27

His protestations notwithstanding, Jackson wanted to vote Republican. Yes, he spent much time criticizing the party, but only to offer what he thought were improvements, to change the philosophical direction of the party of Lincoln, to make it attractive to his ideal of the "new breed of Negro." What shape would this new party take? Why would it appeal to African-Americans? An article printed in the News, but taken from the national news service A.N.P., provides a hint. According to the writer, "the millstone

about the neck of the Republican Party is this same individualistic ideology, which if applied to our present order, will hasten one of the bloodiest revolutions in history. It is hard for the [G.O.P.] to face the stubborn fact that we are living in the 20th century and not the 19th. Rugged individualism is dead and buried beyond hopes of a resurrection." Stripped of the showy and heated rhetoric, this quote contains recognition that collective action replaced individualism as the foundation of American political culture. Thus, not only did the policy agendas of Rhodes and the black community converge in the 1940s, but also their political styles meshed.28

Editorials in the News celebrated the change in black political culture. In May of 1944 one writer argued that "the Negro group just like any other relatively cohesive group of people seeks to achieve its goals through institutions of organized action." In a second editorial, the News commended Rhodes for proclaiming the week of May 21-28 of 1944 as "NAACP week." The editorialist believed Rhodes' act recognized the contributions of organizations to the city and encouraged "the democratic process of working

28 Ibid.
for realization of the rights through organized groups." A third editorial, in September of 1944, lamented the death of Wilbur King, a local African-American attorney and politician. The News remarked that King and Preston Poindexter had wisely led black Columbus in a "day of personal leadership," but "Today, we have a new negro. He is a creature of organization." This new emphasis on political organization served as the philosophical foundation for Rhodes' connections to the black community.29

Both Rhodes and Columbus' African-Americans benefitted from the transformation. Before the Rhodes era, when blacks relied on individual ties to the power structure, intermittent and unstable policy resulted. In the Rhodes era, consistent organizational ties to the power structure created opportunities for favorable policy outcomes. Subject neither to the whims of an untimely death of a leader nor to the political fashion of the moment, black voters in Columbus renewed in the 1940s their sense of political power. Yet a change as fundamental as the one

they experienced could not occur without consequences. These consequences helped transform the black community's agenda from family-centered community needs to a public debate on civil rights, thus challenging that moment of middle ground established in the early years of Rhodes' mayoral tenure.
CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSION

The changes in Columbus' political culture, those innovations influenced by African-American leaders within the community and animated by James Rhodes, contributed to consequences that extended beyond the 1940s and the city's boundaries. Pluralism in politics redefined the kind of Republican politician Ohio voters encountered for the next forty years and altered the agenda of Columbus' black leadership. After his mayoralty tenure ended in 1952, Rhodes took his act on the road, serving ten years as state auditor and sixteen years as Governor. Moreover, building on the political strength gained in the Rhodes era a new group of black leaders advanced a nationally focused civil rights program. Yet black political influence in Columbus never reached the same level again, stunted by the decline of urban areas and the rise of decentralized suburban political, economic, and residential entities.

Prior to Rhodes, the most popular and respected Ohio Republicans were Robert Taft and John Bricker. Both men
honored their political skills in the 1920s and emerged in the 1930s as critics of the New Deal whereas Rhodes matured in the shadow of Roosevelt's style and policies. When nineteenth century individualism lost favor, replaced by a longing to participate in the public sphere not as an individual but as one affiliated with a group, Taft and Bricker clung to the old political order. In fact, the Ohio State News went so far as to claim that, however principled, "Wrong John Bricker" was "just off the beam" and suggested that Taft "continue rummaging through [a] dictionary and thesaurus for words to dress up his outworn philosophies." Rhodes, in contrast to the individualism of Taft and Bricker, adopted the organized yet segmented society as the framework for dealing with voters. He treated voters not as individuals first but as members of distinct groups thatbroker demands from government.  

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While Rhodes developed this style in Columbus and successfully utilized it for a fifty-year political career, the consequences for black Columbus were more complicated. First, the accomplishments of the new politics triggered the rise of civil rights-oriented black organizations that challenged the Urban League's dominance as the preeminent black group. Second, despite these challenges, the Urban League bent the contours of black political culture toward the philosophy of professional social workers and away from the style and philosophy of religious institutions. Third, and finally, although politically invigorated by national and local events of the forties, black Columbus lost power after the Rhodes era because the civil rights agenda refocused attention away from local problems and because local power slowly shifted to the suburbs.

Questions about the League methods began during World War Two. Even the Ohio State News, normally receptive to the Urban League philosophy, offered not so subtle critiques. In March of 1944, for example, a letter to the editor criticized a previous News editorial that derided the local NAACP for ineffective leadership. The letter writer denounced the News for its "tirade" against the group and suggested that "there should be room in Columbus for more
than one organization," a clear reference to the strength of the Urban League. The reader, however, did not have to push the News very hard to see his point of view, for in later editorials and columns the League came under direct fire.31

In April of 1944, columnist Russell Jackson lamented the lack of solutions to combat rising juvenile delinquency. He criticized social workers who dealt in outdated theory and blamed, in part, the recent wave of lawbreaking on "the social working group that earns good coin for its 'expert' knowledge." In that same issue, Shad Jones, another News writer, argued that the interracial approach of the League was "faulty, far fetched, bunk." The editorialist also chimed in, proposing, "Let's have no more studies and conferences." Each essayist never mentioned the League directly, but by commenting on social workers, studies, conferences, and interracial activity the League was the obvious target.32

31ibid, March 25, 1944, p. 18 (microfilm edition, Ohio Historical Society, roll 00164, frame 042).

32ibid, April 29, 1944, pp. 7 and 11 (microfilm edition, Ohio Historical Society, roll 00164, frames 116 and 118). In addition to blaming social workers for the rise in delinquency, Jackson pointed his finger at parents and "greedy real estate operators who apportion off the black ghettoes in order to gauge the sons and daughters of Ham with high rental rates," creating a "hopeless sense of frustration."
In the next month, the News denunciations became stronger than in previous issues. Jones wrote a column in which he flayed the YMCA and other social uplift groups. He thought that African-Americans would "never succeed with instruments supplied" to him by his oppressors and that "like many other instruments of social control," these groups "can be a most effective instrument for keeping peoples enslaved, and, as the saying goes, making 'em like it." An editorial went even farther in its criticism. "Institutions, like the people who operate them, tend to become complacent, grow old and weary, live in the past." These groups, continued the writer, "tend to go off into highly technical sleight of hand, preen themselves in a tawdry aura of race relations, point to their glorious past, and spend much time and effort in retaining their slipping leadership. These are the false prophets, the nefarious leaders and the Esaus of the group." The News was trying to write the obituary of the Columbus Urban League.33 But what group could have replaced the League? The NAACP had

33 *ibid*, May 20, 1944, p. 7 and May 13, 1944, p. 7 (microfilm edition, Ohio Historical Society, roll 00164, frames 164 and 148). Before assuming leadership of the Columbus Urban League in 1921, Nimrod Allen directed a local branch of the YMCA.
evidenced little organizational momentum since it rallied to contribute to the defeat of Ohio's Republican Senator in 1930. Instead, an upstart organization, the Vanguard League, led by younger blacks and guided by a more confrontational approach than the Urban League, attempted to lead the way.

The Vanguard League (VL) formed in 1940. In contrast to the Urban League, most of the Vanguard Leagues' members and all of its leaders were African-American. The new group originally wanted to become a parent organization, based in Columbus, for a national federation of civil rights associations. Tactics included picketing, boycotting, and filing lawsuits. While the VL dealt with several local businesses, most of its political contact reached to the federal government, often bypassing the local authorities. This strategy seemed logical because the federal government possessed greater resources than the city to fight racism, but when combined with the VL's national ambitions the means and the ends thwarted its ability to survive locally. Despite the VL's success in getting jobs for blacks and opening up some of Columbus' theaters and restaurants to blacks, its membership dwindled after World War Two, so much
that it eventually dissolved before the end of the decade and affiliated with the Congress on Racial Equality (CORE). 34

While the VL failed in its organizational aspirations, it remains important for three reasons. First, the VL represented African-Americans organizing to achieve their goals, pooling their resources to fight discrimination. This group fit, then, the prevailing political ideology in Columbus: organize to meet the needs of one's particular segment of society. Second, the VL marked the beginning of a distinct shift in the policy demands of black Columbus.

34The judgment that the VL relied on the federal government more than the city government is based on an examination of the remaining organizational records. The VL's correspondence suggests that federal bureaucrats dealt more with the group than did Rhodes or other city officials. Of course, letters to local authorities might not exist anymore, or, more likely, these interactions occurred face to face. Thus, a record of Rhodes' connections to the VL might be incomplete. In addition, Rhodes, through organizations, sought consensus and tried to avoid confrontation. In contrast, the VL used organization to challenge consensus and provoke (nonviolently) confrontation. As a result, the groups' philosophy and the limits on local power forced the VL to look more to the federal government for assistance and less to the city. See Vanguard League, MIC 87, Ohio Historical Society. For a discussion of the VL's specific activities, see Charles K. Ross, "Civil Rights Groups in Columbus, Ohio, 1940-1950," (unpublished master's thesis: The Ohio State University, Columbus, OH, 1994) pp 29-50. The standard text on CORE is August Meier and Elliott Rudwick, CORE: A Study in the Civil Rights Movement, 1942-1968 (Oxford University Press: New York, 1973).
While the Urban League remained the key black group, Columbus' black leaders eventually emphasized civil rights as opposed to private community concerns and adopted a more vocal, critical stance toward the city's power structure. Third, and finally, the VL foreshadowed the later civil rights groups in that their focus was essentially national. Even though they relied on the black masses and grass roots activity, the various organizations initially tried to awaken the country to problems in the South and encourage the federal government to act. However necessary the strategy and poignant the consequences, often the national orientation sapped energy from the potential of black political influence in Columbus' local affairs.

In Columbus, the rise of suburbs and the concomitant decline of urban power made opportunities for political success for the city's African-Americans remote. If one measure of a community's strength is the viability of its newspaper, then, based on the News' dropping circulation in the late forties, Columbus' black community was changing. During the five years prior to 1947, News circulation climbed from ten to fifteen thousand. In 1942, for example, the News reported a circulation of 10,221. In 1945 that figure increased to 12,006. In 1947, 15,000 Columbus
citizens subscribed to the *News*. By 1949, however, only 7,065 continued to buy the paper. In 1951 and 1952, the circulation rate dropped further, to 5,237 and 2,971. In 1953, the *News* ceased publication. Since 1935, its first year of publication, the *Ohio State News* had reported the local events that concerned black Columbus. The *News*’ obvious connections to Rhodes in the 1940s contributed to the image of the paper, giving its readers a sense that they read a newspaper that spoke for their interests in city hall. Yet with the departure of Rhodes at the end of 1952 and the fragmenting of city politics as a result of the rise of suburbs, the *News*’ readership, and the sense that city politics mattered, disappeared.35

Some Columbus citizens recognized early the process of suburbanization. In 1945, Charles Sutton, a professor of Landscape Architecture at Ohio State University and a member of local parks and recreation committees, wrote to a city judge about this problem. The letter began with praise for

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35 The *News*’ circulation figures are reported in J. Percy H. Johnson, ed., *N.W. Ayers and Son’s Directory: Newspapers and Periodicals* (N.W. Ayer and Son, Inc.: Philadelphia, PA) 1942 (p. 748), 1945 (p. 714), 1947 (p. 751), 1949 (p. 772), 1951 (p. 772), 1952 (p. 779). Llewellyn Coles, the editor and publisher of the *News*, later served Rhodes as an executive assistant when Rhodes was Governor.
rural recreation spots within reasonable driving time of Columbus, yet pointed out that some of the city's residents had no access to these areas, signaling his concern for the lack of options afforded to many African-Americans. Sutton argued that decentralization of urban areas "will be the movement of the future." He then advocated planning outdoor leisure opportunities for "these decentralized zones." In future years, "these decentralized zones" would force political leaders to rethink economic and social policy.36

During his mayoral years, however, Rhodes temporarily staved off the ill effects of political and social fragmentation. By focusing on urban renewal, recreation, and community needs, Rhodes forced white civic leaders and masses alike to consider urban policy. Generally, tension between centrifugal, segmenting impulses and organizing, centripetal forces has characterized the history of the American city. In the Rhodes era, however, the history of

36Letter from Charles Sutton to Judge Cloys. P. McClelland, dated August 15, 1945, The Ohio State University Archives, Charles Sutton Collection (spec. reg. 40.125), box 1, "Columbus Committee on Parks, 1934-1951."
Columbus is an exception. Because of his personality, policy agenda, and political style, Rhodes effectively papered over those fissures.\textsuperscript{37}

The black leaders of Columbus aided Rhodes in that process. For they helped to create a local political culture long before Rhodes appeared on the city's scene. Until Rhodes, however, no politician successfully exploited it. With origins in the Progressive Era, the foundation of the culture proffered a middle class, professional outlook, the method used social science techniques, and the goal was to educate and inform. It also placed a premium on

\textsuperscript{37}The idea of the city as torn between centralizing and decentralizing tensions is from Samuel P. Hays, "The Changing Political Structure of the City in Industrial America," \textit{Journal of Urban History}, Vol. 1, No. 1, November 1974, pp. 6-38. On the rise of suburbs, see Kenneth T. Jackson, \textit{Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States}, (Oxford University Press: New York, 1985). For the effects of this process on urban political process and power, see Jon C. Teaford, \textit{City and Suburb: The Political Fragmentation of Metropolitan America, 1850-1970}, (Johns Hopkins University Press: Baltimore MD, 1979). Former Cleveland mayor Carl Stokes, one of the nation's first black mayors, suggests that Rhodes also used water policy to force suburbs to stay within city boundaries. According to Stokes, "Rhodes saw that the suburbs had to be forced to incorporate as part of Columbus if the central city was to survive. Whenever a newly developed area decided it wanted water lines, Rhodes laid down his hard line. The suburb either submitted to annexation or it got no water." See Carl B. Stokes, \textit{Promises of Power: A Political Autobiography}, (Simon and Schuster: New York, 1973), p. 66.
retaining the identity of the particular segment within the context of pluralism and centralized organizational activity. These elements made possible the successful electoral coalition cobbled together by Rhodes. As a consequence, the success of the political connections between Rhodes and black leaders emboldened the next
generation of blacks to transform the agenda from community needs to civil rights. Thus, pluralism laid the foundation for modern civil rights activity in Columbus. 38

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38 While pluralism laid the foundation for the civil rights agenda in Columbus, one author argues that in Cincinnati pluralism muted this agenda. Not until a new ideology, "one that placed primacy on the autonomous individual rather than the group," did a civil rights program emerge. See Robert A. Burnham, "The Mayor's Friendly Relations Committee: Cultural Pluralism and the Struggle for Black Advancement," in Henry Louis Taylor, Jr., ed., Race and the City: Work, Community, and Protest in Cincinnati, 1820-1970, (University of Illinois Press: Urbana, IL, 1994), pp. 258-279. In addition, black political culture in Columbus provides an exception in that regarding politics in the 1940s, the black church is conspicuous by its absence. For studies that assert the centrality of the church to black political culture and activity, see Aldon D. Morris, The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement: Black Communities Organizing for Change, (Free Press: New York, 1984) and Charles R. Henry, Culture and African-American Politics, (Indiana University Press: Bloomington, IN, 1990). Finally, the civil rights agenda in Columbus, while greeted politely by city leaders, fared poorly. School desegregation and busing, for example, prompted the political and business leaders to use every legal ploy to avoid the mandate of the 1954 Supreme Court decision in Brown. See Gregory Jacobs, "Getting Around Brown: Desegregation, Development, and Columbus Public Schools, 1954-1994," (unpublished master's thesis: The Ohio State University, 1994).
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